World Health Assembly Session - COVID-19

Why in news?

The 73rd session of the World Health Assembly (WHA) took place virtually from May 18-19, 2020.

What is the WHA?

- The WHA is the decision making body of the WHO.
- The Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland and attended by member states of WHO.
- During the Assembly, the WHO's 194 member states discuss health agendas set by the body's Executive Board.
- They also set new goals and assign tasks to fulfil these goals.
- Due to Covid-19, the Assembly was held virtually this year, and has been fit into a two-day schedule from a three-week schedule.

What was the resolution at the meet?

- A resolution was brought forward by the European Union (EU) and was endorsed at the Assembly.
- During the session, countries including India, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand, UK and Canada accepted the resolution.
- Reportedly, 116 of the 194 member states were in favour of the resolution.
- It asked for an "impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation" of the WHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The resolution also called for identification of the "zoonotic" source of the coronavirus.
- The origin of the virus is currently believed to be a wet market in Wuhan, China.
- Apart from this, the Assembly also addressed a global vaccine action plan with the "Immunisation Agenda 2030".
- This aims to ensure immunisation for all age groups to prevent the spread of preventable diseases and sustaining vaccine supplies.

What does the resolution demand?

- The resolution does not mention China.
- It, however, says the Director General of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus should continue to work closely with the -

1. World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)
2. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (UN FAO)
3. countries

- This is as part of the One-Health Approach to 'identify the zoonotic source of the virus'.
- Also, the route of introduction to the human population, including the possible role of intermediate hosts
- The call includes efforts such as scientific and collaborative field missions.
- This will enable targeted interventions and a research agenda to reduce the risk of similar events.
- It will also help provide guidance on how to prevent SARS-COV2 infection in animals and humans and prevent the establishment of new zoonotic reservoirs.

Why is the resolution important?

- Since the pandemic, there has been an increasing pressure on China.
- China has so far opposed suggestions for inquiry into the origins of the virus.
- Meanwhile, the US has repeatedly blamed the WHO.
- It claims that the WHO had failed to obtain timely information and share it in a transparent fashion.
- The US President Donald Trump said that WHO's response was “China-centric”.
- In this backdrop, he threatened to permanently cut funding to the WHO.
- At present, the US is the WHO’s biggest contributor and makes up over 14.67% of the total funding, at $553.1 million.
- Given all these, the resolution gains importance.

What does this mean for China?

- While the resolution has been endorsed, it remains to be seen how the probe will be carried out and to what degree of independence.
- Significantly, the timeline of the probe is also not clear.
- So far, China has opposed demands calling for an international investigation into the virus.
- Recently, China’s premier Xi Jinping announced a $2 billion donation to the United Nations.
- This is over twice the amount the US contributed before Trump cut off funding.
- It also offered to set up hospitals and health infrastructure in Africa.
- At the WHA, Xi said China “supports” the idea of a comprehensive review of

the global response towards Covid-19 after it was brought under control.
- The Trump administration however sees China’s announcement as a way to escape scrutiny.

Source: Indian Express

