

INSIGHTS

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INSIGHTS CURRENT EVENTS

TEAM INSIGHTS

2013

NATIONAL

Group of Ministers (GoM) on Telangana issue

- The Group of Ministers (GoM), presided over by the Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde was setup to “discuss the approach and methodology” to be adopted for the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh and creation of Telangana.
- The GoM would take the opinion of stakeholders on all important subjects while formulating its recommendations and the whole approach would be basically based on Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee report.

What was the recommendation of Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee report?

- The Srikrishna Committee report was submitted in 2010:
- After taking due consideration and analyzing the issue, the committee did not see creation of Telangana to be the most preferred option, but the second best option. Separation is recommended only in case it is unavoidable and if this decision can be reached amicably amongst all the three regions. Considering all aspects, the committee felt that while the creation of a separate Telangana would satisfy a large majority of people from the region, it would also throw up several other serious problems. It was also noted that, the implications for the other two regions also cannot be ignored.

Way Forward:

- The Union Government might consider giving a special financial package to the Seemandhra region, besides building a modern capital for the divided Andhra Pradesh.
- The GoM would try and address all concerns related to social and infrastructure development in the coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions to pacify protesters.

Disaster Management: Cyclone Phailin

- The very severe cyclonic storm Phailin is expected to hit the coasts of Andhra Pradesh, Odhisha, West Bengal and the Government is taking precautionary measures to mitigate the disaster.
- The armed forces have been put under high alert
- The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has deployed around 500 personnel to carry out relief and rescue operations
- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has deployed 24 aircraft, including Ilyushin-76, C-130J Super Hercules and the Antonov-32, along with 18 helicopters.
- The Navy is ready with its fleet of choppers to carry out rescue operations

What do you mean by Disaster Management?

- Disasters are events that are sometimes unpredictable; it can be caused either human or nature. It poses threat to human life and property or leads to large scale disruption of normal life. Hence it is important for any government to manage disasters. Government on its part - makes laws, allocates resources and does proper planning and sustainable development to mitigate the disaster.

What are cyclones?

- A cyclone is an area of closed, circular fluid motion rotating in the same direction as the Earth. This is usually characterized by inward spiraling winds that rotate anti-clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere of the Earth.

How are tropical cyclones (Cyclone Phailin) formed?

- Tropical cyclones form only over warm ocean waters near the equator.
- To form a cyclone, warm, moist air over the ocean rises upward from near the surface. As this air moves up and away from the ocean surface, it leaves less air near the surface. So basically as the warm air rises, it causes an area of lower air pressure below.
- Air from surrounding areas with higher air pressure pushes in to the low pressure area. Then this new “cool” air becomes warm and moist and rises, too. And the cycle continues...
- As the warmed, moist air rises and cools the water in the air forms clouds. The whole system of clouds and wind spins and grows, fed by the ocean’s heat and water evaporating from the ocean surface.
- As the storm system rotates faster and faster, an eye forms in the centre. It is very calm and clear in the eye, with very low air pressure. Higher pressure air from above flows down into the eye.

Courtesy – Google sites

What is NDRF?

- Two national calamities in quick succession in the form of Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and Gujarat Earthquake (2001) brought about the realization of the need of having a specialist response mechanism at National Level to effectively respond to disasters. This realization led to the enactment of the DM Act on 26 Dec 2005. The NDMA was constituted to lay down the policies, plans and guidelines for disaster management.
- The DM Act has made the statutory provisions for constitution of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for the purpose of specialized response to natural and man-made disasters. Accordingly, in 2006 NDRF was constituted with 08 Bns (02 Bn each from BSF, CRPF, ITBP and CISF).

Courtesy NDRF govt. website

Cooperatives does not come under the ambit of RTI: Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court (SC) has held that Cooperative societies will not come under “public authority” as defined under Section 2(h) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act and hence are not liable to provide information to the general public under this law.
- The rationale behind this rule is that:
- “The powers exercised by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and others under the Cooperative Societies Act are “only regulatory or supervisory” and will not amount to dominating or interfering with the management or affairs of the society so as to control it.”
- If the information is not under control of public authority, citizens can’t have access to it.
- Recognizing that the right to privacy was a sacrosanct aspect of Article 21 of the Constitution, the law has put in a lot of safeguards to protect the right under Section 8(j) of the RTI Act
- Moreover, if the information sought for is personal and has no relationship with any public activity or interest or it will not sub-serve the larger public interest, the public authority or the officer concerned is not legally obliged to provide that information.

Significance of 97th Amendment Act (AA):

- With the coming of 97th AA, forming of cooperatives has become a fundamental right (Article 19 (1) (c)) and under Part IV of the Constitution, it has included Article 43B- the state shall endeavour to promote their autonomous functioning, democratic control and professional management of cooperative societies.
- It also provides for reservation of one seat for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes and two seats for women on the board of every co-operative society, which have individuals as members from such categories
- The provisions are made such that it will enhance public faith in the cooperative institutions by insulating them from avoidable political or bureaucratic interference.

National competition policy in the era of LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization)

In the current scenario, the chairman of Competition Commission of India (CCI) Ashok Chawla has called for adoption of a National Competition Policy (NCP) to help address entry barriers in public and private sectors.

Why such a policy?

- State-Market debate has been in the news ever since the Government of India (GoI) adopted its liberalization policy in 1991. The policy paradigm in the liberalised era still has a tilt towards control by the state. Hence the need for a NCP!
- The NCP would lead to more robust economic welfare and provide good governance to the country. The policies prior to 1991 have been institutionalized and it is difficult to demolish such institutions. Thus, the need of independent agencies to review such policies to make them competition compliant and more relevant is the need of the hour.
- Re-engineering or redesigning of institutions is needed to address challenges facing the policy.

- While competition in markets will be monitored by the CCI, anti-competitive outcomes of government policies, rules and regulations need to be reviewed through implementation of the competition policy.
- NCP broadly refers to government measures, policies and regulations aimed at controlling the behaviour of enterprises and structure of markets.

Cabinet has decided on constituting ‘Rail Tariff Authority’

- Prime Minister earlier in the year (2013) had directed the Railways to put up the constitution of a **Rail Tariff Authority** so that the body could automatically take note of the volatility in the prices of fuel and other inputs and make recommendations for adjusting the fares accordingly.
- Now, the Railway Tariff Authority has got a backing through the executive orders as desired by the Cabinet to avoid the delay in the legal process.
- With Railways’ finances and projects still stagnant, freight and passenger fares are set to rise with this decision.
- The Railways, for the first time, had increased passenger fares midstream by way of fuel adjustment component (FAC) recently. The FAC was imposed on freight charges as well.

INTERNATIONAL

‘Stapled Visa’ an issue to reckon upon

- Recently, two young archers from Arunachal Pradesh (ArP) were prevented by authorities from leaving for China with stapled visas on their passports. They were headed for the Youth World Archery Championship in Wuxi.

Issue:

- China still does not recognise India’s ownership of ArP; the other area region being Aksai Chin in the western Himalayas.
- Stapled visas to Arunachal would lead to misgivings over opening up to China via the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) project.
- Even though India has made several attempts on China to put down its claim on ArP, Chinese have always maintained that it was their policy to issue stapled visas to people from Arunachal.

Our View:

- As a counter-move, India can issue stapled visas to visitors from the Tibet Autonomous Region; but this is harmful for the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Hence any issue must always be taken forward through a ‘dialogue’ and an amicable solution must be reached among the Asian Giants!!
- From the sports fraternity perspective, it must also be noted that this issue should not be a hurdle for the future prospects of the athletes. Since the biennial championship will be the stepping stone to Rio Olympics for many of the youngsters. For

example, the previous championships saw the emergence of Deepika Kumari who won the silver medal in the world senior championships of late.

AU: ICC targeting Africans

- The African Union (AU) is contemplating on continent-wide withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the context of the ongoing trial against Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Deputy William Ruto.

Why is AU contemplating such a move?

- The AU feels that, ICC has been used as an instrument to target the Africans and would seek immunity from prosecution for sitting heads of state like Mr. Kenyatta.
- It would demand a one-year deferment of Mr. Kenyatta's case to allow him and his deputy to deal with the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Nairobi earlier this month; and recuse heads of state from attending court hearings in person.
- Despite ICC's global mandate, the court has opened only eight investigations so far, all targeted at African nations: Uganda, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Kenya, Libya, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- The AU has repeatedly called on the Security Council to defer Sudan President Mohammed al-Bashir's prosecution for crimes against humanity in Sudan's enduring conflict. The Security Council's refusal to consider the request has hardened the AU's stance on the ICC.
- The critics have called for a change in ICC's approach - from a "simplistic suspect-victim" approach to a comprehensive political and legal package incorporating elements of "truth telling, repentance, justice, healing and forgiveness".
- Recently, the Kenyan Parliament had also voted to stop cooperation with the ICC.
- Mr. Kenyatta and Mr. Ruto are accused of orchestrating widespread post-election violence in 2007 in which over 1,200 people were killed and 600,000 displaced.

More about ICC:

- Article 16 of Rome Statute (the framework that underpins the ICC) allows the U.N. Security Council to defer the trial; Article 27 expressly rules out immunity for Heads of State, elected representatives and government officials; and Article 63 requires the trial be conducted in the presence of the accused.
- 122 countries have ratified the Rome Statute, out of which 34 countries belong to Africa alone. However, India, China, Israel and the United States have not signed on.

- On citing that, the situation in Afghanistan "still constitutes a threat to international peace and security" United Nation Security Council (UNSC) has decided to extend the mandate of the NATO-led force in Afghanistan for the last time before it hands over total responsibility for security to Afghan forces at the end of 2014.
- The NATO-led International Assistance Force (ISAF) is in a supporting role, since June 2013 as the Afghan forces have taken the lead for security nation-wide.
- Possible consequences:
- The Taliban might take advantage of the situation and this would lead to further instability of Afghanistan,
- Critics have argued that the U.S. and NATO have inflicted suffering on the Afghan people and repeatedly violated its sovereignty.

CIA whistleblower award for Snowden

- Former CIA analyst Edward Snowden was given an American whistleblowers' award for exposing massive U.S. surveillance dragnet.
- The Sam Adams Award "for Integrity in Intelligence"
- The award is named after Samuel A. Adams, a C.I.A. whistleblower during the Vietnam War and is given annually. In 2010 it was conferred on the WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Coal block auction soon

- The first ever auction of coal blocks to the private sector is likely to take place in December as the Cabinet has already given its nod for the methodology for auction.
- Six explored blocks, with an estimated reserve of 2,000 million tonnes, will be auctioned in the first phase. On the approval of the methodology, it provides for upfront and production-linked payments, and benchmarking of coal sale prices. Coal blocks will now be put for auction after the Environment Ministry reviews them, and bidders have to agree to a minimum work programme.
- The main aim of the policy is to ensure greater transparency (which was earlier missing in the auctioning process and this had led to the 2G Scam), in auctioning of the explored blocks.

NATO's Afghan mandate extended for last time

AWARDS

Nobel for Chemical arms watchdog

- The **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** has been awarded Noble Peace prize for its efforts in “**eliminating chemical weapons**” in Syria.
- Recent events in Syria, where chemical weapons have again been put to use, have underlined need to enhance the efforts to do away with such weapons.
- OPCW has not only gained credibility for its role in enforcing the peace option in Syria through its technical expertise, but also for its courage and determination shown in the dangerous war zone.
- A few states have not observed the deadline, which was April 2012, for destroying their chemical weapons. This is especially in reference to the USA and Russia.

2. monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging
3. providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats
4. fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.

- Mr Ahmet Uzumcu, is the Director General of OPCW

Courtesy - OPCW website

Criticism over the Nobel Peace Prize

- According to the Nobel Committee, by conferring the award on the OPCW it was upholding Alfred Nobel’s vision of disarmament.
- But despite its claims of being independent, the Nobel Peace prize has over the years attracted criticism as politically driven. Its choice of the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobao in 2010 and Barack Obama in 2009 are cited as examples of its pro-West tilt. The Nobel Committee keeps the nomination list secret for 50 years.
- This year the favourite was Malala Yousufzai, the 16-year-old education and peace campaigner from Pakistan who despite being grievously injured by the Taliban for her outspoken advocacy of education for girls, continues to spread her message around the world. The other strong contenders were the courageous doctor from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Denis Mukwege, who had treated thousands of women who faced rape and torture during the civil war. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Svetlana Gannushkina and Lilya Shibanova, Russian human rights activists, Claudia Paz y Paz, the first woman Attorney-General in Guatemala and a human rights campaigner and others were all on the nomination list.
- The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded 94 times to 125 Nobel Laureates between 1901 and 2013, 100 individuals and 25 organisations.
- Last year (2012) the prize was won by the European Union; in 2011 it was won by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman for their work on women’s rights.

More about OPCW:

- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997. At present, OPCW has 189 Member States, who are working together to achieve a world free from chemical weapons. They share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security.
- The Convention contains four key provisions:
 1. destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW