Daily News Juice

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1. Status of climate finance as per OECD report

Why in news?

A new report, published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), showed that economically developed countries fell short of their promise to jointly mobilise \$100 billion a year towards climate mitigation and adaptation needs of developing countries in 2021 — one year past the 2020 deadline. The report said that developed countries mobilised \$89.6 billion in 2021 and that finances for adaptation fell by 14% in 2021 compared to 2020.

Why is the OECD report important?

The OECD is largely a group of rich countries including the U.S., the U.K., Germany, France, Switzerland, Canada, and others. The report, as such, offers a peek into their idea of climate finance ahead of the COP28 climate talks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) next week, where the topic is expected to be a key bone of contention.

How is climate finance accounted for?

The OECD report showed that of the \$73.1 billion mobilised in 2021 by the public sector via bilateral and multilateral channels, \$49.6 billion was provided as loans. While the report doesn't classify them in terms of the rates at which they're provided, data available elsewhere sheds light on the extent to which rich countries rely on loans at commercial rates to fulfil their climate finance obligations. For example, an assessment by the American non-profit research group Climate Policy Initiative of global climate finance flows between 2011 and 2020 found that 61% of climate finance was provided as loans, of which only 12% was at concessional interest rates.

So, when the OECD report states that two-thirds of public climate financing was provided as loans, it means the conditions attached to such financing could further exacerbate debt stress in poorer countries. This is also a critique of the OECD report as it considers loans at face value, not the grant equivalent, when arriving at total climate finance figures. This means that while poorer countries shell out money towards repayment and interest, the loan is still counted as climate finance provided by the developed world.

What is additionality?

Another issue in the OECD report pertains to additionality. The UNFCCC states that developed countries "shall provide new and additional financial resources to meet the agreed full costs incurred by developing country Parties in complying with their obligations under the convention". This means that developed countries cannot cut overseas development assistance (ODA) in order to finance climate needs because that

would effectively rob Peter to pay Paul. In real-world terms, it would mean cutting off support for healthcare to reallocate that money to, say, install solar panels.

The "new and additional finance" also means that developed countries cannot doublecount. For example, a renewable energy project could contribute to both emission reductions and overall development in a region. However, as per the UN Convention, donor countries cannot categorise such funding as both ODA and climate finance because it wouldn't fulfil the "new and additional" criterion. Yet they do. A few years ago, European Union officials admitted to double-counting development aid as climate finance.

What counts as climate finance?

At present, there is no commonly agreed definition of 'climate finance' because developed countries have endeavoured to keep it vague. The ambiguity works in favour of richer countries because it leaves the door open to arbitrarily classify any funding, including ODA and high-cost loans, as climate finance and escape the scrutiny that a clearer definition might bring. Therefore, while developed countries can claim they have provided billions in climate finance, the actual flows need to be checked to know whether they went into climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries or something else.

How much financial assistance do developing countries need?

The latest OECD report claims, based on preliminary and as-yet-unverified data, that the \$100 billion goal was likely met in 2022. But the data is neither finalised nor published, and the advisable take-away is scepticism. It is also important to note that the figure of \$100 billion came out of thin air at the COP15 talks and isn't based on an assessment of how much climate investment developing countries actually need.

The OECD report added that by 2025, developing countries are estimated to require around \$1 trillion a year in climate investments, rising to roughly \$2.4 trillion each year between 2026 and 2030. The \$100 billion goal pales in comparison, dwarfed further by the fact that it remains unmet.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment Source: The Hindu

2. HC has struck down Haryana's private sector quota

Why in news?

The Punjab and Haryana High Court recently quashed a law passed by the Haryana government in 2020 that provided 75% reservation in private jobs to residents of the state.

What was this law?

The Haryana law reserved 75% of jobs in the private sector that offered a monthly salary of less than Rs 30,000 (originally Rs 50,000) for residents of Haryana.

Earlier, in November 2019, the Andhra Pradesh Assembly had passed The Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Bill, 2019, reserving three-fourths of jobs for local candidates within three years of the commencement of the Act. The law was challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, which observed that "it may be unconstitutional". However, the challenge is yet to be heard on merits.

Who challenged the law and on what grounds?

The Faridabad Industries Association and other Haryana-based associations went to court. The petitioners argued that private sector jobs are purely based on skills and an analytical bent of mind, and employees have a fundamental right to work in any part of India.

The Haryana government argued that it had the power to create such reservations under Article 16(4) of the Constitution, which says that the right to equality in public employment does not prevent the State from "making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State".

What else was there in the Haryana law?

According to the law, a candidate "domiciled in State of Haryana", called a "local candidate", could avail of the reservation after registering themselves on a designated online portal. Employers were required to make recruitments only through this portal.

Employers could apply for an exemption under the Act, but that entailed a long procedure and required government-appointed officers to believe that the employer's exemption request held merit.

What did the High Court rule?

The court noted that Section 6 — which required employers to submit quarterly reports with details of local candidates employed and appointed — and Section 8 — under which authorised officers could call for documents or verification to ensure the law was being implemented — of the Act amounted to "Inspector Raj", and that private employers were being put under the State's anvil on whom to employ.

The court ruled that the state's action amounted to exercising "absolute control over a private employer," which is "forbidden for public employment." The restrictions were "gross to the extent that a person's right to carry on occupation, trade, or business" under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution was being impaired, the court said.

Also, the court said, the state "cannot as such discriminate against the individuals on account of the fact that they do not belong to a certain State".

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance Source: The Indian Express & The Hindu

3. 25 years of the International Space Station

Introduction

It passes over our heads 16 times every 24 hours at an altitude of a mere 430 kilometers (267 miles). It's possible to spot it from the ground and track where it is in the sky at any minute of the day.

There have been numerous scientific discoveries on the ISS that have had a direct impact on our everyday lives on Earth (more on that below). It is one of the world's most successful locations for international diplomacy, peace and collaboration, even in times of war. It's literally been a safe space for 25 years.

When did the International Space Station launch?

The first segment of the ISS — the Zarya Control Module — was Russian and launched November 20, 1998. Zarya supplied fuel storage and battery power, and served as a docking zone for other space vehicles arriving at the ISS. One month later, on December 4, 1998, the US launched the Unity Node 1 module. Together, the two modules were the start of a functioning space laboratory. Over the course of 42 assembly flights, the ISS became what it is today. Since then, the ISS has been continuously inhabited.

How big is the ISS?

The ISS is split into various spaces for living and working. It has six sleeping quarters, two bathrooms, a gym, and a 360-degree view bay window.

It measures 109 meters (357 feet) end-to-end, "one yard shy," states NASA, of a fulllength American football field. Or, if swimming is your thing, the ISS is more than twice the length of an Olympic swimming pool. And if you're into rockets, the ISS is shorter than SpaceX's Starship by 12 meters.



Its solar array wingspan is also 109 m. To compare: The largest commercial aircraft, the Airbus A380, has a wingspan of 79.8 meters. And about 13 kilometers of electrical wires run through the space station.



Figure 1Bedroom inside International Space Station

What is the ISS's average speed?

As mentioned above, the ISS orbits Earth numerous times in one day — every 90 minutes to be precise — at a speed of 8 kilometers (5 miles) per second.

What do astronauts do onboard the ISS?

When they're not conducting scientific experiments (ones that can't be done on Earth), ISS astronauts go on regular spacewalks to add new components to the station, such as robotic arms, or run maintenance. There have been times when astronauts have had to inspect or fix holes that were created by space debris.

The astronauts are also on a strict health regimen. They have to mitigate the loss of muscle and bone mass, which is caused by microgravity in space. That includes working out on specially designed machines, including treadmills, for at least two hours a day.

But as researchers focus more and more on humans living in space, for example on the moon or Mars, the astronauts' daily exercise is also used to improve our scientific understanding of the effects of space on our bodies. What would happen if humans lived in microgravity for years on end? Would our bodies still be strong enough, or too weak to return to Earth?

What scientific discoveries on the ISS have benefited life on Earth?

Astronauts have conducted hundreds of scientific experiments on the ISS. Sometimes they experiment on themselves, monitoring their general health, nutrition or the effects of solar radiation. And sometimes they conduct experiments for scientists on Earth. These experiments have led to numerous scientific breakthroughs.

From Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease to cancer, asthma and heart disease — it's all been studied in space. Scientists say some medical experiments are best done in space because cells behave in microgravity more like they do inside the human body, but it's difficult to recreate such conditions on Earth.

There have been discoveries to benefit drug development, new water purification systems, methods to mitigate muscle and bone atrophy and those that have led innovations in food production.

How long will the ISS be operational?

Plans for the future operation of the ISS were thrown into uncertainty with the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Both the European Space Agency and national bodies withdrew from international collaborations with Russia, and Russia said it was leaving the ISS to build its own space station.

It's not just the war, though — old and new spacefaring nations want to make an independent mark on space. They include Japan, China, India, the United Arab Emirates and others.

The US and Europe have said they remain committed to the International Space Station through 2030. But plans are afoot for a post-ISS world, as well: NASA is almost entirely focused on its Artemis program and plans to populate the moon. And ESA is working toward a new space station, which it is calling Starlab.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology Source: The Indian Express