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1. Why has a UN body withheld accreditation to India's NHRC?

Why in News?

For the second year in a row, an organisation affiliated with the UN human rights office has deferred accreditation for India's human rights body, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).



Without accreditation from the Geneva-based Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), NHRC cannot represent India or vote at the UN Human Rights Council (formerly United Nations Commission on Human Rights).

The delay in accreditation can also be cited to raise questions about the independence, competence, and fairness of the NHRC. The NHRC, which was established on October 12, 1993 after Parliament enacted the Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), is currently chaired by former Supreme Court judge Arun Mishra.

What is the accrediting agency?

GANHRI, which represents about 120 national human rights institutions, is responsible for reviewing and accrediting these institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles every five years.

GANHRI acts through its Subcommittee on Accreditation (SCA), which categorises member NHRIs into two groups, 'A' and 'B'. As of November 29, 2023, 120 NHRIs were accredited by GANHRI, 88 of which were given 'A' rank, indicating full compliance with the Paris Principles; the remaining 32 were put under 'B', indicating partial compliance.

And what are the Paris Principles?

The Paris Principles, formally Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions, which were adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 20, 1993, set out minimum standards that NHRIs must meet in order to be considered credible and to operate effectively.

The Paris Principles lay down six main criteria to determine which NHRIs are functioning effectively, and would receive accreditation from GANHRI.

These principles are:

- (i) broad mandate based on universal human rights norms and standards;

- (ii) autonomy from the government;
- (iii) independence guaranteed by the statute or Constitution;
- (iv) pluralism, including membership that broadly reflects their society;
- (v) adequate resources; and
- (vi) adequate powers of investigation.

These Principles also say that NHRIs should be equipped to receive complaints and cases brought by individuals, third parties, NGOs, trade unions, or other organisations representative of professionals such as lawyers and journalists.

What happens if India loses accreditation?

NHRIs with 'A' status can participate in the UN Human Rights Council, its subsidiary bodies, and some UNGA bodies and mechanisms. They are also eligible for full membership of GANHRI, which includes the right to vote and hold governance positions.

NHRIs accredited with 'B' status can participate in GANHRI meetings, but cannot vote nor hold governance positions.

Unless India is accredited, the NHRC can't represent the country at the UN Human Rights Council, or vote or hold governance positions. India's review has been deferred, with no final decision yet.

Why has India's accreditation been put on hold?

The decision was taken after an SCA meeting held on May 1 at the United Nations Palais des Nations in Geneva. The SCA has such sessions twice a year, and receives detailed briefings on each country. Subsequently, a pre-session is held to ascertain issues for consideration, followed by an interview with each country's human rights institution.

The May 1 meeting was chaired by New Zealand. South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Spain were among the countries that participated.

The committee is yet to release its report. However, last year's report listed the areas where the NHRC was seen as not properly adhering to the Paris Principles. These included a lack of transparency in NHRC appointments, conflict of interest caused by the appointment of police to oversee investigations, and no minority or female representation on the panel.

Also, on March 26, nine human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, jointly wrote to GANHRI expressing concern about India's human rights institutions. "...The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, [has] raised concerns about the increasing restrictions on the civic space and discrimination against minorities in India ahead of the country's General Elections," the letter said. These concerns were also raised by UN human rights experts who drew attention to "attacks on minorities, media and civil society" in India, it said.

The letter urged GANHRI-SCA to amend the current 'A' rating of the NHRC.

What is India's record of accreditation with GANHRI?

The NHRC was established in 1993, and was accredited for the first time in 1999. It got 'A' rank in 2006, and retained it in 2011. In 2016, accreditation was deferred due to reasons that included the appointment of political representatives, and the failure to ensure gender balance and pluralism in NHRC staff, but the SCA ultimately gave NHRC 'A' status in 2017.

Last year, the SCA withheld India's accreditation again, and gave six reasons for it, including that the NHRC couldn't create conditions for operating without government interference, that there were too many government officials and individuals affiliated with the ruling party in the NHRC.

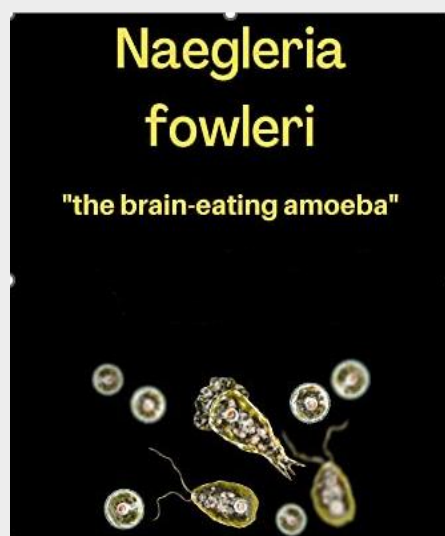
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

2. What is *Naegleria fowleri* or 'brain-eating amoeba', which led to a girl's death in Kerala?

Why in News?

A five-year-old girl undergoing treatment for primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), a rare infection caused by *Naegleria fowleri* or "brain-eating amoeba", died at the Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode recently.



In the past too, the rare yet deadly infection has claimed several lives. What are the circumstances under which one can be affected by it and what are the symptoms associated with it? We explain.

What is primary amoebic meningoencephalitis?

Primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) is a rare brain infection that is caused by *Naegleria fowleri*. It is a free-living amoeba or a single-celled living organism.

Naegleria fowleri lives in warm fresh water and soil around the world, and infects people when it enters the body through the nose. Higher temperatures of up to 115°F (46°C) are conducive to its growth and it can survive for short periods in warm environments.

The amoeba can be found in warm freshwater, such as lakes and rivers, swimming pools, splash pads, surf parks, or other recreational venues that are poorly maintained or minimally chlorinated.

How does *Naegleria fowleri* infect people?

Naegleria fowleri enters the body through the nose, usually when people are swimming. It then travels up to the brain, where it destroys the brain tissue and causes swelling.

In the recent Kozhikode case, it is being suspected that the girl was infected while swimming in a local river. On May 1, she bathed in the river along with four children, but the others did not develop symptoms and their test results were negative.

Notably, people cannot get infected with *Naegleria fowleri* from drinking water contaminated with the amoeba. PAM is also non-communicable.

What are the symptoms of primary amoebic meningoencephalitis?

In the initial stage, the symptoms include headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. Later on, the patient may have a stiff neck and experience confusion, seizures, hallucinations and slip into a state of coma.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Most people with PAM die within 1 to 18 days after symptoms begin. It usually leads to coma and death after 5 days."

Past incidents of infection

There have been 20 reported cases of PAM in India, with the Kozhikode case being the seventh such infection in Kerala. In July 2023, a 15-year-old boy died of it in Alappuzha. The first incident in Kerala was also reported in Alappuzha in 2016, perhaps due to the large number of water bodies here.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. What does President Ebrahim Raisi's passing mean for the future of Iran

Introduction

Being Iran's President is not easy. The highest elected office in the country is not the most powerful one. The President is answerable to the Supreme Leader, who is appointed by a body of senior clerics. The President's main responsibility is to run the day-to-day affairs of the country, especially its crisis-ridden, sanctions-hit economy. The President also has to run a delicate foreign policy in a hostile region.

Ebrahim Raisi, the 63-year-old former judiciary chief who became Iran's eighth President in 2021, was doing just that, until May 19, 2024, when he was killed in a helicopter crash.



Immediate priority

Iran faces three broad challenges in the wake of Raisi's death. Tehran's immediate priority is to put in place an orderly transition so that the "nation would not be disrupted at all", as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has said. Mr. Khamenei has already approved

First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber as acting head of the executive branch of the state. Authorities have announced that elections would be held on June 28.

When Raisi became President, all branches of Iran's government — executive, judiciary and legislature — came under the control of conservatives. But what worries the establishment is the dwindling turnout. For years, Iran's clerical leadership would use high voter turnout as a marker of legitimacy. If the voter turnout was 85% in the 2009 presidential elections, it fell to 48% in 2021 when Raisi was elected. When the country is preparing to hold a snap election, the establishment would like to see not just the election of another conservative as President but also a high turnout.

Larger transition

Secondly, Raisi's abrupt death did disrupt Iran's bigger transition plans as well. Mr. Khamenei, the most powerful man in Iran, is 85 years old and ailing. Many Iran watchers saw Raisi as an ideal candidate to succeed Mr. Khamenei. Raisi was relatively young, ideologically committed, had the blessings of the establishment and successfully negotiated between the different branches of the state and made his standing stronger ever since his election. But now, Iran has to start from scratch to find Mr. Khamenei's successor. Different names are being added to the list, including Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the Supreme Leader, and Alireza Araf, an influential white-turbaned cleric who heads Friday prayers at the Qom Shia seminary.

Regional tensions

Raisi's death comes at a time when regional tensions are at an all-time high. After the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7, 2023, regional focus shifted to Iran's support for non-state actors in West Asia, including Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis. Last month, Iran launched an unprecedented drone and missile attack on Israel, after its consulate in Damascus was struck. Hezbollah is fighting a slow-burning war with Israel on its northern border. Houthis, the Yemeni militia, is carrying out attacks targeting vessels in the Red Sea, "in solidarity with Palestinians".

In recent months, Iran has flexed its muscles both through its proxies and directly in West Asia. A change in presidency is unlikely to alter Iran's overall security doctrine, which has been laid out by the clerical and military establishment. But for the smooth implementation of this multi-layered security strategy, which involves both state and non-state actors, in a hostile region, Iran needs a cohesive national leadership. The challenge before the Ayatollahs is to stay the political course irrespective of the unexpected disruptions.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu