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News: Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT).

- Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) jointly launched the first Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT).

Key Highlights of the Global Report on Assistive Technology (GReAT)

People Need Assistive Products

- More than **2.5 billion people need one or more assistive products**, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, or apps that support communication and cognition.

People Denied Assistive Products

- **A billion of them are denied access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where access can be as low as 3% of the need for these life-changing products.**

Number of People in Need of Assistive Products in Future

- The number of people in need of one or more assistive products is likely to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050, due to populations aging and the prevalence of non-communicable diseases rising across the world.
- Also, affordability is a major barrier to access.

Large Gaps in Service Provision and Trained Workforce

- A survey of 70 countries featured in the report found large gaps in service provision and trained workforce for assistive technology, especially in the domains of cognition, communication and self-care.

Assistive Technology (AT)

- Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software program or product system that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

Examples

- Technologies and devices such as prosthetics, braces, walkers, special switches, special-purpose computers, screen readers and specialised curricular software.

- Universal assistive technology coverage implies that **everyone everywhere receives the AT that they need without financial or other hardships.**
- Priority Assistive Products List launched by WHO in 2018 **include hearing aids, wheelchairs, communication aids, spectacles, artificial limbs, pill organisers, memory aids and other essential items for the elderly and person with disabilities.**

News: Special Drawing Rights (SDR)

- Recently, the **International Monetary Fund lifted the Renminbi (Chinese currency) weighting in the Special Drawing Rights currency basket**, prompting the Chinese central bank to pledge to push for a further opening of its financial markets.

Special Drawing Right (SDR)

- The SDR is **an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969** to supplement its member countries' official reserves.
- So far SDR **204.2 billion (equivalent to about US\$291 billion) has been allocated to members**, including SDR 182.6 billion allocated in 2009 in the wake of the global financial crisis.

- The value of SDR is based on basket of five currencies – US Dollar, Euro, Chinese Renminbi, Japanese Yen and British Pound Sterling.
- The SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF and some other international organizations.
- The SDR is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF. Rather, it is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members. SDRs can be exchanged for these currencies.
- The respective weights of currencies in SDR are Dollar (43.38%), followed by Euro (29.31%), Renminbi (12.28%), Yen (7.59%) and Pound (7.44%).

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an organization of 189 member countries, each of which has representation on the IMF's executive board in proportion to its financial importance, so that the most powerful countries in the global economy have the most voting power.
- The IMF, also known as the Fund, was conceived at a UN conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, in July 1944. India is a founder member.
- Union Finance Minister is the ex-officio Governor on the IMF's Board of Governors.

- IMF, as per Bretton Woods's agreement to encourage international financial cooperation, introduced a system of convertible currencies at fixed exchange rates, and replaced gold with the U.S. dollar (gold at \$35 per ounce) for official reserve.
- After the Bretton Woods system (system of fixed exchange rates) collapsed in the 1971, the IMF has promoted the system of floating exchange rates.
- Countries are free to choose their exchange arrangement, meaning that market forces determine the value of currencies relative to one another. This system continues to be in place today.
- World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) uses GDP in the comparative analysis of its member nations.
- Quota subscriptions are a central component of the IMF's financial resources. Each member country of the IMF is assigned a quota, based broadly on its relative position in the world economy.
- The IMF's Board of Governors conducts general quota reviews at regular intervals (no more than five years).
- Any changes in quotas must be approved by an 85 percent majority of the total voting power, and a member's own quota cannot be changed without its consent.

- The largest shareholders according to the vote share are **United States (16.50%), Japan (6.14%), China (6.08%), Germany (5.31%), France (4.03%), United Kingdom (4.03%), Italy (3.02%), India (2.63%), Russia (2.59%) and Brazil (2.22%)**.

News: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commission (EC)

- Recently, the President appointed Rajiv Kumar as the Chief Election Commissioner (25th CEC).

Election Commission of India (ECI)

- Articles **324-329**, Part XV of Indian Constitution specifies about the Election Commission of India and its works.
- Article 324 of the **Constitution states that the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of other election commissioners (ECs), if any, as the president may from time to time fix.**
- The body was established as a **single member body in 1950**. Two election commissioners were added in 1989.
- Today, the Election Commission has been functioning as a **multi-member body consisting of three election commissioners** all of whom are **appointed by President**.

- The CEC and the two other ECs have equal powers and receive equal salaries, allowances. (Similar to that of a judge of the Supreme Court).
- In case of difference of opinion amongst the CEC and/or two other ECs, the matter is decided by the Commission by a majority.
- Term of Chief Election Commissioner is 6 years or, 65 years of age, whichever is earlier.
- The term of EC members are determined by President.
- Reappointment of members of election commission is possible.
- The constitution is silent about the qualifications to be possessed by the members of Election Commission.
- Salary is drawn out of Consolidated Fund of India but expenses made by the Commission are voted in Parliament.
- The CEC is provided with the security of tenure. He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- Other ECs cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the CEC. However, such recommendation from CEC is not a binding on the President. In 2009, such a recommendation from the then CEC, was declined by the President.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)

- The Chief Electoral Officer assists the Election Commission at the state level. He is appointed by the Chief Election Commissioner in consultation with the state government.

Returning Officer

- The Returning Officer of a parliamentary or assembly constituency is responsible for the conduct of elections in the parliamentary or assembly constituency concerned as per section 21 of the Representation of the People Act 1951.
- The Election Commission of India nominates or designates an officer of the Government or a local authority as the Returning Officer for each of the assembly and parliamentary constituencies in consultation with the State Government/Union Territory Administration.
- In addition, the Election Commission of India also appoints one or more Assistant Returning Officers for each of the assembly and parliamentary constituencies to assist the Returning Officer in the performance of his functions in connection with the conduct of elections.

- Recently, the Election Commission of India has proposed to link the Electoral Roll with Aadhar card with a view to curbing the menace of multiple enrolment of the same person at different places.
- The recommendation for elections is made by the Election Commission (EC) and the notification for election is issued by the President and Governors of the State concerned.
- Election Commissioner of India (ECI) represents the Republic of India in Association of World Election Bodies (A – WEB).

Powers

- Conducting general & bye elections to Parliament and State legislatures.
- Conducting elections to the post of President and Vice President of India.
- Preparation of Electoral Roll.
- Granting of Party symbol and recognition of National, State parties based on recent election performance. The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) order, first promulgated in 1968, mandates the Election Commission to provide for specification, reservation, choice and allotment of symbols at parliamentary and assembly elections, for the recognition of political parties.
- Issue of Model Code of Conduct.

- The ECI is endowed with the **power of setting limit on expenses of poll**. This limit is revised from time to time. This power is given with a view to secure fair elections by curbing the undue advantage, which may be gained by wealthy candidates.
- When on election duty, the government officers work under the control of the Election Commission and not under the government.
- When the Election Commission comes to an opinion that polling was not fair in some booths or even an entire constituency, it orders a repoll.
- If any **question arises as to whether a member of parliament has become the subject to any disqualification under Article 102** then the question shall be referred for the **decision of the president and his decision shall be final**. The president **shall obtain the opinion of the Election Commission and shall act according to such opinion**.
- However, the Election Commission **cannot disqualify a candidate who engages in electoral malpractice**. At best, the ECI may **direct the authorities to register a case against the candidate**.
- The ECI has power to decriminalize politics by putting **lifetime ban on convicted politicians, thereby preventing those from criminal background to contest in elections**. This has been envisaged in **Articles 102 and 191 of the**

Indian Constitution along with sections 7(b), 8 to 10-A of the Representation of People Act, 1956.

- The 44th amendment Act empowered the Election Commission in the case of President's Rule also.
- The 44th Amendment Act of 1978 introduced a new provision to put restraint on the power of the parliament to extend a proclamation of President's Rule beyond one year.

The 44th amendment Act provided that beyond one year the President's Rule can be extended by six months at a time only when two conditions are fulfilled:

- A Proclamation of National emergency should be in operation in the whole of India, or in the whole or any part of the state;
- The Election Commission must certify that the general elections to the legislative assembly of the concerned state cannot be held on account of difficulties.
- Passport, Driving License, Service Identity Cards with photograph issued to employees by Central/State Govt./PSUs/Public Limited Companies, Passbooks with photograph issued by Bank/Post Office, PAN Card, Smart Card issued by RGI under NPR, MNREGA Job Card, Health Insurance Smart Card issued

under the scheme of Ministry of Labour, Pension document with photograph, Official identity cards issued to MPs/MLAs/MLCs, and Aadhaar Card.

- Overseas electors shall have to produce their original passport only for identification.
- Previously, the Commission had allowed Photo Voter Slip (PVS) as a document for identification.
- However, it was found to be misused due to lack of security features, hence its use as a stand-alone identification document for voting has been discontinued
- In case of difference of opinion amongst the CEC and/or two other ECs, the matter is decided by the commission by a majority.
- According to Sec. 73 of the R. P. Act, 1951, after the results of all Parliamentary constituencies are declared, the Election Commission will constitute the new Lok Sabha by notifying in the official gazette, the names of the elected members. The EC issues a notification to constitute the new Lok Sabha and then present it to the President enabling him to convene the new House.

cVIGIL Mobile Application

- Election commission of India launched a mobile app called cVIGIL.
- A **user-friendly and easy to operate Android application**, requires an Android smartphone equipped with a **camera, good internet connection and GPS access**.
- It will be **operational only where elections are announced**. cVIGIL will allow anyone in the election-bound state to report **violations of Model Code of Conduct**.
- Citizens can immediately report on incidents of misconduct within minutes of having witnessed them and upload it on this app, without having to rush to the office of the returning officer to lodge a complaint.
- The **automated location mapping will be done using Geographic Information System**.
- After its successful submission through the app, the vigilant citizen gets a Unique ID to track and receive the follow up updates on her or his mobile and will get a unique id for each report for follow up updates.
- The identity of the complainant will be kept confidential.
- The app has inbuilt features to prevent its misuse. It will receive complaints only about Model Code of Conduct violations. The **user will get 5 minutes to report an incident after having clicked a picture or a video**.

- To prevent any misuse, the app will not allow uploading of the pre-recorded or old images and videos. The app will not facilitate saving of the photos or videos recorded using the 'cVIGIL' app into the phone gallery either.
- Further, the application will be active only in States where elections have been announced. The moment a citizen exits an election-bound State, the app will become inactive.

Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)

- SVEEP, started in 2009 is the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India.
- SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.

Poll Expenses

- **Election Commission**, under the Rule 90 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 sets the poll expenses limit for each individual candidate for both Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies separately.
- An individual contesting for Lok Sabha can spend up to a maximum of 70 lakh and an individual contesting for State Legislative Assembly can spend up to a maximum of 28 lakh.
- Under Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, every candidate shall keep a separate and correct account of all expenditure incurred between the date on which he has been nominated and the date of declaration of the result.
- All candidates are required to submit their expenditure statement to the ECI within 30 days of the completion of the elections.
- An incorrect account or expenditure beyond the cap can lead to disqualification of the candidate by the ECI for up to three years, under Section 10A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- It can be noted that there is no cap on a political party's expenditure, which is often exploited by candidates of the party. However, all registered political parties have to submit a statement of their election expenditure to the ECI within 90 days of the completion of the elections.