

02 July 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran breaches limit on uranium stockpile

Context:

Iran has surpassed its uranium stockpile limit set under the nuclear deal with world powers.

Background:

- In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme called the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)” with a group of world powers, the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
- Under the JCPOA
 - Iran's uranium stockpile was reduced by 98% to 300kg
 - Iran said it would redesign its heavy-water nuclear reactor, so it could not produce any weapons-grade plutonium, and that all spent fuel would be sent out of the country as long as the modified reactor exists.
 - Iran was also not permitted to build additional heavy-water reactors or accumulate any excess heavy water until 2031, as per the nuclear deal.
 - Iran also agreed to implement the Additional Protocol to their IAEA Safeguards Agreement, which allows inspectors to access any site anywhere in the country they deem suspicious.
 - Sanctions previously imposed by the UN, US and EU were lifted and Iran gained access to more than \$100bn in assets frozen overseas. It was able to resume selling oil on international markets and using the global financial system for trade.
- However, in May 2018, US President Donald Trump abandoned the deal.

Details:

- Under the nuclear deal, Iran agreed to have less than 300 kg of uranium enriched to a maximum of 3.67%.
- Previously, Iran enriched as high as 20%, a short technical step away from weapons-grade levels.
- Iran had also announced that it would surpass its uranium stockpile limit set under JCPOA.
- Confirmation by the UN nuclear watchdog that Iran has breached the limit has put new pressure on European nations. These world powers have been trying to save the deal amid President Donald Trump's maximalist campaign targeting Tehran.
- Iran separately threatens to raise its uranium enrichment closer to weapons-grade levels on July 7 if Europe fails to offer it a new deal.
- Actions of the Europeans have not been enough so the Islamic Republic will move ahead with its plans as it has previously announced, Iran has said.

Category: HEALTH**1. Rise in cases of vector-borne diseases****Context:**

According to a report from the three municipal corporations in Delhi, cases of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue and chikungunya have shown an increasing trend this week.

Details:

- The number of cases of vector-borne diseases is expected to rise during the monsoon.
- The three municipal corporations in Delhi have been undertaking several measures such as door-to-door surveys and spraying insecticides to prevent mosquito breeding.
- The experts from the public health department requested residents to take precautionary measures.
- They also advised residents to clean all utensils, coolers, flower pots and other items which are conducive to the accumulation of water every week thoroughly.

Vectors:

- Vectors are living organisms that can transmit infectious diseases between humans or from animals to humans.
- Many of these vectors are bloodsucking insects, which ingest disease-producing microorganisms during a blood meal from an infected host (human or animal) and later inject it into a new host during their subsequent blood meal.
- Mosquitoes are the best known disease vector.
- Others include ticks, flies, sandflies, fleas, triatomine bugs and some freshwater aquatic snails.

Diseases transmitted by Mosquitoes:**Aedes:**

- Chikungunya
- Dengue fever
- Lymphatic filariasis
- Rift Valley fever
- Yellow fever
- Zika

Anopheles:

- Malaria
- Lymphatic filariasis

Culex:

- Japanese encephalitis
- Lymphatic filariasis
- West Nile fever

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**1. No extra funds for Jal Shakti Abhiyan****Context:**

The Centre rolled out the Jal Shakti Abhiyan as a jan andolan or people's movement on water conservation.

Issues:

- India's annual per capita water availability has dropped from 5,177 cubic metres in 1951 to just 1,545 cubic metres in 2011.
- Climate change has also made the country more vulnerable to water scarcity.
- Most of the 1,592 blocks where the Jal Shakti Abhiyan is being implemented fall into the critical or over-exploited groundwater category, where groundwater is being withdrawn faster than it can be replenished.

Details:

- Jal Shakti Abhiyan has been launched in the backdrop of rampant water scarcity in the spotlight,

whether in urban centres like Chennai or as drought in parts of central India.

- The campaign is meant to bring sensitivity on the subject, and give focussed approach.
- However, there is no additional funding or specific targets for the campaign to achieve, according to Jal Shakti Minister.
- Over the next two and a half months, the campaign will push to implement existing water conservation schemes and increase awareness in 256 water-stressed districts.
- With regard to targets in terms of the number of reservoirs, check dams or traditional water bodies that would be created, restored or recharged under the scheme, States have been requested to prepare an inventory of water bodies.
- The Jal Shakti Abhiyan would aim to accelerate water harvesting, conservation and borewell recharge activities already being carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and the Integrated Watershed Management Programme of the Rural Development Ministry, along with existing water body restoration and afforestation schemes being undertaken by the Jal Shakti and Environment Ministries.
- Progress would be monitored in real time through mobile applications and an online dashboard.
- A major communications campaign on TV, radio, print, local and social media would be carried out, with celebrities mobilised to generate awareness for the campaign.
- Though water is a State issue, the campaign would be coordinated by 255 central IAS officers of Joint or Additional Secretary-rank, drawn from ministries as varied as Space, Petroleum and Defence.

2. Public Service Commission for Delhi: HC seeks reply on plea

Context:

The Delhi High Court has sought response of the city government on a petition seeking establishment of a Public Service Commission (PSC) for the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi.

Details:

- The petition has sought a direction to the chief secretary of GNCTD to issue a notification for establishing the PSC.
- The plea claims that a PSC for the national capital would expedite selection of officers for its administration.
- It would also bring greater accountability and transparency.
- The petitioner has alleged critical failure on the part of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) to comply with the provisions of Article 315 and Article 239 AA of the Indian Constitution.
- It has been contended that Article 315 states that there shall be a separate PSC for the Union and each State and the Delhi government has not complied with the provision.
- Under Article 239 AA, the Assembly has the power to make laws for the whole or any part of the NCT with respect to any matters in the State List or in the Concurrent List if any such matter is applicable to UTs “except matters with respect to entries 1, 2 and 18 of the State List and entries 64, 65 and 66 of that list in so far as they relate to the said entries 1, 2 and 18”.
- The petition said establishment of a PSC is item 41 in the State List.
- It added that despite representations sent on the issue to the Lieutenant-Governor and the Chief Secretary of GNCTD, no efforts have been made to set up a PSC for the NCT of Delhi.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Report sought on fly ash management

Context:

The National Green Tribunal sought a report from the authorities on the current status on disposal and management of fly ash.

Details:

- The report has been sought, following a plea alleging unscientific handling of fly ash generated by a unit of NTPC.
- A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson has directed Aravalli Power and Jhajjar Power to provide a report on the current status of fly ash disposal and management.
- They have also been directed to furnish an action plan along with timelines within one month.
- Additionally, the Haryana State Pollution Control Board was directed to furnish a report on the status of air quality and stack monitoring with respect to the two units within one month.

Fly Ash and Fly Ash Management:

- Fly Ash is the residue of the combustion process produced at the time of generating power in coal based thermal power plants.
- It is a resource material used for manufacturing of blocks, bricks & tiles, Portland cement, construction of road embankments, low lying area development and in many applications of construction industries.
- The fly ash content produced as result of combustion of Indian coal is significantly higher as compared to the other countries.
- Various approaches need to be adopted for effective fly ash management.
- The coal has to be washed at the place of origin in order to prevent the ash from entering the power plant. Currently 63% of the fly ash produced is utilised.
- Effective fly ash management reduces fly ash generation.
- This is necessary for the environmental protection and also to reduce the land space occupied by fly ash in the power plant.

2. App to track your carbon footprint to be launched

Context:

Chief Minister of Maharashtra has announced that the State government would now track citizens' carbon footprint through an app.

What is carbon footprint?

Carbon footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization, or community. Carbon footprint of a person is the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted by his/her personal activities.

Background:

- The idea of the app was initiated after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised international organisations to bring India's pollution levels to 2005 levels by 2030.
- The PM had also announced India's aim to generate 175 GW (gigawatt) of renewable energy by 2022, of which 100 GW is to be solar.

- India has, as part of the Paris Summit, promised to reduce greenhouse gas emission by 20% to 25%.

Details:

- The carbon footprints of the citizens will be tracked and those who achieve an emission neutral status will be rewarded with a certificate and tax rebate.
- The footprints of an individual, as per the app, will include his use of electricity, air conditioning, kitchen activities among others.
- The aim is to reduce pollution and carbon emission in the state.
- The State Forest Department is developing the app.
- The app will be able to count the everyday carbon emission of citizens and suggest measures to reduce it depending on the count.
- The app could be used as a tool to create awareness on climate change.

Category: SECURITY

1. Finally, aircraft carrier INS Viraat to be scrapped

Context:

The Parliament was informed that aircraft carrier Viraat is going to be scrapped.

Details:

- The aircraft carrier was decommissioned from service two years ago.
- Efforts to keep it intact by converting it into a museum or other means have not been successful.
- Several States had submitted proposals. However, INS Viraat could not be handed over to any State Government because of non-receipt of a self-sustaining financially complete proposal.
- The Navy had been incurring expenditure on its upkeep such as the provision of electricity and water, and repairs till date.
- Vikrant, also a Centaur class, too, was maintained by the Navy in Mumbai for 17 years as various proposals to convert it into a museum went back and forth unsuccessfully before the ship was eventually sent to a scrapyard in 2014.
- Thus, in view of considerations of safety, security etc., a decision has been taken to scrap INS Viraat.

INS Viraat:

- Viraat is a Centaur class aircraft carrier weighing 27,800 tonnes.
- It had served in the British Navy as HMS Hermes for 25 years from November 1959 to April 1984.
- After refurbishment was commissioned into the Indian Navy in May 1987.
- It was decommissioned from the Navy in March 2017 at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai.
- The Navy has stated on several occasions that it cannot keep Viraat indefinitely as it would block space in the already crowded Mumbai dockyard.

D. GS4 Related

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E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Lessons from Bhutan

What's in the news?

- If a policy recently announced by the Bhutanese government is implemented, Bhutan's teachers, doctors and other medical staff will earn more than civil servants of corresponding grades.

Editorial Analysis:

Taking a Closer Look at the new move by Bhutan:

- The new salary scales will benefit about 13,000 teachers and doctors.
- This is a novel move.
- No other country has accorded teachers and doctors such pride of place in its government service, both in terms of remuneration and symbolism.
- Remarkably, the proposal was announced by Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, himself a qualified doctor — which suggests that professional experience informs the policy.

(a) Examining the Policy:

- It is important to examine the policy's educational aspect.
- Is the proposal part of a coherent strategy, or an inspired announcement that is resolute in intent but likely effete in effect?
- The policy's tonal reference is to be found in Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (2018-23), published by its **Gross National Happiness Commission**, which is also **the country's highest policy-making body**.
- The commission's strategy to achieve desired national outcomes through education opens with the notation, "making teaching a profession of choice".
- The proposal then is evidently at the core of a larger governmental strategy to achieve the country's human developmental objectives.
- The decision also comes in the wake of high levels of teacher attrition, especially the best.
- Experts opine that the government has formulated the policy as a mechanism to stop this attrition.

(b) Positively influencing educational outcomes:

- Intuiting the correlation, as Bhutan has, between attracting the best talent to a profession and the remuneration it potentially offers is easy.
- However, an important question arises: Is it possible to demonstrate that improving the status of the teaching profession positively influences educational outcomes?
- **The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** is a worldwide study that measures and compares student ability in reading, mathematics, science and global competence, with financial literacy an option.
- Accordingly, it ranks educational systems of countries.
- An independent study led by the **economist, Peter Dolton**, has demonstrated a distinct correlation between student outcomes in a country, as measured by PISA scores, and the status that its teachers enjoy.
- The initiative's latest report, **Global Teacher Status Index 2018**, based on its own surveys across 35 countries, goes on to make a strong case for high wages to improve teacher status.
- It is important to note that policies act as levers that governments use to achieve desired results in

focus areas.

- The results of Bhutan's policy, if implemented, will take a few years to emerge for critical evaluation. It is, however, based on credible research.

(c) The fiscal implications:

- Bhutan already spends about 7.5% of its GDP on education. The fiscal implications of the new salary structure are unclear now.
- Generally, teachers constitute a considerable portion of government employees.
- Therefore, governments looking to emulate Bhutan's lead will inevitably be asked questions about the financial viability of such a momentous administrative decision.
- For instance, the Minister concerned in Tamil Nadu, one of India's better performing States on educational indices, turned down demands of striking teachers for better pension explaining that wages, pensions, administrative costs and interest repayments already amounted to 71% of the State's expenditure.
- He asserted it leaves little for other developmental programmes.

(d) Can India afford a similar policy?

- India currently spends about 3% of its GDP on education, accounting for about 10% of the Centre's and States' budgetary expenses.
- Salaries constitute a large portion of this expenditure.
- The NITI Aayog in its report last year (2018) recommended that India raise this to 6% of GDP by 2022.
- Paying teachers (and doctors) significantly higher salaries may seem like a tall order, but the Central and State governments could consider rationalising both teacher recruitment and allocation of funds to existing programmes.
- Some programmes may have outlived their purpose, while others could be pared down or better directed.
- In fact, improving accountability in the system could free up huge savings.
- It is important to note that a World Bank study found that teacher absenteeism in India was nearly 24%, which costs the country about \$1.5 billion annually.
- Absenteeism could be the result of many factors, including teachers taking up a second job or farming to boost incomes, providing parental or nursing care in the absence of support systems, or lacking motivation.
- The incentive of an enviable income which is girded with unsparing accountability could mitigate many ills that plague the system, free fiscal space and help meet important national developmental objectives.
- Piloting a policy of such consequence may also be easier in a smaller State, say Delhi.

(e) Case in Point: Education System in Delhi

- Education is a key focus area for the Delhi government; the State invests 26% of its annual budget in the sector (much more than the national average).
- The administration has also worked on improving teacher motivation as a strategy for better educational outcomes. The base has been set.
- Experts point out that the political leadership in the State, which is unafraid of the bold and big in the social sector, could build on this.
- Moreover, since the State is highly urban and well-connected, it would be easier to enforce accountability measures, which must underpin so heavy an expenditure.

Concluding Remarks:

- Ultimately, no investment that enables an educated, healthy, responsible and happy community can be deemed too high by any society.
- The short-term GDP-minded would do well to consider these words in OECD's 'Education at a Glance 2018' report: "The quality of education can be a strong predictor of a country's economic prosperity. Shortfalls in academic achievement are extremely costly, as governments must then find ways to compensate for them, and ensure the social and economic welfare of all."
- In conclusion, Governments intent on improving the quality of education they offer must step out of incrementalism in policy-making.
- Improving teacher status by offering top notch salaries to attract the best to the profession could be that revolutionary policy-step forward, which Bhutan has shown a willingness to take.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Miles to go

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts point out that '**self-care**', which mostly happens outside the formal health system, is nothing new.

The rise of self-care interventions:

- However, what has changed is the deluge of new diagnostics, devices and drugs that are transforming the way common people access care, when and where they need them.
- With the ability to prevent disease, maintain health and cope with illness and disability with or without reliance on health-care workers, **self-care interventions are gaining more importance.**

The Twin Problems many in India face:

- Millions of people, including in India, face the twin problems of acute shortage of healthcare workers and lack of access to essential health services.
- According to the World Health Organization, which has released self-help guidelines for sexual and reproductive health, over 400 million across the world already lack access to essential health services and there will be a shortage of about 13 million health-care workers by 2035.

What does Self-Help mean?

- Self-help would mean different things for people living in very diverse conditions.
- While it would mean convenience, privacy and ease for people belonging to the upper strata who have easy access to healthcare facilities anytime, for those living in conditions of vulnerability and lack access to health care, self-help becomes the primary, timely and reliable form of care.
- Not surprisingly, the WHO recognises self-care interventions as a means to expand access to health services.
- Soon, experts opine that the WHO would expand the guidelines to include other self-care interventions, including for prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases.

Perspective on India:

- India has some distance to go before making self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health freely available to women.
- As a matter of fact, **Home-based pregnancy testing** is the most commonly used self-help diagnostics in this area in India.

- Interventions include self-managed abortions using approved drugs — morning-after pills taken soon after unprotected sex, and mifepristone and misoprostol taken a few weeks into pregnancy — that can be had without the supervision of a healthcare provider.
- Crucially, while the morning-after pills are available over the counter, mifepristone and misoprostol are scheduled drugs and need a prescription from a medical practitioner, thus defeating the very purpose of the drugs.
- The next commonly consumed drug to prevent illness and disease is the pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention.
- India is yet to come up with guidelines for PrEP use and include it in the national HIV prevention programme.
- Despite the WHO approving the HIV self-test to improve access to HIV diagnosis in 2016, the Pune-based National AIDS Research Institute is still in the process of validating it for HIV screening.
- Lastly, one of the reasons why people shy away from getting tested for HIV is stigma and discrimination.
- The home-based testing provides privacy.
- India has in principle agreed that rapid HIV testing helps to get more people diagnosed and opt for treatment, reducing transmission rates.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Imitation registry

What's in the news?

- Nagaland is following on the footsteps of its western neighbour, Assam, in the task of setting up a **Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN)**.

Editorial Analysis:

- This is a variant of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** that Assam has adopted with decidedly mixed results so far.
- Nagaland claims to have watched the process unfold in Assam, followed it closely, and it will now complete the task of identifying and registering indigenous inhabitants in less than five months, by December 10, 2019.
- This is more or less the kind of time-line that was followed by Assam, which is yet to publish its final NRC a year after the process began.
- In two months from July 10, 2019, Nagaland hopes to have a list of indigenous inhabitants, after which it will be published and time given till October 10 to file claims and objections, before finalisation.

An Issue that needs greater thought:

- Experts opine that Nagaland's plan sounds simple. Furthermore, Nagaland is considerably less populated than Assam.
- However, the Assam experience shows that in the complex demographics of the Northeastern States, it may not turn out that way.
- As many as 40 lakh people were left out of the NRC listing in Assam, which seemed aimed to filter out 'illegal immigrants'.
- Indeed, in Nagaland, various local attempts have been made to determine non-locals, non-tribals and non-Nagas, and identify what some people refer to as the 'Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrant'.
- As a matter of fact, two years ago, a town not farther than 15 km from Dimapur, the largest city and the commercial capital of the State, passed a resolution to place curbs on IBIs and devised ways to

prevent them from integrating, living or trading in the town.

(a) Need to Proceed with Caution:

- Experts opine that when such is the situation on the ground, in an already volatile region where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is routinely extended, **it is best that Nagaland proceeds with caution in this enterprise.**
- The RIIN should not ultimately become a vehicle to make outsiders of insiders.
- The Assam experiment has no clear end-point.
- As a matter of fact, Bangladesh has repeatedly suggested that the process going on in Assam is “an internal matter” of India, implying that there is no deportation possibility here.
- Critics opine that other than deepening the existing fault-lines in its own State and rendering the situation even more volatile, it is unclear what the Nagaland government hopes to achieve through the exercise.

Concluding Remarks:

- An important question arises: What happens to the people who are in the end found to be on the wrong side of the Nagaland list?
- It is important to note that the right to appeal and a humane hearing should be in-built in this exercise.
- Finally, the NRC experiment in Assam witnessed extremely divisive political posturing.
- Other Northeastern states are sure to be watching with keen interest what is unfolding in Assam and Nagaland.
- Emotive political issues cannot be allowed to drive the compiling of a registry of citizens.

2. Violation of reservation in top posts at universities

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that the introduction of the **Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Ordinance, 2019**, which is meant to “provide for the reservation of posts in appointments by direct recruitment of persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the socially and educationally backward classes, to teachers' cadre in certain Central Educational Institutions established, maintained or aided by the Central Government”, **redresses the anomaly found in the recruitment of Other Backward Class (OBC) candidates at higher levels of teaching positions.**

What does the ordinance indicate?

- The ordinance indicates that reservation to OBCs shall be provided at all levels of teaching, leaving no space of misinterpretation by some universities that had arbitrarily restricted reservation for OBCs to the level of ‘Assistant Professor’.

Perspective on Universities in violation of the ordinance:

- Recent advertisements by 13 central universities are in clear violation of the ordinance.
- Of these, only Allahabad University and Dr. Harisingh Gour University have followed fully the reservation policy by earmarking positions for OBCs at all levels, while the Central University of Kashmir has reservation at all levels except that of ‘Professor’.

Representation of OBCs:

- Further, even after a clarification issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development recently, only the Central University of Himachal Pradesh issued a revised notification providing OBC reservation at all levels of teaching.
- Curiously, while the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University — Amarkantak has reserved positions for 'Economically Weaker Sections' (EWS) at the levels of 'Associate Professor' and 'Professor', it has no reserved positions for OBCs.
- The Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which is known for its commitment to issues related to social justice, too has no reservation at higher levels of teaching positions.
- The rapidity with which the Central University of Rajasthan has almost reached the last step of recruitment is questionable.
- It is important to note that **though OBCs account for about 50% of the country's population, their representation in all faculty positions in all central educational institutions is only 9.8%.**
- According to a recent report by the University Grants Commission, only 13.87% of positions at the Assistant Professor-level in central universities were occupied by OBCs. The representation became almost negligible at higher levels, i.e. those of Associate Professor and Professor, accounting for just 1.22% and 1.14%, respectively.
- **Noticeably, the representation of OBCs was less than that of Muslims at higher levels of teaching. Certain communities of Muslims are recognised as OBCs, and if we exclude them, the representation of non-Muslim OBCs in the institutions would become negligible.**

Concluding Remarks:

- Generally, the decision-making power at universities rest upon the Professors and Associate Professors.
- Professors, who play a significant role in the recruitment process, at times misinterpret the constitutional provisions.
- Even if a violation is found, the maximum a court does is to order a correction to the institution's advertisement, without awarding any compensation to the petitioner or punishment to the violators. Moreover, legal procedure is tedious and hence is generally avoided.
- Noticeably, implementation of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs in higher educational institutions funded by the Centre was delayed for more than 15 years after the announcement, while the same for EWS was done within a month of the announcement.
- Such differential treatment results in imbalanced representation of a social group at higher levels of teaching and decision-making.

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. Is there a case for free rides for women?

Editorial Analysis:

- In an important recent development, **women may soon get to travel for free on buses and Metro trains in Delhi.**
- However, experts point out that **this gender-based public transport fare subsidy programme, announced by the Aam Aadmi Party government, has not been tested anywhere in India in the past.**

Looking at the two sides of the argument:

- Proponents claim that the policy will protect and liberate women.
- Critics argue that it is financially unviable and unfair.
- As polarised debates over the intent and impact of the policy continue, it is useful to assess whether

this idea, in principle, has any merit.

- **A Look at the International Perspective:**

- It is important to note that cities often provide public transport fare subsidies to all or some citizens to encourage them to use public transport, or for easing their travel cost burdens.
- **Singapore, for example, offers a discount to rail commuters who are willing to travel before the morning rush-hour.**
- **Public transport is free for residents in Estonia.**
- Luxembourg, with a population of about 600,000, has made public transport free for those under the age of 20. Paris, with a population of over 2 million, has announced a comparable plan.
- Hong Kong has implemented a public transport fare concession scheme for people aged 65 years or more.
- Berlin offered women a 21% ticket discount for one day in March this year (2019) to highlight the gender wage gap.

(b) The Indian Perspective:

- In India, however, urban transport fare discounts are less common, although concessions for seniors, students, and other socioeconomic groups are available for government-operated flights and long-distance railway services.
- Further, **fare discounts intend to make public transport truly public as some people are at a relative disadvantage in urban transportation markets due to their unique social, economic, and health circumstances.**
- As a matter of fact, **Article 13 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises freedom of movement as a basic human right.**
- If we consider transportation as a fundamental social need and providing mobility for the transportation-disadvantaged as our collective responsibility, then any urban transport policy should include subsidies targeted at the disadvantaged.
- **Specific supply-side investments or fare price discounts to help the disadvantaged travel, conduct activities and prosper are therefore justified.**
- Public transport may even need to be free for some. In this context, it is important to examine the case of women.

(c) A Note on Women Commuters:

- It is important to note that women in India travel far less than men, and this has significant impacts on their education, employment, and enjoyment.
- A study in Delhi found that college girls, compared to boys, chose lower ranked colleges with safe and reliable transport access.
- Similarly, an estimated 60% of women workers in India choose to work from home or at a place which is less than a km from home, according to the 2011 Census.
- **The remaining working women tend to rely excessively on public transport, according to a World Bank Study conducted in Delhi.**
- An RTI application revealed that, in 2013, **only 13% of Delhi driving licences were issued to women.** These findings are suggestive of gender differences in travel choices and patterns.

(d) Factors Contributing to the Inequality:

- Wage discrimination, gender segregation in employment, and household labour divisions contribute to gender inequality in transportation.
- Because men's jobs are considered to be more valuable, they tend to own the household vehicles and commute privately.
- This lopsided rationing of household transport budgets also results in women taking slower commute options to save on expenses.

- When Delhi Metro hiked fares last year (2018), around 70% of women surveyed in a study suggested that they would have to choose a less safe travel option for work, or travel less.
- **It is important to note that compromises on education and jobs for travel purposes is one of the reasons for women earning less than men, leaving the workforce, and consequently being more cash-poor than men. Finally, limited money to travel also means that women are willing to forgo hospital visits, significantly affecting their health.**
- There may be a case for free or discounted public transport for women.
- A subsidy like this is most likely to benefit women who might consider taking up jobs for which they are better suited but are further away from home.
- Women can engage in a range of activities that promote their well being. Free public transport can therefore bring more women to public spaces, and, consequently, make those spaces safer for women.

(e) Examining the cost of free rides:

- Two questions remain. Who will pay for the subsidies aimed at the transportation-disadvantaged? And will such subsidies make it difficult for public transport to achieve its other major goal — reducing car use and cleaning up the air?
- To address these questions, we must first recognise that personal motorised vehicle travel is highly subsidised globally, including in India. Believe it or not, driving is cheap.
- **Car and motorised two-wheeler users are not required to pay for the full costs their travel choices inflict on society in the form of traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and distortions in urban form.**
- It is important to note that promotion of cleaner fuels and vehicle-sharing can reduce but not eliminate the costs.

The Way Forward:

- Indian cities must consider pricing interventions such as congestion charges, mileage-based road use charges, parking charges, and higher petrol taxes so that private driving costs better reflect full social costs.
- London and Stockholm, for example, have been charging for congestion for over a decade. Such measures, in addition to discouraging driving, can help governments generate funds for expanding, improving, and operating relatively cleaner transportation alternatives such as public transport.
- It is important to note that better public transport service is key to getting people out of cars, reducing air pollution, and making cities more liveable.

It is possible that revenues from appropriately charging personal motorised travel will be sufficient to make travel by public transport cheap or free for the transportation-disadvantaged, without any additional public subsidy requirement.

As a matter of fact, **even if free public transport for women makes economic sense and seems fair, would all women support the policy?**

Concluding Remarks:

- Informal surveys conducted after the Delhi government's announcement suggests that women are divided in their preference for the policy.
- Women who feel this policy treats them as lesser citizens should have the choice to opt out.
- Whether a free public transport pass for women should be income-based is unclear; means-testing for a public transport fare concession programme may not be worth the effort.
- Finally, this debate is not for Delhi alone.
- **It's time that all Indian cities crafted efficient, effective, fair, and context-specific public**

transport policies. Men and women do not enjoy equal freedom to move in India, and policymakers should act.

F. Tidbits

1. Thermal plants are wasting water

- The government is launching a massive awareness campaign exhorting people to conserve water.
- However, key thermal plants across the country are wasting water. By doing this, thermal plant are contravening a 2015 order by the Union environment ministry to use water efficiently.
- Just about 51% of the plants were found to be in compliance with the regulations.
- Out of the total 156 plants/units, 66 claimed that they complied with the water consumption limits, while 30 admitted that they were non-compliant.
- For another 46 plants, either data was not available, or replies were ambiguous or the plants were closed.
- As other 14 plants were using sea water, they are exempted from the regulations.
- Thermal power plants consume, on an average, 5-7 cubic metres/MWh of water.
- According to a Central Electricity Authority report from 2012 Every reduction of 0.5 cubic metres/MWh in the specific consumption of a 1000 MW plant could save enough water in a year to irrigate 700 ha of land; or provide drinking and domestic use water to 68,000 people for an entire year.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Titan is the Second largest natural satellite in the solar system.
2. Titan is larger than Earth's Moon.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

Titan is Saturn's largest moon. It is the second largest natural satellite in the solar system after Ganymede. It is larger than planet Mercury. It is the only moon known to have a dense atmosphere. It is 50% larger than Earth's moon and 80% more massive.

Q2. Which of the following is not a member of the G 20?

- a. Brazil

- b. India
- c. Turkey
- d. Afghanistan

Answer: d

Explanation:

The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Asset Reconstruction refers to conversion of non-performing assets into performing assets.
2. Asset Reconstructions are regulated under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

An Asset Reconstruction Company is a specialized financial institution that buys the NPAs or bad assets from banks and financial institutions so that the latter can clean up their balance sheets. Asset Reconstruction refers to conversion of non-performing assets into performing assets. Asset Reconstructions are regulated under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002.

Q4. Brihat Samhita was written by

- a. Kalidasa
- b. Vishnu Sharma
- c. Bana
- d. Varaha Mihira

Answer: d

Explanation:

Varahamihira lived in Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh). His most notable work was Brihat Samhita, an encyclopedic work on architecture, temples, planetary motions, eclipses, timekeeping, astrology, seasons, cloud formation, rainfall, agriculture, mathematics, gemology, perfumes and many other topics.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. India should aim for a digital non-alignment. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Comment on the role of Cooperative Federalism in bringing about agricultural reforms in India. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

