

21 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. An estimate of WASH across healthcare facilities in India

Context:

- Study into the cost of ensuring **WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene)** in healthcare facilities of India.

Background:

Lack of WASH facilities:

- A 2019 joint global baseline report by **WHO** and **UNICEF** had pointed out that globally, one in four healthcare facilities lacked basic water servicing and one in five had no sanitation service and 42% had no hygiene facilities at point of care.

Concerns with low coverage of WASH provisions:

- Inadequacies in providing WASH and also lack of infection prevention and control can lead to **healthcare associated infections**. Pathogens like *Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella typhi*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* have been implicated as causative agents of healthcare associated infections because of their ability to develop **resistance to antibiotics**.
- Around 8,27,000 people in low and middle-income countries die as a result of inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene each year. Approximately, **death of 2,97,000 children under five years** can be prevented each year if better WASH could be provided.

Details:

- The study estimates that improving WASH across the public healthcare facilities in India and maintaining this for a year would cost \$354 million in capital costs and \$289 million in recurrent expenses.
- The study finds that the most costly interventions were providing clean water, linen reprocessing and sanitation while the least expensive were hand hygiene, medical device reprocessing and environmental surface cleaning.

Significance of WASH strategy:

Developmental goal:

- The status of WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in healthcare facilities is an important issue in development. Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation is one of the **2030 sustainable development goals**.

Infection prevention and control:

- WASH is related to infection prevention and control. WASH interventions can help **reduce healthcare-associated infections among mother and neonates** across the Indian healthcare system. In the fight against the spread of antimicrobial resistance, prevention of infections is an important aspect.

Cost effective intervention:

- A 2012 WHO report had calculated that for every dollar invested in sanitation, there was \$5.50 to be gained in **lower health costs, more productivity and fewer premature deaths**.
- Addressing gaps in WASH across the Indian healthcare system is affordable when compared to other national health campaigns and provides a cost effective health intervention in the Indian context with limited recourses available for health interventions.

Way forward:

- There is the need for a concerted effort from local bodies, State and Central governments to sustainably **address quality and inequality issues in WASH provision**.
- There is the need to combine the WASH initiative with other national efforts to address health priorities. The intersection between WASH, infection prevention and control and antimicrobial resistance offers policy makers an opportunity to address multiple overlapping problems through interventions on WASH in healthcare facilities.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Modi, Morrison discuss media Bill

Context:

- Conversation between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Details:

- India and Australia being **comprehensive strategic partners**, are working together on issues like COVID-19, the circular economy, oceans and an open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- The two leaders also discussed the progress of Australia's media platform Bill.
 - Under the **News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020**, tech and social media giants such as Facebook and Google will have to pay local news outlets for using their content.
 - The Australian law would force Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google to reach commercial deals with Australian publishers or face compulsory arbitration.
- The move is being studied worldwide as it will set a precedent in the use of Web-based news and content. Legislation is being studied worldwide given that many governments are struggling to contain online platforms. The Indian government too is looking at reining in major social media platforms.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Wettest place on Earth sees decreasing trend in rainfall

Context:

- Research on the changes in rainfall pattern across India.

Background:

- Cherrapunji was previously the wettest place on earth but now **Mawsynram is the wettest place in the world**. Mawsynram receives over 10,000 millimetres of rain in a year.

Details:

Decreasing trend of rainfall:

- The study which looked at the rainfall pattern in the past 119 years (period of 1901–2019) found a **decreasing trend** at Cherrapunji and nearby areas.
- The study noted that the annual mean rainfall for the period 1973–2019 showed decreasing trends of about 0.42 mm per decade.

Factors affecting the trend:

- Researchers have noted that the **changes in the Indian Ocean temperature** have a huge effect on the rainfall in the region.
- The **role of humans** is also another significant factor affecting the observed change in rainfall pattern. Satellite data analysis shows a **reduction in the vegetation area in northeast India** in the past two decades, implying that human influence also plays an important role in the changing rainfall patterns. There has been a marked increase in areas of cropland from the year 2006 onwards.
 - The traditional way of cultivation known as **Jhum cultivation or shifting cultivation** and developmental activities in the region has contributed to deforestation.

Concerns:

- **Northeast India is highly sensitive to changes in regional and global climate**. The first signs of the effect of climate change will be evident for the extreme cases such as the rainfall at Cherrapunji.
- Northeast India has the highest vegetation cover in India and includes 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world, and thus is important in terms of its greenery and climate-change sensitivity.

Way forward:

- There is the need to conserve the vegetation or forest areas in the northeast.
- Solid waste and waste water management strategies are inevitable to combat climate-induced changes of water bodies and ground water.
- Given the climate sensitivity of the region **long-term plans for sustainable development** are necessary.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. The road map for reducing public sector role

Context:

- The new disinvestment policy

Details:

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech for 2021-22, announced a new policy for central public sector enterprises (CPSEs). The policy would serve as a roadmap for disinvestment of government-owned firms across sectors.

Vision:

- In the areas that are strategic, bare minimum CPSEs will be maintained and the rest of the firms will be privatised, merged or subsidiarized with other CPSEs, or closed.
 - The strategic sectors include atomic energy, space and defence, transport and telecommunications, power, petroleum, coal and other minerals, and lastly, banking, insurance and financial services.
- All firms in sectors considered non-strategic would be either privatized or closed.

Proposed process:

- The NITI Aayog would suggest which public sector firms in strategic sectors should be retained, considered for privatisation or merger or 'subsidiarisation' with another public sector firm, or simply closed.
- A core group of secretaries on disinvestment will consider the NITI Aayog's suggestions and forward its views to a ministerial group.
- The ministerial group would include the Finance Minister, Road Transport and Highways Minister and the minister in charge of the administrative ministry of the public sector enterprise concerned.
- After the ministerial group's nod, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management in the Finance Ministry will move a proposal to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for an 'in-principle' nod to sell specific CPSEs.

Exclusion:

- Public sector firms and corporations engaged in activities allied to the farm sector will not be privatised.
- Similarly departments with commercial operations like Railways and Posts, firms making appliances for the physically challenged, and those providing support to vulnerable groups through financing of SCs, STs, minorities and backward classes will also not be privatized.

- CPSES “maintaining critical data or having a bearing on national security”, security printing and minting companies, will not be privatized.

Objective of privatization:

Impetus to private sector participation and associated benefits:

- The policy’s objective is to minimise the public sector’s role and create new investment space for the private sector, in the hope that the infusion of private capital, technology and management practices will contribute to growth and new jobs.

Revenue stream for the government:

- The proceeds from the sale of the public firms would help finance various government-run social sector and developmental programmes.
 - The Union Budget has estimated Rs. 1.75 lakh crore as receipts from PSU stake sales in the current year.

Concerns:

Challenges of privatization:

- There have been challenges in previous attempts at privatization.
 - For example the failed attempt to sell 76% of the stake in the loss-ridden national carrier Air India. Also an earlier attempt to sell Air India had got stalled in the face of a political outcry.

Low price realization of PSE shares:

- As compared to the disinvestment target of Rs. 2.10 lakh crore for 2020-21, just about Rs. 20,000 crore has been raised so far.

Impact of the pandemic:

- The more recent attempts at privatization of Air India Maharatna oil PSU Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL), Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India and Pawan Hans were affected by the pandemic. The timelines and investor interest were affected by the pandemic.
- The turmoil in the global economy due to the economic impact of the pandemic could impact the valuations of firms being privatised.
- Privatisation during a recession may dampen economic recovery as investors will end up buying existing capacities instead of embarking on fresh investments.

Piecemeal approach:

- The privatization approach has been piecemeal and has created uncertainty.

Significance of new policy:

- The new policy is significant as it goes beyond a piecemeal approach and lays down a clear cut vision. The new policy goes beyond the Vajpayee-era privatisation drive, which was limited to a 'case-by-case' sale of entities in non-strategic sectors.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Conclusive land titling and its challenges

Context:

- Proposed bill on Conclusive Land Titling.

Background:

- The government's think tank, NITI Aayog, has proposed a bill on Conclusive Land Titling.
- The Model Bill on Conclusive Land Titling has been sent to States and Union Territories seeking their comments.

Details:

Current system:

- India currently follows a system of presumptive land titling. This means that land records are maintained, with information on possession, which is determined through details of past transactions.
- Ownership is established on the basis of current possession. Registration of land is actually a registration of transactions, such as sale deeds, records of inheritance, mortgage and lease.
- Holding registration papers does not actually guarantee the ownership title of the land.

Proposed system:

- Under a conclusive land titling system, land records designate actual ownership.
- The title is granted by the government, which takes the responsibility for accuracy. Once a title is granted, any other claimant will have to settle disputes with the government, not the title holder.
- Further, under conclusive land titling, the title holder is not in any danger of losing ownership.

Significance of new system:

- The new system envisages reforming the country's land markets through a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded.

Lower litigation:

- A conclusive land titling system will drastically lower litigation related to land.
- Land-related disputes account for two-thirds of all pending court cases in India. Disputes on land or real estate take an average time of 20 years in the courts to be resolved.

Incentivize economic activity:

- Currently land titles are based on transactions where people have to keep the entire chain of transaction records, and a dispute on any link in that chain causes ambiguity in ownership.
- The increased confidence on land ownership documents will allow investors to purchase land for business activities without uncertainty or fear of risk. The long-running court cases currently stifle the appetite for investment in many sectors of the economy.
- The new system would help end land disputes which create hurdles for infrastructure development and housing construction.

Active land market:

- The new system would promote an active land market.

Ease of governance:

- Conclusive land titling will allow the urban local bodies to collect property taxes more effectively.
- Ambiguity in ownership also results in a black market for land transactions, which deprives the government of taxes. This would end under the new system.

Benefit for small and marginal farmers:

- The new system with conclusive land titles would allow the small and marginal farmers to access agricultural credit through formal channels by using their land as collateral.
- This will allow them to have access to timely and cheap credit.

Challenges:**Un-updated records:**

- The biggest challenge is that land records have not been updated for decades, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Unless the land titles are not based on updated records, conclusive land titles could create even more problems.

Challenge to claimants:

- In case of any disputes over the land titles, the onus falls on claimants, many of whom have no access to documentation, to proactively challenge the titling. This could strain them financially.

Lack of human resources:

- The local governments do not have the resources or manpower to conduct local level surveys to undertake the envisaged process.

Way forward:

- Comprehensive village-level local surveys with community involvement are a necessary precursor to the land titling process.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Gauging einsteinium

- **Einsteinium is an element with the symbol Es and atomic number 99.**
- Einsteinium is a member of the actinide series. Einsteinium was discovered as a component of the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion in 1952.
- It is **exceptionally radioactive**.
- Recently, chemists have studied and characterised its properties in the lab.

2. Perseverance to search for signs of life

- **NASA's Mars rover, Perseverance** has successfully touched down on the Martian surface (Jezero Crater). The touchdown is the first step in the effort to collect Mars samples and return them to Earth.
- The main objective of the mission is to search for signs of **ancient microbial life on Mars**.

3. Rebels with a green cause

- **Extinction Rebellion** is an environmental group that seeks to turn **public attention to climate change and biodiversity loss** through shock protests.
- XR has three key demands: Governments should 'tell the truth' about the climate crisis; commit themselves to act on net zero carbon emissions by 2025; and create citizens' assemblies that will advise them on a just transition.

4. Mammoth tale

- A new study suggests that climate change and not extensive hunting by humans may have driven the **large mammals of North America such as mammoths and glyptodons** to extinction.
 - Glyptodon was a genus of large, heavily armored mammals that lived during the Pleistocene epoch.
- The study notes that 13,000 years ago the intense lowering of temperatures resulted in the slow decline of mammals in North America.

G. Tidbits

1. Promote Indian languages: Venkaiah

- Ahead of **International Mother Language Day**, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu has written to all members of the Upper House urging them to promote and preserve Indian languages.
- Cultural and linguistic diversity form the bedrock of Indian civilisation. India is home to 19,500 languages and dialects, of which 200 were facing the threat of immediate extinction.

2. India backs the Maldives on UN role

- India has reiterated its support for a greater role for the Maldives in multilateral affairs. Multilateral engagement is very important in the contemporary globalised system.
- **Maldives is a part of the Indian Ocean Regional Association. The Maldives also rejoined the Commonwealth in February 2020**, three years after it quit the organisation.

3. CSR shouldn't be mandated, says Premji

- IT czar and philanthropist Azim Premji recently stated that companies should not be legally mandated to engage in corporate social responsibility.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- a. Jhum: India
- b. Roca: Brazil
- c. Ladang: Myanmar
- d. Milpa: Mexico

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Shifting Cultivation is known as Ladang in Indonesia, Caingin in Philippines, Milpa in Central America & Mexico, Ray in Vietnam, Taungya in Myanmar, Tamrai in Thailand, Chena in Sri Lanka, Conuco in Venezuela, Roca in Brazil, Masole in central Africa.
- In India, it is known by various local names. Most common among these is 'Jhum' cultivation.

Q2. The News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020 is associated With which of the following country?

- a. Australia
- b. Canada
- c. France
- d. U.S.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Under Australia's News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code Bill 2020, tech and social media giants such as Facebook and Google will have to pay local news outlets for using their content.
- The Australian law would force Facebook and Alphabet Inc.'s Google to reach commercial deals with Australian publishers or face compulsory arbitration.

Q3. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Einsteinium?

1. It was discovered as a component of the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion in 1952.
2. It is exceptionally radioactive.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Einsteinium is an element with the symbol Es and atomic number 99.
- Einsteinium is a member of the actinide series. Einsteinium was discovered as a component of the debris of the first hydrogen bomb explosion in 1952.
- It is exceptionally radioactive.
- Recently, chemists have studied and characterised its properties in the lab.

Q4. In which of the following multilateral organizations are both India and Maldives both members?

- 1. SAARC
- 2. Commonwealth of Nations
- 3. Indian Ocean Regional Association

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1,2 and 3
- d. 1 and 3 only

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Maldives is a part of the Indian Ocean Regional Association and also the SAARC.
- The Maldives also rejoined the Commonwealth in February 2020, three years after it quit the organisation.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. In the light of the new policy for central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) announced by the Finance Minister in the Budget speech for 2021-22, evaluate the significance and challenges therein with respect to disinvestment of government-owned firms. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-3,Economy]

2. The proposed bill on Conclusive Land Titling envisages a fundamental legal and procedural shift in how land titles are awarded in India and this would yield multiple benefits to various stakeholders. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)[GS-2,governance]

