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CURRENT AFFAIRS

1. SOON, USE MOBILES, INTERNET ON FLIGHTS IN INDIA

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended that in-flight connectivity — both Internet and MCA (mobile communication on aircraft) services — should be allowed over Indian airspace.

The Authority is of the view that as long as the provision of the service is technically feasible and security concerns can be addressed, there should be no regulatory barrier in the provisioning of any of these services. Therefore, both Internet and MCA service should be permitted as in-flight connectivity (IFC) services in the Indian airspace.

2. GOVT PLANS LIVEABILITY INDEX OF 116 CITIES

- ❑ The ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has decided to bring out a liveability index of 116 cities, including the 99 smart cities already identified, state capitals, and cities with 1 million-plus population. The cities, which together account for a total population of 13.4 crore people, will be ranked in order of the quality of life they offer.
- ❑ The ministry has decided to involve the Economist Intelligence Unit, which brings out an annual liveability index of cities across the world, for the purpose.
- ❑ The programme would be funded by the World Bank, and the assessment would be of relative nature, with the 116 cities graded against each other.
- ❑ Currently, the EIU's 'Global Liveability Ranking' for 140 cities includes only two Indian cities — Mumbai and Delhi.

3. NEW NATIONAL URBAN POLICY

The Union government is set to come up with **India's first National Urban Policy framework**. With urban development being a state subject until now; there has never been a comprehensive national policy that spells out the country's plan for urbanisation.

The housing and urban affairs ministry has appointed a panel, headed by Smart City Mission Director Sameer Sharma, to develop such a policy framework.

The aim is to outline the plan in keeping with the commitments made by all nations at **Habitat III**, the bi-decennial United Nations (UN) conference on housing and sustainable urban development held in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016. The policy will look at urban legislation, urban economy, and urban planning. The panel is expected to revisit the New Urban Agenda, released at Habitat III, which defines what nations are expected to do towards the cause of sustainable urban development in the period 2016-30.

The National Urban Policy will focus on 10 main areas. These include cooperative federalism, agglomeration economies, harnessing rural-urban continuum, inclusive growth, sustainability, empowering local-level institutions, sound housing and urban infrastructure finance system, social justice and gender equity, and robust urban information system.

Goal No. 11 of UN's Sustainable Development Goals requires world leaders to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". As per UN estimates, urban India will have 583 mn people by 2030, with an addition of 65 mn to the current urban population base. India will account for 18-19 per cent of the global increase in urban population and therefore its urban development indicators such as water supply, sanitation, garbage management etc will affect global averages. Also, Indian cities currently contribute 63 per cent of the country's GDP which is lower than the share of cities in most countries.

The paradigm shift

According to a draft note by UN-Habitat, India has moved from a 'business-as-usual approach' to paying systematic attention to urbanisation and its challenges. The paradigm changes it has brought while addressing the challenges of urbanisation are:

1. Taking urbanisation as an opportunity rather than a challenge
2. Citizen-centric approach to align the development agenda of the cities with people's priorities and needs
3. Cooperative federalism: Freedom and resources to states/urban local bodies (ULBs) to design and implement
4. Focus on infrastructure that leads to delivery of services to citizens
5. Renewed focus on integrated planning through convergence and qualitative improvements
6. Commitment to environment sustainability
7. Focus on inclusive growth
8. Technology to enhance efficiency of services delivery
9. Shift from project-based approach to outcome-based approach Based on these principles, India has developed its vision of urbanisation which reinforces the planned approach for addressing urban issues. It lays down 10 broad levers to make cities work towards greater efficiency, inclusion, sustainability and safety. These levers are:
 - ❑ Putting in place integrated urban policies consistent with principle of co-operative federalism
 - ❑ Harmonise agglomeration economies
 - ❑ Harnessing the rural-urban continuum
 - ❑ Promoting inclusive urban development
 - ❑ Recognise and actively promote the centrality of sustainability
 - ❑ Empowering municipalities and other local level institutions
 - ❑ Strengthening housing finance system
 - ❑ Provision and financing of urban infrastructure and basic services
 - ❑ Access to social justice and gender equity
 - ❑ Robust urban information system

4. NON-PROLIFERATION NOD

India gained entry into the Australia Group (AG), an important non-proliferation regime which seeks to ensure that exports do not contribute to the development of chemical or biological weapons. After the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), the membership in another of the four major export control regimes is expected to give India a boost in its bid to secure a berth in the 48-member Nuclear Suppliers Group, which has been blocked by China at the behest of Pakistan. China is not a member of the MTCR, the WA and the AG.

5. EC ON OFFICE OF PROFIT

The Election Commission has recommended that 20 Aam Aadmi Party MLAs embroiled in the office of profit case be disqualified.

What is the issue?

On 13th March 2015, the AAP government passed an order appointing 21 MLAs as Parliamentary Secretaries. This was challenged by Advocate Prashant Patel who petitioned President Pranab Mukherjee that these MLAs should be disqualified. The Delhi Legislative Assembly, then passed the Delhi Member of Legislative Assembly (Removal of Disqualification) (Amendment Bill), 2015 excluding Parliamentary Secretaries from “office of profit” with retrospective effect. However, the President withheld assent to the amendment bill and referred the matter to the Election Commission.

Interestingly, the Delhi High Court heard a writ petition challenging the very appointment of 21 Parliamentary Secretaries by the Delhi Chief Minister and quashed it. The issue in front of the Election Commission is whether the office of Parliamentary Secretary in the GNCTD, 1991 constitutes an ‘office of profit’. Article 191 in the Indian Constitution has not defined the term ‘office of profit’, therefore paving the way for courts to lay down the law.

What is the status now?

Following notices by the Election Commission, the 21 AAP MLAs have given their reply in writing-- seeking, additionally, a personal hearing which was turned down. Advocate Prashant Patel has also submitted his rejoinder to the replies of AAP MLAs. The President will have to sign on the decision taken by EC, a quasi-judicial body.

What is the reply of AAP MLAs to the Election Commission?

- ❑ Complainant has suppressed the fact that in the State of Delhi, the position of Parliamentary Secretary is 'honorary' in nature and no financial benefits are attached to it.
- ❑ No facilities such as official space, vehicle, staff for office, residential accommodation, technical devices, travelling allowance or any additional emoluments / re-imburement of any nature is being given to the MLAs in their capacity as Parliamentary Secretary.

- ❑ The veracity and legality of the order 13th March 2015 is sub judice and is being considered by the High Court and, it would be in the fitness of things to await the decision in the said matter before the arguments in the present case is heard.
- ❑ The law laid down in the judgment in Dr Deorao Laxman Anande Vs Keshav Laxman Borkar AIR 1958 Bom 314 interpreting Article 191 (a) notes that the post cannot be regarded as office for the following reasons:
 - (a) non- remunerative and without a dedicated salary unlike ministerial posts.
 - (b) No perks attached to the post / appointment
 - (c) No dedicated office or office support systems designated
 - (d) No exclusive responsibilities or functions , with the sole purpose being to assist the Minister-in-charge for any assistance he may need in connection with his work for the govt.
 - (e) No exclusive prerogative to tender opinion on any subject of governance , or authority to execute ministerial work given.

6. A poor prognosis: the National Medical Commission Bill-The National Medical Commission Bill is unlikely to provide a dynamic new thrust to medical care in India

National Medical Commission drawbacks:

- ❑ A regulatory body should be expected only to regulate and not to formulate policy, which is the function of Parliament and requires inputs from a number of sources, preferably with different points of view.
- ❑ The Commission should only be expected to monitor and regulate the training of health-care personnel and maintain professional standards.

Lack of point of integration:

- ❑ It is poor policymaking to smuggle in clauses about interdisciplinary meetings between different medical systems and bridge courses into this Bill, under the omnibus “miscellaneous” section
- ❑ The failure of successive governments to promote scientific medicine and integrate the best of indigenous systems into one unified system has led to unhealthy competition among the various streams of medicine in India. It must be emphasised that modern medicine is wrongly labelled “Western” or “Allopathy”.

Who should the members of the Commission be?

- ❑ The present system of appointing members to the MCI has failed, resulting in rent-seekers repeatedly entering the Council.

- ❑ The election process should be reformed, not replaced. The proposal to have sections of society other than medical professionals in the commission is laudable. Having an almost entirely nominated commission, as the present Bill provides, is unhealthy

Should private initiative be allowed in medical education?

If the government is sincere in its objective of providing universal medical care, it is clear that high-cost private education will further exacerbate the problem of too many specialists in metropolitan areas chasing too few patients.

Way forward

The government should exhibit statesmanship and form a parliamentary committee to draft a new Bill altogether with clear and workable objectives. In the end, policy decisions should be decided by policymakers, and not bureaucrats.

Also Refer

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Prelims practice question

Consider the following statements

- 1) Before election, it is the duty of the Election Commission and its officers to look into the nominations and study whether the contesting candidates hold any post which would disqualify them for contesting elections
- 2) Recommendation of Election commission is binding on president

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. Only 1 B. Only 2 C. Both 1 and 2 D. Neither 1 nor 2

Mains practice question

1. National Medical Commission replacing the Medical council of India may not actually reform the process- Comment.