

# 25 Mar 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A. GS1 Related

### B. GS2 Related

#### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

- [1. Pulwama: India to seek U.S. virtual SIM details](#)

#### **POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

- [1. Scooters, bikes used as earth excavators in Mizoram: CAG](#)

### C. GS3 Related

#### **INTERNAL SECURITY**

- [1. Army's carbine procurement held up](#)

#### **ENVIRONMENT**

- [1. Rising sea levels to affect water table in T.N.](#)
- [2. Rushikulya waits for Olive Ridleys](#)

### D. GS4 Related

### E. Editorials

#### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

- [1. Parallel tracks on trade ties \(India-US Relations- Trade Issues\)](#)

#### **POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

- [1. Twelve years later](#)
- [2. Disinformation is everywhere in India](#)
- [3. Another look at fiscal transfers](#)

### F. Tidbits

- [1. A hawker raising awareness about voting in Bihar's capital](#)

### G. Prelims Fact

- [1. Basant Utsav](#)
- [2. Chenchus](#)
- [3. Kyasanur Forest Disease \(KFD or monkey fever\)](#)
- [4. Heat wave](#)

### H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

### I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

## A. GS1 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## B. GS2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Pulwama: India to seek U.S. virtual SIM details

#### Context:

Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) suicide bomber behind the Pulwama attack and his Pakistan and Kashmir-based handlers used virtual SIMs.

#### Details:

- A request would be sent to the U.S. to seek details from a service provider of “virtual SIMs”, which were used by the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) suicide.
- The request to the US will include details of phone numbers that got in touch with the "Virtual SIM" and who had activated it, they said, adding that Internet Protocol addresses would also be sought.
- While the security agencies would attempt to find who had paid for the virtual SIM, they were also aware that the terror groups used forged identities, as was done during the Mumbai 26/11 terror strikes.

### **What is virtual SIM?**

- It is a fairly new modus operandi where terrorists across the border were using a "virtual SIM", generated by a service provider in the US.
- In this technology, a computer generates a telephone number and the user downloads an application of the service provider on their smartphone.
- The number is linked to social networking sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram or Twitter. The verification code generated by these networking sites is received on the smartphone and the user is ready.

## **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. Scooters, bikes used as earth excavators in Mizoram: CAG**

#### **Issue:**

A report of the Comptroller and Auditor General has unearthed anomalies in the implementation of Border Area Development Programme (BADP) from 2012-2017 along Mizoram’s border with Myanmar.

#### **Details:**

- Moving earth in mountainous Mizoram is apparently the job of two-wheelers, not excavators.
- Earth-cutting and excavation along the border were done with scooters, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws and cars.
- According to the CAG report, Mizoram’s Rural Development department and block development officers of Champhai and Lungsun Blocks hired “earth excavators” for 67 road projects along the border.
- A cross-check of the registration numbers of the “earth movers” mentioned in money receipts with the State Transport Department revealed they were two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and small cars.
- The CAG also found that the same vehicles recorded as earth excavators or trucks were used at two or more different places at the same time in 20 of the 67 BADP projects.

#### **Border Area Development Programme (BADP):**

- The BADP was started in the year 1986-87 for balanced development of border areas of States bordering Pakistan, namely, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Gujarat and Rajasthan and subsequently it was extended to all the land borders.
- It has been implemented through 17 States (viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal) which constitute the International Land Borders.
- The main objective of the BADP is to meet the special developmental needs and well-being of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to saturate the border areas with the entire essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/ State/

BADP/ Local schemes and participatory approach.

- The funds under BADP are provided to the States as a 100% non-lapsable Special Central Assistance.

In 2015, the government had released revised guidelines for the modified Border Area Development Programme (BDAP).

- BADP was extended to all villages located within 0-10 km of International border in all the 17 states that share India 's international borders.
- Within these villages, the villages identified by the Border Guarding Forces will get first priority.
- The Empowered Committee on BADP under the secretary, Department of Border Management would include representatives of Ministries of Rural Development, Sports, and Health etc.
- Some new schemes for convergence to BADP were included viz. Swachhta Abhiyan, Skill Development Programmes, Rural / border tourism, scientific farming etc.
- Provisions for third party inspection and quality control mechanism were included.
- Special and specific area schemes were included under which some villages were to be developed as model villages.

## C. GS3 Related

**Category: INTERNAL SECURITY**

### 1. Army's carbine procurement held up

**Issue:**

The fast-track procurement of 93,895 Close Quarter Carbine (CQB) rifles for the Army has been delayed even after the completion of cost negotiations as the case is pending with the Defence Ministry.

**Details:**

- Cost negotiations have been completed, and the file has gone to a three-member oversight committee where it has been held up without a decision.
- The oversight committee consists of members of the Army, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Defence Ministry.
- The status of the case was on the agenda of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) meeting.
- In January 2018, the DAC approved the purchase of 72,400 assault rifles and 93,895 carbines through the fast-track procurement (FTP) mode.

**Close Quarter Carbine:**

- Carbines are nothing but, miniaturized assault rifles featuring an overall shorter barrel and is comparatively lighter in weight and easier to handle compared to Assault Rifle.
- Carbines are an effective trade-off between weight and range of a rifle to an effective mobility to allow a soldier to offset the weight of body armour and additional equipment a soldier has to carry.
- Carbines are suited for Indoor Operations during Close Quarter Battles as they are easy to handle and manoeuvre compared to full length Assault Rifles.
- They are mostly long gun with a barrel that is under 20 inch.
- The carbine should have an effective range of 200 m and weigh less than 2 kg.

Indian Army has been looking to replace age-old 'INSAS' (Indian National Small Arms System) rifles in use which has reliability issues. The close-quarter battle (CQB) carbines are critical for the Indian Army

posted in the Kashmir Valley to take on terrorists holed up inside buildings. But sadly, there have been repeated failures to purchase them.

## Category: ENVIRONMENT

### 1. Rising sea levels to affect water table in T.N.

#### Context:

A study published in the Journal of Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, has forecast the impact of sea level rise on the coastal aquifer in the coming years, till 2100. Fresh water will be replaced with saline water over time, says the study.

#### Details:

- The fragile water table in the city's coastal areas, particularly along East Coast Road, is under threat of severe seawater intrusion due to anticipated rise in sea levels in the next few decades, according to a study by the Department of Geology, Anna University.
- There is a rise in sea level by 2mm every year based on a report by the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- The increasing sea level would also force the water table along the coastline to move upwards. But it would slowly replace the freshwater at the bottom of the aquifer.
- Given the rate of increase in sea level, the water table would witness an incursion of sea water to the extent of 2-3mm every year.
- The volume of fresh water would gradually reduce in the coastal areas due to climate change-induced sea level rise.
- Rapid urbanisation and indiscriminate drawal have already led to salt water intrusion in areas from the Adyar river to Palavakkam. Residents are heavily dependent on other resources, including private water tankers.

#### Way forward:

- In general, it is expected that east coast of India will be more vulnerable than the west coast because of its low lying nature and hence the tendency of coastal flooding will rise if the sea level rises significantly.
- It is imperative to change the land-use pattern along the shoreline to tackle the impact of climate change.
- Areas closer to the coast must adopt water conservation measures to sustain groundwater.
- Only minimal groundwater extraction through open wells must be allowed and water pumped in localities along the shoreline must be replenished through rainwater harvesting.
- Large residential complexes must adopt other measures like permeable pavements.
- An integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) plan is the most appropriate and necessary tool for long-term sustainable development, which could tackle current and future vulnerabilities of the coastal area.
- The plan should actively involve the local communities, and include building regulations, urban growth planning, building institutional capacity and raising awareness.

### 2. Rushikulya waits for Olive Ridleys

#### Context:

Even after waiting for almost a month, Olive Ridley turtles have not yet arrived for mass nesting at Odisha's

Rushikulya rookery and Devi river mouth.

#### Details:

- The Rushikulya river mouth off Ganjam coast in Odisha, famous for mass nesting of endangered Olive Ridley turtles.
- Except for few occurrences of sporadic nesting, mass nesting has yet not occurred. The reasons for the delay are not fully understood yet.
- Although it is held that climatic parameters, as well as beach conditions, decide mass nesting at a coast, it is not completely understood how these parameters affect their decision-making.
- However, mass nesting has already occurred at the Gahirmatha coast of the State.
- The Forest Department has readied six artificial hatcheries to incubate eggs resulting from sporadic nesting. The beach has been cleaned up.
- A metal net fences a stretch of over five kilometres from Gokharkuda to Prayagi — this fencing is expected to protect Olive Ridelys and their eggs from predators and human intervention.
- CCTV cameras continue to keep a watch on the nesting beach.

#### Olive Ridley Turtles:

- Gets name from its olive colored carapace, which is heart-shaped and rounded.
- Olive Ridley sea turtles come in large numbers for nesting to Odisha coasts. The mass nesting draws worldwide attention on the conservation of Olive Ridley in Odisha.
- The synchronised nesting in mass numbers is called Arribadas.
- They are mostly carnivorous and feed on jellyfish, snails, crabs, and shrimp. They occasionally consume algae and seaweed.
- The major breeding ground for these turtles is Rushikulya (Odisha), Dharma (Odisha), Devi estuary (Odisha), Astaranga Coast (Odisha), Gahirmatha beach (Odisha) and Hope Island of Coringa Wild life Sanctuary (Andhra Pradesh).
- They are classified as Vulnerable — IUCN Red List.

## D. GS4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Parallel tracks on trade ties (India-US Relations- Trade Issues)

##### What's in the news?

- Recently, U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to rescind the benefits Indian exports enjoy under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme
- Pursuant to this development, some experts have pointed out that the timeline of U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to rescind the benefits Indian exports enjoy under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme is revealing.

##### Note to Students:

1. We at BYJU'S have covered the issue on the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme



in considerable detail in our YouTube based video lecture as available on the below link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpJhyxHG-EU>

2. Another important issue being touched upon in this editorial analysis is the Government of India's FDI policy concerning the e-commerce sector. We at BYJU'S have covered this issue as well as part of our YouTube release which is as below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9B1kypdinA>

### **A Brief Look at the Recent Past:**

- India-U.S. trade tensions escalated in the year 2018 when the U.S. took two consecutive decisions to increase import tariffs on steel and aluminium, and place India's eligibility for GSP benefits under review.
- As a matter of fact, shortly after, India said it would impose retaliatory tariffs on imports from the U.S. and even notified the list of items on which these would apply.
- Meanwhile, the U.S. stood fast on not exempting India from its tariff hikes, with Mr. Trump complaining about India's high import tariffs several times.
- The GSP review, however, stretched on, with the two countries holding frequent talks to address the concerns.
- India, for its part, postponed the deadline for the imposition of the retaliatory tariffs six times.

### **What prompted the U.S. to review India's GSP status?**

- Washington's decision to review India's GSP status stemmed from complaints from American medical and dairy industries, both of which said India was not providing "equitable and reasonable access to its market".
- India has said it had tried hard to cater to most of the U.S. demands and reach an understanding, but key points of difference, especially regarding India's cultural concerns to do with dairy products, could not be accommodated.
- Given this, and the fact that the U.S. has been expressing discontent over India's policies to do with data localisation and FDI rules in e-commerce, the decision to withdraw the GSP status should not come as a surprise. The question is, how will New Delhi react?

### **Reaction by the Government of India:**

- Following the U.S. announcement, the Commerce Ministry of the Government of India, was quick to downplay the impact, saying that the GSP benefits amounted to only \$190 million, while India's total exports under GSP to the U.S. stood at \$5.6 billion.
- It is also important to note that Indian officials have stressed that talks on the issue would still continue during the 60-day period after which the GSP decision would come into effect.

### **Editorial Analysis:**

#### **E-commerce rules: A Perspective**

- It begins with the change in foreign direct investment (FDI) rules in India.
- It is important to note that the tightened norms that came into effect on February 1, 2019, place several restrictions on e-commerce companies, including Walmart-owned Flipkart and Amazon.
- The unexpected changes came after Walmart, the world's largest retailer, paid over \$16 billion to acquire Flipkart last May (May 2018). To raise the resources needed, Walmart put one of its biggest

international operations, Asda, on the block for \$10 billion.

- The calculations behind the \$500 billion retail giant's investment in India have gone awry after the change in the FDI rules. The Walmart family are close friends of Mr. Trump.
- On February 20, 2019, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon said the company was disappointed that New Delhi had changed the FDI rules without consultation and hoped for a more collaborative process going forward.
- Days later, on March 4, 2019, Mr. Trump notified Congress of his intention to slap punitive action on India by ending preferential treatment for the country's exports.

### Why is India concerned?

- It is important to note that Walmart has a reputation for killing small retail businesses with ultra-low prices, a concern that influenced New Delhi's decision to tighten the FDI rules.
- While the FDI policy might be irreversible, economic diplomacy can still defuse the situation and prevent the removal of the GSP benefits that will not take effect for until at least 60 days after the notifications to Congress and the Indian government.
- The simmering tensions go back to April 2018 when the United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched a review of New Delhi's eligibility for the GSP programme.
- Tensions escalated in June 2018, as New Delhi, in response to Washington's 25% tariff hikes on steel and 10% levies on aluminium, immediately accused it of unfair trade practices, and, seeking to signal a muscular approach, threatened retaliatory tariffs on \$235 million of U.S. imports.
- Bilateral talks since then have failed to ease tensions and India now stares at losing the GSP benefits. Foreign Secretary V.K. Gokhale returned empty-handed from Washington recently.
- India's GSP status came under review after the U.S. medical and dairy industries complained that New Delhi is not providing them "equitable and reasonable access to its market". India's data localisation policies deepened the rift.
- New Delhi's use of price control measures against imported drugs and medical devices has grown noticeably. Cardiac stents were put under price controls in February 2016 and knee implants attracted similar action in August 2017, after which trade margins for many medical devices are sought to be capped.
- S. manufacturers complain that in doing so, New Delhi has meted out differential treatment to them vis-à-vis domestic players.
- For domestic companies, the price to distributors is considered while in the case of global manufacturers the base proposed is the landed costs of imports.
- **The U.S. medical device industry wants price controls on cardiac stents and knee implants withdrawn and would like products to be treated on parity with domestic medical devices through a trade margin rationalisation regime.**
- New Delhi has preferred to act against unreasonable price mark-ups through price controls when exactly the same outcomes can be achieved through other types of policy alternatives.
- The USTR is right in pointing out that price capping counts as a trade barrier. New Delhi can easily address the concerns by replacing price controls with trade margin rationalisation measures, applying them equally to domestic and foreign manufacturers.
- India is the largest beneficiary of the GSP, the largest and oldest U.S. trade preference programme. The GSP is aimed at promoting economic development by allowing duty-free entry of products from designated beneficiary countries. Nearly 4,800 different goods from 129 designated countries enjoy duty-free access under the programme.
- The immediate loss for India is preferential access at zero or minimal tariffs to the U.S. in case of about 1,900 products, or about half of all Indian products.
- New Delhi has downplayed the impact of the proposed withdrawal of benefits, saying exports worth \$190 million only are likely to be affected and that the tariff advantage was 4% or more on only 2,165 of a total of 18,770 tariff lines.

### Estimating losses:

- Experts opine that this is an underestimation. The loss to the economy would be much larger than what the Department of Commerce is projecting.
- While it is true that the actual tariff advantage from the programme works out to a meagre \$190 million, which is just 0.4% of the total Indian exports to the U.S., the actual loss will not be limited to the immediate tariff advantage.
- Indian exporters are competing for market share in the U.S. with other low-income countries in industries where margins are wafer thin. Even minor price hikes can drive significant drops in export volumes. In which case, losing GSP access will be costlier than the projections.
- Among price-sensitive products eligible for higher GSP benefits that risk losing out to competition from other countries are processed food, leather products, plastic products, building materials, tiles, hand tools, engineering goods, cycles and made-ups such as pillow/cushion sleeves and woven women's apparel.
- Many of these are the very industries the new e-commerce FDI rules seek to protect.

### A Possible Way Forward for India:

- Some experts suggest that an option the government of India can exercise is to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods.
- Experts have opined that the government's efforts to downplay the impact of the withdrawal of GSP status and express readiness for more talks, however, suggest it is not keen to take a decisively strong stance. It bears emphasis that while the actual amounts at stake are relatively small, with even India's proposed tariffs on the U.S. amounting to just \$900 million, the impact on small industries in the country could nevertheless be significant.
- The best way forward is to have a broad based dialogue. The other initiative should be to involve other players in the U.S. decision making system.
- It is important to convey that there are other important elements as well in the India- U.S. bilateral relationship other than just trade.
- If the U.S. is calling India an ally, then that should also influence areas such as trade policy as well.

## **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. Twelve years later**

#### **Note to Students:**

This editorial release touches upon an important area which the judicial system in our country needs to address, i.e. "Witness Protection". Keeping this in mind, we take the liberty of covering the issue of witness protection as well.

#### **Larger Background:**

- It is important to note that lack of Witness Protection is one of the reasons amongst others for low conviction rate.
- Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India and State Governments are responsible for prevention, detection, registration and investigation of crime and for prosecuting the criminals through their law enforcement agencies.

#### **What is Witness Protection Scheme?**

In December 2018, the Supreme Court of India approved India's first Witness Protection Scheme, noting



that one of the main reasons for witnesses to turn hostile is that they are not accorded appropriate protection by the State.

The Supreme Court approved India's first Witness Protection Scheme, noting that one of the main reasons for witnesses to turn hostile is that they are not provided appropriate protection by the State.

A Bench of Justices A K Sikri and S Abdul Nazeer asked the Centre, states and Union Territories to "enforce" the scheme "in letter and spirit" The court said, "it shall be the 'law' under Article 141/142 of the Constitution, until the enactment of suitable Parliamentary and/or State Legislations on the subject".

### What is the Witness Protection Scheme?

- The question of witness protection had come up in a PIL that sought protection for witnesses in cases against self-styled Godman Asaram Bapu.
- The scheme was drawn up by the central government with inputs from 8 states/Union Territories, legal services authorities of five states and open sources including civil society, three high courts as well as from police personnel.
- The scheme was finalised in consultation with National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
- The important features of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 include identifying categories of threat perceptions, preparation of a 'Threat Analysis Report' by the head of the police, protective measures like ensuring that the witness and accused do not come face to face during probe, protection of identity, change of identity, relocation of witness, witnesses to be apprised of the scheme, confidentiality and preservation of records, recovery of expenses etc.

The programme identifies "three categories of witnesses as per threat perception":

1. **Category A:** Those cases where threat extends to life of witness or family members during investigation, trial or even thereafter.
2. **Category B:** Those cases where the threat extends to safety, reputation or property of the witness or family members during the investigation or trial.
3. **Category C:** Cases where the threat is moderate and extends to harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family members, reputation or property during the investigation, trial or thereafter.

The bench also asked all states and Union Territories to set up vulnerable witness deposition complexes, as required by the Scheme, by the end of 2019.

These rooms will be equipped with facilities to prevent the accused and witness coming face to face.

The expenses for the programme will be met from a Witness Protection Fund to be established by states and Union Territories.

### What's in the news?

- In a recent development, the Madras High Court has broken the mould to set aside the perverse acquittal of all those involved in the attack on the Madurai office of Dinakaran, a Tamil daily, in 2007 and sentenced nine of them to life.
- It is important to note that three persons were killed due to suffocation after parts of the office were set on fire by a mob owing allegiance to M.K. Alagiri, elder son of M. Karunanidhi and then a powerful Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader in the temple city.

### Editorial Analysis:

- It is not often that political hooliganism is punished in a court of law.

- In cases that result in loss of life, investigation and prosecution tend to become inescapable — but the trials are often derailed because of the nexus between party heavyweights and police officers who lean on witnesses to turn hostile.
- It is therefore gratifying that the Madras High Court has broken the mould to set aside the perverse acquittal of all those involved in the attack on the Madurai office of Dinakaran, a Tamil daily, in 2007 and sentenced nine of them to life. Three persons were killed due to suffocation after parts of the office were set on fire by a mob owing allegiance to M.K. Alagiri, elder son of M. Karunanidhi and then a powerful Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader in the temple city.
- They were angry over an opinion poll carried in the daily, which is part of the Sun Group of Kalanithi Maran, grandnephew of M. Karunanidhi and brother of former Union Minister Dayanidhi Maran.
- The poll had claimed that Mr. Alagiri was less popular than his brother M.K. Stalin, who now leads the DMK after Karunanidhi's death in 2018.
- Some experts opine that while the initial reaction from the media group and the press fraternity was one of anger and outrage, the cause for justice substantially failed after a patch-up between the feuding sections of the family.
- Even while the investigation was transferred to the CBI, the political system was working to save the party's hirelings. Most witnesses turned hostile, the trial judge rejected even photographic and videographic evidence on technical grounds, and the CBI failed to bring home the guilt of the assailants.
- The High Court has noted that among the eye-witnesses who shied away from deposing in favour of the prosecution were Dinakaran's own reporters and photographers, other journalists who covered the event and many police officers who were at the spot while the protest was turning violent and dozens of party cadre were gathering there with lethal intent.
- It has made a dark but possibly apposite comparison with the Best Bakery case, in which a key witness turned hostile and it was later revealed she had lied out of fear for her life.
- The Bench has pulled up the trial judge for "manifest perversity" in his treatment of evidence, especially in rejecting on flimsy grounds the testimony of forensic experts that there was no sign of manipulation or tampering in the photographs and footage presented in court.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

- Experts opine that it was well known to the public that Mr. Alagiri wielded enormous clout at that time and that his supporters were involved in the incident.
- It is indicative of the atmosphere of intimidation that prevailed that even journalists who covered the incident denied their presence.
- While the court has prevented a miscarriage of justice in this case, it is a sordid truth that the state of affairs may continue in future too, unless amoral political leaders and pliant police officers mend themselves.

## **2. Disinformation is everywhere in India**

### **Editorial Analysis:**

- With the Lok Sabha elections coming up, it is critically important that Indians have access to credible and trustworthy information before they vote.
- Experts opine that the problem, unfortunately, is that many do not feel they do.
- In a brand new survey of English-language Internet users in India conducted by the University of Oxford, experts have found that a majority of the respondents are concerned with whether the news they come across online is real or fake.
- As a matter of fact, after the Pulwama attack, social media and messaging apps were flooded with false and misleading content as people tried to make sense of the horrible violence.
- Some of this was ordinary people sharing misinformation in good faith, but much of it was not.

- As the Central Reserve Police Force noted a few days after losing 40 men in the attack, “It has been noticed that on social media some miscreants are trying to circulate fake pictures of body parts of our Martyrs to invoke hatred while we stand united. Please DO NOT circulate/share/like such photographs or posts.”
- Even as some news media made the occasional misstep and amplified some of this disinformation, other journalists and fact-checkers were working overtime to identify and debunk some of the worst examples shared online, including fake or manipulated material trying to link Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary in-charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, to the attack.

### **The heart of the problem: A Perspective**

- Social media and messaging apps are thus at the heart of the disinformation problems that India faces.
- Of the survey respondents conducted by the team of experts, 52% said they get news via Facebook, and the same percentage said they get news via WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook.
- With an estimated quarter billion Indians having come online since the last general election, companies like Facebook, Google and Twitter have become central parts of the Indian media environment, including the disinformation problems that it faces.
- But disinformation is not only a problem of social media and digital platforms.

### **A Few More Observations:**

- In the survey, strikingly, those who use Facebook and/or WhatsApp for news do not report higher levels of concern over whether the news they come across is real or fake than those who do not rely on them.
- It seems people are as concerned about information from news media as they are about information from social media.
- More detailed questions in the survey reveal a far more complex set of wider problems.
- At the heart of disinformation problems are stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons, to try to discredit rivals or make money from clickbait.
- Of the respondents to the survey, 51% say they are concerned about this problem.
- But strikingly, a similar number say they are concerned about what they consider to be poor journalism (stories that respondents consider marred by factual mistakes, inaccuracies, etc.).
- And 50% say they are concerned by hyperpartisan political content, where facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda, whether from politicians, pundits or publishers.
- Thus, when many Indians in the run-up to the elections say they are concerned about what is real and what is fake on the Internet, this is clearly in part about social media and digital platforms.
- However, unfortunately, it is also about some news media and some politicians who people see as part of the disinformation problems that India faces.
- It is only a few years ago that the Press Council of India said that “the phenomenon of ‘paid news’ has acquired serious dimensions”, “goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies and has become pervasive, structured and highly organised.”
- The Press Council concluded: “It is undermining democracy in India.”
- Cobrapost’s sting operation last summer (2018), which exposed large media houses willing to peddle propaganda as news, demonstrates that some of these problems persist.

### **Low trust in institutions**

- Beyond the rise of digital media, the backdrop of disinformation problems in India is thus low trust in established institutions.
- Though there are some admirable exceptions, established institutions often seem to fail the people who rely on them.

- Other studies have found low trust in politicians and political parties.
- The above survey also shows that just 36% of respondents feel they can trust most news most of the time, statistically indistinguishable from the 34% who say they trust news found via social media.

### Addressing the issues

- An important question arises: what can be done to address these issues?
- It is clear that platform companies have much to do to improve their content moderation and contain disinformation.
- For example, Facebook has announced that it currently has over 500 full-time employees and at least 3,500 external contractors who focus on election work, on top of the 30,000 people across the company focused on safety and security issues. (Given the fact that India accounts for more than 10% of the global user base of both Facebook and WhatsApp, and is growing rapidly, it would be good to know how many of these people are focused specifically on India.)
- Similarly, it is troubling that some coordinated attempts to amplify and spread misleading and false information sometimes seem to emanate from major political parties and activists who support them.
- Experts point out that this ought to stop, and if it does not, has to be continuously and critically covered by independent journalists to ensure that people are aware of what is going on.

### Concluding Remarks:

- Finally, it is clear that Indian news media has a lot of work to do if it wants to gain the trust of the Indian public.
- Many express high levels of trust in some individual brands, most notably major newspapers and some broadcasters. But many news media are not trusted.
- In a situation where disinformation seems to be everywhere, and digital platforms, some politicians and some news media are intertwined in these problems, we can only hope that those news media which genuinely do stand out as providers of credible information are able to convince people that they provide exactly that — news that is worthy not only of people's attention, but also their trust.

### 3. Another look at fiscal transfers

#### Note to the Students:

The following lecture on the recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission would lend greater perspective.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Hc3jd5CinU>

#### Larger Background:

- Federalism is an old concept. Its origin is mainly political. It is well known that the efficiency of a government depends on, among other factors, its structure.
- In large countries, it has been felt that only a federal structure can efficiently meet the requirements of people from different regions. Underlying this proposition is the premise that preferences vary across regions.
- In India, during the independence struggle, provincial autonomy was regarded as an integral part of the freedom movement.
- However, after Independence, several compulsions, which included defence and internal security, led to a scheme of federalism in which the Centre assumed greater importance.
- Also in the immediate period following Independence, when the Centre and all States were ruled by the same party and when many of the powerful provincial leaders migrated to the Centre, the process of centralisation gathered further momentum.



- Economic planning at a nation-wide level helped this centralising process.

## Editorial Analysis:

### Fiscal federalism

- Fiscal federalism is the economic counterpart to political federalism.
- Fiscal federalism is concerned with the assignment on the one hand of functions to different levels of government, and with appropriate fiscal instruments for carrying out these functions on the other.
- It is generally believed that the Central government must provide national public goods that render services to the entire population.
- A typical example cited is defence.
- Sub-national governments are expected to provide goods and services whose consumption is limited to their own jurisdictions.
- An equally important question in fiscal federalism is the determination of the specific fiscal instruments that would enable the different levels of government to carry out their functions.
- This is the '**tax-assignment problem**' which is much discussed in the literature on the subject.
- In determining the taxes that are best suited for use at different levels of government, one basic consideration is in relation to the mobility of economic agents, goods and resources.
- It is generally argued that the de-centralised levels of government should avoid non-benefit taxes and taxes on mobile units.
- This implies that the Central government should have the responsibility to levy non-benefit taxes and taxes on mobile units or resources.
- Building these principles into an actual scheme of assignment of taxes to different levels of government in a Constitution is indeed very difficult.

### Perspective from Different Constitutions:

- Different Constitutions interpret differently what is mobile and what is purely a benefit tax. For example, in the United States and Canada, both Federal and State governments have concurrent powers to levy income tax. On the contrary, in India, income tax is levied only by the Central government though shared with the States. Recognising the possibility of imbalance between resources and responsibilities, many countries have a system of inter-governmental transfers.

### What does the Indian Constitution say?

- The Indian Constitution lays down the functions as well as taxing powers of the Centre and States. It is against this background that the issues relating to the correction of vertical and horizontal imbalances have been addressed by every Finance Commission, taking into account the prevailing set of circumstances. However, Central transfers to States are not confined to the recommendations of the Finance Commissions. There are other channels such as those through the Planning Commission until recently as well the discretionary grants of the Central government.

### A Look at Specifics:

- In 2010-11, in the combined revenue receipts of the Centre and States, the share of the Centre was 64.68%. After transfer, the share came down to 40.20%. In the case of the States, their share before transfers was 35.32%. After the receipts of transfers the share of States went up to 59.80%. Thus the shares got reversed. In 2016-17, the share of the Centre after transfers was 33.37% and that of the States was 66.63%. In the case of total expenditures, the share of the Centre in 2014-15 was 41.14% and that of the States was 58.86%. The ultimate position appears reasonable. The question may be on the mode of transfers.



### A Look at New developments:

- The Fourteenth Finance Commission has broken new ground in terms of allocation of resources.
- One of its major recommendations has been to increase the share of tax devolution to 42% of the divisible pool.
- This is a substantial increase by almost 10 percentage points.
- The commission has argued that this does not necessarily affect the overall transfers but only enhances the share of unconditional transfers.
- It is true that Centrally Sponsored Schemes, which have ballooned in recent years, may have 'encroached' on the territory of States.
- Over years, the performance of the Central government is judged not only on the basis of actions taken which fall strictly in its jurisdiction but also on initiatives undertaken in the areas which fall in the Concurrent and even State lists.
- Centralised planning has something to do with it.
- Today, the Central government is held responsible for everything that happens, including, for example, agrarian distress.
- In viewing the responsibilities of the Centre and States we must take a broader view than what is stipulated in the Constitution.
- On the allocation of unconditional transfers, two questions arise. The first is to determine the total transfers that need to be made, while the second is whether all transfers must be done by the Finance Commission alone.
- Finance Commissions prior to the Fourteenth recognised that some transfers were being made by the Planning Commission; this was kept in mind while deciding on tax devolution.
- By the time the Fourteenth Finance Commission was required to submit its report, a fundamental change in the institutional framework had occurred.
- The Planning Commission was replaced by the NITI Aayog, which was simply a think-tank with no powers of resource allocation.
- In this context perhaps what the Fourteenth Finance Commission did was justifiable.
- Of course, the Fourteenth Finance Commission did what it did because the terms of reference had not made any distinction between Plan and non-Plan revenue expenditures.
- **The moot question is about what happens if any future government revives the Planning Commission with financial powers. This will put the Central government in a fix.**

### Some suggestions put forward by Experts:

- Perhaps the time has come for the Constitution to be amended and the proportion of shareable taxes that should go to the States fixed at the desired level.
- The shareable tax pool must also include cesses and surcharges as these have sharply increased in recent years.
- Fixing the ratio at 42% of shareable taxes, including cesses and surcharges, seems appropriate.
- Another possible route is to follow the practice in the U.S. and Canada: of allowing the States to levy tax on personal income, with some limitations.
- Since one of the concerns is that resources do not match functions, this may be a way out.
- But, as in the U.S., the scheme should be simple and ride on federal income tax, that is, just a levy on the income assessed by federal authorities.
- The freedom given to the States must be limited. It is important to note that the levy by the Centre and States together should be reasonable.
- Furthermore, once this power is given to the States, the transfers from the Centre need adjustment. As far as India is concerned, this is an area which needs a fuller study.

### Concluding Remarks:

- Adoption of any one of these alternatives will avoid friction between the Centre and the States.

Perhaps the first alternative of constitutionally fixing the ratio is the easiest.

- There are issues relating to horizontal distribution.
- Equity considerations have dominated the allocations. This is as it should be.
- However, the ability of bringing about equalisation across States in India has limitations.
- Even the relatively richer States have their own problems and they feel 'cheated' because of the overuse of the equity criterion.
- An appropriate balancing of criteria is needed particularly in the context of the rise in unconditional transfers. Of course, appropriate balancing is what all Finance Commissions are concerned about.

## F. Tidbits

### 1. A hawker raising awareness about voting in Bihar's capital

- A humble street hawker in Patna is diligently working to raise awareness about voting and asking the electorate to vote on the basis of a candidate's merit to build a strong democracy.
- Through his 'Cycle Jagrukta Yatra', Lal Mani Das travels across the Bihar capital and also tells people to not give in to temptation of money or other material gains offered by others to sway their votes.
- Wearing a shirt and a trouser, a pair of slippers, and sporting a cap bearing the Election Commission logo and a slogan, he paddles around Patna on his bicycle, and distributes pamphlets to people, carrying an appeal to vote wisely.
- In front of his bicycle, he has put up a banner that enumerates the qualities a candidate should have, which every voter should keep in mind.
- He himself wears a big, two-sided banner carrying a message — 'Respect rights of a citizen. Cast your vote'.
- "Voting is essential for ensuring a strong democracy. My first target is to reach out to many so that more and more numbers come out and vote. Also, I am appealing to them to vote for candidates who have character and those who respect the rule of law," Mr. Das said.

## G. Prelims Fact

### 1. Basant Utsav

- Holi by the name of Basant Utsav is celebrated with fervour in the state of West Bengal.
- The tradition of Vasantotsav, meaning Spring Festival was started by poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan.
- Rabindranath Tagore founded the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan.
- Being no exception to the ethereal charm of Holi, he decided to add a new dimension to the festivities. Thus, he came up with an idea to celebrate the festival in this way. Also known as 'Dol Jatra' or the 'Dol Utsav', the fiesta enjoys the repute as the "Rabindrik Basanta Utsav".
- Today "Basanta Utsav" at Santiniketan is not only a Visva-Bharati University's programme or a local programme, rather a grand fiesta.
- What is appreciated is the grace and dignified manner in which Vasant Utsav is celebrated in West Bengal as compared to boisterous Holi witnessed in most parts of India.
- Boys and girls joyfully welcome Spring, the season of hope not just with colours but with songs, dance, chanting of hymns in the serene ambiance of Shantiniketan.

### 2. Chenchus

- The Chenchus are Adivasi, a designated Scheduled Tribe in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Odisha. They are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group
- They are an aboriginal tribe whose traditional way of life has been based on hunting and gathering.

- The Chenchus speak the Chenchu language, a member of the Dravidian language family.
- Some Chenchus have continued to specialize in collecting forest products for sale to non-tribal people.
- Many Chenchus live in the dense Nallamala forest of Andhra Pradesh. They are also known as Chenchu Reddies in Rayalaseema because they use the Reddy title.
- The Chenchus are referred to as one of the Primitive Tribal Groups that are still dependent on forests and do not cultivate land but hunt for a living.
- Non-tribe people living among them rent land from the Chenchus and pay a portion of the harvest.

### 3. Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD or monkey fever)

- Kyasanur forest disease (KFD) is a tick-borne viral haemorrhagic fever endemic to South India.
- The disease is caused by a virus belonging to the family Flaviviridae, which also includes yellow fever and dengue fever.
- The vector responsible for its transmission is ticks (*Hemaphysalis spinigera*). These ticks are known to thrive in the Western Ghats and transmit the disease to humans. Humans contract KFD infection from the bite of nymphs of the tick.
- Monkey fever is so named because it primarily affects black-faced langurs and red-faced bonnet monkeys and result in their death.
- High fever with headache, followed by haemorrhagic symptoms such as bleeding from nose, throat and gums are the common symptoms. It also causes gastrointestinal bleeding muscle stiffness, tremors, absent reflexes and mental disturbances.
- It is endemic to South Asia and was first detected in 1957 in Kyasanur Forest of Karnataka.

### 4. Heat wave

- World Meteorological Organization defines a heat wave as five or more consecutive days during which the daily maximum temperature exceeds the average maximum temperature by five degrees Celsius.
- If the maximum temperature of any place continues to be more than 45° C consecutively for two days, it is called a heat wave condition.
- Heat wave is also called a “silent disaster” as it develops slowly and kills and injures humans and animals nationwide.
- In India, heat waves typically occur between March and June, and in some rare cases even extend till July.
- Heat waves are more frequent over the Indo-Gangetic plains of India.

## H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. World Happiness Report is a publication of:

- a. United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network
- b. World Bank
- c. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
- d. United Nations Economic and Social Council

**Ans: a**

**Explanation:**

The World Happiness Report is an annual publication of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. It contains articles and rankings of national happiness based on respondent ratings of

their own lives.

**Q2. Which of the following is not correctly matched?**

- a. Sampriti: Bangladesh
- b. Mitra Shakti: Sri Lanka
- c. Surya Kiran: China
- d. Indra: Russia

**Ans: c**

**Explanation:**

The given pairs are Military exercises and the countries that participate in such exercises with India. Surya Kiran is India's military exercise with Nepal. Military exercise with China is called Hand in Hand.

**Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) :**

- 1. VVPAT machines can be accessed by polling officers only.
- 2. The paper slip printed through the VVPAT contains the poll symbol and name of the voter.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

**Ans: a**

**Explanation:**

The paper slip is printed through the VVPAT contains the poll symbol and name of the candidate. This allows the voter to verify his/her vote.

**Q4. Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme was launched in the state of:**

- a. Karnataka
- b. Tamil Nadu
- c. Odisha
- d. Punjab

**Ans: c**

**Explanation:**

KALIA or "Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation" scheme was launched by the Odisha Government for farmer's welfare. The aim of the scheme is to accelerate agricultural prosperity and reduce poverty in the State to encourage cultivation and associated activities. The scheme is being seen as a viable alternative to farm loan waivers. The KALIA scheme looks more comprehensive as it covers the landless agricultural labourers too. It also seeks to provide help to vulnerable agricultural households,

besides promising interest-free crop loan.

Q5. Consider the following statements about Payments bank:

1. Payment Banks can accept demand deposits, issue ATM/debit cards and credit cards.
2. Payment Banks cannot lend to customers.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

**Ans: b**

**Explanation:**

A payments bank is a differentiated bank, offering a limited range of products. It cannot lend to its customers. It cannot issue Credit cards. However, it can accept demand deposits, issue ATM/debit cards. It can accept deposits of only upto Rs. 1 Lakh per account from individuals and small businesses.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Analyse the features and potential of the Border Area Development Programme. The scheme has not been implemented in the North Eastern States as effectively as it has been implemented in the Western states. What is the reason for this asymmetric development? (15 Marks)
2. Discuss the possible impacts of climate change on Coastal regions in India. (10 Marks)



