

08 Nov 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Report: lack of transparency in High Courts is worrying

Context:

A new study by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy has found that there is a yawning gap between the judiciary's pronouncements on the Right to Information (RTI) Act and the manner in which the High Courts are implementing it.

Issues:

- The report has remarked that the RTI rules of several High Courts provide for a relatively

inconvenient procedure when compared to the RTI rules of the Government of India.

- The lack of good quality proactive disclosures by several High Courts on their websites marks the failure of the High Courts to discharge a specific statutory obligation imposed under Section 4(1)(b) of the RTI Act.
- It added that the lack of administrative transparency, especially financial transparency, within High Courts was a matter of grave concern. In particular, the lack of transparency in financial matters of the High Courts.
- Most High Courts do not proactively publish details about their budgets and expenditure. Even fewer High Courts are willing to provide copies of their budgets and audit reports under the RTI Act.
- The report found that despite the law being crystal clear on the limits of delegated legislation; several High Courts have included patently illegal clauses in their RTI Rules. It pointed out that despite Section 8 of the RTI Act restricting the number of grounds for denying information to citizens, the RTI rules of several High Courts have included additional grounds for rejecting requests for information.
- On the convenience index, the Vidhi report noted that while several High Courts did recognise convenient modes of payments like postal orders, the High Courts of Allahabad, Chhattisgarh, Guwahati, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Rajasthan and Sikkim, did not recognise it.
- On the convenience index, not a single High Court was able to match the convenience offered by the Government of India's RTI Rules.

Conclusion:

- The report remarked that it should be a matter of concern to see the judiciary lagging behind the Centre when it comes to abiding by the letter and spirit of the RTI Act.
- The fact that the RTI rules of so many High Courts have provisions that run the risk of being declared ultra vires the RTI Act coupled with the fact that nine High Courts and most District Courts have not bothered to make any of the disclosures under Section 4(1)(b) of the RTI Act, is indicative of serious systemic issues within the administrative side of the judiciary.
- Transparency is something the judiciary itself must reflect and act on rather than be pushed on the matter by lawmakers and civil society.

2. Maharashtra tops in justice delivery

Context:

India Justice Report 2019 has been released by the Tata Trusts in collaboration with Centre for Social Justice, Common Cause, and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, DAKSH, Tata Institute of Social Sciences - Prayas and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

Details:

- The report is based on publicly available data from different government entities on the four pillars of justice delivery — police, judiciary, prisons and legal aid.
- The report looks at data indicators from the four pillars, covering themes like infrastructure, human resources, diversity (gender, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Other Backward Class), budgets, workload and trends over the last five years.
- The index has been calculated on data compiled from 2012 to 2017.

Key findings of the report:

Justice meter

While Maharashtra emerged as the overall topper among large/medium States in justice delivery, Tamil Nadu and Kerala fared better in individual categories

*Scores out of a total of 10 points



Policing

- Tamil Nadu topped with a score of 6.49*
- U.P. was at the bottom with a score of 2.98, whereas Bihar got 3.77



Prisons

- Kerala ranked on top with a score of 7.18
- Jharkhand fared the worst with a score of 3.46, whereas Uttarakhand scores 3.72, Punjab 4.35, Andhra Pradesh 4.35 and U.P. 4.42



Judiciary

- Tamil Nadu was on top with a score of 6.99 | ▪ Bihar was the worst performer with a score of 2.41, while U.P. scored 3.7, Karnataka 3.76, Uttarakhand 4.17 and Jharkhand 4.3



Legal aid

- Kerala topped with a score of 6.58 | ▪ U.P. fared the worst, followed by Uttarakhand, Bihar and Odisha

- Maharashtra has topped the list of 18 large-medium States, in justice delivery followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana. In this category, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are at the bottom, while among seven smaller States, Goa leads the group.
- The country has about 18,200 judges with about 23% sanctioned posts vacant.
- Women are poorly represented in these pillars, constituting just 7% of the police.
- Prisons are over-occupied at 114%, where 68% are undertrials awaiting investigation, inquiry or trial.
- Regarding budgets, most States are not able to fully utilise the funds given to them by the Centre, while the increase in spending on the police, prisons and judiciary does not keep pace with the overall increase in State expenditure.
- Some pillars also remain affected by low budgets. For instance, India's per capita expenditure on free legal aid is 75 paise per annum.

Significance of the report:

- The findings establish very serious lacunae in India's justice delivery system.
- The report highlights the fact that even the best performing States scored less than 60% in their performance on capacity across the police, judiciary, prisons and legal aid.
- It is a great effort to mainstream the issues concerning the justice system.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran resumes uranium enrichment at Fordow plant

Context:

Iran has resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow plant.

Details:

- This marks Tehran's fourth step away from the 2015 nuclear agreement.
- The suspension of uranium enrichment at the long-secret plant was one of the restrictions on its nuclear programme Iran had agreed to in return for the lifting of sanctions.

- Uranium enrichment is the sensitive process that produces fuel for nuclear power plants but also, in highly extended form, the fissile core for a warhead.
- Iran is now enriching uranium to 4.5%, exceeding the 3.67% limit set by the 2015 deal but less than the 20% level it had previously operated to and far less than the 90% level required for a warhead.
- Also, Iran has always denied any military dimension to its nuclear programme.

The issue has been covered in 5th November 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

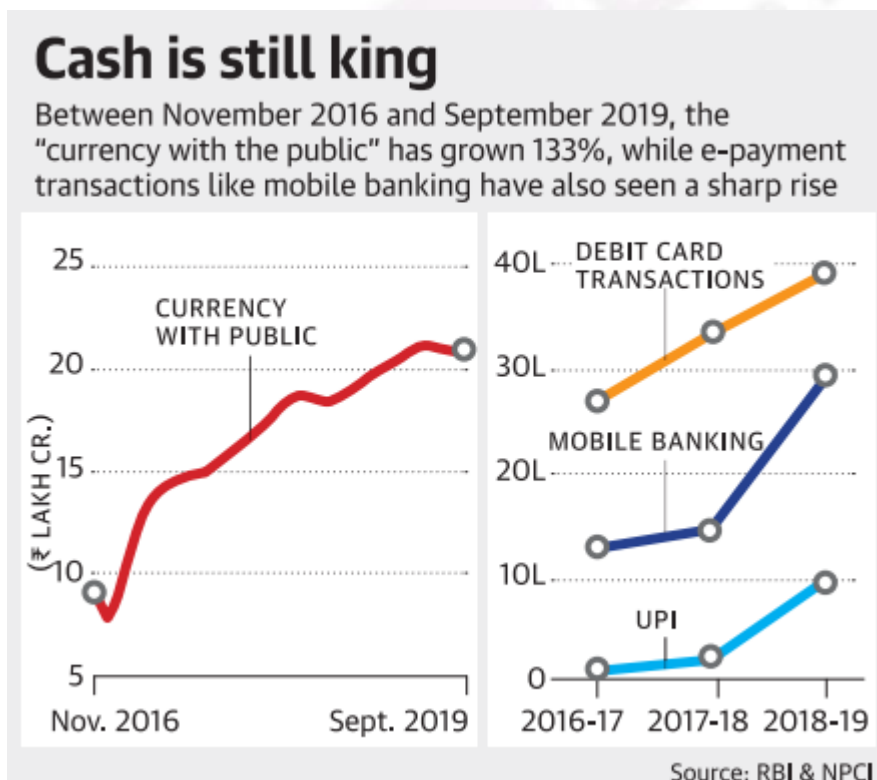
1. 3 years since DeMo, cash is back

Context:

Reserve Bank of India data shows that three years since demonetisation, the level of cash with the public has grown faster than the GDP growth of the country, even as digital payments — especially those on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platform — have seen robust growth.

Details:

- Reserve Bank of India data shows that the public held Rs. 20.49 lakh crore in cash as of September 2019, which is 13.3% more than the figure for the corresponding month of 2018.
- The data show that the cash held by the public made up 96% of the money in circulation, with most of the rest deposited in banks. In December 2016, one month after demonetisation and the enforced deposits in banks, this percentage stood at 83%.



Concerns:

- The three basic objectives that the government declared at the time of demonetisation were: reducing black money, curbing counterfeit notes, and reducing cash in circulation.
- Three years on, the data shows that none of the objectives have been met.
- While fake notes are back, so is cash in the economy.
- Government data, from Reserve and other agencies, shows that the fake currency problem persists.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. Junking fast food

Context:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has notified a draft regulation aimed at prohibiting the sale and advertisement of food rich in fat, sugar and salt to school children.
- One of the important regulations proposed is that foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) cannot be sold to children in school canteens/mess premises/hostel kitchens or within 50 m of the school campus.
- The draft comes in response to the 2015 order from the Delhi High Court directing the central agency to frame norms to promote healthy diets in schools.

Concerns:

- Even as malnutrition accounted for over seven lakh (68%) deaths in children under the age of five years in 2017 in India, there is rising obesity in schoolchildren in many States.
- According to a July 2017 study, India, with 14.4 million, had the second most number of obese children among 195 countries.
- A recent study found 23 States to have child overweight prevalence more than the national average, with six States having a prevalence of over 20%.

Details:

- The FSSAI prohibits food companies that manufacture junk food from advertising or offering for free such foods in school premises and within 50 m of the campus.
- Besides prohibiting the sale of junk food, the FSSAI requires schools to simultaneously encourage and promote a safe and balanced diet.
- To thwart food companies from luring children to consume foods rich in fat, sugar and salt, the companies are prohibited from using their logos, brand names and product names on books and other educational materials, as well as on school property such as buildings, buses, and athletic fields.
- As a general guidance to provide wholesome food, the agency recommends the use of a combination of whole grains, milk, eggs, and millets.
- It also listed a set of general guidelines for selection of food products that can be offered in schools.

Conclusion:

- Enforcement, particularly in preventing the sale and promotion of unhealthy food near schools would

be a challenge. For instance, despite the sale and advertisement of tobacco products within 100 yards of a school being prohibited, violation is more the norm than the exception.

- Several studies have shown how a western diet affects the composition and diversity of gut bacteria and sets the stage for many metabolic diseases. Hence, any attempt to reduce and discourage the intake of unhealthy foods, which is a major cause of unhealthy weight gain in children, should be welcomed.
- Onus of inculcating healthy eating habits also starts at home. Besides taking steps to reduce the intake of unhealthy food, both schools and parents should ensure children get adequate physical activity, which is increasingly being neglected for various reasons.

Category: SECURITY

1. Changing the status quo

Context:

The Ministry of Home Affairs has proposed that the Assam Rifles should be merged with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and serve under the operational control of the MHA.

Issue:

At present, the Assam Rifles, a Central paramilitary force, is under the administrative control of the MHA and operational control of the Army, i.e. the Ministry of Defence. The Army is opposed to this proposal.

Background:

- Assam Rifles was formed as Cachar Levy in 1835 to assist the British rulers in maintaining peace in the Northeast.
- The unit was later converted into the Assam Military Police Battalion with two additional battalions in 1870. They were known as the Lushai Hills Battalion, Lakhimpur Battalion and Naga Hills Battalion. Just before World War I, another battalion, the Darrang Battalion, was added. They all rendered great service by assisting the British in Europe and West Asia during the war. These battalions were then renamed Assam Rifles.
- They continued to be regular armed police battalions, but with the 'Rifles' tag, which was a matter of honour for their competence, on par with any regular Army battalion.
- It was after the Chinese aggression in 1962 in Arunachal Pradesh that the Assam Rifles battalions were placed under the operational control of the Army.

Arguments against the merger:

- The army is vehemently opposing the proposal ever since it was floated by the home ministry.
- The Army argues that the Assam Rifles should be merged with it, to ensure national security.
- Army has reasoned that altering with status quo in defending Myanmar border would be a major blow for operations against North Eastern insurgent groups based in Myanmar.
- Even the officers of Assam rifles are opposing such move. The officers have argued that the force must remain under the operational control of the Army for better coordination while conducting anti-terror operations in the region.
- It is believed that, if the proposal is accepted the Army will not be able to use Assam Rifles in conventional operations along the eastern frontier with China.

Arguments in favour of the merger:

- It needs to be noted that back in 2001, the Group of Ministers had stated that the principle of 'One Border, One Force' should be strictly adhered to.
- It is argued that, if ITBP can guard the India-China border in Ladakh, there is no reason why it cannot guard the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh and beyond. All Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) are acclimatised to almost every region of the country now due to country-wide deployment of all CAPF battalions. The operational role performed by the ITBP at 18,700 feet in Ladakh is testimony enough to its capability to guard the border in any part of the country.
- The concept of having two masters for an organisation — one for administrative control and another for operational control — is not only absurd but also leads to problems of coordination. Therefore, the Home Ministry's move to merge all its 55,000-strong Assam Rifles with the ITBP is believed to be a step in the right direction.

Conclusion:

The Home Ministry has taken up the issue of merger with the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). The matter is in the Delhi High Court, after retired personnel filed a petition saying they were facing difficulties in drawing pension because of dual control. The merger issue needs to be taken up on priority by the CCS so that doubts are cleared. The modalities of absorbing the officers should be worked out to stall any situation of a vacuum being created once the deputationists are repatriated to the Army.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Real estate shelter

Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of an Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) of Rs. 25,000 crore to provide last-mile funding for stalled affordable and middle-income housing projects across the country.

This issue has been covered in 7th November Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

Significance of the announcement:

- The Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) announced, has expanded in both size and scope from the earlier one announced in September, 2019. And the variables are clear such as the unit sizes that will be supported.
- The AIF will provide funds to bail out stalled real estate projects with unit size of less than Rs. 2 crore a unit in metros and Rs. 1 crore in other places.
- It will offer support to viable projects with a positive net worth and registered with the Real Estate Regulatory Authority.
- It will also apply to projects that have been declared as non-performing assets by banks and to those lined up before the insolvency court.
- Apart from real estate promoters, this will also aid lenders, mainly finance companies and banks, whose funds are locked up in these projects.
- Most of the stalled projects are solvent but stuck for liquidity and with support from the AIF, can be completed, unlocking value not just for buyers but also precious cash for the project promoters and their lenders.
- The real estate sector is not only one of the biggest provider of jobs but also has a huge multiplier effect in the economy. Industries ranging from cement and steel to paints and sanitaryware stand to reap the benefits of a healthy real estate sector.

Way forward:

- Many good ideas have suffered due to bad implementation. While the AIF is a good idea, it is important that it is implemented without glitches.
- The critical part will be identifying the genuine projects in need of support and ensuring that biases do not creep in.
- It would also be important to attract more investors into AIF.
- Along with private money in the AIF, return expectations will also have to be managed. The Reserve Bank of India having set the stage through successive rate cuts and liquidity infusion, the real estate industry now has to do its part.

F. Tidbits

1. Kerala on its way to achieve 100% Internet penetration

This has been covered in 7th November Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Demoiselle cranes

- The demoiselle crane (*Grus virgo*) is a species of crane found in central Eurasia, ranging from the Black Sea to Mongolia and North Eastern China.
- Demoiselle cranes spend the winter every year in Gujarat and Rajasthan after covering a distance of over 5,000km.
- The bird is symbolically significant in the Culture of India and Pakistan, where it is known as Koonj.
- In Khichan, Rajasthan, villagers feed the cranes on their migration and these large congregations have become an annual spectacle.
- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species classifies them as “Least Concerned”.

What’s in News?

Thirty-seven demoiselle cranes were found dead at Khichan in Rajasthan.

2. ‘Bulbul’ likely to bring heavy rain to Odisha

What’s in News?

- Odisha State government kept its coastal districts prepared for the cyclonic storm ‘Bulbul’ (that is over east-central Bay of Bengal), which is likely to bring heavy rainfall.
- In a major relief to the people of Gujarat, cyclone ‘Maha’ fizzled out into the Arabian sea as a depression without making a landfall.

To know more about Tropical Cyclones, formation of Tropical cyclones, procedure of assigning names to cyclones. [Click here](#)

3. Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is an apex-level body constituted by the government of India, dealing with macro prudential and financial regularities in the entire financial sector of India.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following is/are the report/s published by International Atomic Energy Agency?

1. Nuclear Technology Review
2. World Nuclear Performance Report
3. Nuclear Energy Data

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Nuclear Technology Review and Technical Cooperation Report are the publications of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- World Nuclear Performance Report is published by World Nuclear Association (WNA).
- Nuclear Energy Data is the Nuclear Energy Agency's annual compilation of statistics and country reports documenting nuclear power status in NEA member countries and in the OECD area.

Q2. "Cyclone Bulbul" was named by which of the following countries?

- a. Bangladesh
- b. Pakistan
- c. Maldives
- d. Oman

Answer: b

Explanation:

In the year 2000, eight countries came together to assign names to the tropical cyclones that originate in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Cyclone Bulbul was named by Pakistan.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Unified Payments Interface:

1. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is a payments system that allows multiple bank accounts belonging to any participating bank to be controlled via single mobile app.
2. The system allows instantaneous transfer of funds across different banks with the use of a single identifier.
3. It was launched by the Indian Banks Association.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is payments system that allows multiple bank accounts belonging to any participating bank to be controlled via single mobile app. The system allows customers to instantaneously transfer funds across different banks with the use of a single identifier which will act as a virtual address and eliminate the need to exchange sensitive information such as bank account numbers during a financial transaction. It was launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). NPCI is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, for creating a robust Payment & Settlement Infrastructure in India.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) :

- 1. It is an autonomous body, registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- 2. CSIR is funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology.
- 3. The Prime Minister of India is the ex officio President of CSIR.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is the largest research and development (R&D) organisation in India. The objectives of the Council are scientific and industrial/applied research of national importance. CSIR is funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology and it operates as an autonomous body through the Societies Registration Act, 1860. The Prime Minister of India is the ex officio President of CSIR.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. The usual argument is that transparency will undermine judicial independence. Can there be different standards for transparency across different arms of the state? Critically analyse. (15 Marks, 250 Words)
- 2. Can the Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) set up by the government for the real estate sector, which is reeling under financial stress help revive the sector and boost the economy. Discuss. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

