

05 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. J&K restores 4G mobile Internet

Context:

The Jammu and Kashmir administration restored high-speed mobile Internet.

Background:

- The internet services were shut by the government since August 5, 2019, when the Centre ended the state's special status.

Read more on this topic covered in [11th January 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- Keeping in view the advice of a special committee and upon careful review of the overall security situation, the Home Department revoked the restrictions on mobile data services and fixed line Internet.
- Prepaid SIM card holders will also be provided services only after verification as per the norms applicable.

2. Registered unrecognised parties double in last 10 years

Context:

According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), registered unrecognised parties doubled in the last 10 years.

Key findings:

- The contribution reports of only 3.39% of the total registered unrecognised political parties are available in the public domain for 2018-19, while the reports of only 3.56% of such parties for 2017-18 are uploaded on the respective State Chief Electoral Officers' websites.
- The number of these parties increased two-fold in the last 10 years.
 - From 1,112 in 2010 to 2,301 in 2019.
 - The figure spiked disproportionately during the year of parliamentary election.
- The contribution reports of none of the registered unrecognised political parties of 25 States/UTs including Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, etc. are available on the respective State CEO websites for 2018-19. For 2017-18, contribution reports of parties of 21 states/UTs are not available.
 - The findings point to a violation of the ECI guidelines.

Details:

- There are 2,360 political parties registered with the [Election Commission of India](#) and 2,301 or **50% of them are unrecognised**.

Registered Unrecognised Parties:

- Registered unrecognised parties are those that are:

- Either newly registered parties (or)
- Those which have not secured enough percentage of votes in Assembly or General Elections to become a State party (or)
- Those which have never contested in elections since being registered
- Such parties don't enjoy all the benefits extended to the recognised parties.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. 'No blanket nod given for surveillance'

The Centre has denied granting blanket permission to any agency for interception or monitoring of any messages or information under its surveillance programmes such as the Centralised Monitoring System, the Network Traffic Analysis, and the National Intelligence Grid.

- An affidavit was filed by the Ministry of Home Affairs before the Delhi High Court in response to a petition seeking to constitute a permanent, independent oversight body for reviewing lawful interception and monitoring orders or warrants under the provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act and the [Information Technology Act](#).
- The affidavit said that there is no blanket permission to any agency for interception or monitoring or decryption.
- It also said that permission from the competent authority (Union Home Secretary) is required, as per due process of law and rules in each case.
- The ministry said that the existing safeguards of oversight by a high-level committee chaired by Cabinet Secretary at the Central level and chaired by Chief Secretary at the State level, are adequate and provide effective supervision.

Centralised Monitoring System:

- The Centralised Monitoring System is a centralized telephone interception provisioning system installed by the Centre for Development of Telematics, an Indian Government owned telecommunications technology development centre.
- It is operated by Telecom Enforcement Resource and Monitoring Cells.

Network Traffic Analysis:

- NETRA (Network Traffic Analysis) is a software network developed by the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, a DRDO laboratory.
- It is used by the Intelligence Bureau, and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), to intercept and analyse internet traffic using pre-defined filters.

National Intelligence Grid:

- The National Intelligence Grid or [NATGRID](#) is the integrated intelligence grid connecting databases of core security agencies of the Government of India.

- It collects comprehensive patterns of intelligence that can be readily accessed by intelligence agencies.

Category: ECONOMY

1. PSUs playing a role in farm sector will not be sold

Context:

The government has listed the firms that will stay outside the purview of divestment.

Details:

- The policy has specified four strategic sectors where 'bare minimum' public sector presence will be retained as per Finance Minister's [Budget](#) speech.
- However, an annexure to the policy has listed out types of public sector entities that will remain outside its ambit.
- NITI Aayog would be in charge of recommending the firms in strategic sectors that should be retained, considered for privatisation or merger or 'subsidiarisation' with another public sector firm, or simply closed.
- DIPAM would move a proposal for obtaining 'in-principle' from the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs for strategic disinvestment of a specific PSE from time to time, on a case-to-case-basis.
- The timing for specific transactions will, however, be contingent on the considerations of appropriate sequencing, sectoral trends, administrative feasibility, investors' interests, etc.

Outside purview of divestment:

- Public sector firms engaged in activities allied to the farm sector, such as provision of seeds to farmers, or procurement and distribution of food for the public distribution system, will not be up for sale under the new disinvestment policy announced in the Budget.
- Excluded are central public sector enterprises concerned with:
 - assisting farmers in getting access to seeds;
 - promoting innovation in agriculture;
 - procurement and distribution of food for the public distribution system.

2. RBI reiterates growth-supportive stance

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would retain an accommodative policy stance into the next financial year to help revive growth on a durable basis even as it held interest rates and vowed to ensure inflation remains within the target.

Details:

- The RBI has announced that it would gradually restore the Cash Reserve Ratio.
 - The CRR had been cut to 4 % in two phases to address the pandemic's fallout, as part of a 'normalisation process'.

- RBI's upper tolerance threshold of 6% was breached for six consecutive months through November 2020.
 - However, CPI inflation had eased to 4.6% in December 2020.
 - Core inflation, excluding food and fuel, however, remained elevated in December 2020 with only a marginal moderation.

Note:

- The MPC also estimated real GDP growth at 10.5% in 2021-22, slightly lower than the 11% projected in the Economic Survey and the International Monetary Fund's forecast of 11.5%.

Monetary Policy Committee:

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee constituted by the Reserve Bank of India and led by the Governor of RBI.
- Monetary Policy Committee was formed with the mission of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to restrain inflation within the particular target level.
- Monetary policy refers to the use of instruments under the control of the central bank to regulate the availability, cost and use of money and credit.

Read more on the [Monetary Policy Committee and Instruments of Monetary Policy in India](#)

3. Retail investors to be able to buy GSecs directly: RBI

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it would allow retail investors to open gilt accounts with the central bank to invest in government securities directly and without the help of intermediaries.

Details:

- It is proposed to provide retail investors with online access to the government securities market — both primary and secondary — directly through the Reserve Bank (Retail Direct).
- Government securities or G-Secs are securities issued by the RBI on behalf of the Government of India to meet the latter's borrowing programme for financing fiscal deficit.

Significance:

- Allowing retail participation in the G-Sec market is a bold step towards the financialisation of a vast pool of domestic savings and could be a game-changer.
- This will broaden the investor base.
- It would provide retail investors with enhanced access to participate in the government securities market.
- This is a major structural reform placing India among select few countries which have similar facilities.
- This measure together with HTM [hold to maturity] relaxation, will facilitate the smooth completion of the government borrowing programme in 2021-22.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A prisoner's tragedy, a nation's shame

Context:

- Perarivalan has been in prison for almost 30 years for his role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi during the 1991 election campaign.
- The government agencies have continued to insist on his incarceration despite being unsure of his role.

Prolonged injustice:

- The charges of CBI against Perarivalan for terrorist offences under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), were upheld by the trial court along with conspiracy to commit murder under the [Indian Penal Code \(IPC\)](#).
- Over the course of many rounds of litigation, his conviction only for the conspiracy to commit murder under the IPC has been sustained.
 - He has served 30 years as part of his life imprisonment sentence.
 - His death sentence was commuted in February 2014.
- At the core of his conviction is his confession to a police officer, a legacy of the TADA that was carried forward under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).
 - Confessions to a police officer are inadmissible as evidence under the Indian Evidence Act.
 - However, terrorism legislation such as TADA and POTA made confessions to the police admissible.
 - This was valid as evidence as long as it was made to an officer not lower than the rank of Superintendent of Police.
- Later, it was found that in effect, Perarivalan was convicted based on a manipulated confession to a police officer.
 - Despite the Supreme Court dropping the TADA charges, his confession which was admissible only due to provisions of the TADA was then used to convict him for IPC offences.
- His effort to get a remission under the Code of Criminal Procedure was rejected by the Central Government in April 2018.

Issue:

- Perarivalan's is a classic case of state agencies being unable to identify and arrest those at the heart of the conspiracy while sacrificing the lives of those who might have had a peripheral role at worst.

- While he was sentenced to death for buying two battery cells, there is no evidence about the bomb, the bombmaker, where the bomb was tested, and who supplied the RDX, the military-grade explosive that was used.
- Justice M.C. Jain's Report (Jain Commission Inquiry) to Parliament in March 1998 identified massive gaps in the CBI's investigation, including a lack of clarity on the source and the making of the bomb.
- To address these concerns, the CBI constituted the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) to conduct further investigations.
 - Over two decades, the MDMA has been submitting reports in sealed covers to the TADA Court and Perarivalan has been denied access to these.
 - Also, the MDMA has repeatedly stated that Perarivalan and the other accused are not part of these ongoing investigations.
 - Yet, he continues to be in prison for purchasing batteries whose use remains a mystery.

Latest developments:

- His application for a pardon had been pending with the Governor since December 2015.

Read more on the latest developments in [5th February 2021 CNA](#).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Terminal declined

Context:

Sri Lanka recently backed out of an agreement with India and Japan to develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Significance of the project:

- The project, worth an estimated \$500-\$700 million, was a key marker for infrastructure investment in the island nation where Chinese projects are most prominent.
- More than two-thirds of trans-shipment at this port is tied to India, making it an important trade and connectivity link.
- As a joint venture for India and Japan to invest in, the project was also expected to showcase how two Indo-Pacific partners, and also Quad members, could provide South Asia with viable, transparent and sustainable alternatives for financing and development.

India's Reaction:

- Both Japan and India have expressed their deep disappointment with the decision.
- India has said it continues to engage Sri Lanka on the ECT issue, although it remains cold to Colombo's alternative offer of developing the West Container Terminal.
- Over the past year, India has invested much time and resources to India-Sri Lanka ties, including a new credit line, currency swap agreement, and COVID-19 assistance and vaccines.
- India has also set much store by its partnership with Japan, which could be a template for similar projects, as a counter to China's BRI.

Conclusion:

- There is much at stake for all three countries to derail the partnership.
- It is in the best interest of all the three parties, but primarily Colombo's, to find a compromise formula to salvage a deal that has far-reaching consequences for the region.

Read more on the topic in [February 3rd, 2021 CNA](#).

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Start-up India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS):

1. It is an early-stage funding for start-ups.
2. The implementing body of the scheme is the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Start-up India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) is an early-stage funding for start-ups.
- The Scheme aims to provide financial assistance to start-ups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry and commercialization.
- It will be implemented with effect from 1st April 2021.
- The implementing body of the scheme is the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to 'e-CHARAK':

1. It is a mobile application as well as a web portal for the promotion and marketing of medicinal plants/herbs.
2. It is a mobile application for ensuring seamless export of khadi from India.
3. It was jointly developed by the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Ministry of AYUSH and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- e-CHARAK is a mobile application as well as a web portal for the promotion and marketing of medicinal plants/herbs.
- It was jointly developed by the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Ministry of AYUSH and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
- It is an e-channel for herbs, aromatics and raw materials and is a platform to enable information exchange between various stakeholders mainly farmers involved in the medicinal plants sector across the country.
- The e-CHARAK application supports different local languages and it also provides the fortnightly market price of 100 Medicinal Plants from 25 herbal markets across India.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Hathkargha Samvardhan Sahayata (HSS) Yojana:

1. The scheme was introduced to facilitate technology up-gradation in the handloom sector.
2. The scheme aims at providing 90% subsidy for the purchase of looms and accessories by the weavers.
3. The scheme is under the Ministry of Textiles.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to registered unrecognised political parties:

1. A registered unrecognised political party cannot have any star campaigners.
2. They are entitled to exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it.
3. They get broadcast/teecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Registered unrecognised parties are those that are
 - Either newly registered parties (or)
 - Those which have not secured enough percentage of votes in Assembly or General Elections to become a State party (or)
 - Those which have never contested in elections since being registered
- Such parties don't enjoy all the benefits extended to the recognised parties.
- Only parties recognised as State or National Parties are entitled to exclusive allotment of the reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it. They get broadcast/teecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- A registered unrecognised political party cannot have any star campaigners.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the pardoning powers provided to the executives in India. Evaluate the scope of the pardoning power of the President and pardoning power of the Governor. (15 Marks 250 Words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. In the light of the recent developments with respect to the East container terminal project in Sri Lanka, examine the factors which are leading to a downturn in India-Sri Lanka ties. [GS-2, International Relations]