

17 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Kiran Bedi removed as Puducherry L-G

Context:

Kiran Bedi has been removed as the Lieutenant-Governor of Puducherry. Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan has been given additional charge of the Union Territory until regular arrangements are made.

Details:

The Puducherry Lt Governor and the Puducherry Chief Minister have been locked in a tussle over several issues in the past.

Read more on this topic covered in the Editorials Segment in 13th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry:

- UT of Puducherry is headed by the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry as its nominal head, with a democratically elected Chief Minister as the real head of the executive.
- Other union territories don't have an elected government and legislative assembly.
- Puducherry, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir (newly formed UT) are the three territories that have democratically elected governments like Indian states.
- Rules of Business of the Government of Puducherry, Government of UTs Act, 1963 and the constitutional provisions expect the Lieutenant Governor to act as a bridge between the local government and the Centre.
- The manner in which the LG functions vis-à-vis the elected government (Council of Ministers) is also spelt out in the Rules of Business of the Government of Pondicherry, 1963, issued on June 22, 1963.
- Under Rule 47, which deals with persons serving in the UT government, the Administrator exercises powers regulating the conditions of service of such persons in consultation with the Chief Minister. In case the LG has a difference of opinion with the Chief Minister, he/she can refer the matter to the central government for the decision of the President.

Note:

- Lt. Governors are appointed by the President of India for a term of five years.
- The LG holds office at the pleasure of the President.

2. Explain action taken on OTTs, SC tells govt.

Context:

The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the government to explain the actions taken to regulate content on OTT platforms.

- Recently, 17 'Over the Top' (OTT) platforms or video streaming service providers have adopted a 'toolkit' for effective implementation of the self-regulation code introduced in 2020.

This topic has been covered in **12th February 2021** and **13th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Sri Lanka considering India's grant instead of China project

Context:

In a bid to displace a Chinese company that had won the contract to install renewable energy systems in three small islands off Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, India has offered a grant of \$12 million to execute it.

Details:

- The development comes less than a month after the Cabinet cleared a project to install hybrid renewable energy systems in Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu, located in the Palk Bay, some 50 km off Tamil Nadu.
- Recently, Sri Lanka cleared a Chinese energy project in three islands off the Jaffna peninsula that are barely 50 km from the Tamil Nadu coast.

This topic has been covered in the **9th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

- Sri Lanka's Minister of Power said that the government would consider India's proposal.

Note:

It remains to be seen if India's proposal gets official clearance, but India's swift offer comes in the wake of being ejected — along with Japan — out of the East Container Terminal (ECT) development project at the Colombo Port.

Read more on this topic covered in the **3rd February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Lab study to trace origin of disaster

Context:

A team of scientists at the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) in Dehradun is analysing fragments of ice, rock and mud in their labs to better understand the origins of the disaster that took place at Chamoli in Uttarakhand.

This topic has been covered in the **8th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Cairn files case in U.S. to push India to pay \$1.2 bn award

Context:

Cairn Energy has filed a case in a U.S. district court to enforce a \$1.2 billion arbitration award it won in a tax dispute against India, pressure on the government to pay its dues.

Details:

- In December 2020, an arbitration body awarded the British firm damages of more than \$1.2 billion plus interest and costs.
- The tribunal ruled India breached an investment treaty with Britain and said New Delhi was liable to pay.

This topic has been covered in the 27th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.

- Cairn has now asked the U.S. court to recognise and confirm the award, including payments due since 2014 and interest compounded semi-annually.
- Cairn aims to enforce the award under international arbitration rules, commonly called the New York Convention, and recover losses caused by India's "unfair and inequitable treatment of their investments".

New York Convention:

- The New York Arbitration Convention is also known as the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards.
- It was first adopted by the United Nations diplomatic conference on 10 June 1958 and was enforced on 7 June 1959.
- It requires courts of the contracting states to give effect to an agreement to arbitrate when seized of an action in a matter covered by an arbitration agreement and also to recognize and enforce awards made in other states, subject to specific limited exceptions.
- It was adopted mainly for promoting healthy business relations between the countries and to promote harmony and coordination among the states.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Freedom and security

The article talks about the social media platforms operating in India and suggests that the government must view freedom of speech as an aid, not an impediment, to national security.

Background:

- Recently, the Indian government and Twitter were at loggerheads over issues related to content removal and [freedom of expression](#).

- The Centre had expressed deep disappointment over the microblogging platform's partial compliance of its orders grudgingly and with substantial delay.

This topic has been covered in the 5th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Social Media and Freedom of Speech:

- Social media has not just confined its wings to sharing information and pictures.
- It has now become a platform for sharing thoughts, ideas, and reviews thus exercising freedom of speech to the amplest.
- While the Constitution of India grants the right to freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right, it is not an absolute right.
- It does not give immunity for every possible use of language and prescribes punishment for those who abuse this freedom.
- It allows the govt. of India to frame laws and to impose restrictions in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India.
- The legislature has the power to enact laws under Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression to impose restrictions on the following grounds:
 - Sovereignty and Integrity of India
 - Defamation
 - National Security
 - Public Order
 - Decency
 - Friendly relations with foreign states.

Details:

- The government of India has called on the social media platforms operating in India to follow the law of the land.
- The Minister of IT and Communications said that while criticisms are welcome, when social media is used to propagate hate, action would be taken.
- The issue is still in the realm of statements and counter-statements.
- While keeping up the pressure on Twitter by threatening to take action, the government seems to have stopped short of taking action.
- While being defiant initially, Twitter also seems to have stopped short of escalating it and going to court.
- If either one of the parties had decided to escalate the issue, the contentious law under which social media platforms are required to comply with blocking orders could come under legal scrutiny.
 - The reference is to Section 69A of the [Information Technology Act, 2000](#).
 - Under the provision of the Act, the government can order a digital intermediary to block any content on grounds including security of the state and public order.

This issue has been covered in the 15th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.

- The Supreme Court did uphold the constitutionality of Section 69A in the Shreya Singhal vs. the Union of India case in 2015.
- However, criticism over the secrecy of the process and the arbitrariness with which it has been used over the years has never ceased.
- This Section, in a way, represents the wide censorship powers that the government has.

Conclusion:

- Social media has been a provider of a platform for people to express themselves.
- It has not only made citizens more informed but has helped in shaping the laws and legislations according to the needs of the public.
- Citizen awareness and consciousness are important for a successful democracy.
- Diversity of opinions is essential to enable the citizens to have informed judgments.
- While it is important to regulate social media content, it is important to see freedom of speech as one of the key facilitators of security of state instead of looking at it as an antithesis of security.

2. The viability of two proposals: On having 4 capitals in India

Context:

Recently, the West Bengal Chief Minister asked why India should have only one capital and suggested that there be four. She suggested that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in a rotating manner.

History:

- Calcutta (now Kolkata) was once the capital of this country until King George V announced in December 1911 that Delhi would be the new capital.
- Parliament House was opened in 1927 and the magnificent Viceroy's residence (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the government buildings were inaugurated in 1931.
- One of the factors that may have weighed in favour of New Delhi could be its proximity to the summer capital, Shimla.

Feasibility of the proposal:

- Four capitals would obviously mean having Parliament buildings in three other regions, too.

Accommodation:

- If there are four capitals, accommodation for all the MPs and the adjunct staff will have to be constructed.
- While those from the northern parts of the country would prefer to be comfortably ensconced in the existing residential accommodation in New Delhi, those from other parts of the country may prefer to settle in the capital of the region to which they belong.
- After the Parliament sessions, these residential accommodations would be vacant for months after every session.

- In addition to this, huge expenditure would be involved in all the MPs and their staff having to fly to and from these capitals every now and then.

Security:

- Providing security to all the MPs will be a huge burden for the State Police.
- Vacant accommodations where the MPs don't reside would also have to be guarded round the clock.
- Depending on the risk factor, enhanced security will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of them.

Expenditure:

- Even shifting a State capital would involve huge expenditure.
- The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's proposal to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli was eventually shelved when it became apparent that it would impose a huge burden on the state exchequer.
- The cost to the government exchequer to have capitals in three other States will be mind-boggling and our nation can ill-afford this.

A proposal to be considered:

- In 2021, a similar request was made when the Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India.
- This has been a long-standing demand.
- Unlike the proposal to establish four capitals, this one merits serious consideration.
- The proposal needs consideration given the prohibitively long distance between the southern states and Delhi.
 - Not many can afford to travel all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases.
 - The exorbitant fees of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another deterrent.
- Also, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of the Court of Appeal with 15 judges each be created across the country to reduce the burden of the Supreme Court.

Merits:

- This would enable judges to go through each case thoroughly and deliver a well-thought-out verdict.
- Setting up these courts would call for an amendment in the Constitution. Though the demand is to set up a bench in the south, southern Bar Councils may later take up the issue of setting up separate appellate benches in regions in the south.
- Such an arrangement would leave the apex court free to deal with constitutional issues.
- With a huge number of cases pending in various courts, a viable solution needs to be worked out.
- Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

Category: HEALTH

1. Combating vaccine hesitancy

Context:

Poor communication and lack of transparency on vaccine efficacy data have produced vaccine hesitancy, resulting in low uptake in some States.

This topic has been covered on 15th February 2021 CNA.

Vaccine Hesitancy:

- According to the World Health Organization, vaccine hesitancy is defined as a reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccine services.
- Vaccine hesitancy is as old as the concept of vaccination itself.
- However, in times of uncertainty, people are particularly susceptible to misinformation due to an intricate combination of cognitive, social and algorithmic biases i.e., information overload and limited attention spans.

Issues:

- The debates around hesitancy for COVID-19 vaccines include concerns over safety, efficacy, and side effects due to the record-breaking timelines of the vaccines, competition among several companies, misinformation, and religious taboos.
- Social media has seen a rising number of self-proclaimed experts who have been decoding the ingredients and efficacy of the vaccines through unsubstantiated claims.
- Misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines may seriously dent the fight against the pandemic.

Way Forward:

- People can choose to not be inoculated, but to break the chain of transmission, it is imperative to have the right strategy in place.
- Instead of anti-vaxxers, the target audience must be the swing population i.e., people who are sceptical but can be persuaded through scientific facts and proper communication.
- The second measure is to pause before sharing any unverified news from social media.
- There is a need to inculcate the habit to fact-check any news related to COVID-19 vaccines.
- The third measure is to use the celebrity effect — the ability of prominent personalities to influence others to take vaccines.
- The infodemic around vaccines can be tackled only by actively debunking myths, misinformation and fake news on COVID-19 vaccines.

F. Prelims Facts

1. COVAX Project

- The COVAX project is a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, an ambitious programme based on funding from high and middle-income countries.

- It is a unique case of global cooperation and a strategic shift to enhance global development outcomes.
- COVAX aims to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.
- It aims to deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021.
- COVAX is co-led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO.

G. Tidbits

1. Ambassadors' team heads to J&K to study situation

What's in News?

European Union Ambassador is expected to lead a delegation of Ambassadors, including some from European countries, to Jammu and Kashmir.

- The European Union's European External Action Service (EEAS) confirmed their acceptance of the External Affairs Ministry's invitation.
- The visit is expected to study the situation on the ground there ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Porto in May for the E.U.-India summit.
- The visit has received some criticism from leaders in the Union Territory, including former Chief Minister saying such guided tours would serve no purpose.

2. Telcos ask government to defer net neutrality rules

What's in News?

The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) has urged the government to bring over-the-top (OTT) service providers such as WhatsApp under the licensing regime and defer net neutrality rules on telecom operators till the time 'same service, same rules' are applied on the applications.

- The net neutrality principles prohibit service providers from discriminating against Internet content and services by blocking, throttling or according preferential higher speeds.
- The COAI wrote to the Telecom Department in response to the recommendation of the [TRAI](#) on OTT players that no regulations should be imposed on the calling and messaging apps till the time clarity emerges in the international jurisdictions.
- Till the time any decision is taken regarding licensing of OTT communication providers, the unequity between TSPs (telecom service providers) and OTTs should not be increased further, it said.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Lieutenant Governor (LG):

1. The LG is appointed by the President of India for a term of five years.
2. The LG holds office at the pleasure of the President.

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:

Both the statements are correct.

Q2. Nainativu and Neduntheevu are located in:

- a. Palk Bay
- b. Persian Gulf
- c. Gulf of Cambay
- d. Gulf of Oman

Answer: a

Explanation:

Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu are located in Palk Bay, some 50 km off Tamil Nadu.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Leopard:

- 1. The Indian leopard is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- 2. It is listed on a par with Tigers in Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.
- 3. A melanistic leopard is called black panther or jaguar.
- 4. The rosettes of each leopard are unique in shape and size, making the species identifiable individually.

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

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 3 and 4 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Indian leopard is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- It is listed on a par with Tigers under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.

- A melanistic leopard is called black panther or jaguar.
- The rosettes of each leopard are unique in shape and size, making the species identifiable individually.

Q4. Which of the following Commissions recommended that Governors must not be removed before completion of their five year tenure, except in rare and compelling circumstances?

- a. 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission
- b. Punchi Commission
- c. Sarkaria Commission
- d. Rajmanner Commission

Answer: c

Explanation

- The Sarkaria Commission had recommended that Governors must not be removed before completion of their five-year tenure, except in rare and compelling circumstances.
- It also suggested that the Governor should be an eminent person from outside the State and should be a detached figure without intense political links or should not have taken part in politics in the recent past.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Freedom of speech must not be seen as the antithesis of security of the state, but as one of its key facilitators. Critically analyse the statement. (10 Marks, 150 Words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance].
2. Examine the feasibility and merits of the proposals to have in India, four national capitals and regional benches of the Supreme Court across the country. (15 Marks 250 Words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance].