

19 Jun 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Twitter grilled by MPs over violation of new IT rules

Context:

Social media giant **Twitter** was questioned by members of the **Standing Committee on Information and Technology** for **non-compliance with the new IT rules**.

Background:

- Information Technology (Guidelines For Intermediaries And Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 was enacted by the government in February 2021.

Read more on [New Social Media Rules, IT Rules 2021. Provisions, Penalties](#)

Also read about the guidelines covered in [February 28th, 2021 CNA](#).

- Several concerns had been raised by the social media platforms with respect to the new IT Rules.

Read about the concerns raised in relation to the IT Rules 2021, covered on [May 28th, 2021 CNA](#).

- Twitter has not yet accepted the new IT rules which came into force in May 2021.
- Even after the three months of issuance of the new IT rules, which had asked to set up a grievance redressal system, **Twitter didn't comply with the latest IT Rules**.

Details:

- Twitter India representatives were questioned on a range of issues pertaining to its **failure to appoint a full-time compliance officer** and its **claims of being an intermediary despite manipulating content on its site**, which would put it in the category of a publisher.
- Twitter accepted that it **differentiates between tweets – promoting the healthy ones and suppressing the harmful**.
- It also accepted that it **gives priority to its own laid down policies over the law of the land in cases of conflict**, leading the panel to conclude that this is a gross violation of the [IT Act, 2000](#).

The Social Media platforms, in the instance of non-compliance with the new IT Rules, will have to face huge repercussions. Their **intermediary status will be taken off** and therefore, they will be **liable for criminal action**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Sale of illegal HTBt cotton seeds doubles

Context:

The **illegal cultivation of herbicide-tolerant (HT) Bt cotton** has seen a huge jump in 2021.

Issues:

- Seed manufacturers claim that the **sale of illegal seed packets has more than doubled from 30 lakh in 2020 to 75 lakh in 2021.**
- The **illegal seeds are sold using the brand name of prominent companies.**
- **Farmers are at risk** with such illegal cotton seed sale as there is **no accountability of the quality of seed; it pollutes the environment.**
- The **industry is losing legitimate seed sale.**
- The **government is losing revenue in terms of tax collection.**

Cultivation of the genetically modified cotton variant has **serious environmental and economic consequences.**

Bt Cotton and HTBt Cotton:

- **Bt cotton is the only transgenic crop that has been approved by the Centre for commercial cultivation in India.**
 - It has been **genetically modified to produce an insecticide to combat the cotton bollworm** (a common pest).
- The **HTBt cotton variant adds another layer of modification.** It makes the **plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate.** This has **not been approved by regulators.**
 - It is feared that **glyphosate has a carcinogenic effect.**
 - **The unchecked spread of herbicide resistance** to nearby plants through pollination could **create a variety of superweeds.**

Way Forward:

- Genetic modification **could bring about changes that can be harmful to humans in the long run.** **GM crops** must be released commercially **only after their long-lasting effects are studied.**
- In India, the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** is the apex body that allows for the **commercial release of GM crops.**
 - **Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a jail term of 5 years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh under the Environmental Protection Act, 1989.**
- The Centre has made the policy to ban this variant. The **State governments must take action.**
- HT seed sales are carried mostly by unorganised and fly by night operators. **Action must be taken to stop such sales and punish offenders.**

Category: SECURITY

1. Panel formed for talks on theatre commands

Context:

A high-level committee has been formed for wider consultations on the creation of integrated tri-service theatre commands.

Details:

- The panel includes the **Vice-Chiefs of the three services, the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and representatives from Ministries** such as Home Affairs, Finance and Law.
- Some aspects like **bringing in paramilitary forces, which are under the Home Ministry, under the purview of the theatre commands and financial implications that may arise in the process of integration** has necessitated the move.

Mandate of the committee:

- The committee will **examine all issues and find a way forward** before a **formal note** on their creation is **sent to the Cabinet Committee on Security**.
- The issue is about **fine-tuning the proposals and forming a consensus on the integrated tri-service theatre commands**.

Integrated Theatre Commands:

- There are about 19 military commands in the country and only two of them are tri-service commands – Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command, which looks after nuclear assets.
- Instead of having separate commands for every service, **the CDS is working on having a joint or theatre command that can carry out all war-fighting formations under a single commander**.
- The commander could either be from the Army, Air Force or the Navy.
- **Theaterisation means putting specific units of personnel from the three services — Army, Navy and Air Force — under a common theatre commander so they fight as a cohesive unit.**
 - Both the US and China follow a theatre command doctrine.

Read more on [Integrated Theatre Commands Explained](#).

Note:

- It is a part of reforms carried out after the **formation of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)**.
- The mandate of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) includes **bringing about jointness among the three services**, including through the establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- The country's first CDS Gen. Bipin Rawat had **constituted teams headed by the Vice-Chiefs of three services to study and submit recommendations on the formation of various commands**.
- Also, **two proposed commands: air defence and maritime theatre** are being discussed.
 - The proposed **Air Defence Command plans to integrate all air assets of the armed forces**.
 - The **Maritime Theatre Command plans to bring in all assets of the Navy, Coast Guard as well as coastal formations of the Army and Air Force under one umbrella**.
 - On land, the **Army's Northern Command and Western Command would be converted into two to five theatre commands**.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. In India, looking beyond the binary to a spectrum

The article talks about the need to grant marriage rights to same-sex couples in India, at the earliest.

Civil Rights for LGBTQIA+ community:

- The **LGBTQIA+ community** is a community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other identities that make up a **diverse group of individuals with varying sexual orientations and gender identities**.
- The last two decades have witnessed **tremendous progress in establishing civil rights** for the LGBTQIA+ community.

International jurisprudence:

Globally, the recognition of the unequal laws discriminating against the LGBTQIA+ community has acted as a **trigger to reform and modernise legal architecture to become more inclusive and equal**.

- As a result of a verdict by the Constitutional Court of **South Africa**, the **Civil Union Act, 2006 was enacted**, enabling the voluntary union of two persons above 18 years of age, by way of marriage.
- In **Australia**, the **Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws – General Law Reform) Act 2008** was enacted to provide equal entitlements for same-sex couples in matters of, inter alia, social security, employment and taxation.
- In **England and Wales**, the **Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013** enabled same-sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies or with religious rites.
- In 2015, the **Supreme Court of the United States decided that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples**. It held the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples to be a grave and continuing harm, serving to disrespect and subordinate gays and lesbians.

Courts and civil rights:

- In India, **marriages are solemnised under personal laws** such as the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872, Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.
- **At present, same-sex and queer marriages are not clearly recognised in India**. However, we are not deprived of judicial guidance.
- **Arunkumar and Sreeja vs The Inspector General of Registration and Ors.**
 - In this case, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court employed the interpretation that the **term ‘bride’ under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 includes transwomen and intersex persons identifying as women**.
 - Therefore, a **marriage solemnised between a male and a transwoman**, both professing the Hindu religion, is **deemed to be a valid marriage under the Act**.

- It expands the scope of a term used in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 in a progressive manner and sets the stage for re-imagining the marriage rights of the LGBTQIA+ community.
- **Shafin Jahan vs Asokan K.M. and Others (Hadiya case)**
- In this case, the Supreme Court said that the **right to choose and marry a partner was** considered to be a **constitutionally guaranteed freedom**.
 - SC held that the “intimacies of marriage lie within a core zone of privacy, which is inviolable” and “**society has no role to play in determining our choice of partners**”.
- **From the logical interpretation of these judgements**, it is apparent that any legal or statutory bar to same-sex and queer marriages must necessarily be held to be unconstitutional and specifically violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

Expanding the scope of marriage:

- The domain of marriages cannot be immune to reform and review.
- **Reform of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 to bring self-respect marriages** under its very umbrella, is seen as a strong move towards **breaking caste-based practices within the institution of marriage**.
 - Self-respect marriages were legalised in Tamil Nadu (later, in Puducherry) through amendments to the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.
 - Self-respect marriages have **done away with priests and religious symbols such as fire or saptapadi**.
 - Solemnisation of such marriages requires only an exchange of rings or garlands or tying of the mangalsutra.
- Similarly, **understanding the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community, the law must expand the institution of marriage to include all gender and sexual identities**.
- At least 29 countries in the world have legalised same-sex marriage.
- It is time for India to review its existing legal architecture in order to legalise marriages irrespective of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Cold peace

Context:

US President Joe Biden met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva.

Details:

- The world leaders met for the first time in a decade.
 - They last met when the Russian leader was prime minister and Biden was serving as vice president, in 2011.
- **Relations between the two countries have hit the lowest point** in recent years since the end of the Cold War.

- The U.S. has accused Russia of **interfering in its elections and launching cyberattacks** and criticised its **stifling of internal dissent**.
- Russia has slammed **America's interventionist foreign policy**.

History of the U.S.-Russia ties:

- There are **structural issues in the U.S.-Russia ties**.
- When Russia ended its post-Soviet strategic retreat and adopted a more assertive foreign policy under Mr. Putin (partly in response to NATO expansion into eastern Europe) **the West saw it as a threat to its primacy**.
- The **2008 Georgia war** severely affected the relations between democratic Russia and the West.
- In 2014, the annexation of Crimea renewed tensions.
 - Russia was thrown out of the G8, and western sanctions followed.
- Ties hit rock bottom with allegations that **Russian intelligence units carried out cyberattacks** and **ran an online campaign to get Donald Trump elected President** in the 2016 U.S. election.
- Russia, which had amassed troops on the Ukraine border, sees **NATO's** expansion into its border region as a threat.

Significance of the meeting:

- All these geopolitical and bilateral issues cannot be resolved in one summit. They can take **measures to prevent relations from worsening**.
- The Geneva summit has **set a pragmatic tone for engagement between the two competing powers**.
- The summit demonstrated a willingness to strengthen engagement and reduce tensions.
- Despite the differences, the **leaders held talks on all critical issues, bringing diplomacy to the centre stage**.
- They have decided to return their Ambassadors to the Embassies.
- They **announced a strategic stability dialogue to discuss terms of arms control measures**.

Way Forward:

- Both countries should be ready to **address their critical concerns**.
- They **must agree to a cold peace**, which would help in **addressing other geopolitical problems such as Syria**.
- **Russia should understand the importance of cooperating with the West**. Permanent hostility with other powers cannot be of much help to Russia.
- The U.S. should be **less pessimistic about Russia's foreign policy goals**. Russia, despite its weakened economic status, remains a great power.

Conclusion:

The message from Geneva is that the leaders wanted to establish rules of engagement so that the countries can **better address their differences and seek common ground on issues of mutual interest**. With

some predictability in ties with Russia, Mr. Biden can strengthen his China-focused foreign policy. And with a less hostile America, Mr. Putin can retain Russian influence in its backyard.

Category: EDUCATION

1. Fair assessment

The article talks about **student evaluations amidst the ongoing pandemic.**

Issue:

- **Student evaluation has become a challenge in all countries**, in the current pandemic situation.
- Many have **opted for a hybrid system of school-level internal assessments** combined with any examinations that may have been held.
- As the **course of the pandemic remains uncertain**, developing a continuous assessment system in schools for 2021-22 and beyond has become a necessity.

Context:

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has announced the **marks tabulation framework for Class 12 students.**

Class 12 Evaluation Framework:

- The framework was evolved by CBSE to **fulfil a Supreme Court mandate.**
- It encompasses **three assessment years starting with Class 10.**
- It **distributes score weightage** across the **Class 10 public examination**, the **Class 11 annual test**, and the **Class 12 school tests** in a **30:30:40 ratio** for theory, and actual score for internal assessment and practicals.
 - This aims to **level out any irregular phase in a student's performance.**
- The marks considered from Class 10 will be the **average of the best three subjects among five.**
- A provision has been made to take a Class 12 public examination at a later date to attain a higher score when the pandemic has subsided.
- The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) has also developed a similar system.

Challenges:

- There are some challenges to uniformly implementing the CBSE plan.
- Its success is dependent on the **approach of school result committees responsible for the inclusion of Class 12 marks.**
 - Uneven access to devices and online connectivity, with an impact on scores or even resulting in non-appearance, must be resolved by the result committees.
- There is then the issue of fraud.
 - In the U.K., reports indicate that **influential parents** exerted pressure on schools to give their wards **an unfair hike in grades in a similar mixed evaluation system.**

Way Forward:

- For fairness, CBSE mandates the **participation of external members on the result committees**, but it will take **utmost transparency to dispel students' apprehensions**.
- A dependable dispute resolution process must be established.
- The CBSE has taken the lead on this, and State Boards must follow a similar pattern for student evaluations without further delay.

F. Prelims Facts

1. India, 3 EU nations begin naval exercise

What's In News?

The Indian Navy and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) exercise began in the Gulf of Aden.

Details:

- It is the **first joint naval exercise** between the Indian Navy and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR).
 - European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR) is the **EU's counter-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia**.
- Countries participating in the exercise are **India, Italy, Spain and France**.
- The two-day exercise will see **high tempo-naval operations at sea**, including **advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises, cross deck helicopter operations, tactical manoeuvres, boarding operations, underway replenishment, Search & Rescue, Man Overboard drills, and other maritime security operations**.
- Five warships from four navies are participating in the exercise.
- **Indian Naval Ship Trikand** – mission deployed for Anti-Piracy Operations is participating in the exercise.

EUNAVFOR and India:

- **Under the charter of the World Food Programme (UN WFP)**, EUNAVFOR and the Indian Navy converge on multiple issues including counter-piracy operations and protection of vessels deployed.
- Indian Navy and EUNAVFOR also have regular interaction through **SHADE (Shared Awareness and De-confliction) meetings held annually in Bahrain**.

Note:

- At the same time, a **virtual information-sharing exercise is also being conducted** between the **Indian Navy Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa**.

G. Tidbits

1. 'Lift restrictions on MGNREGS works in rural areas'

What's in News?

Civil society groups in Rajasthan have called for a lifting of restrictions on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) works in rural areas.

Details:

- Against 50 lakh labourers engaged for MGNREGS works during June 2020, only 18.8 lakh have got the work in 2021.
- An order of the State government to restrict the number of labourers at a site to avoid crowding was being misinterpreted for sanctioning only a single work in each village panchayat.

Issues:

- They raised concerns that the **State government's orders had weakened the employment venture** during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Works have not been sanctioned on a large scale** in the village panchayats and **those demanding employment as a statutory right are not getting it.**
- A large segment of the rural **population completely depends on the scheme for their livelihood.**
- This has led to hunger and starvation.

Read more on [MGNREGA \(Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act\)](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. With reference to Committee of Privileges, which of the following statements is/are incorrect?

1. The functions of the committee are semi-judicial in nature.
2. In Lok Sabha it has 15 members, in Rajya Sabha, it has 10.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Some distinct rights are enjoyed by the legislators in a parliament or an assembly without which they cannot discharge their functions and these rights are peculiar to them and as such are not enjoyed by members of any other institution or body of individuals.

- In India, these privileges emanate from the Constitution itself with identical provisions in this regard in the form of Articles 105 and 194, which give these privileges to the Members of Parliament and members of the state legislature respectively.
- Committee of Privileges investigates the matters of breach of such privileges.
- Its function is to examine every question involving breach of privilege of the House or of the members of any Committee thereof referred to it by the House or by the Speaker.
- It has 15 Members in Lok Sabha and 10 Members in Rajya Sabha.
- It recommends suitable actions to be initiated by the house. Therefore, the functions of the committee are semi-judicial in nature.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Jamdani weaving tradition is of Bengali origin.
2. Uppada Jamdani Silk Saree from Telangana has been accorded the GI tag.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Jamdani weaving tradition is of Bengali origin.
- Jamdani is a handloom woven fabric made of cotton, which was historically referred to as muslin.
- Uppada Jamdani Silk Saree that has been accorded GI tag is from Andhra Pradesh.

Q3. Consider the following Pairs:

Virus	Illness
1. Coronaviruses	SARS
2. Togaviruses	Nipah
3. Paramyxoviruses	Chikungunya
4. Filoviruses	Ebola

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 1, 2 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only

d. 2, 3 and 4 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Coronaviruses cause common cold, SARS, MERS, etc.
- Filoviruses were discovered for the first time in 1967. They belong to the family Filoviridae. Two members of the family that are commonly known are the Ebola virus and the Marburg virus.
- Togaviruses cause Chikungunya.
- Paramyxoviruses cause Nipah.

Q4. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is in the state of

- a. Maharashtra
- b. Rajasthan
- c. Uttar Pradesh
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is a protected area in Uttar Pradesh. It shares the north-eastern boundary with Nepal.

Q5. Why is the offering of “teaser loans’ by commercial banks a cause of economic concern? (UPSC 2011)

1. The teaser loans are considered to be an aspect of sub-prime lending and banks may be exposed to the risk of defaulters in future.
2. In India, the teaser loans are mostly given to inexperienced entrepreneurs to set up manufacturing or export units

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- A teaser loan is any loan that offers a lower interest rate for a fixed amount of time as a purchase incentive.
- The teaser loans are considered to be an aspect of sub-prime lending and banks may be exposed to the risk of defaulters in future.
- In India, teaser loans are mostly given as personal loans, car loans and home loans.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. It is imperative for India to recognise marriage rights for same-sex couples. Analyse the statement. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-1, Social Issues].
2. U.S and Russia must reset their relationship to pragmatic levels and reduce tensions. Discuss in the context of the Geneva summit held recently between the two Presidents. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, International Relations].

