

GOVERNANCE**TRAI Suspends New SMS Scrubbing Norms**

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) temporarily suspended the scrubbing of short message service or SMS by telecom service providers (TSP) for seven days.

The action by TRAI comes after the functioning of several SMS-based services of banks and e-commerce platforms was affected recently, as the TSPs implemented the second phase of SMS regulation.

Key Points

- Telecom Commercial Communication Customer Preference Regulation, 2018:
- It was issued to “effectively deal with the nuisance of spam”.
- Rules mandate telcos to verify the content of every SMS with the registered text before delivering it to consumers.
- As per TRAI norms, the content of all SMSes will now be verified before it is allowed to be delivered on the users’ device. This process, known as scrubbing, was implemented recently after several delays.
- The new TRAI regulations for principal entities, which will be allowed to send SMSes to customers, seek registration of senders, telemarketers, headers, content, templates, consent templates and subscriber preference.
- The rules prohibit unregistered senders from initiating commercial messages, while registered companies are prevented from sending fraudulent messages to their customers.
- TRAI has released a framework under which telcos could use a distributed ledger technology or blockchain to verify the sender information and content of every commercial SMS before it was delivered on the user’s device.
- Blockchain will ensure two things i.e, non-repudiation and confidentiality. Only those authorised to access details will be able to access subscriber details and only when they need to deliver service.
- According to TRAI, the old technology and platform allowed unscrupulous telemarketers to override the stated preference of the subscriber by claiming consent that may have been surreptitiously obtained.

Recent Issue:

- Even though TSPs implemented the scrubbing norms, some companies did not adopt them, leading to text messages getting dropped and transaction failures.
- TSPs followed TRAI regulations and activated the due process of content scrubbing to address the issue of unsolicited commercial communication.
- TSPs had sent various communications to the principal entities to register their content template with TSPs.

Blockchain Technology

- Blockchain is a shared, immutable ledger that facilitates the process of recording transactions and tracking assets in a business network.
- An asset can be tangible (a house, car, cash, land) or intangible (intellectual property, patents, copyrights, branding).
- Virtually anything of value can be tracked and traded on a blockchain network, reducing risk and cutting costs for all involved.
- The initial and primary use of blockchain technology was for monitoring cryptocurrency (e.g. bitcoin) transactions. However, other usage and applications have emerged in the last few years.
- The government of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have put the land records on the blockchain technology owing to its easy traceability feature.
- Election Commission (EC) officials are exploring the potential of using blockchain technology to enable remote voting.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Rationalisation of Railway Fares**

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways has suggested rationalisation of both freight and passenger fares.

Key Points**Committee’s Observation:****Social Service Obligations:**

- The losses incurred by the railways in passenger services purportedly due to the social service obligations which include pricing tickets at fares lower than costs and passenger concessions.
- The railways incur losses to the tune of Rs. 35,000-38,000 crore a year in the passenger segment.

Effect of Covid:

- Revenues from passenger services further deteriorated due to suspension of operations during Covid-19.

Operating Ratio:

- Noted the regular deterioration in Railways Operating Ratio (OR).
- OR indicates how much the Railways spend to earn a rupee. It helps determine the financial health of the Railways.
- For example, an operating ratio of 98.36% for 2019-20, indicates that to earn Rs. 100, the Railways will have to spend Rs. 98.36.
- For 2020-21, it is estimated to be 131.4%.
- For 2021-22, Railways is targeting OR of 96.15%.

Challenges in the Functioning of Railways:

- Indian Railways' ills are as multifarious as they are well-known: bureaucratic, obese structure with a misconceived perception of public-service-obligation, warped investment priorities, capacity crunch on arterial routes, strained terminals, irrational fare & freight structures.
- It has one of the highest rail freight charges in the world. This has also resulted in consumers moving to roadways for freight transportation, which is more convenient for them.
- The predicament of the railways is that the profits earned from freight business are utilised to compensate for the losses incurred on passenger and other coaching services, thereby adversely affecting both freight and passenger business.

Committee's Suggestions:

- Revisiting social service obligations and resuming services suspended during covid.
- Adjust Passengers Fares:
- Undertake "prudent adjustment" of passenger fares to reduce the burden on freight segments.
- Make Fares Demand-cum-Market Driven:
- Both passenger fares and freight rates have to be demand-cum-market driven and fixed differently for different segments.

Retain Customers:

- As the demand for transport is elastic in a competitive market the Railways should be mindful of the fact that any increase in fares should be confined to a certain limit depending upon the competition from other transport modes.
- The operational efficiencies of the railways in both freight and passenger business have to be leveraged to a greater extent so as to retain the customer base and enhance revenues.

Strengthen Planning and Management:

- The railways should strengthen their planning, management and monetary mechanisms to earn substantial non-fare revenues through various methods/sources, already intended and put in place.
- For example: Dividends from its public sector undertakings, land lease, parking, sale of scrap, advertisements and publicity etc.
- Railway finances should be managed prudently so that the OR may reach at acceptable level in the near future.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Uighur Muslims

Recently, several hundred Uighur Muslim women in Turkey staged an International Women's Day march against the extradition agreement of Turkey with China and demanding the closure of mass incarceration camps in China's Xinjiang Province.

Earlier in 2020, the United States House of Representatives approved a legislation calling for sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for oppression of Uighur Muslims.

Key Points

Uighur Muslims:

- The Uighurs are a predominantly Muslim minority Turkic ethnic group, whose origins can be traced to Central and East Asia.

- The Uighurs speak their own language, similar to Turkish, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations.
- The Uighurs are considered to be one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minority communities in China.
- However, China recognises the community only as a regional minority and rejects that they are an indigenous group.
- Currently, the largest population of the Uighur ethnic community lives in Xinjiang region of China.
- A significant population of Uighurs also lives in the neighbouring Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.
- Xinjiang is technically an autonomous region within China — its largest region, rich in minerals, and sharing borders with eight countries, including India, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan.

Persecution of Uighurs:

- Over the past few decades, as economic prosperity has come to Xinjiang, it has brought with it in large numbers the majority Han Chinese, who have cornered the better jobs, and left the Uighurs feeling their livelihoods and identity were under threat.
- This led to sporadic violence, in 2009 culminating in a riot that killed 200 people, mostly Han Chinese, in the region's capital Urumqi.
- Uighur Muslims for decades, under the false accusation by the Chinese government of terrorism and separatism, have suffered from abuses including persecution, forced detention, intense scrutiny, surveillance and even slavery.
- However, China claims its camps to be 'educational centres' where the Uighurs are being cured of "extremist thoughts" and radicalisation, and learning vocational skills.

China's Extradition Treaty:

- In December 2020, China approved an extradition treaty with Turkey aimed at strengthened judicial cooperation to facilitate a crackdown on transnational criminals including terrorists.
- Extradition is the formal process of one state surrendering an individual to another state for prosecution or punishment for crimes committed in the requesting country's jurisdiction.
- The extradition agreement comes amidst deepening economic and financial ties between Turkey and China.
- China is also Turkey's leading supplier of Covid-19 vaccines.
- Since 1990, the Uighur diaspora in Turkey has become more vibrant and has attracted widespread attention globally through demonstrations, conferences, meetings and briefings.

Concerns of Uighur Muslims:

- If Turkey ratifies the treaty, this will be the last nail in the coffin of Uighur culture as China will silence the biggest Uighur diaspora outside Xinjiang.
- The treaty will become another instrument in the hands of China for the prosecution of its enslaved Uighur minority.

India's Stand:

The Indian government has maintained near silence on the Uighur crisis.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Scheme

Lok Sabha was informed about SATAT scheme.

Ministry: Ministry for Petroleum

Key Points

- SATAT scheme was launched on October 01, 2018
- Oil and Gas Marketing Companies (OGMCs) are inviting Expression of Interest (EoI) from potential entrepreneurs to procure Compressed Bio Gas (CBG).
- Provisions under scheme: (1) Assured price for offtake of CBG with long term agreements by OGMCs; (2) Inclusion of bio manures produced from CBG plants as Fermented Organic Manure (FOM) under Fertilizer Control Order 1985; (3) Inclusion of CBG projects under Priority Sector Lending by RBI
- 9 CBG plants have been commissioned and have started supply of CBG.
- These plants are located in Andhra Pradesh (1 No.), Gujarat (3 No.), Haryana (1 No.), Maharashtra (3 No.) and Tamil Nadu (1 No.).

- These plants are set up by entrepreneurs and private companies who have raised financial resources to develop these plants.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Programmes To Promote Women Entrepreneurship

Several schemes have been launched by the Indian Government to promote Women Entrepreneurship. Some of them have been discussed below.

Pradhan Mantri YUVA (PM YUVA) Yojana

Ministry: The Ministry of Skill Development

Objective: Creating an enabling ecosystem through entrepreneurship education, training, advocacy and easy access to entrepreneurship network.

‘Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs and Startups by Women’

- Ministry: Ministry of Skill Development in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Germany.

Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

- Ministry: Ministry of MSME
- It has the target to generate self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro enterprises for non-farm sector.

Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs)

- Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development
- It is Skill development program
- It involves enabling a trainee to take Bank credit and start his/her own Micro-enterprise.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)

- Ministry: Ministry of Rural Development
- Aim: Eliminating rural poverty through promotion of multiple livelihoods for each rural poor household.

Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)

Under this Sub-scheme of DAY-NRLM, a total of 194,144 enterprises have been set-up up to 31st January, 2021.

ART AND CULTURE

India’s list of World Heritage Sites

Lok Sabha was informed about the Declaration of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Ministry: Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Key Points

- At present, India has 38 World Heritage Properties.
- All the sites are conserved as per ASI’s Conservation Policy.
- India has 42 sites listed under Tentative List which is a prerequisite condition for inscription as World Heritage Site.
- ‘Dholavira: A Harappan City’ has been submitted for nomination of World Heritage Site in 2019-2020.
- Nomination dossiers of ‘Santiniketan, India’ and ‘Sacred Ensemble of Hoysalas’ have been submitted to UNESCO for the year 2021-22 cycle.
- Sites are selected on the basis of their potential for fulfilling criteria under Operational Guidelines and demonstration of Outstanding Universal Value.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Trishul Military Airbase under UDAN scheme

The First flight from Delhi to the newly upgraded Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly Airport, Uttar Pradesh, was recently flagged off.

Ministry: Ministry of Civil Aviation

Key Point

- The up gradation has been done under the Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (RCS-UDAN).
- Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly belongs to the Indian Air Force and the land was handed over to the Airport Authority of India for construction of the interim civil aviation operations.
- Alliance Air was awarded the Delhi – Bareilly route under the UDAN-4 bidding process last year.

ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY

Independent Environment Regulator

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) asked the government to explain the reasons for not setting up an “Independent Environment Regulator” to oversee green clearances.

Key Points

SC’s Order:

- SC had ordered the setting up of a national environment regulatory body under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to ensure independent oversight of green clearances way back in Lafarge Umiam Mining Private Limited v. Union of India case (2011), commonly known as the Lafarge mining case.

Envisaged Functions of the Regulator :

Appraisal and Approval: The regulator will carry out independent, objective and transparent appraisal and approval of projects for environmental clearances.

Monitoring and Implementation: It will also monitor the implementation of the conditions laid down in the clearances and impose penalties on polluters. While exercising such powers, the regulator will ensure the National Forest Policy, 1988 is duly implemented.

Current Issues:

Related to Environment Impact Assessment (2006):

Lack of Capacity: The environmental clearance at the national level is overseen by an Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which functions on an ad-hoc basis, without much regulatory capacity.

- The state-level appraisal committees overseeing the clearance also function without much regulatory support.
- The committees function as per the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006.

Lack of Expertise: The EAC has been questioned on many occasions for lack of expertise of its members and chairpersons.

Lack of Proper Legislation: EAC and the state-level committees are toothless due to the lack of effective legislative power and supporting institutional capacity.

Need:

Unbiased Decision Making: Lack of an independent body to oversee the entire environmental regulatory process could lead to a possible political interest in the decision making.

Proper Compliance: The major concerns regarding EIA norms, such as the compliance monitoring and ex-post regularisation, could be tackled with proper standard-setting by a regulator.

Preventing Regulatory Delays: Cutting down on regulatory delays is also important. This may be possible with the help of a credible independent regulator. But an optimum level of rigour in the regulatory process and standards is important for environmental protection.

Temporary Solution:

As per the SC till an Independent Regulator was put in place, the Environment Ministry should prepare a panel of accredited institutions from which alone the project proponent should obtain the Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Exercise Dustlik-2

Recently, the second edition of India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise “Dustlik-2” started in Chaubatia, Uttarakhand.



Key Points

Aim of the Exercise:

- Counter Insurgency (CI) and Counter Terrorism (CT) operations in mountainous, rural and urban scenarios under the United Nations (UN) mandate.

About the First Edition:

- Took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in November 2019.

Significance:

- Uzbekistan is important to India for security and connectivity to the Central Asian region and also Iran, it is also one alternative India has with respect to Afghanistan.
- Security concerns stemming from the conflict in Afghanistan is one of the major challenges for India's involvement in Central Asia.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Climate change, overexploitation, and policy measures have combinedly turned India into a water-stressed economy. Discuss.

Ans:

Depletion of water resources due to overuse and decline in water supplies due to climate change is pushing India closer to the tipping point of water scarcity. Apart from these, several government policies especially pertaining to Agriculture (minimum support price), also resulted in over-exploitation of water. These factors make India a water-stressed economy.

Reasons for Water Stress in India

Over-exploitation of Ground Water: In India groundwater provides for over two-thirds of irrigation requirements. However, in the last four decades, about 85% of the total addition to irrigation has come from groundwater.

This is clearly unsustainable resulting in steep depletion of the groundwater table.

Policy Issues: The problem of groundwater over-exploitation gets compounded by Indian law which extends exclusive rights to landowners over groundwater.

More importantly, the open-ended state procurement policy of wheat & rice and subsidized electricity also contributes to the blindness harnessing of groundwater.

Rapid Urbanization: India is urbanizing rapidly. This implies heightened water demand from households, industry, and agriculture. Further, concretization also reduces the ground-water replenishment.

Sub-optimal Utilization of Surface Water: Given suboptimal command area development and distribution of water in ill-maintained (and uncovered) canals, leads to the suboptimal utilization of water infrastructure and often results in heavy soil erosion and siltation.

Increasingly Variability in Monsoon: A recent report by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) shows a 'significant' drop in rainfall in Northern India over the past three decades, and rising variability in the monsoons nationwide.

Way Forward

- **Policy Intervention:** River rejuvenation ought to be a policy priority of the Centre and state governments. Sustainable operations and maintenance of irrigation systems must be boosted. For example, Rainwater harvesting should be incorporated into urban planning.
- **Decentralized Approach:** There is a need for a key focus on water conservation, source sustainability, storage, and reuse wherever possible.
- **Citizen Led Solution:** Need to emphasize behavioral change, differentiating of potable and non-potable water usage by the citizenry will go a long way in bringing a Jan Andolan.

Conclusion

For sustainable utilization of the stressed water resource, there is a need for follow-through action under the framework of cooperative federalism and citizen activism. In this context, a participatory approach is needed in water governance.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Consider the following pairs:

India's Joint Military Exercises Partner Countries

- | | |
|---------------------|------------|
| 1. Dustlik | Mongolia |
| 2. Nomadic Elephant | Uzbekistan |
| 3. Yudh Abhyas | USA |
| 4. Bold Kurukshetra | Nepal |

Which of the pairs given above is/are not correctly matched?

- 1 and 2 only
- 3 only
- 1, 2 and 4**
- 2, 3 and 4

2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Uighur Muslim is an indigenous minority community of China.
2. The largest population of Uighurs live in Xinjiang region of China.
3. The Xinjiang region of China shares borders with India and Pakistan only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only**
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

3. With reference to the 'National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)', consider the following statements:

1. This programme is being implemented only in rural areas.
2. The National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) is a part of NSAP.
3. It was brought within the umbrella of 'Core of Core' schemes of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) in 2016.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 3 only**
- d) 1, 2 and 3

4. Consider the following statements:

1. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was established by an executive order.
2. Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) took over the adjudicatory and disputes functions from TRAI.

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

5. With reference to Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) System, consider the following statements:

1. It is used in nuclear submarines to increase their lethality and stealth multifold.
2. The AIP system based submarines can stay underwater for a longer duration.

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