

**GOVERNANCE**

**RTI Requests Rejections**

The Centre has rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission (CIC)'s annual report.

Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15.

**Key Points**

- Rejection without Reason: Almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- These rejections are classified under the 'Others' category in the CIC data.
- The Finance Ministry alone rejected 40% of its total RTI requests without providing a valid reason under the Act.
- More than 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office, the Delhi High Court, the Comptroller and Auditor General, among others fell into the "Others" category.
- Maximum Rejections: The Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received.
- The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.

**Ground for Rejection of the RTI Requests:**

- Section 8(1) deals with the exemption from disclosure of information:
- If it is related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence,
- Information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property,
- Information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person,
- Information which would impede the process of investigation or prosecution of offenders,
- Information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest.
- Of the permissible grounds for rejection, Section 8(1) was used in around 46% of the cases.
- Section 9:
- It empowers the Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer to reject a request for information which involves an infringement of copyright.

**Section 24:**

- It exempts information related to security and intelligence organisations except allegations of corruption and human rights violations.
- Around one in five (20%) permissible rejections coming under this category.

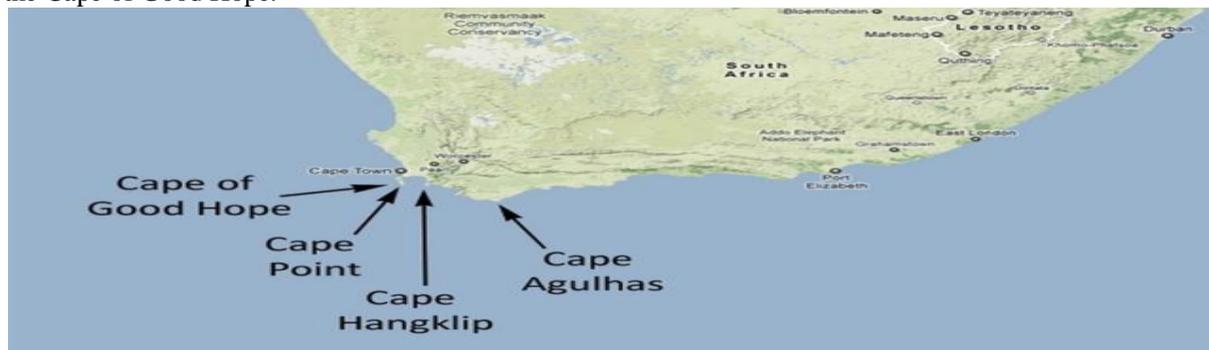
**Power and Functions of CIC:**

- It is the duty of the Commission to receive and inquire into a complaint from any person regarding information request under RTI, 2005.
- The Commission can order an inquiry into any matter if there are reasonable grounds (suo-moto power).
- While inquiring, the Commission has the powers of a civil court in respect of summoning, requiring documents etc.

**INDIAN ECONOMY**

**Cape of Good Hope as a alternative to Suez Canal**

With \$200 billion of India's trade flows with Europe, North America and South America at risk due to the blockage of the Suez Canal, the Department of Commerce is planning re-routing shipments through the Cape of Good Hope.



**Key Point**

- The Cape of Good Hope is a rocky headland on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.
- A common misconception is that the Cape of Good Hope is the southern tip of Africa.
- Contemporary geographic knowledge instead states the southernmost point of Africa is Cape Agulhas.
- When following the western side of the African coastline from the equator, however, the Cape of Good Hope marks the point where a ship begins to travel more eastward than southward.

**Cape Agulhas**

Cape Agulhas is a rocky headland in Western Cape, South Africa.

It is the geographic southern tip of the African continent and the beginning of the dividing line between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATION****NASA and ISRO collaborate on satellite NISAR**

NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite called NISAR.

It will detect movements of Earth's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.

**Key Points**

- It is an SUV-sized satellite.
- The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR.
- SAR here refers to the synthetic aperture radar that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth.
- Also, SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images.
- Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness, which means that it can collect data day and night in any weather.
- NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.

**Do you know?**

- ISRO will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.
- The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, India, into a near-polar orbit.
- It will scan the globe every 12 days over the course of its three-year mission of imaging the Earth's land, ice sheets and sea ice to give an "unprecedented" view of the planet.

**NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT****NPNT Compliance: Drone Operations**

Recently, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has granted permits to "No-Permission-No-Takeoff" (NPNT) compliant drone operations at 34 additional green zones to facilitate, smoothen, and promote drone operations in the country.

**Key Points**

- NPNT is a software program that enables every Remotely Piloted Aircraft (except Nano) to obtain a valid permission through DigitalSky platform before operating in India.
- Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) is defined as an Unmanned Aircraft (UA), which is piloted from a remote pilot station. Drone is a layman terminology for UA.
- DigitalSky is a Ministry of Civil Aviation initiative, a highly secure and scalable platform which supports technology frameworks such as NPNT designed for enabling flight permission digitally and managing Unmanned Aircraft operations and traffic efficiently.
- If a NPNT compliant drone tries to breach geo-fencing (to go beyond the permissible boundary in the airspace), the in-built software will compel the drone to return-to-home (RTH).
- Drone flights in the green zone sites shall be compliant with the applicable conditions of Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021.
- Flying in the 'green-zones' require only intimation of the time and location of the flights.
- Permissions are required for flying in 'yellow zones' and flights are not allowed in the 'red zones'.

**Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021:**

- UAS categorised as airplane, rotorcraft and hybrid with further categorisation as remotely piloted aircraft, model remotely piloted aircraft and autonomous unmanned aircraft system.

- UA is classified as nano, micro, small, medium and large unmanned aircraft based on the maximum all up weight.
- Mandatory for individuals and companies to obtain approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to import, manufacture, trade, own or operate drones.
- No Permission- No Take-off (NPNT) policy adopted for all UAS except for those in the nano category.
- Micro and small UAS are not permitted from flying above 60m and 120m, respectively.
- UAS prohibited from flying in strategic and sensitive locations, including near airports, defence airports, border areas, military installations/facilities and areas earmarked as strategic locations/vital installations by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Research and development (R&D) organisations, including start-ups, authorised UAS manufacturers, any accredited recognised institution of higher education located in India, are permitted to carry out R&D of UAS only after obtaining authorisation from the DGCA.
- Penalties ranging between rupees ten thousand and one lakh for individuals, and for organisations, a 200, 300 and 400% of the amount specified for individuals, based on the size of the organisation..

## INDIAN POLITY

### Hate Crime

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) quashed Hate Crime proceedings initiated against a senior journalist for a Facebook post.

The SC ruled that petitioners' social media post was only an expression of truth in the face of persecution.

### **Key Points**

- The decision came in Petitioners appeal against the Meghalaya High Court's refusal to quash the proceedings against her under Sections 153a (hate), 500 (defamation) and 505(c) (incite a community or caste to commit an offence against another) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- Section 153a:
- Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.
- It shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine.

### **Section 505c:**

- With intent to incite, or which is likely to incite, any class or community of persons to commit any offence against any other class or community.
- It shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

### **Hate Crime in India:**

- Hate Crime in India is defined in terms of the harm done to a community at large rather than an individual's right to freedom of speech and expression and the harm done as a result of hate speech.
- In India, hate speech is prohibited which is based upon religion, ethnicity, culture or race.

### **Indian Laws Against Hate Crimes:**

- Though the term is nowhere mentioned in any statute, its different forms are identified across the laws.
- The IPC under Sections 153A, 153B, 295A, 298, 505(1) and 505(2)25 declares that word, spoken or written, that promotes disharmony, hatred, or insults on basis of religion, ethnicity, culture, language, region, caste, community, race etc., is punishable under law.

Some other laws which contain provisions concerning hate speech and its prevention are:

- The Representation of People Act, 1951.
- Information Technology Act 2000.
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

## ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY

### African Elephants

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has declared African Forest and Savanna (or bush) elephants as 'critically endangered' and 'endangered' respectively.

- Earlier, African elephants were treated as a single species, listed as Vulnerable. This is the first time the two species have been assessed separately for the IUCN Red List.

**Key Points**

- African elephants are the largest land animals on Earth. They are slightly larger than Asian elephants.
- They have two fingerlike features on the end of their trunk while Asian elephants have just one.
- Elephants are matriarchal, meaning they live in female-led groups.
- African elephants are keystone species, meaning they play a critical role in their ecosystem. Also known as “ecosystem engineers,” elephants shape their habitat in many ways.
- Elephants have a longer pregnancy than any other mammal—almost 22 months. This compounds the problem of conservation since there are simply not enough calves being born to make up for the losses from poaching.
- There are two subspecies of African elephants, the Savanna (or bush) elephant and the Forest elephant. Savanna elephants are the larger of two.

**African Savanna Elephant:**

- Scientific Name: *Loxodonta africana*
- Decline: Dropped by 60% in the last 50 years.
- IUCN Status: Endangered
- Habitat: Plains of sub-Saharan Africa
- African Forest Elephant:
  - Scientific Name: *Loxodonta cyclotis*
  - Decline: Dropped by 86% in the last 31 years.
  - IUCN Status: Critically Endangered
  - Habitat: Forests of Central and West Africa. They rarely overlap with the range of the savanna elephant.
  - The forest elephant has a more restricted natural distribution. Therefore, its decline is especially worrying.
  - While savanna elephant populations can bounce back given sufficient protection, the forest elephant is likely to recover much more slowly.
  - Law enforcement is also more problematic in many Central African countries which are home to the forest elephant.

**Threats:**

- Poaching for the illegal ivory trade.
- Regions with high levels of poverty and corruption are more likely to have higher poaching rates. This suggests that helping communities develop sustainable livelihoods could reduce the lure of poaching.
- **Habitat Loss:** Increasing human population, and conversion of land for agriculture and development.

**IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM****Earth Hour**

The Earth Hour is being observed on 27th March 2021.

**Key Points**

- Earth Hour is the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)’s annual initiative that began in 2007.
- It is held every year on the last Saturday of March.
- It encourages people from more than 180 countries to switch off the lights from 8.30 pm to 9.30 pm as per their local time.
- The idea is to refrain from the use of non-essential lighting to save energy in a symbolic call for environmental protection.

**Impact:**

- Earth Hour has become a catalyst for positive environmental impact, driving major legislative changes by harnessing the power of the people and collective action.

**Examples:** It helped

- Create a 3.5 million hectare marine-protected area in Argentina.

- Ban all plastics in the Galapagos in 2014.
- Plant 17 million trees in Kazakhstan.
- Light up homes with solar power in India and the Philippines.
- Push new legislation for the protection of seas and forests in Russia.

**DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE**

**Qns “When there is citizen participation in budgeting and closer engagement of citizens in the monitoring of civic works, there are better outcomes and fewer leakages.” In the light of the given statement discuss the utility of the Participatory Budgeting. (250 words)**

Ans:

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is an innovative policy making process. Citizens are directly involved in making policy decisions. These programs are designed to incorporate citizens into the policymaking process, spur administrative reform, and distribute public resources to low-income neighborhoods.

The concept that was pioneered in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the mid-1980s is now practiced in one form or other in thousands of cities around the world.

**Benefits of Participatory Budgeting**

- **Voice in Civic Governance:** It makes citizens feel like they have a voice in civic governance and thereby builds trust.
- It facilitates a targeted, hyperlocal focus on budgeting and problem-solving.
- It also ensures that the diverse needs and experiences of local communities are understood and a range of voices is heard in local decision-making.
- **Community Ownership:** This would foster far greater ownership in communities for civic assets and amenities, thereby resulting in better maintenance and upkeep.
- At the local level, it is a win-win for communities, elected councilors, and the city administration.
- It addresses inefficiencies arising from misplaced prioritization of civic works relative to citizen needs.
- **Facilitating Equity:** Actively engaging with communities to advance equality and eliminate inequalities is integral to participatory decision-making and the allocation of public resources.
- Finally, it improves accountability for civic works at the last mile (as citizens would monitor budget execution).
- **Increasing Trust Between Government & People:** Citizens could work with ward-level engineers to use these funds to get their urban commons (street lights fixed, make their footpaths walkable, spruce up their parks, create a new childcare center or public toilet in an urban poor settlement) fixed.
- This would change the lives of the people and build trust between citizens and governments.
- **Inclusive:** It ensures social and political inclusion as low income and traditionally excluded political actors are given the opportunity to make policy decisions.

**Challenges with the participatory budgeting approach:**

- **Lack of Information And Knowledge Participants:** Citizens with low levels of information and expertise are involved in making important public policy decisions.
- Some participants have good knowledge of a particular issue (i.e. health care, housing, or education), still their knowledge about other policy issues may be low.
- **Time-consuming:** It is time-consuming compared to an imposed budget by Union/states. Since the budget preparation starts from the local level to the top, too much participation may occur that may derail the process.
- **Limited Scope:** It sacrifices long-term planning to short-term gains given that most demands of citizens are immediate.
- **Thinking local, acting local:** It tends to prioritize local issues and ignore regional, national or global issues.

**Conclusion**

Thus, there is a need to focus on participatory budgeting in order to adopt a bottom-up approach and increase social justice by providing a platform for traditionally excluded members of society to have a voice in decision-making processes, potentially leading to more just and equitable governance and improve the living conditions of the poor.

**DAILY QUIZ**

1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) is appointed by the President under Article 124 of the Constitution.
2. The appointment of CJI is done on the recommendation of the Supreme Court collegium.

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

2. With reference to the 'Electoral Bonds', consider the following statements:

1. It is a financial instrument for making donations to political parties.
2. State Bank of India is authorised to issue and encash these bonds.

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

3. Consider the following statements about Helium:

1. It is a monatomic gas with the lowest boiling point as compared to all other elements.
2. The Rajmahal volcanic basin is the storehouse of Helium in India.
3. Qatar is the largest exporter of Helium in the world.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

4. With reference to Net-Zero Emissions, consider the following statements:

1. It refers to achieving zero net carbon emission in the atmosphere.
2. India has committed to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

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 the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NBFID), consider the following statements:

1. It will organise and facilitate foreign participation in infrastructure projects.
2. NBFID may raise money in the form of loans in both Indian rupees and foreign currencies.

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