

Curbing Fake News in India



For Prelims: Right to information , Article 19 , Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre

For Mains: Regulatory frameworks for digital media in India, Challenges and implications of fake news for democracy and public order

Source:TH

Why in News?

The **Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology** in the Parliament has proposed several measures aimed at **curbing the spread of 'fake news' and misinformation**, highlighting the potential harm such content can cause to public order and democratic processes.

What are the Key Recommendations to Curb Fake News?

- **Fact-checking Mechanisms** : The committee favors making it mandatory for all media organizations to have a **fact-checking mechanism** and an internal **ombudsman** to oversee editorial content.
- **Penal Provisions** : It suggests amendments to **laws to increase fines and hold media accountable for editorial content** and discourage the spread of misinformation.
 - The panel supports a clear definition of 'fake news' and incorporates it into existing media regulations while ensuring that such efforts do not infringe on freedom of speech or individual rights.
- **Strengthening the Press Council of India** : Create a complaint portal and an independent monitoring body for better oversight
- **Regulation of AI-generated Content** : Licensing for AI content creators and mandatory labeling of AI-generated material, such as videos, to enhance transparency and reduce the spread of deceptive material.

What is the Need to Curb Fake News?

- **Threat to Democracy** : Fake news can manipulate public opinion, especially during elections, undermining the democratic process.

- Fake news undermines **citizens' right to information**, which is protected under Article 19 as upheld by the **Supreme Court of India in *Raj Narayan vs. Uttar Pradesh Government (1975)***.
- **Disruption of Public Order** : Misinformation can lead to violence and unrest, threatening social stability.
 - In 2018, WhatsApp rumors about child kidnappers in India led to mob lynchings across several states, causing deaths and public disorder.
- **Erosion of Trust** : Fake news reduces **trust in media and institutions, making it harder for society to make informed decisions**.
 - During the Covid-19 pandemic, misinformation regarding vaccines and treatments circulated widely, causing people to **question government health guidelines and delaying vaccination efforts**.
- **National Security Risks** : Misinformation can destabilize nations and create divisions, posing a security threat.
 - In the aftermath of the **2020 anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests**, fake news related to the CAA spread, leading to violence and protests in multiple cities, increasing tensions and security concerns.
- **Health and Safety Risks: False health information can lead to dangerous behaviors**, negatively affecting public health by causing panic, fear, depression, and fatigue.

What are the Challenges in Regulating Fake News?

- **Defining Fake News:** Defining what constitutes "fake news" is subjective, there is **no universally accepted definition** making it difficult to distinguish **fake news from opinions, satire, or commentary**.
- **Freedom of Speech:** Excessive regulation risks curbing the **fundamental right to free speech under Article 19** of the Constitution. Balancing regulation with democratic freedoms is complex.
- **Rapid Spread on Digital Platforms:** Social media enables instant sharing of content, allowing **fake news to go viral before fact-checking can occur**. This rapid dissemination makes timely intervention difficult.
 - Many social media platforms are based outside India, creating legal and jurisdictional challenges in enforcement and accountability.
- **Technological Complexity:** AI-generated content, deepfakes, and automated bots can **create highly realistic misinformation that is hard to detect**. Laws often lag behind these fast-evolving technologies.
 - The **anonymity provided by the internet** allows people to spread false information without accountability. This makes it difficult to trace the originators of fake news and hold them responsible.
- **Low Digital Literacy:** A significant portion of the **population lacks the skills to critically evaluate information online**, making them more vulnerable to misleading content.
- **Risk of Government Overreach:** Heavy-handed regulation may be perceived as censorship, potentially undermining trust in authorities and media institutions.
- **Political and Social Polarization:** In **politically or socially polarized environments, people may be more likely to accept fake news that aligns with their beliefs, making it harder to regulate and challenge misinformation effectively**.

What are India's Initiatives to Prevent Spread of Fake News?

- **Press Council of India (PCI)** : Provides guidelines for ethical journalism.
- **IT Act, 2000**: Empowers the government to regulate intermediaries and online content.
 - Under the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, intermediaries must not host, publish, or share unlawful content.
 - Failure to comply with these due diligence obligations results in the loss of safe-harbour immunity under Section 79 of the IT Act
- **Press Information Bureau (PIB) Fact-Check Unit** : Counters government-related misinformation.
- **Election Commission of India (ECI)** : ECI introduced '**Myth vs Reality Register**' to proactively combat mis-information in General Elections 2024.
 - ECI also conducts campaigns to counter fake news during polls.
- **Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Advisory (2024)**: Prohibits promotion of online betting and surrogate ads targeting Indian users.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** : Framework for law enforcement to tackle cybercrimes.
- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** : Allows citizens to report cybercrimes; routed to State/UT police for action.

What Robust Mechanism can Strengthen Fake News Regulation in India?

- **Strengthen Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Legislation should precisely distinguish fake news from opinions, satire, or dissent to avoid misuse.**
 - Singapore's criminal laws on misinformation and EU's self-regulatory code provide insights on balancing regulation and enforcement.
- **Empower and Institutionalize Fact-Checking:** Fact-checking organizations should be certified by a central body , with regular audits to ensure adherence to quality standards.
 - The European Fact-Checking Standards Network offers models for transparency and reliability.
- **Platform Accountability and Regulation:** They must ensure transparency by disclosing recommendation and amplification algorithms to prevent the viral spread of false information, as exemplified by the EU Digital Services Act, which mandates platform accountability and swift removal of illegal content.
 - Additionally, platforms should clearly label synthetic or AI-generated content to keep users informed and aware of manipulated or automated material.
- **Leverage Technology and AI Responsibly:** AI tools can amplify fake news, but with purpose-built AI tools and human oversight, it can also mitigate it at scale.
 - **Community Notes programme** and AI tools can integrate **BHASHINI** for India's linguistic diversity to detect context-specific misinformation.
- **Promote Media Literacy and Public Awareness:** Integrate digital literacy into school curricula and encourage critical thinking and responsible sharing behavior on social media.
 - Use local influencers, fact-checkers, and NGOs to reach linguistically and culturally diverse populations.
- **Inter-Ministerial Coordination** : Align efforts of MeitY, MIB, MHA, and Consumer Affairs for unified action. Ensure content removal or penalties are subject to review to prevent misuse.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Examine how India can balance freedom of speech and regulation of misinformation in the digital age.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. What do you understand by the concept of “freedom of speech and expression”? Does it cover hate speech also? Why do the films in India stand on a slightly different plane from other forms of expression? Discuss. (2014)

US Sanctions on Chabahar Port



For Prelims: Chabahar Port , International North-South Transport Corridor , Indian Ports Global Limited , Strait of Hormuz , Belt and Road Initiative , Gulf of Oman .

For Mains: Significance of Chabahar Port for India, Implications of the Revocation of Chabahar Port's Sanctions Waiver for India.

Source: IE

Why in News?

The Trump administration has **revoked the sanctions waiver** for **Chabahar Port** , affecting India's access to **Afghanistan and Central Asia** and undermining its strategic position in the region.

- The **exemption** , granted in **2018** under the **Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA)** , allowed **India** to advance its long-term plan to develop **Chabahar Port** as a **gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia** .

What are the Implications of Revoking Chabahar Port's Sanctions Waiver for India?

- **Strategic Implications:** The **revocation** of Chabahar's waiver can undermine India's **regional leverage** , limiting its ability to counterbalance **Gwadar Port** , integrate into the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** connecting **Russia and Europe** , and maintain influence in **Afghanistan and Central Asia** .
- **Economic and Trade Implications:** India's **exports** to **Iran and Afghanistan** —including **textiles, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, and food products** —face disruption, while **investments** of **USD 120 million** and commitments of **USD 250 million** are at risk.
 - The revocation coincides with **India-US trade talks** and **50% duties** on labor-intensive goods, pressuring India's **export strategy** .
- **Operational and Legal Risks:** Companies like **Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL)** face exposure to **US sanctions** under the **IFCA** potentially causing **delays or suspension** of Chabahar trade and expansion projects.
- **Geopolitical Implications:** The revocation puts pressure on **India-US relations** and marks a major setback for India's plan to use **Chabahar Port** as a vital gateway for **trade and humanitarian aid** , especially to **Afghanistan** .

Chabahar Port

- **About:** It is a **deep-water port** in **Sistan-Baluchistan, Iran** , on the **Makran coast** near the **Gulf of Oman** , outside the **Strait of Hormuz** .
 - It is Iran's only **deep-sea port** with **direct open-ocean access** , providing **India** secure and direct access for **large cargo ships** .
 - It has two main terminals— **Shahid Beheshti** and **Shahid Kalantari** —with India actively involved in developing the **Shahid Beheshti Terminal**.
- **Development & Management:** The **Chabahar Agreement (2016)** was signed between **India, Iran, and Afghanistan** to establish the **International Transport and Transit Corridor** .
 - **IPGL** , through its subsidiary **India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ)** , took over **Chabahar Port operations** in **December 2018** .
- **Operational Performance:** To date, **Chabahar Port** has trans-shipped **2.5 million tonnes of wheat** and **2,000 tonnes of pulses** from India to Afghanistan, facilitated **40,000 litres of Malathion** (environment-friendly pesticide) to Iran in 2021 for locust control, and supported **humanitarian aid** , including during the **Covid-19 pandemic** .



What is the Significance of Chabahar Port for India?

- **Alternative Trade Route:** It provides **India an alternative route to Afghanistan and Central Asia** , bypassing Pakistan, and improves access to **Iran and the INSTC** via shorter routes from **Kandla Port**.
- **Ensuring Connectivity:** The ongoing conflicts and tensions in the West Asian region , such as the **Yemen crisis** and the recent escalation between Iran and Pakistan, have disrupted vital maritime trade routes.
 - Chabahar provides India with an alternative route for its commercial interests, reducing dependence on traditional chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Economic Benefits:** It strengthens India's trade with Central Asia and Afghanistan ,

diversifies routes, and enhances access to Russia, Europe, Iran, and Afghanistan .

- Chabahar Port, a key **INSTC node** , links the **Indian Ocean to Northern Europe** , cutting trade costs by **30%** and transit time by **40%** , while giving landlocked nations access to the **Indian Ocean and Indian markets**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** Serves as a crucial entry point for humanitarian aid and reconstruction in Afghanistan.
- **Strategic Influence:** It strengthens India's strategic presence in the Indian Ocean , counters China's Gwadar Port and [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#) , and enhances anti-piracy capabilities .

Conclusion

Chabahar Port remains central to **India's regional influence** , **trade prospects** , and **connectivity ambitions** . Its role as a **strategic counterweight** offers enduring opportunities, despite challenges from **US sanctions** , **regional instability** , and **competing projects**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the strategic importance of Chabahar Port for India and analyze the implications of US sanctions on its development.

[Watch Video on YouTube:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/UC268Vv5vwM>

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UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. What is the importance of developing Chabahar Port by India? (2017)

- (a) India's trade with African countries will enormously increase.
- (b) India's relations with oil-producing Arab countries will be strengthened.
- (c) India will not depend on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- (d) Pakistan will facilitate and protect the installation of a gas pipeline between Iraq and India.

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. In what ways would the ongoing U.S-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to this situation? (2018)

Q. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries. (2017)

NE-SPARKS



Source: PIB

The Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region interacted with school students from the **North Eastern Region (NER)** who participated in the **NE-SPARKS program**.

NE-SPARKS

- **About:** The '**North East Students' Programme for Awareness, Reach, and Knowledge on Space**' (**NE-SPARKS**) is a flagship initiative to promote **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)** from **NER** .
- **Collaborative Effort:** It is supported by the **Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER)** in collaboration with the **8 North Eastern States** , **North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC)** - **ISRO** .
- **Funding:** The program is funded by the **MDoNER and the state Govt. in 60:40 ratio** respectively. **NESAC is the nodal agency** .
- **Scale & Reach:** The program aims to facilitate **exposure visits** for **800 meritorious science students** (100 from each **NE state**) to **premier ISRO centres** , like those in **Bengaluru**.

[Read More: Northeast India From Frontier to Frontrunner](#)

Bonnard Standard



Source: IE

The Supreme Court (SC) of India has reaffirmed the **Bonnard standard** , emphasizing strict conditions for granting **pre-trial injunctions in defamation cases** , particularly involving journalists, to safeguard **freedom of speech and public interest** .

Bonnard Standard

- **About:** Established in ***Bonnard vs Perryman (1891, United Kingdom)*** ; sets the standard that an **injunction** can only be granted if the court is satisfied the **defendant cannot justify the defamation claim** , and not just based on suspicion.

- An **injunction** is a **court order that requires someone to do or stop doing a specific action** .
- **2024 Bloomberg Case:** The SC in 2024 **upheld this principle or standard** , striking down an **ex parte injunction** against Bloomberg.
 - The Court emphasized the **importance of protecting free speech and public debate**, stating such injunctions should be granted **only when not granting them would cause greater injustice** .
- **Violation in Adani Case:** A Delhi trial court order barred journalists from publishing allegedly **defamatory content** about **Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL)** and permitted the **plaintiff (Adani)** to demand **takedowns within 36 hours** violated this standard by:
 - Issuing an **ex parte ad interim injunction** without hearing the **journalists' defenses** .
 - Acting as a "**prior restraint**" on **publication** , seen as an **unconstitutional restriction** on the **fundamental right to free speech** under **Article 19(1)(a)** .
- **Legal Framework:**
 - **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution outlines **reasonable restrictions on free speech, including defamation** . However, restrictions must be justified.
 - The SC has repeatedly criticized the **granting of ex parte injunctions without a proper trial**, emphasizing the severe consequences these may have on freedom of speech and the public's right to know.

Right to Freedom

- √ **Protection of Right to**
 - **freedom of speech and expression;**
 - **assemble peacefully;**
 - **form associations/unions;**
 - **move freely throughout the territory of India;**
 - **reside and settle in any part of India;**
 - **practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.**
- √ **Protection in respect of conviction for offences**
- √ **Right to life and personal liberty**
- √ **Right to education**
- √ **Protection against arrest and detention in certain cases**

Read More: Landmark Rulings Safeguarding Freedom of Press in India

India Adds 7 Natural Sites to UNESCO Tentative List

Source: DD

Why in News?

India has added seven natural sites to **UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites (WHS)** , taking its total to **69 (49 cultural, 17 natural, and 3 mixed properties)** . This highlights the country's commitment to preserving its rich natural and cultural heritage.

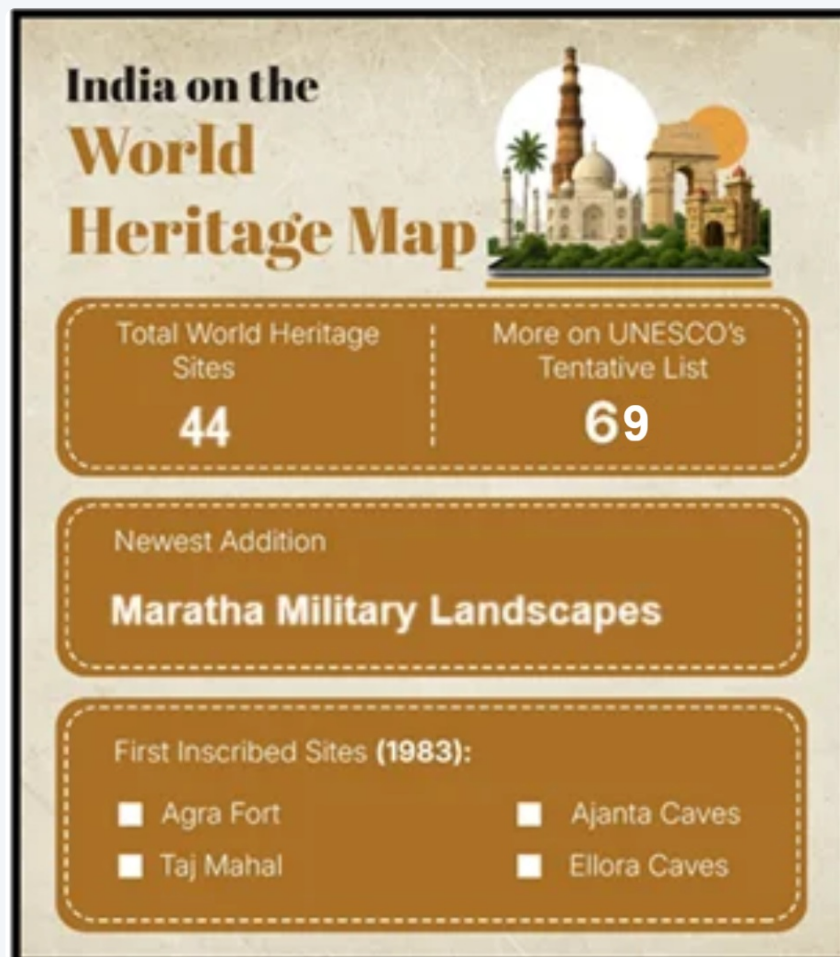
What is UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites?

- **About:** It is the first step toward **UNESCO World Heritage nomination** . Countries identify cultural or natural sites of outstanding universal value and submit them to UNESCO at least a year before nomination.
 - Only sites on the **Tentative List can be considered for full inscription**. In India, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** compiles and submits these nominations.
- **India's Newly Added Sites:**
 - **Deccan Traps at Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra :** Home to some of the best-preserved and studied lava flows in the world, these sites form part of the **massive Deccan Traps** and are located within the **Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary** (already a UNESCO World Heritage Site).
 - **Geological Heritage of St. Mary's Island Cluster, Karnataka:** Known for its **rare columnar basaltic rock formations**, this island cluster dates back to the **Late Cretaceous period (101 to 66 million years ago)** .
 - **Meghalayan Age Caves, Meghalaya:** The stunning cave systems of Meghalaya, particularly the **Mawmluh Cave** , serve as the global reference point for the **Meghalayan Age in the Holocene Epoch** (last 11,000 years of the Earth's history till date), reflecting significant climate and geological transitions.
 - **Naga Hill Ophiolite, Nagaland:** A rare exposure to **ophiolite rocks** of , these hills represent **oceanic crust uplifted onto continental plates** (offering deep insights into tectonic processes and mid-ocean ridge dynamics).
 - **Erra Matti Dibbalu (Red Sand Hills), Andhra Pradesh:** Red sand formations near Visakhapatnam showcase unique **paleo-climatic and coastal geomorphological features** that reveal Earth's climatic history and dynamic evolution.
 - Erra Matti Dibbalu was declared a GeoHeritage Monument by Geological Survey of India (GSI) in 2016.
 - **Natural Heritage of Tirumala Hills, Andhra Pradesh:** Featuring the **Eparchaeon Unconformity and the iconic Silathoranam (Natural Arch)**, this site holds immense geological significance, representing over 1.5 billion years of Earth's history.
 - They are part of **Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve and Venkateswara National Park**.

- **Varkala Cliffs, Kerala:** Cliff along **Kerala's coastline expose the Warkalli Formation of the Mio-Pliocene age** , along with natural springs and striking erosional landforms, offering both scientific and touristic value.

World Heritage Sites

- WHS are places of outstanding universal value, recognized for protection and preservation for future generations. They can be cultural, natural, or mixed and are safeguarded under the **1972 World Heritage Convention**, adopted by UNESCO member countries.
- The **UNESCO World Heritage Committee** maintains the list through the **World Heritage Programme** . India ratified the Convention in 1977.
- **WHS in India:** As of September 2025, India has 44 World Heritage Sites recognized by UNESCO, with the **Maratha Military Landscapes** of India being inscribed as the 44 th site.



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following properties included in the World Heritage List released by UNESCO: (2024)

1. Shantiniketan
2. Rani-ki-Vav
3. Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas
4. Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodhgaya

How many of the above properties were included in 2023?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Ans: (b)

Mains :

Q.1 Safeguarding the Indian Art Heritage is the need of the moment. Discuss. **(2018)**

Q.2 Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss. **(2020)**