

1. With 3320 new cases reported in the last 24 hrs taking the total tally to 62,584 the ICMR has decided to check for **community transmission** in 75 worst affected districts.
2. TN government has moved to Supreme Court challenging the High Court order prohibiting liquor sales citing revenue loss and commercial loss.
3. The **Bureau of Police Research and Development** has issued a guide to help police detect fake news.
4. TN government has announced the formation of a panel to be headed by former RBI Governor C. Rangarajan to study the impact of the pandemic on the State's economy.
5. Applications seeking information under the **RTI** act can be filed online in the State of Tamil Nadu.
6. The Government of India has decided to borrow from the market ₹ 12 lakh crore from the market as against the earlier target of ₹ 7.8 crore in light of the COVID pandemic.
7. Odisha government has decided to increase the work shift to 12 hours by tweaking the Factories Act 1948.
8. A diplomatic row has broken out between India and Nepal over the new Link Road that will connect to Manasarovar.
9. Protected areas of reptiles are generally not the areas where these animals roam about. Mostly the habitats of reptiles fall in unprotected areas.

#### **Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D)**

The Government of India established the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1970s.

It replaced Police Research and Advisory Council (1966), with the primary objective of modernization of police force.

In 1995 Government of India decided to entrust issues relating to Correctional Administration Work to the BPR&D.

Thereby BPR&D has to ensure the implementation of prison reforms as well.

The Government of India further decided to create National Police Mission under the administrative control of BPR&D to transform the police forces in the country.

## Four Stages of Transmission of COVID-19

### Stage 1-Imported Transmission

It is reported among the travellers entering the country via the borders and airports. These can be controlled through thermal screening and quarantine. To prevent imported transmissions, India has suspended visas to foreign nationals and the facility of visa-free travel to Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card-holders.

### Stage 2-Local Transmission

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines it as the transmission through direct contact with an infected person within the country.

### Stage 3-Community Transmission

It signifies that a virus is circulating in the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or of contact with an infected person. India's current emphasis on social distancing and discouragement of public gatherings is aimed at checking community transmission. Once community transmission begins, it is more difficult to trace contacts. As one unknown source of infection can infect many people unknowingly. Among the countries where community transmission seems to have begun are China, Italy and South Korea.

### Stage 4- Epidemic

An epidemic is a large outbreak, one that spreads among a population or region. It is less severe than pandemic due to a limited area of spread.

### Level of Transmission in India

So far, most of the cases in India have had a history of travel abroad or have contracted the disease from somebody around them. However, some of the cases in the country had neither any history of foreign travel nor had they come directly in contact with an infected person. Currently, India is at Stage 2 of Local Transmission and precautions are being taken to prevent it from entering Stage 3 of Community Transmission.

### India's Current Strategy to tackle COVID-19

#### Social Distancing and Cluster Containment:

The cluster containment strategy intends to contain the disease within a defined geographic area by early detection, breaking the chain of transmission and thus preventing its spread to new areas.

It includes geographic quarantine, social distancing measures, enhanced active surveillance, testing all suspected cases, isolation of cases, home quarantine of contacts, social mobilization to follow preventive public health measures.

#### Possible Involvement of the Private Sector:

The government is working with private hospitals to develop standard operating procedures for treatment and isolation of patients.

The involvement of the private sector may face some issues like the possibility of profiteering, affordability issues, crowding of people at a large number of places, etc.

### Global Scenario

Italy followed a model of lockdown whereas South Korea has observed a model of free testing.

India has been following the Italian model of lockdown.

China has adopted a graded approach, and the number of new cases are gradually declining.

It has locked down Hubei, the epicentre. Elsewhere, it enforced social distancing measures.

## Indian Council of Medical Research

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research.

Its mandate is to conduct, coordinate and implement medical research for the benefit of the Society; translating medical innovations into products/processes and introducing them into the public health system. It is funded by the Government of India through the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

The right to information gained power when Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 providing everyone the right to seek, receive, information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political rights 1966 states that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, the freedom to seek and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

According to Thomas Jefferson "Information is the currency of democracy," and critical to the emergence and development of a vibrant civil society. However, with a view to set out a practical regime for the citizens to secure information as a matter of right, the Indian Parliament enacted the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Genesis of RTI law started in 1986, through judgement of Supreme Court in Mr. Kulwal v/s Jaipur Municipal Corporation case, in which it directed that freedom of speech and expression provided under Article 19 of the Constitution clearly implies Right to Information, as without information the freedom of speech and expression cannot be fully used by the citizens.

#### Objectives of the Act

To empower the citizens  
To promote transparency and accountability  
To contain corruption and  
To enhance people's participation in democratic process.  
Reasons for Adoption of Information Act

The factors responsible for adoption of information act are as follows-

Corruption and scandals  
International pressure and activism  
Modernization and the information society  
Features of the Act

Section 1(2) : It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Section- 2 (f): "Information" means any material in any form, including Records, Documents, Memos, e-mails, Opinions, Advices, Press releases, Circulars, Orders, Logbooks, Contracts, Reports, Papers, Samples, Models, Data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a Public Authority under any other law for the time being in force.

Section- 2(j) : "Right to Information" means the right to information accessible under this Act which is held by or under the control of any public authority and includes the right to:

Inspection of work, documents, records;

Taking notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records;

Taking certified samples of material;

Obtaining information in the form of diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts where such information is stored in a computer or in any other device.

Section 4 of the RTI Act requires suo motu disclosure of information by each public authority. However, such disclosures have remained less than satisfactory.

Section 8 (1) mentions exemptions against furnishing information under RTI Act.

Section 8 (2) provides for disclosure of information exempted under Official Secrets Act, 1923 if larger public interest is served.

The Act also provides for appointment of Information Commissioners at Central and State level. Public authorities have designated some of its officers as Public Information Officer. They are responsible to give information to a person who seeks information under the RTI Act.

Time period: In normal course, information to an applicant is to be supplied within 30 days from the receipt of application by the public authority.

If information sought concerns the life or liberty of a person, it shall be supplied within 48 hours.

In case the application is sent through the Assistant Public Information Officer or it is sent to a wrong public authority, five days shall be added to the period of thirty days or 48 hours, as the case may be.

#### What is Public Authority?

"Public authority" means any authority or body or institution of self government established or constituted—

by or under the Constitution;

by any other law made by Parliament/State Legislature.

by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any— body owned, controlled or substantially financed;

non-Government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

## Importance

The RTI Act, 2005 did not create a new bureaucracy for implementing the law. Instead, it tasked and mandated officials in every office to change their attitude and duty from one of secrecy to one of sharing and openness. It carefully and deliberately empowered the Information Commission to be the highest authority in the country with the mandate to order any office in the country to provide information as per the provisions of the Act. And it empowered the Commission to fine any official who did not follow the mandate.

Right to information has been seen as the key to strengthening participatory democracy and ushering in people centred governance.

Access to information can empower the poor and the weaker sections of society to demand and get information about public policies and actions, thereby leading to their welfare. It showed an early promise by exposing wrongdoings at high places, such as in the organisation of the Commonwealth Games, and the allocation of 2G spectrum and coal blocks. Right to information opens up government's records to public scrutiny, thereby arming citizens with a vital tool to inform them about what the government does and how effectively, thus making the government more accountable. Improves decision making by public authority by removing unnecessary secrecy.

### Challenges

Different types of information is sought which has no public interest and sometimes can be used to misuse the law and harass the public authorities. For example-

Asking for desperate and voluminous information.

To attain publicity by filing RTI

RTI filed as vindictive tool to harass or pressurize the public authority

Because of the illiteracy and unawareness among the majority of population in the country, the RTI cannot be exercised.

Though RTI's aim is not to create a grievance redressal mechanism, the notices from Information Commissions often spur the public authorities to redress grievances.

### RTI vs Legislations for Non Disclosure of Information

Some provisions of Indian Evidence Act (Sections 123, 124, and 162) provide to hold the disclosure of documents.

Under these provisions, head of department may refuse to provide information on affairs of state and only swearing that it is a state secret will entitle not to disclose the information.

In a similar manner no public officer shall be compelled to disclose communications made to him in official confidence.

The Atomic Energy Act, 1912 provides that it shall be an offence to disclose information restricted by the Central Government.

The Central Civil Services Act provides a government servant not to communicate or part with any official documents except in accordance with a general or special order of government.

The Official Secrets Act, 1923 provides that any government official can mark a document as confidential so as to prevent its publication.

### RTI vs Right to Privacy

Conceptually, RTI and the right to privacy are both complementary as well as in conflict to each other. While RTI increases access to information, the right to privacy protects it instead.

At the same time they both function, as citizen rights safeguarding liberty, against state's overreach.

When the question of harmonising the contradicting rights arises, it should

give justice to the larger public interest

advance the public morality

### RTI vs OSA

The OSA was enacted in 1923 by the British to keep certain kinds of information confidential, including, but not always limited to, information involving the affairs of state, diplomacy, national security, espionage, and other state secrets.

Whenever there is a conflict between the two laws, the provisions of the RTI Act override those of the OSA.

Section 22 of the RTI Act states that its provisions will have effect notwithstanding anything that is inconsistent with them in the OSA.

Similarly, under Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, a public authority may allow access to information covered under the OSA, "if the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to the protected interest".

## **RTI and Political Parties**

**Why activists want political parties to be brought under RTI?**

**To contain corruption**

**Huge donations from corporates which lead to favouritism or crony capitalism**

**Illegal foreign contribution**

**The leader of the opposition is statutorily mandated to be part of the select committees to choose**

**Chairperson for CIC, Lokpal, CBI Director and CVC**

**Various members of the opposition are also part of various parliamentary committees**

**They enjoy multiple benefits like concessional office spaces, free airtime on DD & AIR from govt**

**Stand of Political Parties**

**PP's are not public authorities, hence cannot be brought under RTI Act.**

**Disclosed information can be misused.**

**Can disclose financial information under the IT Act.**

**Recent Amendments**

**The RTI amendment Bill 2013 removes political parties from the ambit of the definition of public authorities and hence from the purview of the RTI Act.**

**The draft provision 2017 which provides for closure of case in case of death of applicant can lead to more attacks on the lives of whistleblowers.**

**The proposed RTI Amendment Act 2018 is aimed at giving the Centre the power to fix the tenures and salaries of state and central information commissioners, which are statutorily protected under the RTI Act. The move will dilute the autonomy and independence of CIC.**

**The Act proposes to replace the fixed 5 year tenure to as much prescribed by government.**

**Other Issues**

**Information commissioners do not have adequate authorities to enforce the RTI Act.**

**In case of award of compensation to activist by public authority as ordered by commission, compliance cannot be secured.**

**Poor record-keeping practices**

**Lack of adequate infrastructure and staff for running information commissions**

**Dilution of supplementary laws like the whistleblowers protection Act.**

**Conclusion**

**The Right to Information Act was made to achieve social justice, transparency and to make accountable government but this act has not achieved its full objectives due to some impediments created due to systematic failures.**

**As observed by Delhi High Court that misuse of the RTI Act has to be appropriately dealt with; otherwise the public would lose faith and confidence in this "sunshine Act".**

**It is well recognized that right to information is necessary, but not sufficient, to improve governance. A lot more needs to be done to usher in accountability in governance, including protection of whistleblowers, decentralization of power and fusion of authority with accountability at all levels.**

**This law provides us a priceless opportunity to redesign the processes of governance, particularly at the grass roots level where the citizens' interface is maximum.**

### Darchula – Lipulekh road

The road is an extension of Pithoragarh-Tawaghat-Ghatiabagarh road. In this 80 Km road, the altitude rises from 6000 feet to 17,060 feet. It originates from Ghatiabagarh in Uttarakhand and terminates at Lipulekh Pass, the gateway to Kailash Mansarovar. With the completion of this project, the arduous trek through treacherous high-altitude terrain can now be avoided by the Pilgrims of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and the period of journey will be reduced by many days.

(Note: The Lipulekh Pass links Uttarakhand with China's Tibetan Autonomous Region.)

### Significance

At present, the travel to Kailash Mansarovar takes around two to three weeks through Sikkim or Nepal routes.

Lipulekh route had a trek of 90 Km through high altitude terrain and the elderly yartris faced lot of difficulties.

Now, this yatra will get completed by vehicles.



The Sal Forest tortoise is widely distributed over Eastern and Northern India and Southeast Asia.

In fact, 23 of the 29 species of freshwater turtle and tortoise species found in India come under the threatened category in the IUCN red list and are under severe existential threat due to human activities. Also known as the elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*), the sal tortoise, recently assessed as critically endangered, is heavily hunted for food. It is collected both for local use, such as decorative masks, and international wildlife trade. A recent study by ecologists in the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, finds that the area designated as a protected area network has only a small overlap with the actual habitat it roams around in.



