



## Current Affairs of the Day

### GS Paper II

- Why do you need the 'colonial law' of sedition, CJI asks govt.
- SC sends a strong message to the government

### GS Paper III

- Simpler drone rules in the offing
- '2 million Indian accounts banned during May-June'



## Why do you need the 'colonial law' of sedition, CJI asks govt.

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, in what may be an unprecedented judicial criticism of the way the sedition law is used by the government to crush liberties, asked why a colonial law was used against Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak continued to survive in the law book 75 years after Independence.

### Highlights:

1. Sedition is a colonial law. It suppresses freedoms. It was used against Mahatma Gandhi, Tilak. Is this law necessary after 75 years of Independence?
2. The CJI said the sedition law, or Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, was prone to misuse by the government. The use of sedition is like giving a saw to the carpenter to cut a piece of wood and he uses it to cut the entire forest itself.
3. The CJI's oral statement in open court takes a significant note amid rising public denouncement of Central and State law enforcement agencies using the law to silence dissent, muzzle free expression and deny bail to jailed activists, journalists, students and civil society members.
4. A number of petitions have been filed highlighting the "chilling effect" sedition has on the fundamental right of free speech. The CJI's remarks have also opened the floor for debate and introspection on the court's own verdict in 1962, in the Kedar Nath case, which upheld Section 124A.

### Low conviction rates:

1. The CJI drew the attention of the Attorney General to the conviction rates under sedition. If you look at the history of use of this Section 124A of IPC, you will find that the conviction rate is very low. There is a misuse of power by executive agencies.
2. The CJI asked the government why it did not throw out the sedition law along with the hundreds of "stale laws" it had expunged from the statute books.
3. We are not blaming any particular government or State. But do look at how Section 66A of the Information Technology Act is continuing to be used... How many unfortunate people have suffered? And there is no accountability for all this.



## SC sends a strong message to the government

The Chief Justice has sent a clear signal that Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code may have passed its time. The CJI has made it clear that the court is sensitive to the public demand to judicially review the manner in which law enforcement authorities are using the sedition law to control free speech and send journalists, activists and dissenters to jail, and keep them there.

### Highlights:

1. In a way, the court has questioned the need for the continuance of Section 124A — a colonial provision that was used to jail the Mahatma — in the law books of modern democracy.
2. This is a step away from the court's own Kedar Nath judgment of 1962 which had upheld Section 124A but read it down to mean any subversion of an elected government by violent means.
3. The court will have to re-examine whether this 59-year-old judgment holds in the modern context when the State is itself using a punitive law to impose serious burdens on free speech.
4. In 2019, 93 cases were on the ground of sedition as compared to the 35 cases that were filed in 2016. The same constitutes a 165% increase. Of these 93 cases, charge sheets were filed in a mere 17% of cases and even worse, the conviction rate was an abysmally low 3.3%.
5. The National Crime Records Bureau reports show that in 2019, 21 cases of sedition were closed on account of no evidence, two were closed for being false cases and six cases were held to be civil disputes.

The time is long past when the mere criticism of governments was sufficient to constitute sedition. The right to utter honest and reasonable criticism is a source of strength to a community rather than a weakness, the judgment recorded.



## Simpler drone rules in the offing

Simplified drone rules, which abolish the need for a large number of approvals and give impetus to research and development, are in the offing in the country.

### Highlights:

1. The Ministry of Civil Aviation released the Draft Drone Rules, 2021, for public consultation until August 5. The rules will replace the Unmanned Aircraft System Rules, 2021, notified on March 12, 2021.
2. The intent is to make the rules user-friendly and to encourage drone research and development. This is another important step towards realising the vision of India as a drone hub.
3. Drones are bringing the next big tech revolution around the globe with reduced costs, resources and time taken for operations. It is upon us to ride on the new wave and facilitate its uptake, especially among our start-ups.
4. The number of forms to be filled to seek authorisation before operating a drone has been reduced from 25 to six, according to a statement issued by the Ministry.

### Changed rules:

1. While most drones will need a unique identification number, a certificate of airworthiness, a remote pilot licence for the person controlling the drone and prior permission, no such approvals will be required for drones used for research and development by entities and educational institutions recognised by the Union government, State governments or Union Territory Administrations, start-ups recognised by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade and drone manufacturers having a Goods and Service Tax Identification Number.
2. Unlike the previous rules, which required drone operators to have a principal place of business within India, there are no such restrictions for foreign-owned companies registered in India in the new proposed rules.
3. Drones will also not need security clearance before registration or licence issuance.
4. The Quality Council of India and certification entities authorised by it will issue airworthiness certificates for drones, instead of the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation.



5. In order to encourage indigenous manufacturing, the import of drones and drone components will be regulated by the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade.
6. Moreover, the Union government may specify certain standards for obtaining a certificate of airworthiness for drones, which will promote the “use of made-in-India technologies, designs, components and drones; and India’s regional navigation satellite system named Navigation with Indian Constellation [NavIC],” according to the draft rules.

## ‘2 million Indian accounts banned during May-June’

WhatsApp banned two million Indian accounts to prevent harmful behaviour and spam on its platform between May 15 and June 15, according to the company’s first monthly transparency report released.

### Monthly transparency report

1. Our top focus is preventing accounts from sending harmful or unwanted messages at scale. We maintain advanced capabilities to identify these accounts sending a high or abnormal rate of messages and banned 2 million accounts in India alone from May 15-June 15 attempting this kind of abuse, the platform said.
2. The company identifies an Indian account via +91 phone number.
3. Stating that more than 95% of such bans are due to the unauthorised use of automated or bulk messaging, the company added that these numbers have increased significantly since 2019 because its systems have increased in sophistication, and hence are detecting more accounts even as it believes there are more attempts to send bulk or automated messages.
4. “We ban the vast majority of these accounts proactively, without relying on any user reports,” the Facebook-owned firm said. Globally, the monthly average of accounts banned or disabled on the platform is about 8 million.
5. The company also received 345 grievances from users during the period relating to issues such as ban appeal, product support, account support and safety support. Of this, the company took remedial action in 63 instances.
6. The majority of users who reach out to WhatsApp are either aiming to have their account restored following an action to ban them or reaching out for product or account support.