



# CURRENT AFFAIRS



Argasia Education PVT. Ltd. (GST NO.-09AAPCAI478E1ZH)  
Address: Basement C59 Noida, opposite to Priyagold Building gate, Sector 02,  
Pocket I, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, 201301, CONTACT NO:-8448440231

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## NET NEUTRALITY

*This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details "Net neutrality". This topic has relevance in the Governance section of the UPSC CSE exam.*

### **For Prelims:**

*About Net neutrality?*

### **For Mains:**

*GS 2: Governance*

*Importance of Maintaining Net Neutrality?*

*Flawed Arguments Affecting Net Neutrality?*

### **Why in the news?**

In response to the government's request, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) initiated an extensive consultation process to examine the necessity and potential approaches for regulating Over-The-Top (OTT) services.

### **Introduction:**

Net neutrality is the principle that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should provide equal and unbiased access to all online content, applications, and services, without discriminating or giving preferential treatment to any specific data. This concept holds significant importance for both consumers and the telecommunications industry.

### **Importance of Maintaining Net Neutrality:**

- Net neutrality ensures that users have unfettered access to the entirety of the internet, promoting transparency and freedom in content consumption. It guarantees that all online services and applications are equally accessible.

# What is net neutrality?

All traffic on the internet should be treated equally.

## NO BLOCKING

Your internet access provider (IAP) cannot block you from accessing legal content of your choice.



## NO THROTTLING

Your IAP cannot intentionally throttle legal internet traffic to slower speeds than others traffic.

## NO PAID PRIORITIZATION

Your IAP cannot sell 'fast lane' service to content providers who can pay more than others.

### Challenges for Telecom Companies:

Over the years, telecom companies have faced several challenges related to net neutrality:

- **Shift in Revenue Streams:** Traditional revenue streams, such as voice calls and SMS, have dwindled due to the emergence of Over-The-Top (OTT) services, which often offer free or cheaper alternatives.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Telecom companies have had to invest significantly in upgrading their infrastructure to handle the increased data traffic generated by OTT services, without a proportional increase in revenue.
- **Taxation and Licensing:** Telecom companies argue that OTT services are not subject to the same level of taxation and licensing fees, creating an uneven playing field.
- **Data Consumption:** On the flip side, the use of OTT services has led to a surge in data consumption, which has become a growing revenue stream for telecom companies as they provide the connectivity for these services.

### Basis of TRAI Regulation in India:

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has been at the forefront of regulating net neutrality in India. TRAI's actions have influenced the adoption of net neutrality in the country and have been recognized globally. TRAI's regulation on discriminatory tariffs for data services, introduced in 2016, played a pivotal role in shaping the net neutrality landscape in India.

### Flawed Arguments Affecting Net Neutrality:

Several flawed arguments have been raised by telecom companies in their bid to challenge net neutrality:

- **OTT Platforms Sharing Bandwidth Costs:** Telecom companies demand that content providers like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ Hotstar share the costs of bandwidth, but this argument is fundamentally flawed and undermines net neutrality principles.
- **OTTs Running on Telecom Infrastructure:** Telecom companies claim that OTT platforms are free riders benefiting from the infrastructure they maintain. However, this disregards the fact that OTT platforms invest in content delivery networks (CDNs) that enhance internet capacity.

- **Telecom Capitalizing on Data Demand:** Telecom companies capitalize on the demand generated by OTT platforms by providing internet connectivity to consumers. If they fail to cover costs, they can raise their prices, as is customary in a fair market.
- **Competition Within OTTs:** OTT services compete based on the quality and variety of content, streaming quality, user experience, and multi-device availability, and telecom companies charging both consumers and content providers creates an unfair situation.
- **Increased Costs for Consumers:** If OTT platforms concede to telecom companies' demands, the costs could be transferred to consumers through higher subscription fees or reduced service quality, affecting those relying on OTT services for entertainment, education, and work.

### The Way Forward:

It is crucial for all stakeholders, including policymakers, to understand the long-term implications of acceding to the short-sighted demands of telecom companies. Upholding net neutrality principles is not only about preserving an open internet but also fostering an environment conducive to innovation, competition, and consumer welfare, particularly in countries like India where the internet plays a crucial role in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

Source:

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-telco-double-dip-attempt-that-threatens-net-neutrality/article67505304.ece>

### Q.1 Consider the following statements about the concept of net neutrality:

1. Allowing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to prioritize certain online content and applications over others.
2. Providing equal and unbiased access to all online content, applications, and services by ISPs, without discrimination or preferential treatment.
3. Regulating the prices of Internet service plans to ensure affordability for consumers.
4. Promoting the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) for secure online browsing.

**How many of the above statement/s is/are correct?**

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

**ANSWER: A**

### Q.2 Which of the following objectives are associated with the “Digital India” initiative of the Government of India? (2018)

1. Developing India’s own Internet companies similar to China’s approach.
2. Creating a policy framework to incentivize international corporations collecting Big Data to establish large data centers within India.
3. Extending Internet access to many villages and providing Wi-Fi in schools, public areas, and popular tourist destinations.

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

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

**ANSWER: B**

**Q.3 Discuss the significance of net neutrality in ensuring an open and fair internet ecosystem. How does the principle of net neutrality impact the rights of consumers and the business practices of Internet Service Providers (ISPs)? Provide examples and arguments to support your answer.**

**Rishabh**

## CENTRAL INFORMATION COMMISSION

*This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details "Central Information Commission". This topic has relevance in the "Polity and Governance" section of the UPSC CSE exam.*

### **For Prelims:**

*What is the Central Information Commission?*

*How the Information Commissioner appointed?*

### **For Mains:**

*GS2: Polity and Governance*

*Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.*

### **Why in the news?**

Mr. Heeralal Samariya (IAS) has assumed the role of Chief Information Commissioner within the Central Information Commission.

### **Central Information Commission**

- The Central Information Commission, established in 2005 under the **Right to Information Act of 2005**, holds **jurisdiction over all Central Public Authorities**.
- **Specific powers and functions:**
  - Adjudicating second appeals for information disclosure
  - Issuing directives for record maintenance
  - Proactively disclosing information
  - Investigating complaints regarding the inability to file RTI requests and imposing penalties
  - Overseeing and reporting on various matters, including preparing an Annual Report
- **Composition of CIC:**
  - Chief Information Commissioner
  - Ten Information Commissioners
- The decisions of the Commission are final and binding.

### **Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005**

- The Indian Parliament passed the Right to Information Act (RTI) in May 2005.

- It gives citizens the right to access information held by public authorities, except in cases where the information is exempted under the Act.
- The RTI Act aims to promote transparency and accountability in government and to combat corruption.

### **Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (IC):**

- **Appointment:**

- The President appoints the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) on the recommendations of the Appointments Committee.

- **Committee for the appointment of the CIC/IC:**

- The Prime Minister serves as the Committee Chairperson.
- The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
- A Union Cabinet Minister is nominated by the Prime Minister.

- **Qualifications for CIC/IC**

- Individuals eminent in public life with extensive knowledge and experience in various fields, including law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media, or administration and governance.

- **Disqualifications**

- They cannot be a Member of Parliament or Member of the Legislature of any State or Union Territory.
- They must not hold any other office of profit, be connected with any political party, or be engaged in any business or profession.

- **Term of Office**

- The CIC/ICs are appointed for a **fixed term of three years**, starting from the date they assume office.

- **Retirement from Parent Service**

- In cases where the Central or a State Government previously employed a CIC/ICs at the time of their appointment, they are considered to have retired from their prior service with effect from the date of their appointment to the Central Information Commission.

- **Salaries**

- The Chief Information Commissioner receives a fixed monthly salary of Rs. 2,50,000 (Rupees two lakh and fifty thousand).
- Information Commissioners are entitled to a fixed monthly salary of Rs. 2,25,000 (Rupees two lakh and twenty-five thousand).

- **Removal:**

- An Information Commissioner can only be removed from office upon the order of the **President based on proven misbehaviour or incapacity**.
- This action can only be taken after the Supreme Court inquiry following a reference made to it by the President.
- President can also order the removal of the Chief Information Commissioner or any Information Commissioner if they meet any of the following criteria:
  - Are adjudged insolvent.
  - Have been convicted of an offence which, in the President's opinion, involves moral turpitude.
  - Engage in paid employment outside the duties of their office during their term of office.
  - Are, in the President's opinion, unfit to continue in office due to infirmity of mind or body.

- Acquire financial or other interests that are likely to adversely affect their functions as the Chief Information Commissioner or an Information Commissioner.

### Issues related to the Central Information Commission

- **Limited Reach:** While the Commission has jurisdiction over all Central Public Authorities, it lacks control over state public authorities, which restricts its reach.
- **Dependence on Public Information Officers:** The effectiveness of the CIC relies on the appointment and cooperation of Public Information Officers. If an officer declines to accept an information request or if no officer has been appointed, the CIC's ability to function effectively is compromised.
- **Limited Resources:** The CIC faces resource constraints due to its budget, potentially impeding its capacity to carry out its functions effectively.

While the CIC plays a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability in public authorities, it faces challenges regarding its reach, dependence on Public Information Officers and resource constraints. However, it can leverage opportunities such as digital transformation and awareness programs to overcome these challenges. It must also navigate threats such as non-compliance by public authorities and legal challenges to its decisions.

Sources:

[Was kept in Dark on appointment of new CIC Heeralal Samariya: Adhir writes to President - The Indian Express](#)

### Q1. With reference to the Central Information Commission, consider the following statements:

1. The Central Information Commission is a statutory body under the Information Commission Act 2005.
2. The Central Information Commission holds jurisdiction over all Central and State Public Authorities.
3. The decisions of the Central Information Commission are final and binding.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) None

Answer: (c)

### Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Information Commissioners:

1. The President appoints the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners on the recommendation of the Cabinet.
2. The CIC/ICs are appointed for a fixed term of five years.
3. The terms of service and salaries of CIC and ICs are equal to the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.

How many of the abovementioned statements are correct ?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: (d)

**Q3. Central Information Commission plays a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability in public authorities. Discuss.**

**Gaurav**

