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1. All you need to know about Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony today**Swearing in ceremony**

At noon on January 20 – 10.30 pm in India – Donald J. Trump will be sworn in as President of the United States for the second time. The ceremony will be held inside the United States Capitol Rotunda, the circular central space below the dome of the Capitol, which was overrun four years ago by rioters seeking to overturn Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election.

**47th President**

The inauguration of the 47th President will mark a remarkable moment in American history, and one of the most extraordinary comebacks in modern politics anywhere. Trump is also only the second President in the 230-plus years of American democracy to have come to power, lost the re-election, and then returned to the White House. The other leader to have served non-consecutive presidential terms was Grover Cleveland, the 22nd and 24th President in the 1880s and 1890s.

In 2021, Trump skipped the inauguration ceremony of his successor – and now would-be predecessor – President Biden, insisting that the 2020 election had been “stolen” from him. This was the first time in 150 years that any former US President had boycotted the formal transfer of power.

Date of ceremony

Presidential inauguration ceremonies have historically followed a set of rules that have evolved through tradition. Following an amendment to the US Constitution in 1933, the ceremony has been held every four years on January 20 – or January 21 if the 20th is a Sunday.

The oath of office is administered to the President and Vice President at noon, with a series of official engagements scheduled before and after.

That the inauguration takes place more than two months after Election Day allows for the peculiar, long drawn-out process of officially declaring the election result followed in the US. It also gives the outgoing administration time to wind down, and the incoming one to put in place personnel and agenda to ensure a seamless transition.

Why is there a gap between elections and inauguration?

The presidential election is held in November and the outcome is “called” by prominent media organisations soon afterward. Within a few days, the President invites the President-elect to the White House to congratulate him and to discuss the transition process.

The transition period is marked by a flurry of activity as the President-elect begins the process of making appointments to his administration. The most important positions must be confirmed by the US Senate – that process is underway.

The President-elect also receives intelligence briefings throughout the transition period.

What happens on the day of the US President's inauguration?

A Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC), consisting of members from the House and Senate, formed every four years, plans and hosts the event. The United States Secret Service is designated as the primary federal entity responsible for security.

The ceremony, which is traditionally held at the West Front of the US Capitol – the ceremonial first nail for the construction of the 2025 inaugural platform was driven on September 18, 2024 – was moved indoors to the Rotunda by Trump in view of the extreme cold in Washington DC. The maximum temperature for Monday is predicted to be minus 4 degrees Celsius, the minimum minus 12, and it is expected to be minus 6 at noon. The last time the ceremony was moved indoors was during Ronald Reagan's second inauguration in 1985 – also because of the weather.

Senior leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties and former US Presidents are expected to attend the inauguration, apart from businessmen Elon Musk (who will be part of the Trump administration), Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos.

Foreign dignitaries including External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Chinese Vice President Han Zheng will attend. Invitations have been extended to former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, the leader of Britain's right-wing Reform UK party Nigel Farage, and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

However, the "vast majority" of the more than 200,000 ticketed guests "will not be able to attend the ceremonies in person", the Joint Inaugural Committee has said. The Rotunda can accommodate at best 600 attendees, and only "those with tickets for the Presidential Platform and members of Congress will be able to attend in person".

What does the oath say?

The most important part of the inauguration ceremony is the President's oath-taking; it is the only event of the day that is mentioned in the US Constitution. All other events have evolved through tradition.

The text of the oath has remained the same since 1884: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Trump and Vance will place their hands on the Bible, a ritual that has become an integral part of the oath. Traditionally, the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court administers the oath.

The presidential oath will be administered by Chief Justice John Roberts, and the vice-presidential oath by Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. How is TRAI and the govt. combating spam?

Introduction

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) will be using distributed ledger technology (DLT) to register spam preferences from customers, TRAI chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti said. Spam rules will be tightened to make commercial messages traceable, the TRAI has indicated.

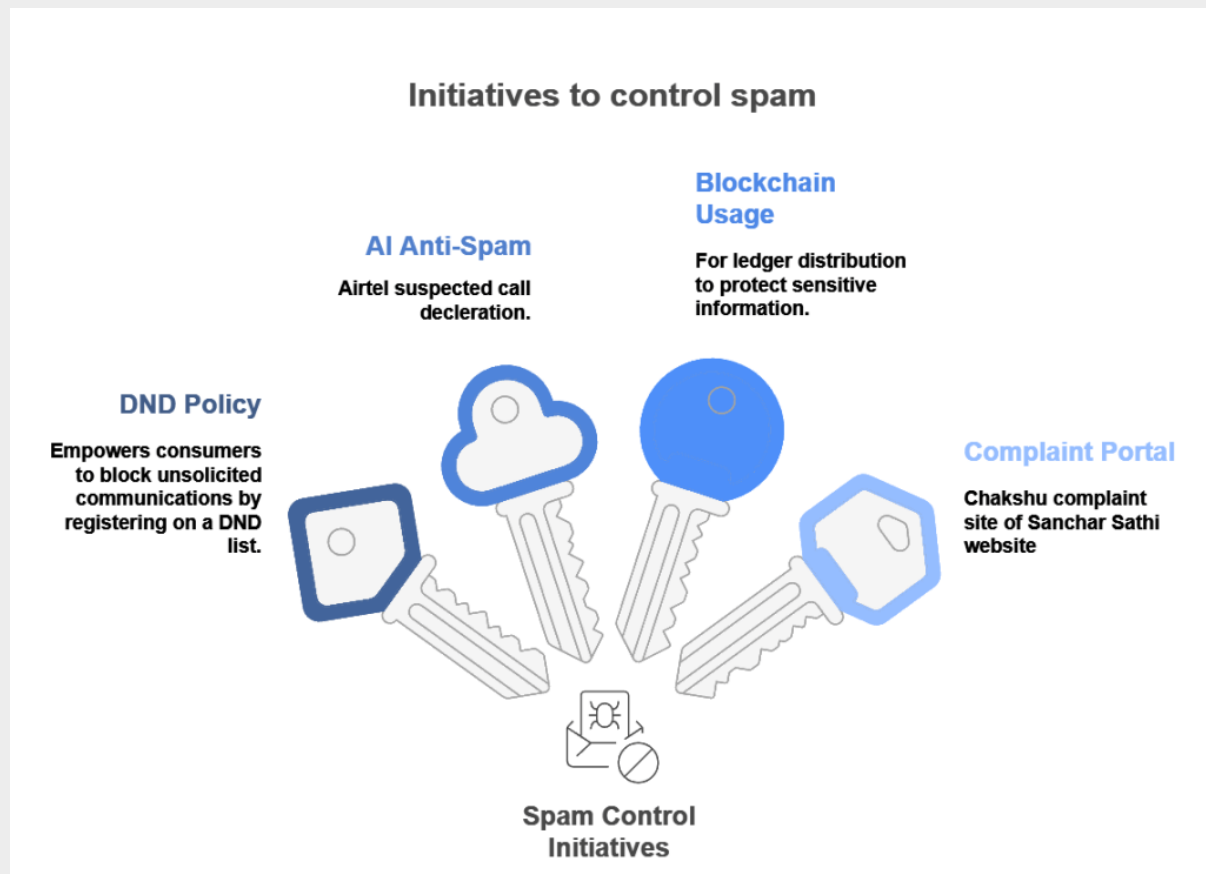
What is TRAI's role in fighting spam?

The TRAI regulates the telecom industry, and its main role is in regulating Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC), the official name for spam. Starting in 2007, the regulator implemented a do-not-disturb (DND) registry, which would force telemarketers to abide by customer preferences when it came to commercial calls.

If a telecom customer signs up to the DND registry, they are not supposed to get any spam calls or SMS messages.

TRAI had also worked with an external agency to develop a DND app, which would allow customers to register their DND preference, and accept complaints. Under the Telecom

Commercial Communication Customer Preference Regulation (TCCCPR), 2018, telemarketers who called or sent messages to DND-registered customers would receive warnings, and if enough warnings accumulated, they would be blacklisted from sending messages to telecom operators.



The DND app has not always been maintained by the TRAI, and was briefly unavailable from 2022 onwards. An SMS reporting facility where users would have to report messages in a particular format was available, but further steps were taken to make the process more user friendly. In 2024, TRAI mandated that DND reporting be made available on every telecom provider's app.

What role does blockchain play?

In order to fight the deluge of spam messages, TRAI mandated in the TCCCPR that telcos use a blockchain ledger, also known as a distributed ledger, in order to store a constantly-updated list of approved senders of SMS messages. Telcos would also be required to approve specific formats of messages. For instance, an OTP message that goes, "Your OTP is 433212," would be stored in the blockchain as "Your OTP is ..." with space for a variable. These messages have been required to be sent from sender IDs, and not phone numbers.

This has been one of the most stringent rules that have been issued to fight SMS spam anywhere in the world. Blockchain as a technology allows for so-called immutability, which means that every stakeholder involved in a transaction has a reliable, un-tamperable version of the same data. At the time of the 2018 regulations, the necessity to use blockchain for the purpose of maintaining a spam exemption database was debated, as enthusiasm about the

technology's potential had spilled over beyond cryptocurrencies, where it continues to be a mainstay.

In 2024, the regulations were tightened to ensure "traceability" of messages, thus making sure that telcos would have a complete record of who issued a message before it is sent to an SMS gateway. This was aimed at plugging a crucial flaw in the system that would allow anyone to register on the blockchain solutions implemented by telecom operators and send out fraudulent or spam messages in spite of the systems in place to combat them. These, Mr. Lahoti has said, will be further tightened in the coming year.

Have these measures been effective?

For those who have registered their DND preferences, communications from legitimate businesses that follow the rules may have reduced. However, spam has a constantly changing character. While much of spam is merely commercial messages that may be annoying but harmless, the wave of digitisation has increased incentives to get around the protections against commercial messaging and calling. A wave of fraudulent calls have also emerged, with cyber frauds seeking to ensnare Indians in financial scams. Many of these operations are done outside the framework of SMS sender IDs, and are run through disposable 10-digit phone numbers, making it hard for real-time enforcement of anti-spam regulations.

There is also the issue of spam and scam calls from international numbers, which can be leased from certain online Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers, but appear as legitimate international call traffic.

Which are the other steps taken by the government to end spam?

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has launched the Sanchar Saathi portal, which has a reporting site called Chakshu. DoT has partnered with law enforcement, banks, and other stakeholders in order to accept reports of "suspected fraudulent" calls and messages, and has moved to cancel lakhs of numbers that are associated with unauthorised telemarketers and scammers.

It also set up the Telecom Security Operation Centre at its New Delhi headquarters to monitor suspicious internet traffic in real time. Meanwhile, firms like Airtel have taken steps to declare suspicious calls using Artificial Intelligence as "Suspected Spam," a move that is being replicated by other telcos as well. The telco has also started labelling international calls on smartphones.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Why RG Kar rape case convict was not given death penalty

Introduction

The CBI had argued strongly for the death penalty in the case that shook West Bengal and triggered several weeks of protests and strikes by doctors. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had demanded death for the murderer.

The Supreme Court has held that a sentence of death should be passed only in the “rarest of rare” cases, after the court has considered possible “aggravating” and “mitigating” circumstances (Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab, 1980).



‘Rarest of rare’ test

In Bachan Singh, the SC considered a challenge to the constitutionality of the death penalty. It upheld the death penalty, but said it should be imposed only in the “rarest of rare” cases where there is no possibility of reformation.

The five-judge Constitution Bench did not specify the standards to determine whether the death penalty should be imposed, but laid down non-exhaustive lists of “aggravating” and “mitigating” circumstances for courts to consider while making the decision.

AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES, which could tilt the court’s decision towards the death penalty:

- * If the murder is pre-planned, calculated, and involves extreme brutality;

- * If the murder involves “exceptional depravity”;

- * If the accused has been found guilty of murdering a public servant, police officer or a member of the armed forces while on duty, or because of anything they may have lawfully done while discharging their duty.

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES, which could tilt a case away from the death penalty:

- * Whether the accused was “under the influence of extreme mental or emotional disturbance” at the time of the offence;

- * Age of the accused; they would not be given death if they are very young or very old;

- * Probability of the accused posing a continued threat to society;

- * Probability of reforming the accused;

- * If the accused was acting on the directions of another person;

- * If the accused believed their actions were morally justified;

- * If the accused suffers mentally and is unable to appreciate the criminality of their actions.

After Bachan Singh

The understanding of mitigating and aggravating circumstances has evolved over the years, and new factors have been added to the list through several decisions. These include:

AGE OF ACCUSED: In several cases including Ramnaresh and Ors v. State of Chhattisgarh (2012) and Ramesh v. State of Rajasthan (2011), the Supreme Court considered the young age of the accused persons (below 30 in these cases) as an indication that they could be reformed. However, as the Law Commission of India noted in its 262nd Report (2015), The Death Penalty, age as a mitigating factor “has been used very inconsistently”. In Shankar Kisanrao Khade v.

State of Maharashtra (2013), the SC split several cases with similar facts into two groups: where age was considered as a mitigating factor, and where age was ignored or considered irrelevant. The court also noted that sentencing in death penalty cases had become "judge-centric". In the RG Kar case, the convict Sanjoy Roy is 35 years old.

NATURE OF OFFENCE: In Shankar Khade, the SC said courts should compare the case before them with a pool of cases concerning similar offences before determining the punishment. Otherwise, the court said, applying the "rarest of rare" doctrine would become "subjective". The Law Commission Report used the example of cases concerning the rape and murder of a young child, and presented examples to show that it "shocks the judicial conscience in some cases, not in others".

In Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983), the SC held that death could be given in cases where the "collective conscience" of society is so shocked that the judiciary is expected to impose the death penalty.

The Law Commission noted that this decision, and the decisions it influenced in the future, focused only on the circumstances of the crime, and not the circumstances of the criminal and the possibility of reform.

POSSIBILITY OF REFORM: In Bachan Singh, the SC held that the government must prove there is no possibility of reform, and that the presumption would be against such a penalty. In Santosh Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra (2009), the SC said "the court will have to provide clear evidence as to why the convict is not fit for any kind of reformatory and rehabilitation scheme". The Law Commission Report said the requirement for evidence was held as "essential" in Bariyar "for introducing an element of objectivity into the sentencing process".

Stage of the trial

When should the court consider these circumstances?

In Bachan Singh, the SC said courts must conduct a separate trial after convicting, so that judges can be persuaded why the death sentence should not be imposed.

When should this separate trial take place? In several rulings, the SC has held it can be on the same day; in other cases, it has stressed the importance of a "real, effective and meaningful hearing" during the sentencing hearing in death penalty cases.

In Dattaraya v. State of Maharashtra (2020), the court held that such a hearing did not take place, and that this was a valid reason to commute a death sentence to life imprisonment.

In suo motu proceedings instituted in 2022 (IN RE: Framing Guidelines Regarding Potential Mitigating Circumstances To Be Considered While Imposing Death Sentences), the SC asked whether sentences delivered on the same day as the conviction satisfy the requirement of a meaningful and effective hearing.

It also noted that aggravating circumstances form a part of the record of a case and are always available to a judge, whereas mitigating circumstances are only placed on record after a conviction and before sentencing.

"This", the Bench said, "places the convict at a hopeless disadvantage, tilting the scales heavily against him", and referred the case to a larger Bench to create a uniform approach to sentencing hearings in death penalty cases.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

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