# U.S.'s decision to block Iran-linked websites

## Why in news?

The US government has blocked dozens of US website domains connected to Iran.

## What is the rationale?

- The move is linked to what the US says are disinformation efforts.
- It has accused the sites, including Iran's state-owned Press TV, of spreading disinformation.
- In the past, the U.S. had cracked down on Chinese and Iranian media over similar allegations.
- The move comes days after Iran elected Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline cleric, as President.
- Mr. Raisi has been sanctioned by the U.S. for his alleged role in the execution of political prisoners and other rights violations.
- His election as the President has already escalated tensions between the two countries.
- The U.S. wants Iran to return to the terms of the original Iran-U.S. nuclear deal.
- It also wants to discuss Iran's ballistic missile programme and its regional activities.
- Mr. Raisi, known for his hardline domestic and foreign policy views, has rejected such demands outright.

## Is the US move justified?

- Iran responded that the U.S. was trying to "muzzle free speech".
- The U.S.'s move hardly serves its declared purpose of fighting disinformation.
- E.g. America seized the website of the semi-official Iranian news agency, Fars, in 2018.
- But it switched to an Iranian domain and was back online.
- The decision would also aid the Iranian narrative that America remains hostile.
- The U.S. decision could also create hitches in the diplomatic process under way.
- Notably, both countries are trying to revive the nuclear deal.

- So, the move by the U.S. now seems like an unnecessary provocation.

## What is the way forward?

- The way to fight disinformation campaigns is to promote information and strengthen independent journalism.
- Mr. Raisi would take over the presidency in early August 2021 (nearly a month to go).
- So, Mr. Biden's best chance to revive the nuclear deal is to do it before then.
- Both sides should focus on the diplomatic path.
- This should aim at achieving a pragmatic agreement first that addresses the most critical issues such as Iran's expanding nuclear programme and America's sprawling sanctions regime.

**Source: The Hindu**

