

1 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. ‘Preventing stigma requires a full-throated campaign’

Context:

Gita Sen, Director and Distinguished Professor, Public Health Foundation of India, talks about how the stigma attached to [COVID-19](#) is much like what was seen with HIV/AIDS and how it is a result of poor knowledge.

Issue:

- Stigma and fear are the result of people’s poor knowledge about COVID-19 and how it spreads. This is compounded by the large amount of fake news and false information being generated today.
- Some groups face the additional element in that discrimination against them is already there, and COVID-19 has become one more reason to stigmatise them.
- The most vulnerable groups to the virus are the poor in urban slums, migrant workers with no homes, people living in close proximity with little possibility of social distancing or even hand-washing.

- In terms of stigma, it was widely seen with the HIV/AIDS patients. But HIV-related stigma did not extend, in general, to health workers.

Groups most vulnerable to stigma related to COVID-19:

Three sets of people are being stigmatised now:

1. Those in quarantine, whether they have tested positive or not — many State governments are violating medical ethics codes by publicising address details, marking doors of their homes with stickers and even large posters, stamping them with indelible ink — and stories are coming in of people being thrown out of their homes, shunned, etc.
2. Health workers from doctors down to the frontline workers are facing stigma and discrimination including losing their homes because their landlords somehow think they will be contagious.
3. Those who traditionally face discrimination like migrant workers, people from the northeast, victims of religious or other persecution.

Way forward:

- Preventing stigma requires a full-throated campaign of public information.
- It would be good if the Union Health Minister were to give a daily briefing to let people know what is happening, together with creative social media campaigns about the virus itself that gets rid of the stigma.
- It would be valuable, if the Prime Minister spoke against stigma, on behalf of health workers, on behalf of migrant workers and those suffering discrimination, in support of women.
- What is needed is clear, informative and fun messages of the kind that our social marketers surely know how to produce.
- People also need to understand that the same health worker that you stigmatise today may be the one who you may have to turn to tomorrow.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC upholds right to discuss COVID-19

Context:

The [Supreme Court](#) (SC) has upheld the right to free discussion about COVID-19.

Concerns:

- Any deliberate or inaccurate reporting by the media, particularly web portals, has a serious and inevitable potential of causing panic in large sections of society.
- Any panic reaction in the midst of an unprecedented situation based on such reporting would harm the entire nation.

Details:

- A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, was responding to a request from the Central government that media outlets, in the larger interest of justice, should only publish or telecast anything on COVID-19 after ascertaining the factual position from the government.
- The court took a view balancing free press and the need to avoid panic in society during an unprecedented crisis.
- However, the SC has directed the media to refer to and publish the official version of the developments in order to avoid inaccuracies and large-scale panic.
- It is also noteworthy that creating panic is a criminal offence under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- It has ordered the government to start a daily bulletin on COVID-19 developments through all media avenues in the next 24 hours.

Category: HEALTH

1. Hydroxychloroquine combination allowed

Context:

The Union Health Ministry has allowed the use of Hydroxy chloroquine in combination with Azithromycin under close monitoring for patients with severe disease and requiring ICU management as per the revised Guidelines on Clinical Management of COVID-19.

Details:

- Hydroxy chloroquine was previously under testing and was allowed to be administered only to doctors and caregivers in direct contact with COVID-19 positive cases. (Read [24th March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#))
- The Health Ministry has noted that no specific antiviral has been proven to be effective as per currently available data. However, based on the available information (uncontrolled clinical trials), Hydroxy chloroquine may be considered.
 - Its usage in some patients has shown a significantly reduced viral load in nasal swabs.
 - Hydroxychloroquine is known to have a variety of side-effects, and can in some cases harm the heart.
- It has been cautioned that the medication is presently not recommended for children less than 12 years, pregnant and lactating women.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China chases Indonesia's fishing fleets, staking claim to sea's riches

Issue:

Fishers in Natuna Islands say they feel vulnerable with Beijing's presence in South China Sea becoming more aggressive.

Natuna Islands:

- The major island and reef formations in the South China Sea are the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas Islands, Natuna Islands and the Scarborough Reef.
- The Natuna Regency is an archipelago of 272 islands located in the south part of the South China Sea in the Natuna Sea.
- Indonesia's [exclusive economic zone \(EEZ\)](#) off the coast of Natuna is slightly overlapped by China's widely disputed South China Sea claim.



Concerns:

- Backed by Chinese coast guard ships, Chinese fishing fleets have been raiding the rich waters of the South China Sea that are internationally recognised as exclusively Indonesia's to fish.
- The Chinese steel trawlers scrape the bottom of the sea, destroying other marine life. So not only does the Chinese trawling breach maritime borders, it also leaves a lifeless seascape in its wake.
- The latest episode occurred in February 2020, fishers said, when Chinese boats flanked by coast guard vessels dropped their trawl nets yet again. It seemed as if the coronavirus outbreak peaking in China at the time hadn't diminished the country's global ambitions.
- Wary of offending its largest trading partner, Indonesian officials have played down incursions by Chinese fishing boats. But with the Chinese presence growing more aggressive, fishers in the Natunas are feeling vulnerable.
- China's illegal fishing near the Natunas carries global consequence, reminding regional governments of Beijing's expanding claims to a waterway through which one-third of the world's maritime trade flows. But local leaders in the Natunas don't control what happens near their shores.

- The Chinese fishers are helping feed the country's growing appetite for seafood by trawling the South China Sea. But they are also serving a broader purpose. Beijing wants Chinese fishers to operate there because their presence helps to embody China's maritime claims.

2. Diplomatic Relations between India and China

Context:

India and China celebrate 70 years of Diplomatic Relations (1950-2020).

Background:

- On April 1, 1950, China and India established diplomatic relations.
- India was the first non-socialist country to establish relations with the People's Republic of China.
- In 1954, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited India. China and India signed the Joint Statement and jointly advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.
- In the same year, Indian Prime Minister Nehru visited China. He was the first head of government of a non-socialist country who visited China since the founding of the People's Republic of China.
- In 1955, Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Nehru attended the Asian-African Conference in which 29 countries participated in Bandung, Indonesia and jointly advocated the Bandung Spirit of solidarity, friendship and cooperation.
- In 1962, the border conflict led to a serious setback in bilateral relations.
- In 1976, China and India restored ambassadorial relations and bilateral ties improved gradually.

Details:

- Year 2020 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India.
- It is also China-India Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges.
- The two sides agreed to hold 70 celebratory activities to demonstrate the historic connection between the two civilizations as well as their growing bilateral relationship over the years and further deepen people-to-people exchanges between the two countries at all levels.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Govt. cuts interest rates on NSC, PPF

Context:

The government has slashed interest rates on small savings schemes, including National Savings Certificate and Public Provident Fund, by up to 1.4% for the first quarter of 2020-21, in line with the moderation in bank deposit rates.

Details:

- The move by the government has followed the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) recent 75 bps cut in its key interest rate to counter the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.
- The [Economic Survey](#) had earlier suggested that the interest rates on the small savings schemes be reduced to bring them in consonance with the interest rates prevailing in the economy.
- The latest rate reduction in small savings schemes does not bode well for fixed income investors, especially for senior citizens who are dependent on interest as a major source of regular income. This is because over the past one year, banks have also been reducing interest rates on fixed deposit (FDs).

How are interest rates set on Small Saving Schemes?

- Interest rates for small savings schemes are notified on a quarterly basis.
- Interest rates are paid quarterly.
- The formula to arrive at the interest rates of the small savings schemes was given by the Shyamala Gopinath Committee.
- The committee had suggested that the interest rates of different schemes should be 25-100 bps higher than the yields of the government bonds of similar maturity.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. The cost of a cure for COVID-19

Context:

- **Drug development for COVID-19** and related issues.

Background:

- The [World Health Organization](#) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.
- However, the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** declared COVID-19 an **orphan disease, or a rare disease.**
 - A rare disease is any disease that **affects a small percentage of the population.**
 - In case of rare disease, the rarity of its occurrence means there is a lack of a market large enough to gain support and resources for discovering treatments for it.
 - **Companies find it difficult to recoup their R&D costs** given the small number of people suffering from the rare disease.

The Orphan Drug Act:

- In the U.S., under the **Orphan Drug Act, 1983**, companies are provided incentives to develop therapies, or orphan drugs, for rare diseases.
- The government **grants economically advantageous conditions to creating and selling relevant drugs.**

- The Act allows seven years of **market exclusivity and financial incentives** to innovators of these drugs.
- Privileges under the Act may be conferred to companies for drugs to treat a disease that affect less than 200,000 people in the U.S., or for a disease that affects more than 200,000 people but for which there is no hope of recouping R&D costs.

Details:

- The Food and Drug Administration agency of the U.S. has **granted Gilead Sciences orphan drug status for its antiviral drug, Remdesivir.**
 - Remdesivir was **originally developed to treat Ebola.**
 - The drug is now being **tested for treating COVID-19.**
- Gilead has recently sought that orphan drug status be rescinded for its antiviral drug, Remdesivir.

Concerns:

Applicability of the statute to the drug:

- There have been questions raised on how right the U.S. FDA is in **conferring the status of an orphan drug on a potential drug for COVID-19.**
- COVID-19 is anything but a rare disease, with 800,049 confirmed cases across the world. The number of cases in the U.S. alone is close to 1,80,000 and is fast increasing and would cross the threshold 2,00,000 cases in a matter of days.
- Congressional findings for the Act state that the purpose of the legislation is to provide financial incentives for drugs that may reasonably expect to generate relatively small sales.
- There have been questions on the **legality of the application of the statute to the Remdesivir drug.** There are concerns that the FDA's interpretation of the statute is only benefitting big pharma companies during a pandemic.

Precedents:

- Despite Gilead Sciences claims to make the drug accessible and affordable around the globe, the precedents indicate otherwise.
 - Gilead's very high **pricing of its drug to treat hepatitis C** and its drug to treat HIV had attracted attention in the past.
 - There have been many reversals from the company in the past too. Gilead had suspended its "compassionate use" programme for Remdesivir. The programme was reinstated for only children and pregnant women after public uproar.

Negative impact on health care system:

- In case of orphan drug status being granted, generic manufacturers would not be able to market a drug to treat COVID-19 with the same active ingredient till the **seven-year period of market exclusivity** does not end.
- This would have given the patent holder company a **free hand in pricing policies and licensing conditions**, which would have had disastrous consequences on the healthcare system.
 - The orphan drugs are often **highly priced**. This would **reduce its accessibility to the needy and vulnerable.**

Impact on India:

- While the orphan drug status of Remdesivir would have no impact on India, **Gilead Sciences does hold a patent in India**, which it is likely to claim for if it is successful in developing the drug.

Way forward:

The patent holder:

- Given the gravity of the situation, Gilead should make sure that the drug, if found successful, should be **made available to all at a suitable price.**
 - It should consider placing the drug under its **Medicines Patent Pool, a move that would make the medicine more accessible.** A similar approach was followed by Gilead in placing its HIV therapy in the Medicines Patent Pool.
 - Alternatively, it can also be **placed under the “expanded access” programme, for emergency use in severely ill patients.**

Government:

- The governments can **aid the company through monetary support for the development of the drug,** given its criticality. This will offset some of the companies' up front development costs and make the drug affordable to the people.

Challenge the patent:

- **Patents are open to challenge.**
- If the company is not willing to extend the use of its crucial drugs, concerned agencies and groups can challenge the patents under relevant sections of the Act.

For India:

- - If Gilead's drug is successful, the **Indian government should issue a compulsory licence under the Patents Act.**
 - In case of patent rights, Indian law permits the government to issue a compulsory licence **in certain circumstances of a public health crisis** under Section 92 of the Patents Act.
 - This allows **third parties to manufacture a patented drug without permission of the patent holder.** Indian companies have already expressed their capability to manufacture the drug.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. A pandemic in an unequal India

Context:

- The author of the article highlights the higher impact of the pandemic on the poor and calls for increased governmental measures to reduce the vulnerability of the poor.

Details:

- The measures adopted by the government to spread the progress of the virus were first, to introduce a 'work from home' measure, urge people to wash their hands frequently, ensure physical distancing, and then the announcement of a 21-day lockdown.

- **India's impoverished millions are likely to overwhelmingly bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic** and the measures being taken to limit its spread.
 - Since the poor people are mainly engaged in the unorganized sector, dependant on daily wages, working from home is not an option for them.
 - Most of the poor households **do not have access to water**.
 - The poor often **live in crowded places** where ensuring social distancing or physical distancing is difficult.
 - The lockdown would directly **impact their income security and subsequently their economic and social security**.
 - The virus will devastate the poor if they are infected given the fact that they only have **limited access to health care**.
- The author of the article expresses concerns over the fact that the official strategies to fight the virus place the major responsibility on citizens, of whom a majority are poor without access to basic amenities.

Way forward:

- The **Union government's [Garib Kalyana Yojana](#)** is a welcome step to reduce the pain on the poor and vulnerable sections.
- The author calls for **further governmental measures to ensure that the vulnerability of the poor and needy are covered for** in these critical times.
 - **Enhancing the amount of money being transferred** to the poor for an extended frame of time.
 - Ensuring the timely delivery of pension amounts.
 - Availability of **free and adequate water supply**.
 - **Increase PDS entitlements with higher nutritional standards**.
 - Provide **cooked meals to homeless people**, aged and the disabled.
 - Ensure **adequate access to public health care facilities** for the poor and needy.

For more information on this issue refer [31 March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

F. Prelims Facts

1. RS members to donate from MPLADS fund

What's in News?

Many members of the [Rajya Sabha](#) have consented to contribute from their Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) funds to the common central pool to fight COVID-19.

- Rajya Sabha Chairman had asked the MPs to contribute at least ₹1 crore each from their MPLAD funds.

MPLADS:

- The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) is an ongoing Central Sector Scheme which was launched in 1993-94.
- The Scheme enables the Members of Parliament to recommend works for the creation of durable community assets based on locally felt needs to be taken up in their constituencies in the area of national priorities namely drinking water, education, public health, sanitation, roads, etc.

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has been responsible for the policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Scheme.
- Under the scheme, each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector works estimated at ₹5 crores a year to be taken up in their respective constituencies.

Read more about [MPLADS](#).

G. Tidbits

1. Treat migrants humanely, SC tells officials

What's in News?

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the subsequent lockdown, India is seeing a large-scale movement of migrant workers. The Supreme Court has asked the police and the authorities to treat migrant workers journeying home in fear of COVID-19 in a humane manner.

Concerns:

- The government said it was imperative to stop the mass migration as there was a likelihood that three out of every 10 workers might be carrying the coronavirus.

Details:

- The court has ordered the government to ensure that migrant workers stopped from crossing the inter-State borders were given food, shelter and medicines.
- The Bench, through videoconferencing, asked the government to urge community and religious leaders to speak to the migrant workers lodged in shelters.
- Government has been asked to have trained counsellors talk to the workers.
- According to the Joint Secretary, Home Ministry, more than 6 lakh migrants have been accommodated in 61,000 relief camps across India.

Authentic information

- The court has also directed the government to set up an expert committee and a dedicated portal within 24 hours to disseminate authentic information about the virus and stop the spread of fake news.

2. Three quasi-subspecies of virus in circulation, says ICMR

What's in News?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has said that a mixture of three quasi-subspecies of SARS-CoV-2 is in circulation in India.

- Scientists are yet to classify a SARS-Cov-2 variant as an Indian strain.
- These imported variants showed no differences from how they behaved in the place of origin.

3. Pre-monsoon crop cultivation yet to begin

What's in News?

In Karnataka, the farmers are being encouraged to continue with their agricultural activities while also staying safe. District administrations are working with dealers to ensure there is enough supply of seeds and fertilizers.

Besides the main crops such as ragi and maize, farmers cultivate green gram, black gram and sesame, during this season.

Importance of pre-monsoon crop:

- Pre-monsoon crop is important for the kharif crop that will follow.
- Those who grow pre-summer crops normally let plants grow on their fields after harvesting the crops.
- The plant stubs become green manure when farmers prepare the fields when the monsoon arrives.
- Pre-monsoon crop contributes to less than 10% of the total agricultural production in the State, but remains important.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Arrange the following from North to South:

1. Spratly Islands
2. Paracel Islands
3. Scarborough shoal
4. Natuna Islands

Choose the correct option:

- a. 2, 3, 1, 4
- b. 2, 1, 3, 4
- c. 3, 2, 1, 4
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4

Answer: a

Explanation:



Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS):

1. MPLADS is a Central Sector scheme fully funded by the government of India.
2. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is responsible for the policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Scheme.
3. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. All of the above
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct. MPLADS is a Central Sector scheme fully funded by the government of India. Under the scheme, funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities. The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable. Funds not released in a particular year are carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is responsible

for the policy formulation, release of funds and prescribing monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Scheme.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. India is the largest producer of pulses in the world.
2. India has the world's largest area under cultivation of pulses.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

India has the world's largest area under pulses — 27-29 million hectares in two seasons — and is the world's largest producer — 22-24 million tonnes.

Q4. Which of the following tribes belong to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands?

1. Onge
2. Toto
3. Shompen
4. Jarawa
5. Sentinelese

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1, 2 and 3 only
- b. 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- c. 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: c

Explanation:

Andaman and Nicobar Islands house Onge, Shompens, Sentinelese, Jarawa, Great Andamanese and Nicobarese tribes. Toto is a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group in West Bengal.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the major aspects of India's National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) policy, 2016. Examine the need to balance the often contradicting objectives of encouraging innovation and protecting the rights of innovators versus the need to ensure public good, with suitable examples. (15 marks, 250 words)

2. Analyze how India's poor are likely to overwhelmingly bear the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures being taken to limit its spread. Suggest suitable measures to lessen this impact. (10 marks, 150 words)

