

23 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Attacks on health workers to attract up to 7 years in prison

Context:

In the backdrop of public venting of angst against healthcare service personnel leading to harassment, assault and damage to property, the Union Cabinet has approved the promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

Issue:

COVID-19 outbreak has posed a unique situation where harassment of the healthcare workforce and others working to contain the spread of the disease has been taking place at all fronts, in various places, including in cremation grounds.

Objectives:

- The ordinance is being promulgated to protect healthcare service personnel and property, including their living/working premises, from violence during epidemics.
- The ordinance is intended to ensure zero tolerance to any form of violence against healthcare service personnel and damage to property.
- The ordinance aims at making acts of violence against medical staff a cognisable and non-bailable offence.
- It seeks to provide compensation for injury to healthcare personnel or for damage or loss to property.

Details:

- The ordinance proposes that in cases of attacks on healthcare workers, the investigation will be completed within 30 days and the final decision arrived at within one year.
- The punishment for such attacks:
 - Will be three months to five years and the fine ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh.
 - In severe cases, where there are grievous injuries, the punishment will be six months to seven years and the fine ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh.

2. No 100% quota for tribal teachers: SC

Context:

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held it unconstitutional to provide 100% reservation for tribal teachers in schools located in Scheduled Areas across the country.

Background:

- The five-judge Bench was answering a reference made to it in 2016 on whether 100% reservation is permissible under the Constitution.
- The case stemmed from a legal challenge to a January 10, 2000 order issued by the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh Bench providing 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribe candidates, out of whom 33.1/3% shall be women, for the post of teachers in schools located in the Scheduled Areas of the State.
- The court said the 2000 notification was “unreasonable and arbitrary”.

Judgement:

- The court held that 100% reservation is discriminatory and impermissible.
- It asserted that the opportunity of public employment is not the prerogative of a few.

- A 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribes has deprived Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes also of their due representation.
- The court referred to the Indira Sawhney judgment, which caps reservation at 50%.

Details:

- The judgment by the Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra said it was an obnoxious idea to have only tribals teach tribals.
- “It is an obnoxious idea that tribals only should teach the tribals. When there are other local residents, why they cannot teach is not understandable. The action defies logic and is arbitrary. Merit cannot be denied in toto by providing reservation,” the bench observed.
- “Citizens have equal rights, and the total exclusion of others by creating an opportunity for one class is not contemplated by the founding fathers of the Constitution of India,” Justice Mishra wrote.

3. Cabinet approves ₹15,000-cr. Package

Context:

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹15,000-crore investment package for the [COVID-19](#) emergency response and health system preparedness.

Details:

- The key objectives of the package include mounting emergency response to slow and limit COVID-19.
- Post facto approval was given to the package at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The funds will be used in three phases with
 - ₹7,774 crore for immediate use.
 - The rest for medium-term support, that is one to four years.
- The plan includes:
 - Developing diagnostics and COVID-19-dedicated treatment facilities.
 - Centralising the procurement of essential medical equipment and drugs.
 - Strengthening the healthcare systems nationally and in States.
 - Bio-security preparedness.
 - Pandemic research.
- Health workers, including ASHA workers, have been given insurance cover under the [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana](#).

Category: HEALTH

1. Stress and anxiety rise amid pandemic

What's in News?

Psychiatrists say there is a universal presence of anxiety due to COVID-19, but certain categories of people are highly vulnerable.

Issue:

Experts warn that the relationship between COVID-19 and mental health problems are “bi-directional”: such illnesses are not merely consequences of the pandemic, but an inability to deal with them can lead to the spread of COVID-19 infection.

People susceptible to anxiety, stress and other psychological issues:

- The first category involves those dealing with poverty and unemployment and the second category includes those with psycho-social issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc.
- There is also a small minority of people who have COVID-19 infection, or have a family member who has tested positive, who have reported heightened anxiety.
- Many frontline workers, such as ASHA workers, are also extremely susceptible to stress.
- Caregivers of those with mental illnesses also burn out as they try to cope with multiple responsibilities such as working from home, managing domestic chores, the threat of a job loss, etc.

Way forward:

- Senior doctors recommend that policymakers ensure that relief services are delivered with empathy.
 - It is said that it is important to ensure that people’s dignity is not challenged.
 - If people get humiliated through this process of seeking help, this will have a long term impact.
- With the real problems being hunger, shelter and clothing, it is advised that the mental health issues will not be solved merely by counselling, but through a multi-dimensional approach that includes financial support.
- Devising a policy without any delay, including one to prevent suicides is the need of the hour.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Military satellite launched, claims Iran

Context:

Iran has said that it put its first military satellite into orbit, making it an emerging world power.

Details:

- Sepahnews, the Revolutionary Guards’ website, said the satellite, dubbed 'Noor' meaning “light” in Persian, had been launched from the Markazi desert, a vast expanse in Iran’s central plateau.
- The satellite orbited the Earth at 425 kilometres above sea level, said Sepahnews.
- The Noor satellite was launched by a three-stage rocket which the Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said was powered by a combination of solid and liquid fuels.
- The rocket bore the name Qassed, meaning messenger.
- Although there is technological overlap between space launches and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), Iran denies that the aim of its space programme is to pursue ICBM technology.

Note:

- Iran launched its first satellite into orbit in 2009. It then performed successful satellite launches in 2011, 2012 and 2015, all using Safir rockets.
- This mission is the first successful satellite launch by Iran since February 2015.
- It is the first by the previously-unknown Qased launch vehicle.

- Iran's previous satellite launch attempts used Safir and Simorgh rockets, which the country claimed pursued peaceful purposes.

The U.S reaction:

- The US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said the launch violated a 2015 UN Security Council resolution.
- The 2015 UN resolution Pompeo was referring to was intended to endorse a nuclear deal with Iran that the US abrogated in 2018. The resolution (UNSC 2231) said: "Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology."

2. Amid pandemic crisis, President returns to his favourite agenda

Context:

- U.S. President Donald Trump has taken his administration's war on immigration to the next level with his decision to temporarily suspend issuance of green cards.
- He has also confirmed that he would sign an order partially blocking immigration to the U.S., in a move he argues would protect workers from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Issues:

- About 22 million Americans have lost their jobs since the outbreak forced a global shutdown.
- The U.S. is the world's hardest-hit country, and health care infrastructure in hotspots such as New York has struggled to cope.

Rationale behind the decision:

- With about 22 million Americans losing jobs, the pandemic has devastated the economy. By pausing immigration, the idea is to help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs as America reopens.

Details:

- The order would not impact immigrants already living in the U.S. or those who come on temporary visas for work or travel, including H-1B visa holders and temporary farm workers.
- American citizens will still be able to bring their spouses and children to the U.S., but the relatives of the current green card holders or those who want to apply for green cards based on a job offer would be blocked.
- Trump has said that after 60 days, the policy will be evaluated based on economic conditions in the country.
 - Between October 2018 and October 2019, the U.S. had issued about 5,77,000 green cards.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Centre, State can fix sugarcane price, says SC

Context:

A Constitution Bench of the [Supreme Court](#) has held that both the Central and State governments have the power to fix the price of sugarcane under the Concurrent List of the Constitution.

Background:

The case revolved around a petition by the Western Uttar Pradesh Sugar Mills Association questioning if the State had the power to fix a minimum price when a similar price had already been set by a Central legislation.

Details:

- Noting that both the Centre and states have concurrent powers on the subject, a five-judge Constitution Bench, however, said the latter were free to fix sugarcane price higher than the minimum price fixed by the former.
 - The five-judge Bench said that even though a State cannot fix a minimum price if the Centre has already fixed it, the State is always welcome to fix the advised price.
- States can't fix sugarcane price lower than the statutory minimum price fixed by the Centre.
- The price fixed by Centre is the "Statutory Minimum Price" and the price fixed by state is "Advisory Minimum Price".
- There was no conflict between the two until the Advisory minimum price was higher than the statutory minimum price of sugarcane, it said, adding, the Centre has complete authority to set the statutory minimum price and states can fix an advisory price, which needed to be higher than the one fixed by Centre.

2. Global remittances will see a sharp fall: WB

Context:

The World Bank Group in a report "COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens" has said that global remittances are projected to experience their sharpest decline in recent times — 20% — owing to migrants losing jobs and wages because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- The pandemic and declining oil prices are likely to reduce remittances from the U.S., the U.K., and EU countries to South Asia, resulting in a projected fall of 22% in remittances to \$109 billion.
 - In 2019, these remittances grew by 6.1%.
- In India, remittances for 2020 are projected to fall by 23% to \$64 billion.
 - They grew 5.5% in the previous year to \$83 billion.
- The sharpest decline was for Europe and Central Asia — where Russia is a strong source of income and the Ruble had weakened against the U.S. dollar.
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia were next in terms of projected declines in remittances.

Importance of remittances:

- Remittances are crucial in low and middle income countries.
- Remittances are used in financing household and family expenses — such as on higher education.
- Studies have shown that higher remittances improve nutritional outcomes by increasing investments in higher education.

Conclusion:

- A fall in these remittances puts various positive outcomes at risk, the World Bank has warned. This is especially true at a time when households were tackling food shortages and financing livelihood needs.
- It is believed that quick actions that make it easier to send and receive remittances can provide much-needed support to the lives of migrants and their families. These include treating remittance services as essential and making them more accessible to migrants.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**1. JNTBGRI to play key role in sequencing of Indian species****Context:**

The Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) has been selected as one of the Biological Knowledge and Resource Centres of the Indian Initiative on Earth BioGenome Sequencing (IIEBS).

Details:

- JNTBGRI will play a key role in a nationwide project to decode the genetic information of all known species of plants and animals in the country.
 - With over 5,000 plant species in its field gene bank and conservatories, JNTBGRI has a major role in conserving the endemic flora of the Western Ghats.
- The whole genome sequencing of 1,000 species of plants and animals will be taken up in the initial phase of IIEBS to be completed over a period of five years.

Earth BioGenome Project (EBP):

- The project is a part of the Earth BioGenome Project.
- It is an international initiative to catalogue life on the planet.
- It will eventually lead to the generation of the genetic blueprint of all living forms.
- EBP aims to sequence the genetic codes of all of earth's eukaryotic biodiversity over a period of 10 years.
- The digital repository of genome sequences is expected to provide the critical infrastructure for better understanding of ecosystems and conservation of biodiversity as well as the development of new treatments for infectious and inherited diseases, agricultural products, biomaterials and biological fuels.
- The project will enable collection and preservation of endangered and economically important species. The decoded genetic information will also be a useful tool to prevent biopiracy.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**1. MGR Medical University makes 'vaccine candidate'****Context:**

The Tamil Nadu Dr. MGR Medical University has developed a vaccine candidate against SARS-CoV-2 through reverse vaccinology.

Details:

- In the first phase, the university developed a synthetic polypeptide that can bind the viral genome, and is all set to move to the next phase of research.
- They worked with the viral genome sequence using bioinformatics.
- They have identified a synthetic polypeptide which can bind the viral genome. In the next stage, the polypeptide must be tested on tissue cell lines. Testing on tissue cultures will start after approval from regulatory agencies.

Reverse Vaccinology:

- Reverse vaccinology is an improvement on vaccinology that employs bioinformatics.
- It is the name given to the examination of the genome of an organism in order to identify novel antigens and epitopes that might constitute vaccine candidates.
- It is the technique of identifying the proteins that are exposed on the surface by using genome instead of the microorganism.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. A time for planetary solidarity

Introduction

- This article discusses cooperation beyond the national boundaries at the time of crisis. It looks at contributions made by individuals, communities, and nations to respond to a planetary crisis within days.
- Global solutions to the pandemic will need helping hands from strong leadership at the national level, resources deployed to reduce the spread, bringing behavioural changes in the people and strengthening local institutions.
- Added to this, responsible civil society and non-state actors should show compassion towards the vulnerable sections.

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

- The **Internet** has been used extensively for learning and work previously. Now, the scale of international video meetings and virtual classes taking place is unprecedented.
- In **certain sectors** such as accounting, desk-based research and software development, working remotely turns out to be profitable to companies.

- **Climate change and COVID-19** are two very different challenges, but they do have some key things in common. Both are global - they do not respect national boundaries - and both require countries to work together to find solutions.
 - The drastic reduction in flights, for instance, has affected the airline industry adversely but also highlighted the fact that many flight trips during 'normal' times are in fact unnecessary.
 - For example, a return flight, economy class, from Delhi to New York releases about 0.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide (it is twice as much in premium economy). This is half of India's per capita annual emissions.
- **Industrial production and electricity generation** also do not have to go back to pre-COVID-19 levels.
 - Life under lockdown has already demonstrated that there are essentials, **superfluous items and luxuries**.
 - Responsible consumer action and new social norms to limit the last two can make a dent on greenhouse gas emissions while promoting simpler and potentially happier ways of life.

Green Growth

The focus of green growth strategies is ensuring that natural assets can deliver their full economic potential on a sustainable basis.

- Unfortunately, the popular version of 'green growth' is flawed because it assumes that normal business activity can be made more sustainable merely by adding renewable technology and trees to it.

Changes that can be introduced in the post COVID-19 World

- For a sizeable fraction of the workforce, work from home has to be encouraged, better organised and provide enhanced freedom.
 - It should be the norm in many sectors and people could work from home at least half the time, thus reducing travel needs, reducing [greenhouse gas](#) emissions, and simplifying child care and other domestic services.
- An even more revolutionary approach to education and learning is conceivable. Online schooling and college education without paywalls is already available, but if it were expanded to develop open access schools and universities, the scam of high admissions fees can be altogether eliminated.
- A transformation of work is also needed for the entrepreneurial class, where greater flexibility, coordination and access to markets are made easier.
- In addition, social measures must be strengthened to protect the health and safety of the poorest.
 - Public hospitals need to be improved and have the capacity to respond to pandemics and related crises.
 - Access to care during emergency and beyond should be equally available to all.

Conclusion

- The global community has shown that it can act to address a crisis, with governments, businesses and individuals taking measures and changing behaviours in response to the pandemic. When we work together, even small personal actions when put together, can make a big difference, helping us to overcome huge challenges.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. The village is still relevant

Background

- The economic reforms that kick-started in the 1990s opened the doors of the Indian economy. State monopoly was replaced by private sector participation.
- Public health and education were two areas in which India took a decisive turn in the 1990s and were opened up for private enterprise.
- This was viewed as a major policy reform, a necessary part of the bigger package of economic reforms.

Public-Private Partnership

- The State began regulating the private sector by issuing rules to comply by and took a back seat. Villages were no more regarded viable as sites of public investment. Its infrastructure suffered. Chronic shortage of functionaries became the norm and the major sufferers were the villagers.
- This lack of investment led to many villagers migrating from the rural set up to the urban areas.
 - The service providers and the administrators felt providing basic amenities such as running water, electricity and jobs to rural people becomes easier if they move to a city.
- This kind of thinking had considerable academic support. They argued that agriculture, the main resource of livelihood in the countryside, was no longer profitable enough to attract the young.
- Welfare state activities were gradually withdrawn and doles were provided in the form of subsistence-level provision of food, literacy and disease control.
 - Special measures were also designed to select the 'best' among rural children and make them competitive enough to survive in the urban world that was treated as mainstream.

As we begin to imagine the post-coronavirus scenario, a key question to contemplate is whether we should revisit the policies put in place during the 1990s.

Imbalance and invisibility

- This general framework justified discriminatory funding in every sphere, including health and education. No serious public investment could be made in villages. Even as medical education and teacher training became increasingly privatised, the availability of qualified doctors and teachers willing to work in villages dwindled.
- In the city where these villagers had lived for years, they were part of the informal economy which offers no protection against exigencies. The new urban architecture denies them visibility too.

Privatisation denies access to the most vulnerable

- Most vulnerable (the old and sick) are most dependent on public healthcare systems.
- Privatization and introduction of market-like instruments in healthcare make necessary care accessibility dependent on one's capacity to pay and perpetuate inequalities in health and in access to healthcare services.

Conclusion

- The villagers thus deserve to have new sites and forms of livelihood. They also deserve systems of health and education that are not designed as feeders to distant centres.
- Initiatives in this direction will make both cities and villages more sustainable and capable of coping with the kind of crisis we are currently facing.
- Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj (Village Republic) can be interpreted and appreciated in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. He used to say that India's soul lives in its villages. To Gandhi, villages were the basic units of social organisation. Therefore, the villages should be self-sufficient in the matters of their vital requirements.

1. Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs

For more on this, refer to:

[CNA dated March 19, 2020](#)

[CNA dated March 18, 2020](#)

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Lockdown leaves Bihar's litchi growers in the lurch

What's in News?

The prolonged lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic has put Bihar's more than 45,000 litchi farmers in a bind as they stare at imminent losses amounting to almost ₹1,000 crore this year.

- Bihar, especially Muzaffarpur district, accounts for almost 40% of the total litchi production in the country.
- In 2019, litchi business was severely hit by rumours that its consumption leads to encephalitis.

2. Centre cuts non-urea fertilizer subsidy

What's in News?

The Centre has cut the subsidy for non-urea fertilizers this year to ₹22,186 crore which is about 3% lower than what was the estimated expenditure on the nutrient based subsidies in 2019-20.

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) also approved the inclusion of a complex fertilizer, ammonium phosphate, under the nutrient-based subsidy scheme.
- The scheme was set up in 2010 to ensure the availability of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers to farmers at an affordable price, as the retail prices of such non-urea fertilisers are decontrolled and set by manufacturers.

Read more about [Nutrient-based subsidy scheme](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Earth Bio-Genome Project will sequence and catalog the DNA of all of Earth's eukaryotic biodiversity.
2. Eukaryotic species include all plants, animals, fungi and other organisms whose cells have a clearly defined nucleus surrounded by a membrane.
3. Eukaryotic cells are typically much larger than those of prokaryotes.

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Earth Bio-Genome Project (EBP) is an international consortium of scientists which would undertake the project that aims to sequence, catalog, and characterize the genomes of every eukaryotic biodiversity on Earth, over a period of 10 years.
- The EBP project will help to create a detailed genetic sequence and reveal evolutionary connections among genus, orders and families that will make up the Digital Library of life.
- Eukaryotic species include all plants, animals, fungi and other organisms whose cells have a clearly defined nucleus surrounded by a membrane.
- Eukaryotic cells are typically much larger than those of prokaryotes, having a volume of around 10,000 times greater than the prokaryotic cell. They have a variety of internal membrane-bound structures, called organelles, and a cytoskeleton composed of microtubules, microfilaments, and intermediate filaments, which play an important role in defining the cell's organization and shape.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme:

1. Under the Scheme, a fixed amount of subsidy is decided by the government on an annual basis and is provided on each grade of subsidized Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers, including Urea.
2. In India, urea is the only controlled fertilizer and is sold at a statutory notified uniform sale price.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Under the **Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme**, a fixed amount of subsidy is decided by the government on an annual basis and is provided on each grade of subsidized Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers, except for Urea based on the nutrient content present in them.
- The scheme was launched in 2010. It is largely for secondary nutrients like N, P, S and K and micronutrients which are very important for crop growth and development.
- In India, urea is the only controlled fertilizer and is sold at a statutory notified uniform sale price. The MRP of urea is statutorily fixed by the Government of India.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Both the Central and State governments have the power to fix the price of sugarcane under the Concurrent List of the Constitution.
2. The Centre has complete authority to set the statutory minimum price for Sugarcane.
3. States can't fix sugarcane price higher than the statutory minimum price fixed by the Centre.

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

- a. 3 only
- b. 1 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1 and 2 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

Both the Central and State governments have the power to fix the price of sugarcane under the Concurrent List of the Constitution. The Centre has complete authority to set the statutory minimum price and states can fix an advisory price, which needed to be higher than the one fixed by Centre. States can't fix sugarcane price lesser than the statutory minimum price fixed by the Centre.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Reverse Vaccinology:

1. It is the technique of identifying the proteins that are exposed on the surface by using genome instead of the microorganism.
2. Reverse vaccinology employs bioinformatics.
3. It has been used on several bacterial vaccines.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Reverse vaccinology is an improvement on vaccinology that employs bioinformatics.
- It is the name given to the examination of the genome of an organism in order to identify novel antigens and epitopes that might constitute vaccine candidates.
- It is the technique of identifying the proteins that are exposed on the surface by using genome instead of the microorganism.
- It was first used against Serogroup B meningococcus. Since then, it has been used on several other bacterial vaccines.
- Reverse vaccinology was used for designing vaccines against some diseases eg. Anthrax, Endocarditis, Meningitidis, etc.

1. Multilevel governance and multilateralism will help in stabilizing the post COVID-19 world. Elaborate. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Post-retirement appointment of judges undermines confidence in the judiciary and in constitutional democracy. Suggest alternatives to guarantee clear cut separation of powers and impartiality in the dispensation of justice. (15 marks, 250 words)

