

3 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- [1. Geo-fencing app will be used to locate quarantine violators](#)
- [2. PM asks States to suggest plan for staggered end to lockdown](#)

C. GS 3 Related

SECURITY

- [1. India to raise Sheikh Saeed case at FATF if he walks free](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

- [1. Safe forests, safe people: On diseases of animal origin](#)

HEALTH

- [1. Quarantine and the law](#)

F. Prelims Facts

- [1. Operation Sanjeevani](#)

G. Tidbits

- [1. Forest department comes to the rescue of tribals](#)
- [2. Doctors wary of BCG vaccine study](#)
- [3. DRDO develops bio suit, sealant for safety gear](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. **Geo-fencing app will be used to locate quarantine violators**

Context:

The Centre is using powers under the Indian Telegraph Act to fetch information from telecom companies every 15 minutes to track [COVID-19](#) cases across the country.

COVID-19 Quarantine Alert System (CQAS):

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has shared a standard operating procedure (SOP) with all telecom service providers regarding the application called COVID-19 Quarantine Alert System (CQAS).

- The government has tested this application which triggers e-mails and SMS alerts to an authorised government agency if a person has jumped quarantine or escaped from isolation, based on the person's mobile phone's cell tower location.
- The CQAS will prepare a list of mobile numbers, segregating them on the basis of telecom service providers, and the location data provided by the companies will be run on the application to create geo-fencing.
- The "geo-fencing" is accurate by up to 300 m.

What is Geo-fencing?

- A geofence is a virtual perimeter for a real-world geographic area.
- Geofencing is a location-based service in which an app or other software uses GPS, RFID, Wi-Fi or cellular data to trigger a pre-programmed action when a mobile device or RFID tag enters or exits a virtual boundary set up around a geographical location, known as a geofence.

How does the application work?

- The system will collate phone data, including the device's location, on a common secured platform and alert the local agencies in case of a violation by COVID-19 patients under watch or in isolation.
- It is said that the location information is received periodically over a secure network for the authorised cases with due protection of the data received.

Details:

- The States have been asked to seek the approval of their Home Secretaries under the provisions of Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, for the specified mobile phone numbers to request the DoT to provide information by email or SMS in case of violation of "geo-fencing".
- The particular provision under the Act, amended multiple times since 1885, authorises the State or the Centre to access information of a user's phone data in case of "occurrence of any public emergency or in the interest of the public safety."
- Kerala was one of the first States to use geo-fencing to track COVID-19 cases.

Addressing the privacy concerns:

- It said that the phone number should be deleted from the system after the period for which location monitoring is required is over.
- The data would be deleted four weeks from thereon.
- The data collected shall be used only for the purpose of Health Management in the context of COVID-19 and is strictly not for any other purposes. Any violation in this regard would attract penal provisions under the relevant laws.

Issues:

- The geo-fencing will only work if the quarantined person has a mobile phone from Airtel, Vodafone-Idea or Reliance Jio.
- "BSNL/MTNL" do not support location based services. BSNL and MTNL are government-owned.

2. PM asks States to suggest plan for staggered end to lockdown

Context:

The Prime Minister, at his second video conference with Chief Ministers, told them that it was important to formulate a common exit strategy to ensure staggered re-emergence of the population once the lockdown ends.

Details:

- It was emphasised that the collective goal of all should be to “save every Indian”.
- The states are advised to brainstorm and send suggestions for the exit strategy.
- “Testing, tracing, isolating and quarantine” was declared the first priority for the next few weeks.
- It is emphasised that the supply lines for medical equipment and drugs and raw materials needed for the manufacture of these products need to be kept seamless, even more than supplies of other products.
- The PM urged that district-level disease surveillance officers should be appointed as soon as possible to make sure that penetration of this strategy is optimum. Data collected from private laboratories allowed to test should be collated district-wise to be utilised for further strategising on tackling the pandemic.
- States have been urged to promote and encourage the use of immunity boosting methods used by traditional systems of medicines in India such as Ayurveda, as fatalities were high among those with compromised immunity.

Steps taken:

- This being the harvest season in many parts of the country, farmers and labourers are exempted from the lockdown. However, they are advised to maintain some physical distancing even on fields.
- As for procurement, suggestions were called for, to go beyond the route of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC). It was advised that a truck pooling scheme should also be worked out with farmers for ferrying produce to the market.
- The Centre would release ₹11,000 crore from the State Disaster Relief Fund which should be used for efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The states have been urged to ensure that monies and grains released under [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana](#) is disbursed speedily.
- Volunteers of the National Cadet Corps and the National Service Scheme would also be recruited in the effort to combat COVID-19.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. India to raise Sheikh Saeed case at FATF if he walks free

Context:

The decision by a Pakistani court in Sindh to acquit Ahmed Omar Sheikh Saeed of murdering journalist Daniel Pearl will be raised by India at the next meeting of the Financial Action Task Force, where Pakistan’s Grey List status will come up for discussion.

Who is Ahmed Omar Sheikh Saeed?

- The British-born Saeed has been in a Pakistani prison since he was arrested for the kidnapping and killing of the Wall Street Journal’s correspondent in Pakistan in 2002.
- He was in Indian prisons from 1994-1999.

- In December 1999, Saeed was released along with Masood Azhar and another alleged terrorist Mushtaq Zargar by the Indian government in exchange for 155 hostages aboard the hijacked IC-814.
- Once he was released along with Azhar at Kandahar, Saeed is believed to have become a key aide to Osama Bin Laden and was allegedly a part of Bin Laden's plans for the Al-Qaeda's attacks in the U.S.

Details:

- The next FATF meeting is expected in June 2020, but may be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- India plans to not just raise Saeed's history with terrorism in India, but his links with Al-Qaeda and, more specifically, his role in the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. at the FATF meeting.
 - Saeed has not yet been tried in that case and the Pakistani government's actions in the next few days would be closely watched.
 - Officials indicated that if Pakistan's federal government doesn't file a strong appeal against the acquittal and Saeed walks free, it would also show how transnational norms against terror financing were being flouted by Islamabad.

Note:

- It was noted by the Financial Action Task Force ([FATF](#)) that Pakistan had largely addressed 14 of 27 action items, with varying levels of progress made on the rest of the action plan.
- The FATF plenary meeting at Paris concluded in February 2020, retained Pakistan in the 'Grey List' in which it was placed by the FATF in June 2018.
- The FATF had strongly urged Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by June 2020. It has urged the country to continue to work on implementing its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Safe forests, safe people: On diseases of animal origin

Introduction

- Scientific evidence and spread of virus across the world shows the invisible processes where pathogens originally found in wild animals were later transmitted to humans.
- Diseases of animal origin such as [Ebola](#), HIV, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, bird flu and swine flu have raised alarm over potential pandemics in recent years, and the **COVID-19 pandemic** has confirmed the worst fears of scientists.
- The infection is assumed to have surfaced in a wet market that kept live animals in Wuhan, China. It highlights the following issues:
 - Wild Animals are hunted for food
 - Humans are clearing forests on a massive scale, mostly for farming
 - The wild species which harbored viruses came closer to domestic animals and humans

Examples

- The **Nipah Virus outbreak** was caused by rampant deforestation which resulted in fruit bats losing their forest habitat and venturing onto farms, where they spread the virus to pigs, which then jumped species to humans.
- **Hendra virus** is a virus that mainly infects large fruit bats (flying foxes) which can be passed on to horses.
- The **Kyasanur Forest disease** outbreak came after the encroachment of cattle and farms into Indian forests.
- Virus-carrying rodents can be spotted in deforested areas.

This underscores the value of maintaining viable ecosystems, and eliminating the need for wild bats to colonise human surroundings.

Deforestation a strong driver of infectious disease transmission

- There is concern about rising economic activity, such as road building and mining, cutting through forests, bringing more people in close contact with animals.
 - This means that infectious diseases which were once confined to wildlife have now spilled over to people in areas undergoing rapid forest clearing.
 - **Biodiversity in forests harmlessly retains dangerous viruses** and other pathogens among a vast pool of wild animals, away from people.
- Many viruses exist harmlessly with their host animals in forests, because the animals have co-evolved with them. But humans can become unwitting hosts for pathogens when they venture into or change forest habitat.

What Government can and should learn?

Governments should stop viewing undisturbed landscapes as an impediment to economic growth.

- This should serve as a dire warning to the government that hasty permissions granted for new roads, dams, mines and power projects in already weakened forests can unleash more scourges.
- It would do well to roll back its dilution of the environmental clearance system, strengthen it with a mandate to the States, and leave protected areas to scientific experts.
- There is mounting evidence that environmental protection confers health protection.
- Pristine forests with diverse species keep viruses virtually bottled up, out of man's way. They should be left undisturbed.

Conclusion

- To protect national and global biosecurity, it is imperative that we protect our forests and keep forests intact.
- Therefore, the goal now is to deal with the trade in wildlife and deforestation which would help in arresting future outbreaks and also to better understand how these viruses might spread, and to potentially develop vaccines.

Category: HEALTH

1. Quarantine and the law

Meaning

Quarantine is considered the oldest mechanism to reduce the rapid spread of bacterial infections and viral onslaughts. It has been legally sanctioned by all jurisdictions in the world for the maintenance of public health and to control the transmission of diseases.

- **Quarantine** is imposed to separate and restrict the movement of persons, who may have been exposed to infectious disease, but not yet known to be ill.
- But, **isolation** is a complete separation from others of a person known or reasonably believed to be infected with communicable diseases.

Quarantine Settings

- As per the WHO guidelines, possible quarantine settings are:
 - Hotels or dormitories and well-ventilated single rooms or homes, where a distance of at least one metre can be maintained from other members.

Balancing individual rights with public interest

- In the year 1990, an employee of the World Wildlife Federation was diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
 - He was terminated from service and detained for 64 days in quarantine-like isolation under Goa Public Health (Amendment) Act, 1957 (GPH).
- The Bombay High Court (1990) felt that solitary detention was a serious infringement of basic human rights guaranteed to the individual, but held that under unusual situations and exceptional exigencies, such **isolated detentions are justifiable for the cause of public health**.
 - Such isolation, undoubtedly, has several serious consequences. It is an invasion upon the liberty of a person. It can affect a person very adversely in many matters, including economic condition.
 - But in matters involving a threat to the health of the community, individual rights have to be balanced with public interest. In fact, individual liberty and public health are not opposed to each other but are well in accord.

The reason assigned by the High Court to **uphold the quarantine was that even if there was a conflict between the right of an individual and public interest, the former must yield to the latter**.

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- In India, the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, a law of colonial vintage, empowers the state to take special measures, including inspection of passengers, segregation of people and other special steps for the better prevention of the spread of dangerous diseases.
- It was amended in 1956 to confer powers upon the Central government to prescribe regulations or impose restrictions in the whole or any parts of India to control and prevent the outbreak of hazardous diseases.

For more information, refer to [12 March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

F. Prelims Facts

1. Operation Sanjeevani

What's in News?

An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J transport aircraft delivered 6.2 tonnes of essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives under Operation Sanjeevani.

- At the request of the government of Maldives, the IAF aircraft activated Operation Sanjeevani and lifted these medicines from airports in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Madurai before flying to the Maldives.
- These medicines and consumables were procured from India but couldn't be transported due to the 21-day lockdown imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- Among other things, these medicines include influenza vaccines, anti-viral drugs such as lopinavir and ritonavir — which have been used to treat patients with COVID-19 in other countries — medicines for cardiac conditions, kidney ailments, hypertension, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, allergies and cancer treatment, anticonvulsants, as well as catheters, nebulisers, urine bags and infant feeding tubes.

G. Tidbits

1. Forest department comes to the rescue of tribals

What's in News?

In Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, the Forest Department has bought tribal products collected by the tribespeople of the Agasthyavanam Biological Park (ABP) and the Neyyar and Peppara forest ranges as part of a market intervention initiative to soften the lockdown impact.

- The ambitious project, Vanika, formally launched by the Chief Wildlife Warden is being undertaken by procuring perishables above the prevailing market rates.
- Buoyed by the initial response, the Department is toying with the idea of extending the scheme to other tribal regions in the State.

2. Doctors wary of BCG vaccine study

What's in News?

Doctors and scientists in India have expressed caution on a study which argues that countries that have deployed the BCG-tuberculosis vaccine in their immunisation programmes have seen fewer deaths from COVID-19.

- The study argues that 55 middle and high-income countries chosen for the analysis that have a current universal BCG policy had 0.78 deaths per million people, whereas middle and high income countries that never had a universal BCG policy (five countries) had a larger mortality rate, with 16.39 deaths per million people, a significant variation.
- The BCG vaccine is known to confer a strong immune response that have protective effects beyond just staving off a tuberculosis infection and because COVID-19 was particularly lethal to the elderly, those countries where the elderly were likely to have had a BCG shot in their childhood were likely to be better protected against the coronavirus, the authors argue.

Findings:

- Italy, where the COVID-19 mortality is very high, never implemented universal BCG vaccination.
- On the other hand, Japan [and which has a BCG policy since 1947] has maintained a low mortality rate despite not implementing the most strict forms of social isolation.

Note:

- Low and middle-income countries, even if they had universal immunisation policies, were excluded from the analysis because they were also likely to have low testing rates for COVID-19 infection and therefore fewer reported deaths.
- India wasn't included in the analysis.

3. DRDO develops bio suit, sealant for safety gear

What's in News?

In a major breakthrough, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) has developed a special sealant as an alternative to seam sealing tape which is critical in personal protective equipment (PPE).

- The DRDO has prepared a special sealant as an alternative to seam sealing tape based on the sealant used in submarine applications.
- A bio suit has also been developed to keep medical and other personnel engaged in combating COVID-19.
- The bio suit has been subjected to rigorous testing for textile parameters as well as protection against infection from synthetic blood.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following countries are currently under FATF "Grey List":

1. Iran
2. Pakistan
3. Yemen
4. Zimbabwe
5. North Korea

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Currently, North Korea and Iran are the only two countries included in the black list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Bahamas, Botswana, Cambodia, Ghana, Iceland, Mongolia, Panama, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Yemen and Zimbabwe have been included in the grey list of the FATF.

Q2. Recently, tonnes of essential medicines and hospital consumables were airlifted by the Indian Air Force to Maldives under:

- a. Operation Sanjeevani
- b. Operation Amrut
- c. Operation Sahyog
- d. Operation Vanilla

Answer: a

Explanation:

An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130J transport aircraft delivered 6.2 tonnes of essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives under Operation Sanjeevani.

Q3. "BCG vaccine" or "Bacille Calmette-Guérin vaccine" is administered to children to prevent:

- 1. Measles
 - 2. Tuberculous Meningitis
 - 3. Miliary Tuberculosis
 - 4. Leprosy
- a. 1 and 2 only
 - b. 2 and 3 only
 - c. 2, 3 and 4 only
 - d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: c

Explanation:

BCG (Bacille Calmette-Guérin) vaccine offers partial protection against some forms of Tuberculosis like Tuberculous Meningitis, Miliary disease and also leprosy. Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) is the most common form of central nervous system tuberculosis (TB) and has very high morbidity and mortality.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve:

- 1. It is a protected area in the Eastern Ghats.
- 2. It is a part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme.
- 3. Shendurney, Peppara and Neyyar wildlife sanctuaries are located in Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is located in the southernmost end of the Western Ghats. It was added to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves under the UNESCO, Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme in 2016. Three wildlife sanctuaries, Shendurney, Peppara and Neyyar, are located in the site, as well as the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger reserve.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Preventing the loss of forests could reduce the likelihood of future virus outbreaks. Analyze. (10 Marks, 150 Words)
2. What are some of the innovative ideas and technological tools employed in India to help tackle COVID-19? (10 Marks, 150 Words)

