

9 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. ‘Importance of soft power is increasing globally’

Context:

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) celebrates its foundation day on 9th of April.

Role of ICCR in the present world:

- The ICCR was established when there was neither the concept of soft power nor was the term in use.

- Naturally then, the activities were limited in terms of their number and their diverse character as well.
- Majorly, it was about scholarships to foreign students, cultural exchanges involving artistes and youths as also establishing some chairs in some universities, etc.
- Now, in a world where every nation wants to influence and occupy the mind space of the global community and thereby add to its prowess, the ICCR has a major role to play.
- Owing to the limitations of military might which are more obvious, the importance of soft power is increasing.

Indian Council for Cultural Relations

- The ICCR is an autonomous organisation of the Government of India involved in India's external cultural relations, through cultural exchanges with other countries and their peoples.
- It was founded in 1950 by [Maulana Abul Kalam Azad](#), independent India's first Education Minister.
- Its objectives are:
 - To actively participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes pertaining to India's external cultural relations.
 - To foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries.
 - To promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people, and to develop relations with nations.

2. Afghan government frees 100 Taliban prisoners as part of peace process

Context:

The Afghan government freed 100 [Taliban](#) prisoners as a first step in a peace process with the hardline Islamists.

Details:

- The development comes despite the group's suspension of talks on a planned prisoner exchange crucial to moving to formal talks to end years of war.
- Differences over the prisoner release question have been complicating U.S. brokered attempts to create a lasting peace agreement to end more than 18 years of conflict in Afghanistan.
- A February 2020 pact between the United States and the Taliban, under which U.S.-led international forces will withdraw in phases in exchange for Taliban security guarantees, is the best chance to reduce U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan.
 - It required the Afghan government — which was not a signatory to the accord — to free 5,000 Taliban prisoners, and for the insurgents to release 1,000 pro-government captives in return.
 - In the accord, Washington promised the withdrawal of US and foreign troops from Afghanistan by July 2021 provided the Taliban start talks with Kabul and adhere to other guarantees.
- But peace hinges on talks between the U.S.-backed Afghan government and the militants.
- A prisoner exchange is meant to build confidence on both sides for those talks.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Wildlife board holds virtual meet

Context:

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) had its first-ever video-conferencing meet where infrastructure projects in 11 States were cleared.

Environmental Clearance:

- Projects that encroach into forests or protected reserves require NBWL nod as part of the government's environmental clearance process.
- Projects are appraised at the State level and then subsequently presented to a large committee of wildlife experts, the Chief Wildlife Wardens of States, top officials in the Union Environment Ministry and Forest Ministry and, the Environment Minister.

Details:

- Most of the projects are given in-principal approval, though only the formal minutes of the meeting would reveal the conditions which projects would have to adhere to.
- Of the 11 developmental projects given approval were,
 - Two infrastructure proposals related to setting up power transmission lines and constructing a highway in Goa, which would boost tourism.
 - Nagpur-Mumbai superhighway.
 - A small-scale stone mining project in Kota, Rajasthan.
 - An underground pumped storage facility for generating hydroelectricity.
 - An Indian Railways project to build a railway bridge in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.
 - Irrigation projects in Uttarakhand and Telangana.
 - Defence projects in Uttarakhand.

Also read about [Environmental Impact Assessment](#).

2. Poaching, not virus, is the bigger threat, says tiger expert

Context:

Wildlife scientist and an expert on tiger conservation has cautioned that a spurt in poaching during the lockdown period poses a greater threat to wildlife than the coronavirus.

Details:

- The warning came after the advisory issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for immediate preventive measures to stop the spread of the virus from humans to animals and vice versa in national parks, sanctuaries and tiger reserves.
 - The advisory came after a tiger at the Bronx zoo in the U.S. tested positive for the [novel coronavirus](#).
- However, it was pointed out that wild tiger populations had high birth rates and high annual mortality rates and the coronavirus-related threats were highly unlikely to cause population declines.
- On the contrary, it was said that the real threat to tigers was posed by a surge in local poaching of prey species during the lockdown.

- It was highlighted that the police were busy and forest officials faced movement constraints, emboldening a new wave of poachers.
- The ban on domestic meat sale early in the lockdown may have added to poaching.

Way forward:

- Precautionary measures need to be taken while handling captive animals, without relaxing anti-poaching activities.
- Personnel handling tiger operations should ensure that they are coronavirus negative.

Note:

- Novel Coronavirus is known to affect domestic cats.
- Also, a tiger at the Bronx zoo in the U.S. has tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

Read more about [Tiger Conservation in India](#).

3. Armyworm attack adds to Assam farmers' woes

Context:

A pest attack has added to the COVID-19-related woes of Assam's farmers. However, it is confined to a district.

Details:

- The Directorate of Agriculture said farmers in Northeastern Dhemaji district reported armyworm attack on the standing crops.
- The armyworm attack has been on patches where harvesting was not completed.
- The armyworm caterpillar, the larval stage of several species of moths, has a voracious appetite.
- The term "armyworm" can refer to several species, often describing the large-scale invasive behaviour of the species' larval stage.
- Entomologists say it feeds on more than 80 species of plants.

Issues:

- The possibility of the pest attacking other crops has not been ruled out as many farmers have been unable to harvest due to the lockdown despite the Centre's notification to ease restrictions on the farm sector.
- Pre-monsoon rains have eluded Assam so far. The weather has been a factor too.
- A major issue agriculture officials have been facing is reaching out to farmers. Fear of contracting the virus has made villagers block access to roads and all other gaps, not letting outsiders — even buyers of their produce — to come in and residents to go out.
- While the disconnect is a cause for concern, officials fear the winter crop cycle could be affected if the lockdown continues.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

Category: POLITY**1. Needed, greater decentralisation of power*****Introduction***

- The COVID- 19 pandemic has hit humanity very badly leading to a health and economic crisis in India. At this juncture, managing the pandemic is very crucial to avert casualties. In India we have a federal setup where the onus is on both the central and state Governments to take brisk measures.
- The state Governments in particular, have installed a series of measures to combat the onslaught of COVID-19.
 - The delivery of health care largely rests with the States, health being a state subject.
 - Even before the Union government invoked the Disaster Management Act, 2005, many State governments triggered the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.
- These actions may not be perfect but the start has been made.
 - Some of them have even disproportionately trampled upon basic civil liberties.
- But these decisions were communicated to the public with clarity and consideration, helping, in the process, to lay out a broad framework for the nation.

In doing so, they have **acted not merely as “laboratories of democracy”**, to paraphrase the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, but also as founts of reasoned authority.

Equally, though, as much as State governments have taken up positions of leadership, they have repeatedly found themselves throttled by the limitations.

Stifled by limitations

- One, they are not able to structure their welfare packages due to limited access to funds.
- Two, the states are unable to make swift payments for the purchase of health-care apparatus such as ventilators and personal protective equipment because of red tape.
- Three, the immense disruption of supply chains not only of essential goods and services but also of other systems of production and distribution, which has placed States in a position of grave economic uncertainty.

Division of powers

The Seventh Schedule to the Constitution divides responsibilities between Centre and the states.

- The Union government is tasked with matters of national importance, such as foreign affairs, defence, and airways.
- States take the responsibilities concerning public health and sanitation, agriculture, public order, and police. In these domains, the States’ power is plenary.

This federal architecture is fortified by a bicameral Parliament.

- A House of the People [[Lok Sabha](#)] comprising directly elected representatives and
- A Council of States [[Rajya Sabha](#)] comprising members elected by the legislatures of the States.

Financial Autonomy

In formulating this scheme of equal partnership, the framers were conscious of a need to make States financially autonomous. To that end they divided the power to tax between the two layers of government to ensure that the authority of the Union and the States did not overlap.

- Therefore, the **Centre**, for example, was accorded the power to tax all income other than agricultural income and to levy indirect taxes in the form of customs and excise duties.
- The sole power to tax the sale of goods and the entry of goods into a State was vested in the **State governments**.
- The underlying rationale was simple: States had to be guaranteed fiscal dominion to enable them to mould their policies according to the needs of their people.

Despite this plainly drawn arrangement, the Union has repeatedly displayed a desire to treat States, as the Supreme Court said in **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India**, as mere “**appendages of the Centre**”. Read more on the [S.R. Bommai Case](#).

- Time and again, efforts have been made to centralize financial and administrative power, to take away from the States their ability to act independently and freely.

Attempts to provide more funds to the states

- The Central Govt. accepted the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission to increase the share of the States in total tax revenues from 32% to 42%.
- But gains made by the States have been entirely offset by a simultaneous decline in share of grants and by a concomitant increase in the States’ own contribution towards expenditures on centrally sponsored schemes.

Other measures that have proved to be damaging

- The creation of a **Goods and Services Tax regime** which, far from achieving its core purpose of uniformity, has made the very survival of the States dependent on the grace of the Union.
- The Union government has also introduced a slew of **legislation as money bills**, in a bid to bypass the Rajya Sabha’s sanction.
- Similarly, the role of the **Governors** has been weaponized to consolidate political power.
- The most egregious among the moves made is the gutting of [Article 370](#) and the division of **Jammu and Kashmir** into two Union Territories without securing consent from the State Legislative Assembly.

Conclusion

- These limitations demonstrate an urgent need to decentralize administration, where States — and local bodies are allowed greater managerial freedom and the Union government will command less but coordinate more.
- Thus, a crisis of the kind that COVID-19 has wrought will show us that India needs greater decentralisation of power; that administration through a single central executive unit is unsuited to its diverse and heterogeneous polity.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. For better use: On MPLADS funds

Background

CNA dated April 17, 2020

Criticism about the scheme

- A conceptual flaw pointed out by experts is that it **goes against the separation of powers**. It allows individual legislators to encroach on the planning and implementation duties of the administration.
- **Jurists** have pointed out that the Constitution does not confer the power to spend public money on an individual legislator.
- Experts have called it out for weak monitoring. The **Supreme Court**, in fact, called for a robust accountability regime.
- The **CAG** has flagged instances of financial mismanagement and inflation of amounts spent.
- The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** recommended its abrogation altogether, highlighting the problems of the legislator stepping into the shoes of the executive.

Conclusion

- The current suspension gives some scope for a reconsideration of the scheme in its totality.

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. No lockdown for abuse

Context

- Increase in domestic violence cases in India and other countries since the imposition of lockdowns.
- It highlights the plight of many silent sufferers of domestic violence across the world in these times.

Why increase in domestic violence cases?

- The literature on domestic violence suggests that when men and/or women get employed, **domestic violence tends to fall as interactions between couples reduce**, going to work might have been the only reprieve from emotional abuse and violence.
- Under a lockdown, interaction time has increased and families have been left without access to the outside world. The literature also suggests that **violence is a way for the man to assert his notion of masculinity**.
- The current atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, food insecurity, and unemployment **may create feelings of inadequacy in men**.
- All these factors are only likely to aggravate tensions at home and make women victims of those tensions.
 - It is believed when people feel powerless in one area of their lives, they often seek to establish more power over other areas.
 - This is particularly dangerous in domestic violence situations, because domestic abuse is, at its core, an effort by one partner to dominate and establish psychological, emotional, physical and sexual control over the other partner.
- Women are also confined within the four walls of the house and they cannot share their grief with anybody.

- The lack of access to friends, family and support organisations is expected to aggravate the situation for abused women further.

What can be done?

- **Police** around the country should come up with **domestic violence response plans** to prepare for the expected increases and to ensure victims get help even with restrictions on public movement.
- **The National Commission for Women (NCW)** has appealed to women to reach out to their nearest police stations or call the State Women's Commission for support.
 - The NCW could increase its advertising expenditure on TV to relay messages requesting women to contact the police station for help.
 - The 181 helpline number set up for this reason should remain active, and women should be reminded of this number via TV ads.
- The **government** could also send mass SMS messages as it did during the onset of the COVID-19 crisis as most women have access to at least a basic phone.
- **Mental-health organizations** should issue suggestions to help families reduce uncertainty and stress in the home.

Examples from the world

- The **French government** has extended monetary support to organisations fighting this crime.
- **British activists** have requested their government to release emergency funds to support organisations that are dealing with domestic violence-related issues.
- The **Indian government** should also extend monetary support to such organisations in India rather than rely entirely on ASHA workers on whom the burden of community welfare is already very high.
 - The staff of such organisations should be allowed to travel without being stopped by the police.

Conclusion

- Studies show that women more than men tend to be affected adversely during epidemics.
 - We need to take these advisories seriously to prevent further widening of the rift between men and women in our society.
- As the lockdown and limited movement outside the house appears to be a long drawn affair, the best recourse for victims of physical abuse is to report the crime and seek help.

Category: HEALTH

1. It's time for the Red Berets

Context

- The **World Health Organisation (WHO)**'s responsibility is to monitor threats to public health and inform and advise the member states.
- In the present scenario, however, they were not equipped to fight a pandemic of this proportion.

How is the WHO funded?

There are four kinds of contributions that make up funding for the WHO. These are assessed contributions, specified voluntary contributions, core voluntary contributions, and PIP contributions.

- According to the WHO website, **Assessed Contributions** are the dues countries pay in order to be a member of the organisation. The amount each Member State must pay is calculated relative to the country's wealth and population.
- **Voluntary contributions** come from Member States (in addition to their assessed contribution) or from other partners. They can range from flexible to highly earmarked.
- **Core voluntary contributions** allow less well-funded activities to benefit from a better flow of resources and ease implementation bottlenecks that arise when immediate financing is lacking.
- **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Contributions** were started in 2011 to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential, and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies.

Since the WHO is not able to fight the pandemic effectively we need a composite force that has the capabilities of massive sanitisation, testing, hospitalisation and providing support systems. The only UN body which has the training for assembling fighting forces for emergencies is the Department of Peace Operations.

A force under Chapter VII

The [UN Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) stands paralysed because of petty battles on the name of the pandemic, its origin and the need for transparency. It should hold an emergency meeting and authorize the UN Secretary General to **put together a force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter**.

- Most Chapter VII resolutions determine the existence of a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression in accordance with Article 39.
 - The mandate of the Charter should **be interpreted to emphasise that this is the greatest threat to international peace and security**.
- A **UNSC Resolution is considered to be 'a Chapter VII resolution'** if it makes an explicit determination that the situation under consideration constitutes a threat to the peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression, and/or explicitly/implicitly states that the UNSC is acting under Chapter VII.
- Moreover, conflicts are possible on account of the fragility of the international system. Member states should be requested to send not only troops, but also police, health workers and equipment.
- Only a UN force which can enforce social distancing and lockdowns can prevent a catastrophe.

Steps to be taken

- Chapter VII resolutions are very rarely isolated measures. Often the **first response to a crisis is a resolution** demanding the crisis be ended and authorizing the Secretary General to request member states to make personnel available.
 - This is later followed by an **actual resolution detailing the measures** required to secure compliance with the first resolution.
 - Sometimes dozens of resolutions are passed over time to modify and extend the mandate.
- The **UN peacekeeping forces are called Blue Berets** because of the colour of the caps they wear. The health force can have caps of another colour, probably red.
- The launch of the Red Berets will be a historic action to be taken at a critical moment.

Conclusion

- As for the cost, the responsibility for the deployment of forces for peacekeeping, peace building and peace enforcement is that of the permanent members. Instead of competing with each other for leadership of the post-COVID-19 world, let them help create a post-COVID-19 world.
- If an action plan is initiated, the UN's relevance will be established and there will be a concrete act taken to end the pandemic.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Kerala experts for 3-phased easing of curbs

What's in News?

An expert committee headed by a former Kerala Chief Secretary has recommended a phased relaxation of the lockdown to contain COVID-19 for areas outside the seven hotspot districts in the State.

Phase I relaxation: For qualifying for Phase 1 relaxation, there has to be not more than one new case in the district for the entire week prior to the date of review on April 14. No increase more than 10% of the number of persons under home surveillance in the district and no hotspots of COVID-19 anywhere in the district as identified by the Health Department are the other criteria fixed.

Criteria for Phase II: A district will qualify for Phase II relaxation at the time of second review only if there is no more than one new case for the entire fortnight prior to the date of review. Not more than a 5% increase in the number of persons under home surveillance from the date of the previous review and no infection hotspots are the additional criteria.

Phase III relaxation: A district will qualify for Phase III relaxation only if there is no new case of infection in that district for the fortnight prior to the date of review. Also, a decrease of more than 5% of the number of persons under home surveillance from the date of the previous review and no hotspots anywhere in the district are needed.

Restrictions during 3 phases



PHASE I	Face mask compulsory for stepping out	Identity card must, travel purpose to be explained	Odd-even scheme for private vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gathering of more than 5 persons • No religious congregations • Attendance at marriages, funerals to be 10
	Ban on those above 65 with history of comorbidity from stepping out	Total clampdown on vehicle movement on Sunday	No flights, train services	
	Govt. offices, banks may reopen with 50% attendance	One person per house can go outside for 3 hours	No entry of any person from outside the State	
				Super markets, malls, cinemas, bars to remain closed
PHASE II		PHASE III		
Autos, taxis may be allowed, but only one and three passengers respectively	Domestic flights for essential passengers, doctors, health workers, patients	Hostels, residential facilities may be opened		
Bus travel for short distance within city or town with one person per seat	Activities under MGNREGS, micro, small and medium enterprises begin	Inter-district bus transport with two-thirds capacity	Bevco may start online sale of liquor	
Attendance at marriages and funerals to be 20	Workers at worksite 20 or 25% of staff strength, whichever is higher	IT companies to open partially	No religious congregations, large marriages, political meetings, conferences	Entry into the State, should undergo 14-day quarantine
People may be permitted to walk for 30 minutes before 7.30 a.m.		Universities, schools, colleges open for exams		

2. Virus hits both genders equally, except in 2 nations

What's in News?

An analysis of global data shows that, in a striking contrast with many countries, men in India more than women appear disproportionately likely to test positive for COVID- 19.

- This anomaly, could be a statistical reflection of relatively low testing for the disease in India.
- Many countries — including the United Kingdom and the United States — while publicising data on cases and death rates don't have sex-segregated national data.
- However, data from 40 countries, which do share such data and compiled by GlobalHealth5050, an independent research initiative that tracks gender and health, suggest that the gender-split in all countries is roughly 50-50, barring two exceptions: India and Pakistan.
 - 76% of the cases confirmed in India and 72% of Pakistan's cases have been confirmed in men.
 - Greece - 55% male; Italy - 53% male; Germany – 50% male. China had 51:49 cases among men and women.
 - Another unusual exception was South Korea where 60% cases were women.

- However, men in all countries were significantly more likely — almost twice — to die than women, though this data point is available for only 18 countries.
- Experts opine that India’s wide disparity was more likely due to sociological factors and when testing increased and more infections detected, the male-female gap would likely narrow.
- An epidemiologist associated with the Public Health Foundation of India said it was likely that in most countries international travellers — the key source of the initial tranche of infections in most countries — were equally likely to be men or women.
 - It’s possibly more reflective of employment trends in India. Women are less likely to be travelling for work internationally from India, he said.

3. COVID-19 tests must be done for free: SC

- Tests relating to COVID-19, whether done in approved government or private laboratories, shall be free of cost, the Supreme Court has ordered.
- A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and S. Ravindra Bhat held that tests relating to COVID-19 must be carried out only in National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories accredited labs or any agency approved by the World Health Organisation or the Indian Council of Medical Research.
- The court has ordered the government to issue the necessary directions immediately.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) :

1. It is chaired by the Prime Minister.
2. It is a statutory organisation.
3. No alternation of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.
4. Its recommendations are binding on the Central Government while framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The National Board for Wildlife is chaired by the Prime Minister.
- The National Board for Wildlife is a “Statutory Organisation” constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- No alternation of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.
- Its role is “advisory” in nature and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.

Q2. Arrange the following water bodies in South East Asia from North to South:

1. South China Sea
2. East China Sea
3. Yellow Sea
4. Bohai Sea

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:



Q3. Consider the following statements about Maulana Abul Kalam Azad:

1. He was the youngest person to serve as President of Indian National Congress.
2. He founded the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.
3. He was independent India's first Education Minister.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Born on 11 November 1888 and died on 22 February 1958, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a senior Muslim leader of the Indian National Congress during the Indian independence movement. In 1923, at the age of 35, he became the youngest person to serve as President of the Indian National Congress. He was independent India's first Education Minister. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations was founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) :

- 1. NTCA is a statutory body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change.
- 2. The Annual Report prepared by NTCA has to be laid in the Parliament along with the Audit Report.
- 3. NTCA is chaired by the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change. NTCA is chaired by the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The National Tiger Conservation Authority would be required to prepare an Annual Report, which would be laid in the Parliament along with the Audit Report.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

- 1. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on domestic violence and has increased the threat women face at home. What can be done to alleviate the burden women bear in this regard?
- 2. Is it time to think about a new organisation, as the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been inept to control the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic? Critically examine.

