# 3. COVID-19: A Test for Political Systems

**Prelims Syllabus:** Polity & Governance

**Mains Syllabus:** GS-II Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and challenges pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to local levels and Challenges Therein.

## Context:

- Any crisis would test the existing political arrangements. COVID-19 is one such crisis, which may test the existing political constellations in India as well as the world. This COVID-19 crisis may test India's two distinctive Features — Democracy and Federalism.

## How does it Test Democracy?

- A democratic system means that the flow of information is free and open and that there is a constant feedback loop.

- In a democracy, criticisms from the Opposition and media and public interventions from domain experts can be included in making and refining policy.

- The government must see this as a strength and be open to inputs from all sources.

- At the same time, a democratic system also, by its very nature, is slower and more deliberative.

- It is difficult to enforce decisions (including the national lockdown); any curtailment of rights can only be through due process and temporary; and finding quick solutions to structural problems (a weak health system in this case) is not easy.

## How does it Test Federalism?

- The crisis response will require both the Centre and the states to work together.

- There is a complex division of powers envisaged in the Constitution.

- But it is clear that broad policies to deal with Covid-19 can be framed at the Centre; the power of implementation lies largely with state governments, which also have room to innovate. To their credit, political parties across the divide are seeking to work together.

- At the same time, the rift between different units has been apparent during the exodus of migrant workers from Delhi — with differences between the Centre and the Delhi government, and the Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar Governments.

## The Global Political Viewpoint:

- When the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) broke out in China, observers were keen to understand whether an authoritarian system was better equipped to deal with a crisis of this magnitude or the system's deficiencies would impede recovery.

- The initial suppression of the news about the virus pointed to the failures of an authoritarian system, but the subsequent lockdown of Hubei and ramping up of health infrastructure in quick time also showed the strengths of the Chinese system.

- China's efforts to project its success in dealing with the pandemic is as much an effort to shore up the legitimacy of its domestic political system as to regain international credibility.

  - ✓ India has to beat back the pandemic, not just to save lives and preserve its economy, but also to safeguard its fundamental political features. The stakes are extraordinarily high.