

1. The Spectre of a Post-COVID-19 World

Prelims Syllabus: Miscellaneous

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Context:

- In many parts of the world, borders are closed, airports, hotels and businesses shut, and school cancelled. These unprecedented measures are tearing at the social fabric of some societies and disrupting many economies, resulting in mass job losses and raising the spectre of widespread hunger.

Digital Factor:

- The physical analog world is being decimated, with traditional analog businesses including hotels, restaurants and airplanes in crisis.
- The **digital world, however, is thriving**. We are surviving through this pandemic because of technology like smartphones.
- In the post-pandemic world, technology will be as ubiquitous as it is now, if not more, and tech companies will become even more powerful and dominant.
- **Use of surveillance -**
 - ✓ It is a useful weapon to fight the virus - for instance, countries like Israel are using smartphones to figure out who's been where in order to track clusters of the virus.
 - ✓ The technocratic authoritarian model in Beijing and East Asia, such as in Singapore and to some extent South Korea are dealing more effectively with the virus.
 - ✓ But at the same time, such moves threaten to undermine individual freedom and privacy. The sophistication of such technologies may determine our **socio-political rights** in the future.

Social Change:

- **Changes in people:**
 - ✓ COVID-19 can have lasting effects on people's values.
 - ✓ It **changes the habits of the people** - they work and travel in a different way, their daily routines and the very rhythm of their lives change, including when they eat and how they communicate with their families.
 - ✓ **Religion** - one of the biggest sources of culture for the human being will undergo changes, the epistemology of society - will never again be the same.

- **Police States:**
 - ✓ COVID-19 will fast-forward the fourth industrial revolution and digitalization of all services, including public services. .
 - ✓ Digital technology makes it possible to create subtle police states as citizens **might voluntarily offer private data** in hope the state can provide security.
- **International cooperation:**
 - ✓ On the international level, there will be less cooperation.
 - ✓ The trend of nationalism and self-reliance will continue, especially as the **fear of the "external" and "foreign"** can be exploited by populists.
- **Fragile healthcare and weak Economy:**
 - ✓ Most states are challenged in their resilience economically, socially and in terms of public health.
 - ✓ The public health crisis compounds existing domestic economic crises amid a global economic depression following the end of the COVID-19 crisis.
 - ✓ This might overthrow those regimes whose legitimacy is undermined by inability to manage the crisis.

Prognosis for India

- India was estimated to be among the 15 most affected economies by the COVID-19 epidemic
 - ✓ An early estimate by the Asian Development Bank, soon after the epidemic was declared, was that it would cost the Indian economy \$29.9 billion.
 - ✓ A recent industry estimate pegs the cost of the lockdown at around \$120 billion or 4% of India's GDP.
 - ✓ The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had at one point warned that India would require up to six months even after the entire course of the COVID-19 epidemic is over to restore normalcy and business continuity.
- To compensate for this loss, massive inflows of government funds would be needed.
- India, like any other developing country, might find it difficult to find adequate resources for this purpose. Hence, it would be wise to start thinking of what next, if at least to try and handle a situation created by the most serious pandemic in Recent Centuries.