

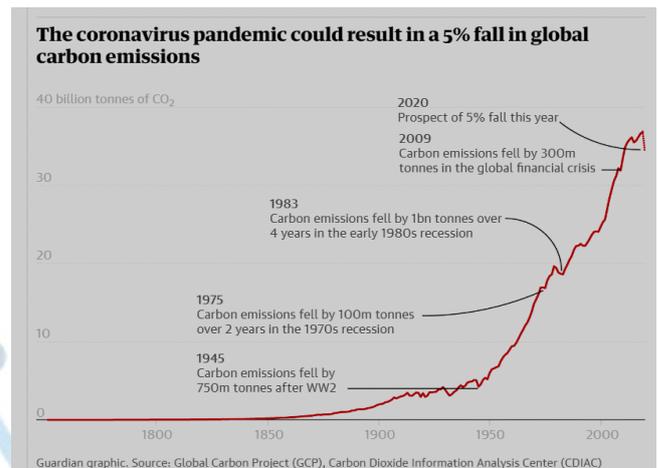
2. Coronavirus' Impact on Environment

Prelims Level: Environment

Mains Level: GS-III Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Context:

- According to a study, global carbon emissions from the fossil fuel industry could fall by a record 2.5bn tonnes this year (a reduction of 5%), as the coronavirus pandemic triggers the biggest drop in demand for fossil fuels on record. The unprecedented restrictions on travel, work and industry has resulted in improved air quality in polluted cities.



Air Quality:

- The COVID-19 lockdown has led to Cleaner Air.
- The fossil fuel industry's registered biggest drop in CO₂ emissions on record, in a single year.
- Global carbon emissions from fossil fuels and cement production fell to their lowest levels in about a decade.

Water Quality:

- The nationwide lockdown to fight COVID-19 has improved Ganga River's water quality.
- The major cause of water pollution is toxic industrial waste which is discharged into the river.
- As the factories are shut due to lockdown, Ganga water has become cleaner and even safer to drink.
- Globally the coronavirus containment measures have resulted in reduced human activities, paving way to improved Water Quality in the Natural Environment.

Wildlife:

- With the absence of human activity, stray domestic animals and wildlife have moved to fill the void.

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- The wild animals are claiming back their spaces and roaming freely while humans are sheltering in their houses during the Lockdown Period.

A Cause for Concern:

- COVID-19 is causing a radical change in Human behaviour around the world. These changes will have positive and negative consequences and impacts for wildlife and natural ecosystems
- Better air quality, healthy riverine and flourishing ecosystems during coronavirus containment measures paints a healthy picture of the environmental effects.
- However, this decline is happening because of the economic meltdown in which thousands of people are losing their livelihoods, not as a result of the right government decisions in terms of climate policies, which is a matter of concern.
- The decline in demand of fossil fuel has reduced the prices, which in turn may affect the consumption pattern in the post-lockdown period.
- The 'work from home' idea which has been side-lined has become a norm during this coronavirus period. This change if continued can reduce footfalls to offices thereby reducing fossil fuel consumption due to transit.
- In order to make up for the economic losses, the governments across the globe may loosen their environmental laws, which may cause more harm than good.
- The pandemic will change the consumption pattern, particularly food, and may cause price volatility, ultimately affecting the poor and the deprived sections of the population.

Way Forward:

- This lockdown provides a natural laboratory condition of the environment, to gather baseline data for different environmental parameters.
- The academic/research institutions may use this scenario to build a nationwide baseline data for the environment by collecting (with taking all necessary health precautions) measurements of various atmospheric, hydrological and ecosystem parameters.
- These baseline data can be helpful in determining the shares of different sectors in environmental pollution.
- Further, it can be used by stakeholders and policy makers to build a sustainable development model for the nation.