
1. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

Context:

- The OPCW has recently said that the Syrian air force carried out three chemical attacks on a village in Syria's western Hama region in 2017.
- It concluded that the Syrian air force helicopter dropped bombs containing poisonous chlorine and sarin nerve gas
- About Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
- It is an international organization established by the Chemical Weapons Convention, 1997 to implement and enforce the terms of the non-proliferation treaty, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, or transfer of chemical weapons by signatory states.
- It is authorized to perform inspections to verify that signatory states are complying with the convention.
- It includes a commitment to grant inspectors full access to chemical weapons sites.
- It also performs testing of sites and victims of suspected chemical weapons attacks.
- It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. Its headquarters are located in The Hague, Netherlands.
- It established OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) in 2018 to identify the perpetrators of illegal attacks.
- By the 2001 Relationship Agreement between the OPCW and the United Nations, the OPCW reports on its inspections and other activities to the UN through the office of the Secretary General.

About Sarin Gas:

- It is a chemical warfare agent classified as a Nerve Agent.
- They are similar to certain kinds of insecticides (insect killers) called organophosphates in terms of how they work and what kind of harmful effects they cause.
- It was originally developed in 1938 in Germany as a pesticide.
- It is a clear, colorless, and tasteless liquid that has no odor in its pure form. However, it can evaporate into a vapor (gas) and spread into the environment. It is also known as GB.
- Chlorine gas: Chlorine is a choking agent. Its greenish-yellow clouds of gas cause shortness of breath, wheezing, respiratory failure, irritation in the eyes, vomiting, and sometimes Death.

2. Dollar Swap Agreement

Context:

- Recently, India is working with the United States to secure a dollar (currency) swap line that would help in providing an additional comfort in an event of any abrupt outflow of funds.
- India already has a currency swap facility with other central banks like Japan, UAE etc.

Highlights:

- The economic effects of COVID-19 hit investor sentiment, Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been large sellers of Indian equity and debt markets in March and April so far. This has led to outflow of funds from the country.
- India liquidated its forex assets, to stabilise the rupee which recently fell below the 76 level against the dollar.
- India's foreign currency assets had declined by around \$7.50 billion in two weeks to \$439.66 billion as on March 27.
- According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, 63.7 per cent of India's foreign currency assets – or \$256.17 billion – is invested in overseas securities, mainly in the US treasury.
- But India is expected to comfortably tide over any challenge posed by continued outflows of funds from the markets, given the adequacy of foreign exchange reserves, a swap line with the US Fed provides an additional comfort to the forex markets.

Dollar Swap Arrangement:

- Dollar swap: It is a kind of currency swap. The word swap means exchange.
- A currency swap between the two countries is an agreement to exchange currencies with predetermined terms and conditions.
- The US Federal Reserve will provide dollars to a foreign central bank. At the same time, the foreign central bank provides the equivalent amount of funds in its currency to the Fed, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which is the next day or as far ahead as three months, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.
- It carries no exchange rate or other market risks as transaction terms are set in advance.

- The Central banks and Governments engage in currency swaps with foreign counterparts to meet short term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or to ensure adequate foreign currency to avoid Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis till longer arrangements can be made.

Forex Reserves (Foreign Exchange Assets):

- They are assets held on reserve by a central bank in Foreign Currencies.
- It includes foreign currencies, bonds, treasury bills and other government securities.
- These are held to ensure that a central bank has enough funds if its national currency weakens/ devalues rapidly.

3. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

Why in News:

- Recently, ICCR has observed its 70th foundation day on 9th April 2020.

About ICCR:

- It is an autonomous organisation of the Government of India, involved in India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy), through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
- It was founded in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's first Education Minister.
- It has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of the International Day of Yoga by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since 2015.
- It has instituted several awards, which are conferred upon the foreign nationals for their contributions in different fields, under its mandate of promoting India's cultural relations. Such awards include–
 - ✓ Distinguished Indologist Award
 - ✓ World Sanskrit Award
 - ✓ Distinguished Alumni Award
 - ✓ Gisela Bonn Award
- It runs 36 cultural centres across the globe and its emphasis is on making India a hub of higher education.
- Classical dance, music or Hindi and Sanskrit language classes are continuing at most of ICCR centres via skype and other applications without Hindrance.

- It is the only soft power institution of the country which plans to focus more on areas that have so far largely remained “neglected” like Indian literature, Indian artisans and also Ayurveda.

4. COVID 19 - Reproduction Rate

Why in News?

- While people around the world are currently living under a lockdown due to the COVID-19, researchers are still in the process of understanding the nature of its transmission.

R0(Reproduction Rate):

- It is the rate at which a virus is transmitted.
- It is also called the basic reproduction number, it indicates the average number of people who will contract the virus from a person who has already been infected, in a population that does not have immunity for the said disease.

Mathematical Representation:

- RO is the division of the number of new infections by the number of existing infections, or the average number of new infections over an infectious period
- $RO = \frac{\text{new infections}}{\text{existing infections}}$

Infectious Period:

- It depends on the virus, which can be a few weeks, months, or even decades.
- The virus is assumed to be introduced to a population that does not have herd immunity or vaccination against it.

Range of R0 for Eradicating a Disease:

- The ideal scenario is when the RO is below 1.
- This means the infection is transmitted to fewer people. When such a rate is maintained over a considerable period of time, the disease is eradicated.

World Study:

- While many studies have differed in their conclusions, the World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated the RO for coronavirus at 1.4 to 2.5.
- In China’s Wuhan, where the disease originated, lockdown measures brought the Rt (effective rate) down to 0.3, thus significantly slowing the number of new infections.
- Governments around the world which have enforced such measures are hoping to follow the same path, although experts fear a second wave of infections once lockdowns are lifted.

5. Asymptomatic Virus Carriers

Why in News?

- Researchers have gathered evidence that in China, the epidemic was driven by a lot of not very-sick people. They estimate that about 86% of infections early in that outbreak were transmitted by people who never got sick enough to go to the doctor.

Highlights:

- To have any idea whether current social distancing efforts are helping slow the spread of coronavirus, and to gauge how long we should go on this way, scientists need to know how many people have mild or asymptomatic cases of Covid-19.

Asymptomatic Carriers:

- Since the symptoms are vague and possibly non-existent, the case numbers that climb by the day aren't what they seem. The true numbers may be much higher or only a little higher.
- Understanding the mild cases can help researchers get a handle on the spread of the disease, how it's spreading and how widespread it's already become.
- The research was popularized as a warning against "silent spreaders", people who have no idea they are infected. Another study showed that in China, people within one family had symptoms that ranged from undetectable to severe. Random testing done in Iceland showed that 50% of people who tested positive had no symptoms.
- But more important than determining who has gotten the disease is determining who is giving it to others. The study suggested that about 86% of documented infections were picked up from people with undocumented ones.
- Symptoms are self-reported and subjective. The symptoms of mild coronavirus are pretty vague except for the fever, which people might not measure if they feel normal.
- New evidence suggests that those with very mild cases might experience a loss of the sense of smell. The prevalence of this symptom is not yet known – people who can still smell should not assume they are uninfected, but those who suddenly lose that sense should consider themselves sick.
- The range of severity is making this pandemic hard to fight – if it were severe in most people, as SARS was, it would be easier to stop the spread. If it were mild in most people, we'd treat it like the flu. But instead it's extremely severe and deadly in some people and extremely mild, and possibly even silent in others.

- It's been established that after people become infected, they can walk around for an average of five days and up to around two weeks before they start to feel sick, and it's not yet clear how many of those days their bodies shed enough of the virus to infect others.
- The conclusion was that people without documented symptoms were about half as contagious as those with them, and yet they constituted the majority of people who got and spread the disease during that period.

6. Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

Why in News?

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

ICCR in 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.

Objectives:

- 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.

