

COVID- 19 NEWS**Immunity Passports**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against issuing “immunity certificate” or “immunity passport” to people who have recovered from Covid-19, as there is no evidence that they will be protected from a second infection.

About:

- Under increasing pressure to reopen their economies, parts of Europe and the US have been considering issuing immunity certificates to people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have its antibodies— thus presumed to be immune to the disease.
- People who are issued these certificates would be allowed to go back to work and move about freely.

Arguments against:

- Much remains to be understood about the spread of the virus, as well as immunity to it. There have been reports, including from China and South Korea, of patients who appeared to have recovered from the disease testing positive again.
- There are also logistical problems, as not enough test kits are still available around the world to be able to issue such certificates on a large scale.
- Issuing such certificates would create resentment among members of the community, and raise the possibility of stigmatisation.
- As younger populations are known to be more resilient to the virus, they would be more favoured to get immunity certificates, as opposed to older people, leading to divisions.

World Day For Safety And Health At Work

This year, the World Day for Safety and Health at Work will focus on addressing the outbreak of infectious diseases at work, in particular, on the COVID-19 pandemic.

About:

- It is an annual international campaign to promote safe, healthy and decent work.
- According to ILO, a national occupational safety and health culture is one where –
 - the right to a safe and healthy working environment is respected at all levels,
 - governments, employers and workers actively participate in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties, and
 - where the highest priority is accorded to the principle of prevention.
- Observed on: 28 April (every year). 28 April is also the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers organized worldwide by the trade union movement since 1996.
- Observed by: The International Labour Organization (ILO). This celebration is an integral part of the Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health of the ILO, as documented in the Conclusions of the International Labour Conference in 2003.
- Observed since: 2003.

Using Air Conditioners During Coronavirus Outbreak

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) issued the advisory to its officials to address concerns associated with the spread of the disease via air conditioners and ventilation systems.

About:

- The guidelines state “Set air conditioners room temperature between 24 degrees Celsius and 30 degrees Celsius and maintain relative humidity between 40 per cent and 70 per cent.
- The guidelines were formulated by the Indian Society of Heating Refrigerating and Air Conditioner Engineers (ISHRAE) .
- It quotes a study that found the transmission of Covid-19 in 100 cities in China lower in high temperature and high humidity. It also quotes a study which has shown that the SARS-CoV-2 can live for 14 days on a surface at 4 degrees Celsius, one day at 37 degrees Celsius and will die in 30 minutes at 56 degrees Celsius.
- Humidity can affect the infectivity — the ease with which infections can take place — of the virus through respiration. In a dry environment, or when there is low humidity, it is easier for foreign particles to invade the body.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY

Basaveshwara

Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted the people on the occasion of Basava Jayanthi, the Birth anniversary of Lord Basaveshwara.

About:

- Basaveshwara, also known as Bhaktibhandari, Basavanna or Basaveswara, was a 12th century philosopher, Kannada poet and a social reformer during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka.
- He spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas. He rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals.
- He introduced new public institutions such as the 'Anubhava Mantapa' (or, the "hall of spiritual experience"), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
- He was founder of the Lingayats sect.

Key works related to him:

- Basava purana: It is a 13th-century epic poem written by Palkuriki Somanatha in Telugu language. It is a sacred text of Lingayat. The epic poem narrates the life story of philosopher and social reformer Basava.
- Vachana Sahitya: Basava literary works include the Vachana Sahitya. It was written in Kannada language.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Immigration Ban (U.S.)

United States President Donald Trump announced that he would be using an executive order to suspend legal immigration into the U.S. for 60 days. The time limit could be extended depending on conditions on the ground.

Reason behind it:

- The immediate context of his proposal is the teetering U.S. economy, which has ground to a virtual halt in the face of the pandemic.
- The deeper context to the announcement is the fact that Mr. Trump is seeking re-election in the November 2020 election. Proposals to restrict immigration served Mr. Trump's campaign well during the 2016 presidential election.

Implications for visa applicants:

- The order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category; agricultural workers classified under the H-2A visa; and seasonal workers, who fall into the H-2B category.
- The policy will also likely carve out exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care.
- Exemptions are also being made for those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives. This includes spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens applying for green cards, or permanent residency.
- Those who have already been granted permanent residence will not be impacted by this executive order.
- Those on the EB-5 programme, which requires individuals to invest at least \$500,000 in U.S. real estate projects, will be considered.

South China Sea Dispute

Recently, China unilaterally renamed 80 islands, reefs and other geographical features around the Spratly and Paracel Islands (in South China Sea) with Chinese names, drawing criticism from neighbouring countries who have also laid claim to the same territory.

Spratly Islands dispute:

- There has been an ongoing territorial dispute between China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia concerning the ownership of the Spratly Islands archipelago and nearby geographical features like corals reefs, cays etc. in the South China Sea.
- Although the Spratly Islands are largely uninhabited, there is a possibility that they may have large reserves of untapped natural resources including Oil.

Paracel Islands dispute:

- The Paracel Islands archipelago is a collection of 130 islands and coral reefs and is located in the South China Sea, almost equidistant from China and Vietnam.
- Since 2012, China, Taiwan and Vietnam have attempted to reinforce their claims on the territory by engaging in construction of government administrative buildings, tourism, land reclamation initiatives and by establishing and expanding military presence on the archipelago.

Exercise 'Pitch Black'

Australia has informed India that its premier multilateral air combat training exercise — Pitch Black 2020— scheduled from July 27 to August 14 has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.

About:

- The next edition of Pitch Black is scheduled for 2022. In the last edition of Pitch Black in 2018, the Indian Air Force (IAF) for the first time deployed fighter aircraft.
- The defence and strategic engagement between India and Australia has steadily gone up in recent years especially on the bilateral front with naval cooperation at the forefront.
- The bilateral naval exercise AUSINDEX early last year saw participation of the largest Australian contingent ever to India with over 1,000 personnel.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Special Liquidity Facility For Mutual Funds (SLF-MF)

RBI has been decided to open a special liquidity facility for mutual funds of ₹ 50,000 crore to bail out Mutual Funds (MFs) hit by the turmoil in the debt fund segment that led to the closure of six credit risk funds by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund.

About:

- Under the SLF-MF, the RBI shall conduct repo operations of 90 days tenor at the fixed repo rate.
- The SLF-MF is on-tap and open-ended, and banks can submit their bids to avail funding on any day from Monday to Friday (excluding holidays).
- The scheme is available from April 27, 2020 till May 11, 2020 or up to utilization of the allocated amount, whichever is earlier.
- Funds availed under the SLF-MF shall be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of MFs by
 - extending loans, and
 - undertaking outright purchase of and/or repos against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial papers (CPs), debentures and certificates of Deposit (CDs) held by MFs.
- Liquidity support availed under the SLF-MF would be eligible to be classified as held to maturity (HTM) even in excess of 25 % of total investment permitted to be included in the HTM portfolio.
- Exposures under this facility will not be reckoned under the Large Exposure Framework (LEF).

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns.“Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity.” Analyse this statement in light of India’s pharmaceutical capabilities and responsibilities amid the novel coronavirus pandemic across the world.

Ans

India is a prominent and rapidly growing presence in global pharmaceuticals. It is the largest provider of generic medicines globally, occupying a 20% share in global supply by volume, and also supplies 50% of global demand for vaccines. India is the source of 60,000 generic brands across 60 therapeutic categories and manufactures more than 500 different Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs). India ranks 3rd worldwide for production by volume and 13th by value, thereby accounting for around 10% of world’s production by volume and 1.5% by value.

Issues Involved

- **Pandemic Outspread:** The entire world is facing Coronavirus Pandemic spread and most of the developed countries are struggling to contain it.
- **Rising demand for medicines:** recently India has been requested by the US and around 30 countries including Brazil and several SAARC nations for a supply of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ).

- HCQ is an anti-parasitic medication that has been available since the 1940s. It has been used to treat malaria.
- According to the price and drug availability watchdog, the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA), India has a production capacity of 40 metric tonnes, which means 20 crore tablets of 200 mg per month.
- Moral obligation of India: the utilitarian principle i.e “the greatest benefit to the greatest number”, says it is the responsibility of any nation to support the other nation for a humanitarian cause.
- Challenges for India: despite being a leading supplier of high-quality medicines to several countries, Indian pharmaceutical industry is highly dependent on China for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) i.e. pharmaceutical raw materials.
- Any distortion in API import would lead to a shortfall of essential medicine supply in India.

India's Response

- Recent Initiatives: Indian has relaxed the ban on the export of hydroxychloroquine. It has stated that it would supply drugs to countries that needed it the most, and to neighbours who were dependent on India's capabilities.
- Pragmatic approach: India's approach should be calculative and based on the 'quid pro quo'; especially with the developed nation who are having their expertise in manufacturing ventilators and other essential equipment.
- Being a major economic player in the South-Asian region, India is morally obliged to support the under-developed SAARC nations in their fight against the pandemic.

Conclusion

- India's decision to selectively allow export is a welcome step as India would be recognised as a globally responsible stakeholder in the fight against the pandemic and reaffirms India's designation of pharmacy to the world.
- This will indeed strengthen India's soft power strategy it has pursued so assiduously since the 1990s and it will also re-establish the age-old concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', the world is one family, which gives India an identity different from all other countries.