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Distance Learning Programme (DLP)

GIST OF INDIA YEAR BOOK (2022)

(UPSC CSE)



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GIST OF INDIA YEAR BOOK 2022

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CONTENTS

COVID-19 (Special Chapter)

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Dealing with the Pandemic | 1-9 |
|------------------------------|-----|

Land, People and Jurisprudence

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 2. Land & The People | 10-17 |
| 3. National Symbols | 18-19 |
| 4. Polity | 20-39 |
| 5. Defence | 40-46 |
| 6. Law & Justice | 47-57 |
| 7. India and the World | 58-73 |

Economy, Labour & Financial Architecture

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 8. Basic Economic Data | 74-77 |
| 9. Finance | 78-104 |
| 10. Corporate Affairs | 105-111 |
| 11. Commerce | 112-116 |
| 12. Industry | 117-132 |
| 13. Labour, Skill Development & Employment | 133-143 |

Building Human Resources

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| 14. Health & Family Welfare | 144-152 |
| 15. Education | 153-163 |
| 16. Welfare | 164-184 |

Farmers & Foodgrains

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|---------|
| 17. | Agriculture | 185-190 |
| 18. | Food & Civil Supplies | 191-202 |

Infrastructure of Progress

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|---------|
| 19. | Planning | 203-209 |
| 20. | Rural Development | 210-222 |
| 21. | Housing & Urban Affairs | 223-227 |
| 22. | Transport | 228-238 |

Energy & Resources

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|---------|
| 23. | Energy | 239-247 |
| 24. | Water Resources | 248-261 |
| 25. | Environment | 262-279 |

Communication & Content

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| 26. | Communications & Information Technology | 280-290 |
| 27. | Mass Communication | 291-301 |

Science, Culture & Sports

- | | | |
|-----|---|---------|
| 28. | Culture and Tourism | 302-316 |
| 29. | Scientific & Technological Developments | 317-327 |
| 30. | Youth Affairs & Sports | 328-334 |

Federal Structure & National Events

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------|
| 31. | States and Union Territories, National Events and
General Information | 335-372 |
|-----|--|---------|

DEALING WITH THE PANDEMIC

The Beginning

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) was acquainted by the national authorities in China of cases of pneumonia of unknown causes in the Chinese city of Wuhan on December 31, 2019. A novel virus, namely Coronavirus, was identified by the Chinese authorities as the cause of the pneumonia cases.
- A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. In the first week of January 2020, the new virus was subsequently named the “Covid-19 virus”.
- WHO declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a ‘public health emergency of international concern’ on January 30, 2020. By March 2020, the exponential increase in the number of cases outside China led the WHO to announce that the outbreak could be characterised as a pandemic. By then, more than 1,18,000 cases had been reported in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths recorded.

Reservoir and Origin

- The original source of the transmission of the virus to humans remains ambiguous as does whether the virus became pathogenic before or after the spillover event. It has been recommended that the virus might have originated from the market since many of the early infectees were workers at the Huanan Seafood Market (Wuhan, China).
- On the other hand, simultaneous research done by different countries suggests that visitors may have introduced the virus to the market, which then facilitated the rapid spread of the infection.
- A WHO report of March 2021 stated that human spillover via an intermediate animal host was the most likely explanation, with direct spillover from bats next most likely. Introduction of the virus through the food supply chain at the Huanan Seafood Market was considered another possible, but less likely, explanation.

COVID Arrives in India

- As the Covid outbreak in China started worrying the world, India initiated taking pre-emptive measures to prevent the outbreak including thermal screening at international airports, in-flight announcements, issuing of travel advisories, establishing quarantine centres along with providing immediate critical care, etc.
- In response to the emergency situation, the government took steps to evacuate its citizens and nationals of friendly nations from affected countries. The evacuated passengers were quarantined and isolated as per the protocol.
- Still, towards the end of January 2020, the fast-spreading virus reached India with one case reported in Kerala on January 30, 2020. More cases were reported subsequently in the coming months.



Government Response

- The increasing magnitude of this outbreak in India contemplated for a pre-emptive, proactive, graded, whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach established around a comprehensive strategy to prevent infections, save lives and minimise the impact.
- A High-level Group of Ministers (GoM) was formed on February 3, 2020 to review, monitor and evaluate the preparedness and response measures being taken regarding the management of Covid-19 in the country.
- 'Janata Curfew' was followed from 7 am to 9 pm on March 22, 2020 and on March 24, 2020, a 21-day complete lockdown of the entire country was announced.
- A strategic approach was finalised and plans were prepared accordingly for small clusters and large outbreaks of Covid-19 in the country. Containment plans and guidelines were released on a wide range of subjects related to travel, behavioural and psycho-social health, surveillance, laboratory support, hospital infrastructure, etc.
- Aarogya Setu App was launched on April 2, 2020 to assist people analyse their risk of infection and undertake necessary timely action. On April 14, 2020, the 21-day lockdown was extended till May 3, 2020.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were formulated and released related to the movement of people stranded at different places within the country including migrant labourers. Seamless availability of essential items was also ensured in an organised and efficient manner.
- Due to the lockdown measures leading to significant gains in the situation in the country, the lockdown was further extended for a period of two weeks starting from May 4, 2020 and was further extended for the fourth time up to May 31, 2020.
- Directed at bringing home the Indians stranded in many countries due to the pandemic, the government launched the Vande Bharat Mission which began on May 7, 2020 with two flights landing in Kochi and Kozhikode from Abu Dhabi and Dubai.
- All these initiatives prevented many cases and casualties. India collectively stood up to manage the pandemic and successfully blunted its aggressive progression.

Breaking the Chain

- The government adopted the 'test, track and treat' strategy earnestly and continued the emphasis on preventive measures to contain the spread of the virus which include wearing masks, washing hands/using sanitiser, maintaining adequate physical distance, prompt testing on observing symptoms and prompt isolation on testing positive.
- The Prime Minister interacted regularly with the Chief Ministers of all states and UT administrations and all stakeholders to understand issues and collaborate for effective Covid management. The government prepared about 60 guidelines/SOPs/advisories for the management of Covid-19. These guidelines were widely communicated.
- Eleven empowered groups were constituted on March 29, 2020 on different aspects of the management to make informed decisions on issues ranging from:
 - Medical emergency planning.
 - Availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine facilities, disease surveillance and testing.
 - Ensuring availability of essential medical equipment.
 - Augmenting human resource and capacity building.



- Supply chain and logistics management.
 - Coordination with the private sector.
 - Economic and welfare measures.
 - Information, communications and public awareness.
 - Technology and data management.
 - Public grievance.
 - Strategic issues related to lockdown.
- The MoHFW released containment plans to curb cluster and large outbreaks and these plans were updated from time to time.

Economic Support

- Immediate actions were taken by the administration and a ₹1.70 lakh crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) was released for the poor to help them get over the economic fall-out.
- All state governments and union territory administrations were suggested to ensure adequate arrangements of temporary shelters and provision of food for the poor and needy people including migrant labourers stranded due to lockdown measures in their respective areas.
- On May 12, 2020, the Prime Minister announced a special economic package and gave a clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. Free foodgrains worth ₹8 crore were provided to migrant labourers and their families. Additionally, on May 13, 2020, to strengthen India's fight against the disease, PM CARES (Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations) Fund Trust allocated ₹3,100 crore to be used for the purchase of ventilators, relief measures for migrants and vaccine development.

Medical Infrastructure

- The MoHFW implemented various schemes, programmes and national initiatives to provide universal access to quality healthcare. Select health facilities were established as quarantine centres, covid care centres and covid hospitals in the states which were duly supported by the Centre.
- The testing increased to about 15 lakh million tests a day, much higher than what was stipulated by WHO which was 140 tests per million population per day. India obtained an indigenous production capacity of more than 10 lakh kits per day in 2020.
- It is important to note that the number of dedicated isolation beds increased 36.3 times and dedicated ICU beds increased over 24.6 times compared to what had existed in March 2020. A three-tier arrangement of health facilities was created for the appropriate management of infected cases.
- Guidelines on clinical management of infected cases were issued and regularly updated and widely circulated. These included case definition, prevention of infection control, laboratory diagnosis, early supporting therapy, management of severe cases and complications.
- India is one of the largest global suppliers of vaccines producing nearly 60 per cent of the world's vaccines. Regional offices of Health and Family Welfare were established in 19 state capitals with the primary objective of ensuring proper liaison and coordination between the centre and state governments.

IT to the Rescue

- In order to ensure the dissemination of the standard treatment protocols and reduce mortality to the maximum extent, a number of initiatives were launched. An AIIMS Corona Helpline was started to guide the doctors on medical management. Covid-19 National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC) was started by AIIMS, Delhi. Its aim was to cater to doctors from anywhere in the country who wanted to consult AIIMS faculty for the management of patients as well as for the public in general.
- Telemedicine guidelines were issued to provide teleconsultation to patients for mitigation of their illness and prevention of crowding in clinics. It helped in triage, treatment and counselling for the care of ill patients by healthcare providers in areas with limited access.
- To ensure accessibility of quality treatment for both Covid and non-Covid health issues to far-flung areas, the use of telemedicine was promoted in a big way.
- 'eSanjeevani', a web-based comprehensive telemedicine solution, was utilised to extend the reach of specialised healthcare services to masses in both rural areas and isolated communities.
- Communication material and toolkits were developed (pamphlets, posters, audio and AV films) and provided to the states/UTs for preventive steps required to be taken by the communities, handling of myths and stigma associated with the disease and for widely publicising the helpline numbers. The two vaccines were granted Emergency Use Authorization by the Indian regulators in January 2021. One of these vaccines developed and manufactured by Bharat Biotech was developed using Whole Virion Inactivated Coronavirus Vaccine (Covaxin) in collaboration with ICMR and National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, and the other vaccine was Oxford University-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine (Covishield) manufactured by Serum Institute of India (SII). Additionally, a unique digital platform – Co-WIN (Winning over Covid), rolled out by MoHFW, supported the vaccination activity.

Unlock Phases

- Once the situation in the country was in considerable control, the lockdown measures were relaxed in a phased manner, starting with the first phase of re-opening, Unlock-1, which was implemented from June 1, 2020 with an economic focus.
- From July 1, 2020, new guidelines for Unlock-2 were issued to open up more activities in areas outside the containment zones, based on the feedback received from states and UTs and extensive consultations held with related central ministries and departments.
- Continuing the phased re-opening of the country, Unlock-3 was implemented from August 1, 2020 during which restrictions were further relaxed.
- Thereafter, Unlock-4 was implemented from September 1, 2020, extending further the phased re-opening. Further relaxations of restrictions were implemented from October 1, 2020 in areas outside containment zones.

Mutating Virus

- By the end of February 2021, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh witnessed an upsurge in daily new cases. The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), a grouping of 10 National Laboratories established by the



MoHFW, on December 25, 2020, found variants of concern and a novel variant in India on March 24, 2021. In May 2021, the World Health Organisation classified the B.1.617 variant as a cause of global concern.

- When New Delhi saw an unprecedented surge of daily new cases in April 2021, Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre (SPCCC) at Chhatarpur, New Delhi was reinitiated with the addition of 500 oxygenated beds. A Plant of 1 MT capacity was built by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) with assistance from the PM CARES fund.
- As part of operation 'Samudra Setu II', seven Indian Naval ships were deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries. The Operation Samudra Setu was launched in 2020 by the Indian Navy for repatriating the Indian citizens stranded in neighbouring countries back to India.
- Even as the country was dealing with this surge of Covid-19 cases, another threat posed by a fungus, Mucormycosis (Black Fungus), was being reported in a few patients during or post-recovery. The Government of India proactively made all-around efforts to ramp up the supply and availability of Amphotericin-B antifungal drug for the treatment of Mucormycosis and supplemented the domestic availability of this anti-fungal drug through import. In May 2021, when India saw a spike in cases, a special scheme 'PM-CARES for Children' was launched for children who lost both the parents or surviving parent or legal guardian/adoptive parents due to Covid-19.

World's Largest Vaccination Drive

- The world's largest Covid Vaccination Drive was launched in January 2021. The Government's goal was to ensure the highest possible level of health and well-being for all at all ages through a preventive and promotive healthcare orientation in all developmental policies and universal access to good quality healthcare services with minimum financial hardship.
- Phase-I of the National Covid-19 Vaccination Strategy was launched on January 16, 2021 that focussed on protecting Health Care Workers (HCWs) and Front-Line Workers (FLWs).
- Phase-II, initiated from March 1, 2021, focussed on protecting the most vulnerable population (persons above 60 years of age and persons above 45 years with associated specified co-morbidities). This was further relaxed to include all people above 45 years of age on April 1, 2021.
- In phase III, initiated on May 1, 2021, everyone above the age of 18 became eligible for the vaccine. Covid-19 vaccination continued to be free for eligible population groups in all the Government covid vaccination centres which received vaccine doses from the Government of India.
- The Gam-COVID-Vac combined vector vaccine, popularly called Sputnik-V, developed by M/s Gamaleya Institute, Russia was also granted permission for Emergency Use Authorization in April 2021.
- On September 11, 2021, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) launched the 'Medicines from the Sky' project in Telangana under which drugs and vaccines were delivered using drones.
- Permission was granted to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for conducting experimental Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) vaccine delivery in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Manipur, and Nagaland.



- India's unique initiative of Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) was launched on January 20, 2021. Vaccines were delivered to 96 countries including Bangladesh, Nigeria, Myanmar and Bhutan. The success of the world's largest Covid vaccination drive, which started in January 2021, can be measured from the fact that India crossed a milestone of 100 crore vaccinations on October 21, 2021, in merely 10 months' time.

Efforts by Different Ministries/Departments

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

To ensure that people do not fall below the poverty line due to the pandemic and also non-Covid hospitalisations, specific packages were notified under Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) for testing and treatment of infection.

Indian Red Cross Society

- It scaled up preparedness and response to tackle the situation by initiating a wide range of activities, namely distributing food, dry ration, masks, sanitisers, gloves, PPE kits, test kits, ventilators and so on.
- In the initial phase of the outbreak, volunteers were trained and awareness and prevention programmes were conducted to sensitise people and vulnerable communities.

CoWIN App

- The CoWIN app was developed to track and support vaccination across the country.
- The app has also been integrated with DigiLocker and UMANG for getting certificates of vaccination.

Telemedicine Solution-eSanjeevani OPD

eSanjeevani OPD is basically a patient-to-doctor teleconsultation system which became operational in April 2020. It was developed for providing teleconsultation services to patients through safe and structured video-based clinical consultations between doctors in a hospital and patients in the confines of their homes.

Ministry of Home Affairs

- The Union Home Secretary reviewed the status of screening people entering India in view of the virus threat. Dispersal of evacuees began from Wuhan housed at ITBP Quarantine Facility at Chhawla, New Delhi after they were tested negative in coronavirus tests.
- The government closed certain immigration land check posts for all incoming passenger traffic located at India's borders with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. The Bureau of Immigration, under MHA, issued a 24x7 helpline to answer queries regarding visa and travel restrictions as well as to facilitate foreigners in India in availing consular services.
- The Government of India started facilitating the return of Indian nationals stranded abroad on compelling grounds in a phased manner. The travel was arranged by air and sea. SoP was prepared in this regard.