



Current Affairs of the Day

PAPER 2:

➤ Polity & Governance:

1. 1.4 lakh families reach MGNREGA's annual work limit
2. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
3. Trinamool, CPI oppose postal ballots for 65-plus voters

➤ International Relations:

1. World Drug Report 2020
2. China rebukes Britain over 'gross interference' in Hong Kong

➤ Health:

1. Coronavirus is airborne, 239 experts warn in letter to WHO



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Key Points:

- If airborne transmission is a significant factor, especially in crowded spaces with poor ventilation, the consequences for containment will be significant.
- Masks may be needed indoors, even in socially distant settings. Health care workers may need N95 masks that filter out even the smallest respiratory droplets as they care for coronavirus patients.

Filters may help:

- Ventilation systems in schools, nursing homes, residences and businesses may need to minimise recirculating air and add powerful new filters. Ultraviolet lights may be needed to kill viral particles floating in tiny droplets indoors.
- The WHO has long held that the coronavirus is spread primarily by large respiratory droplets that, once expelled by infected people in coughs and sneezes, fall quickly to the floor.

1.4 lakh families reach MGNREGA's annual work limit

- At least 1.4 lakh poor rural households have already completed their quota of 100 days of work under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** in the first three months of the year, and will not be eligible for further benefits under the scheme for the rest of the year. Another seven lakh households have completed 80 days and are on the verge of running out of work as well, according to the scheme's database.
- With COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown resulting in thousands of unemployed migrant workers returning to their villages and now dependent on MGNREGA wages, activists are urging the government to increase the limit to at least 200 days per household.
- The MGNREGA scheme contains a provision for districts affected by drought or other natural disasters to request an expansion of the scheme to allow for 150 days of work per household. Given that COVID-19 was declared a national disaster, activists have demanded that this provision be implemented immediately.
- Overall, 23 lakh households have already completed 60 days of work.



Value Added Information

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):

- The scheme was introduced as a social measure that guarantees “**the right to work**”.
- The key tenet of this social measure and labour law is that the local government will have to **legally provide at least 100 days of wage employment in rural India to enhance their quality of life.**

Key objectives:

- Generation of paid rural employment of not less than 100 days for each worker who volunteers for unskilled labour.
- Proactively ensuring social inclusion by strengthening livelihood base of rural poor.
- Creation of durable assets in rural areas such as wells, ponds, roads and canals.
- Reduce urban migration from rural areas.
- Create rural infrastructure by using untapped rural labour.

The following are the eligibility criteria for receiving the benefits under MGNREGA scheme:

- Must be Citizen of India to seek NREGA benefits.
- Job seeker has completed 18 years of age at the time of application.
- The applicant must be part of a local household (i.e. application must be made with local Gram Panchayat).
- Applicant must volunteer for unskilled labour.

Key facts related to the scheme:

- The **Ministry of Rural Development (MRD)**, Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments.



- **Individual beneficiary oriented works** can be taken up on the cards of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, small or marginal farmers or beneficiaries of land reforms or beneficiaries under the Indira Awaas Yojana of the Government of India.
- Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, **wage employment will be provided to the applicant.**
- **Right to get unemployment allowance** in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- **Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory**, which lends to accountability and transparency.
- The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands.
- It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

Role of Gram Sabha:

- It determines the order of priority of works in the meetings of the Gram Sabha keeping in view potential of the local area, its needs, local resources.
- Monitor the execution of works within the GP.

Roles of Gram Panchayat:

- Receiving applications for registration
- Verifying registration applications
- Registering households
- Issuing Job Cards (JCs)
- Receiving applications for work
- Issuing dated receipts for these applications for work
- Allotting work within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought in the case of an advance application.



- Identification and planning of works, developing shelf of projects including determination of the order of their priority.

Responsibilities of State Government in MGNREGA:

- Frame Rules on matters pertaining to State responsibilities under Section 32 of the Act ii) Develop and notify the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for the State.
- Set up the State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC).
- Set up a State level MGNREGA implementation agency/ mission with adequate number of high calibre professionals.
- Set up a State level MGNREGA social audit agency/directorate with adequate number of people with knowledge on MGNREGA processes and demonstrated commitment to social audit.
- Establish and operate a State Employment Guarantee Fund (SEGF).

Trinamool, CPI oppose postal ballots for 65-plus voters

- The chorus against the Election Commission's decision to extend the postal ballot facility to voters who are 65 years or above has grown with the Trinamool Congress and the Communist Party of India shooting off letters to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora opposing the move.
- They said that with the postal ballot, there was a greater chance of disclosure of voter's preference to the public at large, which violated the fundamental premise of secrecy of vote

Background:

- The EC notified amendments to the **Conduct of Election Rules** on June 19, extending the postal ballot facility — that so far was available only for armed forces personnel and government servants posted abroad — to those above 65 years and any one suffering from COVID-19.



Opium seizures: India in top five list

Key findings of World Drug Report 2020:

- The fourth highest seizure of opium in 2018 was reported from India, after Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to the latest World Drug Report of the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.
- The maximum of 644 tonnes of opium was seized in Iran, followed by 27 tonnes in Afghanistan and 19 tonnes in Pakistan. In India, the figure stood at four tonnes in 2018. In terms of heroin seizure (1.3 tonnes), India was at the 12th position in the world.
- Again, Iran reported the highest seizure of heroin (25 tonnes), followed by Turkey, United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Heroin is manufactured from the morphine extracted from the seed pod of opium poppy plants.

Global pattern:

- From Myanmar, which accounts for 7% of the global opium production, and Laos, where 1% of the opium is produced, it is supplied to east and south-east Asia and Oceania. Mexico accounts for 6% of the global opium production, while Colombia and Guatemala account for less than 1% of global production.
- The report said that the global area under opium poppy cultivation declined for the second year in a row in 2019. It went down by 17% in 2018 and by 30% in 2019. “The global area under opium poppy cultivation is nevertheless still substantially larger than a decade ago and at similar level of the global area under coca cultivation,” the report said.
- Despite the decline in cultivation, opium production remained stable in 2019, with higher yields reported in the main opium production areas. “Taking opium consumption into account, the estimated global opium production in 2019 would have been sufficient to manufacture 472-722 tonnes of heroin...,” said the report.
- The opiates seized in the largest quantity in 2018 continued to be opium (704 tonnes), followed by heroin (97 tonnes) and morphine (43 tonnes). “Globally, 47 countries reported opium seizures, 30 countries reported morphine seizures and 103 countries reported heroin seizures in 2018, suggesting that trafficking



in heroin continues to be more widespread in geographical terms than trafficking in opium or morphine,” the findings of the report showed.

- Quantities of seized opiates remained concentrated in Asia, notably in south-west Asia (70%). Most opiates seized were reported in or close to the main opium production areas. Therefore, Asia, which is host to more than 90% of global illicit opium production and the world’s largest consumption market for opiates, accounted for almost 80% of all opiates seized worldwide in 2018.
- Outside Asia, the largest total quantity of heroin and morphine was seized in Europe (22% of the global total in 2018).

About Opium:

- Opium is illicitly produced in about 50 countries. However, close to 97% of the total global production of opium in the past five years came from only three countries.
- About **84% of the total opium was produced in Afghanistan**, from where it is supplied to neighbouring countries, Europe, west Asia, south Asia and Africa. A small percentage also reaches North America and the Oceania region.

China rebukes Britain over ‘gross interference’ in Hong Kong

- China’s Ambassador to London accused Britain on Monday of gross interference and making irresponsible remarks over Beijing’s imposition of **new security legislation in Hong Kong** that he said could damage future Chinese investment.
- Britain has described the security law as a “clear and serious” **violation of the 1984 Joint Declaration** under which it handed back its colony to China 13 years later and said that London would offer around three million residents a path to British citizenship.