



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- Massive distribution of ex gratia will strain finances, says Centre
- Plan to put Lakshadweep under Karnataka HC
- Health infrastructure has increased 45-fold: Centre
- China vaccinations cross 1 billion

GS Paper III

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Massive distribution of ex gratia will strain finances, says Centre

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is not a “one-time disaster”, such as an earthquake or a flood for which victims can be compensated with just money, the Centre told the Supreme Court.
2. It is an ongoing pandemic, which will continue to attack in waves. A “broader approach” is essential. The government was responding to petitions in the Supreme Court to pay ₹4 lakh compensation to the families of every COVID-19 victim.
3. Limiting relief to monetary pay-offs was a “narrow and pedantic approach”. There was also no precedent of giving ex gratia compensation for a disease or disaster spread out over several months or years.
4. Massive distribution of compensation across the country at this point would dry up precious financial resources of the Centre and the States.
5. If the entire State Disaster Response Funds get consumed on ex gratia compensation for COVID-19 victims, the States may not have sufficient funds for organising COVID-19 response, for provision of various essential medical and other supplies, or to take care of other disasters like cyclones, floods, etc.
6. Already the finances of state governments and the Central government are under severe strain due to the reduction in tax revenues and increase in health expenses on account of the pandemic.

Plan to put Lakshadweep under Karnataka HC

1. The Lakshadweep administration, which has been facing widespread protests over its policies, has mooted a proposal to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court.
2. The proposal was initiated by the administration after several litigation were moved before the Kerala High Court against the decisions taken by the islands’ new Administrator.
3. These decisions included revising standard operating procedures for COVID-appropriate behaviour, the introduction of the “goonda Act” and demolishing hutments of fishermen for the widening of roads.



4. This year, as many as 23 applications, including 11 writ petitions, have been filed against the Administrator and also against the alleged high-handedness of either the police or the local government of the islands.
5. The proposal for shifting the legal jurisdiction from the High Court of Kerala to Karnataka comes amid these developments.

Health infrastructure has increased 45-fold: Centre

1. The Centre told the Supreme Court that the nation's health infrastructure has increased up to 45-fold to brace successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The total intensive care unit (ICU) beds had increased by 45-fold, from a baseline of 2,500 to 1,13,035. The total isolation beds (excluding ICU beds) had climbed 42-fold, from 41,000 to 17.17 lakh.
3. The number of category one COVID-19 dedicated hospitals had increased 25-fold from 163 to 4,096, while the number of category two dedicated COVID-19 health centres and category three dedicated COVID-19 care centres were 7,929 and 9,954 respectively.
4. Oxygen-supported beds had multiplied 7.5-fold, from 50,583 to 3.81 lakh. Even isolation railway coaches grew from zero to 5,601.

China vaccinations cross 1 billion

1. China has now administered more than one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines, its National Health Commission (NHC) said.
2. The renewed vaccination push saw 500 million doses administered in the past 28 days — more than 17 million doses across the country every day — according to the NHC's figures.
3. The initial slow speed was attributed to a combination of vaccine hesitancy and the widespread perception that vaccinations were not needed as COVID-19 had been broadly under control in China since last summer.
4. China has avoided a second wave with continuing tight curbs on international travel that have remained in place since last year, among few countries to keep in place stringent measures that severely limit the number of international



arrivals, all of whom also have to undergo mandatory 21 days centralised quarantine.

5. Stringent lockdowns and mass testing and tracing have been deployed to quickly squash subsequent local outbreaks that have been linked to overseas arrivals or port cities, as has happened in recent weeks in southern Guangdong province which reported cases of the Delta variant.
6. Around 40% of the population will be fully vaccinated by the end of June, with 70% expected to be fully covered by the end of the year, authorities have said.
7. China's Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines have been approved by the World Health Organisation for emergency use.

The pact signed to conserve rare turtle in Assam

1. A major temple in Assam has signed a memorandum of understanding with two green NGOs, the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden and the Kamrup district administration for the long-term conservation of the rare freshwater black softshell turtle or the Nilssonina nigricans.
2. A vision document 2030 was also launched after Turtle Survival Alliance India and Help Earth signed the pact involving the Hayagriva Madhava Temple Committee. The temple, revered by both Hindus and Buddhists, is at Hajo, about 30 km northwest of Guwahati.
3. Until sightings along the Brahmaputra's drainage in Assam, the black softshell turtle was thought to be "extinct in the wild" and confined only to ponds of temples in northeastern India and Bangladesh.
4. The International Union for Conservation of Nature had in 2021 listed the turtle as "critically endangered". But it does not enjoy legal protection under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, although it has traditionally been hunted for its meat and cartilage, traded in regional and international markets.
5. Various temple ponds in Assam such as that of the Hayagriva Madhava Temple harbour various threatened species of turtles.
6. This multi-stakeholder association [conservation pact] aims to restock the wild with viable, self-sufficient and genetically pure threatened turtle populations in the region.