COVID-19 Disease

What is the issue?

- The COVID-19 is a disease caused by the spread of 2019-nCoV (2019 novel Corona Virus).
- Originating in China, it has spread to other parts of the world which is a cause for concern.

What is a Coronavirus?

- Coronaviruses are a class of viruses so named because their electron microscope image resembles the corona of the sun.
- They are usually found in animals, but sometimes get transmitted to human beings possibly through the food chain.
- The symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath.
- This happened during the 2003 outbreak of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) coronavirus that claimed close to 800 lives.
- The current 2019 strain that had originated in China has been named as 2019 ‘novel’ coronavirus (2019-nCoV) or SARS-CoV-2.

What is the current situation?

- The number of laboratory confirmed 2019-nCoV cases in Wuhan and other parts of mainland China has come down now.
- But, the number of countries/regions that have so far reported at least one confirmed case has also gone up recently.
- The cases were reported in Vietnam, Germany, South Korea, Iran, etc.
- Deaths were observed in 3 countries in the East Mediterranean region.
- In contrast, cases have been increasing only slowly in Hong Kong; Singapore has almost cut the transmission cycle.

What is the South Korean situation?

- South Korea has the most number of infections outside China.
- Beyond the high number of cases reported from South Korea, what is indeed alarming is the rate of viral spread.
- Many of the cases in the country are linked to a religious cult group.
- There is a difficulty in tracing the contacts of cult members, as they prefer not to disclose their link to the church.

- This has made it difficult for South Korea in containing the spread.
- The spread has been equally alarming in Iran as in South Korea.
- The number of those infected in Italy is more than double that of Iran.

What is the cause for concern?

- Generally, the cases were reported in cruise ships, jails and large clusters seen in churches in South Korea and Singapore.
- From cases observed, it becomes apparent that **mass gatherings in enclosed spaces** are an ideal ground for the virus to spread.
- This raises the question whether shutting down many Chinese cities, thus locking both healthy and infected people together, had provided a fertile ground for the virus to spread.

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express.

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