



Mains Practice Question

Q. The novel coronavirus outbreak has become a worldwide disaster. How far is it correct to say such frequent viral outbreaks are man-made disasters? (250 words)

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Approach

- Start by highlighting facts – recent viral outbreaks from India and outside.
- Substantiate how such outbreaks are turning into disasters- losses, reasons of which are man-made rather than natural.
- Highlight the controllable nature of such man-made disasters with measures needed.

Introduction

The ongoing novel coronavirus outbreak has resulted in thousands of deaths worldwide, surpassing the SARS outbreak. The 2018 Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala, frequent dengue, malaria in North-West India, Japanese Encephalitis cases in Bihar, Ebola in Western Africa substantiate these rising cases of viral outbreaks, especially in under-developed countries.

Body

A disaster is a sudden occurrence of an event resulting in huge losses – lives, resources.

- Reasons for viral outbreaks as man-made disasters
- Inefficient health infrastructure results in high mortality: Lack of medicines, doctors etc. lead to inaccessibility to timely treatment as evident in the case of dengue mortality in India even with available treatment. This is mainly due to public health expenditure and income inequality.
- Lack of Research and Development: Currently, for such outbreaks, countries depend on international bodies like WHO to develop vaccines/treatments due to lack of internal capacities like in case of Ebola virus. This leads to the unavailability of the local and immediate response to the outbreak.
- Lack of effective monitoring and quarantine measures results in rapid and uncontrolled spread of virus. Knee-Jerk measures employed at times of public health emergencies result in mobilisation of huge quantum of resources in a short time, thus affecting other sectors of the economy.
- Social and economic reasons due to high-density urbanisation, increasing globalisation, changing lifestyle, increasing human-wildlife (fruit bats in case of Nipah) contact result in the transmission of zoonotic diseases.

Since most cases have underlying reasons emanating from man's changing role in the environment, they can be controlled by addressing such reasons.

- Following protocols with established capacity to tackle sudden outbreak like in case of Global Emergency declaration by WHO.
- Increasing investment in research and development – biotechnology like Human Genome Project, medical infrastructure, especially in public institutions in underdeveloped countries, aid and co-operation by developed countries.

- Effective monitoring: robust disease surveillance system – case of Delhi in bringing down dengue cases, implement laws strictly, especially related to wildlife, environment and health.
- Special resource allocation for handling emergency situations like Contingency Fund.

Conclusion

Though viral outbreaks can take the form of man-made disasters. Such situations can be managed given man's own ability to identify both point and nonpoint sources resulting in such disasters and since most of them accrue due to man's own created ecosystem, they can be mitigated.

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