

11 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. [NHRC asks govt. about steps taken to help the mentally ill](#)

B. GS 2 Related

HEALTH

1. [India has enough stock of HCQ, says Centre](#)
2. [Scarcity of drugs, devices imminent, govt. warned](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [Export sector may see 15 mn jobs go, NPAs rise: FIEO](#)
2. [Removal of tariff ceiling may revive investment in renewables](#)
3. [‘Post-pandemic period will see turnaround in job market’](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

HEALTH

1. [Team India and winning the pandemic battle](#)

ECONOMY

1. [Lives and livelihoods](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [Bhilwara breaks virus transmission chain](#)

G. Prelims Facts

1. [Saudi, Russia want oil cuts finalised at G20 talks](#)
2. [No evidence of community transmission: Health Ministry](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. NHRC asks govt. about steps taken to help the mentally ill

Context:

- The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has asked the Union Ministry of Home Affairs to address the concerns of the mentally ill on the streets, during the lockdown.

Background:

- A **complaint registered with the NHRC** had highlighted the issue of mentally ill persons **completely dependent for food and shelter on charities, temples and gurdwaras**.
- Notably, the **administrations have not issued any specific guidelines** or made arrangements for these people for their survival during this period of crisis

Details:

- Taking cognisance of a complaint about the alleged violation of the human rights of mentally ill people, the NHRC has asked the Home Ministry to inform it, within two weeks, of the arrangements made to protect the interests of this vulnerable group.
- The NHRC has asked the Home ministry to issue necessary directions to all the States and Union Territories to ensure that persons suffering from any kind of mental ailment under their jurisdiction are **provided with proper counselling towards necessary precautions for their personal care and protection from the virus** and not deprived of **basic amenities like food, shelter and medical care etc.**
- The NHRC has called on the Central and State governments to provide food, shelter and social security to this vulnerable class of people.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. India has enough stock of HCQ, says Centre

Context:

- India's clearance to export essential drugs.

Background:

- Researchers believe there is a chance that the drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) can treat coronavirus infection, though it is yet to be clinically proven.
- **India is the largest producer of HCQ** and there had been increasing demand for the drug.
- **The Directorate General of Foreign Trade had banned the export of drugs and essential equipments.** Exports of HCQ and paracetamol were banned.

Details:

- Given the high requests for HCQ and considering the domestic stock and requirement and keeping sufficient buffer, a decision had been taken to release some of the surplus medicine for export purposes.
 - The government overturning the ban has allowed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Department of Pharmaceuticals to assess requests from various countries.
 - Twenty-four other drugs that were put on a restricted list have been cleared for export as well.

- Exports were being cleared in **three categories: humanitarian aid, aid to neighbouring SAARC countries, and commercial orders** to countries such as the U.S. and Brazil. India would also be providing drugs to some countries in Africa and Latin America.
- The government's move has won India many expressions of gratitude from countries that received clearances for their medical supplies.
- Clarifying on concerns raised that the government was wrong in letting through the exports, the Union government has clarified that **India has sufficient buffer of the drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ)**.

2. Scarcity of drugs, devices imminent, govt. warned

Context:

- **Concerns raised by the Department of Pharmaceuticals** over the likely shortage of medicines and medical devices.

Background:

- The Department of Pharmaceuticals has been entrusted with ensuring the **seamless production and distribution of critical life-saving medicines** in the wake of the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details:

- **Production units engaged in making essential commodities, including medicines, vaccines, masks and their ancillaries** had been **exempted from the restrictions** imposed as per the three-week national lockdown.
- However, still, the drug and medical device manufacturers are **functioning at only 20%-30% capacity** on an average during the lockdown.
- There are **multiple factors** responsible for the problems being faced by pharma firms in the country.
- **Unavailability of labour:**
 - Reverse migration of labour
 - Local workers are not reporting to work due to lack of public transport, fear of police action and family and local community pressure.
- The **unavailability** of transport and courier services:
 - The **restrictions on movement** have left many trucks stranded on highways.
 - Even drivers who are not stranded are **unwilling to take up work** due to the fear of ill treatment by the police, stoppage of vehicles on State, district and city borders, and lack of food and diesel on the route.
 - **The courier services are not fully functional** in metro cities as well as Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. Courier services are crucial in ensuring movement of medicines and medical devices.
- **The closure of ancillary industries:**
 - Despite repeated requests from the Department of Pharmaceuticals and the Home Ministry's directions, **the ancillary industries are not being considered essential by local administrations** and the police and continue to impose restrictions on their mobility and production.
 - Ancillary suppliers of inputs, including packaging material, excipients (required for tablets and capsules manufacturing), utility consumables like briquettes/gases (required to run boilers) and spare parts are not able to operate/supply due to restrictions.

Concerns:

- The Department of Pharmaceuticals has raised concerns that if the production does not reach the pre-lockdown level soon, it could lead to countrywide shortages of medicines and medical devices in the coming weeks.

Way forward:

- There is the need to **take immediate steps** to help drug makers resume production under the current lockdown.
 - There are suggestions to allow the pharma industry to **ferry back their contractual workers from their native places** to mark for the labour shortage.
 - **State and district administrations need to be sensitised** and nudged to be proactive to fulfil the need for pharma units to function fully. The state governments need to ensure such production work continues.
 - Truck drivers with commercial licences must be allowed to move with or without a vehicle by treating it as a 'pass' during the lockdown. There is a dire need to **address the apprehensions of these drivers and also motivate/incentivise the truck drivers**.
 - The courier services need to be made fully functional with appropriate safeguards.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Export sector may see 15 mn jobs go, NPAs rise: FIEO

Context:

- Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the export sector.

Details:

- **Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO)** has stated that many of the exporting units have had a **cancellation of over 50% of the pre-existing orders** due to their inability to deliver on time owing to the national lockdown in place and also due to the reduced demand conditions in the importing countries.
- The export units are left with very few existing orders.
- Given the global outbreak of the COVID-19, **the forecast for global trade also does not seem promising for the export based industries**.
- **China's reopening and resuming of factory operations** post the lockdown has resulted in many orders going to China due to which **India is losing market to China**.

Concerns:

- There are concerns that the continued closure of factories will result in **heavy losses** and bring them to the brink of closure as they were burdened with fixed costs which in any case have to be absorbed by the factories.
- The exporter's body of FIEO estimates that about **15 million people may face job losses** in India's exports' sector owing to reduced business opportunities.
- The bankruptcy of these units might also lead to an increase in NPAs (Non-Performing Assets) among exporting units, thus affecting the whole economy.

Way forward:

- FEIO has sought immediate announcement of a relief package for the export sector.

- FEIO has called for a balance between life and livelihood and is in favour of **reopening of the factories** with a minimum number of workers to ensure that the pre-existing orders are met.

2. Removal of tariff ceiling may revive investment in renewables

Context:

- The Central government's decision to remove the tariff ceiling from renewable energy tenders.

Background:

- India has an ambitious plan to augment the renewable energy capacity, with a **target of 175 GW by 2022**.
- Capacity addition in renewables was 11-12 GW over the 2017 and 2018 fiscals. However, the **rate of capacity addition has observed a drop** with new addition reducing to 9GW in fiscal 2019 and it is likely to remain subdued through fiscal 2020 as well.
- The **financial allocation towards renewable has also seen a decline** over the years.

Details:

- The increased focus and support from the government for Renewable energy sector has lead to a **steady decline in the renewable energy tariffs over the years**.
 - The **solar weighted average tariff lies in the range of ₹2.50-2.60 per unit**. This is owing to the **lower module cost, larger scale of projects**, and continued tendering activity in the segment, which has spurred **competition among players**.
 - For the wind energy tenders, tariffs have remained constant at the ₹2.8 per unit mark.
- However, the **viability of these projects remain a concern** as the sector grapples with **execution challenges on the ground and unrealistic tariff quotes** during the tendering process.
- The central government's decision to remove the tariff ceiling from renewable energy tenders would give the renewable energy sector a much needed fillip.

Significance:

- Renewable energy developers will now have the leeway to **factor in higher risk due to implementation challenges** and unforeseen circumstances during the operation.
- This will allow for higher bid tariffs, which will help improve subscription to tenders and viable operations.
- The removal of tariff ceiling is likely to lead to an **incremental increase of 6-7 GW over the medium term**.

3. 'Post-pandemic period will see turnaround in job market'

Context:

- Likely **changes in the job market post the COVID-19 pandemic**.

Background:

- The pandemic has **badly affected the economy** and has led to large scale unemployment, mainly in the unorganized sector.
- The **organized sector has also been affected**. While start-ups and small to mid-sized companies have been badly hit by the crisis, the large cash-rich business houses are also facing the brunt owing to reduced demand conditions and lack of labour and hurdles in logistics.
- The **job market has slowed down** in the wake of the global pandemic.

Details:

- The analysts are predicting that a **new order will emerge in the job market** after the end of the current pandemic.

Medical and public health sector:

- Despite the current slowdown, essential services such as medical and public health continue to drive demand. Despite the slump in the sector, healthcare continues to be one of the foremost drivers of economic growth.
 - **Virtual medical tourism** could take off to provide psychological aid and faster therapeutic healing to patients.
 - **Microbiology and bio-technology segment jobs** are expected to grow. There would be renewed focus on research by pharmaceutical companies.
 - **Pharma and medical equipment companies** will likely witness a period of increased business.
- Several new jobs in the field of health and hygiene may come up.

Technology sector:

- Gaming, **Over-The-Top (OTT) services**, work-from-home virtual team, **project management software, e-commerce and edu-tech segments** are likely to witness a steady increase in business.
- The whole **digital and e-commerce segments may possibly become the new 'sunrise' sectors**.
- Several new jobs in the field of technology may come up.

Nature of employment:

- Though the companies will continue to have **full-time employees in their core areas** and across IT digital skills, online marketing and content writing, there will also be **increased demand for contract employees** across delivery services, fulfilment centres and contact centres.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. Team India and winning the pandemic battle

The question staring at India and the world amidst the global pandemic is if there is an early timeline for return to normalcy or will we have to wait for years to regain the vigour and the vitality of life as before in a reconnected world. The editorial throws light upon how the ability to quell the epidemic is linked to political will and professional skill shaping a multi-sectoral response.

Self-reliance is the way:

- Globalisation lies shredded as the French and German officials are seen protesting at the Americans, seizing shipments of masks that they had ordered from China, in what is being called “guerre des masques” (war of the masks).
- There will be a need for **scientific and economic cooperation with the rest of the world**, but self-reliance is the key.

- From panning a **staged release from the lockdown** to India has to **developing domestic capacity for medical equipment**, India should chart its own strategy.

Focus on health services:

- It must be ensured that the health-care system provides **timely and competent care to all** who need.
- Primary health-care facilities, district hospitals, public and private tertiary care institutions have to **gear up with equipment** and **augment human resources** drawn both from trainees and retirees.
 - Considering the higher risk to older health-care providers, the **first line of care should be formed by younger staff members** who will have milder effects even if infected.
 - The **older staff members can provide supervisory support**.
 - This will prevent attrition of the health workforce due to exhaustion or illness.
- **Temporary hospitals** for treatment and isolation facilities for persons on quarantine may **need to be set up at short notice**.
- Industry must produce essential medical equipment and drugs to meet the needs and, if capacity permits, assist other countries.

Moving forward:

- Whether there are already infected cases that will spread outdoors after the lockdown will be gauged by clinical criteria (syndromic surveillance) and testing (using viral or antibody tests as indicated).
- The involvement of designated volunteers and community-based organisations can greatly enhance case detection, isolation, counselling, severity-based care and social support.
- Potentially favourable factors for India are the younger age profile and a higher rural proportion of our population compared to China, Europe, the United States or other highly affected countries whose populations are older, urban and highly mobile.
 - However, this enjoins India to energetically **protect the elderly and rural segments of the population**.
 - Restricting urban to rural movement to essential goods and essential needs, for at least six weeks after the lockdown ends, will help.
- The **health, nutrition and financial security of the poor must be ensured**.
- Essential **economic activity** can be **resumed in stages**.
- There would be a need for greater level of testing to detect both asymptomatic and symptomatic persons who have been infected, through random population sampling in different parts of the country.
 - **Testing capacity must be quickly increased** to meet this mapping mandate.
 - **Hotspots should be identified**, based on numbers of self-referred symptomatic cases, persons identified on home visits and population survey results.
 - These should be **ring fenced, with intense search for contacts** and active spreaders, with further localised lockdown, as needed.

Conclusion:

- Even if some factors favour India, the country's ability to quell the epidemic will depend on how well political will and professional skill can shape a coherent, countrywide multi-sectoral response.
- Full support is needed from the other sections of the government and the citizens.
- Everyone has to be on their toes, avoiding a poor health system response, supply chain delays and social distancing violations.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Lives and livelihoods

Context:

The Prime Minister, while announcing the lockdown had to decide between saving lives and ensuring livelihoods. He rightly privileged the former over the latter then. As India nears the end of the lockdown period, the serious damage to the economy and livelihoods is beginning to make itself apparent. The editorial talks about various **measures to manage the unprecedented crisis on the economic front**.

Issues:

- There is tremendous pressure from industry bodies to opt for a **nuanced policy** that will help **economic activity to restart**.
- They **fear a collapse** if activity is stopped for another fortnight.
- **Lives could be lost** to hunger and **livelihoods sacrificed** in the lockdown.

Way ahead:

- One way to sidestep this existential dilemma is by bringing on a **second round of an economic relief package** that goes well beyond the first both in terms of the financial commitment and the spread.
 - The ₹1.7-lakh crore package announced by Finance Minister was a good start but barely accounted for **1% of GDP**. India should spend at least 5% of GDP for now — about ₹10-lakh crore.
 - The **cash transfers to the poor should be hiked** to at least ₹3,000 a month for the next three months. This should be in addition to free rations and cooking gas, as was announced earlier.
- Out-of-the-box ideas for delivering support and also for raising the required funds might be required.
- The government should **let go off fiscal conservatism** and go all out to spend and support the economy. Economists are unanimous that there is little option now but to **print money and spend** (what the developed countries are doing).
- In the harvest season, **farmers need logistical support** for moving their produce to markets.
- Lenders, including NBFCs, should be granted freedom to **reschedule their loan accounts** so that borrowers are not under pressure to repay for fear of turning delinquent.
 - A **credit guarantee fund** that will support non-delinquent borrowers for the next six months will be a good option.
 - Such a fund can be **financed through a domestic bond offering**.
- The **bankruptcy code should be suspended** for the next **six months**, at least for MSMEs.
- A **GST holiday** for the next three months would be a good option.
 - The loss of revenue will be ₹3-lakh crore at worst, but in reality will be much lower than that because economic activity is at a standstill now.
 - Such a move will **ease cash flows for business** and also **obviate the need for statutory compliances** at a time when the focus will have to be on getting businesses back on track.

Conclusion:

The crisis now is without precedent and the solutions must not be conservative. Generous support from the government, and quickly delivered, is the need of the hour.

F. Tidbits

1. Bhilwara breaks virus transmission chain

- Bhilwara had emerged as the worst-affected district in Rajasthan in the month of March.
- **An aggressive 11-day-long “all-down curfew”** was implemented with even essential services being curtailed.
- **Teams of health workers have screened a population of 24 lakh in the entire district** and conducted **contact tracing** of COVID-19 patients on a war-footing.
- The containment model involved some meticulous strategies adopted in several phases, including isolation of the district with its borders being sealed, screening in the city and in rural areas, and **sending the people showing symptoms to home quarantine and the confirmed patients to isolation wards**. This was followed by a **rigorous monitoring** in the villages.
- The “ruthless containment” model adopted in Bhilwara has **succeeded in breaking the chain of novel Coronavirus transmission**. This had led to only two new cases being reported in the city of 4 lakh people.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Saudi, Russia want oil cuts finalised at G20 talks

- Top oil nations are finalizing a deal for big output cuts to lift crude oil prices. Russia and Saudi Arabia will take a large part of the production cuts
- Riyadh, Moscow and its allies, which make up the informal OPEC+ group, have forged a pact to curb crude production by the equivalent of 10% of global supplies and have asked other producers outside the OPEC+ framework to cut a further 5%.
 - **OPEC+ is also referred to as the Vienna group.** It is grouping of oil producing nations, **made up of the OPEC members and 10 other non-OPEC members (Russia, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan etc).**
 - The **world’s largest energy producer, U.S.** is not part of the deal.
 -

2. No evidence of community transmission: Health Ministry

- Community Transmission is defined by the WHO as **the inability to relate confirmed cases through chains of transmission for a large number of cases or the increasing positive tests through sentinel samples**.
- This indicates that the virus is circulating within the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or contact with an infected person.
- The Union Health Ministry has **denied evidence of community transmission of COVID-19**.
- The Ministry’s response follows an **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report** based on a nearly month long surveillance of 5,911 randomly chosen samples of patients and its findings.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct for the 2018-2019 fiscal year?

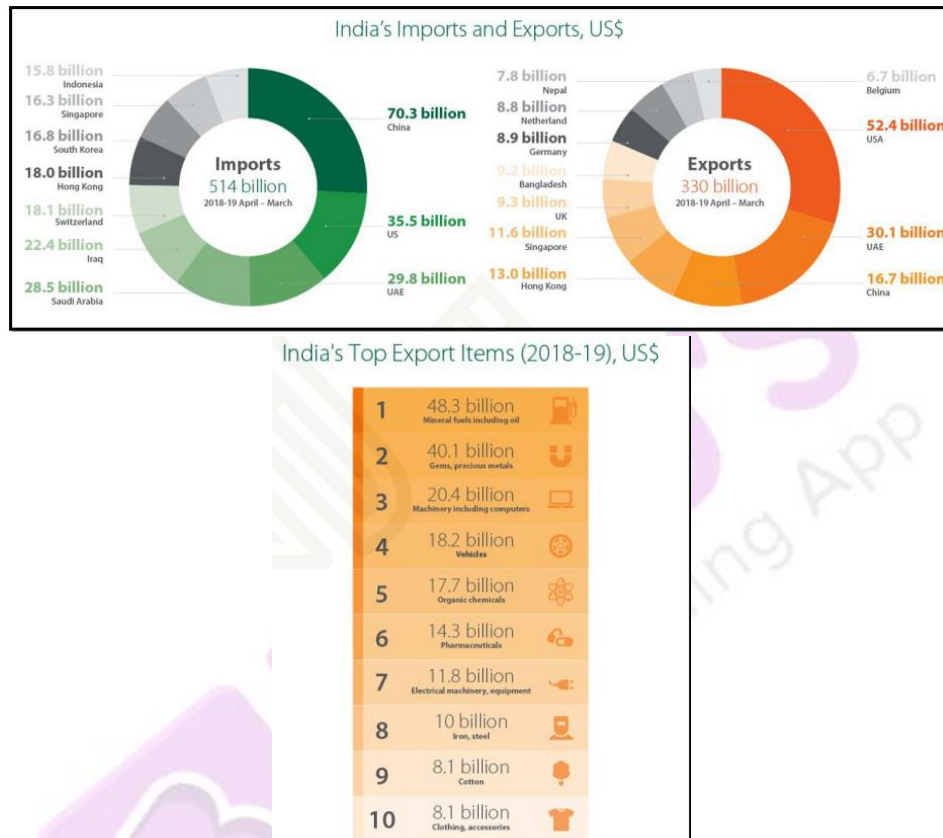
1. India imports the largest value of goods and services from China.
2. India exports the largest value of goods and services to the U.S.
3. Mineral fuels account for the largest share of exports from India.

Options:

- 1 only
- 1 and 2
- 1,2 and 3
- 2 only

Answer: c

Explanation:



2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- India through its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), has pledged to increase the share of non-fossil fuels-based electricity to 40 per cent by 2030.
- India has set itself a domestic target of installing 175 GW of renewable power capacity by 2030.

Options:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a

Explanation:

- In its INDC, India has pledged to improve the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 per cent by 2030 below 2005 levels. It has also pledged to increase the share of non-fossil fuels-based electricity to 40 per cent by 2030. It has agreed to enhance its forest cover which will absorb 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂, the main gas responsible for global warming) by 2030.
- India's INDC builds on its goal of installing 175 gigawatts (GW) of renewable power capacity by 2022, of which the solar energy will constitute the largest share of 100GW.

3. Which of the following countries is not part of the OPEC+ framework?

- a. Mexico
- b. U.S.
- c. Azerbaijan
- d. Kazakhstan

Answer: b

Explanation:

- OPEC+ is also referred to as the Vienna group. It is grouping of oil producing nations, made up of the OPEC members and 10 other non-OPEC members (Russia, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan etc).
- The world's largest energy producer, U.S. is not part of the deal.

4. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect regarding the National Human rights Commission?

1. The NHRC is a statutory body.
2. Chairperson of NHRC (except those appointed as acting chairperson) have always been a Retired Chief Justice of India.
3. The home minister and chairman of the Rajya Sabha are part of the committee which recommends the members of the NHRC to the president.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2
- c. 1, 2 and 3
- d. 3 only

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India is a Statutory public body under the Protection of Human Rights Act.
- The Chairperson and members of the NHRC are appointed by the President of India, on the recommendation of a committee consisting of:
 - The Prime Minister (Chairperson)
 - The Home Minister
 - The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House)
 - The Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House)
 - The Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Lower House)
 - The Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House)

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Given the gloomy forecasts for global trade in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, discuss the associated concerns from the Indian perspective and suggest suitable policy measures. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. India's commitments on renewable energy capacity building under its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions though well intended are facing implementational challenges. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)