

# 18 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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*Nothing here for today!!!*

## B. GS 2 Related

**Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### 1. Afghan President, rival sign power sharing deal

**Context:**

- Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and political rival Abdullah Abdullah have signed a **power-sharing agreement**.

### Background:

#### Political turmoil in Afghanistan:

- Post September 2020 elections in Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah both declared themselves the winner of the presidential election leading to political disarray in the war-torn nation.
- They have been locked in a power struggle since then.

#### Afghan peace process:

- A peace agreement between the U.S. and the **Taliban** calls for U.S. and NATO troops to leave Afghanistan.

#### [Also read CNA dated March 1, 2020](#)

- The U.S. has been trying to get the **Taliban and the Afghan Government to begin intra-Afghan negotiations**, but the political turmoil and personal acrimony between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah have impeded talks.

#### Afghan issues:

- Despite billions of dollars in international aid, **Afghanistan remains extremely poor**. The poverty level soared from 35% of the population in 2012 to more than 55% last year.
  - Poverty in Afghanistan is defined as a person who survives on \$1 or less a day.
- The country has more than 6,400 confirmed infections of COVID-19. The **country's health care system**, devastated by four decades of war, is woefully unprepared for a major outbreak.

#### Details:

- As per the concluded political deal, Mr. Ghani would remain President of Afghanistan, while Mr. Abdullah would lead **Afghanistan's National Reconciliation High Council** and some members of Abdullah's team would be included in Ghani's Cabinet.
  - The Reconciliation Council has been given the authority to handle and approve all affairs related to **Afghanistan's peace process and** talks with the Taliban.
- The agreement is expected to speed up the intra-Afghan dialogue preparations that have been delayed.

#### India's response:

- **India has welcomed the agreement** and hopes that the political agreement and creation of the High Council of National Reconciliation will result in renewed efforts for establishing **enduring peace and stability**; and putting an **end to externally sponsored terrorism and violence**.

## 2. 'India must not give Taliban legitimacy until it joins intra-Afghan talks'

#### Context:

- **National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)** member and former envoy to Afghanistan, Amar Sinha has expressed his views on the evolving situation in Afghanistan and India's response to it.

#### Background:

### Rising violence in Afghanistan:

- Recently, there have been instances of **attacks in Kabul**, including at a hospital maternity ward. The situation seems to have worsened since the U.S.-Taliban agreement.
- Amar Sinha notes that, unfortunately, the **U.S.-Taliban deal** has a tolerance for violence written into it as it **contains no commitment to stopping attacks against Afghan forces** and only deals with attacks against American soldiers and [NATO](#) forces.

### U.S. Response:

- The U.S. statement blames the recent attacks on ISIS.
- The **U.S. seems to be trying to salvage their deal with the Taliban** despite the rising violence in Afghanistan, and has been trying to absolve the Taliban of guilt while investigations are still under way.

### Calls for ceasefire:

- In the light of rising violence in Afghanistan, several countries including India have called for an **immediate ceasefire to help Afghanistan deal with the COVID-19 pandemic**. The Taliban has thus far rejected all calls for a ceasefire.

### U.S.'s call for India's participation:

- Despite **bilateral ties between New Delhi and Kabul remaining strong**, India is being sidelined in the regional talks on Afghanistan.
- **India has been reluctant of talking to the Taliban** directly and has limited itself to “non-official” presence in the intra-Afghan meet convened by Russia involving the Taliban representatives and regional countries.

### [Check CNA dated March 2, 2020](#)

- The U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has suggested that India should play a more active role in the Afghan Peace process and should talk directly to the Taliban.

### [Check CNA dated May 9, 2020](#)

### Details:

- The call by the U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad asking India to speak to the Taliban directly to discuss security concerns is concerning, given that it is identical to the situation before 2001, before the global war on terror, when each country was on its own.
- **India is not averse to talking to the Taliban, if it joins the mainstream** and becomes a political force representing Afghan interests. Taliban has shown no intent to join the intra-Afghan talks.
- Talking directly to the Taliban should be done only after India's concerns such as **commitments on security, safety of minorities, and infrastructure projects** are guaranteed by the Taliban.
- It would be pointless for India to engage with the Taliban till it joins the intra-Afghan dialogue.

### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. [Over 42,000 undertrials released](#)

**Context:**

- Report from the **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)**.
  - NALSA is a statutory body providing **free legal services to the weaker sections**.

**Background:****Congested prisons in India:**

- There are 1,339 prisons with approximately 4,66,084 inmates in India with the undertrial prisoners accounting for a large share of the inmates. **The National Crime Records Bureau estimates the rate of occupancy of Indian prisons at 117.6%.**

**COVID-19 crisis:**

- The [Supreme Court](#) had observed that **physical distancing**, an effective measure to check the spread of the novel coronavirus, **would be difficult in prisons**.
- The court **issued guidelines, formed committees** and asked the legal services authorities to work together and release undertrial prisoners and those on bail and parole to bring the prison population down.

**Details:**

- The legal services institutions have intervened to release 42,529 undertrial prisoners as well as 16,391 convicts on parole to **de-congest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic**.

**Issue of domestic violence:**

- Legal assistance was provided in 658 cases of **domestic violence during the lockdown**.
- NALSA, in coordination with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, has issued directions to the State legal services authorities to collaborate with **One Stop Centres (OSCs)** established in each State for providing legal assistance to women facing domestic violence.
- It has been also involved in **providing counselling services to victims and the needy**.

## C. GS 3 Related

**Category: ECONOMY****1. Centre throws open all sectors to private players****Context:**

- The **fifth tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package** announced by the Finance Minister.

**Details:**

- The major provisions of the final tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package include the following:

- There is an **additional 40,000 crore rupees allocation** for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (**MGNREGA**).
- The **new Public Sector Enterprise Policy** promotes the entry of private companies into every sector of industry, while limiting public sector enterprises to only strategic sectors.
  - The new policy will notify specific strategic sectors in which at least one PSU will remain, although private companies will also be allowed.
  - Even in the strategic sectors, no more than four PSUs will be allowed, with the rest being privatised, merged or brought under holding companies.
  - PSUs in all other sectors will be privatised.
- Corporate enterprises have been offered relief via **changes to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and the Companies Act**.
  - Fresh insolvency proceedings would be suspended for a year.
  - COVID-19 related debt will not trigger defaults.
  - **Firms will be allowed to list abroad** directly.
- State governments have been given more fiscal room in the current crisis with the **hiking of their borrowing limits from 3% to 5% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**. However, the hiked limits will be **conditional on States implementing reforms** related to ration portability, ease of doing business, power distribution, and urban local bodies.

### Significance:

- The total package announced under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package amounts to **20.97 lakh crore rupees accounting to 9.8% of GDP**.
- The decision to allocate 40,000 crore rupees to the MGNREGA scheme in addition to the 61,000 crore rupees allocated in the Budget was widely welcomed, as a measure that will **support rural livelihoods** at a time when returning migrants swell unemployment in the villages.
- The hike in borrowing limits of the state is important as GSDPs are likely to contract, further shrinking possible borrowing at a time when States are at the frontline of containment and relief operations. The increase in borrowing limits would **make extra resources worth 4.28 lakh crore rupees available to States**.
- For the health sector, there is the announcement for **increased public expenditure** including infectious disease hospital blocks in every district and public laboratories in every block. There are provisions for higher number of health and wellness hubs.

### Concerns:

#### Inadequate expenditure:

- Out of the ₹20.97 lakh crore stimulus package, **only ₹2.2 lakh crore can be traced as direct additional budgetary cost to the central exchequer**, while another ₹1.55 lakh crore relates to already budgeted expenditures.

#### Heavy reliance on credit related measures:

- The remaining **85% of the stimulus package** is heavy on credit-related measures and comes from the RBI's liquidity announcements (amounting to around 8 lakh crore rupees), credit guarantee schemes and insurance schemes, apart from the **structural reforms** which are not really stimulus or relief measures.

#### Double counting:

- Some analysts have pointed out double counting as the **credit guarantee schemes** to support small companies and non-banking finance companies would also **tap into the RBI's measures**.

### Weak state's finances:

- Though the additional allocation to MGNREGA is welcome, given that States account for 40% of MGNREGA expenditure, including most upfront costs, they will also have to be willing to spend on the scheme.

### Higher cost of borrowing for the states:

- The **interest on the state bonds has shot up to 9%** and States are having to pay a high cost for their market borrowings.
- Given that the Centre's cost is lower at about 6%, it would have been better for the Centre to borrow from the market and transfer to the States.

### Public sector enterprise policy:

- There are concerns that **privatising PSUs would find fewer buyers** at a time of global recession.
- The process of privatization would lead to a scenario wherein the potential buyer would be spending money which could have otherwise gone into fresh investment or a financial transfer, thus effectively **contracting demand in the economy**.

## Category: INFRASTRUCTURE

### 1. Multiple conditions on discoms

#### Context:

- The announcement of the '**Special Long Term Transition Loan to Discoms for COVID-19**' under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package.

[Check CNA dated May 17, 2020](#)

#### Background:

- The financial assistance is meant to help the **discoms clear their dues to power producers**, both belonging to the Central Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and the private sector, and transmission companies.
- The financial assistance will be paid in two tranches and the loan will have tenure of up to 10 years, including moratorium of not more than 3 years.

#### Details:

- The central authorities have imposed a number of conditions on state governments and their power distribution companies (discoms) to avail themselves of benefits from the 90,000-crore rupees package.
  - The discoms should submit an **“unconditional and irrevocable” guarantee from the respective State governments** with due approval from the State Finance Departments before the first disbursement. If a State fails to pay the power bill and subsidy within 60 days of the due date, it will be charged with an additional interest of 0.25% on the outstanding loan amount.
  - As part of **“pre-commitment conditions,”** the discoms should have arrangements for self-assessment by end consumers and **digital payment** of the bills, apart from **installation of**



“smart” or pre-paid meters at the premises of the government departments and attached offices.

- The insistence on “smart” or pre-paid meters is being made so that the discoms get their dues regularly.

## Category: AGRICULTURE

### 1. Punjab farmers’ to go for direct seeding of rice

#### Context:

- Kharif sowing of paddy in Punjab.

#### Details:

- As the **labour shortage** is imminent owing to **exodus of migrant labourers** amid the ongoing lockdown, farmers in Punjab seem all set to go for **direct seeding of rice (DSR)** this Kharif season, moving away from the traditional practice of raising rice nursery and then transplanting rice seedlings in a puddled field.
- The DSR technique **called ‘tar-wattar DSR’** has been developed and successfully tested on a good scale at farmers’ fields.

#### Advantages of DSR method:

- The DSR technology recommended in Punjab as an alternative method of rice (paddy) planting offers several advantages:
  - It will **help save irrigation water and energy (power)** in contrast to the conventional method.
  - The DSR technique is **less time consuming and labour intensive** than the conventional practice.
  - There is **lesser weed problem**, besides the reduced incidence of nutrient deficiency, especially iron, owing to lesser leaching of nutrients and deeper root development.
  - The technology has a wide adaptability as it is suitable for medium to heavy textured soils including sandy loam, loam, clay loam and silt loam, which account for 87% area of paddy cultivation in Punjab.
  - The DSR offers **avenue for groundwater recharge** as well as it prevents the development of hard pan just beneath the plough layer.
  - Under DSR, the **crop matures 7-10 days earlier** than puddle transplanted rice, hence, it gives more time for the management of paddy straw, for the timely sowing of the next wheat crop.
  - Results from research trials and farmers’ field survey have also indicated that **wheat grain yield, after DSR, is 1.0-1.2 quintal per acre higher** than puddle transplanted rice.
  - The DSR involves **more precision in timing and greater accuracy in operations** compared to conventional transplanted rice.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

## 1. Farm gate in focus

### **Context:**

- Farm sector reforms announced under the Atmanirbhar Bharat package.

Also read: [CNA dated May 16, 2020](#)

### **Details:**

- The Centre's moves for **farm sector reforms** have received both positive and negative feedback from the stakeholders.

### **Positive steps:**

#### *Agricultural infrastructure:*

- Given the **lack of adequate cold-storage facilities** which was causing **large post-harvest losses**, especially in perishables, the **1-lakh crore rupees fund to finance agriculture infrastructure projects** at the farm gate and produce aggregation points is a laudable step.
- The government's proposal to **channel the funds to agricultural cooperatives, farmer producer organisations, rural entrepreneurs and start-ups** is encouraging as it lays the onus of creating the appropriate infrastructure or logistics solution largely on the principal beneficiaries, the farmers themselves. This would ensure greater effectiveness and accountability.

#### *Promoting food processing units:*

- The **10,000 crore rupees scheme to promote the formalisation of micro food enterprises** is a significant step forward.
- A **cluster approach** focused on different regions on signature produce would assist unorganised enterprises in scaling up food safety standards to earn the products certification and **build brand value**.

### **Concerns:**

- The package includes three reform proposals that are aimed at enabling better price realisation for farmers by removing restrictions and facilitating enhanced marketing freedom. It included:
  - Amendments to the **Essential Commodities Act**
  - Proposal for a federal law to facilitate **barrier free inter-state trade** of farm products
  - Law for **contract farming**

#### *Essential Commodities Act:*

- Though the reforms are well-intended, the move to amend the Essential Commodities Act is fraught with risks.
  - The Essential Commodities Act has been a vital tool in the government's armoury for protecting consumers from **irrational volatility in the prices of essentials** by **tamping down on black marketeers and hoarders**.



- Despite the chances of harassment of even honest traders and exporters under the old act, the total deregulation for foodgrains is fraught with the **risk of future inflationary food price spikes**.
  - The amendment deregulates cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions and potato from stocking limits, all of which are essential parts of the Indian diet.

*Bypassing APMC Act and contract farming law:*

- The centre seeks to bypass the APMC regime through a central law that would allow farmers the freedom to sell across State borders.
- There is also a proposal for a framework for farmers to enter into pre-sowing contracts with buyers.
- The proposed changes, once enacted, **could privilege market forces without necessarily safeguarding food security**.

## Category: ECONOMY

### 1. Labour rights are in free fall

#### Context:

- Under compulsion of reviving the economy, the state governments are amending and relaxing labour laws.

[Check CNA dated May 12, 2020](#)

#### Government's arguments:

- The government's strategy visualises effecting an economic turnaround through improvement of India's rank in the "ease of doing business" index, thereby **attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and enthrusting domestic private capital**.
- Industry associations and government are projecting these changes as necessary for **enticing FDI relocating from China**.
- **Flexible labour and environmental laws** are key instruments through which business sentiments are being sought to be improved.
- The extension of a work day up to 12 hours would help **address the problem of labour shortages** at a time when social distancing is the norm.

#### Concerns:

##### **Labour law dilution:**

- There seems to be **steady effort at easing labour laws** in favour of the businesses.
- Elements of labour law dilution were already visible in the **four labour codes** aimed at consolidating 44 central labour laws (on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety, health and working conditions).
- The COVID crisis seems to have provided an opportunity for the government to **amplify its efforts in labour law reforms**.

*Minimum Wages Act:*

Under Labour Code:

- The **Code on Wages, 2019** makes a distinction between **national minimum wage and national floor wage**.
- The minimum wage calculated by a government-appointed committee in 2018 was ₹375 per day, whereas, the national floor wage in the same year was ₹176 per day.
- The State governments, under the wages code, are directed to set their minimum wages only above the national floor wage. Thus, States, vying for private investments, would invariably consider the national floor wage, and this in effect would **dilute the idea of minimum wage**.

Under COVID crisis:

- Some states under the current crisis have sought to **exempt employers from complying with the Minimum Wages Act 1948**.

*Industrial Disputes Act:*

Under Labour Code:

- The **Industrial Relations Code, 2019**, proposes to raise the membership threshold of a trade union from 15% to 75% of the workforce in an establishment, for it to be recognised as the negotiating union.

Under COVID crisis:

- Some states have sought to **exempt employers from complying with the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**.
  - Therefore, employers can **hire and fire workers** at will.
  - Employers are allowed to offer “fixed-term” employment without any restrictions on the number of renewals.
- The M.P. ordinance states that **for new establishments**, provisions guiding **industrial dispute resolution, strikes/lockouts and trade unions would cease to operate**.

*Labour inspection:*

Under Labour Code:

- The **wages code** had severely **eroded the inspection mechanism** by snatching away the power of inspectors to conduct surprise checks. Even when violations in law are detected, they are mandated to advise, provide information and facilitate employers to comply with the law.

Under COVID crisis:

- Some states under new amendments have sought to **exempt factories employing less than 50 workers from regular inspections** and allow third-party inspections.

**Undemocratic route:**

- The governments have chosen the path of **promulgating ordinances and notifying rules**, in which labour rights have been suspended without discussion and deliberation.

**Period of suspension:**

- The length of suspension of the labour rights varies from 1,000 days (M.P.) to three years (U.P.). There is no basis to expect that the impact of the lockdown will stretch for so long and it appears that **State governments are competing to project themselves as investor-friendly.**

#### **Doubtful impact:**

- There are doubts over whether the suspension of labour rights, aimed at reducing labour cost, would stimulate private investment and ensure recovery.
- Past experience does not inspire confidence.
  - The Reserve Bank of India's policies designed to reduce the cost of borrowing capital has not been able to increase credit takeoff.
  - Reductions in corporate tax made no impact in boosting private capital and reviving growth in subsequent quarters.
- **Banking on private investment for economic recovery** when the economy is facing acute uncertainty **may turn out to be futile.**

For more information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated May 12, 2020](#)

**Category: HEALTH**

### **1. Where is health in the stimulus package?**

#### **Context:**

- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package.

#### **Details:**

- The package of 20-lakh crore rupees announced by the Prime Minister focuses on reviving economic activities, restoring livelihoods, addressing concerns of hunger and starvation, stimulating small and medium enterprises, and enhancing farm incomes. The **health sector has not received much attention.**

#### **Concerns:**

##### **Poor state of healthcare facilities:**

- The healthcare delivery system in most States is extremely fragile given the **poor state of primary healthcare facilities.**
- The public provisioning of healthcare has been found to be **insufficient, of poor quality and having limited reach.**

##### **Poor resource allotment to health sector:**

- The **public spending on health has been consistently low** at around 1.15% of GDP for well over a decade.

##### **Opportunity cost of COVID-19 pandemic:**

- It is possible that **resources allocated for other health programmes are being diverted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic**. The opportunity cost of such diversion of funds could be high.
- People's access to routine maternal and child health as well as family planning services in parts of the country has been negatively impacted. **Progress made with respect to various diseases could witness setbacks.**

#### **Limitations of private sector:**

- **India's private sector in health is sizable.**
  - The private sector accounts for 93% of all hospitals, 64% of all hospital beds, and 80-85% of all doctors.
- Most private healthcare providers seem to be **incapable of and unwilling to help** even during a national crisis.
  - Rapidly declining revenues and sharply eroding profits are leading to the closure of many private hospitals.
  - Only a few private providers have come forward to extend support to the government.

#### **Way forward:**

##### **Strengthening public health:**

- The COVID-19 pandemic experience has brought out the **critical importance of the public sector in health provisioning**.
- There is a need to invest in **universal health coverage (UHC)** by reversing the financial neglect of public healthcare. Nearly every country in the world that has achieved anything like UHC has done it through the public assurance of primary healthcare.

##### **Increasing investments in health:**

- There is a need to urgently and immediately step up investments in health.
- A new '**health investment plan**' (as part of the stimulus package), at least 1% of the GDP, out of the stimulus package should be earmarked for improving the country's health infrastructure and strengthening public health service delivery.

##### **Prioritizing primary healthcare:**

- Up to 70% of the additional expenditures should be ring-fenced for primary healthcare and further **strengthening health and wellness centres, primary health centres and community health centres**. This would enable the State governments to be better prepared to face a second round of the pandemic.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Investing in health, apart from improving people's well-being, is also essential for accelerating and sustaining India's economic growth.

## **F. Prelims Facts**

### **1. Odisha braces for Amphan impact**

- The **severe cyclonic storm 'AMPHAN' over southeast Bay of Bengal** is very likely to move nearly northwards slowly during the next 24 hours and then re-curve north-north-eastwards.
- **Odisha is bracing for heavy rain** under the influence of the severe cyclonic storm Amphan, which is set to skirt away from the State's northern coast to make landfall between West Bengal and Bangladesh.
- The **IMD** has issued an '**orange alert**' expecting heavy to very heavy rainfall in coastal districts.

## 2. Lockdown extended; States will take a call on infection zones

- The Centre has extended the nationwide lockdown for the fourth time till May 31 while giving considerable flexibility to the States in deciding red, green and orange zones of COVID-19 intensity.
- The **Ministry of Home Affairs**, in its fresh guidelines for Lockdown 4.0, has eased restrictions considerably.
- The decision to extend the lockdown was taken after the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** directed the Centre and the State governments to continue the lockdown measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.
- The **National Executive Committee (NEC) of the NDMA, chaired by the Union Home Secretary**, was directed to modify the lockdown guidelines keeping in view the need to restart economic activities.

## G. Tidbits

### 1. Pak. President issues order to hold polls in Gilgit-Baltistan

- Pakistan President has promulgated an order to form a caretaker government, as well as to conduct elections in **Gilgit-Baltistan province**, a move strongly opposed by India.
- India has argued that the entire **union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India.**

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA)?

1. It is a statutory body.
2. It organizes the Lok Adalats for speedy resolution of cases.
3. The Chief Justice of India is the executive Chairman of NALSA.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option a

**Explanation:**

- The National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA) was formed on 9 November 1995 under the authority of the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987.
- Its purpose is to provide free legal services to eligible candidates and to organize Lok Adalats for speedy resolution of cases. The prime objective of NALSA is speedy disposal of cases and reducing the burden of the judiciary.
- The Chief Justice of India is patron-in-chief of NALSA while the second senior-most judge of the Supreme Court of India is the Executive-Chairman.

**Q2. Which of the following are the advantages of the Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) technology being propounded in Punjab?**

1. Less time consuming
2. Less labour intensive
3. Lesser weed problem
4. Lesser water requirements
5. Crops mature earlier
6. Aids groundwater recharge

**Options:**

- a. 1, 2 and 4 only
- b. 1, 2 and 3 only
- c. 1, 2, 5 and 6 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

**Answer:**

**Option d**

**Explanation:**

- The DSR technology recommended in Punjab as an alternative method of rice (paddy) planting offers several advantages:
  - It will help save irrigation water and energy (power) in contrast to the conventional method.
  - The DSR technique is less time consuming and labour intensive than the conventional practice.
  - There is lesser weed problem, besides the reduced incidence of nutrient deficiency, especially iron, owing to lesser leaching of nutrients and deeper root development.
  - The technology has a wide adaptability as it is suitable for medium to heavy textured soils including sandy loam, loam, clay loam and silt loam, which account for 87% area of paddy cultivation in Punjab.
  - The DSR offers avenue for groundwater recharge as well as it prevents the development of hard pan just beneath the plough layer.
  - Under DSR, the crop matures 7-10 days earlier than puddle transplanted rice, hence it gives more time for the management of paddy straw, for the timely sowing of the next wheat crop.
  - Results from research trials and farmers' field survey have also indicated that wheat grain yield, after DSR, is 1.0-1.2 quintal per acre higher than puddle transplanted rice.
  - The DSR involves more precision in timing and greater accuracy in operations compared to conventional transplanted rice.

**Q3. The severe cyclonic storm 'AMPHAN' is associated with which of the following regions?**



- a. East coast of India
- b. West coast of India
- c. South east Asia
- d. West Asian region

**Answer:**

**Option a**

**Explanation:**

- The severe cyclonic storm 'AMPHAN' over southeast Bay of Bengal is very likely to move nearly northwards slowly during the next 24 hours and then re-curve north-north-eastwards.
- Odisha is bracing for heavy rain under the influence of severe cyclonic storm Amphan, which is set to skirt away from the State's northern coast to make landfall between West Bengal and Bangladesh.

**Q4. The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is chaired by**

- a. Union Home Minister
- b. Prime Minister
- c. Union Home Secretary
- d. Cabinet Secretary

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**Answer:**

**Option c**

**Explanation:**

- The NDMA has been established under the Disaster Management Act.
- The Disaster Management Act under Section 8 enjoins the Central Government to Constitute a National Executive Committee (NEC) to assist the National Authority.
- The NEC is composed of Secretary level officers of the Government of India in the Ministries of home, agriculture, atomic energy, defence, drinking water supply, environment and forests, finance (expenditure), health, power, rural development, science and technology, space, telecommunication, urban development, and water resources, with the Home Secretary serving as the Chairperson, ex officio.
- The Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee is an ex officio member of the NEC.
- The NEC is responsible for the preparation of the National Disaster Management Plan for the whole country and to ensure that it is "reviewed and updated annually".

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the farm sector reforms announced under the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, discuss the significance of the reforms and the possible concerns due to the changes proposed. (15 marks, 250 words)

2. Under compulsion of reviving the economy, the state governments are amending and relaxing labour laws. Analyze the government's arguments for the changes being made and also the concerns expressed by the stakeholders. (10 marks, 150 words)
3. In the light of the health sector not receiving much attention under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package, discuss the challenges in the Indian health sector and suggest suitable measures to mitigate the risks involved. (15 marks, 250 words)

