

# 19 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## A. GS 1 Related

### Category: GEOGRAPHY

#### 1. Odisha, West Bengal brace for Amphan

##### Context:

According to the [India Meteorological Department](#), the storm system in the Bay of Bengal, Amphan has developed into a super cyclone and is expected to make landfall along the West Bengal-Bangladesh coast.

##### Details:

- Amphan is expected to bring heavy to extremely heavy rainfall over Gangetic West Bengal and heavy to very heavy rainfall over north coastal Odisha.

- The Odisha Government has deployed units of the [National Disaster Response Force](#) and the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force to north-coastal districts for carrying out rescue operation.
- Ahead of the monsoon's arrival in Kerala, the month of May typically sees intense tropical storm activity in the Bay of Bengal.
- From 1965 to 2017, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea collectively registered 46 'severe cyclonic storms'. More than half of them occurred between October and December. Seven of them occurred in May and only two (in 1966 and 1976) were recorded in April, according to data from the India Meteorological Department's cyclone statistics unit.
- Before Fani, only one of them (in 1966) had actually made landfall over India.

#### **Amphan:**

- It is the first tropical cyclone of the 2020 North Indian Ocean cyclone season.
- Amphan is the second pre-monsoon cyclone to form in the Bay of Bengal in two years. The first one was Cyclone Fani.
- According to the India Meteorological Department forecast, it will make landfall as a very severe cyclone between the Sagar islands of West Bengal and the Hatiya islands of Bangladesh.
- It has been named by Thailand.

Read more about Tropical Cyclones covered in [29th October 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

## **B. GS 2 Related**

### **Category: HEALTH**

#### **1. New technique for lung treatment of newborns launched in Jaipur**

##### **Context:**

A recent medical technique, known as less invasive surfactant administration (LISA), has been started for the treatment of lung disease or respiratory distress syndrome among premature babies.

##### **Details:**

- Less-invasive surfactant administration (LISA) is a technique whereby surfactant is given via a thin catheter inserted in the trachea.
  - The surfactant is administered via a thin feeding tube, instead of endotracheal tube, which is immediately removed after the procedure, while the baby is on the continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine.
- The LISA technique allows the infant to remain on non-invasive ventilation support and avoids intubation and therefore mechanical ventilation.
- LISA has been developed as a lung protective strategy for respiratory management and ventilation, in view of the mechanical ventilation causing damage to the preterm lungs of newborns.
- It is found that LISA technique is very helpful in minimising the side effects.

### **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

#### **1. Centre notifies Karnataka judge's appointment**

**Context:**

The Ministry of Law and Justice has notified the appointment of P. Krishna Bhat as an additional judge of the Karnataka High Court, almost four years after his name was first recommended by the Supreme Court collegium.

**Details:**

- A Law Ministry notification said Mr. Bhat has been appointed for two years. Additional judges are usually appointed two years before being elevated as a permanent judge in the High Court.
- The Supreme Court collegium had first recommended Mr. Bhat, then a District and Session's Court judge, in 2016.
- However, the government did not act on the recommendation as a woman law officer gave a written complaint against him to the then Chief Justice of India (CJI), T.S. Thakur. The complaint was then found to be 'without any basis'.
- In October 2019, the Collegium reiterated its recommendation and the government accepted it.

For an in-depth understanding of the Appointment of Judges, read more about the [Collegium System](#).

## 2. J&K notifies rules for domicile certificates

**Context:**

The J&K administration has notified the J&K Grant of Domicile Certificate Procedure Rules, 2020 and set a fast-track process in motion to issue the certificates within a stipulated time of 15 days.

**Details:**

- Domicile certificates have now been made a basic eligibility condition for appointment to any post under the Union Territory of J&K following the amendments in the previous Act.
- Under the amended rules, eligible non-locals can also apply for the certificate.

This issue has been covered in [2nd April 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#). [Click here](#) to read.

**Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## 1. Are the United States and China entering a new Cold War?

**Context:**

Relations between the U.S. and China have plunged to the lowest point in the recent weeks. The rising tensions between the two superpowers have prompted many experts to warn of a new Cold War.

**Background:**

- Relations between the two countries had started deteriorating well before the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.
- In 2017, the Trump administration's National Security Strategy called China as "a revisionist power" seeking "to erode American security and prosperity".

- In September 2019, while responding to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State's comment that the American government was formulating a strategy to address potential "security challenges" by China, the Foreign Ministry in Beijing urged the U.S. to abandon the Cold-War mentality.
- COVID-19 appears to have aggravated the crisis.

#### Details:

- Record high temperatures have been recorded in Sino-U.S. relations in recent years and the pandemic is no exception to this.
- Competition rules the relationship, and flexibility and mature handling are in short supply on both sides.
- Uncertainty prevails, whether it is on the question of resolving trade problems, or on the maritime front in the East and South China Seas, on technology, or on mutual mud-slinging on COVID-19-related issues.

#### Where is the current crisis in relations between the U.S. and China headed?

- According to Nirupama Menon Rao, former Foreign Secretary, this situation is unlikely to ease until the U.S. presidential election. Post-election, temperatures could decrease, but a deep-rooted antipathy towards China has gripped the popular and political imagination in the U.S. Therefore, tensions will not go away. In China, the leadership and public opinion are both on a nationalist overdrive and the Trump administration is seen as the prime antagonist.

#### Does it mean both countries are already in a Cold War?

- Experts point out that there are similarities between the current crisis and the Cold War.
- The political elites of both China and the U.S., like the Soviet Union and the U.S. back then, see each other as their main rivals.
- However, the kind of proxy conflicts between the U.S. and China which was seen during the Cold War is not to be seen now. Also, the world is not bipolar any more.
- It is opined that there are third parties such as the EU, Russia, India and Japan. These parties increasingly have a choice whether or not to align with either power as they see fit and on a case by case basis. This leads to a very different kind of international order than during the Cold War.

## 2. Call for WHO probe into virus origin

#### Context:

An India-backed draft resolution at the 73rd session of the World Health Assembly which seeks **global investigation into the spread of the novel coronavirus** has received a big boost with the African group of nations extending support for the motion.

#### Details:

- The development came soon after the Assembly convened in Geneva where the head of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) declared that the global body will look into the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The recommendation is part of the text jointly conceived by Australia and the European Union. It aims to evaluate possible food and animal-related sources that could have led to the spread of the deadly pandemic.
- The language of the motion seeks to delve deep into the origin of the virus.

- The draft resolution also calls for impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation into the “WHO-coordinated international health response” to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### 1. Oxford vaccine fails to shield monkeys from virus

##### Context:

A high-profile potential vaccine for COVID-19, being tested by researchers at Oxford University, has failed to protect vaccinated monkeys from being infected by the virus. However, the test animals appeared to be protected from pneumonia.

##### Details:

- The vaccine candidate, **ChAdOx1 nCoV-19**, being tested is a **weakened form of a common cold virus (adenovirus)** that affects chimpanzees but has been neutered to prevent replication in humans.
- Reports of the candidate vaccine’s performance in monkeys (*rhesus macaque*) have prompted researchers to test the vaccine’s potency in humans.
- However, detailed results of the trials in monkeys suggest that, based on these results, the vaccine may not be the panacea to protect people from being infected and passing on the infection to others (*The research paper is yet to be peer-reviewed*).
- It is said that the presence of the virus is in the upper respiratory tract (of the animals). It is possible that these can come down again to the lower respiratory tract (and cause pneumonia). Ideally, if one has been inoculated with the vaccine, the person should be able to substantially clear out the virus.
- This vaccine is among the eight that are ahead in terms of being tested in humans for efficacy.

### Category: DEFENCE

#### 1. 83 LCA-MK1A deal high priority: IAF chief

##### Context:

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) will set up the second squadron of indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas. The high priority deal for 83 LCA-MK1A jets is expected to be signed.
- The IAF is also about to place orders for over 200 Astra indigenous Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles.

##### LCA-MK1A jets:

- As per Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Tejas MK1A will be capable of mid-air refuel.
- There will be an updated internal Radar Warning Receiver (RWR).
- It will have the capability to fire different types of Beyond Visual Range (BVR) and close combat air to air missiles.
- These aircraft according to the Ministry of Defence will be forming the backbone of the IAF.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INFRASTRUCTURE

#### 1. A jolt to national energy security

##### **Context:**

- Finance Minister's proposal for **reform of power tariff policy** as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package.

##### **Background:**

- The **DISCOMS have been under financial stress** and there have been repeated attempts at improving their condition through various initiatives and schemes from the governments.

##### **Rising costs for DISCOMs:**

- The cost of power purchase has risen to 80% of the total costs of State DISCOMs.

##### **Causes:**

##### *Two part tariff policy:*

- The **two-part tariff policy has been mandated by the Ministry of Power** since the 1990s.
- As more private developers came forward to invest in generation, DISCOMs were required to sign **long-term power purchase agreements (PPA)**, committing to pay **a fixed cost to the power generator**, irrespective of whether the State draws the power or not, and a **variable charge for fuel** when it does.

##### *Over optimistic projections:*

- The PPAs signed by DISCOMs were based on **over-optimistic projection of power demand estimated by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA)**.
- Due to this, DISCOMs locked into long-term contracts end up **servicing perpetual fixed costs** for power not drawn.
- Due to the CEA's overestimates, the all-India plant load factor of coal power plants is only 56%. This leads to **underutilization of available capacity** and **increases the operating cost of the generation plants** which invariably leads to higher costs for the electricity.

##### *Renewable energy factor:*

- From 2010, **solar and wind power plants were declared as “must-run”**, requiring DISCOMs to absorb all renewable power, even in excess of mandatory renewable purchase obligations. The decrease in thermal generation to accommodate all available green power, **entailed further idle fixed costs payable on account of two-part tariff PPAs**.
- DISCOMs are having to integrate large volumes of solar and wind energy power at **relatively high tariffs** (5 Rs./kwh in Karnataka and 6 Rs./kwh in Tamil Nadu for solar power).
- In 2015 the Centre announced an ambitious target of 175 gigawatts of renewable power by 2022, offering a slew of concessions to renewable energy developers, and aggravating the burden of DISCOMs.

### **Details:**

- The proposal for reform of power tariff is part of the recent comprehensive proposal to **amend the Electricity Act, 2003**.
- Significant changes have been proposed in the **Electricity Act, 2020**.
  - There is a proposal for **sub-franchisees under the DISCOM service areas**.
    - This is an attempt to usher in markets in the sector which the government hopes will be more efficient and accountable.
  - The amendment proposes **greater concessions to renewable power developers**.
    - This is in line with India’s climate action initiatives and to increase India’s energy security by making use of the renewable energy potential of India.
  - There is a proposal to **eliminate the cross-subsidies in retail power tariff**, which means that each consumer category would be charged what it costs to service that category.
    - This would help reduce the steep cross-subsidies in electricity being borne by the industries which make their goods and services costly in the global market.
    - The elimination of cross subsidy would entail more efficient usage of electricity.
    - The **provision for direct transfer of subsidies** would reduce leakage losses.
  - State regulators will henceforth be appointed by a central selection committee.
    - This is meant to ensure uniformity in appointment processes across states and also ensure the availability of a larger talent pool from across the country for appointments.
  - Establishment of a **centralised Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority**.
    - This would help ensure faster resolution of disputes and entail lower pendency and associated costs.

### **Concerns:**

#### **Sub-franchising:**

- The sub-franchisees would invariably be private players. Private sub-franchisees are likely to pick and **choose the more profitable segments of the DISCOM’s jurisdiction**.
- The Electricity Bill 2020 does not clarify whether a private sub-franchisee would be required to buy the power from the DISCOM or procure cheaper power directly from power exchanges.
- DISCOMs will be saddled with costly power purchase from locked-in PPAs and fewer profitable areas from which to recover it, which would further deteriorate their financial health.

#### **Renewable energy concessions:**

- The increased concessions and **limits of mandatory renewable energy purchase obligations** will have a cascading impact on the DISCOM’s idling fixed charges further impacting the viability of DISCOMs.

#### **Elimination of cross-subsidies:**

- The removal of cross subsidization would result in higher tariffs for rural consumers as the rural consumers require long lines and numerous step-down transformers resulting in higher servicing costs.
- The proposed amendment envisages State governments directly subsidising selected categories through direct benefit transfers. This would further **burden State governments** that are already struggling with direct power subsidies, and further deteriorate their financial position.

#### **Increased centralization:**

- The appointment of state regulators by a central selection committee jeopardises regulatory autonomy and independence and the **concurrent status of the electricity sector**.
- The establishment of a centralised Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority will transfer the power to adjudicate upon disputes relating to contracts away from State Electricity Regulatory Commissions.
- The implementation of the proposed reforms will **weaken the control of States** over an industry supplying a basic human necessity such as electricity and mark an increasing **centralisation of control over the sector**.

#### **Energy security:**

- The proposed changes could destabilize the functioning of the distribution utilities/companies (DISCOM) and have **serious consequences for the country's energy security**.

**For more information on related themes, refer to:**

[CNA dated May 18, 2020](#)

### **Category: ECONOMY**

#### **1. A matter of relief**

##### **Context:**

- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package.

##### **Details:**

- An analysis of the COVID-19 relief package brings to light the government's approach.

##### **Supply side provisions:**

- The major aim of the package involves giving a **strong supply-side push** by measures such as boosting **availability of capital on easy terms** and **empowering farmers and businesses** to produce more.
  - A major aspect is the **liquidity support** to businesses to help them set the economic cycle back in motion.

##### **Demand side provisions:**

- Demand side measures have been minimal. **Income and wage support schemes** have been kept to a minimum.
- There has been a conscious effort to **limit the fiscal impact**.



- The fiscal impact of the 20-lakh crore rupees package is estimated by economists at between 2-3% of GDP.

*Government's stand:*

- Given the centre's current low revenue flow, there are not much resources with the government to spend on a fiscal stimulus.
- The option of a demand-side stimulus through a resort to deficit financing seems to be reserved for a future date if the infection does not subside or a second wave begins prompting another lockdown.

**Concerns with the present approach:**

- The government's decision to not borrow and spend more on boosting demand seems to neglect the current **desperate need for demand stimulus**.
- The increase in supply without proportionate increase in demand would render the **approach ineffective** and may in fact bring upon a **bigger problem** down the line.

**Way forward:**

- A strategy to **drive consumption by increasing the disposable income** in the hands of the people, **combined with a liquidity boost**, may have worked better under the prevailing conditions. A **fiscal stimulus** could have been fitted into the overall package.
- The measures needed to increase disposable income in the hands of the people could involve the following measures:
  - Suspending GST for a couple of months or cutting rates temporarily.
  - Lowering direct taxes.
  - **Ensuring work** for all those seeking jobs through schemes like MGNREGA.
  - **Income support** to vulnerable sections.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[CNA dated May 18, 2020](#)

**Category: HEALTH**

**1. Preparing for a syndemic**

**Context:**

- The World Health Organization has announced that COVID-19 is likely to last for an extended frame of time and experts have warned that there will be a second wave of infections.

**Details:**

- Given the possibility of diseases like dengue and malaria emerging with the upcoming monsoon season in tropical South Asia, experts have cautioned that COVID-19 could become even more problematic by becoming a syndemic.
  - **A syndemic is a situation when two or more epidemics interact synergistically** to produce an **increased burden of disease** in a population.

[su\_box title="Previous examples:" box\_color="#7960a0" title\_color="#ffffff"]

- The 1957 Asian influenza pandemic showed that deaths could be not only due to the primary viral infection, but also due to secondary bacterial infections among influenza patients; in short, they were caused by a viral/bacterial syndemic.
- Researchers have shown that in Kisumu, Kenya, 5% of HIV infections are due to higher [HIV](#) infectiousness of malaria-infected HIV patients.[/su\_box]

### Concerns:

#### **Increased vulnerability:**

- Medical experts have pointed out the need to watch out for **secondary bacterial infection** in those with **weakened immunity due to COVID-19**.

#### **Antibiotic resistance:**

- Given the **increasing antibiotic resistance across the world**, the medical community needs to be aware of **co-morbidities**, especially if COVID-19 deepens as a syndemic in populations with antibiotic resistance.

**Also read:** [Antimicrobial Resistance - Definition, Causes & Types](#)

#### **India's Challenges:**

- With **India's ongoing migrant crisis**, there is a possibility of COVID-19 becoming more widespread and intense given the large-scale urban-to-rural chaotic migration.
- In societies with **resource-constrained settings** like India, even an economical pooled testing strategy might be difficult to enforce due to financial reasons.
- Given the lure of speed of entry, there could be **quality concerns** of the newly introduced products and intellectual property battles.
- The **upcoming dengue and malaria season** will add to the burden of the medical sector and increase the complexity of the COVID-19 crisis.

#### **Way forward:**

#### **Innovative approach:**

- Along with aggressive population-level PCR and antibody testing, countries need to consider **innovations in population health surveillance technology** and develop creative business models at a large scale.
  - **Smart thermometers** could play a crucial role in constantly monitoring temperatures.
  - Monitoring oxygen levels in the brain daily through a **pulse oximeter**.
    - COVID-19 is found to cause happy hypoxia, where the lack of oxygen in the brain goes undetected till it gets severe.

## F. Prelims Facts

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## G. Tidbits

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to River Galwan:

1. The River flows through India and Pakistan.
2. It is an upstream tributary of River Indus.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Galwan River flows from the disputed Aksai Chin region in Xinjiang of China to Ladakh of India. It originates in the area of Samzungling on the eastern side of the Karakoram range and flows west to join the Shyok River. It is one of the upstream tributaries of the Indus River.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Saharias of Madhya Pradesh are classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
2. The highest number of PVTGs are found in Madhya Pradesh.
3. Some of the PVTGs are distributed in more than one State.

Which of the given statement/s is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Saharias of Madhya Pradesh are classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- Among the 75 listed PVTGs, the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar including Jharkhand (9), Madhya Pradesh including Chhattisgarh (7), Tamil Nadu (6), Kerala and Gujarat having five groups each. The remaining PVTGs live in West Bengal (3), Maharashtra (3), two each in Karnataka and Uttarakhand and one each in Rajasthan, Tripura and Manipur. All the four tribal groups in Andamans, and one in Nicobar Islands, are recognised as PVTGs.
- Some of the PVTGs are distributed in more than one State.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) :

1. NBWL is a statutory organization constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 with an advisory role.
2. No alternation of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.
3. The NBWL is chaired by the Environment Minister.

**Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?**

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is a statutory organization constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 with an advisory role. No alternation of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL. The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister.

**Q4. Cyclone Amphan is named by:**

- a. India
- b. Thailand
- c. Bangladesh
- d. Oman

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Amphan is the first tropical cyclone of the 2020 North Indian Ocean cyclone season.
- According to the India Meteorological Department forecast, it will make landfall as a very severe cyclone between the Sagar islands of West Bengal and the Hatiya islands of Bangladesh.
- It has been named by Thailand.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Analyze the reasons for the increasing financial vulnerability of the DISCOMs and evaluate the likely impact of the proposed reforms in the Electricity Act 2020. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package focuses more on supply side provisions than on demand side provisions. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)