

16 May 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Monsoon will arrive on June 5, says IMD

Context:

- India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast on the arrival of the monsoon.

Details:

IMD forecast:

- The **normal date of onset of the monsoon over Kerala is June 1.**
 - The monsoon is considered to have arrived over Kerala only if it meets several criteria, the most important being 14 meteorological stations in Kerala and Karnataka receiving a certain minimum amount of rainfall over two consecutive days.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast **a delay in the arrival of the monsoon this year.** The IMD has set a date of June 5.

Factors considered:

Summer temperatures in North India:

- The prevailing summer temperatures in north India is not conducive for monsoon onset. **Below-normal summer temperatures in north India** and **prevailing rainfall from Western Disturbances** will delay the monsoon's further progress to Kerala. The activity of the Western Disturbances has lowered temperatures and isn't helping the monsoon to establish.
 - **Western Disturbances** are rain bearing systems that **originate in the Mediterranean regions and bring rain to north India.**

Developing cyclone in the Bay of Bengal:

- IMD has also considered the influence of a developing cyclone in the Bay of Bengal.
- The IMD predicts that the storm in the Bay of Bengal is likely to grow into a cyclone and aid the advent of the monsoon into the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- The developing storm will **pull some of the monsoon winds into the Andamans** but it will take more time for conditions to develop enough for it to gain strength and move into Kerala.
- After the arrival on Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the monsoon typically takes 10-11 days to reach the Kerala coast.

Skymet's forecast:

- Skymet, a private forecaster, **expects the monsoon to arrive earlier.** Skymet has forecast May 28 as the date of arrival of monsoon.

- Skymet has argued that the cyclone in the Bay of Bengal will not hamper the routine progress of the monsoons and instead the early onset of monsoon in the A&N Islands will bring the monsoon early over Kerala.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC relief for firms unable to pay full wages during lockdown

Context:

- Supreme Court's observation of the Home Ministry orders.

Background:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had issued an order mandating the industry, shops and commercial establishments, to pay their workers without any deductions in the name of COVID-19. The order directed the payment of full wages.

Petitions against the MHA order:

- This order was challenged by several companies.
 - They challenged the constitutional validity of the order arguing that the blanket directive to pay full salaries against no work was **arbitrary and violative of Article 14 (Right to Equality) of the Constitution.**
 - They argued that there is an obligation to pay when work is actually done and there is no obligation if no work is done and that the **employer has a right to not pay if no work is done.**

SC observations:

- The Supreme Court has asked the **government not to resort to any coercive action against any private companies** who had not paid their workers full wages during the lockdown in accordance with the previous government order.
- The court has opined that the payment of full wages, as directed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) order **may not be viable for small and private enterprises**, which are tottering on the brink of insolvency due to the lockdown.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. New law for contract farming

Context:

- Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan economic stimulus package.

Details:

- A major provision of the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan economic stimulus package** involves the fulfilment of the long-pending **agricultural marketing reforms**.

Promoting inter-state trade:

- The Centre has been attempting to reform agricultural marketing through a model Act and encouraging States to adopt it. However, given the wide divergence of the laws of different states, these laws have not been effective enough.
- In this light, the Union Finance Minister has announced plans to enact a **central law** to permit **barrier-free inter-State trade of farm commodities and e-trading**. This will allow farmers to sell produce at **attractive prices** beyond the current mandi system.
- The centre argues that though **agricultural marketing comes under the State List**, the **inter-State trade falls in the central list** and the centre can, therefore, make such a law.

Contract farming:

- There are also plans to ensure a facilitative **legal framework to oversee contract farming**.
- This would provide **farmers with assured sale prices and quantities** even before the crop is sown and also allow **private players to invest in inputs and technology** in the agricultural sector.

Deregulating produce:

- The Centre will be deregulating the sale of six types of agricultural produce, including cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potatoes, by amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- **Stock limits will not be imposed** on these commodities except in case of national calamity or famine or an extraordinary surge in prices. These stock limits would not apply to processors and exporters.
- The argument for the deregulation is that the Essential Commodities Act was enacted at a time of food scarcity, and needs to reflect current concerns wherein the farmer's income is as important as ensuring consumer demands.

Investment in infrastructure:

- The economic stimulus package also includes a plan to **invest 1.5 lakh crore rupees** to build farm-gate infrastructure and support logistics needs for fish workers, livestock farmers, vegetable growers, beekeepers and related activities.

Significance:

- Some of the reforms being envisaged have been under discussion for over two decades. These have been long overdue reforms.
- The mandi closures during the lockdown had highlighted the urgent need for multiple channels to sell produce. The sought agricultural reforms are seeking to convert this crisis into an opportunity.

- The reforms will have a positive **impact on the food processing sector**. The reforms will **encourage investments in food processing** and together with the infrastructure outlays will contribute in shaping a competitive agri value chain, reduce wastages and raise farmer incomes.
- These reforms will **benefit both farmers and consumers**.
 - The reforms will **empower farmers**, strengthen agri-food processing linkages and enable demand-driven value added agriculture.
 - The reforms will contribute towards **mitigating post-harvest losses and wastage** by giving a fillip to scientific storage facilities.
 - The reforms will **help the small farmers earn additional income** by way of value-added agri-produce through food-processing.
- The reforms are significant given that the agricultural sector provides livelihoods to about half of India's workforce.

Concerns:

- Though several agricultural economists and farm activists have welcomed the reform and investment announcements, they have also expressed concerns over the **lack of immediate support** to help farmers survive the current crisis.
- They have argued that currently, it is the **time for relief**, which should be prioritised over reform.

2. 1 lakh crore rupee farm infra fund to be financed by NABARD: FM

Context:

- The Union Finance Minister has announced plans for a **1 lakh crore rupees farm infrastructure fund** as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package.

Background:

- Supply chain disruptions during COVID-19 revealed critical **gaps in agricultural infrastructure and logistics systems**.
 - Farmers were forced to throw away their produce or sell their produce at a loss due to the lockdown. The consumers also faced supply issues during the lockdown.

Details:

- The 1 lakh crore rupees Agriculture Infrastructure Fund will be **financed and managed by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)**.
- Financing will be provided to primary agriculture cooperative societies, farmer producer organisations, agriculture entrepreneurs and start-ups to **develop cold chain storage and other post-harvest management infrastructure** at the farm gate and aggregation points.
- The stimulus package also includes **plans to strengthen infrastructure in food processing**, fisheries, animal husbandry, horticulture, herbal cultivation and beekeeping with total funding of 50,000 crore rupees.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. NEET is not student-friendly, merit-promoting

Context:

- Recent judgment of the Supreme Court on the **National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)**.

Background:

- NEET was initially struck down as unconstitutional in **Christian Medical College, Vellore case (2013)** by a 2:1 majority.
- In 2016, NEET notifications were incorporated as statutory provisions under the Medical Council of India Act and the Dentists Act.
- In 2016, a review petition** was allowed and NEET was made compulsory even prior to a full hearing by the constitution Bench.

Details:

- The Supreme Court in its judgment has held that there is no fundamental right violation in prescribing **National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admissions of graduate and post-graduate programs in medical and dental courses** across aided and unaided minority professional institutes and has upheld the NEET examination for institutes across the country.
- The SC has held that a **uniform entrance examination like NEET** helps weed out evils from the system and various malpractices which have decayed the educational system.

Concerns:

- The author of the article expresses concerns over the recent judgment and argues that key concerns of NEET have been overlooked by the SC bench.

Disadvantaging students:

- With NEET and similar other national tests such as the Joint Entrance Examination and Common Law Admission Test, coaching institutes are prospering and gaining undue influence over the coaching industry.
- The large-scale variation in the syllabus and standards of the Central Board of Secondary Education and State boards place at a disadvantage the students coming from state boards.

- The author argues that in the case of **multiple tests a student tends to gain** due to the following reasons:
 - If a student falls ill or has not done well in one test, he/she will still have a chance to qualify in another without losing a year.
 - It gives a student a right to select an institution of his choice.

Element of class:

- Though the SC bench notes that NEET promotes merit, the author argues that true meritocracy requires competition and equality of opportunity.
 - Since **most of the coaching institutes are located in cities**, poorer students from a rural background and who have studied in the vernacular medium face a disadvantage.
- Empirical research in the United States on **standardised common tests** has found that these tests are **biased against the poorer and underprivileged sections of population, women and minorities**. Thus there is an element of class in NEET that the Indian judiciary has so far overlooked.

Minority rights:

- SC has stated that the **minority institutions are equally bound to comply with the conditions imposed under the relevant Acts and regulations** to enjoy affiliation and recognition.
- The author argues that minority rights are not the violation of the equality provision in Article 14 as the **Constitution does permit classification**. Substantive equality, as opposed to formal equality, mandates differential treatment.
- The author argues that the rights of minority institutions are being violated through the regulation measures of the government.
- Though minority institutions cannot grant admission based on their whims and fancies, but if such an institution follows an identifiable or reasonable methodology of admitting students, the **imposition of NEET with mandatory centralised counselling** is indeed an unreasonable restriction on these institutions.
- Even if one concedes the necessity of NEET, centralised counselling due to which several minority institutions and private medical colleges are unable to fill their seats is indeed an 'intolerable encroachment' of the rights of minority institutions.
- This leads to the denial of **Article 30 rights of minority institutions and Article 19(g) rights of private unaided institutions**. The Supreme Court has upheld the importance of Article 30 time and again through its numerous judgments.

Lessens autonomy of institutes:

- The NEET exam is a clear case of **centralization in the educational sector**.
- The author argues that NEET lessens the autonomy of universities and higher education institutions, particularly private, unaided ones.

Increasing government domination of the educational process:

- The author argues that exclusive control of education by the State may have **undesirable impacts on the society**. Institutions of higher learning controlled and managed by governmental agencies may promote the political purposes of the State.
- The author argues that the trend towards the governmental domination of the educational process must be resisted in the interest of democracy.

Other concerns:

- NEET paper has been leaked twice in the last four years and therefore, there is not much confidence in NEET's fairness and transparency.
- In the 2018 NEET, as many as 49 questions had errors in Tamil translation.
- Some argue that common admission tests **cannot measure abilities that are essential for learning such as imagination, curiosity and motivation**.

2. TASMAL tribulations

Context:

- Supreme Court Judgment on Liquor sale in Tamil Nadu.

Background:

- Faced with dwindling revenue due to the stagnation in economic activity since the national lockdown began, States desperate to raise money have resorted to restarting liquor sales.
- Tamil Nadu had restarted liquor sales through outlets of the State-run TASMAL. The Madras High Court initially allowed the State government to open its network of liquor shops, subject to several conditions for maintaining physical distancing. However, after overwhelming evidence of lack of physical distancing, the HC banned across-the-counter sales and directed that only online sale be permitted.
- Tamil Nadu Government had approached the Supreme Court to obtain a stay on the Madras High Court order.

Details:

- Keeping with its other interim orders on similar petitions from other states, **SC stayed the HC order, paving the way for the resumption of sales through outlets**.

SC's take:

- The State government's argument that the HC ought not to have interfered in a **policy matter** seems to have convinced the SC.
- The SC seems to be mindful of the need **to preserve the policy space of States**, choosing not to impose its views or ideas on any government. It wants the state to decide on the viability of opening liquor sales without leading to any adverse spread of the pandemic.

Concerns:

- The **number of people testing positive for the novel coronavirus is increasing** in Tamil Nadu. The opening of liquor outlets may increase the rate of infection.
- SC's observation that online sale is not possible in a State like Tamil Nadu seems to be questionable.

Way forward:

- The State government has to live up to its promise of **preventing overcrowding** in the vicinity of the liquor outlets.

F. Tidbits

1. Centre borrows another \$1 billion from World Bank for COVID-19 relief

- The Centre would be availing \$1 billion loan from the World Bank to support its **COVID-19 relief measures and financial assistance for the poorest and most vulnerable communities**.
 - The new support will help fund the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana**, to scale up cash transfers and free food grain distribution to vulnerable communities, pensioners and poor workers, and provide insurance support to health workers.
- The money will also be used for **reforms in India's social security net**, making it more integrated, portable and focussed on the urban poor.
- The WB had already approved a \$1 billion loan to support India's health sector in April. Hence the WBs total commitment to India's COVID-19 response currently stands \$2 billion.

2. 'A self-reliant India will not be isolationist'

- All crises alter geo-politics, and there will be significant changes after COVID-19 too. This would include re-balancing of hard and soft power, the emergence of new multilateral conversations and change in the strength of the countries.
- Recently the Prime Minister had pitched to make **India self-reliant** by sustained focus on making the **nation's economy globally competitive**.
- The Foreign Secretary of India has stated that a self-reliant India will automatically be a **more internationalist India** as it does not seek self-centred or "isolationist" arrangements.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Coast Guard ship count hits 150

- A ship and two interceptor boats (IB) were commissioned into the **Coast Guard** recently.
 - **Ship ICGS Sachet** is the first in a series of five **offshore patrol vessels (OPVs)** being built by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).
 - It is designed to carry a twin-engine helicopter and four high-speed boats and one inflatable boat for swift boarding and search and rescue operations.
 - The ship is also capable of carrying **limited pollution response** equipment to undertake oil spill pollution response at sea.

- The ships will be deployed extensively for **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance, coastal security** and other duties as enshrined in the Coast Guard charter of duties, to safeguard the maritime interests of the nation.
- The **interceptor boats, C-450 and C-451**, are designed & built by the Larsen & Toubro Shipyard, Hazira.
 - These boats are designed for high-speed interception, close patrol and low intensity operations.
- The Navy has formally inducted landing craft utility (LCU) L57 into service at Port Blair. This is the seventh LCU in the series of the MK-IV class.

2. Merchandise exports drop over 60%

- With the global trade coming to a near halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, India's **merchandise exports decreased by over 60% year-on-year**.
 - **Except for iron ore and drugs and pharmaceuticals**, all other commodities saw negative growth.
 - The decline in merchandise exports has been mainly due to the ongoing global slowdown, further aggravated due to the current Covid-19 crisis. The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in **large scale disruptions in supply chains and demand** resulting in a cancellation of orders.
- **Service exports for April 2020 have also witnessed a decline** of about 36.65% year-on-year.
- Notably, the **merchandise trade deficit for April 2020 has reduced**. There is the **overall trade surplus** for April 2020 of around \$0.16 billion as compared to the deficit of \$8.67 billion in April 2019.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following would qualify as advantages of Contract farming?

1. Farmers can have improved access to technology, credit, marketing channels and information.
2. Farmers can have an assured market for their produce.
3. It reduces the risk of price fluctuations for both the seller and the buyer.
4. It ensures a consistent supply of agricultural produce with quality, at the right time and lesser cost for the buyers.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Contract farming can be defined as agricultural production carried out according to an agreement between a buyer and farmers, which establishes conditions for the production and marketing of a farm product or products.
- Contract farming is beneficial for both the farm-producers as well as the buyers.
 - Makes small scale farming competitive – small farmers can access technology, credit, marketing channels and information while lowering transaction costs
 - Assured market for their produce at their doorsteps, reducing marketing and transaction costs
 - It reduces the risk of production, price and marketing costs.
 - Contract farming can open up new markets which would otherwise be unavailable to small farmers.
 - It also ensures higher production of better quality, financial support in cash and /or kind and technical guidance to the farmers.
 - In case of firms, it ensures consistent supply of agricultural produce with quality, at right time and lesser cost.

Q2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. NABARD was established on the recommendations of B.Sivaramman Committee.
2. NABARD is a statutory body.
3. The Government of India and Reserve Bank of India hold equal shares in NABARD.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- NABARD is one of the premier agencies providing developmental credit in rural areas. NABARD is India's specialised bank for Agriculture and Rural Development in India.
- NABARD was established on the recommendations of B.Sivaramman Committee. It is a statutory body based on the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Act 1981.
- It replaced the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).
- Consequent to the revision in the composition of share capital between Government of India and RBI, the Government of India holds 100% share in NABARD.

Q3. Which of the following factors affect Monsoon arrival in India?

1. Western Disturbances
2. Cyclones in the Bay of Bengal
3. Summer temperatures over North India
4. Jet streams
5. Cross-equatorial flow of winds

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The high summer temperatures over north India creates a Low Pressure zone which helps pull in moisture laden winds.
- Western disturbances bring rainfall into north Indian region which helps cool the temperatures. This impacts the formation of a low pressure zone over Indian landmass.
- The shifting of the jet stream north of the Himalayas leads to the sudden burst of Monsoons in India.
- The cross-equatorial flow of winds is another factor which is responsible for the onset of Monsoon. The significant cross equatorial flow of winds wherein winds from the Southern Hemisphere cross to the Equator becoming southwesterly. A significant cross equatorial wind pattern is quite capable of bringing a strong Monsoon surge towards the Indian mainland.

Q4. The Ship 'Sachet' recently inducted into service is a :

- a. Offshore patrol vessel of the Indian Coast Guard
- b. Interceptor boats of the Indian Coast Guard
- c. Frigate of the Indian Navy
- d. Guided Missile destroyer of the Indian Navy

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Ship ICGS Sachet is the first in a series of five offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) being built by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).

- It is designed to carry a twin-engine helicopter and four high-speed boats and one inflatable boat for swift boarding and search and rescue operations.
- The ship is also capable of carrying limited pollution response equipment to undertake oil spill pollution response at sea.
- The ships will be deployed extensively for Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance, coastal security and other duties as enshrined in the Coast Guard charter of duties, to safeguard the maritime interests of the nation.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the recent Supreme Court judgment with respect to the NEET exam, evaluate the advantages and concerns associated with a uniform entrance examination like NEET. (15 marks, 250 words)
2. Discuss the provisions of Article 30 of the Indian Constitution. Analyze the arguments both in favour of more autonomy of the Minority institutes as well as the need for regulation of such institutes. (10 marks, 150 words)