

## 21 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. India in touch with Iran over Farzad B, says govt.

##### Context:

In a setback to India, Iran awarded a contract for developing the giant gas field – Farzad-B in the Persian Gulf to a local company.

- ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), the overseas investment arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), India, had in 2008 discovered a giant gas field in the Farsi offshore exploration block.
- The Indian consortium has so far invested around \$400 million in the block.
- A Development Service Contract (DSC) of the Farzad-B gas field was negotiated till November 2012, but could not be finalized due to difficult terms and international sanctions on Iran.
- In April 2015, negotiations restarted with Iranian authorities to develop the Farzad-B gas field under a new Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC). However, the negotiations remained inconclusive.
- As U.S. sanctions against Iran were reinstated after the United States withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, the negotiations broke down.

##### Location:



#### 2. China completes Tibet highway

##### Context:

China has completed the construction of a strategic highway through the Brahmaputra Canyon.

##### China's Border Infrastructure push – Strategic significance:

- The strategically significant highway through the world's deepest canyon is in Tibet along the Brahmaputra river.
  - It passes through the Grand Canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is called in Tibet.

- It enables greater access to remote areas along the **disputed border with Arunachal Pradesh** in India.
- The construction began in 2014 and is **part of a wider infrastructure push in border areas in Tibet**.
- In **November 2020**, China began work on a **strategically important railway line** — its **second major rail link to Tibet** that will link Sichuan province with Nyingchi.
  - The first one was the **Qinghai-Tibet railway that opened in 2006**.
  - The Chinese President called it a **major step in safeguarding national unity** and a significant move in **promoting the economic and social development of the western region**.
  - The railway would act as a 'fast track' for the **delivery of strategic materials in the time of crisis**.
- Another part of the border infrastructure push is the **construction of new civilian settlements**, along with the **expansion of existing smaller hamlets, along border areas**, some of which lie in **disputed territories claimed by India and Bhutan**, to strengthen China's control over the land.
- In 2017, the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government** launched a plan to build moderately well-off villages **along China's borders with India, Bhutan and Nepal**.

#### Concerns:

- In 2020, satellite images emerged showing a **new village called Pangda built 2-3 km into what Bhutan sees as its land**.
- In 2021, a **village built 4-5 km into what India sees as its territory in Arunachal** was seen via satellite images.
  - Indian officials said this land has been under China's effective control since 1959 and there were military barracks there earlier.

#### Conclusion:

- The civilian settlements, **along with the new infrastructure connectivity**, are seen as **aimed at bolstering China's control over the areas**.

### 3. U.S., Russia at odds over military activity in the Arctic

#### Context:

A campaign is being led by the Biden administration **against Russian attempts to assert authority over Arctic shipping**.

#### Details:

- Russia assumed the rotating chairmanship of the [Arctic Council](#) in May 2021.
- Following this, the U.S. rallied members to oppose Moscow's plans to set **maritime rules in the Northern Sea Route** and its desire to **resume military talks within the council**.
  - Those **talks were suspended in 2014 over Russia's actions in Ukraine**.

- The US Secretary of State stressed the importance of **upholding effective governance** and the **rule of law** to ensure that the “**Arctic remains a region free of conflict where countries act responsibly.**”

**Concerns:**

- Russia has become active in the region due to the effects of climate change.
- The effort reflects **growing concerns in Washington and among some NATO allies** about a **surge in Russian military and commercial activity in the region.**

**Northern Sea Route:**



Image source: <https://www.economist.com/>

- The Northern Sea Route is one of several Arctic shipping routes.
- The Northern Sea Route runs from **Norway to Alaska**.
  - It runs from the **Barents Sea**, near Russia's border with Norway, to the **Bering Strait** between Siberia and Alaska.
- The **entire route lies in Arctic waters** and **within Russia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ)**.

**4. Sri Lanka Parliament passes Bill on China-backed Port City**

### Context:

The **Sri Lankan Parliament** passed a **controversial bill** on laws governing the **China-backed Colombo Port City**.

### Details:

- The **\$1.4-billion Colombo Port City** was launched in **2014** during the previous term of the Rajapaksa government, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the nation.
- It is currently **being built on land reclaimed alongside Colombo's iconic seafront**.
- Environmentalists and fisherfolk have opposed the move.

This issue has been covered in **UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. May 19th, 2021 CNA.**

## **Category: HEALTH**

### **1. Declare mucormycosis an epidemic: Centre to States**

### Context:

The Union government has asked the States to declare mucormycosis an epidemic.

- Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Telangana have already declared the fungal infection being reported in COVID-19 patients an epidemic.

Read more on this topic covered in the **20<sup>th</sup> May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

### Details:

- A new challenge in the form of a **fungal infection, namely mucormycosis**, has emerged and is reported from many States **amongst COVID-19 patients**, especially those **on steroid therapy and deranged sugar control**.
- This infection is leading to **prolonged morbidity and mortality** amongst COVID-19 patients.
- The **main line of treatment is an anti-fungal drug called Amphotericin B**, which is given over an extended period of time. **Surgery** might also be warranted.

Read more on **Mucormycosis [Black Fungus]**

## **C. GS 3 Related**

## **Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

### **1. World's largest iceberg breaks off**

### Context:

A huge ice block has **broken off from Western Antarctica** into the **Weddell Sea**, becoming **the largest iceberg in the world**.



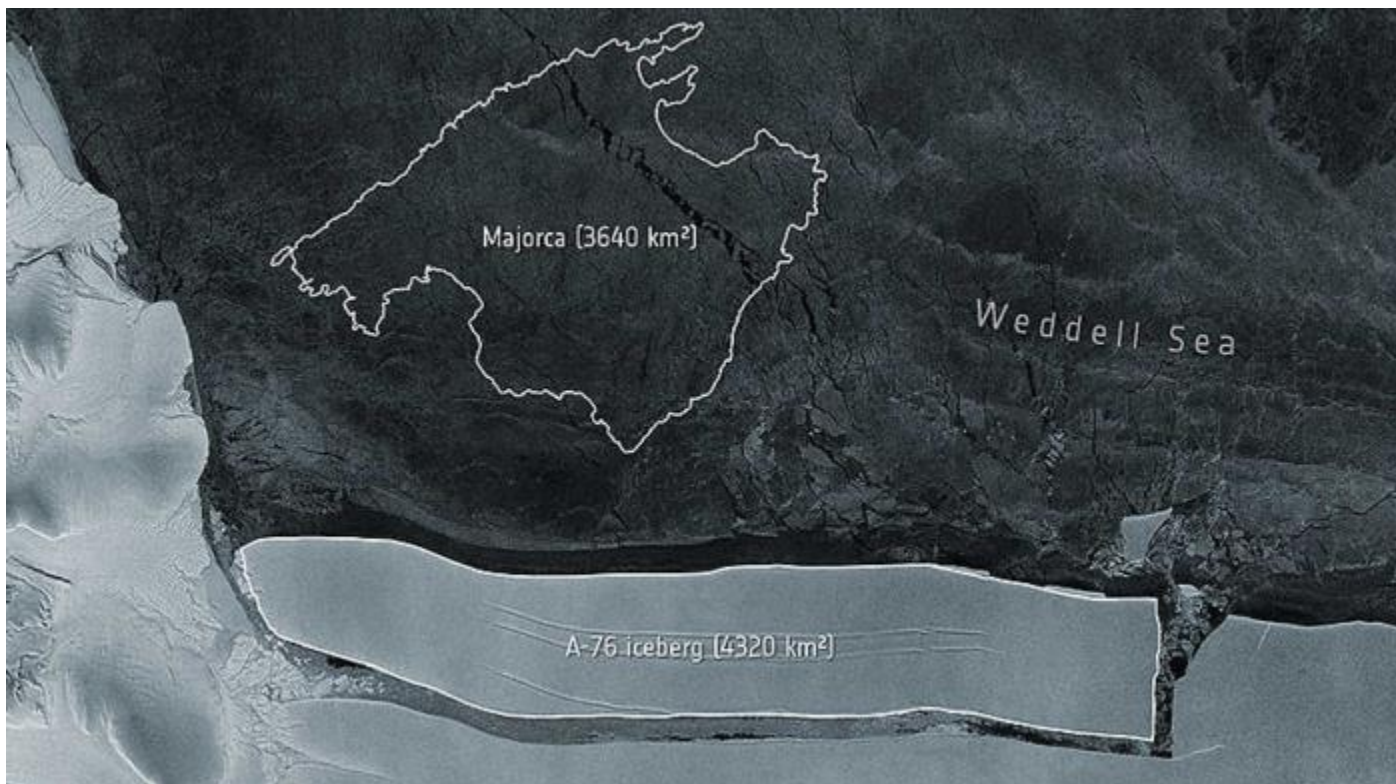


Image Source: <https://www.reuters.com/>

**Details:**

- The iceberg has been named **A-76**.
- It had been monitored by scientists **since it began to separate from the Ronne Ice Shelf**.
- It measures **around 170 km long and 25 km wide**, with an area of 4,320 sq km and is now **floating in the Weddell Sea**.
  - It is slightly larger than the Spanish island of Majorca.
- It is the **latest in a series of large ice blocks to dislodge** in a region acutely **vulnerable to climate change**.
- According to the scientists, it appeared to be **part of a natural polar cycle**.

**Note:**

- **A-23A, the previous world's largest titleholder** has remained in the same area since 1986.
- Icebergs form when chunks of **ice break off from ice shelves or glaciers** and begin to **float in open water**.
- Once it melts, the **new iceberg will not lead to a sea-level rise**, because it was part of a floating ice shelf.

**How are these icebergs named?**

- Icebergs are traditionally named from the **Antarctic quadrant in which they were originally sighted**, then a **sequential number** and, if the iceberg breaks, a **sequential letter** is given to it.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: ECONOMY

#### 1. Can the economy survive the second COVID-19 wave?

##### Context:

- The article analyzes the potential **economic impact of the second COVID-19 wave** and State-level lockdowns, while comparing it with the first wave.

##### Comparison of the economic impact of the two waves of the pandemic:

- A key difference between the first and second waves has been that while the nationwide lockdown last year in response to the first wave of the pandemic resulted in a severe supply shock, the **second wave has resulted more in a demand shock than supply shock**.

##### Magnitude of economic slowdown:

- **The impact of the second wave is likely to be less severe than the first one.**
- Businesses and people have started to adapt to lockdowns and the contraction in demand would be much lower this time.
- Though most forecasts are predicting that there won't be an economic contraction this year and are expecting positive growth for India, the **growth rate is going to be very low**.
- As against the predictions before the second wave, that FY 2021-22 GDP should cross the pre-pandemic 2019-20 GDP in such a scenario is highly unlikely.

##### Challenges of the second wave:

##### Prolonged slowdown:

- The slow pace of vaccination and the **uncertainty and fear of a third wave** would result in the **government being hesitant in opening the economy up** very quickly.
- A significant section of the population has spent a large amount of their savings to fight COVID-19. Some have also been pushed into debt and poverty hampering their financial situation. Such sections will find it difficult to spend even on essentials. This is likely to have an **adverse impact on consumption expenditure based growth revival**.
- The second wave has created a lot of **uncertainty, pessimism and loss of confidence among households and businesses**. It will take time for people to start recovering because it has created a lot of uncertainty. The uncertainty would also disincentivize people with financial resources to spend.

- Hence a **V-shaped recovery** is highly unlikely and the economic recovery is most likely to take a lot of time.

#### **Doubtful effectiveness of monetary responses:**

- As against the previous year, where the RBI announced a large number of monetary measures to mitigate the economic impact of the first wave of the pandemic, there have been very few measures this time around.
- This can be attributed to the fact that there is **very little space for an expansionary monetary policy** given that India is experiencing bouts of inflation as well as growth slowdown, raising **fears of stagflation**.
- The fact that the Indian **economy is not currently in sync with the global business cycle** has resulted in a situation where inflation in the domestic economy has been rising despite a domestic demand slowdown.
  - In advanced economies, growth is picking up and as a result, inflation is picking up as demand recovers. As a result, global commodity prices on items such as crude oil have been surging and this has had an impact on India's domestic inflation.
- The RBI's attempts to incentivise banks to lend to sectors that have been hit hard have not been very successful because of the **risk-averse behaviour of the banks** and their lack of willingness to lend.
- Also despite several incentives for businesses to borrow like the ease of approvals, lower interest rates, etc., there has been **negligible credit off take growth**.
- The risk-averse nature of banks and the lack of interest in businesses to borrow limit the effectiveness of the monetary measures in reviving economic growth.

#### **Limited ability to execute fiscal responses:**

- Given that India's **debt-to-GDP ratio has risen to around 90%** and there has been a collapse in revenues, the ability of the government to employ fiscal responses to revive growth is limited.

#### **Impact on rural areas:**

- Compared to the first wave, this time the **rural areas have witnessed a larger number of infections and mortalities**.
- The **reverse migration** to rural areas has caused an increase in unemployment and **MGNREGA** is not able to absorb workers, which has resulted in a huge mismatch between demand and supply.
- There has been a larger number of job losses in the rural sector. Last time, rural employment was in a much better position as compared to urban unemployment. The **fear of infections has also led to the deceleration of economic activity in rural areas** this time around.
- During the first wave, the robust growth in the agricultural sector had helped limit the national economic contraction to some extent.
- Unlike the last year when the government was able to spend their way out of trouble by spending to create economic activity, this time around it would be difficult to implement such a policy.

### **Category: GOVERNANCE**



## 1. The outdated nature of bureaucracy

### Background:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge to public administration and has tested the resilience of all public institutions.
- The **bureaucracy is being blamed for its ineffective response to the COVID-19 crisis.**
- Academicians and public administration experts have pointed out the **outdated nature of public bureaucracy** for its ineffectiveness.

### Concerns:

#### Continued reliance on traditional bureaucratic structures:

- The article laments the fact that even in this 21st century, democratic countries are still relying on **traditional bureaucracies (Weberian bureaucracy model)** to perform public policy formulation and implementation roles despite such structures having outlived their relevance.
- Some of the major lacunae with respect to the Weberian bureaucratic approach are as follows:
  - Continued **preference for generalists over specialists**
    - In such a system, specialists in every government department have to remain subordinate to the generalist officers despite their superior domain knowledge.
    - The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weakness of such an approach. The lack of authority to healthcare professionals who are specialists to carry out policy formulation can be counted as one of the major lacunae in our policy response to the pandemic.
  - Weberian bureaucracy prefers **leadership of position over leadership of function.**
    - Leadership of function is when a person has expert knowledge of a particular responsibility in a particular situation and is capable of and authorized to respond to evolving situations rather than relying on dictation from someone occupying a particular position.
    - This acts as a major **limitation for decentralized governance which is more effective.** This has resulted in a situation where the bureaucracy has become an end in itself rather than a means to an end, which is, improved governance and socio-economic development of the society.
  - The **rigid adherence to rules** in the traditional bureaucratic structure has been an area of major concern.
    - The strict adherence to process and rules has resulted in COVID-19 aid getting stuck in cumbersome clearance processes even during the pandemic.
    - The rigid **emphasis on the following of rules and regulations and the fear of official sanctions** have resulted in the **rejection of innovation from public officials.**

#### Limitations of outright privatization:

- In the light of the lacunae in the existent bureaucratic structure, there have been growing calls for a new public management in India, which promotes privatisation and managerial techniques of the private sector as an effective tool to seek improvements in public service delivery and governance.
- However, it should be noted that **outright privatization may not be a viable solution in India where there is social inequality and regional variations in development.**
- The private sector is driven by the motive of profits and hence would cater only to people and areas where their operations are financially viable. They would not be able to serve the poor due to his/her inability to pay for the private sector's work.
- Such an approach renders the state as a mere bystander among the multiple market players with accountability being constantly shifted, especially during a crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that the private sector has failed in public service delivery.

### Recommendations:

#### **Collaborative governance:**

- The most appropriate administrative reform to ensure more effective public governance is aiming for collaborative governance in which the **public sector, private players and civil society, especially public service organisations (NGOs), work together for effective public service delivery.**
- Benefits of such a system:
  - Such a system would ensure that there is **no domination of public bureaucracy in policy formulation and implementation.** This can help change the behaviour of bureaucracy towards governance and also help initiate public service reforms – relook at the generalist versus specialist debate, **openness to reforms such as lateral entry and collaboration with a network of social actors.**
  - In such a system the existing network of social actors and private players would take responsibility in various aspects of governance with public bureaucracy coordinating the efforts. Such a structure would allow **the institutionalization of the critical role being played by civil society.** This will help in scaling the impact of effective civil societies.
    - Civil society has been playing a major role during the pandemic.
  - The collaboration of public bureaucracy with the private and social society has had a profound impact on public service delivery as seen in the following cases.
    - Green Revolution (M.S. Swaminathan), the [White Revolution](#) (Verghese Kurien), Aadhaar-enabled services (Nandan Nilekani) and the IT revolution (Sam Pitroda).

### Conclusion:

- The public sector, private players and civil society should all work together for public service delivery.
- Such **new public governance which can help address the various lacunae and make public administration more effective is the future of governance,** especially public service delivery in India.

## **Category: HEALTH**

### **1. The fault line of poor health infrastructure**

- The article analyzes some of the major lacunae in India's public health system. This topic has been previously discussed in the following articles:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 11th May 2021](#)

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 14th May 2021](#)

## F. Prelims Facts

### 1. Delhi HC asks hospitals to install oxygen plants

#### What's in News?

In the backdrop of acute shortage of medical oxygen, the Delhi High Court has asked big hospitals in the capital to install Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants.

#### Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants

- Pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen generating plants are a source of medical-grade oxygen.
- Pressure swing adsorption (PSA) is a technology used to separate some gas species from a mixture of gases under pressure.
- PSA operates at near-ambient temperatures (temperature relating to the immediate surroundings) and differs significantly from cryogenic distillation techniques of gas separation.
- Cryogenic separation is a commercial process that takes place at very low temperature.

Also read: [Pressure Swing Adsorption Working Technology, Oxygen Concentrators](#)

## G. Tidbits

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements about pardoning powers of the Governor is/are correct?

1. The Governor can pardon, reprieve, respite, remit, suspend or commute a death sentence.
2. Governor does not have the power to pardon the sentence inflicted by a court-martial on the convict.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Unlike the President of India, the Governor does not have the power to pardon a death sentence.
- A governor can reprieve, respite, remit, suspend or commute a death sentence.
- Governor does not have the power to pardon the sentence inflicted by a court-martial on the convict.

**Q2. A-76 recently seen in news is**

- a. A team of research scholars visiting Antarctica in an attempt to measure pollution and climate change
- b. A project funded by the European Space Agency (ESA) to understand the pole's gravity field
- c. A large iceberg that has broken off from the Ronne Ice Shelf in Antarctica
- d. An experiment being conducted in the Southern Ocean, Antarctica, aimed at increasing CO sequestration through ocean iron fertilization

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

A huge ice block has broken off from Ronne Ice Shelf in Western Antarctica into the Weddell Sea, becoming the largest iceberg in the world. This has been named A-76.

**Q3. Consider the following statements:**

1. Tropical cyclones have much more intense rainfall than temperate cyclones.
2. Tropical cyclones are surrounded by closed isobars, the isobars of a temperate cyclone are generally elongated.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- Tropical cyclones have much more intense rainfall than temperate cyclones.
- Tropical cyclones are surrounded by closed isobars, the isobars of a temperate cyclone are generally elongated.
- While the velocity of wind in a tropical cyclone is much higher and more damaging, the velocity of air in a temperate cyclone is comparatively lower.

**Also read: Major Differences between Temperate Cyclone and Tropical Cyclone**

**Q4. Which of the following is/are the advantages of Northern Sea Route (NSR)?**

1. It could potentially cut the travel distance between East Asia and Western Europe.
2. Substantial reductions in transportation time.
3. Increased insurance costs and safety considerations.

**Options:**

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- The Northern Sea Route is one of several Arctic shipping routes along the Siberian coast in Russia.
- The Northern Sea Route runs from Norway to Alaska.
  - It runs from the Barents Sea, near Russia's border with Norway, to the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska.
- It will help reduce the transportation time and cost.
- It could potentially cut the travel distance between East Asia and Western Europe.
- However, the disadvantage is that it would increase the insurance costs and safety considerations as the route is open only for 3 months of the year. The region is ice-free only during the summer.

**Q5. Recombinant DNA technology (Genetic Engineering) allows genes to be transferred**

1. across different species of plants
2. from animals to plants
3. from microorganisms to higher organisms

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below. [UPSC 2013]**

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**



- Genetic Engineering or Recombinant DNA technology allows selected individual genes to be transferred from one organism into another, also between nonrelated species.
- It allows genes to be transferred across different species of plants, from animals to plants and from microorganisms to higher organisms.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite predictions that 'New Public Management' would establish itself as the new paradigm of Public Administration, the future of governance is new public governance. Do you agree? Substantiate. (15 Marks, 250 Marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. The Centre's attempt to introduce notable reforms in the system should not be at the cost of bypassing the State Governments. In the light of the statement, discuss the significance of cooperative federalism. (10 Marks, 150 Marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]

