

1. **Amphan hits West Bengal and Odisha.**
2. **Domestic flights to resume from May 25th.**
3. **Two in five COVID 19 patients have recovered ; TN cases crosses 13,000.**
4. **External Affairs Ministry unhappy with Nepal's new political map.**
5. **LAC heats up with China accusing India of trespassing it's territory.**

Cyclone Amphan (pronounced as UM-PUN) is a tropical cyclone formed over Bay of Bengal that has intensified and likely to turn into a "super cyclonic storm (maximum wind speed is 120 knots)".

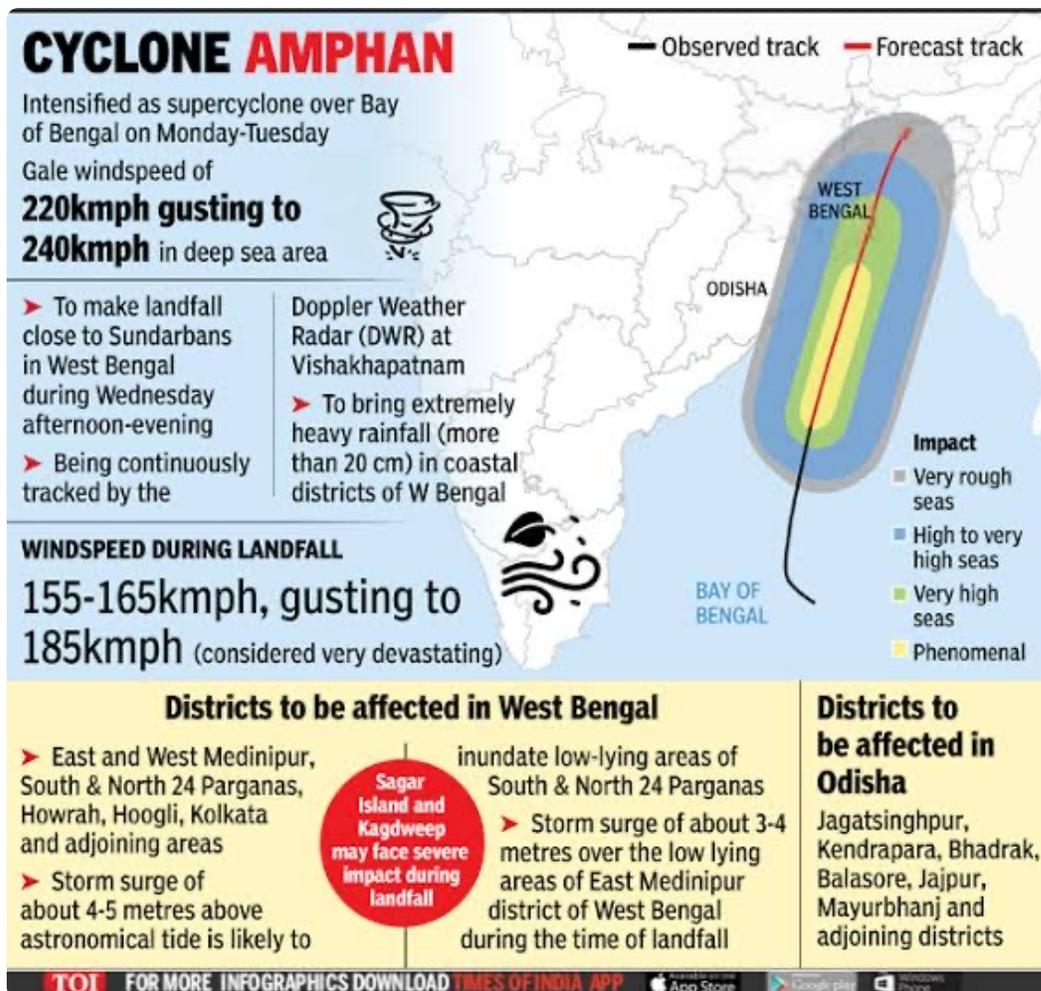
According to the India Meteorological Department forecast, it will make landfall as a very severe cyclone between the Sagar islands of West Bengal and the Hatiya islands of Bangladesh.

It has been named by Thailand.

Affected Regions: West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh.

Amphan is the second pre-monsoon cyclone to form in the Bay of Bengal in two years. The first one was Cyclone Fani.

The pre-monsoon period is generally considered to be unsupportive for the formation of tropical cyclones.



Recently, anti-India demonstrations were seen on the streets of Nepal over the release of a new political map of India, made after the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

The maps showed Kalapani (at the India-Nepal-China trijunction) to the north and Susta (bordering Bihar) to the south as Indian territory.

Reason for Anti-India Sentiments

Nepal and India have been bound together since ages through historical, religious, social, cultural, economic and political relations. The relationship is unique in a sense that neither country has allowed a political boundary to interrupt the free movement of people.

Nepal is ruled by the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) which has political leanings towards China. China is also actively pursuing its foreign policy to decrease India's influence over Nepal and mark its footprints in the territory of Nepal.

A major rupture in relations between the two countries occurred in 2015 at the time of the making of the current constitution of Nepal (which replaced the 2007 Interim Constitution).

India unsuccessfully tried to pursue Nepal to amicably address the grievances of the Madheshi, Janajati and other disadvantaged groups who constitute the bulk of the Nepalese population. Since then, misunderstandings, real or imaginary, persists between the two countries which have become an advantage to some third party players in Nepal like China.

Also, triggering anti-India sentiments by communists or the pro-China political leadership has become the new normal in Nepal's domestic politics. The nationalist sentiment has now become a potent instrument for political mobilisation.

Kalapani and Susta Dispute

The Kalapani territory has become a bone of contention between India and Nepal and the controversy has arisen due to the release of a new political map by India after bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Treaty of Sugauli concluded between British India and the Kingdom of Nepal in the year 1816, maps the Makhali river as the western boundary with India but different British maps showed the source of the tributary at different places which was mainly due to underdeveloped and less-defined surveying techniques used at that time.

The discrepancy in locating the source of the river led to boundary disputes between India and Nepal, with each country producing maps supporting their own claims.

The Susta territorial dispute has arisen as a result of the shifting of the course of the Gandak river.

The Treaty of Sagauli defined Gandak as the international boundary between India and Nepal. When the treaty was signed, Susta was on the right bank of the river Gandak which falls in Nepal territorial control. But, in due course of time, the river has changed its course and Susta now falls on the left bank of the Gandak, which is controlled by India.

Legal Dimension of Issue

According to International Laws, the principles of avulsion and accretion are applicable in determining the borders when a boundary river changes course.

Avulsion: It is the pushing back of the shoreline by sudden, violent action of the elements, perceptible while in progress. Also it can be defined as the sudden and perceptible change in the land brought about by water, which may result in the addition or removal of land from a bank or shoreline.

Accretion: It is the process of growth or enlargement by a gradual buildup. It is the natural, slow and gradual deposit of soil by the water.

If the change of the river course is rapid - by avulsion - the boundary does not change. But if the river changes course gradually - that is, by accretion - the boundary changes accordingly.

Since, the Gandak change of course has been gradual, India claimed Susta as part of their territory as per international laws.

On several occasions, India has tried to resolve the issue through friendly and peaceful negotiations, but the Nepali leadership has always shown hesitation in resolving the issue.

In Nepal, the issue has become a tool for arousing strong public sentiment against India. Therefore, resolving the issue may not be in the best interest of Nepal's domestic politics.

International Law on Trans-boundary Water Disputes

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans-boundary and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention, is an international environmental agreement under United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE).

It was signed in Helsinki (Poland) in 1992.

The purpose of the Convention is to improve national attempts and measures for the protection and management of trans-boundary surface waters and groundwater.

Under the convention, parties are obliged to cooperate and create joint bodies for parties bordering the same trans-boundary waters.

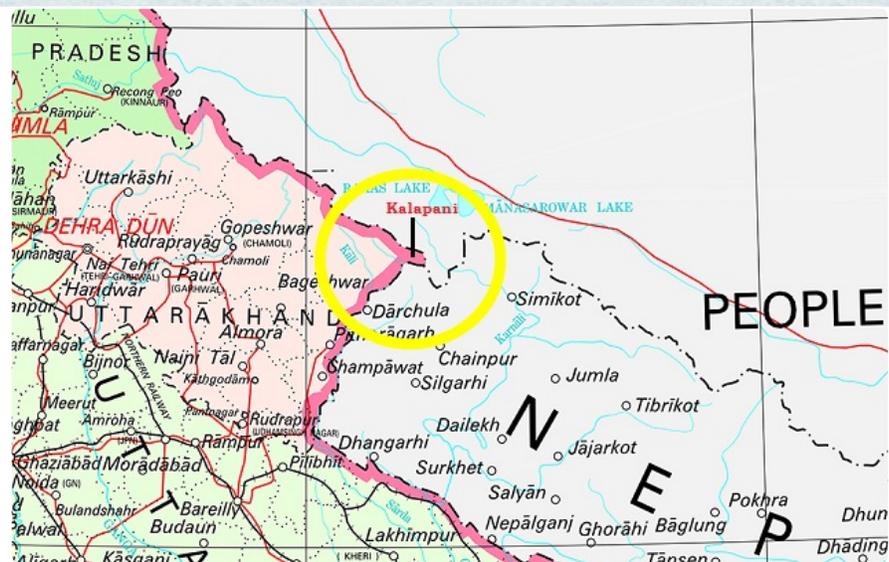
Way Forward

India should maintain a policy of keeping away from the internal affairs of Nepal, while at the same time, in the spirit of friendship, India should guide the nation towards a more inclusive democracy. Since the free movement of people is permitted across the border, Nepal enjoys immense strategic relevance from India's national security point of view, as terrorists often use Nepal to enter India. Therefore, stable and friendly relations with Nepal is one of pre-requisites which India can't afford to overlook.

India should also try to convey to Nepal's leadership about the congenial and friendly environment that 6 to 8 million Nepali citizens living in India enjoys. Therefore, any thoughtless erosion of this centuries old togetherness may prove difficult for both countries.

The existing bilateral treaties between India and Nepal have not taken the shifting of Himalayan rivers into consideration. A primary reason for this is the lack of an approach where ecological concerns and needs of rivers are often dismissed.

Therefore, India and Nepal should try to resolve the boundary dispute by taking into account all shared environmental characteristics.



China

4 states viz., Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and a Union Territory of Ladakh (erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir) share a border with China.

The Sino-Indian border is generally divided into three sectors namely: Western sector, Middle sector, and Eastern sector.

Western Sector

In the western sector, India shares about 2152 km long border with China.

It is between Union Territory of Ladakh (erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir) and Xinjiang Province of China.

In this sector, there is a territorial dispute over Aksai Chin. India claims it as part of erstwhile Kashmir, while China claims it is part of Xinjiang.

The dispute over Aksai Chin can be traced back to the failure of the British Empire to clearly demarcate a legal border between China and its Indian colony.

During the time of British rule in India, two borders between India and China were proposed- Johnson's Line and McDonald Line.

The Johnson's line (proposed in 1865) shows Aksai Chin in erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir (now Ladakh) i.e. under India's control whereas McDonald Line (proposed in 1893) places it under China's control.

India considers Johnson Line as a correct, rightful national border with China, while on the other hand, China considers the McDonald Line as the correct border with India.

At present, Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the line separating Indian areas of Ladakh from Aksai Chin. It is concurrent with the Chinese Aksai Chin claim line.

Middle Sector

In this sector, India shares about 625 km long boundary with China which runs along the watershed from Ladakh to Nepal.

Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand touch this border with Tibet (China) in this sector. Both sides do not have much disagreement over the border in this area.

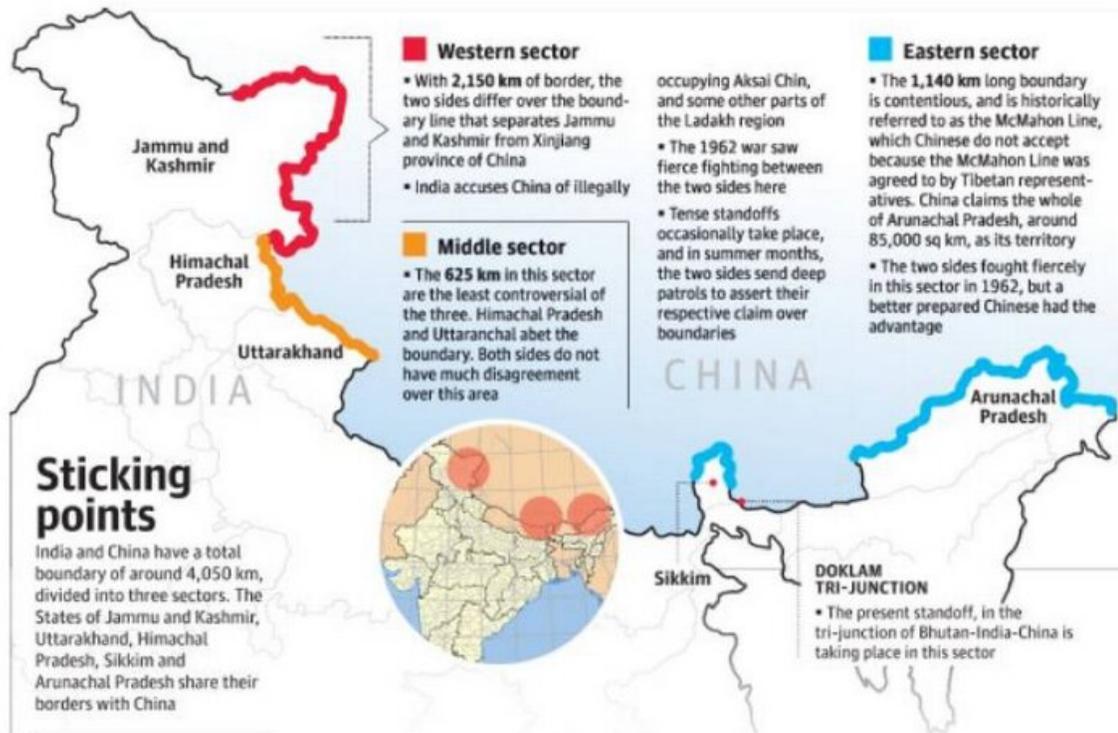
Eastern Sector

In this sector, India shares a 1,140 km long boundary with China.

It runs from the eastern limit of Bhutan to a point near the Talu Pass at the trijunction of Tibet, India and Myanmar.

This boundary line is called McMahon Line.

China considers the McMahon Line illegal and unacceptable claiming that Tibetan representatives who had signed the 1914 Convention held in Shimla which delineated the McMahon line on the map were not having rights to do so.



QUADRILATERAL COORDINATION GROUP

There is uncertainty about the U.S.'s intentions in Afghanistan. [Note that any form of uncertainty in Geopolitics is one of the worst kind of phenomenon there is.]

The likelihood of an American pullout raises the fear of instability in Afghanistan, South and Central Asia. If this happens, security could now depend on efforts made by regional powers [like India and China] to stabilize Afghanistan.

Will China emerge as the power broker in Afghanistan, will India help enhance Afghanistan's security, still remains a question.

Like India, China never had any intention of contributing troops to NATO's anti-Taliban campaign. But as Asia's strongest power and challenger to the U.S., China will try and take the lead if the U.S. reduces its military strength or calls it a day after 18 years of a protracted and indecisive war in Afghanistan.

China's Interest in Afghanistan

Sharing part of a border with Afghanistan, China has a great interest in its stability. China would be adversely affected by war and chaos in Afghanistan, which could spill over into north-western China, Pakistan, and Central Asia.

As all these areas are vital in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), peace in Afghanistan is critical. Over the last decade, China has gained considerable economic and diplomatic influence in Afghanistan.

Unsurprisingly, Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, made China the destination of his first official trip abroad in October 2014.

China then announced its intention to build regional consensus on Afghanistan's security. It has joined the U.S. and Russia in several peace talks with the Taliban and is part of the four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group (with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the U.S.).

It is giving military aid to Afghanistan, with the express intent of fighting terrorism and increasing security cooperation.

Despite the prevailing instability in Afghanistan, China has used diplomacy and finance to appear influential and generous. It has invested in projects such as mining, roads and railways, and health. A rail link, completed in 2016, and running from far eastern China via Uzbekistan to the river port of Hairatan in northern Afghanistan, could reduce the time taken to make shipments, from six months by road, to just two weeks.

China's diplomacy has highlighted its contacts with all parties to the conflict and enhanced its status as a power broker.

Consequences of a US Withdrawal

If the U.S. withdrawal exacerbates conflict, southern Russia will also face the threat of unexpected consequences. [That part of Russia is already tensed.]

Therefore, Russia and its Central Asian 'near abroad' would be willing to expand their cooperation with China to curb insecurity.

Since 2011, China has continually blamed Pakistan for exporting extremists to Uighur in Xinjiang, and for extremist attacks on Chinese workers in the CPEC area. [This is a rare thorn in China-Pakistan relations]

But these incidents have so far not affected their friendship. China has reportedly invested billions in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which cuts across the disputed territory in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. It is unclear how China is going to deal with Pakistan, its all-weather friend which trains and exports extremists across the Durand Line.

India-Afghan Relation

India supports China's role in international negotiations on Afghanistan, the activation of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and other mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation for the restoration of peace and development in Afghanistan.

For its part, India has certainly contributed much 'soft power' ranging from telecommunications to education, Bollywood movies, and pop music.

India (and China) have started a joint training project for Afghan diplomats. India could expand cooperation by facilitating Afghanistan's full membership of the SCO.

The building for the National Assembly was built with Indian assistance to support Afghanistan's democracy. Indian reconstruction largesse, amounting to some \$3 billion, has earned its goodwill and popularity.

Afghanistan-India relations have progressed exponentially over the years and the transformation of bilateral relation is mirrored with remarkable development in achieving the shared objective. The foremost driver of India's Afghanistan policy is its desire to strike a strategic balance between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In practical terms, it means that India wants to ensure that Pakistan does not manipulate the terms of reconciliation between the Afghan Taliban and Kabul. [This means that if Pakistan meddle too much in Afghanistan's internal affairs, Kabul will have the option to lean towards India to balance that out]

The harsh truth is that without the willingness to put the real military capability to project power in the region, India's considerable goodwill cannot achieve its strategic ends.

India, which has been against holding talks with the Taliban for a long time, finally sent two retired diplomats, at the 'non-official level', to join them at the Moscow peace parleys in November 2018. But India's lengthy absence from regional diplomacy has resulted in its limited contribution to the negotiations that are necessary to stabilize Afghanistan.

Way Forward

China's leadership role of the SCO and contacts with all parties (the U.S., the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, Russia, and the five Central Asian states) could give it an opinion in crafting a regional solution on Afghanistan.

That should not prevent India and China from working together, bilaterally and in the SCO, to build a secure Afghanistan.

The Afghan government would like to see India-China economic cooperation in Afghanistan that could boost progress and enhance human security.

Because the Afghan conflict not only drains resources of Western powers directly involved in it but also limits the growth of the region around it, India should actively participate in the development of Afghanistan to help develop the entire region.

Instead of thinking of short-term gains vis-à-vis Pakistan, then, India needs to think of a long-term strategy on how to end the Afghan conflict by supporting a genuine social reconciliation process.

Recently, the high level senior official meeting of Quad nations was concluded in Bangkok (Thailand) on the margins of East Asia Summit on 4th November.

In past some time, differences among the Quad countries seem to have narrowed down.

There are also common references to the creation of a free, open and inclusive regional architecture, rules of the road, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and, ASEAN centrality.

Quad

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.

The idea of Quad was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure. In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's “Democratic Security Diamond” involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.

In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending “Quad” Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).

Quad Nations and China

USA: USA had followed a policy to contain China's increasing influence in East Asia. Therefore, USA sees the coalition as an opportunity to regain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The US has described China, along with Russia, as a strategic rival in its National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy and the Pentagon's report on Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Australia: Australia is concerned about China's growing interest in its land, infrastructure and politics, and influence on its universities.

Taking into account its overwhelming economic dependence on China for prosperity, Australia has continued its commitment to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China.

Japan: In the last decade, Japan has expressed concerns related to China's territorial transgression in the region.

Trade volume with China remains the key lifeline to the Japanese economy, where net exports contributed exactly one-third of Japan's economic growth since the beginning of 2017.

Therefore, considering its importance, Japan is balancing its economic needs and territorial concerns with China

Japan has also agreed to involve in the Belt and Road Initiative by participating in infrastructure programs in third country. In this way, Japan can mitigate Chinese influence in those countries while improving relations with China.

India: In recent years, China's violation of international norms, particularly its construction of military facilities on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, and its growing military and economic power, pose a strategic challenge to India.

Considering China's strategic importance, India is carefully balancing China on one hand and the US on the other, by remaining committed to strategic autonomy to China, which has generally proved reassuring to China.

India has also not permitted Australia to participate in Malabar Trilateral Maritime exercises between India, US and Japan, concerned about what message it would send to China, which is wary of the exercise.

The recent Mamallapuram summit between President Xi Jinping and PM Modi is a positive development, valued by both sides as key to giving strategic guidance to stakeholders on both sides.

Challenges

China's Territorial Claims: China claims that it has historical ownership over nearly the entire region of South China Sea, which gives it the right to manufacture islands. However, the International Court of Arbitration rejected the claim in 2016.

China's Closeness to ASEAN: The ASEAN countries also have a well-knit relationship with China. The Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a recent example of China's increasing influence over ASEAN nations.

Economic Power of China: Considering the economic might of China and the dependence of Quad nations like Japan and Australia on China, the Quad nations cannot afford to have strained relations with it.

Convergence among Quad Nations: The nations in the Quad grouping have different aspirations, aims at balancing their own interest. Therefore, coherence in the vision of Quad nation as a grouping is absent.

Way Forward

The Quad will need to have a clearer vision for itself. It is important for members of the Quad not to be reactive. It is also important to exhibit openness, and ensure that all talk of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' is more than just a mere slogan.

India, Japan, and Australia can take the lead in infrastructural projects, while the US too needs to be more pro-active in pushing ahead the vision of connectivity.

The Quad should focus on building a robust regional consultation mechanism and coordinate with ASEAN nations on issues of regional importance.

The Quad framework derives its geopolitical validation from India's association and presents a unique opportunity for India to be an active participant in shaping regional security architecture with global undertones.