

11 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. ‘15-20% tested developed antibodies against virus’

Context:

At least 15-20% of the over 22,000 people tested randomly across Delhi as part of a serological survey have developed antibodies against COVID-19.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Solar energy will play big role in 'Atmanirbhar Bharat': PM

Context:

A 750 MW solar power project in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh was inaugurated by the Prime Minister.

Details:

- It was developed by the Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited (RUMSL), a Joint Venture Company of Madhya Pradesh UrjaVikas Nigam Limited (MPUVN), and Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), a Central Public Sector Undertaking.
- Solar energy would play a major role in achieving self-reliance in energy, essential for an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India).
- It is in line with India's commitment to attain the target of 175 GW of installed renewable energy capacity by 2022 including 100 GW of solar installed capacity.
- In 2014, the price of solar power was ₹7-8 per unit. Today, it is ₹2.15-2.30 per unit.

Significance:

- The Rewa solar project being touted as Asia's largest is the first such project in India to break the grid parity barrier.

Grid Parity:

Grid parity occurs when an alternative energy (here, Rewa Solar Project) source can generate power at a levelized cost of electricity that is less than or equal to the price of power from the electricity grid.

- Reaching grid parity is considered to be the point at which an energy source becomes a contender for widespread development without subsidies or government support.
- It is the first renewable energy project to supply to an institutional customer outside the state.
 - Delhi Metro will use 24% of the electricity produced from it, Madhya Pradesh will use the rest.
- It will help in the reduction of carbon emission equivalent to 15 lakh tons of CO₂ per year.

2. Fresh push for pedal power in smart cities

Context:

With public transport affected due to the spread of COVID-19, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has invited cities to come up with quick solutions for promoting cycling.

Details:

- The 'India Cycles 4 Change Challenge' and an online portal for cities to submit their proposals were launched by the [Smart Cities Mission](#) of the Ministry.
- Cities would be encouraged to create extensive cycling networks using low-cost methods like pop-up cycle lanes and non-motorised zones and set up community-led cycle rental schemes.
- Apart from the 100 cities implementing the Smart Cities Mission, cities with a population of over 5 lakh and capitals of States and Union Territories can apply.
- In October 2020, 11 cities will be shortlisted and will receive ₹1 crore award and guidance from national and international experts to further scale-up the initiatives in stage two, which will be held until May 2021.
- The programme would be supported by the India Programme of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy.

3. 1.2 million snakebite deaths in India in the past two decades

Context:

According to a study conducted by the Centre for Global Health Research (CGHR) at the University of Toronto, Canada, with Indian and U.K. partners, India recorded a staggering 1.2 million snakebite deaths in the 20-year period from 2000 to 2019.

Concerns:

- About 58,000 deaths were caused by snakebite annually.
- Around 70% of these deaths occurred in low altitude, rural areas of eight States — Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The study also points out that half of all the snakebite deaths occurred during the monsoon period from June to September.
- In the largest ever such survey published in 2011 and titled 'Snakebite Mortality in India: A Nationally Representative Mortality Survey', researchers of the Million Death Study project estimated 46,000 annual snakebite deaths in India.
- Indian anti-venoms neutralise venom from only the spectacled cobra (there are three other Indian cobra species), common krait (there are seven other krait species), Russell's viper and saw-scaled viper, whereas there are 12 other snake species causing fatal bites in the country.

Details:

- The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) recognises snakebite as a top-priority neglected tropical disease.
- Since deaths are restricted mainly to the lower altitude, intensely agricultural areas, during a single season of each year, this should make the annual epidemics easier to manage.
- Experts suggest that targeting certain areas and educating people with simple methods such as 'snake-safe' harvest practices — using rubber boots and gloves, mosquito nets and rechargeable torches (or mobile phone flashlights) — could reduce the risk of snakebites.

Category: SECURITY

1. After camel back, drones used for cross-border smuggling

Issue:

Pakistan-based criminal syndicates and terror outfits that smuggled drugs, weapons and other illegal goods on camel back across the vast Thar desert in Rajasthan and through well-trained foot couriers, are taking to drones.

Details:

- The latest case of arms dropping through a Pakistani drone was detected when the Border Security Force shot down the UAV near Rathua village in the Hira Nagar sector of Jammu.
- Also, a weapon consignment was dropped through three drone sorties in the Dera Baba Nanak area of Punjab's Gurdaspur.
 - Preliminary investigation revealed that it had been sent at the instance of Ranjeet Singh Neeta, chief of Pakistan-based Khalistan Zindabad Force, who was recently designated by the Central Government as a terrorist under the [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act](#).
- Quadcopters are also being deployed by Pakistani agencies for spying activities in the border areas.

Way forward:

- With the increasing use of drones for cross-border smuggling, the Indian security agencies must look for various ways to put in place reliable systems as part of a smart border management mechanism for deterrence.
- In terms of border security, drone jammers may not prove to be more effective.
- There is a need to reinvent border management through other viable options for surveillance, detection and use of anti-drone techniques.

Category: DEFENCE**1. IAF gets last of 5 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters from Boeing****Context:**

Boeing has handed over the last of the five **AH-64E Apache attack helicopters** to the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Details:

- India contracted 22 Apache helicopters and 15 Chinook helicopters from Boeing through the Foreign Military Sales programme of the U.S. government in September 2015 under a \$3 billion deal.
- During the India visit of President Donald Trump in February 2020, India and the U.S. signed a deal for six additional Apaches for the Army.
- Boeing's joint venture in Hyderabad, Tata Boeing Aerospace Limited, has been producing aero-structures for the AH-64 Apache helicopter for both the U.S. Army and international customers.
- Earlier, Boeing handed over the last five of the 15 [CH-47F\(I\) Chinook heavy-lift helicopters](#) to the IAF.

This topic has been covered in the 4th September 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis. [Click here](#) to read.

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. In the name of 'cooperative federalism'

The editorial points out that States are not getting what they should have as per the 14th Finance Commission report.

Centre-state relations:

- Federalism refers to relations between the Centre and states of the Union of India.
- It has been a trend in Indian political history that so long as the central and state governments were ruled by the same political party, the cooperative framework worked very well.
- But when different political parties are in power in the centre and the states and more recently when coalition governments are in power, there are signs of stresses and tensions in intergovernmental relations between the Centre and the States.
- In the period ranging between 1980 and 1989, tussle for the rights of States was focused on [Article 356](#). (Using pliant Governors, regional party governments were politically destabilised).
- Little was done to implement the report of the R.S. Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations.

Details:

- At present, faultline in the Centre-State relation is largely over the way the report of the 14th Finance Commission is being implemented.
- While this began well before COVID-19, the pandemic and its economic disruption have brought things to an edge.
- The 14th Finance Commission report was accepted in 2015 with the promise that it would devolve more finances to the States. As part of the process, States would have new responsibilities, especially in the social sector.
- Two years later, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime was also justified as a grand bargain that would eventually leave all States better off.

Issues:

- In reality, tax devolution to States has been consistently below 14th Finance Commission projections.
 - One reason for this has been the economic slowdown, caused primarily by the Central government, and lower-than-expected GST collections.
 - The shortfall in GST collection for 2018-2019 was 22% when compared to projections. Payments have been delayed as well.
- The Centre has imposed a series of cesses, which are not part of the divisible pool and not shared with the States.
- The nature of public spending in India has undergone a massive shift.
 - In 2014-2015, States undertook programmes and projects spending 46% more than the Central Government; today the figure is 64%.
 - Despite this, the Centre's fiscal deficit exceeds the consolidated State deficit by 14%.
- In the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, States are being required to spend more to help common citizens and save livelihoods. The Centre is providing almost negligible support.

- Following the pandemic, the Ministry of Finance has asked all Union Ministries to cut expenditure.
 - The immediate impact is being felt by States, and grants-in-aid are drying up.
 - Crucial rural development programmes have come to a standstill.

Way forward:

- Due to the pandemic, the fiscal deficit for States, collectively, is inevitably going to breach the projection of 2.04%.
- As per provisions of the [Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management \(FRBM\) Act](#), the GSDP can actually accommodate a fiscal deficit of 3%.
 - While States have respected the limit for years, post-pandemic, this limit will be crossed.
- The FRBM has an “escape clause” that allows for a one-time relaxation of the fiscal deficit threshold up to 0.5% in a time of exigency. The escape clause has been utilised by the Centre but it has proven insufficient in addressing the current crisis.
- The Centre has gone in for subjective interpretation, imposing conditions that are outside the scope of the FRBM.
- There is a wide consensus among fiscal policymakers that the rigidity of the FRBM has to be revisited.
- It should allow for greater flexibility and consultation as to when and how the “escape clause” can be applied.

2. Reform with caution

Context:

The Union Government has constituted a special five-member committee to recommend reforms in India’s criminal laws.

- The ‘Committee for the Reform of Criminal Laws’ has been constituted under Ranbir Singh and several other members.
- The committee, through country-wide consultations with law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judiciary, advocates, academics, and civil society, including media organizations, is seeking suggestions for changes to the country’s penal code.

Details:

- Criminal Law in India is governed by the Indian Penal Code of 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure that was rewritten in 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act that dates back to 1872.
 - There have been several attempts in recent decades to overhaul the body of criminal law.
 - However, comprehensive legal reform is something that requires careful consideration and a good deal of deliberation.
- In 2003, the Justice V.S. [Malimath Committee](#) on reforms in the criminal justice system had come up with some far-reaching suggestions, some of which became part of changes in criminal law.
 - However, it also attracted criticism over the suggestion that the standard of evidence be reduced from “beyond reasonable doubt” to “clear and convincing”.
- In 2007, Madhav Menon Committee submitted its report suggesting various recommendations on reforms in the Criminal Justice System of India.
- The Justice Verma panel came up with a comprehensive and progressive report on reforms needed in laws concerning crimes against women in 2013 in barely one month, but its speed was due to the limited mandate it had.

Criticisms:

- Formation of the committee with an apparently short time frame and limited scope for public consultation has caused considerable disquiet among jurists, lawyers and those concerned with the state of criminal justice in the country.
- It is pointed out that the committee lacks in diversity, as there are no women, Dalits, religious minorities, Adivasis, LGBT persons, differently-abled persons, and grassroots workers from different parts of India.
- Yet another criticism against the Committee is that it has begun its work in the midst of a pandemic. This may not be the ideal time for wide consultations.
 - Activists and lawyers functioning in the hinterland may be at a particular disadvantage in formulating their opinions.
- The panel's mandate is: "to recommend reforms in the criminal laws of the country in a principled, effective, and efficient manner which ensures the safety and security of the individual, the community and the nation; and which prioritizes the constitutional values of justice, dignity and the inherent worth of the individual." It is also not clear why the [Law Commission](#) has not been vested with this task.

Conclusion:

- The current laws governing crime, investigation and trial require meaningful reform.
- If at all criminal law is to be reformed, there should be a genuine attempt to reach a wide consensus on ways to speed up trials, protect witnesses, address the travails of victims, improve investigative mechanisms and, most importantly, eliminate torture.
- An impression should not gain ground that wide-ranging changes are sought to be made within a short time frame and based on limited inputs from the public.
- Reform is best achieved through a cautious and inclusive approach.

3. Crime as punishment

Context:

Gangster Vikas Dubey, wanted for the killing of the eight policemen in Uttar Pradesh, was fired at when he tried to flee after a police convoy taking him to Kanpur, had overturned.

Details:

- Concerns are being expressed about the possibility of his encounter death being officially sanctioned retribution for the murder of eight policemen who were part of the team that went to arrest him.
- Any demand of probity and accountability in police and military is often contested on the supposed ground that it emerges from a support for criminals, terrorists or enemies of the state by influential political and public figures.
- There is no question that crimes such as those Dubey was involved in must be met with exemplary punishment.
- However, it is widely opined that the brutal last episode of Dubey's serial crimes should be no defence if the shooting turns out to be an extra-judicial killing.
- The process of establishing guilt and executing punishment is not an incidental part of justice, but its integral soul. A fair and transparent trial cannot be dispensed with, in order to satisfy cries for vengeance.
- Social sanction of instant justice by state agents might have leached into institutions that are mandated to enforce the rule of law.

Concerns:

- In 2019, when the Cyberabad police shot dead four people accused in a case of gang rape and murder, people celebrated in the streets.
- The courts and the [National Human Rights Commission](#) have also shown a lenient approach in such cases.
- Goaded the police on to deliver instant justice, or even tolerating such behaviour, creates an atmosphere of impunity that could lead to the murder of innocent people.

Conclusion:

- Support for such killings by the police will not make a society more just. Mob justice is no justice at all.
- When law enforcers short-circuit the due process, the damage to state institutions is severe and long-lasting.

Read about Encounter Killings covered in [16th February 2018 Comprehensive News Analysis](#) and [7th December 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: ECONOMY

1. Do we need a fiscal council?

The editorial discusses the idea of a Fiscal Council in India.

Context:

- In the current economic slowdown in the country owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown, economists opine that the government needs to borrow and spend more now in order to support vulnerable households and engineer an economic recovery.
- Many economists have faulted the government's fiscal stance, arguing that this is no time for restraint; the government should spend more to stimulate the economy by borrowing as may be necessary, but at the same time come out with a credible plan for fiscal consolidation post-COVID-19 in order to retain market confidence.

What is holding the government back from spending more?

- Borrowing would mean a steep rise in debt which will jeopardise medium-term growth prospects, an issue prominently flagged by all the rating agencies in their recent evaluations.
- It is the fear of market penalties that is holding the government back from borrowing and spending.

Fiscal Council - the way forward?

- The government can signal its virtue by establishing some new institutional mechanism for enforcing fiscal discipline, such as for example a fiscal council.
- It was first recommended by the Thirteenth Finance Commission and was subsequently endorsed by the Fourteenth Finance Commission and then by the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee headed by N.K. Singh.
- According to the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)), about 50 countries around the world have established fiscal councils with varying degrees of success.
- A fiscal council, at its core, is a permanent agency with a mandate to independently assess the government's fiscal plans and projections against parameters of macroeconomic sustainability, and put out its findings in the public domain.

- The expectation is that such an open scrutiny will keep the government on the straight and narrow path of fiscal virtue and hold it to account for any default.
- The fiscal council could be a solution because it will give an independent and expert assessment of the government's fiscal stance, and thereby aid an informed debate in Parliament.
- Another argument made in support of a fiscal council is that in its role as a watchdog, it will prevent the government from gaming the fiscal rules through creative accounting.

Fiscal council's mandate:

- As per the model suggested by the FRBM Review Committee, the fiscal council's mandate will include, but not be restricted to,
 - Making multi-year fiscal projections.
 - Preparing fiscal sustainability analysis.
 - Providing an independent assessment of the Central government's fiscal performance and compliance with fiscal rules.
 - Recommending suitable changes to fiscal strategy to ensure consistency of the annual financial statement.
 - Taking steps to improve quality of fiscal data.
 - Producing an annual fiscal strategy report which will be released publicly.

Arguments against a Fiscal Council:

- The government is required to submit to Parliament a 'Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement' (FPSS) to demonstrate the credibility of its fiscal stance. Yet, seldom are there in-depth discussions in Parliament on the government's fiscal stance. The problem clearly is the lack of demand for accountability.
 - So, another instrumentality such as a fiscal council for the supply of accountability cannot be a solution.
- The fiscal council will give macroeconomic forecasts for the budget, and if the Ministry decides to differ it is required to explain why it has differed.
 - It is argued that it better be left to the Finance Ministry to defend its numbers rather than forcing it to privilege the estimates of one specific agency.
- Forcing the Finance Ministry to use someone else's estimates will dilute its accountability.
 - If the estimates go awry, it will simply shift the blame to the fiscal council.
- There is already an institutional mechanism by way of the [Comptroller and Auditor General \(CAG\)](#).
 - The argument made here is against the fiscal Council's role as a watchdog.

Conclusion:

The best way forward is to start small and scale it up if it proves to be a positive experience.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Tiger orchids

What's in News?

Tiger Orchids, big yellow flowers with deep brown markings on them, resembling a tiger's coat are in full bloom at the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) in Kerala.



- Tiger orchids (*Grammatophyllum speciosum*) are so-called for their large and resplendent flowers that resemble the tiger skin.
- It is also known as the Giant Orchid because the flowers become massive on attaining maturity.
- They flower in alternate years.
- Tiger Orchids are native to the jungles of Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Papua New Guinea.

G. Tidbits

1. U.S. bans Pakistan's PIA over pilot licence scandal

What's in News?

The United States has banned Pakistan International Airlines from operating chartered flights to the country after the carrier said nearly 150 of its pilots would be grounded over fake or dubious licences.

Pakistan's Aviation Minister recently revealed that a government review had found around 260 of the country's 860 active pilots hold fake licences or cheated in exams.

- It follows a similar move by European Union aviation regulators to bar the state-run carrier for six months.
- The airline had suspended its commercial operations to the U.S. in 2017 after booking financial losses.
- But in April 2020, the U.S. Department of Transport granted it special permission to operate chartered flights for one year, largely to bring back stranded Pakistanis during the coronavirus lockdown.

2. 14% excess rain in India so far this monsoon

- According to data from the [India Meteorological Department \(IMD\)](https://www.imd.gov.in/), Monsoon rainfall since June 2020 has been 14% more than what is normal for this time of the year.
- So far, India has received 28.7 cm rainfall as opposed to the typical 25.2 cm.
- IMD said the southwest monsoon had covered the entire country at a pace not seen since 2013.
- The rain-bearing concentration of clouds, called the monsoon trough, oscillates from the east to the west of the country.
 - In its recent forecast, the IMD said that this trough is likely to shift northwards towards the foothills of the Himalayas.

3. First bus rolls into Swabhiman Anchal after Independence

- Swabhiman Anchal in Odisha's Malkangiri district is considered a stronghold of the CPI (Maoist).
- Situated along the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border, Swabhiman Anchal comprising 151 villages was considered as a liberated zone by the Left ultras.
- Even the State police was afraid of venturing into the cut-off area. Maoists from Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh used to slip into Swabhiman Anchal to take refuge.
- After security forces established their area domination during the past few years, the situation took a turn for the better.
- Different development initiatives were taken up. At least, nine roads have been laid in the difficult Ghat areas.
- Gurupriya Bridge has been built which connects it with the rest of the State.

Read more about Swabhiman Anchal covered in the [22nd November 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Western Ghats have high endemism of orchids.
2. In India, the highest number of orchid species is recorded from Arunachal Pradesh.

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- According to Orchids of India: A Pictorial Guide, as published by the Botanical Survey of India, Western Ghats have high endemism of orchids.
- The highest number of orchid species is recorded from Arunachal Pradesh with 612 species, followed by Sikkim (560 species) and West Bengal; Darjeeling Himalayas have also high species concentration, with 479 species.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to ASEM digital platform:

1. It is an AI-based platform designed to bridge the demand-supply gap of skilled workforce across sectors.
2. It is developed and managed by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
3. It was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development.

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

- a. 1 and 3 only

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has launched AI-based ASEEM digital platform to bridge the demand-supply gap of skilled workforce across sectors.
- ASEEM stands for Atmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping.
- ASEEM is developed and managed by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with Bengaluru-based company Betterplace, specialising in blue-collar employee management.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to AH-64 Apache:

1. It is the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopter.
2. India has procured AH-64 Apache from Russia.
3. It is also used by the US Army.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Boeing has handed over the last of the five AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to the Indian Air Force (IAF).
- The AH-64 Apache is the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopter and is also used by the US Army.
- India contracted 22 Apache helicopters and 15 Chinook helicopters from Boeing through the Foreign Military Sales programme of the **U.S. government** in September 2015 under a \$3 billion deal.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to the recently inaugurated Rewa Solar project:

1. It is India's first renewable energy project to supply to an institutional customer outside the State.
2. It is Asia's largest solar power project.
3. It is located in Madhya Pradesh.

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

- a. 2 and 3 only

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Rewa Solar project is Asia's largest 750 MW solar power project.
- It is located in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh.
- It is India's first renewable energy project to supply to an institutional customer outside the State, i.e, Delhi Metro.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the measures that must be taken by the Centre to address the ongoing fiscal tensions between the Centre and the States. (15 Marks, 250 Words).
2. 'The ends of justice are not served by retributive measures and constitutional justice is non-negotiable'. In light of the given statement, discuss the significance of the due process of law in criminal investigations. (15 Marks, 250 Words).