

13 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Delhi, Male ink \\$400-mn pact for connectivity](#)
2. [Sri Lanka in talks to secure \\$500 mn in Chinese loans](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [No penal provision to protect transgenders from assault: plea](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [Govt. moves to spur demand](#)
2. [Respond to petitions on new farm laws, SC tells Centre](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Towards cleaner air in Delhi](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [Gene editing, the good first and then the worries](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [The purpose of protests](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [American duo win Economics Nobel](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Defence Minister inaugurates 44 bridges built by BRO](#)
2. [Energy Mix](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Delhi, Male ink \\$400-mn pact for connectivity](#)

Context:

The [Exim Bank](#) of India and the Maldives's Ministry of Finance have signed an agreement for \$400 million in Male.

Details:

- The pact follows [India's announcement of a \\$500 million package to the Maldives](#).
- The line of credit (LoC) will fund the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP).
- India has also pledged a grant of \$ 100 million for the initiative.
- The grant and LoC come in addition to the previous LoC of \$800 million, among India's largest loans extended in the region.

Greater Male Connectivity Project:

- The GMCP will consist of a number of bridges and causeways to connect Male to Villingili, Thilafushi and Gulhifahu islands that span 6.7 km.
- It would ease much of the pressure of the main capital island of Male for commercial and residential purposes.
- Once completed, the project will streamline connectivity between four islands, thereby boosting economic activity, generating employment and promoting holistic urban development in the Male region.

2. Sri Lanka in talks to secure \$500 mn in Chinese loans

Context:

Sri Lanka is negotiating a \$500 million loan with China.

Details:

- The negotiations come at a time when Sri Lanka is mulling ways to repay its mounting foreign loans.
 - Sri Lanka is exploring all options, including the \$1 billion currency agreement with India - under negotiation, greater investment in the securities market and bonds, as well as a \$700 million syndicated loan from China.
- China had sanctioned a \$500 million loan in March 2020 to help Sri Lanka cope with the pandemic.
- It recently received a \$90 million grant from China, which would be used for medical care, education and water supplies in Sri Lanka's rural areas.
- Sri Lanka must repay a daunting \$4.5 billion of its outstanding debt in 2021.
- The \$500 million loan, if sanctioned, will take Sri Lanka's total borrowings from China over \$1 billion.

Concerns:

- China considers Sri Lanka to be a critical link in its [Belt and Road Initiative](#) and has provided billions of dollars in loans for Sri Lankan projects over the past decade.
 - The projects include a seaport, airport, port-city, highways and power stations.
- Critics say that the Chinese-funded projects are not financially viable and that Sri Lanka will face difficulties in repaying the loans.
- The U.S.-based credit rating agency Moody's downgraded Sri Lanka's sovereign credit rating by two notches to the "very high credit risk" category.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. No penal provision to protect transgenders from assault: plea

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the government to respond to a plea to provide equal protection in law against sexual abuse for transgender persons.

Issue:

- A petition said there was no penal provision that protected transgender persons from sex crimes.
- The [PIL](#) challenged the constitutional validity of certain clauses of Section 354A (outraging the modesty of a woman) of the IPC, to the extent that they are interpreted to exclude victims of sexual harassment who are transgender persons.
- The plea referred to the provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other criminal laws which do not mention offences against “transgenders, transsexuals, kinnar and eunuchs”.
- In spite of declaring transgender people to be a ‘third gender’ by this court, there is no provision/section in the Indian Penal Code which may protect the third gender from sexual assault by male/female or another transgender.

Steps taken to protect and end discrimination against transgender persons:

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has constituted the National Council for Transgender Persons.

Read more on this topic covered in the [24th August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in 2019.

Read more on this topic covered [in the 12th January 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Way forward:

- The PIL has urged SC to issue an order directing the respondents to pass an Anti-Discrimination Bill that penalises discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender.
- The plea has sought a direction to the Centre to make appropriate modification/interpretation of sections/provisions of IPC dealing with sexual assault to include transgender/transsexuals/kinnar and eunuchs in the definitions accordingly.
- It also sought a direction to the Centre to adopt and implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
 - India is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY**1. Govt. moves to spur demand****Context:**

In order to spur fresh demand of about ₹1 lakh crore in the second half of 2020-21, the Union Finance Minister unveiled a mini-stimulus of sorts.

Details:

- The mini-stimulus package comprises of:
 - Incentives for the government and public sector employees to spend more on consumer durables and services.
 - Interest-free loans of ₹12,000 crore to the States for a 50-year tenure to finance capital expenditure.
- Centre's capital expenditure plans have been enhanced by ₹25,000 crore (from the earlier allocation of ₹4.13 lakh crore).
 - This is for spending on roads, urban development, water supply, defence infrastructure, and domestically-produced capital equipment for defence infrastructure.
- LTC cash vouchers have been announced for Central government and public sector employees as an alternative to spend the leave travel concession (LTC) benefits that expire in March 2021. Private-sector employers and State governments could also extend this facility to their employees.
 - This would convert the LTC payout into a 33% subsidy for acquiring white goods.
 - However, this is seen as a big blow to tourism. Experts warn that this boost is likely to be temporary and the measures may be inadequate to sustain demand.
- A flat ₹10,000 special festival allowance has been announced for all Central employees that could be repaid in 10 interest-free instalments.
 - This would be given in the form of a prepaid Rupay card.
- Of the ₹12,000 crore loans offered to the States, ₹2,500 crore has been earmarked for the eight northeastern States, who could avail ₹ 200 crore each, and Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, who could avail ₹ 450 crore each.
- For the remaining States, loans of ₹ 7,500 crore would be available in proportion to their share of the Finance Commission devolutions. Fifty per cent of the loan would be given upfront, with the rest after the first tranche was utilised.
- Another ₹2,000 crore of loans would be available for the States that undertake three of the four reforms outlined for granting additional borrowing flexibility to the States under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package.

2. Respond to petitions on new farm laws, SC tells Centre

Context:

The Supreme Court has asked the Central government to respond to petitions on the new agricultural laws recently passed by the Parliament.

Concerns:

- The petitioners have termed the recent agricultural reforms as the beginning of an antifarmer exploitative regime.
- While the court said that the mere passage of the laws does not give rise to a cause of action, it suggested the government to address these issues now as questions on the laws are likely to arise in the future in courts.

This topic has been covered in [27th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Towards cleaner air in Delhi

Context:

- The launching of an **anti-pollution campaign by the Delhi administration.**

Background:

Air pollution issue in Delhi:

- Air pollution is a huge concern in Delhi. The high amounts of emissions from vehicles along with polluting industries in the region and the annual agricultural stubble burning exercise contribute to the high pollution loads in the capital. The lack of wind worsens the pollutant concentration.
- **Particulate matter concentration of PM2.5 and PM10 in Delhi exceeds national standards and the World Health Organization limits.** Delhi needs a 65% reduction to meet the national standards for PM2.5.
- Delhi's air also contains **high doses of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide.**
- The winter season only worsens the air pollution in Delhi as the Diwali fireworks blanket Delhi in a haze, compounding air pollution's health risks, particularly to children, the elderly and those with underlying illnesses.

For detailed information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated Nov 4, 2018: Wrong doctor, wrong medicine \(Air pollution in Delhi\)](#)

Details:

- The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has had a positive impact on the city's air.
- But with subsequent economic re-opening and with air pollution returning to pre-COVID levels, the Delhi administration has launched a major anti-pollution campaign.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated Oct 9, 2020: EPCA directs Delhi, other states to implement GRAP](#)

- The anti-pollution campaign is focused on cutting the emissions from thermal plants and brick kilns in the National Capital Region and on chemical treatment of stubble instead of burning from nearby states.

Way forward:

- Though the current measures being taken are commendable, **Delhi's long-term solution to air pollution** should involve the following aspects:

Abating emissions from the transportation sector:

- Vehicles, including trucks and two-wheelers, contribute 20%-40% of the PM_{2.5} concentrations.
- **Reducing emissions from the transportation sector alone could help reduce air pollution from all sources combined by one-quarter to one-third by 2025.**
- Prior international experience in tackling vehicle emissions in cities such as Bangkok, Beijing, and Mexico City could provide valuable insights. The three-part action plan to abate emission from vehicles would comprise of the following aspects.

Ensuring emission control:

- The first and foremost requirement would be to implement the national standards. There is an urgent need for **stricter enforcement of emission controls and tougher penalties for non-compliance**. All categories of vehicles including two-wheelers and three-wheelers should be in compliance with the set emission standards.
- There is a need to **ramp up inspection and maintenance of vehicles to cut emissions**.
 - Emission testing of vehicles under Delhi's pollution under control policy was only 25%.

Incentivize public transport:

- Need to reduce private vehicles on the road by **strengthening public transport**.
- Apart from the public bus service and the metro, Delhi should also consider expanding the **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system**.
 - The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems in Mexico City, Bogota, Istanbul, and Johannesburg have shown impressive results. The sizeable investment cost is more than offset by the benefits that such public transport offers.
- Delhi should ensure better designating of BRT lanes, improving the ticketing system and synchronising BRT with the Metro.
- The 'odd-even' number plate policy should reduce exemptions and allow a longer implementation period to ensure tangible results from this scheme.

Electric vehicles:

- There is a need to **encourage the adoption of electric vehicles**. Subsidies and investment will be needed to ensure the scalability of EVs to a meaningful scale. This could be in the form of **purchase incentives, scrappage benefits on older vehicles, loans at favourable interest and a waiver of road taxes**.
 - The Delhi government's three-year policy aims to make EVs account for a quarter of the new vehicles registered in the capital by 2024.

Addressing emission from other sources:

- The pollution abatement strategy should also involve the **industrial and agricultural sectors**.
- Delhi will be required to work in collaboration with the neighbouring states to address the pollution from industries and agriculture (stubble burning).
- Technical solutions need to be underpinned by **coordination and transparency across Central, State, and local governments**.

Participatory approach:

- **Citizen participation and the media** are vital for better awareness on the issues of pollution and health. A participatory approach will make it easier for the administration to tackle the pollution issue.

1. Gene editing, the good first and then the worries

Background:

- **The Nobel Prize in Chemistry for 2020** has been awarded to two women scientists, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna for the development of a method for **genome editing**.
- This involved programming a Cas9 protein to cut a piece of DNA at a specific site with the help of a small piece of RNA, thereby proving the ability of CRISPR-Cas9 to function as a gene-editing tool.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[CNA dated Oct 11, 2020: Genetic scissors and rewriting the code of life](#)

Details:

- In India, since there is a long way to go before realising the utility of gene editing for therapeutic applications there can be no room for complacency. With the Chemistry Nobel thrusting CRISPR-Cas9 into the limelight, India needs **guidelines for gene-editing research**.

Current situation in India:

- In India, several rules, guidelines, and policies backed by the “**Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989**” notified under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**, regulate genetically modified organisms.
- **The National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research involving Human Participants, 2017**, by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and the **Biomedical and Health Research Regulation Bill** deal with the regulation of the gene-editing process.

Way forward:

- Given the lack of explicit use of the term gene editing in the existing rules, India should come up with a **specific law to ban germline editing** and put out **guidelines for conducting gene-editing research** giving rise to modified organisms.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The purpose of protests

Context:

- The recent Supreme Court judgment in the Shaheen Bagh protest case.

Details:

This issue has been covered previously in the following article:

<https://byjus.com>

[CNA dated Oct 10, 2020: The right balance](#)

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated Dec 31, 2019: Opposing voices can't be muzzled by force](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. American duo win Economics Nobel

What's in News?

U.S. economists Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson won the Nobel Economics Prize.

Details:

- They are honoured for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats i.e, for their work on commercial auctions, including for goods and services difficult to sell in traditional ways (Eg: radio frequencies).
- While people have always sold things to the highest bidder, societies have also had to allocate ever more complex objects such as landing slots and radio frequencies. In response, Milgrom and Wilson invented new formats for auctioning off many interrelated objects simultaneously, on behalf of a seller motivated by broad societal benefit rather than maximal revenue.
- The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences noted that the discoveries have benefitted sellers, buyers and taxpayers around the world.
- Wilson was spotlighted for developing a theory for auctions with a common value.
 - A common value is a value which is uncertain beforehand but, in the end, is the same for everyone.
 - His work showed why rational bidders tend to bid under their own estimate of the worth due to worries over the winner's curse, or winning the auction but paying too much.
- Milgrom, came up with a more general theory of auctions, by analysing bidding strategies in different auction forms.

Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences:

- In 1968, Sveriges Riksbank, Sweden's central bank, established the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.
- The Prize in Economic Sciences is awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden, according to the same principles as for the Nobel Prizes that have been awarded since 1901.
- As it is not one of the prizes that Alfred Nobel established in his will in 1895, it is not a Nobel Prize.
- Nobel Prizes in the fields of Chemistry, Literature, Peace, Physics, and Physiology or Medicine were established as per the will of the Swedish scientist Alfred Nobel in 1895.

G. Tidbits

1. Defence Minister inaugurates 44 bridges built by BRO

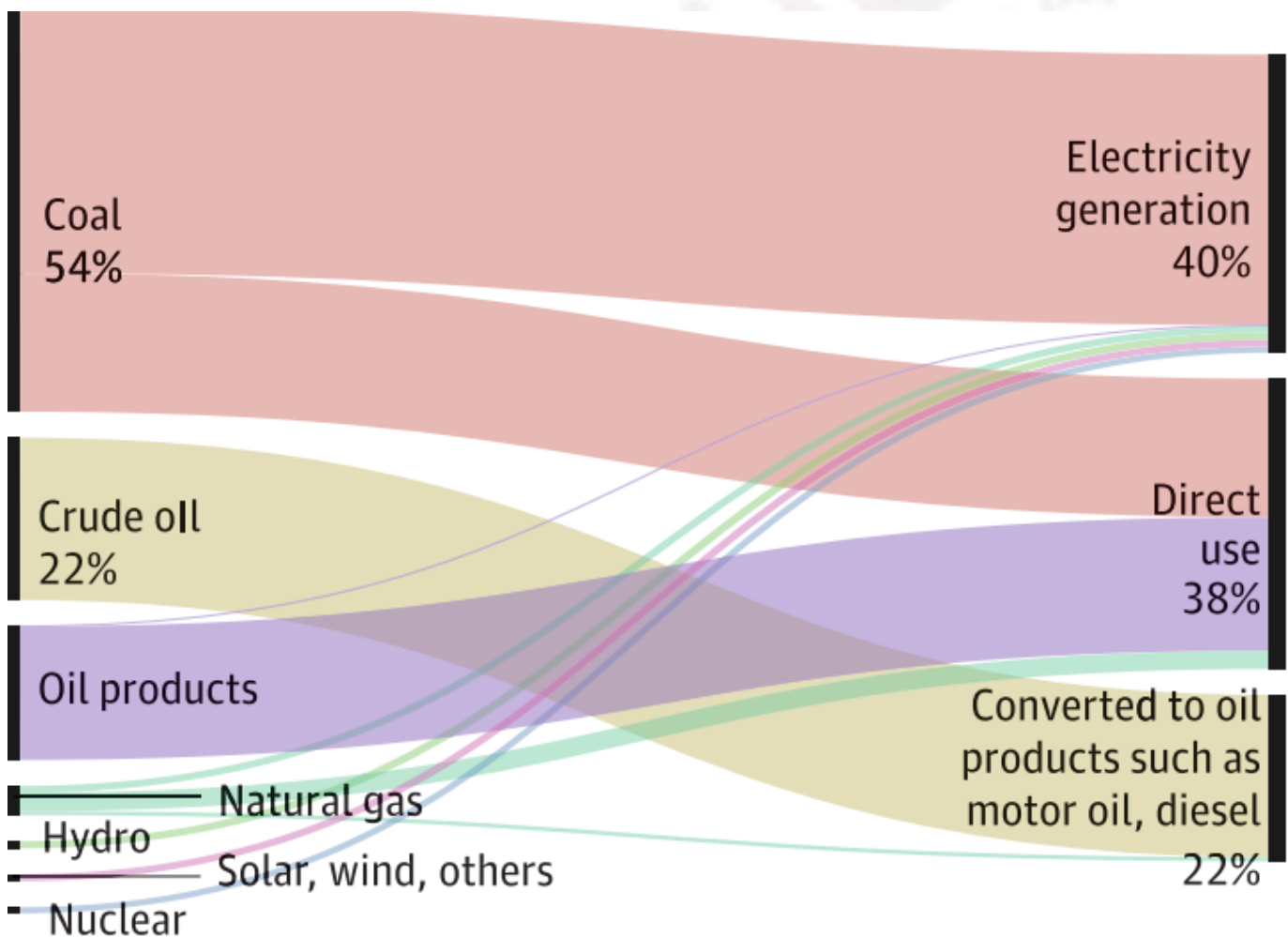
What's in News?

Defence Minister inaugurated 44 permanent bridges across seven States and Union Territories built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

- The bridges are located in J&K (10), Ladakh (8), Himachal Pradesh (2), Punjab (4), Uttarakhand (8), Arunachal Pradesh (8) and Sikkim (4).
- The bridges would provide improved connectivity in the far-flung areas of the western, northern and northeast sectors.
- It would also meet the transport and logistics requirements of the armed forces throughout the year.
- The annual budget of the BRO, which varied between ₹3,300 crore and ₹4,600 crore in 2008-2016, has seen a substantial rise and is pegged at over ₹11,000 crore in 2020-21.

2. Energy Mix

- India's energy needs (electricity and transport combined) are met overwhelmingly by coal and other fossil fuels with renewable energy contributing a minuscule 3% only.
- Electricity generation sector is the major consumer of energy while coal accounts for the major source of energy in India, by meeting around 54% of India's energy demands.
- The following chart shows the production and consumption pattern of energy in India. *(Image Source: The Hindu)*



- One of the major concerns with the fossil fuel phase-out policy and transitioning towards a low carbon economy is the fact that around 6.5 lakh employees work in the fossil fuel supply chain.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is an organisational unit of the UN Secretariat set up to facilitate the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).
2. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) is published by UNDRR.
3. Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

Q2. The Island of Kastellorizo is located in:

- a. Mediterranean Sea
- b. Black Sea
- c. South China Sea
- d. East China Sea

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Kastellorizo Island also known as Meis is located in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Line of Credit (LoC):

1. It is a soft loan provided on concessional interest rates to developing countries.
2. The LoCs promote exports of Indian goods and services.
3. Under an LoC, 75% of the value of the contract must be sourced from India.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Line of Credit is not a grant but a 'soft loan' provided on concessional interest rates to developing countries, which has to be repaid by the borrowing government.
- The LOCs also help to promote exports of Indian goods and services, as 75% of the value of the contract must be sourced from India.

Q4. Which of the following countries are members of both the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)?

1. India
2. Hong Kong
3. United States
4. Pakistan
5. Australia

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Pakistan is not a member state of FATF. It is an FATF Associate Member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG). FATF Asia-Pacific Group is one of the regional affiliates of the Financial Action Task Force.
- India, China, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand Singapore and the United States are members of both APG as well as head FATF.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Air pollution is a grave challenge in the National Capital Region. Discuss the causative factors for the high air pollution in NCR and suggest suitable short and long term solutions to address this issue. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 3/ Environment and Ecology)
2. With the 2020 Chemistry Nobel thrusting CRISPR-Cas9 into the limelight, discuss the prevalent laws, rules with respect to gene editing in India and suggest suitable measures to avoid misuse or unintended consequences due to gene editing. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/Science and Technology)

