

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES

23-08-2023

14th Joint Group of Customs Meeting Between India and Bangladesh

The 14th Joint Group of Customs (JGC) meeting between India and Bangladesh was held on 21st and 22nd August, 2023 in New Delhi.



The India-Bangladesh Joint Group of Customs meetings are held on an annual basis to discuss issues relating to customs cooperation and cross-border trade facilitation.

These meetings play a vital role in enhancing connectivity and developing trade infrastructure for smooth customs clearance at land borders. There are 62 Land Customs Stations (which include land border crossing points, railway stations and river banks/ports) along the India-Bangladesh Border in the States of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Several trade facilitative measures have been undertaken by India in this context recently such as enabling exports from Bangladesh to India by rail in closed containers, with customs clearance facility at any Inland Container Depot (ICD) vide Circular dated 17th May 2022. This would also help decongest the border trade points.

A circular has been issued to enable export of cargo from ICDs in India to Bangladesh using Inland Waterways. Similarly, another circular has been issued to enable transshipment through India of containerized export cargo of Bangladesh, destined for third countries, using Riverine and Land routes. Likewise, it has allowed transshipment of Bangladesh export cargo to third countries using Delhi Air Cargo.

The 14th JGC meeting discussed a host of bilateral issues such as opening of new land customs stations, easing port restrictions, development of road and rail infrastructure, pre-arrival exchange of customs data and a bilateral agreement on customs cooperation. India thanked Bangladesh for completing trial runs and issuing notification for operationalizing the Agreement on Use of Chattogram and Mongla Ports (ACMP) as was decided in the 13th JGC meeting, and initiated discussions on electronic connectivity of the respective transit modules of ACMP.



The bilateral meeting was successfully concluded with both sides committing to furtherance of cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

7th edition of 'Secretariat Reforms' report released, for June-July 2023

88.94 % Public Grievances disposed (8.63 lakh grievances disposed out of 9.70 lakh) All Ministries/ Departments of Govt. of India have adopted delayering and are in partially delayered/ fully delayered category 3.22 lakh physical files reviewed out of which 1.49 lakh files weeded out. 10 Ministries/Departments have 100% share of e-Receipts for June-July 2023.

40.64 lakh sq. ft. of space freed, Cleanliness Campaign conducted at 7,186 sites; Rs 37.56 crore of revenue earned from scrap disposal.

In pursuance of the decisions taken in the National workshop on 23.12.2022, DARPG published monthly report on "Secretariat Reforms" for June-July, 23.

Key highlights of the Report for the month of June-July, 2023 are as follows:

Swachhata Campaign & Reduction in Pendency

- 3.22 lakh files were reviewed. 1.49 lakh files weeded out, out of 1.96 lakh identified for weeding
- 8.63 lakh public grievances disposed out of 9.70 lakh received (Disposal rate-88.94%)
- 40.64 lakh square feet of space freed in June-July 2023
- Rs.37.56 crore revenue earned by scrap disposal in June-July 2023
- Cleanliness Campaign conducted at 7,186 sites

Increasing Efficiency in Decision Making

All Ministries/ Departments of Govt. of India have adopted delayering and are in partially delayered/ fully delayered category (60 fully delayered; 19 partially delayered)

ministries/Departments have reviewed and modified order of delegation 2021-2023

Desk Officer System in operation in 40 Ministries/ Departments

e-Office implementation and analytics

- All 75 Ministries which were identified for e-Office 7.0 migration have adopted e-Office 7.0
- 27.44 lakh active e-Files against 9.24 lakh active physical files in the Central Secretariat
- 10 Ministries/ Departments have 100% e-Receipts in the month of June 2023
- e-Receipts in June increased to 91.92% from 91.43% in May 2023

Best Practices

Department of Telecommunication: To ensure health and well-being of the employees, a scrap room has been converted to Gym in Department of Telecommunications, Sanchar Bhawan, which was inaugurated on 23rd June 2023.



1.

Department of Biotechnology: Initiated E-Book, INTRADBT, and eProMIS to enable applicants to submit proposals, create a repository of all schemes, and provide a one-stop source of information to the Department employees. eProMIS enable applicants to submit competitive research grant project proposals under various R&D programs of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) around the year without waiting for specific calls for proposals.

Department of Commerce: has taken several steps for capacity building and training of its employees. In addition to the annual capacity building plan, 30% of the total employees of the Department have completed their training modules on the Dakshata Programme. The Department has developed an intranet portal accessible to all employees, which helps in data dissemination and digitization of administrative procedures. The portal has provisions for conference room booking, online requisition for stationery, the status of VIP references, uploading of OMs/orders, notice board, dashboard, meetings scheduled on a particular day, download of important forms, etc.

MoU signed between Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and UNDP

The 'Prime Ministers' main focus is development of Social and Infrastructure connectivity in North Eastern Region: Shri B.L. Verma

On 22nd August, 2023, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) and UNDP, in the presence of Minister of State for Ministry of DoNER and Ministry of Cooperation, Shri B.L Verma and UN Assistant Secretary-General & Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy (BERA), Ms Ulrika Mod  er, entered into an MoU wherein UNDP would provide MDoNER

with technical support on fast-tracking progress on the SDGs; monitoring, evaluation and capacity building; support Aspirational districts and blocks; support in the deployment of emerging technologies in governance and in scaling up good practices.



Minister of State, MDoNER, Shri B.L. Verma addressed the delegates and said, Prime Ministers' main focus is development of Social and Infrastructure connectivity in NER and hope UNDP will help the Ministry in achieving this goal. He also said, "The Ministry of DoNER has taken remarkable strides across critical sectors such as infrastructure, connectivity, health, education, climate change and economic growth to transform the lives of the people in the region. In this journey, UNDP has been our key partner in promoting data-driven decision-making, especially through the Northeast Region District SDG Index"

MoS also stated that the NER District SDG Index helped in forming the flagship PM-DevINE scheme, which provides infrastructure and social development funding to boost livelihood opportunities in the region, especially for women and youth.

Ms. Ulrika Modéer appreciated the Government of India's efforts towards fast-tracking the development of the North Eastern Region. She said, "UNDP is privileged to sign this MoU with the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. We are committed to supporting national and sub national efforts to accelerate progress on the goals by providing technical support on SDG localization and improved capacities towards implementation and monitoring of programmes."

The fourth G20 Culture Working Group (CWG) meeting to start tomorrow in Varanasi

The Global Thematic Webinar report 'G20 Culture: Shaping the Global Narrative for Inclusive Growth' will be launched as a part of the Culture Ministers' Meeting

The 4th G20 Culture Working Group (CWG) Meeting will begin tomorrow in Varanasi culminating in the Culture Ministers' Meeting (CMM) on 26th August 2023. Delegates from G20 member nations, invitee countries, and various international organizations will attend the meeting.



Building upon the success of the previous three CWG meetings in Khajuraho, Bhubaneswar and Hampi, as well as the four Global Thematic Webinars, the 4th CWG meeting in Varanasi, from 23-25th August 2023, aims to arrive at actionable outcomes while positioning culture at the heart of policy making.

The insights and recommendations from the expert-driven Global Thematic Webinars on the priority areas of the CWG have been collated in a comprehensive report titled "**G20 Culture: Shaping the Global Narrative for Inclusive Growth**". This insightful report, by India's G20 presidency's Culture Working Group, will be launched in Varanasi as a part of the Culture Ministers' Meeting.

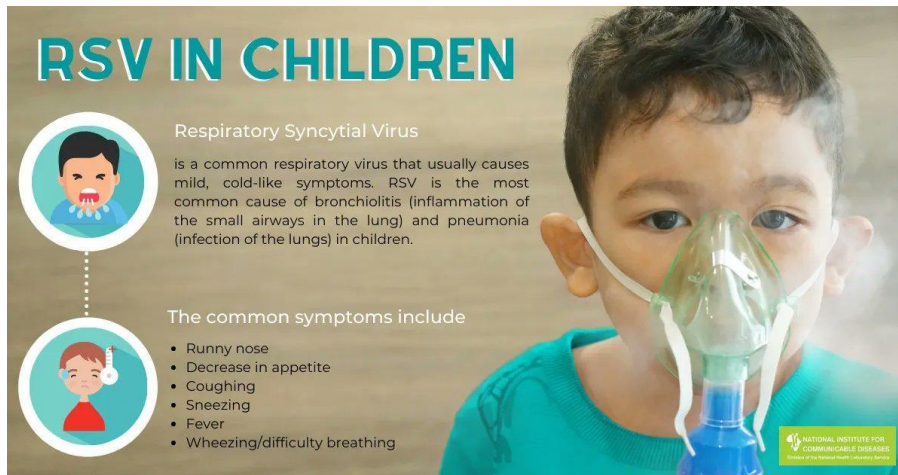
The Culture Ministers' Meeting in Varanasi will aim to catalyse collective actions for accelerating progress on the four priority areas articulated by the Indian Presidency- Protection and Restitution of Cultural Property, Harnessing Living Heritage for a Sustainable Future, Promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries and Creative Economy, and Leveraging Digital Technologies for the Protection and Promotion of Culture.

The CWG, under India's G20 presidency, had launched the 'Culture Unites All' campaign to highlight India's unwavering belief in multilateralism based on peaceful coexistence among diverse cultures and communities. The CWG is releasing a special stamp to commemorate the campaign on 26th August 2023. The 'Culture Unites All' postage stamp has been crafted as a distinctive emblem combining the ideas of connectivity, communication, and journey representing a cultural exchange and establishing cultural context.

In 2020, under the Saudi Arabian Presidency, the Culture Ministers' met for the first time on the side-lines of the G20. In 2021, Culture was formalised as a Working Group during the Italian Presidency, leading to the inaugural G20 Culture Ministers' Meeting and the consequential 'Rome Culture Ministers' Declaration'. The 'Bali Declaration' of 2022 under the Indonesian presidency further stressed the role of culture in sustainable development. In Varanasi, this would be the fourth time that the Culture Ministers of the G20 members and invitee countries would be meeting.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved the first vaccine that protects newborns from Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).



- About Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV):
- It is a common respiratory virus.
- RSV is one of the most frequent causes of childhood illness.
- It usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms.
- Premature infants, babies younger than 6 months old, people over age 65, and people who have a compromised immune system, chronic lung disease, or congenital heart condition can get a more severe case of RSV.
- A severe infection leads to pneumonia and bronchiolitis.

Transmission: RSV spreads from person to person through-

- The air by coughing and sneezing.
- Direct contact, such as kissing the face of a child who has RSV.
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands.

People who have an RSV infection are usually contagious for 3 to 8 days. But sometimes infants and people with weakened immune systems can continue to spread the virus for as long as 4 weeks.

Symptoms: The symptoms of RSV infection usually start about 4 to 6 days after infection. They include-

- Runny nose,
- Decrease in appetite,
- Cough,
- Sneezing,
- Fever,
- Wheezing,
- RSV can also cause more severe infections, especially in people at high risk. These infections include bronchiolitis.

NHPC signs pact with RITES to construct railway siding for 2,880 MW Dibang project

State-owned hydro power giant NHPC has inked an initial pact with RITES to construct railway siding for a 2,880 MW Dibang multipurpose project in Arunachal Pradesh.



"NHPC signed an MoU with RITES for Construction of Railway Siding at Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh) for NHPC's 2,880 MW Dibang Multi-Purpose Project at NHPC Corporate Office on 21st August 2023," a company statement said.

The strategic partnership between NHPC and RITES complements the expertise of both organisations.

Leveraging its core strength, RITES, as a Project Management Consultant, will provide comprehensive and efficient solutions for developing rail infrastructure facilities for NHPC Dibang and other upcoming projects in Arunachal Pradesh.

Key Facts about the Dibang River:

- It flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states of India.
- It is an upstream tributary of Brahmaputra.
- Origin: The Dibang originates near Keya Pass on the Indo-Chinese border in the Upper Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Tributaries: The Sisar, Mathun, Tangon, Dri, Ithun and Emra are the major tributaries of the Dibang.
- The Mishmi Hills are found along the upper course of the Dibang River.

About the Dibang Multipurpose Project:

- It is a flood control and hydroelectric power project planned to be developed on the Dibang River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River, in Arunachal Pradesh.
- At 2,880 MW of installed capacity, it will be the country's biggest hydropower facility.
- It is being developed by India's state-run National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC).
- Dibang hydroelectric plant makeup:
- The project envisages the construction of a 278m-high and 375m-long concrete gravity dam, which will be the highest dam structure in the country.
- The dam will create a 43 km-long reservoir with a gross storage capacity of 3.85 billion cubic metres.
- It includes six horseshoe-shaped head race tunnels of length varying from 300m to 600m with 9m diameter, an underground Powerhouse, and six horseshoe-shaped tail race tunnels of length varying from 320m to 470m with 9m diameter.

NESIDS

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Northeast Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) with a budget of Rs. 8139.50 crore from 2022-23 to 2025-26. The scheme consists of two components: NESIDS-Road and NESIDS-Other Than Road Infrastructure (OTRI).

- The primary objective of NESIDS is to **facilitate infrastructure development, particularly connectivity, in the Northeastern States**. The Cabinet also approved the continuation of the 'Schemes of NEC' for the same period (2022-23 to 2025-26), with a total budget of Rs. 3202.7 crore.
- The schemes under the Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (MDoNER) serve to complement the efforts of various Central Ministries and Departments as well as address the specific needs of the Northeastern States.
- These schemes aim to bridge development and welfare gaps by supporting projects that enhance connectivity, address social sector deficits, and boost livelihood and employment opportunities in the region.
- The scheme is fully funded by the central government and will support projects in sectors such as power, water supply, health, education, tourism, agriculture, and allied sectors.

Northeast Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)

About

- It is a central sector scheme launched by the Ministry of Development of the Northeastern Region, aimed at benefiting all the Northeastern states of India.
- It focuses on bridging infrastructural gaps in the region, covering both physical and social infrastructure aspects.
- The primary objective of NESIDS is to promote inclusive development. By focusing on bridging developmental gaps and fostering growth opportunities, the scheme aims to ensure that no region within the Northeast is left behind.

Features

- **Central Sector Scheme:** NESIDS operates as a central sector scheme, meaning 100% of the funding comes from the Central Government. This ensures consistent and dedicated financial support for the development projects.
- **Comprehensive Infrastructure Coverage:** The scheme has a broad focus, encompassing both physical and social infrastructure. It covers various sectors such as water supply, power connectivity, tourism-related projects, education, and health. This comprehensive approach addresses the diverse developmental needs of the region.
- **Supplementary Support:** NESIDS complements the existing schemes of the Central and State governments in the Northeast. It provides additional funding to address specific infrastructure gaps and developmental challenges that might not be fully covered by other schemes.
- **Beneficiaries:** All eight North East Indian states – Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, and Sikkim – are direct beneficiaries of NESIDS. The scheme is tailored to address the unique development requirements of each of these states.



- **Targeted Financial Assistance:** NESIDS extends financial assistance to projects that are not covered by any other central or state government schemes. This ensures that critical projects, which might otherwise face funding constraints, receive the necessary implementation support

Implementation

- **Funds Allocation:** The allocation of funds under NESIDS follows a normative allocation approach, with funds being disbursed to states at the beginning of the financial year. This ensures a planned and systematic distribution of resources for development projects.
- **Project Completion:** NESIDS provides funds for ongoing projects that are part of the North Eastern Region's Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR). These funds are intended to support the completion of projects within a specified timeframe, enhancing their effectiveness and impact.
- **Performance-Based Approach:** States that are unable to effectively utilize their allocated funds may have their funds redirected to states that are demonstrating better performance in implementing NESIDS projects. This approach ensures optimal utilization of resources and encourages efficient project execution.
- **Eligibility for Funding:** NESIDS funding is reserved for projects that do not receive support from any other central or state government scheme. This criterion ensures that the scheme targets projects with unmet developmental needs, preventing duplication of funding and maximizing the impact of resources.

Significance

- **Focused Development:** NESIDS plays a pivotal role in channelling dedicated development efforts towards the North Eastern region by providing essential financial assistance for various infrastructure projects.
- **Enhanced Infrastructure:** The scheme significantly contributes to the enhancement of physical infrastructure, encompassing crucial aspects such as improved power connectivity, water supply systems, and the development of tourism-related projects.
- **Social Welfare:** NESIDS has a substantial impact on the improvement of social infrastructure within the region. It focuses on strengthening education and healthcare sectors, which directly enhances the overall well-being and quality of life of the people in the North Eastern states.
- **Promotion of Inclusive Growth:** By addressing existing infrastructural gaps, NESIDS catalyzes fostering balanced growth and development across different regions of the country. It ensures that the North Eastern states are not left behind in the nation's journey towards progress.

Challenges

- **Geographical Constraints:** The North Eastern region's challenging terrain, characterized by hills, forests, and rivers, can make the execution of infrastructure projects difficult and costly due to construction complexities and accessibility issues.
- **Human Resource Development:** Developing a skilled workforce capable of planning, implementing, and managing infrastructure projects is crucial. The region may face challenges in sourcing and retaining skilled professionals.
- **Environmental Concerns:** While development is essential, ensuring environmental sustainability is equally important. Balancing infrastructure growth with the preservation of the region's unique biodiversity and natural ecosystems poses a significant challenge.

- **Funding and Financial Management:** Ensuring the optimal utilization of funds and efficient financial management for project execution can be challenging, especially when dealing with large-scale infrastructure initiatives.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Involving local communities and stakeholders in the planning and execution of projects while addressing their concerns and aspirations requires effective communication and coordination.
- **Project Monitoring and Maintenance:** Monitoring the progress of projects and ensuring their long-term maintenance and sustainability can be challenging in remote areas with limited resources.

Addressing these challenges is essential to maximize the positive impact of NESIDS and ensure that the development efforts contribute effectively to the growth and well-being of the North Eastern region and its people.

Way Forward

- **Detailed Planning:** Create detailed development plans that incorporate the enhancement of connectivity through road, rail, and air networks. Identify key infrastructure projects and prioritize them based on their potential impact on trade, tourism, and overall development. Develop a timeline and allocate resources accordingly.
- **Skill Development Framework:** Establish a comprehensive skill development framework that addresses the specific needs of the region. Collaborate with educational institutions and industry experts to design training programs that equip individuals with the necessary skills for project implementation and sustainable growth. Regularly update these programs to stay relevant to changing demands.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment:** Before implementing any development projects, conduct thorough environmental impact assessments. Identify potential risks to the ecosystem and develop mitigation measures to minimize negative effects. Ensure that projects adhere to environmentally friendly practices and adhere to regulatory guidelines.
- **Public-Private Partnership Agreements:** Formulate clear and transparent agreements with private sector partners. Define roles, responsibilities, and expectations to ensure smooth collaboration. Foster an environment of innovation by encouraging private sector partners to bring their expertise and resources to the table.
- **Community Participation:** Engage local communities from the early stages of project planning. Conduct consultations, workshops, and information sessions to gather their input and address their concerns. Incorporate local knowledge and preferences into project designs to ensure that they align with the community's needs and values.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress and impact of development initiatives. Regularly review the outcomes against the established goals and make necessary adjustments. This data-driven approach will help identify successful strategies and areas for improvement.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in building the capacity of government agencies and relevant institutions responsible for project implementation and oversight. Equip them with the skills and knowledge required to manage complex development projects effectively.
- **Stakeholder Communication:** Maintain open and transparent communication with all stakeholders, including government bodies, private sector partners, local communities,

and the general public. Keep them informed about project updates, challenges, and achievements.

- **Flexible Adaptation:** Remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities. Development is an ongoing process, and the ability to adjust strategies in response to new developments is crucial.
- **Long-Term Vision:** Keep a long-term perspective in mind. Development efforts may take time to yield substantial results. Maintain a commitment to the overarching vision of sustainable and inclusive growth.

Conclusion

- NESIDS is a crucial step towards addressing infrastructural gaps and fostering comprehensive development in the North Eastern states. India's focus on both physical and social infrastructure, along with addressing challenges through strategic approaches; will contribute to the region's progress and inclusivity.

Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX)

In a joint effort, the space agencies of India and Japan are embarking on the Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX).



About Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX):

It is a collaborative venture between Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

The mission is scheduled to launch in 2025.

LUPEX will use a rover and lander to study the possibility of establishing a base on the Moon, the availability of water ice, and surface exploration technologies.

JAXA and ISRO are developing the rover and lander, respectively.

The rover will carry not only the instruments of ISRO and JAXA but also those of the US space agency NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA).

Proposed instruments onboard LUPEX:

Ahmedabad-based Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), an autonomous unit of the Department of Space, has proposed multiple instruments in the LUPEX mission mainly to carry out measurements on the surface and subsurface near the permanently shadowed polar region of the Moon.

The objective of one of the proposed instruments

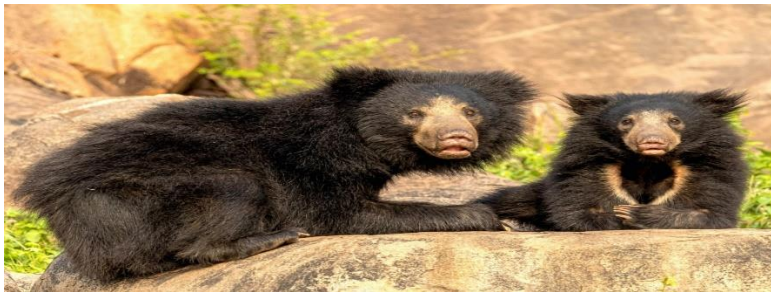
Permittivity and Thermo-physical investigation for Moon's Aquatic Scout (PRATHIMA) — is in-situ detection and quantification of water-ice mixed with lunar surface and sub-surface soil using a rover/lander platform.

The aim of another proposed instrument — the Lunar Electrostatic Dust Experiment (LEDEX) — is to detect the presence of charged dust particles and to confirm the dust levitation process in the volatile-rich polar region, and to estimate the approximate dust size and flux of charged levitated dust particles.

The mission will provide valuable insights into the lunar polar region and will help to pave the way for future human exploration of the Moon.

Sloth Bear

A sloth bear that was entering human settlements in Kudha in the Nilgiris was recently captured and relocated by the Forest Department.



- Sloth bears are one of the eight bear species found across the world.
- Their range includes India, Sri Lanka and southern Nepal.
- 90% of the global Sloth Bear population is found in India.

Habitat: They live in a variety of dry and moist forests and in some tall grasslands, where boulders, scattered shrubs and trees provide shelter.

Features: They have long, shaggy dark brown or black fur and curved claws, which are the longest out of any of the bear species. They use their claws to excavate termites and ants.

Conservation Status IUCN: **Vulnerable**

Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: **Schedule 1**

G20 countries gave record \$1.4 trillion to support fossil fuels in 2022:

The report comes ahead of the Leaders' Summit when the Group of 20 will meet in Delhi on September 9-10 and attempt to gain consensus on climate change.

G20 members provided a record \$1.4 trillion (approximately Rs 116 lakh crore) in public money to support fossil fuels in 2022, according to a study — Fanning the Flames:

G20 Provides Record Financial Support for Fossil Fuels by International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and partners.



The report, to be released on Wednesday (August 23), states that the amount, which includes fossil fuel subsidies (\$1 trillion), investments by state-owned enterprises The researchers found that G20 members could raise an additional \$1 trillion every year by setting minimum carbon taxation levels of \$25–75/tCO_{2e}, depending on the country's income.

Lending from public financial institutions (\$50 billion), is more than double the pre-Covid-19 and pre-energy crisis levels of 2019. The report comes ahead of the Leaders' Summit when the Group of 20 will meet in Delhi on September 9-10 and attempt to gain consensus on climate change. “These figures are a stark reminder of the massive amount of public money G20 governments continue to pour into fossil fuels despite the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change.

The G20 has the power and the responsibility to transform our fossil-based energy systems. It is crucial for the bloc to put fossil fuel subsidies on the Delhi Leaders' Summit agenda and take meaningful actions to eliminate all public financial flows for coal, oil and gas,” said Tara Laan, senior associate at IISD and the lead author of the study.