

Current Affairs of the Day

PAPER 2:

➤ International Relations:

1. Govt. to boost infrastructure in areas along China border
2. Border Area Development Programme (BADP)
3. India slams defacement of rock carvings in Gilgit-Baltistan
4. India, Bhutan ink MoU for environment cooperation
5. Hong Kong belongs to China: Nepal

➤ Health:

1. Rajasthan tops in virus management index
2. HCQ clinical trials will resume: WHO

PAPER 3:

➤ Economy:

1. Cabinet sets up Secretaries' group to attract investment
2. Cabinet nod for agri marketing reforms
3. The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020



Govt. to boost infrastructure in areas along China border

Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- To ramp up infrastructure along the China border, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to spend 10% funds of a Centrally sponsored scheme only on projects in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim.

- The Border Area Development Programme (BADP) has been allocated

₹784 crore in the 2020-21 fiscal and the money is distributed to the border States and Union Territories depending on various criteria such as the length of the international border and population. In 2019-20, ₹825 crore was granted for the scheme.

- According to the new guidelines, approved by Union Home Minister Amit Shah effective April 1, the projects for developing strategically important villages and towns in border areas that have been identified by the border guarding forces will be given priority. Around ₹78.4 crore has been parked for projects in areas inhabited along the 3,488 km China border.

10 km of border:

- Construction of roads, bridges, culverts, primary schools, health infrastructure, playfields, irrigation works, mini-stadiums, indoor courts for basketball, badminton and table tennis can be undertaken within 10 km of the border.

Significance:

- The creation of infrastructure would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas leading to safe and secure borders.

Value Added Information

About Border Area Development Programme (BADP):

- The Border Area Development Programme (BADP) has been implemented through 17 States (viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal) which constitute the International Land Borders.

Extra attention

The government has decided to boost infrastructure along the 3,488 km border with China

₹78.4 CRORE FUNDING: The amount will be spent on projects in villages in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim



PROJECTS THAT CAN BE FUNDED: Roads, bridges, culverts, mini stadiums, community health centres, primary schools and hostels, apart from supply of medical equipment to hospitals

WHO WILL CHOOSE THE PROJECT? The border guarding forces will play a key role in choosing the project



- The main objective of the BADP is to meet the special developmental needs and wellbeing of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border and to saturate the border areas with the entire essential infrastructure through convergence of Central/ State/ BADP/ Local schemes and participatory approach.

Funding and schemes covered:

- The funds under BADP are provided to the States as a 100% non-lapsable Special Central Assistance. The programme is supplemental in nature and the budget allocation for the financial year 2015-16 is Rs.990 crore.
- The BADP schemes include construction of primary health centres, schools, supply of drinking water, community centres, connectivity, drainage to enable sustainable living in border areas.
- It also covers schemes or activities relating to Swachhta Abhiyan, skill development programmes, promotion of sports activities in border areas, promotion of rural tourism, border tourism, protection of heritage sites, construction of helipads in remote and inaccessible hilly areas, which do not have road connectivity.

Rajasthan tops in virus management index

- Rajasthan has occupied the first rank in COVID-19 management index analysed for 10 States by the Central government.
- Though the tally of COVID-19-positive cases in the State is heading towards 10,000 mark, the graph of active cases has been constantly declining.

Cabinet sets up Secretaries' group to attract investment

- The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the setting up of an empowered group of secretaries (EGoS) and project development cells (PDCs) in Ministries and departments for attracting investments to India.

Significance:

- The two decisions would help domestic industries and lead to direct and indirect employment.
- The government said the decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, would "reinforce India's vision of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25".



Empowered group of secretaries (EGoS):

- The EGoS would be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary and would include the Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade as member convener and the NITI Aayog CEO, the Commerce Secretary, the Revenue Secretary and the Economic Affairs Secretary as members.
- The Secretary of the Department concerned would be co-opted, depending on the project.

India slams defacement of rock carvings in Gilgit-Baltistan

- India has reacted strongly to reports of vandalism and defacement of ancient Buddhist rock carvings in Gilgit-Baltistan under Pakistan's control.

Key concerns:

- It is a grave concern that the Buddhist symbols are being destroyed and the religious and cultural rights and freedoms are being trampled with impunity in the Indian territories under illegal occupation of Pakistan.
- The statement has brought into focus the rich Buddhist heritage of the region found in the rock carvings and engravings, especially in areas like Hunza, which were part of the Buddhist circle covering Ladakh and Tibet.
- The engravings have been in news recently also because of the Diamar-Bhasha hydro power project that the Chinese and the Pakistani companies will construct nearby, as locals have opposed it, claiming it may endanger the heritage.

India, Bhutan ink MoU for environment cooperation

- The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bhutan for cooperation in the field of environment protection and management of natural resources.

About:

- The MoU, signed at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "will enable establishment and promotion of closer and long-term cooperation in environment protection and management of natural resources on the basis of equity, reciprocity and mutual benefits.
- It will cover air, waste, chemical management, climate change and other areas and will remain in force for 10 years from the date of signing.

Cabinet nod for agri marketing reforms

- The Union Cabinet has approved an amendment to the 65-year-old Essential Commodities Act, removing cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.



- The amendment will be made effective immediately via an ordinance, according to the Agriculture Ministry.

The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020:

- The Cabinet also approved ordinances to remove restrictions on farmers selling their produce outside notified market yards, as well as to facilitate contract farming and allow farmers to engage in direct marketing, according to an official statement.
- All these measures were promised in the Aatmanirbhar package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last month.



Foreign investment:

- The amendment to the ECA, which has been under discussion for more than a decade, will deregulate the production, storage, movement and distribution of these food commodities.
- By removing the private sector's fears of "excessive regulatory interference," the Centre hopes to increase private and foreign investment, especially in cold storage facilities and the modernisation of the food supply chain, said the statement.
- Adequate processing and storage facilities will reduce wastage and increase income for farmers of perishable commodities.
- To protect consumers, the amendment allows regulation during war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity, while providing exemptions for exporters and processors at such times as well.

Aim:

- The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020 aims to open up agricultural marketing outside notified mandis for farmers, and also remove barriers to inter-State trade.
- While both agriculture and markets are State subjects, the Centre is counting on the fact that trade and commerce in foodstuffs is part of the concurrent list to push through its ordinance.

Key facts:

- In fact, industry sources suggest that 60% of agricultural trade already takes place outside the mandis through unregulated sales. By legalising and facilitating such sales, the Centre hopes that farmers will benefit, rather than middlemen.



- Not all States have been on board with these reforms, especially as State governments will not be allowed to levy fees on these sales.
- The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020 is aimed at facilitating contract farming, where a private buyer contracts to purchase a crop at a certain price at the beginning of a season, transferring the risk of market unpredictability from the farmer to the corporate sponsor.
- However, farmers groups have expressed concern that corporates will benefit more than small farmers from such direct marketing measures, and wish to see the specific provisions of the ordinance before welcoming it.

HCQ clinical trials will resume: WHO



- The World Health Organisation said on Wednesday that clinical trials of the drug hydroxychloroquine will resume, after having been suspended pending a safety review in the search for coronavirus treatments.

Hong Kong belongs to China: Nepal

- Nepal came out strongly in favour of the 'one China policy', and said it considers Hong Kong to be an "integral" part of China.
- Beijing had urged countries, including India, to support the new law. Pakistan has extended wholehearted support to Beijing's 'one China' policy in the similar context.
- The government of Nepal entered into an agreement to target "criminals" and anti-China activists during President Xi Jinping's Kathmandu visit in October 2019.
- The move was seen as a step towards signing of extradition treaty with Beijing that would allow Beijing to arrest Tibetan activists and critics of China visiting Nepal. Wednesday's support is also timely as it strengthens China's position in an ongoing diplomatic row with the U.K. over Hong Kong's future.