

Current Affairs of the Day

PAPER 2:

➤ International Relations:

1. World Bank seeks 'universal eligibility'
2. Singapore Convention on Mediation

PAPER 3:

➤ Economy:

1. Amid fierce protests, Rajya Sabha passes two farm Bills
2. Govt. tables Bill to amend FCRA
3. Five Star Villages Scheme launched



Amid fierce protests, Rajya Sabha passes two farm Bills


➤ Two of the three agriculture-related legislation piloted by the Narendra Modi government, aimed at liberalising the farm sector, were passed by the Rajya Sabha by voice vote on Sunday amid a din as the Opposition parties, enraged by the refusal of Deputy Chairman Harivansh to allow voting on resolutions they moved, broke microphones, stood up on tables and flung papers in the air.

➤ The legislation — the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, were cleared by the Lok Sabha last week.

 The dictatorial attitude of the Chair in not wanting to get a sense of the House ... led to bedlam & chaos. The anti-farmer Bills were passed in the din without voting. Why the tearing urgency? On whose orders?


JAIRAM RAMESH,
CONGRESS CHIEF
WHIP IN RAJYA
SABHA



 I was in my seat when I asked for a vote, but the Deputy Chairman completely ignored my demand. The rules dictate that even if one member of the House asks for a resolution [against the Bills] to be put to vote, it should be. This was clearly undemocratic


K.K. RAGESH,
CPI(M) MP



 This is the height of indiscipline and intolerance. People have given mandate to PM Narendra Modi. This is an insult to people's mandate

PRALHAD JOSHI, PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS MINISTER



 The bottom line is that the Opposition wanted a vote on the Bills and the BJP did not want to vote because it did not have numbers. This story does not end here. The BJP told you it is a historic day, but it is a sad day for Parliamentary democracy

DEREK O'BRIEN, TRINAMOOLOO CONGRESS





Govt. tables Bill to amend FCRA

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2020, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Sunday by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai.

Key takeaways:

- The Centre is set to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act and proposes to make Aadhaar a mandatory identification document for all the office-bearers, directors and other key functionaries of an NGO or an association eligible to receive foreign donations.
- The Bill says the amendment is required to enhance transparency and accountability in the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions worth thousands of crores of rupees every year and facilitating the “genuine” non-governmental organisations or associations who are working for the welfare of society.
- The Bill proposes to include “public servant” and “corporation owned or controlled by the government” among the list of entities who are not eligible to receive foreign donations, the draft says.
- **Bars public servants:** “Amendment of clause (c) of sub-section (1) of section 3 to include public servant also within its ambit, to provide that no foreign contribution shall be accepted by any public servant,” the Bill says.
- In 2016, the Home Ministry had cancelled the licence of Lawyers Collective, run by noted lawyers Indira Jaising and Anand Grover for various violations. The Ministry, in its suspension notice, had said that Ms. Jaising — as a government servant — had received foreign funds over ₹96 crore when she held the post of Additional Solicitor General (ASG) between the years 2009 and 2014, in violation of FCRA norms.
- FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect the internal security of the country. The Act, first enacted in 1976 was amended in the year 2010 when a slew of new measures were taken by the Union Home Ministry to regulate foreign donations.
- The Bill proposes that not more than 20% of the total foreign funds received could be defrayed for administrative expenses. At present the limit is 50%.



- The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill further states, “The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 was enacted to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations or companies and to prohibit acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the national interest and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.”

World Bank seeks ‘universal eligibility’

- The \$1 billion World Bank loan to prevent, detect and respond to the threat of coronavirus and strengthen national health systems for preparedness as India combats the ongoing pandemic comes with a condition of “universal eligibility” in procurements.
- This would mean that all preferential market access policies, including Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order, Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) Policy, certain benefits to start-ups, shall not be applicable on purchases made while implementing the national project.

Review of documents:

- Besides paving the way for universal eligibility in the supply system, the World Bank would have the right to review the procurement documents, inspect/audit all accounts, records and other files relating to the project. Compliance to these conditions has been made mandatory for the funding.
- The Railways will spend ₹399 crore across its network to strengthen health infrastructure in the combat against COVID-19 in this financial year. The focus will be on creating more isolation facilities with medical equipment such as ventilators, oxygen cylinders etc.
- This is part of the “India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Strengthening Project,” a joint initiative of the Government of India and the World Bank that has \$1 billion loan disbursed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The Railway Ministry is one of the implementing agencies of the project.



Highest allocation:

- While the Northern Railway has got the highest allocation of ₹45.59 crore this year followed by the Eastern Railway with ₹42.56 crore, the Southern Railway has been given ₹30.95 crore. The Integral Coach Factory, the largest coach maker in the world, got a sanction of ₹3.17 crore. The total allocation to 16 Zonal Railways, Metro, production units and others stands at ₹399.36 crore.
- These funds would be utilised for establishing isolation wards by purchasing ventilators, oxygen cylinders, laboratory machines, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) kits, face shields, hospital furniture, medical equipment, gloves, goggles and other consumables.
- The first component of the project deals with emergency response to the pandemic and would be implemented till April 2022. Railways would have to make procurements in accordance with the World Bank guidelines, the Railway Board said and added that the funds allocated should not be exceeded. In case any railway expected that it would not be in a position to spend the funds earmarked by March 31, 2021, the same should be communicated to the board latest by December 31, 2020.
- The Railways, one of the largest employers in the country, has reported 14,714 COVID-19 cases among its employees and 336 deaths. The Central Railway has topped the list with 67 deaths and 1,323 cases followed by the South Central Railway with 54 deaths and 2,202 cases. While the Southern Railway, headquartered in Chennai, has reported 21 deaths and 1,145 cases, the ICF had 9 deaths and 422 cases among its employees.

Five Star Villages Scheme launched

- Five Star Villages scheme has been launched recently.
- **Ministry:** The Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications.

Key takeaways:

- **Aim:** To bridge the gaps in public awareness and reach of postal products and services, especially in interior villages.
- **Objective:** To ensure universal coverage of flagship postal schemes in rural areas of the country.



- It has three components: (1) Product and Service Availability; (2) Product and Service Publicity; (3) Product and Service Marketing.
- Branch offices will function as one-stop shops to cater all post office related needs of the villagers.
- **Implemented by:** A team of five Gramin Dak Sevaks. They will be assigned a village for marketing of all products, savings and insurance schemes.
- **Team will be headed by:** Branch Post Master of the concerned Branch Office.
- The scheme is being launched on pilot basis in Maharashtra. Based on the experience, it will be implemented nation-wide.

Singapore Convention on Mediation

- Recently, the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation has come into force.
- It is also known as the Singapore Convention on Mediation.
- It is the first UN treaty to be named after Singapore.

Key takeaways:

- The convention will provide a more effective way of enforcing mediated settlements of corporate disputes involving businesses in India and other signatories.
- India approved the signing of the Convention in July 2019.
- The Convention has 53 signatories which include China and the USA as well.

Significance:

- It will promote mediation as an alternative and effective method of resolving trade disputes.
- The settlement reached by parties shall be binding and enforceable.
- Mediated settlement agreement across borders can be done by applying directly to the courts of countries that have signed and ratified the treaty.
- It will save time and legal costs.



- Businesses in India and around the world will now have greater certainty in resolving cross-border disputes through mediation.
- It will boost India's 'ease of doing business' credentials by enabling swift mediated settlements of corporate disputes.
- It will also provide a positive signal to foreign investors about India's commitment to adhere to international practice on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).