



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper - II

- 'Carefully monitoring' Brahmaputra developments: India
- Not using masks flouts fundamental rights: SC
- Iran moves to step up nuclear enrichment

GS Paper - III

- Government offers eight amendments to farm laws
- Services PMI signals rise in activity for a second month



'Carefully monitoring' Brahmaputra developments: India



A State-run Chinese hydropower firm, POWERCHINA, is planning to build the first downstream dam on the Brahmaputra, known as the Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet.

Highlights:

1. India on Thursday said it “carefully monitors all developments on the Brahmaputra” river, even as Beijing said it was its “legitimate right” to develop hydropower projects on the lower reaches of the river.
2. Officials from the firm said last week that they were eyeing the enormous potential of the river’s “Great Bend” just across the border from Arunachal Pradesh in Tibet’s Medog county, where the river falls over a 2,000-metre drop before turning to flow into India.
3. While China in 2015 operationalised its first hydropower project at Zangmu in Tibet and is constructing three other dams at Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha, these are run-of-the-river dams on the upper and middle reaches. The proposed new



dam is also likely to be a run-of-the-river hydropower project that will not divert water but will be the first on the lower reaches.

Communication for Flood management

1. Good cooperation between China, India and Bangladesh is needed in flood reporting, flood control, disaster relief, and emergency management. There are communication channels existing for this.

User rights

1. As a lower riparian State with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers, India has consistently conveyed its views and concerns to the Chinese authorities and has urged them to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activities in upstream areas.
2. The Chinese side has conveyed to us on several occasions that they are only undertaking run-of-the-river hydropower projects which do not involve diversion of the waters of the Brahmaputra.

Govt. offers to make 8 changes to farm laws

Farmers Demands:

1. Repeal three farm laws
2. Legal assurance for MSP regime
3. Protect mandis
4. Stop slapping large fines on farmers for burning stubble
5. Withdraw the Electricity Bill, 2020, which could affect power subsidies for farmers

Government Proposes to amend laws:

1. These include placing safeguards to ensure that land alienation is not possible via contract farming;
2. Strengthening the State-run mandi system and possibly equalising taxes in these markets and private markets;



3. Allowing grievance redressal in civil courts rather than just in the offices of Sub-Divisional Magistrates;
4. Ensuring registration of private traders beyond the requirement of a PAN card. Issues related to stubble burning and power subsidies were also discussed.

Not using masks flouts fundamental rights: SC

People who do not wear masks in public and follow physical distancing norms violate the fundamental rights of others amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court said on Thursday.

Highlights:

The poor implementation and lack of will on the part of the authorities to enforce COVID-19 norms was stark. Weddings and rallies were seeing hundreds of people, Justice Shah remarked. Vegetable markets are being thronged by people as if there is no pandemic. The court asked why the police were not taking any action against the violators.

Iran moves to step up nuclear enrichment

Iran's watchdog body approved a law on Wednesday that obliges the government to halt U.N. inspections of its nuclear sites and step up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal if sanctions are not eased in a month.

Highlights:

1. Under the new law, Tehran gives one month to the deal's European parties to ease sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors, imposed after Washington quit the JCPOA pact between Tehran and six powers in 2018.
2. It also says the government should resume uranium enrichment to 20% and install advanced centrifuges at its Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities.
3. Iran's pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani, the architect of the 2015 deal, criticised Parliament's move as "harmful to diplomatic efforts" aimed at easing U.S. sanctions.



Background:

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

1. In 2015, Iran agreed on a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
2. It came after years of tension over Iran's alleged efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted that its nuclear programme was entirely peaceful, but the international community did not believe that.
3. Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.
4. Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) Tehran agreed to significantly cut its stores of centrifuges, enriched uranium and heavy-water, all key components for nuclear weapons.
5. The JCPOA established the Joint Commission, with the negotiating parties all represented, to monitor implementation of the agreement.
6. In 2018 Trump unilaterally left JCPoA.

INSTEX Barter Mechanism

1. A trade mechanism 'Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX)' was established by France, Germany and the United Kingdom in January 2019 to allow European entities to maintain trade with Iran.
2. The mechanism has been designed to circumvent U.S. sanctions against trade with Iran by avoiding the use of the dollar.
3. The United States imposed sanctions after it withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018.
4. This Paris-based mechanism functions as a clearinghouse allowing Iran to continue to sell oil and import other products or services in exchange.
5. The mechanism represents the continuing commitment of France, Germany and the UK to the JCPOA.



Services PMI signals rise in the activity for a second month

The recovery in the Indian services sector was sustained in November as new work orders supported business activity growth and the first rise in employment in nine months, a monthly survey showed on Thursday.

Highlights:

1. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index posted above the critical 50 mark that separates growth from contraction for the second month in a row.
2. Despite easing to 53.7 in November, from 54.1 in October, the latest reading was still indicative of a solid pace of expansion.
3. Companies enjoyed a further rise in new work intakes and responded to this by lifting business activity and employment.
4. Services firms hired additional workers in November, ending eight months of job shedding. However, the rate of employment growth was marginal as some companies reported having sufficient staff to cope with current workloads.

Background: The India Services Business Activity Index (works as services PMI) is compiled by IHS Markit. It also compiles manufacturing PMI and combined one for manufacturing and services.