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23rd, August, 2022

Today's Topic Covered

1) Raw material prices rise in Punjab....*Read in Detail*

2) African swine fever spreads in Patiala....*Read in Detail*

3) Stunted paddy growth stuns Punjab farming community, experts

4) Punjab makes masks mandatory amid rising Covid cases



Topic: Raw material prices rise in Punjab

Importance: Punjab PCS Prelims and Mains

What is the news?

- The significant increase in raw material prices in the last eight months is leading to existential crisis for several ***Punjab-based hot-mix plant*** owners engaged in the construction of government roads, bridges and buildings.



According to Punjab Hot-Mix Plant Owners Association (HMPOA) president Balwinder Singh Siddhwa:

- Prices of steel, LD0 oil, diesel, cement, gravel, stone and other road construction material have increased anywhere between 35-150 per cent due to the Ukraine war and rising inflation.
- There is an increase of 75 per cent in the rates of bitumen, 52 per cent in the rates of steel, LD0 price has doubled and gravel prices has increased by over 150

per cent.”

- The association members said when the work was allotted to them, the rates were reasonable and profitable as well but now it is beyond one’s control to carry on with the existing rates on Common Schedule Rates (CSR).

Impact of Russia-Ukraine war:

- On one hand, the raw material prices have risen like anything in the last eight months, especially after Russia-Ukraine war, the increase in rates was much faster.
- However, despite this, we are facing issues in the absence of revision of increase in the CSR, which was last time revised in 2012-13 by the government.
- Due to significant increase in prices, development projects in the state have been put on hold by over 200 hot-mix plant owners in protest against the increasing rates of various raw materials.

Demand of the association:

- The association demanded the speedy implementation of mining policy and under that the rates of materials used in new tenders should be fixed.
- The owners also raised the issue of delay in their payments by the government. The contractors also requested the state government to clear the dues of various projects completed by them in the previous years, which is about Rs 700 crore at the earliest.
- Meanwhile, the association has appealed to the state government in view of the increasing corruption. The delegation submitted a memorandum to the Finance Minister to strengthen his statewide corruption-free, Punjab campaign and appraised the contractors in Patiala

and Sangrur about the open bribery flourishing among the officials of the Punjab Mandi Board

What are hot mix plants?

- The Hot Mix Plants or asphalt Hot Mixing Plant is one plant that is used for mixing the dry, warm aggregate, padding and Asphalt for homogeneous mixture at the required temperature. And it is widely used for the construction of highway, city road and parking lot.

(Source: The Tribune)

Topic: African swine fever spreads in Patiala

Importance: Punjab PCS Prelims and Mains

What is the news?

- Deputy commissioner Surabhi Malik on Thursday said that with samples of some pigs were tested positive for African Swine Flu at Patiala, the entire state had been declared as 'Control area'.
- After Bilaspur village and areas of Choti Nadi & Bari Nadi in Patiala, which were announced as epicenters of African swine fever, symptoms of the disease have been reported in pigs in Badungar village and Majal Khurd, too.
- The Department of Animal Husbandry has thus started

testing pigs throughout the district – on the basis of reported symptoms or voluntary testing by farm owners.



About African swine fever:

What is African swine fever?

- African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild pigs, whose mortality rate can reach 100%.
- It is not a danger to human health, but it has devastating effects on pig populations and the farming economy. There is currently no effective vaccine against ASF.
- The virus is highly resistant to the environment, meaning that it can survive on clothes, boots, wheels, and other materials. It can also survive in various pork products, such as ham, sausages or bacon. Therefore, human behaviors can play an important role in spreading this pig disease across borders if adequate measures are

not taken.

It is caused by a DNA virus of the Asfarviridae family.

Some Important Points:

- It was first detected in Africa in the 1920s.
- Historically, outbreaks have been reported in Africa and parts of Europe, South America, and the Caribbean.
- However, more recently (since 2007), the disease has been reported in multiple countries across Africa, Asia and Europe, in both domestic and wild pigs.
- ASF is a disease listed in the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code and thus, reported to the OIE.

African swine fever: a socio-economic burden and a threat to food security and biodiversity:

- Pigs are a primary source of household income in many countries. The spread of ASF across the world has devastated family-run pig farms, often the mainstay of people's livelihoods and a driver of upward mobility. It has also reduced opportunities to access healthcare and education.
- Moreover, pork meat is one of the primary sources of animal proteins, accounting for more than 35% of the global meat intake¹. Hence, this disease poses a serious problem for food security worldwide.
- This disease is also a concern for biodiversity and the balance of ecosystems, as it affects not only domestic farmed pigs, but also wild boars, including native breeds.



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ASF evolution since 2005:

2005: Presence in Africa:

ASF has traditionally been present in the African continent, where it has been reported in 32 countries since 2005, when WOAHA began to collect data on ASF through its World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS)

2007: Appearance in East Europe

In 2007, the disease was confirmed in the Caucasus region of Georgia. From there, the ASF virus gradually spread to neighboring countries (i.e., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Belarus) affecting domestic pigs and wild boar.

2014: Spread to the EU

The first occurrence of ASF was reported in the European Union (EU) in 2014 and since then, numerous EU countries have been affected by this devastating pig disease that continues to be reported in 16 countries (during 2020/2022). Two European countries have managed to eradicate the disease and submitted a self-declaration of freedom: Belgium (event resolved in March 2020) and Czech Republic (event resolved in April 2018).

2018: Emergence in Asia

In August 2018, the virus leapt to China (People's Rep. of), which represented the first occurrence of ASF in Asia. Since

then, the disease has continued to spread in the Region, affecting 16 countries as of 2021.

2019/2020: Spread to Oceania

In September 2019, the first occurrence of ASF in Oceania was reported by Timor-Leste, followed by Papua New Guinea (March 2020).

2021: Reappearance in the Americas

In July 2021 the disease reappeared in the Americas after an absence of almost 40 years, having been introduced in the Dominican Republic and later in Haiti.

2022: Further spread in Asia and Europe

In January 2022, ASF genotype II was notified on the Italian mainland after around 40 years of absence. Two new countries reported the first occurrence of the disease in January as well: North Macedonia and Thailand. In March 2022, ASF was reported for the first time in Nepal.

About World Organization for Animal Health:

- It is an intergovernmental organization responsible for improving animal health worldwide.
- It has 182 Member Countries. India is one of the member countries.
- It develops normative documents relating to rules that Member Countries can use to protect themselves from the introduction of diseases and pathogens. One of them is the Terrestrial Animal Health Code.
- Its standards are recognized by the World Trade Organization as reference international sanitary rules.
- It is headquartered in Paris, France.

(Source: World Organisation for Animal Health & The Tribune)

Topic: Stunted paddy growth stuns Punjab farming community, experts

Importance: Himachal HPAS Prelims and Mains

What is the news?

- Farmers from Hoshiarpur, Pathankot, Fatehgarh Sahib, Ludhiana and Patiala, have reported stunted growth of paddy. As a result, experts from Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) are carrying out a detailed research and are expected to submit the report in a day or two.



Challenges shared by Farmers:

- Jasbir Singh of Ghulal village near Samrala said his paddy crop has been affected by the dwarfing disease. “The shocking part is that the infected plants are growing alongside the healthy plants in the same field,” he said, adding that five years ago, he had faced a similar situation where yield from four acres of land fell to nine quintal. He said he had transplanted paddy using traditional method.
- Swarnjeet Singh of the same village said numerous farmers were complaining of stunted paddy growth. “I transplanted paddy in June and by now the crop should have been around two-foot tall, but the ones affected are only 9 to 10 inches.

Most affected Varieties:

- The most affected varieties include ***PUSA 44, PR 121 and PR 113*** among others.

Also, Scientists track cause of mystery paddy dwarfing in Punjab and Haryana:

1) Scientists at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), who had collected samples of plants from farmers' fields – which showed symptoms of stunting and yellowing – have undertaken their electron microscopy analysis and DNA isolation through PCR (polymerase chain reaction) technique.

2) Agriculture scientists have narrowed down the cause of a mystery disease causing “dwarfing” of rice plants in Punjab and Haryana – as first reported by The Indian Express – to either grassy stunt virus or phytoplasma bacteria. The vector responsible for their transmission is the brown plant hopper, an insect pest that sucks sap from the stems and leaves of rice plants.

3) Scientists at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), who had collected samples of plants from farmers' fields – which showed symptoms of stunting and yellowing – have undertaken their electron microscopy analysis and DNA isolation through PCR (polymerase chain reaction) technique.

Some Reasons shared:

Preliminary laboratory analysis indicates the “phytoreovirus” or rice grassy stunt virus as the source of infection. This virus, which induces stunting and yellowing of rice plants, is transmitted by brown plant hopper. “The infected plants

remained stunted even after application of the recommended dose of fertilizers,” a preliminary report submitted by the IARI to the Union Agriculture Ministry has said.

The second possible source is phytoplasma, a bacterial pathogen that is spread by both brown plant hopper and green leaf hopper sucking insect pests. “What we have are interim findings. A clearer picture will emerge after high-throughput sequencing of the infected samples, the results of which are awaited. We are also not ruling out Fusarium fungus and rice root nematode that are known to cause dwarfism,” IARI Director A K Singh told The Indian Express.

Experts from the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU):

- PAC Experts visited the affected fields and are carrying out field research. The report would be submitted in a day or two.
- Five to six years ago, a similar problem was observed. It had slightly different characteristics and was not widespread.

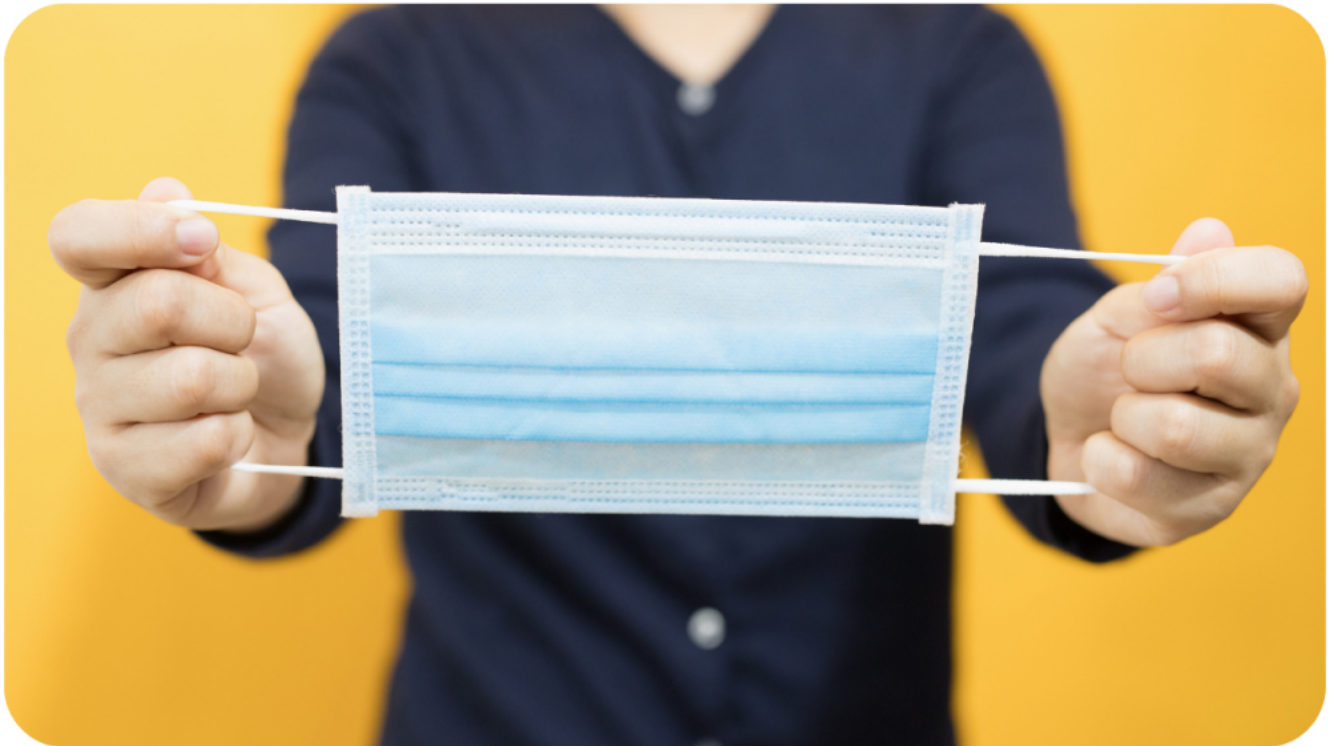
(Source: Indian Express & The Tribune)

Topic: Punjab makes masks mandatory amid rising Covid cases

Importance: Himachal HPAS Prelims and Mains

What is the news?

- Punjab, Department of Home Affairs made wearing masks mandatory in educational institutions, government-private offices, and public spaces after a spike in Covid cases.



Which Article invoked?

- The home affairs department has now invoked the powers under ***Section 2 of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 with all the provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005.***

The department gave the following instructions to be followed with immediate effect:

1. Wearing of appropriate masks shall be ensured in all Educational Institutions, Government & Private Offices and indoor/outdoor gatherings, malls, Public places, etc. for the prevention of the further spread of the virus in the

population and for the well-being of every individual.

2. Covid-19 appropriate behaviors to be strictly followed like social distancing, respiratory etiquette, and no spitting in public places.

3. Anyone having symptoms of Covid-19 must get tested and follow Covid-19 protocol.

4. All hospitals/Labs/Collection centers offering to test for Covid-19 must upload details of tests, including positive and negative results on the COVA Portal of the Government of Punjab as well as intimate complete testing details.

5. Those due to the second dose, and precautionary dose of the Covid-19 vaccine must take it at the earliest.

(Source: Livemint)

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