Exemption of Installation of Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) systems

Prelims: *Current Events of National and International Importance*

Why in the news?

Recently, the Environment Ministry has exempted the majority of India's coal-fired plants from mandatorily installing Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) systems, which are designed to cut sulphur dioxide (SO2) emissions.

- **Original Mandate, 2017 –** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) mandated that Required all coal-fired plants to install FGD systems by 2017 to reduce sulphur dioxide (SO_2) emissions.
- **Limited Compliance** - As of July 2025, only a small percentage of power plants (approximately 8%) have installed FGD systems, with most installations by public sector companies like NTPC.
- **Reasons for Delays -** Challenges such as high capital costs, limited vendor availability, space constraints, and the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to delays in implementation.
- **Recent Policy Changes -** The Environment Ministry has exempted *79% of India's coal-fired power plants* from the mandatory installation of Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) systems.
- A recent gazette notification restricted the mandatory installation of FGD systems to plants located within 10 kilometres of cities with a population exceeding one million.
- **Exemptions -** Plants located beyond this 10km radius are now largely exempt from the mandatory FGD installation.
- **Case-by-Case Evaluation -** Plants in critically polluted areas or "non-attainment cities" (cities exceeding air quality standards for five consecutive years) will be evaluated individually for FGD requirements.
- **Impact of Relaxation -** This policy shift is expected to reduce electricity costs.
- **Continuing Debate -** There is ongoing discussion regarding the necessity and effectiveness of FGD systems, with some studies suggesting Indian coal has a ***lower sulphur content*** and that SO_2 levels near plants are already within permissible limits.
- **Alternative Perspectives -** Some researchers argue for a more focused approach, recommending that FGD systems be mandatory only for plants using imported or high-sulphur coal.
- They emphasize prioritizing other measures like controlling particulate matter pollution.

Reference

[The Hindu| Exemption of Installation of Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) systems]

