

OFFICERS' PULSE

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COVERAGE.

The Hindu
The Indian Express
PIB
Rajya Sabha TV
All India Radio

AT A GLANCE & IN DEPTH.

Polity and Social Issues
Economy
International Relations
Environment
Science and Tech
Culture

CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY
THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Hunger Watch-2

What's in the news?

- The Right To Food Campaign and The Centre for Equity Studies have released their latest survey titled "Hunger Watch-2" which evaluates economic distress following the COVID second wave.
- The same organisations had conducted a similar survey, Hunger Watch-1, in October-December 2020 to measure the fallout of the first wave.
- It found that India's second wave that didn't see a national lockdown like in the first failed to significantly alleviate economic distress and hunger among the poor.
- 66% of the respondents to the second survey said their **income had decreased** as compared to pre-pandemic period. This proportion was **larger among urban households, among households earning less than ₹3,000 per month and among Muslim households.**
- Only 34% of the overall sample reported that their household's cereal consumption in the month preceding the survey was 'sufficient' and **79% of the households surveyed reported some form of food insecurity.**
- **Food insecurity is worse among urban households.** 87% of Muslim households reported some form of food insecurity compared to 77% Hindu households.
- The first survey had reported similar numbers suggesting that the absence of a national lockdown didn't automatically improve the odds of the poorest accessing adequate work and nutrition. Over two thirds of the respondents, for instance, reported

that in October 2020, the quantity of food they were able to consume was less than what it was before the lockdown. Seven out of 10 respondents reported a worsening nutritional quality of diets.

- In 2020 too, the survey found, those belonging to **socially vulnerable groups** such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims as well as households with single women, aged, disabled were **worse off.** These households reported a **higher decline in consumption of food.**

'PDS is providing relief'

- The PDS is providing relief, the report underscored. While 84% of the households had a ration card, over 90% of those who were eligible said they received some food grains. However, other schemes weren't effective. A quarter of households with eligible members said they could not avail the Mid-Day Meal Scheme or the Integrated Child Development Services provisions.
- For both surveys, more than 70% of those interviewed were from rural India. While 64% were Hindu, 18% were Muslim and 71% of the respondents were women. Both male and female working members reported spending approximately 18 days working in the month prior to the survey.
- **Non-agricultural casual labour** was a prominent source of employment in rural and urban areas. 18% of all households reported that a child that was in school before the pandemic had dropped out.

2) Eating right

Context

- In a first-of-its-kind initiative, four police stations in New Delhi have been designated as '**Eat Right Campus**' by the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** for providing nutritious and wholesome meals daily to police personnel at their canteens and mess.
- The scheme is already in place since 2017 in several government institutions including colleges and hostels.

What is the initiative?

- **Eat Right India** is a flagship mission of **FSSAI, a statutory body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)**.
- The mission aims at ensuring that citizens of the country are provided nutritious meals which help in reducing the burden of various lifestyle-related diseases.
- Delhi government's Department of Food Safety, which is the implementing body of the initiative in the capital, has launched a programme called '**Sehatmand Delhi**' under which places that can be designated as 'Eat Right Campus' are identified.
- The initiative works on **three principles**, i.e., to ensure that the food being served to officers, jawans, visitors and staff is safe to consume and in compliance with the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006.
- Secondly, it aims at promoting balanced meals and eliminating trans-fats or "bad fat" found in industrial food products, which has a negative health impact. In addition, it also ensures reduction in consumption of salt and sugar that increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases. The programme also aims at promoting local and seasonal vegetables and reducing the use of chemicals.

How does one get the 'eat right' tag?

- In order to receive the 'Eat Right Campus' certificate, the programme mandates a **preliminary audit** of the campus and identifying any gaps in

cooking and hygiene. Subsequently, a **final audit by a third party** is conducted before a certificate, which has a validity of two years, is handed out. Regular inspections will be carried out by the Food Safety Department or audit agencies in the two years to keep a check on the food quality, until the certification is renewed.

Why does it matter?

- The primary reason behind taking up the initiative was the **welfare of all police personnel**. Police personnel face difficult tasks during their duties and we have seen that they often fall sick after consuming unhygienic food from outside or from the police station's mess. Kitchens inside police stations are usually ignored and hence it affects the cooking.
- Many police personnel ate from roadside eateries near the police station but after a new kitchen was constructed under the programme, things have changed. Specific diet charts have been chalked out to ensure that all police staff and visitors are provided wholesome meals. They are budget-friendly too.

3) Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)

About the Campaign

- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, to which **India is a signatory**, casts an obligation on all the signatory governments to take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- The Accessible India Campaign was launched in **2015** by the **Department**

of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, with a view to fulfilling the obligations under the UNCRPD.

- It is a nation-wide Campaign for **achieving universal accessibility** for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It aims at providing equal opportunity to PwDs to participate in all the aspects of life and live independently.
- The Accessible India Campaign comprises of the following three components:
 - **Built Environment Accessibility:** It aims to provide an accessible physical environment for everyone. To achieve this, measures need to be undertaken to eliminate obstacles and barriers to indoor and outdoor facilities including schools, medical facilities, and workplaces.
 - **Transportation System Accessibility:** It focuses on providing persons with disabilities an equal right to travel and use public and private transportation infrastructure with dignity and independence.
 - **Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility:** Access to information refers to all information. This can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view webpages.

Objectives

- The campaign is based on the principles of the **Social Model of Disability**, that disability is caused by the way society is organised, and not the person's limitations and impairments.
- The **physical, social, structural and attitudinal barriers** prevent People with Disabilities from participating

equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities. A barrier-free environment facilitates equal participation in all the activities and promotes an independent and dignified way of life.

- The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

Why in News?

- According to data provided by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, almost half the government buildings in States and Union Territories (48.5%) identified during access audits in 2016-17 have been made accessible to people with disabilities, while only around 8% of public buses have become fully accessible under the Accessible India campaign ending in June.
- When the Accessible India Campaign was launched in 2015, the deadline for making selected government buildings, transportation and websites accessible for persons with disabilities was March 2018. However, the deadline had been pushed back to June 2022. It includes making at least 25% of public buses fully accessible.
- The target also includes making at least 50% of Central and State government buildings meet accessibility standards.

4) PM CARES scheme for children

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has said that the PM CARES scheme for children orphaned due to COVID-19 pandemic has been extended till February 28, 2022.
- The scheme was earlier valid till December 31, 2021.
- The scheme covers all children who have lost both parents, the lone surviving parent or legal guardian or adoptive parent or parents, due to COVID-19 after March 11, 2020.

- To avail the scheme, a child should not have turned 18 on the date of death of his or her parents.
- The scheme announced in May 2021, provides gap funding for education and health and a monthly stipend from the age of 18 years, apart from a lump sum amount of ₹10 lakh when a beneficiary turns 23 years old.
- Till January 31, 2022, the government had received 6,624 applications, out of which 3,855 had been approved. Applications can be submitted at <https://pmcaresforchildren.in>.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) Cheetahs

About African Cheetah

- The African cheetah is spread out across Africa from **Northwest Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa**. With a bigger territory, the African cheetahs have higher populations compared to Asiatic cheetahs.
- They are categorized as **Vulnerable** in the IUCN Red List.

Why in News?

- Cheetahs, the **world's fastest mammals** are **set to return to India** and will be reintroduced in **Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park**.
- The translocation of African Cheetah is a part of Government of India to reintroduce the **fastest land animal** in India after extinction of the Asiatic cheetah in the 1950s.

News in detail

- The Supreme Court in 2020 had given the nod to **introduce African cheetahs in India** on an experimental basis in a habitat which could be clearly monitored to check if the big cat could adapt to the conditions in India.
- The Wildlife Institute of India in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust of India had recommended **Kuno Palpur** and two other sites for introducing cheetahs after assessment in 2010.

Additional details

Kuno National Park

- Kuno National Park is located in **Madhya Pradesh**. Earlier it was a wildlife sanctuary but in 2018 it was given national park status.
- The **Kuno river** flows through the national park.
- Bio-Geographically this area falls under the **Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forest ecoregion** and the forest types found in this area include the Northern tropical dry deciduous forest, Southern tropical dry deciduous forest, Dry Savannah forest & grassland and Tropical riverine forest.

- The main predators in the protected area are Indian leopard, jungle cat, sloth bear, dhole, Indian wolf, golden jackal, striped hyena and Bengal fox.
- In the 1990s, it was selected as a possible site to implement the **Asiatic Lion Reintroduction Project**, which aimed at establishing a second lion population in India, apart from **Gir National Park in Gujarat**.
- It is on its way to become the only wildlife sanctuary in the world to host **all four major cat species—lion, tiger, cheetah and leopard**.

About Asiatic Cheetah

- Asiatic cheetah is classified as a **"critically endangered"** species by the IUCN Red List, and is believed to survive only in **Iran**.
- Asiatic cheetahs were once widespread across India but were eradicated in the country as they were hunted for sport.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** In 1952, Asiatic cheetah was **declared extinct** from India, after decades of human intervention, hunting and habitat degradation.
- Asiatic cheetahs are almost identical in appearance to their better known African cousins. However, there are subtle differences.
 - The Asiatic cheetah is slightly smaller and paler than its African cousin.



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ECONOMY

1) Commercial coal mining

Background

- In 2020, as a part of the announcements made under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**, the Central government allowed commercial mining in the coal sector.

What is commercial mining?

- Commercial mining **allows the private sector** to mine coal commercially on a **revenue-sharing model without placing any end-use restrictions**.
- Removing end-use restrictions marks the **end of the captive mining regime**.
 - *Captive mining is the coal mined for a specific end-use by the mine owner, but not for open sale in the market.*
 - *A revenue sharing mechanism instead of the earlier fixed price per tonne will introduce competition, transparency and private sector participation in the market.*
- The private firms will have the option of either gasification of the coal or exporting it. They can also use it in their own end-use plants or **sell them in the markets**.
- Further, with **100 per cent foreign direct investment** allowed in the coal sector, global companies can also participate in the auctions.
- The complete freedom to decide on sale, pricing, and captive utilisation is expected to attract many private sector firms to participate in the auction process.
- The government expects these steps will generate employment and reduce India's import bill.

Was the private sector never allowed in mining?

- Private sector participation was permitted until the early 1970s. The Indira Gandhi government announced the **nationalisation of the coal blocks**

in two phases **between 1971 and 1973**.

- The reforms announced in 2020 will effectively **end state-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL)'s monopoly** over mining and selling of coal.

Is this the first attempt by govt to open up the sector?

- After the Supreme Court cancelled the coal block allocations made to the private sector in 2014, the central government had brought in the Coal Mines (Special provisions) Act of 2015 to return these coal blocks to the private sector through **auctions**.
- But there had been **end-use restrictions** and the private sector was **not allowed to trade into the market** making it unattractive for the private sector.
- Further in 2018, private sector firms were allowed to **sell upto 25 per cent of the output** in the market, but this also saw a lukewarm response from the private sector.

Significance

- The government has also decided to spend Rs 50,000 crore on creating **infrastructure for coal extraction and transport**. This would also create job opportunities for locals closer to their homes.
- Despite India having the **world's fourth largest coal reserve** and being the **second largest producer**, the country was the **second largest coal importer**. The sector had been kept out of competition and devoid of transparency, hampering investment and efficiency.
- Fully opening up the sector would increase competition, capital, participation and technology. It would ensure new private players did not face the problem of finance.

Why in News?

- Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi has said that 42 coal blocks have been successfully auctioned so far under commercial auctioning of coal mines.

- Mr. Joshi pointed out that technology can ensure transparency and bring down corruption.

2) Sovereign Gold Bonds Scheme

About the Scheme

- **Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs)** are bonds that are issued **by the RBI on behalf of the Government** on payment of rupees but **denominated in grams of gold**.
- **The value of these bonds is tied to the value of gold.** On redemption, the investor gets interest income and the prevailing price of gold.
- These bonds are thus different from usual Government securities (G-secs) as the redemption value at the time of maturity is not a fixed sum, but linked to the price of an underlying commodity called gold.
- **It seeks to encourage people to buy gold bonds instead of actual gold.**

Features

- The Bonds will be sold through Scheduled Commercial banks (except Small Finance Banks and Payment Banks), Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), designated post offices, and recognised stock exchanges viz., National Stock Exchange of India Limited and Bombay Stock Exchange Limited.
- The Bonds are denominated in **units of one gram of gold and multiples thereof**.
- **Minimum investment in the Bond shall be one gram** with a **maximum limit of subscription of 4 kg for individuals, 4 kg for Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) and 20 kg for trusts** and similar entities notified by the government from time to time per fiscal year.
- The Bonds will be repayable on the **expiration of eight years** from the date of issue.
- **Premature redemption** of the Bond is allowed from the **fifth year** of the date of issue on the interest payment dates.
- The investment in the Bonds will be eligible for **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)** compliance by banks.

- These bonds can also be used as **collateral** for loans.
- The interest on Gold Bonds shall be **taxable as per the provision of Income Tax Act, 1961**. The **capital gains tax** arising on redemption of SGB to an individual has been **exempted**.

Advantages and disadvantages

To the Investor

- The advantages to the investor in investing in SGB instead of gold are the following:
 - **Interest earnings** on an otherwise dead asset;
 - Ease of storage and handling gold, while preserving its advantage of earnings in terms of appreciation of its prices in future;
 - An **alternate instrument for investment**;
- The only possible disadvantage to the investor is that, while in the event of appreciation of the price of gold, the investor gains, however, in the event of a **fall in gold prices, the loss too will be borne by the investor**.

To the Economy

- The advantages to the Government and the economy are the following:
 - **Reduction in the cost of Government's borrowings**- the current borrowing cost from the domestic market is around 7-8 per cent. Thus, an interest payment below this level is a yearly saving for the Government on account of its borrowing cost. This difference can be used by the Government to cover the appreciation of gold prices payable to the investors at the time of redemption.
 - A decrease in the price of the gold will be a gain for the Government.
 - It will **reduce the demand for physical gold** to some extent and thus helps in **reducing the annual demand for import of gold**.

- The possible disadvantage to the Government will be in the event of a **substantial increase in gold prices**.
- For this, the scheme proposes the creation of a **Gold Reserve Fund** which will absorb the price fluctuations and the fund will be continuously monitored for sustainability. Further, the issuance of the SGBs will be in tranches to enable the Government to maintain its

issuance within its yearly borrowing limits.

Why in the news?

- Government of India has announced that Sovereign Gold Bonds 2021-22 will be opened for subscription during the period February 28- March 04, 2022.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) India sends first consignment of aid for Afghanistan

What's in the news?

- Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla has flagged off a convoy of 50 trucks carrying 2500 MT of wheat as humanitarian aid for Afghanistan at the India-Pakistan integrated check post (ICP), the first of about 1000 truckloads which will head for Jalalabad over the next few weeks.
- The wheat is expected to be sent across Afghanistan to help people deal with the crisis caused by food shortages and an economic collapse after the Taliban takeover of Kabul, and was made in response to appeals made by the United Nations for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.
- Traders and truckers in Amritsar also welcomed the trans-shipment, which is taking place after being suspended for nearly three years, and expressed the hope that the opening for Afghan aid would also lead to a **reopening of India and Pakistan trade**, whose closure has caused massive economic losses in the border town.
- Commodities traders in Amritsar said the trade suspension that also followed India's decision to cancel **Pakistan's MFN trading privileges** in 2019 had led to massive losses for their earnings.
- They hope this is the first step to normalise trade relations between the neighbouring countries.
- Apart from wheat, India has already supplied 13 tonnes of essential medication and winter clothing, as well as 500,000 doses of COVAXIN to Afghanistan by commercial flights. Prior to the Taliban takeover, India had used the Chabahar port route through Iran to deliver a million tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan.

About MFN Status

- The Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status is given under **World Trade**

Organization's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)- to which India is a signatory.

- According to the MFN principle, If any country grants one country a special favour such as a lower customs duty rate for one of their products the same would need to be extended to all other WTO members. Although its name implies favoritism toward another nation, it denotes the equal treatment of all countries.
- **Some exceptions are allowed.** For example, countries can set up a **free trade agreement** that applies only to goods traded within the group — discriminating against goods from outside. Or they can give **developing countries special access to their markets.**
- Or a country can **raise barriers against products that are considered to be traded unfairly** from specific countries. And in services, countries are allowed, in limited circumstances, to discriminate.
- In 2019, India announced the withdrawal of the MFN status for Pakistan, following the deadly terror attack on CRPF personnel in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir.

2) United Nations Security Council

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in **1946** as **one of the six principal organs of the UN.** It is generally viewed as the apex of the UN system.
- It is responsible for the **maintenance of international peace and security.**
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of

military action through Security Council resolutions.

- It is the only UN body with the authority to issue **binding resolutions** to member states.

Membership

- UNSC consists of 15 Members.
- The council has **five permanent members** (P-5) United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France.
- These permanent members can **veto** any substantive Security Council resolutions, including those on the admission of new member states.
- The Security Council also has **10 non-permanent members**, elected on a **regional basis** as follows:
 - five for African and Asian States;
 - one for Eastern European States;
 - two for the Latin American and Caribbean States; and
 - two for Western European and other States.
- Each year the 193-member UN General Assembly (UNGA) elects five non-permanent members for a **two-year term**.
- The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Vote and Majority Required

- Each member of the Security Council shall have **one vote**.
- Decisions of the Security Council on **procedural matters** shall be made by

an **affirmative vote of nine members**.

- Decisions of the Security Council on **all other matters** shall be made by an **affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members**.
- However, any member, whether permanent or nonpermanent, must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.

Why in News?

- A resolution on the situation in Ukraine was tabled for action in the UN Security Council. In the 15 member Council, the resolution received 11 votes in favour, Russia voted against it and three nations India, UAE and China abstained.
- Since Russia voted against the resolution that is veto against the resolution, it was not passed.
- India abstained and issued an Explanation of Vote EOV after the vote. In its EOV, India called for return to path of diplomacy. It called for respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.
- India also called for immediate cessation of violence and hostilities as was also conveyed by Prime Minister Modi to President Putin.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) Meta's AI supercomputer

Why in News?

- Facebook-parent Meta recently announced that it is building an AI supercomputer, the AI Research SuperCluster (RSC).

What is a supercomputer?

- A **supercomputer** can **perform high-level processing at a faster rate** when compared to a normal computer.
- **AI Supercomputers** are **made up of hundreds or thousands of powerful machines** which use better artificial intelligence (AI) **models** to improve operations that process huge amounts of data in less time than normal computers. They work together to perform complex operations that are not possible with normal computing systems
- AI supercomputers are **built by combining multiple graphic processing units (GPUs) into compute nodes**, which are then connected by a high-performance network fabric to allow fast communication between those GPUs
- Meta considers the RSC as a powerful supercomputer capable of quintillions of operations per second. It can perform tasks like translating text between languages and help identify potentially harmful content on Meta's platform.

2) International Space Station

Why in News:

- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has **announced** plans to **retire** and decommission the International Space Station (ISS) by 2031.

About ISS

- The **ISS** was **launched in 1998** as part of **joint efforts** by the **U.S., Russia, Japan, Canada and Europe**. The space station was assembled over many years, and it operates in low-earth orbit.

- The space station is **parked at Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** at approximately 350 km above the Earth.
- The ISS makes multiple orbits around the Earth every day.
- The ISS serves as a **microgravity and space environment research laboratory** in which crew members conduct experiments in biology, human biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, and other fields.
- **China** was **barred from** the ISS by the **United States**.
- NASA plans to remove the ISS from its orbit around the earth and eventually plunge it into the ocean.

Additional Details

- **China** has its own **Tiangong station** in orbit around the Earth now.
- **India** has also **set its eye on building its own space station** in low earth orbit to conduct microgravity experiments in space **in 5 to 7 years**.

3) Active Galactic Nuclei

Why in News:

- Scientists said that their observations involving the supermassive black hole at the centre of galaxy Messier 77 and its surrounding cloud lend support to predictions made three decades ago about what are called "active galactic nuclei."

What is active galactic nuclei?

- These are **places** at the **centres of many large galaxies** that have **tremendous luminosity** – sometimes outshining all of a galaxy's billions of stars combined – and produce the universe's most energetic outbursts seen since the Big Bang event 13.8 billion years ago.
- The **energy arises from gas violently falling into a supermassive black hole** that is surrounded by a cloud of tiny particles of rock and soot along with mostly hydrogen gas.

4) Fast Radio Bursts

What are they?

- **Fast radio bursts are extremely bright radio pulses from distant galaxies that last for only a few milliseconds**
- These **brief and mysterious** beacons have been spotted in various and distant parts of the universe, as well as in our own galaxy.
- Their **origins are unknown and their appearance is highly unpredictable.**

Why in News:

- Astronomers of National Centre of Radio Astrophysics (NCRA-TIFR) in Pune and the University of California in the U.S. have used the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) to map the distribution of atomic

hydrogen gas from the host galaxy of a fast radio burst (FRB) for the first time.

What the researchers said?

- The GMRT results indicate the **FRB host galaxy has undergone a recent merger** and that the **FRB progenitor** is most likely a **massive star formed due to this merger event.**
- This is the **first case of direct evidence for a recent merger in an FRB host**, a major step towards understanding the progenitors of FRBs.

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DEFENCE

1) AFSPA

About AFSPA

- Passed in 1958 for the North-East and in 1990 for Jammu & Kashmir, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) **gives armed forces special powers to control “disturbed areas”**, which are designated by the government when it is of the opinion that a region is in such a disturbed or dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary.
- An **area can be disturbed** due to **differences** or **disputes** between members of different **religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities**.
- The **Central Government**, or the **Governor** of the State or **administrator** of the Union Territory can **declare the whole or part of the State** or Union Territory as a disturbed area.

- Under its provisions, the armed forces have been **empowered to open fire, enter and search without warrant, and arrest any person** who has committed a cognisable offence, all while having immunity from being prosecuted.
- The law has been repealed where insurgencies have subsided, and when governments have gained confidence in managing the region using the police force.

Why in News:

- A committee constituted by the Union Home Ministry to study the withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act or AFSPA from Nagaland is yet to conclude its findings.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Border Infrastructure and Management Scheme

What's in the news?

- The Centre has approved the continuation of the central sector umbrella scheme of Border Infrastructure and Management till 2025-26 at a cost of Rs 13,020 crore.
- This decision will **strengthen the border infrastructure for improving border management, policing and guarding the borders.**
- It will help in the creation of infrastructure such as construction of border fence, border flood lights, technological solutions, border roads and Border Outposts/Company Operating Bases to secure the Indo-Pakistan, Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-China, Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Myanmar borders.
- As part of the strategy to secure the borders as also to create infrastructure in the border areas of the country, the government has been taking many initiatives that include expeditious construction of fencing, floodlighting and roads along its borders with Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar, and construction of strategic roads along its borders with China, Nepal and Bhutan.
- The government has also deployed **hi-tech electronic surveillance equipment** on international borders and constructed additional BOPs.

2) National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship

About the Scheme

- The 'National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme' (NMMSS) is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in 2008 to **provide scholarships for meritorious students of classes IX to XII.**
- **Objective:** To award scholarships to meritorious students of economically

weaker sections to arrest their drop out at class VIII and encourage them to continue their study and complete secondary stage.

- **Coverage:** The scheme envisages award of **one lakh fresh scholarships every year** to selected students of class IX and their continuation/renewal in classes X to XII for study in a State Government, Government-aided and Local body schools under the scheme.
- **Scholarship Amount:** An amount of Rs. 12000/- per student per annum.

Why in News?

- The government has approved the continuation of the Central Sector National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme over the 15th Finance Commission cycle for a period of five years i.e. from 2021-22 to 2025-26 with financial outlay of Rs. 1827 crore.

3) Sustainable Cities India program

What's in the news?

- The World Economic Forum and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on a jointly designed 'Sustainable Cities India program' which will aim to **create an enabling environment for cities to generate decarbonization solutions across the energy, transport, and the built environment sectors.**
- This initiative is particularly noteworthy as it comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated India's commitment to turn net zero by 2070 as a climate mitigation response at COP26.

About the Program

- The 'Sustainable Cities India program' intends to enable cities to decarbonize in a systematic and sustainable way that will reduce emissions and deliver resilient and equitable urban ecosystems.

- The Forum and NIUA will adapt the **Forum's City Sprint process** and **Toolbox of Solutions for decarbonization** in the context of five to seven Indian cities across two years.
- The City Sprint process is a series of multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder workshops involving business, government, and civil society leaders to enable decarbonization, especially through clean electrification and circularity.
- The outcome of the workshop series will be a shortlist of relevant policies and business models, which not only reduce emissions but also maximize System Value, such as improved air quality or job creation. City Sprints will help to jumpstart and/or accelerate net zero planning and action.
- The City Sprint process uses the **Toolbox of Solutions** - a digital platform containing over 200 examples of clean electrification, efficiency and smart infrastructure best practices and case studies across buildings, energy systems and mobility from over 110 cities around the world.
- The City Sprint process will also enable cities to run pilot solutions and, based on findings, India will be able contribute 10 to 40 best practice case studies which will be integrated into the Toolbox of Solutions and showcased across the world.
- As per the **World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2022**, densely

populated countries that are highly dependent on agriculture, such as India, are especially vulnerable to climate insecurity. Decarbonization in cities is a real opportunity to keep global warming well below 2°C and cities in India can make an enormous contribution in reaching this goal.

About Net Zero Carbon Cities

- The World Economic Forum's Net Zero Carbon Cities' mission is to create an enabling environment for clean electrification and circularity, resulting in urban decarbonization and resilience. The program aims to do this by fostering public-private collaboration to bridge the gap across the energy, built environment and transport sectors.

About NIUA

- Established in 1976, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) is India's leading national think tank on urban planning and development. As a hub for the generation and dissemination of cutting-edge research in the urban sector, NIUA seeks to provide innovative solutions to address the challenges of a fast urbanizing India, and pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable cities of the future.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) PM-KISAN

About the scheme

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from Government of India.
- **Aim :** To augment the income of the farmers by providing income support to all landholding farmers' families across the country.
- The Scheme initially provided income support to all Small and Marginal Farmers' families across the country, holding cultivable land upto 2 hectares. Its ambit was later expanded w.e.f. 01.06.2019 to **cover all farmer families in the country irrespective of the size of their land holdings.**
- Under the Scheme an amount of **Rs. 6000/- per year** is transferred in three 4-monthly installments of Rs. 2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.
- **Eligibility :** All landholder farmer's families in the country are eligible for the PM-Kisan Scheme subject to the prevalent exclusion criteria. **Farmers who do not own any land are not eligible for this scheme.**
- **Excluded from the scheme**
 - Institutional land holders,
 - Farmer families holding constitutional posts,
 - Serving or retired officers and employees of state/central government as well as PSUs and government autonomous bodies.
- Professionals like doctors, engineers and lawyers as well as retired pensioners with a monthly pension of over Rs 10,000 and those who paid income tax in the last assessment year.
- **Identification of beneficiaries:** The responsibility of identifying the eligible beneficiary farmers and uploading their data on PM-KISAN portal lies entirely with the **state governments.**

Why in News?

- The Government has commemorated the third anniversary of the launch of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme.

2) Eastern Bridge-VI

What's in the news?

- The **Indo-Oman exercise 2022, Eastern Bridge-VI** was successfully conducted at Air Force Station Jodhpur from 21st to 25th of this month.
- Royal Air Force of Oman RAFO participated with Indian Air Force IAF in the exercise which was aimed at providing operational exposure and undertaking mutual exchange of best practices, towards enhancing operational capabilities of both the Air Forces.
- It also provided avenues of cultural exchanges between the personnel of both countries.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) The Budget lacks the 'power' to transform services

Context

- India's Union Budget 2022-23 demonstrates a clear intent to **prioritise investments in clean energy and sustainable development**, in line with the country's promises made at COP26 in Glasgow last year.

Allocation for Health and Education

- **Health** sector witnessed a **16% increase** in estimated Budget allocations from last year
- Medical and public health spending was reduced by 45% for 2022-23.
- The **education** sector also witnessed an **11.86% increase** in allocations.
- Despite these increases in estimates, **health and education** continue to share **only about 2% each of budgetary allocations annually**.

Significance of the role of reliable energy in health and education

- Availability of reliable electricity supply can improve the delivery of health and education services.
- **74% of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals** are interlinked with universal access to **reliable energy**.
- Despite this, 44% of schools and 25% of India's health sub-centres and primary health centres remain unelectrified.
- The **lack of integration of electrification** requirements in development sector policy documents may be partly due to
 - **Lack of information** about electricity and development linkages,
 - **Poor coordination** mechanisms between the sectors and departments, and
 - **Poor access to appropriate finance**.

Way forward

Focus on Multiple policies

- Multiple policies can complement each other to achieve the larger sectoral objectives.
 - For example, in **Assam**, the **Energy Vision document** that lays out the electricity and development outcomes is to be applied in tandem with the Solar Energy Policy 2017 that operationalises this vision via an action plan.

Innovative coordination

- To successfully integrate electricity provisioning and maintenance, policy frameworks should include **innovative coordination and financing mechanisms**.
- Also provide **local decision-makers with some authority** to mitigate policy implementation barriers.

Remove burden over individual facilities

- Providing reliable electricity for health centres and schools should be the **responsibility of centralised decision-making** entities at the State or national level and not on the Individual facilities.

Increase budgetary allocation

- For policies to become transformative **budgetary allocations, institutional structures, finance, information and coordination mechanisms** should be focussed on.

Address Systemic gaps

- **Governing the use of untied funds**, need to be more flexible in allowing school and health facilities to prioritise providing reliable and sustainable electricity.

2) A reductionist approach to tackle population health

Context:

- **Population-level interventions are missing** in India's approach towards tackling non-communicable diseases

What is population health?

- Population health refers to **addressing the health status of a defined population.**
- It is more than just the health of all individuals.
- Population health approach is an approach to health that aims to improve the health of an entire human population.

Focus of Indian Public health

- **Previous decade-** focus of Indian public health remained near-exclusively on maternal and child health and infectious diseases.
- **Now-** Focus shifted to non-communicable diseases (NCD) and chronic illnesses as their rising prevalence causes huge economic and productivity losses.

Policy measures to tackle NCD

- Individualistic policy measures in the form of
 - Enhanced NCD screening and management infrastructure,
 - Wellness and lifestyle interventions,
 - Patient referral mechanisms

What is the issue with the policy measures?

- Population health is **merely pegged with individualistic strategies** instead of population-level determinants of NCDs that are deeply intertwined with social, economic, and political dimensions.
 - A case from the Netherlands is similar to the Indian approach to NCDs.
 - In 2007, the Minister of Health of the **Netherlands** expounded their ideas on improving population health by exploring the **inter-relationships between health and other related sectors** such as economy, housing, social cohesion and environment. But then organised medicine turned it into a paradigm of **personalised preventive medical care, backed by health insurance and dominated by healthcare professionals.**

- NCDs has been **subsumed into a largely biomedical paradigm** with Health and Wellness centres, publicly financed health insurance schemes, vertical NCD control programme and the private sector's complement with a large array of self-tests, over-the-counter products, and lifestyle-change.

Consequences of such approach

- Creates **undue reliance on medical and healthcare professionals** for all public health solutions.
- A policy that **fails to appreciate that tackling NCDs warrants action across a range of sectors** besides health.
- It **impacts our research priorities for NCDs**, which remain concentrated on lifestyle and individual-level NCD determinants and solutions.

Way forward

- The **inter-sectoral, population-based, socially embedded approaches** are needed to tackle NCDs.
- A total **galvanisation of different departments and sectors** to the importance of population health is required.
- **Mobilising digitisation** to generate enough evidence for resolute action on social health determinants is necessary.
- Actionable points and **explicit mandates to address social health determinants** need to be enshrined in Government policy pronouncements.

3) Ploughing a new channel for India's food systems

Food systems transformation

- The **UN Food Systems Summit** called for action by governments in five areas:
 - **Nourish all people;**
 - Boost **nature-based solutions;**
 - Advance **equitable livelihoods**, decent work and empowered communities;

- Build **resilience to vulnerabilities**, shocks and stresses; and
- **Accelerate** the means of **implementation**.
- Aim is to spur national and regional action to deliver the **United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through transforming food systems**.
- Such a transformation in the Indian context would involve **enhancing interfaces between the spheres of science, society and policy, focusing on sustainability, resource efficiency and circularity**.

Challenges with current food system

1. India has about a **quarter of the world's food insecure people** although self-sufficient in food grain production.
2. **Nutrition indicators** have marginally improved over the years. As per the recently released fifth National Family Health Survey (2019-2021)
 - a. **Macro- and micronutrient malnutrition** is widespread
 - b. Nearly 18% of women and 16% of men **unable to access enough food to meet basic nutritional needs**
 - c. Over 32% of children below five years old are still **underweight** phase 2 compendium.
3. India is ranked **101 out of 116 countries** in the **Global Hunger Index, 2021**.
4. **Declining land productivity**, land degradation and loss of ecological services with change in land use.

What has to be done to overcome the challenges?

1. The approach of 'agriculture' serving 'food security' needs must give way to '**food systems**' for '**sustainability**' and '**better nutrition**'.
2. **Science and policy measures should go hand in hand** to address the challenges. For instance,
 - a. **India's Green Revolution** in the 1960s, enabling food security and addressing widespread hunger and poverty was a successful combination of science and policy measures.

- i. **Science**- adoption of High yield variety seeds
- ii. **Policy measures**- Development of institutional structures.
 - b. The **Training & Visit (T&V) system** introduced in the 1970s with World Bank assistance was key to the **science-society interface** as it established a cadre of **agriculture extension specialists at the local level**.
 3. An **agro-climatic approach** to agricultural development is important for sustainability and better nutrition.
 4. **Harnessing the spatial diversity of agricultural production systems** adopting the principles of sustainability, resource efficiency and circularity could correct the limitations of the green revolution.
 5. Meticulous **review of agro-climatic zones** could make smallholders farming a profitable business, enhancing agricultural efficiency and socio-economic development, as well as sustainability.
 6. India should **tap its enormous potential for crop diversification** and enhanced crop productivity based on soil type, climate (temperature and rainfall), and captive water resources.
 7. **Prioritise research and investments** in strengthening and shortening food supply chains, reinforcing regional food systems, food processing, agricultural resilience.
 8. **Improve farmers' competitiveness**, supporting business growth in the rural economy, and **incentivising farmers** to improve the environment.
 9. Infrastructure and institutions supporting producers, agripreneurs and agri micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) should be aligned to the **national and State policy priorities** such as the **National Policy guidelines 2012 of the Ministry of Agriculture for the promotion of farmer producer organisations**, and the **National Resource Efficiency Policy of 2019** of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
 - It would **encourage a resource efficient and circular economy** for

production, processing and storage techniques of food products through renewable energy solutions, reduction of supply chains and inputs (materials, water, and energy).

a. It would also **ensure the efficient use of by-products**, thereby creating value while using fewer inputs and generating less waste for long term and large-scale impact.

Conclusion

- An **effective interface between science, society and policy** encompassing the range of actors and institutions in the food value-chain and a **multidisciplinary and holistic approach**, along with a greater emphasis on policy design, management and behavioural change is the need of the hour.

4) A lesson from Bangladesh: Protect the mother tongue

Context

- **International Mother Language Day** is observed every year on **February 21**.

Why is it being celebrated?

- To **honour those in Bangladesh** who sacrificed their lives to protect their mother tongue, Bangla, against the then rulers of West Pakistan and
- To **honour the ethno-linguistic rights of individuals across the world**.

This year's celebration

- International Mother Language Day 2022 was celebrated across the world with the theme, '**Using technology for multilingual learning: Challenges and opportunities**'.
- It highlighted the **role of technology in developing multilingual education** and in supporting the development of quality teaching and learning for all.
- For instance,
 - Tech giants like **Amazon and Facebook** showcase their products in a few local languages.
 - **Google Translate** has brought numerous regional cultures closer together.

Language movement

- The transition from East Pakistan to Bangladesh has been the first time in world history, where a **mother tongue became the focal point for an independence movement**.
- In March 1948, just months after the birth of Pakistan, Pakistani leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared that the **state language of Pakistan would be Urdu**.
- **All official communication from then was to be in Urdu** and the language was made compulsory in schools.
- Meanwhile, Bangla, which is a completely different language, was removed as a subject in schools and from stamps and currency.
- Students of Dhaka University began their protest on February 21, 1952 **against the 'Urdu only' policy**.
- The police began indiscriminate firing on the students, killing many of them.
- Since then, **February 21 is observed as 'Shaheed Dibosh (Martyrs' Day)'** in Bangladesh to pay tribute to Shaheed Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Abdul Jabbar, Shafiur Rahman, and many more.
- Their passion for their mother tongue and devotion towards their motherland forced the Pakistani leadership to make **Bangla one of the official languages of Pakistan in 1954**.

Significance of the the movement

- The language movement not only gave rise to the **Bengali national identity** in then Pakistan, but also became the **stepping stone for the Bengali nationalist movement**, the six-point movement, the student movement in 1962, the uprising in 1969 and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.
- This is the **only movement** in history that **started with protecting linguistic and cultural rights and ultimately led to the birth of an independent nation, Bangladesh**.

Importance of language

- Language is one of the most important characteristics of the foundation of a culture.

- Language is the most powerful tool that forges social, economic, and cultural ties.

Why should our mother tongue be protected?

- Increasing **localisation of indigenous languages** due to globalisation
- **Disappearance of mother tongues** in a quest to learn foreign languages to receive better job opportunities.
- **Increasingly threatened Linguistic diversity**
 - According to the **United Nations**, at least **43% of the estimated 6,000 languages** spoken in the world are **endangered**.
 - The UN proclaimed the period between **2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages**, “to draw global attention to the critical status of many indigenous languages around the world and to mobilize stakeholders and resources for their preservation, revitalization, and promotion.”

Conclusion

- **Linguistic diversity** defines our socio-cultural identity, connects us with our heritage, and is the foundational pillar of civilizations.
- By drawing inspiration from Bangladesh it is our responsibility to protect our mother tongue.

5) Action plans against AntiMicrobial Resistance (AMR)

Context:

- The recent publication of **The Lancet's global burden of bacterial antimicrobial resistance** highlights the necessity of a robust AMR policy.

What does the report say?

- It estimated that **4.95 million deaths were associated with bacterial AMR** in 2019 alone.
- It also identified the pathogens and pathogen-drug combinations that cause such resistance.

What is AMR?

- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the **ability of microorganisms to persist or grow in the presence of drugs** designed to inhibit or kill them.
- It occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites **change over time and no longer respond to medicines** making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death.
- These drugs, called **antimicrobials**, are used to treat infectious diseases caused by microorganisms such as **bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoan parasites**.
- **WHO has declared that AMR is one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity.**

Reasons for AMR

- Indiscriminate use of antibiotics
- Availability of antibiotics over the counter
- Poor hygiene and sanitation
- Antimicrobial use in the farming and poultry industry
- Lack of vaccines and newer antibiotics
- Poor infection control practices in hospitals.

Government measures against AMR

- India released its own **AMR action plan in 2017**, and announced a **task force for implementation**.
- By **2019, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh** had rolled out **State action plans** and 11 other States are still framing their action plans.
- The **Chennai Declaration**, a consortium of doctors and health-care institutions against AMR, was also formed in 2012 to draw up a road map.
- The **ban on Colistin** in the poultry, aqua farming and animal feeds supplements sectors, which India enforced from July 2019, was considered a strong strike in countering the AMR challenge.

What is the issue?

- Apart from the realm of science, there is also a **correlation between AMR and poor hygiene, lax administrative governance and poor ratio of public-private expenditure**.

Way forward

- While the scientific community looks for solutions in its domain, besides regulating the sale and use of antibiotics, governments must
 - **Raise the standard of living for citizens.**
 - **Provide them accessible and affordable quality health care.**

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) What is the International Court of Justice?

Context

- Ukraine has filed an application before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), instituting proceedings against the Russian Federation concerning a dispute relating to the interpretation, application and fulfilment of the **1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the “Genocide Convention”)**.
- Ukraine has accused Russia of falsely claiming that acts of genocide have occurred in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts of Ukraine, and of using that as a pretext to recognise the independence of these regions and of going to war against Ukraine.

About ICJ

- The ICJ is the **principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN)**. It was established in 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in 1946.
- The court is the **successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ)**, which was brought into being through, and by, the League of Nations, and which held its inaugural sitting at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1922.
- After World War II, the League of Nations and PCIJ were replaced by the United Nations and ICJ respectively. The PCIJ was formally dissolved in 1946, and its last president, Judge José Gustavo Guerrero of El Salvador, became the first president of the ICJ.
- The first case, which was brought by the UK against Albania and concerned incidents in the **Corfu channel** — the narrow strait of the Ionian Sea between the Greek island of Corfu and Albania on the European mainland — was submitted in 1947.

Seat and role

- Like the PCIJ, the ICJ is based at the **Peace Palace in The Hague**. It is the

only one of the six principal organs of the UN that is not located in New York City. (The other five organs are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, and the Secretariat.)

- According to the ICJ’s own description, its role is “to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies”. The court “as a whole must represent the main forms of civilization and the principal legal systems of the world”.
- **English and French** are the ICJ’s official languages.
- **All members of the UN are automatically parties to the ICJ statute, but this does not automatically give the ICJ jurisdiction over disputes involving them.** The ICJ gets jurisdiction only if **both parties consent to it**.
- The judgment of the ICJ is **final and technically binding** on the parties to a case. There is **no provision of appeal**; it can at the most, be subject to **interpretation** or, upon the discovery of a new fact, **revision**.
- However, the ICJ has **no way to ensure compliance of its orders**, and its authority is derived from the willingness of countries to abide by them.

Judges of the court

- The ICJ has **15 judges who are elected to nine-year terms by the UN General Assembly and Security Council, which vote simultaneously but separately**. To be elected, a candidate must receive a majority of the votes in both bodies, a requirement that sometimes necessitates multiple rounds of voting.

- A third of the court is elected every three years. Judges are eligible for re-election.

2) Urban Employment Guarantee schemes

Context

- Recently, while presenting the Budget for the next financial year, the Rajasthan government announced the start of the **Indira Gandhi Shahri Rozgar Guarantee Yojana**. This is essentially an **employment guarantee scheme on the lines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) albeit for the urban areas**.
 - *MGNREGA was started in 2006 and guarantees to provide 100 days of wage employment for unskilled manual work to each rural household every financial year.*
- With each passing year, more and more Indian state governments are looking favourably towards an urban version of MGNREGA. These include Kerala (**Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme**), Odisha (**Unnati or Urban Wage Employment Initiative**), Himachal Pradesh (**Mukhya Mantri Shahri Ajeevika Guarantee Yojna or MMSAGY**), Madhya Pradesh (**Mukhyamantri Yuva Swabhiman Yojana**) and Jharkhand (**Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana**).

Why are urban employment guarantee (UEG) schemes being demanded now?

- India has had a history of urban employment schemes such as the **Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY)**, which was launched in 1997. It provided employment to the unemployed and underemployed urban poor through self-employment and wage employment. In 2013, the SJSRY was replaced by the **National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM)**. But none of them were employment “guarantee” schemes.

- The need for a scheme providing a guarantee is due to the **growing distress among the urban poor**, which has remained largely unaddressed for a long time — Covid just made it worse.
- Most unemployment data shows that the **unemployment rates are typically higher in urban areas**. Add to that the fact that the **urban poor are worst affected by India’s persistently high inflation**.
- In addition to this, Indian towns and cities continue to be plagued by the **prevalence of low-wage, poor quality, informal work**. Government’s **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data** show that despite a rise in the prevalence of regular-salaried work, **over 50 per cent of the urban workforce remains either self-employed or in casual work**.
- Making matters worse is the fact that most of the government schemes providing relief — be it from the Union government or state — **prioritise rural unemployment and poverty**. A good example is the existence of MGNREGA. Yet another example is the **Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan**. This was launched in 2020, with an allocation of Rs 50,000 crore, to boost employment and livelihood opportunities for migrant workers returning to villages in the wake of the Covid outbreak.

What should be the design of a UEG?

- On the face of it, most UEGs appear to be a mere extension of MGNREGA to the urban areas.
- For instance, Himachal’s MMSAGY aims to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed employment to every household in the urban areas. But in reality, a **UEG cannot be a mere extension of MGNREGA**.
- For one, **rural unemployment is mostly seasonal**. During peak farming season, very few rural people may be unemployed. However, during other months, unemployment in rural areas goes up. But there is **no such seasonality in urban unemployment**.

- Similarly, the **public works in which the labour is involved are quite different** from each other. Another key difference is the **capacity of the Panchayati Raj Institutions** in rural and urban areas. Urban local bodies are **poorly funded and have little capacity to provide help**.

DUET Model

- Economist Jean Dreze, who was involved in drafting the MGNREGA, has proposed **Decentralised Urban Employment and Training or DUET**.
- The basic idea behind DUET is that the state government issues **'job stamps'** and distributes them to approved institutions – schools, colleges, government departments, health centres, municipalities, neighbourhood associations, urban local bodies, etc. Initially, the approved institutions will be public institutions (private non-profit institutions could be considered later).
- Each job stamp can be converted into one person-day of work within a specified period, with the approved institution arranging the work and the government paying the wages (statutory minimum) directly to the worker's account on presentation of job stamps with a due-form work certificate from the employer.
- Further, unlike MGNREGA, DUET **proposes to be for both unskilled and skilled workers** and, in fact, has a crucial element is to **provide training or skilling**.

How will a national-level UEG be funded?

- Most of the state-level UEGs are backed by very modest Budget allocations. But a national-level UEG would demand a substantial Budget allocation.
- According to one calculation by researchers at APU published in The Indian Forum, "a UEG programme that covers an estimated 20 million urban casual workers for 100 days, with a wage rate of Rs 300 per day, **would cost the union government around Rs 1 lakh crore**".

- The actual Budget outgo would depend on how many people are covered and what is the guaranteed wage.

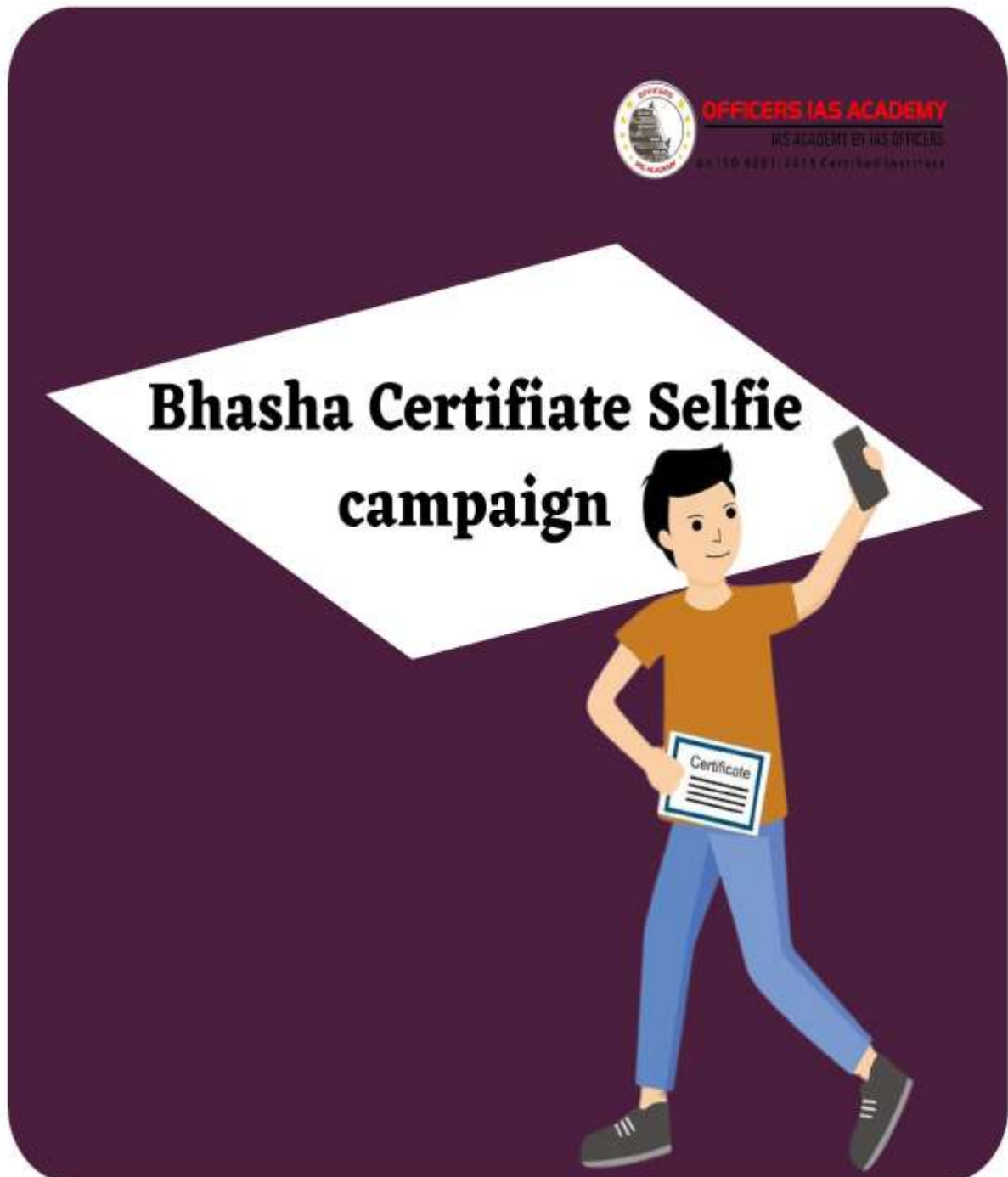
Should there be a national UEG?

- While programmes and schemes like MGNREGA or UEG start as relief measures, they tend to be quite sticky. It is **unlikely that once instituted such a programme will be withdrawn by any future government**.
- Another concern is about **funding**. It often helps provide a different perspective when one adds up all the money spent on MGNREGA over the past 10 or 15 years. Could that amount of money be spent better? Spent towards finding a solution that obviates the need for such relief measures?
- Similarly, it is reasonable to ask that if India had an additional Rs 1 lakh crore to spend, why should the policymakers spend it on a new UEG scheme and not simply boost the Budget allocation for MGNREGA.
- As things stand, each passing year creates another heap of poor and pushes India towards more inequality. The resulting effect — through lower aggregate demand and social unrest — on India's medium and long-term economic prospects is unlikely to be salutary.
- Many point to the **"New Deal"** offered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s to pull the US out of The Great Depression. FDR's "New Deal" was essentially a series of large-scale relief programs financed by direct government spending and aimed at boosting aggregate demand while also creating public infrastructure.
- It is to be seen whether India will see a national UEG as a new deal to recharge the economy or would it be a wasteful expenditure that will threaten to ruin government finances.

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INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) Bhasha Certificate Selfie Campaign



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What's in the news?



The **Ministry of Education** **launched** a campaign 'Bhasha Certificate Selfie to encourage cultural diversity and promote multilinguism and to foster the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

Bhasha Certificate Selfie initiative aims to **promote Bhasha Sangam mobile app**, developed by Ministry of Education and MyGov India.



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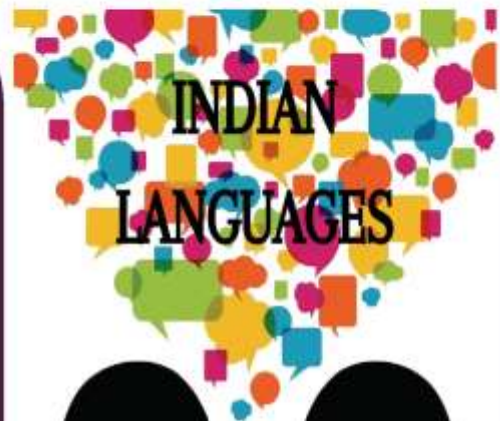


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Using the app, people can learn 100+ sentences of daily use in as many as 22 scheduled Indian languages.



The initiative, under the aegis of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat will aim to ensure that people acquire basic conversational skills in Indian languages. To achieve this, a target of 75 lakh people acquiring basic conversational skills has been set.



75 LAKH



The 'Bhasha Certificate Selfie' initiative is encouraging people to upload their selfie with the certificate from their social media accounts using the hashtag #BhashaCertificateSelfie.



#BhashaCertificateSelfie

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To receive a certificate authorized by Ministry of Education, a user needs to download the mobile app, available in both Android and iOS versions, select any language from 22 scheduled Indian languages, finish all the levels, give a test and earn a certificate.



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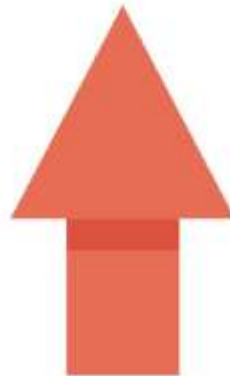


Bhasha Sangam mobile app was launched by Minister of Education and Skill Development Shri Dharmendra Pradhan while commemorating Rashtriya Ekta Diwas which is celebrated on October 31 every year to mark the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

**Bhasha Sangam
mobile app**



सत्यमेव जयते



**Minister of Education and
Skill Development**



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ENVIRONMENT

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