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FOREWORD

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - "Daily Current Affairs_The Hindu" compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - "Daily Current Affairs_The Hindu" would help students, especially beginners save time and streamline their preparations with regard to Current Affairs. A content page and an Appendix has been added segregating and mapping the content to the syllabus.

It is an appreciable efforts by Vedhik IAS Academy helping aspirants of UPSC Civil Services Examinations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Babu Sebastian, former VC - MG University in extending all support to this endeavour. Finally I also extend my thanks to thank Ms. Shilpa Sasidharan and Mr. Shahul Hameed for their assistance in the preparing the compilations.

We welcome your valuable comments so that further improvement may be made in the forthcoming material. We look forward to feedback, comments and suggestions on how to improve and add value for students. Every care has been taken to avoid typing errors and if any reader comes across any such error, the authors shall feel obliged if they are informed at their Email ID.

CONTENTS

- News - Walls get a soft touch with pashmina
GSP 01 O
- News - Rethink impractical projects, Jaishankar tells
Bangladesh FM
GSP 02 A
- News - Putin, Macron agree to work for ceasefire in
east Ukraine Part I
GSP 02 C
- News - Putin, Macron agree to work for ceasefire in
east Ukraine Part II
GSP 02 C
- News -Iran MPs set conditions for N-deal
GSP 02 C
- News - Russia, Belarus extend military drills
GSP 02 C

CONTENTS

- Editorials - Remiss regulator
GSP 02 K
- News -EPFO plans new pension scheme
GSP 02 M
- News - CBI examines NSE's former MD Ravi Narain in
'co-location' case
GSP 02 O
- Editorials - No slacking
GSP 02 T
- Editorials - The Budget spells green shoots for agri-subsectors
GSP 03 A
- Editorials - Tapping technology for multilingual learning
GSP 03 L

Walls get a soft touch with pashmina

Srinagar-born designer Zubair Kirmani repurposing the shawls as wall hangings

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

For centuries, Kashmir's expensive but exquisite and intricately woven pashmina shawls were either a party wear or rare collections hidden in the wardrobes of the elite. However, Srinagar-born fashion designer Zubair Kirmani is writing a new address for this eye-catching and ultra-fine pashmina shawl: the walls.

Mr. Kirmani, who has already earned a name for himself by displaying the Kashmir-influenced couture at top-notch fashion shows such as the Wills Lifestyle India and Lakme Fashion Weeks, has improvised and innovated pashmina shawls into wall hangings, a rare departure for the fabric.

He has employed different embossing techniques, including tedious thread work, to do a rare calligraphic genre with the best craftsmen in Srinagar to turn pashmina into a wall-decorative.

"The idea was to bring



Dynamic edge: Zubair Kirmani aims to infuse a new life into static styles of the fabric. ■ PEERZADA ASHIQ

pashmina out of the closet. The expensive Kashmiri shawls always limited themselves to bright elite parties or the dark corners of closets. My attempt is to add to the utility of the fine fabric, which sees a chain of process in its making. The way people buy costly paintings for the walls, I intend to turn pashmina into a new feature to decorate walls with a classy look," Mr. Kirmani told *The Hindu*.

Reinventing his hallmark geometrical works influenced by the *Khatam-*

band, a decorative geometrical woodwork pattern used to design ceilings of houses and houseboats in the Valley, Mr. Kirmani is using a new geometrical technique to reintroduce the Kufic style of calligraphy that saw its advent in Iraq during the period of Hazarat Ali, one of Prophet Muhammed's sons-in-law, many centuries ago.

"This calligraphic work is challenging. In this artwork, Koranic verses are written without diacritics. There are no signs used under or above the Arabic letters, ne-

cessary for its right pronunciation. Kashmir's art has seen a lot of influence from Persia in the past. Recreating Kufic calligraphy on pashmina is a way to relook at the roots of our influence and also to generate a sense of awe among those who get to see it. I see this art form as merger of many features," Mr. Kirmani said.

Mr. Kirmani is aiming at the growing market in the country and abroad.

"My recent trips to the United Arab Emirates have exposed me to a new market. We need to contemporarise pashmina, even if it means changing its utility. I am sure Arabs, living in hotter conditions, would like to adorn the walls with pashmina artwork rather than buying shawls," he said.

Back to Kashmir after years of spending in the fashion circles of the country, Mr. Kirmani's studio at Srinagar's Zakura is aiming to infuse a new life into the static style in different categories of fabric.

Rethink impractical projects, Jaishankar tells Bangladesh FM

Abdul Momen had asked if Quad can offer same kind of financial aid as China

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Countries seeking loans should worry about unsustainable infrastructure projects such as airports and ports that are empty, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in a sharp riposte to Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, who asked about whether the Quad countries can offer the same kind of financial assistance that China does.

In an exchange at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Mr. Jaishankar also said India's ties with China were going through a "difficult phase", adding that the state of the relationship stemmed from "the state of the border", and China's transgressions along the Line of Actual Control since April 2020.

"We have seen now countries including in our region being saddled with large debts. We have seen projects which are commercially unsustainable: airports where



an aircraft doesn't come, harbours where a ship doesn't come," Mr. Jaishankar told a panel about the future of the Indo-Pacific, in comments that appeared to indicate the debt situation in Sri Lanka, where there have been concerns over the Hambantota port and the Mattala airport, both originally developed with Chinese loans, which Sri Lanka struggled to pay back, eventually having to hand over the port on a 99-year lease to a Chinese company.

"It's obviously in the interest of the consumer country concerned, but it's also in the interest of the interna-

tional community because unsustainable projects don't end there. Often the next is, debt becomes equity, and that becomes something else," he said, in a further illustration of the problem Sri Lanka faced.

Significantly, the question of infrastructure financing was raised by the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, who was in the audience of the panel discussion where Mr. Jaishankar shared the stage with the Foreign Ministers of France, Australia and Japan, as well as senior U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen.

Mr. Momen said while India had offered Lines of Cre-

dit and Japan had also helped with infrastructure financing, incoming loans had been "declining", and it was China that had "come forward with a basket of money and aggressive, affordable proposals".

Mr. Momen said it was hard to decide what to do, given that with the development in Bangladesh, people were demanding more infrastructure.

"We need more funding from our development partners, and that unfortunately comes with lot of strings attached and that becomes very difficult. Today, our largest loans are from the World Bank and the IMF and the ADB, but also, we are trying to get some funding from others. Is there an easy way out," Mr. Momen asked the panel.

Asked about India's relations with China, Mr. Jaishankar repeated his contention that the situation at the LAC had come up due to China's actions in 2020.

Putin, Macron agree to work for ceasefire in east Ukraine

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Sunday agreed to work for a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, Mr. Macron's office said.

In a phone conversation lasting 105 minutes, they also agreed on "the need to fa-

vor a diplomatic solution to the crisis and do everything to achieve one", the Elysee said, adding that French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov would meet "in the coming days".

Mr. Putin and Mr. Macron said they would work "intensely" to allow the Trilateral

Contact Group – Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE – to meet "to get all interested parties to commit to a ceasefire at the contact line" where government troops and pro-Russian separatists are facing each other.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ► PAGES 8 & 11

Putin, Macron agree to work for ceasefire

"Intense diplomatic work will take place in the coming days," Mr. Macron's office said, with several consultations to take place in the French capital.

Mr. Macron and Mr. Putin also agreed that talks among Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany should resume to implement the so-called Minsk protocol which in 2014 had already called for a ceasefire.

They also agreed to work towards "a high-level meeting with the aim of defining

a new peace and security order in Europe", Mr. Macron's office said.

A Washington report quoting Secretary of State Antony Blinken said U.S. President Joe Biden is willing to meet Mr. Putin "at any time" to prevent a war in Ukraine.

Mr. Blinken told CBS's "Face the Nation" that the U.S. President has made "very clear that he's prepared to meet President Putin at any time, in any format, if that can help prevent a war."

Iran MPs set conditions for N-deal

Seek guarantee nations won't pull out of pact or trigger 'snapback mechanism'

REUTERS
DUBAI

Iranian lawmakers have laid out six conditions for the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with global powers in a letter to President Ebrahim Raisi published on Sunday, the country's official IRNA news agency reported.

The letter, signed by 250 out of 290 parliamentarians, stated that U.S. and European parties should guarantee that they would not exit a restored agreement, nor trigger the "snapback mechanism" under which sanctions on Iran would be immediately reinstated if it violates nuclear compliance.

The Parliament has not voted on the proposed conditions and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who enjoys the support of har-



A general view of the Iranian Parliament • REUTERS/FILE

dliners, has the final say on Iran's nuclear policy and all other matters of state.

"We have to learn a lesson from past experiences and put a red line on the national interest by not committing to any agreement without obtaining necessary guarantees first," lawmakers said in the letter.

The statement comes in the midst of final steps to revive a 2015 nuclear agreement in Vienna, which could lead to an agreement "very soon", according to a senior European Union official.

Such conditions from lawmakers at a crucial time risk restricting Iranian negotiators' room for manoeuvre in

Vienna and endanger a final agreement.

The letter also said a return to the deal should only go ahead if all sanctions were lifted, including those pertaining to terrorism, missile technology and human rights.

In addition, lawmakers first want to confirm that Iran receives money from its exports, before the government returns to nuclear compliance, the statement added.

After 10 months of talks in Vienna, one of the remaining differences is Iran's demand for a guarantee from the U.S. of no more sanctions or other punitive steps in the future, and also how and when to restore verifiable restrictions on Iran's nuclear activity.

Russia, Belarus extend military drills

NATO says Russia has stationed 30,000 troops in Belarus and could use them to invade Ukraine

REUTERS
MOSCOW/DONETSK

Russia will extend military drills in Belarus that were due to end on Sunday, the Belarusian Defence Ministry announced, in a step U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said made him more worried about an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Defence Ministry said the decision was taken because of military activity near the borders of Russia and Belarus as well as the situation in eastern Ukraine's Donbass region.

Sporadic shelling across the line dividing Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatists in that region increased sharply last week and continued on Sunday.

NATO says Russia has up to 30,000 troops in Belarus and could use them as part of an invasion force to attack Ukraine, which lies to the south of Belarus. Moscow denies any such intention.

Speaking to CNN, Mr. Blin-



In action: Tanks taking part in a joint military drill of Russia and Belarus near Brest. •AFP

ken said that while all signs suggested Russia was on the brink of invading, the United States and its allies would use every diplomatic opportunity to dissuade the Kremlin. Russia has repeatedly denied any plan to attack, and accuses the West of whipping up fears of war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French

counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, agreed in a phone call on the need for a diplomatic solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine, both governments said.

OSCE meet today

A French presidential adviser said the two agreed that a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation

in Europe (OSCE), with representatives from Ukraine and Russia, be held on Monday.

Poland, currently the OSCE chair, earlier said that at Ukraine's request it was convening an extraordinary session of the council, which is dedicated to preventing armed conflict, on Monday.

Belarus did not say how

long Russian troops in Belarus might now remain in the country, which lies north of Ukraine. Belarus Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin said the focus of the extended exercises was "to ensure an adequate response and de-escalation of military preparations of ill-wishers near our common borders".

The Kremlin did not comment on the Belarus drills. The Macron adviser said that Putin had reiterated that the troops would leave Belarus after the exercises.

Western countries are preparing sanctions they say would be wide-reaching against Russian firms and individuals in case invasion.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a BBC interview broadcast on Sunday that such sanctions would "hit very very hard," and could include restrictions on Russian businesses' access to the dollar and the pound.

However, he acknowledged such threats may not deter Moscow.

Remiss regulator

After the NSE fiasco, SEBI must reaffirm that it remains focused on protecting small investors

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) earlier this month passed a significant order relating to the country's largest stock exchange, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India. As the markets regulator, whose primary mandate is to 'protect the interests of investors in securities', SEBI's 190-page order raises more questions than it resolves. In particular, it spotlights the regulator's tardiness in adjudicating a sensitive matter involving the manner of appointment of a top-level NSE official as well as possible regulatory violations by the then CEO and MD Chitra Ramkrishna in sharing confidential internal information with an unknown person. By SEBI's own admission, the first complaint alleging governance issues in the NSE's April 2013 appointment of Anand Subramanian as Chief Strategic Adviser was received in December 2015. After an exchange of e-mails on the issue between the regulator and the NSE in 2016, SEBI tasked the exchange's board with determining if there had been violations of norms. In November 2017, the NSE sent back a report by the board's Nomination and Remuneration Committee which flagged several irregularities pertaining to his appointment including his lack of relevant experience and that Ms. Ramkrishna alone had interviewed him. Separately, but interconnected, SEBI had in the course of its probe into another matter at the NSE stumbled upon, in 2018, documentary evidence pointing to Ms. Ramkrishna having been in e-mail communication and sharing sensitive information with an unknown person.

The NSE's conclusion based on findings in a forensic audit by Ernst & Young that this unknown person was none other than Mr. Subramanian was sent to SEBI in October 2018. And yet it took the regulator a further 40 months to inexplicably conclude that the unknown person ostensibly guiding Ms. Ramkrishna was unlikely to be Mr. Subramanian – the biggest beneficiary of the guidance by getting promoted as Group Operating Officer and receiving annual pay increases that vaulted his annual compensation to ₹4.21 crore by April 2016, from ₹1.68 crore in April 2013. To be sure, SEBI acknowledges that it was hamstrung by the NSE's dilatory approach in responding to its missives. That the board of a Market Infrastructure Institution, charged with safeguarding the trust of millions of investors, distressingly failed to exercise crucial oversight over the conduct of its CEO apart, SEBI too hardly covers itself in glory. The regulator spills far too much ink in almost voyeuristically sharing the contents of the e-mail exchanges between Ms. Ramkrishna and her 'unknown guide' even as it concludes that it is unable to establish any "specific loss caused to investors" by the NSE and Ms. Ramkrishna. The onus is now on SEBI to reaffirm that there are no 'holy cows' in its regulatory regime and that it remains laser focused on protecting small investors.

EPFO plans new pension scheme

It is for organised sector workers with basic wages of over ₹15,000 a month

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation is planning to introduce a new pension product for organised sector workers who get basic wages of more than ₹15,000 a month and are not mandatorily covered under its Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 (EPS-95).

At present, all those employees in the organised sector whose basic wage (basic pay plus dearness allo-

wance) is up to ₹15,000 a month at the time of joining service are mandatorily covered under EPS-95.

"There has been demand for higher pension on higher contributions among the members of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). Thus, it is under active consideration to bring out a new pension product or scheme for those whose monthly basic wages are more than ₹15,000," a source privy to the develop-

ment said. The proposal on this new pension product could come up for discussion at the meeting of the EPFO's apex decision-making body, Central Board of Trustees (CBT), in Guwahati on March 11 and 12.

During the meeting, a sub-committee constituted by the Central Board of Trustees on pension-related issues in November 2021 would also submit its report.

The source said there were EPFO subscribers with

monthly basic wages of more than ₹15,000 who are forced to contribute lower (at the rate of 8.33% of ₹15,000 per month into EPS-95) and thus they get lower pension.

The EPFO had amended the scheme in 2014 to cap monthly pensionable basic wages to ₹15,000.

Later, there were demands and deliberations to raise the threshold monthly basic wage to ₹25,000, but the proposal was not approved.

CBI examines NSE's former MD Ravi Narain in 'co-location' case

Look-out circulars issued against him, Anand Subramanian, adviser to the firm

DEVESH K PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has recorded the statement of former National Stock Exchange (NSE) Managing Director Ravi Narain in connection with the alleged abuse of server architecture of the exchange to provide preferential access to a private company to the data ahead of other brokers.

In the same case, registered in May 2018, the agency had examined former NSE Managing Director Chitra Ramkrishna this past week. The CBI has already issued look-out circulars against her, Mr. Narain and Anand Subramanian, the former group operating officer and adviser to the exchange.

"Mr. Narain was examined by a CBI team on Saturday. He is currently in Delhi," an agency official said. Mr. Narain was the NSE's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer from April 1994 till March 31, 2013. He was appointed Vice-Chairman in the non-executive category on the exchange's board with effect



Troubled waters: NSE's former MD Chitra Ramkrishna was examined by the CBI this past week. ■ FILE PHOTO

from April 1, 2013, and remained so till June 1, 2017 when he resigned from his post.

More statements

The CBI is likely to also record the statement of Mr. Subramanian. Earlier, the Income-Tax Department had conducted searches on his premises and those of Ms. Ramkrishna in Chennai and Mumbai.

On February 11, the Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) levied penalties on her, NSE and others for violating rules while appointing Mr. Subramanian as chief strategic adviser and

then re-designating him as the group operating officer and adviser to the then managing director of the exchange.

The CBI case is against stock-broker OPG Securities, its owner Sanjay Gupta and others, including unknown SEBI and NSE officials, who have been accused of being involved in a conspiracy, wherein an algorithmic trading software package named "Chanakya" was used by the company to get market feeds from the NSE server ahead of others.

The software, developed by accused Ajay Narottam Shah using the NSE trade da-

ta gathered by him in 2005-06 on the pretext of research work, was sold to OPG Securities and some other brokers, as alleged.

FIR details

According to the first information report, Mr. Gupta and his brother-in-law, Aman Kakrady, were into illegal trading in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai and Ghana through OPG Securities.

During 2010-12, he gained illegal access to the NSE's server architecture in conspiracy with the exchange officials using "co-location" facility. It enabled the company to log in first to the server ahead of other brokers.

As it turned out, a load balancer – a device that facilitates distribution of network traffic across servers – was installed by the NSE in 2012. While servers of all the other brokers were linked to the primary servers, Mr. Gupta got access to the back-up server. As the back-up server had "zero load", his company got expeditious access, as alleged.

No slacking

India must raise the standard of living for citizens, besides regulating antibiotic use

If lack of data was an impediment to roll out action plans against antimicrobial resistance (AMR), now that excuse has been yanked off. The recent publication of *The Lancet's* global burden of bacterial antimicrobial resistance – an elaborate and studied estimate validated by using counterfactual analysis for the first time – comes at a time when the world, weary with battling COVID-19, seems to have lost steam to mount a robust AMR policy. But the report makes it clear that no slacking can be allowed on this front any longer; 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. Bacterial AMR occurs when the drugs used to treat infections become less effective, as a result of the pathogens becoming resistant to the drugs. This happens due to 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, and poor infection control practices in hospitals. While data on exact number of deaths might not have been available, there was no doubt about the alarming nature of associated mortality and morbidity. And yet, few nations have a policy to counter this pernicious problem.

In 2008, when the NDM1 enzyme that renders bacteria resistant to a range of antibiotics was traced back to India, it served as an urgent call for action. 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. Since then, little progress has ensued: 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. No doubt AMR offers humanity one of the most complex challenges that it has faced; but the recognition that solutions are not only in the realm of science is necessary. Scientific publications have established the correlation between AMR and poor hygiene, lax administrative governance and poor ratio of public-private expenditure. While the scientific community looks for solutions in its ken, governments must raise the standard of living for citizens, provide them accessible and affordable quality health care, besides regulating the sale and use of antibiotics. Not doing so in studied haste will only land up eroding the significant health-care gains India has proactively, and painfully at times, secured over the years.

The Budget spells green shoots for agri-subsectors

Though there were no major announcements on agriculture and rural development, the allocations seem to be right



C.S.C. SEKHAR

At the time it was presented, and in the context of the Assembly elections in five States – now underway in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa – the Union Budget was expected to contain measures to boost consumption expenditure. But the Government chose instead to focus more on capital expenditure. There were no major announcements on agriculture or rural development. Given the recent turmoil as a result of the farmers' protests and the repeal of the farm laws, this was a little surprising. However, a closer look at the Budget presents a different picture.

Allotments, key subsectors

It is important to look at the budgetary allocations for agriculture from the perspective of agricultural growth and farmers' income. Agriculture has registered a robust performance during the COVID-19 pandemic and has clocked decent growth rates of 4.3% and 3.6% during 2019-20 and 2020-21. Growth is projected to be about 3.9% in 2021-22, which is a very satisfactory performance indeed! This performance may partly explain the lack of any extra focus on agriculture. However, there is a different story. Within agriculture, livestock and fisheries are two subsectors that have shown an average annual growth rate of 8% or more in the last five years.

These two subsectors roughly

contribute about 33% of the gross value added in agriculture. Also, as per the Situation Assessment Survey 2019, more than 15% of income is derived from livestock subsector. Thus, from a growth perspective as well as the viewpoint of farmers' income, livestock and fisheries are important. In keeping with this, these two subsectors have attracted decent allocations in the Budget.

An increase

The allocation for livestock health and disease control – a major concern for those working in the sector – has rightly been increased from ₹886 crore to ₹2,000 crore, a 126% increase. The allocation for the National Livestock Mission has also increased by more than ₹100 crore (42%). Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, a flagship programme of fisheries, has received an increase of about ₹679 crore (57%). Value addition in agriculture has also got increased attention. The production-linked incentive scheme for food processing has received a huge increase, from ₹10 crore to ₹1,022 crore (a 10,000% jump). Similarly the allocation for micro food processing, which can help in really small enterprises such as pickle and jaggery making, has increased by 125% to ₹900 crore.

Within the crop subsector also major changes in allocations have been made. In keeping with the broad thrust on capital expenditure in the Budget, the allocation for the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, or RKVY (a programme to “ensuring holistic development of agriculture and allied sectors”) has been increased by a whopping ₹8,000 crore, a 400% increase. This programme provides a lot of flexibility to States to devise and



K.L. MUSTAPAH

implement their own agricultural development programmes.

However, it needs to be mentioned here that various other programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) – to improve farm productivity – the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (a programme to “increase soil fertility and also the production of healthy food through organic practices” among other things), etc. have been brought under the RKVY fold this year.

Even after factoring in this inclusion, the allocation has gone up by more than 90%, which is substantial. Continuing the focus on agri-infrastructure, the allocation for the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) has been increased by 150% to ₹500 crore. The central sector scheme called the “Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organisations (FPOs) has also received an allocation of ₹500 crore (100% increase).

But a decrease here

Turning to allocations for output price support, the policy appears to be a little unclear at present. For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshana Abhiyan (PM-AASHA), which is the flagship programme to provide enhanced Minimum Support Price (MSP) of 50% above the cost of production to farmers (started with a lot of ex-

pectation in 2018), has received an allocation of just ₹1 crore! The only conceivable reason for this could be the impending formation of the committee to address the issue of MSPs, which was announced by the Prime Minister while announcing the repeal of the farm laws. The allocation for the price support programme of pulses and oilseeds (the Market Intervention Scheme and Price Support Scheme, or MIS-PSS) has decreased by 58% to ₹1,500 crore. The allocation for price stabilisation fund, meant to address extreme volatility in the prices of perishables, has declined by ₹750 crore (33%). The allocations for price support have declined; so too the budgeted allocation for important subsidies. The budgeted estimate of fertilizer subsidy has shown a decline of nearly ₹35,000 crore (25%). Similarly, the food subsidy has shown a decline of nearly ₹79,000 crore (28%). Such a large decline in fertilizer and food subsidies does not appear achievable.

Not much for NREGA

Agriculture is not a stand-alone activity but is intrinsically linked to overall rural development. With nearly 40% of income being derived from wages by agricultural households, it is imperative that rural development is looked at in conjunction with agriculture. Most major rural development programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (connectivity to unconnected habitations), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing for all in urban areas), and the National Rural Livelihood Mission have received small increases in allocations. One exception is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guar-

antee Scheme (MGNREGS). This flagship rural employment programme, which has been instrumental in reducing distress in the rural economy during the waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, has received lower allocation – by about ₹25,000 crore (25% decrease) from RE 2021-22 of ₹98,000 crore. This is a large decline indeed! A plausible reason is the possible reduction in the need for MGNREGS with the decline in the severity of the pandemic.

Transformative steps

The announcement of measures to promote kisan drones and encourage start-ups to improve value chains of farm produce are welcome steps. The adoption of modern technology in agriculture should not only help reinvigorate the rural economy but could also possibly encourage the younger generation to consider agriculture as a career option – generally perceived to be a laborious and drudgery-laden sector.

Finally, though there were no big ticket announcements on agriculture and rural development, the allocations appear to be in the right direction. The thrust seems to be on important subsectors such as livestock, fisheries and food processing and also on improving infrastructure in the crop sector. Although the allocations on MGNREGS and food and fertilizer subsidies are somewhat lower, there are positives in terms of adoption of technology. The Budget is in the right direction for agriculture. And now, implementation holds the key!

C.S.C. Sekhar is Professor of Economics, Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi

Tapping technology for multilingual learning

As the theme of International Mother Language Day 2022, it has much relevance in reshaping Indian higher education



M. VENKAIAH NAIDU

It is my conviction that expression in one's mother tongue lies at the heart of an individual or community's cultural identity. For centuries, India has been home to hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects, making its linguistic and cultural diversity the most unique in the world. In fact, our linguistic diversity is one of the cornerstones of our ancient civilisation. As I always emphasise, it is our mother tongue that lends expression to our vision and aspirations, our values and ideals, as also our creative and literary endeavours.

In a speech some years ago, the former UNESCO Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura, underscored the importance of mother tongue when he remarked that "the language we learn from our mothers [mother tongue] is the homeland of our innermost thoughts." He aptly described each language to be "as valuable and distinct as every irreplaceable human life".

Vanishing languages

While languages are among the key bridges that ensure cultural and civilisational continuity, globalisation and Westernisation have impacted not just the growth but also the survival of many of our dialects in this rich cultural and linguistic tapestry. Therefore, International Mother Language Day has special significance to the Indian context.

In November 1999, the UNESCO General Conference approved the declaration of February 21 as International Mother Language Day, in response to the declining state of many languages; it has been observed throughout the world since 2000. UNESCO has been striving

to protect the cultural and linguistic diversity of member-states through such pro-active international measures. According to the UN agency, at least 43% of the estimated 6,000 languages spoken in the world are endangered – an alarming figure indeed!

This year's subject

The theme of International Mother Language Day in 2022 – "Using Technology for Multilingual Learning: Challenges and Opportunities" – is one of special relevance to us. The underlying concept is to discuss the role of technology to further the cause of multilingual education. The central idea is to leverage technology to support and enrich the teaching-learning experience on a multi-lingual level. It also aims at achieving a qualitative, equitable and inclusive educational experience. Inevitably, the widespread use of technology would fast-track development. As the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, observed in her message, "Technology can provide new tools for protecting linguistic diversity. Such tools, for example, facilitating their spread and analysis, allow us to record and preserve languages which sometimes exist only in oral form."

Multilingual education predicated on the increasing use of one's mother tongue is a key component of inclusion in education. To underscore the importance of mother tongue in laying the foundation for one's intellectual development, I have always likened it to eyesight and spectacles to other languages. Spectacles can function only if there is eyesight. When applied to Indian classrooms, a multi-lingual approach would also create new pathways of learning by addressing the emerging challenges on a regional and global scale. Seen in its entirety, this is in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas".

Globally, the role of technology



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came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic when school shutdowns forced educators and learners to adapt themselves to online education. Over weeks and months, this became the new normal across the world, though it did present a host of new challenges. These include the requisite skills employed in distance teaching, Internet access, and, importantly, adapting materials and content in diverse languages. While the central and State governments are taking active measures to promote digital learning, it becomes our responsibility to ensure that there is no digital divide.

Direction of the NEP

It would be pertinent to note that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a visionary document which encourages the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction till at least Class five but preferably till Class eight and beyond. In drawing up a road map for the future, the NEP seeks to tailor the teaching and learning process and modify it by making it holistic, value-based and inclusive. The use of mother tongue in teaching is bound to create a positive impact on learning outcomes, as also the development of the cognitive faculties of students.

There is a pressing need to create and improve scientific and technical terminology in Indian languages. This would help transform the educational experience by making existing knowledge systems in a range of disciplines accessible to learners. It would be re-

levant to recall the words of the renowned physicist, Sir C.V. Raman, who observed with great clarity and vision that "we must teach science in our mother tongue. Otherwise, science will become a highbrow activity. It will not be an activity in which all people can participate."

Helping students

Sir C.V. Raman's observation has a prophetic ring of truth when we see it in the light of the fact that we have been able to create a large English-based education system which includes colleges that offer courses in medicine and multiple disciplines of engineering. This impressive system paradoxically excludes a vast majority of learners in our country from accessing higher education. Therefore, the need to build an effective multilingual education system across diverse streams and disciplines becomes all the more imperative. It is important to bear in mind that in a survey conducted by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in 2020 involving over 83,000 students, nearly 44% of students voted in favour of studying engineering in their mother tongue, highlighting a critical need in technical education.

In this context, the collaboration between the AICTE and IIT Madras to translate some courses on the central government's e-learning platform, Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) into eight regional languages such as Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam and Gujarati, is commendable. Such tech-led initiatives will serve to democratise higher education. At the same time, the decision of the AICTE to permit B. Tech programmes in 11 native languages, in tune with the NEP, is a historic move which would open the door for students to a wide range of opportunities; the languages are Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese,

Punjabi and Odia.

Additionally, learning in (your) mother tongue is at the core of building a sense of self-esteem and identity. While I feel that one must accord equal respect to all languages, there is a tendency, which must be noted with regret, among some educators and parents to take a condescending view of education in Indian languages in preference to English language learning. As a result, children's access to their mother tongue becomes restricted, leading to a sort of socio-cultural rootlessness, especially if corrective steps are not taken. We have to teach our children not to mistake competence in English to be a yardstick of intellectual superiority or as a prerequisite for achieving success in life.

Examples to emulate

Our policy-planners, educators, parents and opinion leaders must bear in mind that when it comes to education in mother tongue and local languages, we can take the cue from European countries as well as Asian powers such as Japan, China and Korea, among others.

According to the Language Census, whose findings were widely reported in 2018, India is home to 19,500 languages or dialects, of which 121 languages are spoken by 10,000 or more people in our country. It is our collective responsibility to revive and revitalise the 196 Indian languages which fall under the "endangered" category. Let us not forget that every single language constitutes a cultural crucible which stores the distilled knowledge and the wisdom of our collective consciousness – our values, traditions, stories, behaviour and norms, proverbs, sayings and idioms. Co-existing over centuries, borrowing from and nurturing each other, our languages are interwoven with our individual, local and national identity.

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General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
General Studies Paper IV	
A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.