

UPSC Daily Current Affairs 16 Jul 2021

Midday meals scheme

(Topic- GS Paper II- Governance, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a new study on the inter-generational benefits of the midday meal scheme has been published in **Nature Communications**.

About the Study

- The study tracked nationally representative cohorts of mothers by birth year and socio-economic status to show how exposure to the scheme reduced stunting in their children.
- The findings of the study exacerbate concerns that the interruptions to schooling and to the midday meal scheme could have even longer term impacts, hurting the nutritional health of the next generation as well.
- These findings come at a time when the mid-day meal scheme has effectively been put on hold for the last one and a half years, as schools have been closed since March 2020.

Key highlights

Height-to-age ratio

- Girls who had access to free lunches provided at government schools had children with a higher height-to-age ratio than those who did not,

Prevalence of stunting

- Using nationally representative data on cohorts of mothers and their children spanning 23 years, the study showed that by 2016, the prevalence of stunting was significantly lower in areas where the scheme was implemented in 2005.
- More than one in three Indian children are stunted, or too short for their age, which reflects chronic undernutrition.
- The fight against stunting has often focussed on boosting nutrition for young children, but nutritionists have long argued that maternal health and well-being is the key to reducing stunting in their offspring
- The midday meal scheme was associated with **13-32% of the improvement in the height-for-age z-scores in India between 2006 and 2016.**
- The linkages between midday meals and lower stunting in the next generation were stronger in the lower socio-economic strata and likely work through women's education, fertility, and the use of health services.

Benefited

- Only 6% of girls aged 6-10 years had benefited from the scheme in 1999.
- By 2011, with an expansion in budget, and state implementation following a Supreme Court order, coverage had grown to 46%.

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About Midday meals scheme

91 YEARS OF THE MIDDAY MEAL SCHEME

1925 | Student meal scheme launched by Madras Municipal Corporation

Mid-1980s | Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry also start similar schemes

1990-91 | States with similar programmes increase to 12

1995 | Students in 2,408 blocks to get free foodgrains under national programme


Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development
Research: Atul Thakur

1997-98 | All blocks included

2004 | Cooked midday meal launched for all primary schools

2007 | In 3,479 backward blocks, scheme extended up to Class VIII

2008-09 | Students up to Class VIII in all govt-run or aided schools and madrassas and maqtabas avail of midday meal



- It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 1995. ☑
- **It is under the Ministry of Education.**
- The scheme guarantees one meal to all children in government and aided schools and madaras supported under Samagra Shiksha.
- It is the world's largest school meal programme aimed to attain the goal of universalization of primary education. ☑
- Provides cooked **meals to every child within the age group of six to fourteen years studying in classes I to VIII who enrolls and attends the school.**
- **The Scheme is also covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013**

Objective

- The scheme address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.

Regulation

- The State Steering-cum Monitoring Committee (SSMC) oversees the implementation of the scheme including establishment of a mechanism for maintenance of nutritional standards and quality of meals.

Coverage

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- All government and government aided schools, Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

Nutritional Standards:



	PRIMARY (grade 1-5)	UPPER PRIMARY (grade 6-8)
CALORIES	450gms	700gms
PROTEIN	12gms	20gms

- Cooked meal having nutritional standards of 450 calories and 12 gm of protein for primary (I- V class) and 700 calories and 20 gm protein for upper primary (VI-VIII class)

Recent Development

Expansion of Mid-day Meal Scheme

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has recommended that all government schools start providing free breakfast in the coming academic year, as a part of an expansion of midday meal scheme envisaged by National Education Policy.
- The National Education Policy identifies “providing food and nutrition” as one of the key long-term thrust areas for financing to cultivate a robust education system.

How to Improved Mid-Day Meal Programme?



EXPERTS' RECOMMENDATION
HOW TO IMPROVE MID-DAY MEAL PROGRAMME

- Increase awareness among stakeholders
- Encourage community participation
- Improve infrastructure to store and cook food
- Increase budget for meal per child to improve nutritional value and account for inflation
- Hire more staff to plug gaps in the preparation and distribution of meals
- Introduce better record keeping of the number of meals served per day, items served and nutritional value

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U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan to form quad group to enhance regional connectivity

(Topic- GS Paper II- International Organization, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have agreed in principle to establish a new quadrilateral diplomatic platform focused on enhancing regional connectivity.

The rationale behind the development of Quad group

Afghanistan's strategic location

- Afghanistan's strategic location has for a long time been touted as a competitive advantage for the country.
- Afghanistan is bordered by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast.
- It is located at the heart of the historic Silk Road, Afghanistan was long the crossroads of commerce between Asian countries connecting them to Europe, and enhancing religious, cultural, and commercial contacts.

Countering China's Belt Road Initiative

- The formation of the new quad group is important amid China's desire to extend its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) to Afghanistan.
- By virtue of its location, Afghanistan can provide China with a strategic base to spread its influence across the world.

About Belt Road Initiative

- It a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping when he came to power in 2013.
- It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes

Taliban

- Since the announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. forces by August 31, violence has been rising and efforts to broker a peace settlement between the Afghan government and insurgent Taliban have slowed.

Related Information

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About Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

- It is the informal strategic dialogue between **India, USA, Japan and Australia** with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- The Ministers met also discuss collective efforts in our shared commitments and close cooperation on counter terrorism, mentoring, assistance in disaster relief, airtime security, cooperation, development, finance and cyber security efforts.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**.
- However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- In December 2012, **Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's** “Democratic Security Diamond” involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).
- **Quad is criticised by China as Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).**

FATF review of India put off again

(Topic- GS Paper II- International Organization, Source- Business Standard)

Why in the news ?

- Recently, an evaluation by the global organisation Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to analyse the effectiveness of India's anti-money laundering and countering terrorist financing regime has been postponed for the second time in view of the pandemic and is now slated to be initiated next year

Review of India's anti-money laundering & terror financing regime

- The review of India's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regime was scheduled for 2020 as part of a regular review cycle after 10 years.
- The last such review of India's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regime was held in June, 2010.
- As per this re-scheduled assessment calendar, the technical evaluation of Indian anti-money laundering, countering terrorist financing and the role of relevant legal framework and agencies enforcing these measures would begin in September next year followed by an on-site visit of FATF experts to the country in February, 2023.

What do they evaluate?

- During the evaluation, Indian financial regulatory and enforcement agencies are expected to showcase their action taken reports and dossiers for the enforcement, regulatory and

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investigative work undertaken by them under the anti-money laundering law, criminal tax evasion instance and for strengthening the CFT (combating financing of terrorism) regime.

New compliance regime

- India has prepared to present multiple dossiers of the action undertaken by it under the anti-money laundering law, criminal tax evasion probes and for strengthening the CFT (combating financing of terrorism) regime by the financial intelligence unit (FIU) and other agencies
- The enactment of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act in 2018, the anti-black money Act of 2015, amendments brought in the PMLA over the years, curbing tax evasion under indirect taxes by bringing in the GST (Goods and Services Tax), new protocols to better regulate suspect transactions in banks and financial intermediaries and the **2016 demonetisation of two large currencies are part of the Indian presentation.**
- The high number of domestic and international attachment of assets and penalties issued under the PMLA, and charge sheets filed by various probe agencies under criminal sections of the law against financial crimes and terror funding will also be part of India's presentation to the FATF review team.
- The wide spectrum of offences from wildlife smuggling to use of smart electronic tools to generate black money being probed by Indian agencies will be part of the dossier.

Recent Development

Joint working group

- In 2019, India had set up a joint working group comprising 22 central investigation, intelligence gathering and regulatory agencies to make presentations, hold discussions and brief the FATF experts, drawn from various countries, once the process starts.
- Some of the prominent agencies in this grouping supervised by the Department of Revenue under the Union Finance Ministry include the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax Department, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), CBI, Customs Department, market regulator SEBI, banking regulator RBI and insurance regulator IRDAI.

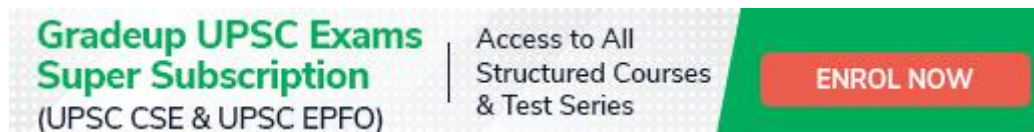
China denies politics behind UNESCO move on Barrier Reef

(Topic- GS Paper III- Environment, Source- The Hindu)

Why in the news?

- Recently, Chinese official said that political tensions between Beijing and Australia were not behind a UNESCO recommendation to place the Great Barrier Reef on its endangered list.

Background



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Tensions between China and Australia

- Australian government allegations that China pressed to have the Barrier Reef listed as endangered whereas the China's stand is that decision was based on reports and data provided by Australia itself.
- Australia should fulfil its obligations to protect world heritage sites instead of making baseless accusations against other members of UNESCO

Reasons for adding Great Barrier Reef to 'in danger' list

- The legal groups' report stresses the reef's plight has worsened since the 2015 review, noting a marine park authority report last year found its outlook had deteriorated from poor to very poor and acknowledged greenhouse gas emissions were the greatest threat to its health.
- It has also suffered three major coral bleaching events due to severe marine heat waves.
- In December 2020, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has said that the climate change had pushed the reef into critical condition.

About World Heritage in Danger

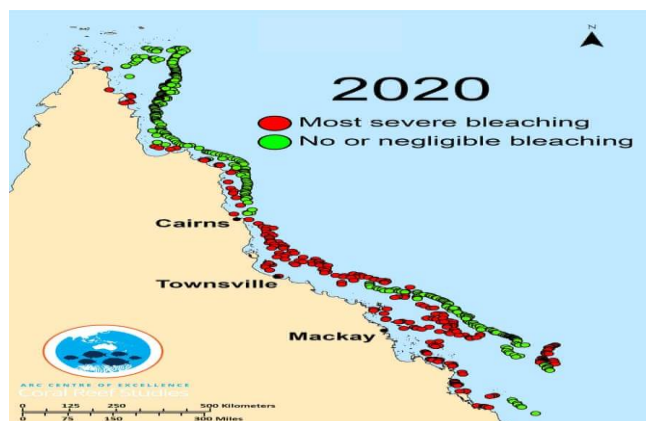
- The List of World Heritage in Danger is designed to inform the international community of conditions which threaten the very characteristics for which a property was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to encourage corrective action.
- **These are**
 - Armed conflict and war, earthquakes and other natural disasters, pollution, poaching, uncontrolled urbanization and unchecked tourist development pose major problems to World Heritage sites. Dangers can be 'ascertained', referring to specific and proven imminent threats, or 'potential', when a property is faced with threats which could have negative effects on its World Heritage values.
- As of now there are **53 properties which the World Heritage Committee has decided to include on the List of World Heritage in danger in accordance with Article 11 (4) of the Convention.**
- The **Italian city of Venice, which has been overrun with tourists, and the waterfront of the English city of Liverpool, which is undergoing a major redevelopment,** are among the other listings in UNESCO's sights

Background

- Under the 1972 World Heritage Convention, a World Heritage property - as defined in Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention - can be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger by the Committee when it finds that the condition of the property corresponds to at least one of the criteria in either of the two cases described in the Operational Guidelines.

About Great Barrier Reef

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- It is a site of remarkable variety and beauty on the north-east coast of Australia.
- It contains the world’s largest collection of coral reefs, with 400 types of coral, 1,500 species of fish and 4,000 types of mollusc.
- The “bricks” in the reef framework are formed by the calcareous remains of the tiny creatures known as coral polyps and hydrocorals.
- The “cement” that binds these remains together is formed in large part by coralline algae and **bryozoans**.

Related Terms

About Coral Bleaching

- The coral and the zooxanthellae share a symbiotic relationship, and 90% of the nutrients that are produced by the algae are transferred to the coral hosts.
- But this relationship gets affected under severe environmental stress which causes the loss of symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae).
- As a result, the white calcium-carbonate exoskeleton is visible through its transparent tissue leading to a condition known as Coral Bleaching.
- The corals become vulnerable in the absence of the algae and begin to die if the temperature of the sea remains high for weeks.
- According to the records of 2016 and 2017, half of the Great Barrier Reef died due to Coral Bleaching.

China steps up climate fight with emissions trading scheme

(Topic- GS Paper III- Environment, Source- Indian Express)

Why in the news?

- China has recently launched its long-awaited emissions trading system which is a key tool in its quest to drive down climate change-causing greenhouse gases and go carbon neutral by 2060.

About China emissions trading system

- The scheme was launched with China, the world's biggest carbon emitter, seeking to take a global leadership role on the climate crisis in the lead up to a crucial UN summit in November 2021.
- The scheme will set pollution caps for big-power businesses for the first time and allows firms to buy the right to pollute from others with a lower carbon footprint.
- The market will initially cover more than 2,200 companies in China's power sector, which are responsible for 14 per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions (or 40-50 per cent of the country's GHG emissions).

Carbon Markets

- The carbon market is not new to the country.
- It began its exercise of building the market right after it emerged as the world's number one GHG emitter in 2010, overtaking the United States-China developed pilots.
- It housed the world's second-largest carbon market as pilot, covering about a GtCO_{2e} (global annual CO₂ equivalent emissions).
- **Carbon markets existed under the Kyoto Protocol, which is being replaced by the Paris Agreement in 2020.**
- Carbon Markets can potentially deliver emissions reductions over and above what countries are doing on their own.

Carbon Markets under the Paris Agreement

- The provisions relating to setting up a new carbon market are described in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.
- Article 6.2 enables bilateral arrangements for transfer of emissions reductions.
- Article 6.4 talks about a wider carbon market in which reductions can be bought and sold by anyone.
- Article 6.8 provides for making 'non-market approaches' available to countries to achieve targets.

India's Initiatives to Reduce Emissions

Bharat Stage-VI

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- India shifted from Bharat Stage-IV (BS-IV) to Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI) emission norms from 1st April 2020 which was earlier to be adopted by 2024.

UJALA scheme

- It has distributed more than 360 million LED bulbs under the UJALA scheme, which has led to energy saving of about 47 billion units of electricity per year and reduction of 38 million tones of CO2 per year.

International Solar Alliance

- It is an Indian initiative conceived as a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries to address their special energy needs.

The National Action Plan on Climate Change

- It has been launched in 2008.
- It aims at creating awareness about the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.

Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC), 2017

- It has been developed by Power Ministry and Bureau of Energy Efficiency.
- It seeks to promote low carbon growth by integrating the renewable energy sources in the design of the buildings

Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA)

- It evaluates the environmental performance of a building holistically over its entire life cycle, thereby providing a definitive standard for what constitutes a green building.

Kisan Saarathi

(Topic- GS Paper III- Agriculture, Source- Financial Express)

Why in the news?

- Recently, a digital platform with the name Kisan Sarathi has been launched on the occasion of **93rd Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**.

About Kisan Saarathi

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- It has been jointly launched by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**.
- It aims to facilitate farmers to get the **right information at the right time in their desired language**.
- It will empower farmers with the technological interventions to reach farmers in remote areas.

Significance

- With the digital platform, the farmers can interact and avail personalised advisories on agriculture and allied areas directly from the respective scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs).
- The initiative will be highly valuable not only in addressing the location specific information needs of the farmers but also in Agricultural Extension, Education and Research activities of ICAR.

About Krishi Vigyan Kendra

- These are agricultural extension centre in India, usually associated with a local agricultural university.
- The KVK scheme is 100% financed by the Government of India.

About Indian Council of Agricultural Research

- It is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- It was established on 16th July 1929 as Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 in pursuance of the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture.
- **It's headquarters at New Delhi.**

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SEBI introduces expected loss-based rating scale for rating agencies

(Topic- GS Paper III- Economics, Source- Economics Times)

Why in the news?

- Recently, SEBI has introduced the expected loss-based rating that is divided into a scale of seven levels, spanning from lowest to highest expected loss.

More in the news

- Credit rating agencies will now be required to provide expected loss-based ratings for projects and instruments associated with the infrastructure sector.
- Seven Level on the new scale are :
 - a. Lowest expected loss
 - b. Very low expected loss
 - c. Low expected loss

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- d. Moderate expected loss
 - e. High expected loss
 - f. Very high expected loss
 - g. highest expected loss
- Instruments rated "EL (Expected Loss) 1" will be considered to have the lowest expected loss over the life of the instruments while those rated "EL 7" will indicate highest expected loss.
 - SEBI said all the provisions in the latest circular except those pertaining to standardisation of rating scales, will be applicable with "immediate effect" for Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs).
 - In cases where a rating scale has not been prescribed by a financial sector regulator or authority, CRAs will only use rating scales prescribed by the Sebi from time to time.
 - The provision in the circular related to standardisation of rating scales will be effective from April 1, 2022.

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