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1. Status of Classical Language to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali languages

Introduction

The Union Cabinet has approved to confer the status of Classical Language to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali languages. The Classical Languages serve as a custodian of Bharat's profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community's historical and cultural milestone.

Point Wise Detail & Background

The Government of India decided to create a new category of languages as "Classical Languages" on 12th October 2004 declaring Tamil as Classical Language and setting following as criteria for the status of Classical Language:

A.   High Antiquity of its early texts/ recorded history over a thousand years.
B.   A body of ancient literature/ texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generation of speakers.
C.   The literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community.

A Linguistic Experts Committee (LEC) was constituted by the Ministry of Culture under Sahitya Akademi in Nov 2004 to examine the proposed languages for the status of Classical Language. The criteria were revised in Nov 2005 as following, and Sanskrit was declared as Classical Language:
1. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.
2. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
3. The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
4. The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

The Government of India, has conferred status of Classical Languages to following languages so far:

Language	Date of Notification
Tamil	12/10/2004

Sanskrit	25/11/2005
Telugu	31/10/2008
Kannada	31/10/2008
Malayalam	08/08/2013
Odia	01/03/2014

A proposal from the Maharashtra Government in 2013 was received in the Ministry requesting Classical Language status to Marathi, which was forwarded to the LEC. The LEC recommended Marathi for Classical Language. During the inter-ministerial consultations on the draft note for cabinet in 2017 for conferring classical status to the Marathi language, MHA advised to revise the criteria and make it stricter. PMO vide its comment stated that the Ministry may conduct an exercise to find out how many other languages are likely to become eligible.

In the meantime, proposal from Bihar, Assam, West Bengal was also received for conferring status of Classical Language to Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali.

Accordingly, Linguistics Experts Committee (under Sahitya Akademi) in a meeting on 25.07.2024, unanimously revised the criteria as below. Sahitya Akademi has been appointed as nodal agency for the LEC:

1. High antiquity of (its) is early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500- 2000 years.
2. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a heritage by generations of speakers.
3. Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.
4. The Classical Languages and literature could be distinct from its current form or could be discontinuous with later forms of its offshoots.

The committee also recommended following languages to be fulfilling revised criteria to be considered as a Classical Language.
1. Marathi
2. Pali
3. Prakrit
4. Assamese
5. Bengali

Implementation strategy and targets
The Ministry of Education has taken various steps to promote Classical Languages. Three Central Universities were established in 2020 through an Act of Parliament for promotion of Sanskrit language. The Central Institute of Classical Tamil was set up to facilitate the translation of ancient Tamil texts, promote research and offer courses for University students and language scholars of Tamil. To further enhance the study and preservation of Classical Languages, the Centres for Excellence for studies in Classical Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and

Odia were established under the auspices of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysuru. In addition to these initiatives, several national and internation awards have been instituted to recognize and encourage achievements in the field of Classical Languages. Benefits extended to Classical Languages by the Ministry of Education include National Awards for Classical Languages, Chairs in Universities, and Centers for promotion of Classical Languages.

Major impact, including employment generation

The inclusion of languages as Classical Language will create significant employment opportunities, particularly in academic and research fields. Additionally, the preservation, documentation, and digitization of ancient texts of these languages will generate jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media.

States/districts covered

The primary states involved are Maharashtra (Marathi), Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (Pali and Prakrit), West Bengal (Bengali), and Assam (Assamese). The broader cultural and academic impact will extend nationally and internationally.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Culture
Source: PIB

2. Mithun Chakraborty to Receive Dadasaheb Phalke Award

Recognition at the 70th National Film Awards

Veteran actor Mithun Chakraborty will be honored with the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2022. The award will be presented during the 70th National Film Awards ceremony on October 8, as announced by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Prime Minister's Tribute

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the actor, calling him a "cultural icon" admired across generations. "Delighted that Shri Mithun Chakraborty Ji has been conferred the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award, recognising his unparalleled contributions to Indian cinema," Mr. Modi posted.

Career Highlights

Mithun Chakraborty received the National Film Award for Best Actor in his debut film, Mrigayaa (1976), directed by Mrinal Sen. His role as a Santhal rebel earned him national acclaim.

Popular Icon of the 1980s

He rose to stardom with the film Disco Dancer (1982), which became a huge success both in India and abroad, making him a dancing sensation of the era.

Awards and Accolades

Throughout his career, Mithun has won multiple awards:
• Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actor for Agneepath (1990)
• Two more National Film Awards for Tahader Katha (1992) and Swami Vivekananda (1998)

Diverse Filmography
Mithun Chakraborty has acted in over 350 films across various Indian languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Odia, Bhojpuri, and Telugu. He is known for his versatility in action, drama, and comedy roles.

Commitment to Social Causes
Beyond cinema, Mithun has been actively involved in charitable initiatives focused on education, healthcare, and supporting underprivileged communities. His dedication to social causes reflects his commitment to giving back to society.

Recent Recognition
In addition to the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, Mithun was recently honored with the Padma Bhushan for his contributions to Indian cinema and society.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu

3. Preparing for the next pandemic: what NITI Aayog report says

Introduction
Four years after the outbreak of Covid, an expert group constituted by NITI Aayog has recommended setting up a comprehensive framework to effectively manage future public health emergencies or pandemics.

The Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response (PPER) framework has called for a new Public Health Emergency Management Act (PHEMA), and the implementation of other measures to ensure a swift and effective response within the first 100 days of the outbreak.

The expert group, which was formed in June 2023, based its recommendations on the learnings and challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and other public health crises. A government statement noted that Covid-19 was "undoubtedly not the last pandemic", and "given the unpredictably, changing planetary ecology, climate and human-animal-plant dynamics, new potentially, large-scale infectious threats to human health are inevitable".

Here are some of the key recommendations made by the expert group in its report, Future Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response: A Framework for Action, which was published on September 11.

Enactment of PHEMA

Public health emergencies require governments to exercise special powers such as mandatory screening of people and putting restrictions on free movement. During the Covid-19 pandemic, provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act (EDA), 1897, and the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA), 2005, were invoked.

But these laws were not entirely satisfactory, the report said. "The EDA 1897 does not define "dangerous", "infectious", or "contagious diseases", or "epidemic". It contains no provisions for the processes required for dissemination of drugs/ vaccines, and the quarantine measures and other preventive steps that need to be taken," it said.

The NDMA was likewise not designed to cater to health emergencies. "It does not specifically define public health emergencies or epidemics. It focuses on managing several types of disasters, including natural disasters," the report said.

These gaps can be filled by enacting PHEMA, the report said. The new law can empower central and state governments to effectively respond to not just pandemics, but also other kinds of health emergencies arising from non-communicable diseases, disasters or bioterrorism.

This special provision Act would empower public health agencies to take urgent action. It would create public health cadres at national and state levels who would be trained and fully prepared to be the first responder.

Empowered panel of Secys

The report proposed creating an Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) — a committee of officials which will be headed by Cabinet Secretary to prepare for public health emergencies and monitor preparedness during peace times. It will "guide on governance, finance, R&D, surveillance, partnerships and collaborations, and other necessary functions that can be ramped up for immediate response" in case of an emergency.

EGoS will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for pandemics, and establish sub-committees for aforementioned functions, the report said.

Strengthen surveillance

The report made several recommendations for strengthening the disease surveillance network. It noted that several epidemics and pandemics, including Covid-19, in the past 50 years were caused by viruses linked to various bat species. Therefore, constant monitoring of the human-bat interfaces was crucial.

The report proposed the creation of a national biosecurity and biosafety network, involving leading research institutions, biosafety containment facilities (labs that use specific safety equipment, practices, and building design to protect people and the environment from biological hazards), and genome sequencing centres.

Swarup said, "All components of this system should be strengthened and connected to work in a harmonised, autopilot mode that gets ignited as soon as the first warning sign is received." The report also recommended setting up an emergency vaccine bank, which would source vaccines from within or outside the country.

Network for early warning

The report proposed building an epidemiology forecasting and modelling network that can predict transmission dynamics of infectious diseases, and monitor the effectiveness of countermeasures, including vaccination, in different scenarios.

A network of centres of excellence (CoE) for research on priority pathogens is also required. Diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines for such priority pathogens, identified from the list maintained by the World Health Organisation, can be developed in advance, the report said.

Independent drug regulator

India needs a well-developed clinical trial network accepted by international regulatory authorities to ensure speedy access to innovative products to tackle public health emergencies. The Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO), which is responsible for regulating the import, sale, manufacture and distribution of drugs, needs to be independent, and needs to have special powers, the report said. The CDSCO is currently under the Ministry of Health.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express

4. How India's temples are run

Introduction

As the Supreme Court hears petitions seeking a court-monitored probe into the alleged adulteration of the ghee in Lord Venkateswara's laddu prasadam, Hindu organisations have revived their demand to free temples from government control.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has announced a nationwide campaign, and Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has called for a "Sanatana Dharma Rakshana Board" to look into all issues relating to temples.

How are religious places run in India?

Muslims and Christians manage their places of worship and religious institutions through boards or trusts run by the community. In the case of many Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist places of worship, however, the government exercises considerable control. Hindu temples form the majority of the around 30 lakh places of worship in India (2011 census).

Temples in Tamil Nadu are managed by the state's Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department. The AP government controls and appoints the head of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which runs the Tirupati Temple.

States use a part of the income from offerings and donations at large temples for the administration and upkeep of those and smaller temples, and for welfare activities that may or may not be connected to the temple — such as running hospitals, orphanages, or schools/ colleges that provide secular education.

Several states — including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan — have enacted laws that give the government the power to administer temples, their incomes and expenditures.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir enacted The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1988, to manage, specifically, the Vaishno Devi Mata Shrine in Katra, Jammu.

States draw their power to enact such legislation from Article 25(2) of the Constitution, under which a government can make laws "regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice", and "providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus".

Religious endowments and institutions are in List III (Concurrent List) of the Seventh Schedule, which means both the Centre and states can legislate on the subject.

How did Hindu temples come under government control?
The historical evidence for the construction of monumental temples dates back to the Mauryan period (321-185 BCE). Throughout Indian history, kings and nobles have donated land and riches to temples, which emerged as centres of culture and economy. The larger temples often promoted agriculture and irrigation, and were significant economic drivers.

In the medieval period, invaders repeatedly attacked and pillaged India's fabulously wealthy temples. The colonial rulers sought to control them — and between 1810 and 1817, the East India Company enacted a series of laws in the presidencies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, giving themselves the right to interfere in the administration of temples, purportedly to prevent the misappropriation of their income and endowments.

In 1863, the British enacted the Religious Endowments Act, which handed over control of temples to committees set up under the Act. However, the government retained considerable influence through judicial jurisdiction, the extension of the Civil Procedure Code and Official Trustees Act to temples, and the Charitable and Religious Trusts Act, 1920. In 1925, the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act empowered provincial governments to legislate on matters of endowments — over the years, this law gave enormous powers of oversight to a board of commissioners, which could even take over the management of a temple.

After Independence, the 1925 Act became the blueprint for various states to enact their own laws to administer temples. The first such Act was the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, passed by the State of Madras in 1951, which paved the way for the supervision of temples by the HR&CE department, and provided for the appointment of an Executive Officer.

Around the same time, a similar law was passed in Bihar. The Madras law was struck down in court, but a new one was enacted in 1959 with a few modifications.

Today, most states in South India follow similar legal structures to control temples. It has been argued that government intervention is necessary to ensure that all castes are allowed entry into Hindu places of worship.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express