

SOCIAL ISSUE

Rice Fortification

The Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution informed the Rajya Sabha that the government approved the Centrally Sponsored Pilot Scheme on "Fortification of Rice & its Distribution under Public Distribution System" for a period of 3 years beginning in 2019-20 with total outlay of Rs. 174.64 Cr.

What is the Scheme?

About:

- To address anemia and micro-nutrient deficiency in the country, the Government of India approved this scheme for a period of 3 years in 2019-20.
- Under the Scheme, FCI (Food Corporation of India) has been asked to come up with a comprehensive plan for procurement and distribution of fortified rice in all the Districts of the country under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) & Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme from 2021-2022. The mid-day meal scheme is now known as PM POSHAN.
- Special focus remains on supplying fortified rice to the 112 specially identified Aspirational Districts of the country.

Objectives the Scheme:

- Distribution of Fortified Rice through Public Distribution System, to cater 15 Districts in the country - preferably one district per State in the initial phase of Implementation.
- Coverage of NFSA (National Food Security Act) beneficiaries under PDS with Fortified Rice in the selected Districts.
- Facilitate cross learning and sharing of best practices among States/UTs and DoF&PD (Department of Food and Public Distribution).
- To evaluate the provision, coverage and Utilization of Fortified Rice by the target population as well as the efficiency/effectiveness of the consumption of fortified rice in reducing the targeted micronutrient deficiencies in different age and gender groups.

What is Food Fortification and its Need?

Fortification:

- Fortification is the addition of key vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt to improve their nutritional content.
- These nutrients may or may not have been originally present in the food before processing.

Fortification of Rice:

- According to the Food Ministry, fortification of rice is a cost-effective and complementary strategy to increase vitamin and mineral content in diets. According to FSSAI norms, 1 kg fortified rice will contain iron (28 mg-42.5 mg), folic acid (75-125 microgram) and Vitamin B-12 (0.75-1.25 microgram).
- In addition, rice may also be fortified with micronutrients, singly or in combination, with zinc, Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B3 and Vitamin B6.

Need of Fortification:

- India has very high levels of malnutrition among women and children. According to the Food Ministry, every second woman in the country is anemic and every third child is stunted.
- India has slipped to 101st position in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2021 of 116 countries, from its 2020 position of 94th.
- The deficiency of micronutrients or micronutrient malnutrition, also known as "hidden hunger", is a serious health risk.
- Rice is one of India's staple foods, consumed by about two-thirds of the population. Per capita rice consumption in India is 6.8 kg per month. Therefore, fortifying rice with micronutrients is an option to supplement the diet of the poor.

What are the Initiatives related to Fortification?

- **FSSAI Regulations:** In October 2016, FSSAI operationalized the Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2016 for fortifying staples namely Wheat Flour and Rice (with Iron, Vitamin B12 and Folic Acid), Milk and Edible Oil (with Vitamins A and D) and Double Fortified Salt (with Iodine and Iron) to reduce the high burden of micronutrient malnutrition in India.

- **Nutritional Strategy:** India's National Nutritional strategy, 2017, had listed food fortification as one of the interventions to address anemia, vitamin A and iodine deficiencies apart from supplementation and dietary diversification.
- **Milk Fortification Project:** The Milk Fortification Project was launched by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) in collaboration with the World Bank and Tata Trusts, as a pilot project in 2017.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

4th Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Recently, the fourth meeting of the foreign ministers of the QUAD grouping (India, the US, Australia and Japan) was held in Melbourne, Australia. The meeting was held amid escalating tension between Russia and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries over Ukraine, the Afghan crisis and increasing concerns over China's "coercion" in the Indo-Pacific region.

What is QUAD?

- It is the grouping of four democracies – India, Australia, the US, and Japan.
- All four nations find a common ground of being democratic nations and also support the common interest of unhindered maritime trade and security.
- The Quad is billed as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- 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.
- Finally in 2017, India, Australia, the US and Japan, came together and formed this “quadrilateral” coalition.

What were the Discussions on Security and Intelligence?

- Called for justice for the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai (2008) and the Pathankot airbase attack (2016) for the first time since the group was formed.
- QUAD is already cooperating on sharing intelligence on threats in the Indo-Pacific region. Called on all countries to ensure that territory under their control is not used to launch terror attacks and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks.
- They made a veiled reference to China's actions in the South and East China seas, reaffirming a commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, “in which states strive to protect the interests of their people, free from coercion.”

What was their Stand on the Vaccine Initiative?

- Renewed commitment to the “flagship” Quad Vaccine initiative to deliver at least one billion vaccines produced in India by the end of 2022 to Indo-Pacific countries, and to a pledge to donate 1.3 billion vaccine doses globally. The Quad vaccine partnership was announced in March 2021.

What is QUAD's Stand on Myanmar Crisis?

- It remains gravely concerned about the crisis in Myanmar and calls for an end to violence, the release of all those arbitrarily detained, including foreigners, and unhindered humanitarian access.
- It reaffirmed its support for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) efforts to seek a solution in Myanmar and called on the military regime to urgently implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and swiftly return Myanmar to the path of democracy.
- It encouraged the international community to work together to support an end to the violence.

What did the Leaders Say on Emerging Technologies?

- Recorded progress on the other fields for cooperation identified during the QUAD summit in 2021, including climate change, critical and emerging technologies, counter-terrorism, infrastructure, Humanitarian-Assistance and Disaster-Relief (HADR) and maritime domain awareness.
- The QUAD is pursuing work on 5G technology and vendor diversification to maintain a diverse, open and interoperable telecommunication ecosystem through collaboration with like-minded partners.

What was India's Stand in the Meeting?

- India is open to supplying safe and affordable Made in India vaccines, such as COVOVAX and CORBEVAX, under the QUAD vaccine partnership.

- QUAD is building an agenda which seeks to further India's shared vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
 1. India and Australia have pledged to work together for building more trusted and resilient supply chains and ensuring broad and inclusive growth in the strategic Indo-Pacific region. Earlier in 2021, the Trade Ministers of India, Japan and Australia have formally launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI).
 2. As liberal democracies, India and Australia would continue to work towards a rule-based international order, freedom of navigation in international waters, promoting connectivity, growth and security for all while respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states.
- It is keen to work together to further peace and stability and economic prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.
- On Myanmar, India pointed to the challenge of insurgency along the Indo-Myanmar border. It also stressed that it is against "national sanctions". The US has imposed sanctions on a number of leaders of the Myanmar Military.
- It maintained complete diplomatic silence on the Russian threat to invade Ukraine.

2. India and WFP to Supply Wheat to Afghanistan

Recently, India signed an agreement with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) for the distribution of 50,000 MT of wheat that it has committed to sending to Afghanistan as part of a humanitarian assistance.

- Earlier, the Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan was held. The meeting called for "urgent humanitarian assistance" to the Afghan people and urged close cooperation and consultation among the regional countries over the Afghan scenario.
- In 2020, India sent more than 20 tonnes of medicines, other equipment and transported 75,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan to address the Covid-19 challenge.

What is the Wheat Agreement About?

- The wheat will be taken through Pakistan to the Afghan border crossing and handed over to WFP officials in Kandahar beginning February 2022.
- Iran has also offered to facilitate some of the wheat through Chabahar port and then on to Afghanistan's border via Zahedan.

What is the Major Concern in Fulfilling the Agreement?

- The route via Pakistan, which has been closed for all exports from India since 2019, and opened only as an exception, is likely to require several weeks for the transport of the current consignment, as infrastructure and labour required to load and reload the wheat has to be organised.
 1. Pakistan had shut down all trade with India to protest the government's changes in Jammu and Kashmir and Article 370 in August 2019.
 2. Subsequently, the Pakistan government had allowed Afghan exports to India to pass through the Wagah border, making an exception also for medicines from India during the pandemic.
 3. India has also flown several consignments of medicines and medical equipment to hospitals in Afghanistan on board flights.

What is the United Nations World Food Programme?

About:

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the leading humanitarian organisation saving lives and changing lives, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience.
- It was founded in 1961 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) with its headquarters in Rome, Italy.
- It is also a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), a coalition of UN agencies and organisations aimed at fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The WFP assists 88 countries, and has assisted 97 million people (in 2019) which is the largest number since 2012.

- The WFP has been awarded with the Nobel Prize for Peace 2020 for its efforts to combat hunger, bettering conditions for peace in conflict-affected areas and preventing the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict.

Major Objectives:

- To end hunger by protecting access to food.
- Improving nutrition and achieving food security.
- Supporting the SDG implementation and partnering for its results.
- To focus on emergency assistance as well as rehabilitation and development aid.

Major Reports:

- Global Report on Food Crisis.

What is the Relation of WFP with India?

- **Background:** WFP has been working in India since 1963, with work transitioning from food distribution to technical assistance since the country achieved self-sufficiency in cereal production.
- **The areas in which WFP mainly assists in India are:**
 1. **Transforming the targeted public distribution system:** WFP is working to improve the efficiency, accountability and transparency of India’s own subsidised food distribution system, which brings supplies of wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene oil to around 800 million poor people across the country.
 2. **Fortification of government distributed food:** To boost the nutritional value of the Government’s Midday Meal school feeding programme, WFP is pioneering the multi-micronutrient fortification of school meals. The pilot project saw rice fortified with iron, which was distributed in a single district, resulting in a 20% drop in anaemia. It has also helped tackle malnutrition by fortifying food given to babies and young children in Kerala State.
 3. **Mapping and monitoring of food insecurity:** WFP has used Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping softwares to identify India’s most food insecure areas, which allows policy and relief work to be targeted appropriately. WFP is also supporting the government’s Poverty and Human Development Monitoring Agency in establishing a State-level Food Security Analysis Unit, working towards the goal of achieving Zero Hunger.
- **Strategy Plan for India:** According to the country strategy plan for India (2019 – 2023), WFP aims to: Enable the most vulnerable people of India to meet their minimum food and nutrition requirements throughout the year. Enable people with a high risk of malnutrition, especially women, children and adolescent girls, to have improved nutrition by 2025.

PRELIMS FACT

Solomon Islands

Recently, the US says it will open an embassy in the Solomon Islands, laying out in unusually blunt terms a plan to increase its influence in the South Pacific nation before China becomes “strongly embedded.”

What is the Reason behind the Decision?

- Solomon Islanders cherished their history with Americans on the battlefields of World War II (1939-45), but that the US was in danger of losing its preferential ties as China “aggressively seeks to engage” elite politicians and business people in the Solomon Islands.
- The move comes after rioting rocked the nation of 7,00,000 in November, 2021. The riots grew from a peaceful protest and highlighted long-simmering regional rivalries, economic problems and concerns about the country’s increasing links with China.
- The embassy announcement fits with a new Biden administration strategy for the Indo-Pacific and emphasises building partnerships with allies in the region as a way to counter China’s growing influence and ambitions. In the Quad meeting held recently, the US has said that it is committed to a “free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient” Indo-Pacific region.

Where is the Soloman Islands Located?

- Solomon Islands is a nation in Melanesia, east of Papua New Guinea, comprising more than 990 islands. Its capital is Honiara, located on the island of Guadalcanal.
- The Solomon Islands have been inhabited by Melanesian people for at least 30,000 years.

- It consists of a double chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in Melanesia. Melanesia is a subregion of Oceania in the southwestern Pacific Ocean.
- The country comprises most of the Solomons chain—with the exception of Buka and Bougainville, two islands at the northwestern end that form an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea.
- The island is a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch, represented by a governor-general, serving as the formal head of state. Still, the country, a member of the Commonwealth, is independent, and the governor-general is appointed on the advice of the unicameral National Parliament.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Highlighting some of the objectives of Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan (Accessible India Campaign), discuss the steps to move towards universal accessibility. (250 words)

Introduction

Accessible India Campaign (AIC) is the nationwide flagship campaign of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The aim of the Campaign is to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country. 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.

Recently, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) released the new Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India 2021.

Body

Components of AIC

1. Built Environment Accessibility
2. Transportation System Accessibility
3. Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

Objectives of Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan

- Making 50% of all the government buildings of National Capital and all the State capitals fully accessible by December 2018.
- Completing accessibility audit of 50% of government buildings and making them fully accessible in 10 most important cities/towns of States by December 2019.
- Ensuring that 50% of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible railway stations by March 2018.
- Ensuring that 25% of Government owned public transport carriers in the country are converted into fully accessible carriers by March 2018.
- Conducting accessibility audit of 50% of all government (both Central and State Governments) websites and converting them into fully accessible websites by March 2017.

About the new guidelines and Steps to move towards universal accessibility

- Earlier, the guidelines were for creating a barrier-free environment, but now we are focusing on universal accessibility.
 1. Universal Accessibility refers to the degree to which the environment, products, and services are accessible to people with disabilities.
 2. The term barrier-free design used to describe the effort of removing physical barriers from the “built environment” for people with disabilities.
- As per new guidelines, ramps are significant for providing an accessible mobility option. But ramps should adhere to given guidelines. It provides the gradient and length of ramps. For instance, for a length of six metres, it recommends the gradient of 1:12. It recommends to keep minimum clear width of the ramp as 1,200 mm.
- Guidelines have been provided for persons with disabilities (PwD) as well as for those involved in planning projects, starting from construction of government buildings to master-planning cities.
- It covers making public buildings and transport fully accessible for wheelchair users. It has also covered users including parent pushing a child’s pram while carrying groceries or other bags or women wearing saris, who are likely to experience temporary problems.
- It calls to incorporate accessibility symbols for PwD, family-friendly facilities and transgender, among the symbols for other user groups.

Conclusion

Accessibility is the key to inclusion and equal access for people with disabilities is the mantra for Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan. An accessible barrier-free environment is the first step towards fulfilling the right of people with disabilities to participate in all areas of community life and achieving the goal of Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. The Global Competitiveness Report is published by the

- International Monetary Fund
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- World Economic Forum**
- World Bank

Q2. Consider the following statements about Organization of Islamic Cooperation:

- It is the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations.
- It was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- India is not a member of the OIC.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 3 only**
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Q3. Consider the following statements about International Space Station (ISS).

- It is a joint project among five participating space agencies.
- It is a habitable artificial satellite in the low Earth orbit.
- It serves as a microgravity and space environment research laboratory.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3**

Q4. Consider the following statements:

- First time use of Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs) occurred in the general election in Kerala in 1982.
- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is an independent system attached with the EVMs that allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended.
- The election commission has mandated one compulsory verification of slip count with the electronic count for one polling station for every constituency.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3**

Q5. With reference to India's Ranthambore National Park, which of the following statements are correct?

- It is located at the junction of the Aravali and Vindhya hill ranges.
- It is bounded to the north by the Banas River and to the south by the Chambal River.
- It harbours dry deciduous forests and open grassy meadow.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3**