



CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 08/08/2023

1. Committee of Parliament on Official Language in New Delhi.

Context: Union Home Minister chaired the 38th meeting of the Committee of Parliament on Official Language in New Delhi.

Details

Committee of Parliament on Official Language

- The Committee of Parliament on Official Language is a statutory body that **was established in 1976** under the provisions of Article 344(4) of the Constitution of India. It was established under Section 4 of **The Official Languages Act 1963**.
- This section states that the committee shall be constituted when a resolution to that effect is moved in either House of Parliament with the previous sanction of the President and is passed by both Houses.
- The main function of the committee is to **review the progress made in the use of Hindi as the official language of the Union and to suggest measures** for its propagation and development. The committee also examines the grievances and suggestions received from various individuals and organizations regarding the official language policy.
- The committee consists of **30 members, 20 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha**, who are nominated by the Speaker and the Chairman respectively. The term of the committee is co-terminus with that of the House.
- The committee elects its chairman from among its members. The committee has a secretariat headed by a director who assists it in its work.
- The committee has been instrumental in promoting the use of Hindi as the official language of the Union and ensuring its compatibility with other languages of India.
- The committees **submit their reports to the President**. The President is required to lay the report before each House of Parliament and also send it to all State Governments

Functions of the committee



- Monitoring the implementation of the constitutional provisions related to the use of Hindi as the official language.
- Recommending measures to increase the use of Hindi in government functioning.
- Reviewing the progress made in the use of Hindi in various government departments and organizations.
- Addressing the concerns of non-Hindi-speaking states and linguistic minorities.

Notable achievements of the committee

- It recommended the adoption of Devanagari numerals along with international numerals in official documents.
- It suggested the use of common Hindi terminology for scientific and technical terms.
- It advocated the use of Hindi in judicial proceedings, diplomatic correspondence, railway tickets, passports, currency notes, etc.
- It proposed the establishment of a National Translation Mission to facilitate the translation of official documents and literature from English to Hindi and vice versa.
- It urged the Central and State governments to provide incentives and facilities for learning Hindi to their employees and students.

Challenges and limitations in fulfilling its mandate

- It has **no statutory powers to enforce its recommendations** or to penalize the violators of the official language policy.
- It has to balance the interests and aspirations of different linguistic groups and regions while promoting Hindi as the official language.
- It has to deal with the resistance and apathy of some sections of society who perceive Hindi as a threat to their linguistic identity and culture.
- It has to cope with the rapid changes in technology and communication that pose new challenges for the development and dissemination of Hindi.

Way forward for the committee

- Continue the efforts to make Hindi more acceptable and accessible to all sections of society and to foster a sense of linguistic harmony and integration in the country.



- **Strengthen its coordination and collaboration with other bodies** and institutions related to language development and promotion.
- Enhance its outreach and awareness programs to educate and motivate people about the benefits and importance of learning Hindi as the official language.
- **Encourage and support research and innovation** in the Hindi language, literature, and culture.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of its recommendations and suggestions.

1. NIDHI

Context: In the Rajya Sabha, the Union Minister of State Science and Technology stated that the NIDHI program has various components to support innovations, startups and startup incubation ecosystem in the country.

Details

- NIDHI (National Initiative for Development and Harnessing Innovations) is a flagship program of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) that aims **to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.**
- NIDHI was **launched in 2016 as part of the Startup India initiative** of the Prime Minister, with a budget allocation of Rs. 500 crores for implementing various components of the program.
- NIDHI is an umbrella program that covers the entire spectrum of innovation and startup development, from ideation to market. It supports aspiring entrepreneurs, innovators, startups, incubators, mentors, investors and other stakeholders of the innovation ecosystem.

Objectives

- To **inspire innovation and entrepreneurship** among young individuals, by cultivating a culture of creativity, risk-taking, and problem-solving.
- To nurture a pipeline of startups that are ready to scale and sustain, by providing them with access to funding, mentoring, incubation, networking, and other resources.



- To **address complex societal and economic challenges**, by leveraging technology-driven solutions that can create positive impact across various sectors.
- To **elevate India's economic competitiveness**, by boosting its innovation quotient and fostering wealth creation.

NIDHI has eight components that address different stages and aspects of startup creation and growth:

- **NIDHI-PRAYAS**: Promoting and Accelerating Young and Aspiring Innovators and Startups. This component provides grants of up to Rs. 10 lakhs and access to fabrication labs (Fab Labs) for innovators to develop prototypes of their ideas.
- **NIDHI-EIR**: Entrepreneur-in-Residence. This component provides fellowships of up to Rs. 30,000 per month for a period of one year to aspiring entrepreneurs who want to pursue their startup ideas full-time.
- **NIDHI-TBI**: Technology Business Incubator. This component supports the establishment and operation of technology business incubators (TBIs) that provide physical infrastructure, mentoring, networking, training and other services to startups.
- **NIDHI-SSS**: Seed Support System. This component provides seed funding of up to Rs. 1 crore to startups incubated in TBIs for product development, validation, marketing and scaling up.
- **NIDHI-Accelerator**: Accelerator Program. This component supports the design and delivery of accelerator programs that provide intensive mentoring, coaching, exposure and access to potential investors and customers of startups.
- **NIDHI-CoE**: Centre of Excellence. This component supports the creation and strengthening of centres of excellence (CoEs) that act as hubs of innovation and entrepreneurship in various domains and sectors.
- **NIDHI-GCC**: Grand Challenges and Competitions for scouting innovations. This component organizes grand challenges and competitions to identify and reward innovative solutions to social and economic problems.
- **NIDHI-SPICE**: Sustainable Progress through Innovation and Commercialization by Entrepreneurs. This component facilitates the creation and sustenance of a



conducive policy environment for innovation and entrepreneurship at the national, state and local levels.

Significance

- **Inspiring Innovation and Entrepreneurship**: By instilling a culture of innovative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit in the youth, NIDHI lays the foundation for a future where novel ideas and inventive solutions drive progress and growth.
- **Nurturing Startup Ecosystem**: Through its emphasis on nurturing startups, NIDHI paves the way for a robust entrepreneurial landscape, cultivating enterprises that not only fuel economic expansion but also provide avenues for employment and wealth generation.
- **Addressing Complex Challenges**: NIDHI's focus on technology-driven solutions addresses intricate societal and economic challenges, translating into real-world advancements that positively impact sectors critical to the nation's well-being.
- **Elevating Economic Competitiveness**: Acting as a catalyst for India's global competitiveness, NIDHI fortifies the economy by infusing it with the energy of innovation and the drive of entrepreneurship, positioning the nation as a dynamic player on the international stage.
- **Enabling Collaborative Progress**: NIDHI's inclusive approach brings together a diverse array of stakeholders, fostering a collaborative environment where academia, industry, government, investors, mentors, and others collectively contribute to the growth of innovation and its far-reaching effects.

Challenges

- **Awareness and Outreach Deficiency**: The lack of widespread awareness limits NIDHI's potential impact, necessitating strategic efforts to effectively reach and engage potential beneficiaries.
- **Mentorship and Expertise Gaps**: A shortage of experienced mentors, experts, and trainers poses a hurdle to nurturing startups effectively, demanding initiatives to bridge this expertise gap.



- **Coordination and Standardization Challenges:** The absence of standardized processes and cohesive coordination among various components and stakeholders can impede the seamless functioning of NIDHI.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Shortcomings:** Inadequate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation may hinder the measurement of NIDHI's progress and the fine-tuning of its initiatives for optimal results.
- **Market Access and Investor Connectivity:** Startups' struggles to access markets, reach customers, and attract investors call for concerted efforts to facilitate these crucial connections and opportunities.
- **Regulatory and Policy Hurdles:** The absence of a supportive regulatory and policy environment can hinder startups' growth and development, necessitating efforts to create a conducive ecosystem.

Way forward

- **Comprehensive Awareness Campaigns:** Launch targeted awareness campaigns through diverse media platforms to ensure that potential beneficiaries are informed about NIDHI's offerings and benefits.
- **Mentorship and Training Initiatives:** Develop mentorship and training programs to foster a pool of qualified mentors, experts, and trainers, enhancing startup guidance and support.
- **Standardization and Collaboration Framework:** Establish a unified framework that encourages coordination and standardization across NIDHI's components and stakeholders, promoting streamlined operations.
- **Robust Monitoring and Evaluation System:** Create a transparent and rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating NIDHI's activities, enabling data-driven decision-making and continual improvement.
- **Market Access and Investor Partnerships:** Forge strategic partnerships to facilitate startups' access to markets, customers, and investors, thereby accelerating their growth trajectory.
- **Policy Advocacy and Simplification:** Collaborate with policymakers to streamline regulatory processes and create a conducive policy environment, fostering a nurturing ecosystem for startups.

2. VAQUITA



Context

- The International Whaling Commission (IWC) issued an "extinction alert" on August 7, 2023, highlighting the critical plight of the vaquita porpoise.
- **With only 10 individuals remaining in the northern Gulf of California or Sea of Cortez in Mexico, urgent actions are needed to prevent the extinction of this species.**
- The alert emphasizes the need for global recognition, support, and immediate efforts to rescue the vaquita population from the brink of extinction.

Details

The Vaquita: A Precarious Existence

- The vaquita porpoise, unique to the Gulf of California, **has seen its population plummet from around 570 individuals in 1997 to a mere 10 in 2018.**
- Despite its small population size, the IWC believes that extinction is not yet inevitable and aims to rally efforts to save the species.
- The vaquita's **habitat is confined to the northernmost part of the Gulf of California**, placing it in a vulnerable situation.

Challenges and Solutions

- The vaquita's **decline is primarily attributed to bycatch in gillnets, a threat exacerbated by the illegal international trade in totoaba fish, sought for their swimbladders in Chinese cuisine.**



- Though a **clear solution exists – replacing gillnets with safe alternatives in vaquita habitats** – progress has been limited due to challenges in enforcement and the presence of the illegal totoaba trade.
- A ban on gillnets in the core habitat of the vaquita, strictly enforced, could provide a chance for their recovery, emphasizing the significance of effective conservation actions.

Lessons Learned and Immediate Focus

- The situation of the vaquita underscores the importance of early and multi-disciplinary actions that address broader factors contributing to endangerment.
- The immediate focus, however, remains on the single action needed to save the vaquita from extinction.
- The vaquita's resilience and the potential for recovery with determined efforts highlight the importance of global cooperation and support.

About Vaquita

- The vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*) is a critically endangered species of porpoise that is native to the northern Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez, in Mexico.
- It is often **referred to as the "panda of the sea"** due to its striking appearance and the urgent need for conservation efforts to save it from extinction.

Description and Appearance

- The vaquita is **the smallest and most endangered cetacean species**, with adults typically reaching lengths of about 4.6 to 5 feet (1.4 to 1.5 meters) and weighing around 120 pounds (55 kilograms).
- They have a distinctive appearance, characterized by a dark ring around each eye and dark patches on their lips and around their mouth, which create a "smiling" appearance.
- Their body is primarily greyish-blue with lighter patches on the sides and a pale grey or white belly.

Habitat and Range



- The vaquita is found exclusively in the upper Gulf of California, a narrow body of water separating the Baja California Peninsula from the Mexican mainland.
- They prefer shallow, warm waters and are typically found in depths ranging from 20 to 50 meters.

Threats and Conservation Status

- The vaquita's critical endangerment is primarily attributed to bycatch, the accidental capture of marine animals in fishing gear intended for other species.
- The illegal gillnet fishing for totoaba, a large fish whose swim bladders are highly valued in traditional Chinese medicine, is the main driver of vaquita decline. Vaquitas often become entangled in these nets and drown.
- The vaquita population has declined drastically over the past few decades. In 1997, there were an estimated 567 individuals; by 2019, only around 10 individuals were believed to be left in the wild.
- In 2019, the Mexican government launched a conservation plan that included a two-year ban on gillnet fishing in the vaquita's habitat, as well as efforts to promote alternative fishing practices. However, enforcement has proven challenging due to illegal fishing activities and limited resources.

Conservation Efforts

- The conservation efforts for the vaquita involve a combination of measures aimed at curbing illegal fishing, protecting their habitat, and supporting local communities.
- Various conservation organizations, such as the VaquitaCPR (Conservation, Protection, and Recovery) program, have been working on initiatives to protect vaquitas. This includes efforts to locate and safely relocate vaquitas to a temporary sanctuary, away from gillnet fishing areas.
- International cooperation and awareness campaigns have also been initiated to raise awareness about the vaquita's plight and the need for its protection.

Challenges and Future Prospects

- The biggest challenge in vaquita conservation is effectively eliminating illegal gillnet fishing in the Gulf of California, as well as tackling the demand for totoaba swim bladders.



- The vaquita's precarious situation has led to debates about whether or not to initiate captive breeding programs. Some experts argue that the species' small population size and the challenges of captivity make this a risky proposition.

Role in Ecosystem

- Vaquitas are important members of their ecosystem as predators of small fish and squid. Their presence helps maintain the balance of marine food webs.

The International Whaling Commission

- The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is a **global intergovernmental organization dedicated to the conservation of whales and the management of whaling activities.**
- Founded in 1946, its primary mission is to ensure the sustainable utilization of whale resources while protecting these marine mammals from overexploitation.
- The IWC plays a vital role in shaping international policies and regulations concerning whaling and cetacean conservation.

Historical Context

- The IWC was established in response to growing concerns about the decline of whale populations due to commercial whaling practices.
- Recognizing the need for coordinated efforts to conserve these marine species, nations came together to form the IWC through the signing of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW).

Objectives and Functions

The IWC's key objectives include:

- Establishing regulations for whaling activities to prevent overexploitation.
- Promoting research and scientific collaboration to enhance understanding of whale populations and their ecosystems.
- Encouraging conservation measures to protect whale species and their habitats.
- Addressing emerging threats to marine mammals, such as habitat degradation, pollution, and climate change.
- Facilitating cooperation among member nations to ensure the sustainable management of whale resources.

Membership and Structure



- The IWC consists of member countries, both whaling and non-whaling nations, that adhere to the ICRW.
- **As of 2020, the IWC had 88 member countries.**
- The organization operates through annual meetings, where member nations discuss and make decisions on various issues related to whaling, conservation, and management.

Key Initiatives

- **Moratorium on Commercial Whaling:** In 1986, the IWC imposed a moratorium on commercial whaling to allow whale populations to recover from decades of overhunting. However, this decision has been a subject of ongoing debate and disagreement among member nations.
- **Scientific Research:** The IWC encourages and supports scientific research on whale populations, their behavior, and their habitats. Research findings contribute to informed conservation and management decisions.
- **Conservation Measures:** The IWC promotes the implementation of conservation measures to protect whales and their ecosystems. This includes advocating for marine protected areas and addressing threats such as ship strikes, entanglement in fishing gear, and habitat degradation.
- **Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling:** The ICRW recognizes the subsistence needs of indigenous communities and permits limited whaling for cultural and nutritional purposes.

Challenges and Criticisms

- **Resumption of Whaling:** Some member nations advocate for the resumption of limited commercial whaling, arguing that certain whale populations have recovered sufficiently to support sustainable hunting.
- **Scientific vs. Commercial Whaling:** The distinction between scientific whaling and commercial whaling has been a point of contention, with concerns raised about the exploitation of loopholes in the moratorium.

3. JEDDHA'S DIPLOMACY

Context:

- The talks on the Ukraine crisis **concluded in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah.**



Details

- More than 40 countries, including China, India, the U.S, and European countries, but not Russia, took part in the Jeddah talks.
- Participants called for continuing international efforts to build a common ground for peace.
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the wide range of countries represented in the Jeddah talks, including developing countries that have been hit hard by the surge in food prices triggered by the war.
- Ukraine said that this is very important because on issues such as food security, the fate of millions of people in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world directly depends on how fast the world moves to implement the peace formula.

Role of Saudi Arabia – A Possible Mediator

- Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter which works closely with Russia on oil policy, has touted its ties to both sides and positioned itself as a **possible mediator in the war, now nearly a year and a half old.**
- In hosting the summit, Saudi Arabia wants to reinforce its bid to become a Global Middle Power with the ability to mediate conflicts.

Saudi Arabia's Changing International Policy

- Over the past few months, Saudi Arabia has attracted international attention with one diplomatic initiative after another – from its beginning of normalization with Iran, to peace talks with the Yemeni Houthis, to the reintegration of Syria into the Arab League, to efforts to broker a ceasefire in Sudan, to hosting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during the Arab League Summit in Jeddah.
- Under Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS, the **international profile of Saudi Arabia has risen very fast.**
- It is reimagining itself **as a middle power, if not a superpower.**
- Saudi's goal for the next 10-20 years is clear – **to become a major non-Islamic, non-oil base geopolitical power.**
- Saudi is trying to earn that position using three major aspects:



1. **Liberal Islam:** For global acceptability, MBS is looking at liberal Islam. He wants to connect Saudi with the outside world. He doesn't want to be restricted to the Islamic world and wants to come out of the Islamic mindset.
 2. **Qatar Model:** Saudi has observed the Qatar model closely and realized that to become powerful, you have to give a platform to the world. Balancing competing trends needs courage. Saudi is displaying it by holding Iran on the one side, and Syria on the other with America and China. In between, they are also in talks with Russia.
 3. **Renewable Technologies:** Saudi has a huge amount of liquidity owing to the oil money. Taking a cue from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), they are now trying to create a base for newer technologies, especially renewable, the current sentiment and biggest selling point. The aim is to become a vital part of the supply chain, which is difficult for others to dislodge.
- It highlights an evolution in how Saudi Arabia is positioning itself and operating on the regional and international stage.
 - One of the primary objectives of Saudi foreign policy **has always been to counter and contain instability in the Middle East in order to keep threats at bay**, limit risks to the free flow of oil exports from the Gulf and facilitate the Kingdom's domestic economic development.
 - Since the rise to power of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the mid-2010s, this has become even more explicit. Riyadh's number-one priority is the **implementation of Vision 2030**, the hugely ambitious socio-economic reform program that is supposed to transform Saudi Arabia into a modern, globally integrated knowledge economy that is less and less reliant on its hydrocarbon riches. The primary task for Saudi foreign policy is **to support and enable this process, not least by reducing the threats posed to the Vision by instability or conflict in Saudi Arabia's neighborhood.**

Mediator in Russia Ukraine Crisis



- Holding Ukraine talks, is an image-building exercise, **in line with the Qatar model.** The conference is a win-win with no stakes — all Saudi is doing is hosting and taking ownership by issuing a press release. In return, **the country will get publicity, become a stakeholder, get a validity for being a responsible country that intervened in global issues, and will come closer to the US and Europe.**
- These talks are a prime example of the success of Saudi Arabia's multipolar strategy of maintaining strong ties with Ukraine, Russia, and China.
- Moving forward, **Saudi Arabia wants to be in the company of India or Brazil,** because only as a club can these middle powers hope to have an impact on the world stage.