



News Analysis (17 Aug, 2019)

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National Essential Diagnostics List

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has finalised the country's first National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL).

- India has become the **first country in the world to compile such a list** that would provide guidance to the government for deciding the kind of diagnostic tests that different healthcare facilities in villages and remote areas require.
- The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** released the first edition of essential diagnostics list (EDL) in May 2018. Even though WHO's EDL acts as a reference point for development of national EDL, **India's diagnostics list has been customised** and prepared as per landscape of India's health care priorities.
- In India, diagnostics are regulated under the regulatory provisions of the **Medical Device Rules, 2017**.
- Diagnostics (medical devices and in vitro diagnostics) follow a regulatory framework based on the drug regulations under the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and **Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 1945**.

NEDL

- **Level of Healthcare:** NEDL has been developed for all levels of health care – village level, primary, secondary and tertiary care.
 - It builds upon the **Free Diagnostics Service Initiative (FDI)** and other diagnostics initiatives of the Health Ministry to provide an expanded basket of tests at different levels of the public health system.
 - FDI was launched in July 2015. Under this initiative, the **National Health Mission (NHM)** is supporting all states to provide essential diagnostics – laboratory and radiology at their public health facilities, free of cost.
- **Scope:** It includes a group of general laboratory tests for routine patient care and for diagnosis of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

- Inclusion of the diagnostic test on **specific diseases selected on the basis of disease burden**: Vector borne diseases (Malaria, Dengue, Filariasis, Chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis); Leptospirosis, Brucellosis, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, B C and E, HIV, Syphilis.
 - Certain tests have been put as desirable tests and should be included in regions or states with high disease burden of that disease.
 - It also encompasses tests relevant for new programmes such as Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) under the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**.
 - In addition to tests, corresponding **In Vitro Diagnostics (IVD)** products have also been recommended. In vitro diagnostics are tests done on samples such as blood or tissue that have been taken from the human body
- A **guidance document on “Regulatory framework for diagnostics**: National and International” has been included.
- It also recommends **list of human resources** such as ASHA workers, lab technicians pathologists for different levels of health care as per the proposed list of diagnostics.

Importance

- Availability of quality assured diagnostics would be helpful in **optimal utilization of Essential Medicine List (EML)**.
- It will help India in achieving **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.8** i.e. Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- Implementation of NEDL will enable **improved health care delivery** through evidence-based care, improved patient outcomes and **reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure; effective utilization of public health facilities**; effective assessment of disease burden, disease trends, surveillance, and outbreak identification; and address antimicrobial resistance crisis.
- It will also enable standardization of technology/diagnostic services and will aid in the **promotion of R&D for new appropriate and effective diagnostics** which in turn will lead to reduction in costs.

Indian Council of Medical Research

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, is the **apex body** in the country for the formulation, coordination and promotion of **biomedical research**.
- It is one of the oldest medical research bodies in the world.
 - As early as in 1911, the then Government of India set up the Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) with the specific objective of sponsoring and coordinating medical research in the country.
 - After independence, several important changes were made in the organisation and the activities of the IRFA. It was redesignated in 1949 as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) with considerably expanded scope of functions.

- The ICMR is **funded by the Government of India through the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.**

Source: TH

Gold Monetisation Scheme

In a move to revive the flagging Gold Monetisation Scheme, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has made it easier for depositors to hand over their holdings of Gold.

RBI has liberalised the GMS, 2015, allowing depositors to directly deposit their bullion with either banks, refiners or Collection and Purity Testing Centres (CPTCs).

- Earlier, the Banks, CPTCs and Refineries had to sign a tripartite agreement for this.
- **Temples, High Networth Individuals (HNIs)** and entities like fund houses, trusts and even government entities **would now find it easier to deal directly with banks** instead of CPTCs.

Gold Monetisation Scheme

- The scheme was launched in November 2015 along with sovereign gold bonds and India gold coins.
- It **facilitates the depositors of gold to earn interest** on their metal accounts. Once the gold is deposited in metal account, it starts earning interest on the same.
- Under the scheme, a depositor gets **2.25% interest annually** for a short-term deposit of one year to three years. Medium- and long-term deposits get 2.5% interest rate.
- **Objective:** To mobilize the gold held by households and institutions in the country to put this gold into productive use and in the long run to reduce the current account deficit by reducing the country's reliance on imports of gold to meet the domestic demand.
- Along with GMS, a **Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme** (an alternative to purchasing metal gold) and development of Indian Gold Coin, were also announced.
- **Banks may accept the deposit of gold at designated branches**, especially from larger depositors.
- The RBI also further relaxed norms under the scheme by which banks, at their discretion, can, allow the depositors to deposit their gold directly with the refiners.
This suits the temples also, as it is estimated that they may be holding around 4,000 tonnes of gold and are capable of depositing gold in tonnes under the scheme.
- Several depositors had earlier complained that banks are not taking an interest in accepting deposits under the GMS in many cities even from large depositors. Banks

had hardly publicised that they run the GMS.

- The RBI has stated that **banks have to identify branches in all states** and union territories where they can accept deposits.
- All designated banks have now been mandated by the RBI to **give adequate publicity to the scheme through their branches**, websites and other channels.

Background

- The GMS scheme had been able to garner only 16 tonnes of gold as deposits in the last four years. This was largely because of banks' apathy towards it and also due to practical difficulties of banks in dealing with collection-hallmarking centres.
- The current scheme mandates that customers have to first approach the CPTCs which are approved by the **Bureau of Indian Standards**.
- These centres had issued depositors purity certificate on gold deposited, and based on the centres' certificate, a bank was supposed to open a deposit account and credit gold.
- CPTCs sent the gold to a refinery which gave the final purity certificate and converted the yellow metal into bars.

Source: Business Standard

Policy Reforms for Startups

Recently, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has brought a slew of policy reforms to promote **India's startup** environment.

- The move is likely to help start-ups raise funds, while allowing promoters to retain control over their companies.
- It **removed** the earlier **requirement of distributable profits for three years** for a company to be eligible to issue shares with differential voting rights.
- **Indian companies are now allowed to issue more shares with Differential Voting Rights (DVR).**

The revised cap on differential voting rights shares is raised to 74% of the total voting power from the existing 26%.

Differential Voting Rights (DVRs).

- Promoters or founders of a start up, often lose control of the firm when they dilute their stakes to raise multiple rounds of funding. **This issue can be resolved by Differential Voting Rights (DVRs).**
- A DVR share is like but it does not follow the **common rule of one share-one vote**,

- It **enables promoters to retain control over the company** even after many new investors come in, by allowing shares with **superior voting rights** or lower or **fractional voting rights** to public investors.

Significance

- Earlier, due to the requirement of raising capital by issuing equity to foreign investors, Indian promoters have had to cede control of their companies.
Some of which had prospects of **becoming Unicorns** (startups that have a market valuation of at least \$1 billion).
- These two changes are expected to **give a boost to the start-up ecosystem**.
- It will also **strengthen Indian companies**, who have lately been targeted by **deep-pocketed global investors** for acquisition of controlling stakes in order to **gain access to their cutting-edge innovation and Indian market**
For example **Flipkart's take over by Walmart in 2018**

Source:THBL

Forex Reserves

According to the latest **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** data, India's foreign exchange reserves surged by **\$1.620 billion** to \$430.572 billion due to rise in foreign currency assets.

- The total foreign currencies (of different countries) an economy possesses at a point of time is its 'foreign currency assets/reserves'.
- The Forex Reserves ('foreign exchange reserves') of an economy is its '**foreign currency assets**' added with its **gold reserves, SDRs (Special Drawing Rights) and Reserve Tranche in the IMF**.

Note

Reserve tranche

Reserve tranche is a portion of the required quota of currency each member country must provide to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** that can be utilized for its own purposes.

Special Drawing Rights

- The SDR is an **international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969** to supplement its member countries' official reserves
- The **SDR is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF**.
- Initially SDR was defined **as equivalent to 0.888671 grams of fine gold**, which at the

time, was also **equivalent to one U.S. dollar**. After the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the SDR was redefined **as a basket of currencies**.

This basket includes five currencies—the U.S. dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling.

- The **collapse of Bretton Woods system in 1973** and the shift of **major currencies to floating exchange rate regimes** lessened the reliance on the SDR as a global reserve asset.
- Officially, the RBI targets neither a particular exchange rate nor foreign exchange reserves, but maintains forex reserves to reduce volatility in the forex market.
 - Forex reserves **act as an insurance** when the rupee tends to be volatile against the dollar,
 - In the process of **supporting weakening rupee**, RBI needs to buy dollars, ultimately, leading to higher forex buildups..
 - But when RBI purchases dollars, it leads to infusion of rupee into the system which leaves **inflationary effect** on the economy.
- Citing the example of China, **the Economic Survey 2014–15** held that India could target foreign exchange reserves of US\$750 billion to \$1 trillion.
- **China has highest forex reserves in the world i.e., \$3.2 trillion. India is currently the sixth largest holder of forex reserves**

Source: TH

Rules Eased for Development in Buffer Zones

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has relaxed the procedure for environmental clearances of developmental activities in the **buffer zone**.

- Buffer Zone is an area supposed to reinforce conservation of protected area. This move is likely to weaken the protection offered to **wildlife sanctuaries and national parks**.
- As per an office memorandum (OM), the projects outside the boundary of the notified **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)** of a sanctuary or national park **but within 10 km radius of the park** will not need prior clearance from the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)**.
 - The **Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2002 recommends a buffer of 10 km** around sanctuaries.
 - **ESZ** are formed to serve as “shock absorber” for protected areas. The basic aim here is to regulate certain activities around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to minimise negative impact on the fragile ecosystem around.
- Such proposals will now get **environmental clearance from the ministry’s Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC)**, which will ensure “appropriate conservation measures in the form of recommendations”.

- **Projects within the notified ESZ** will require the NBWL's nod, which can be applied for together with the initial "terms of reference" application.
- **Mining** will be prohibited within the notified ESZ or within only one km from the boundary of the park, whichever is higher according to the new OM.
- It **nullifies previous OMs** dated February 27, 2007 and December 2, 2009, which made the NBWL's approval mandatory for projects within a 10 km radius of the park.

National Board for Wildlife

As per the amendment of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** in 2002, a provision was incorporated for the constitution of the **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)**, replacing the Indian Board for Wildlife.

- The National Board for Wildlife has 47 members with the **Prime Minister in the Chair**.
- The Minister in charge of the Ministry of Environment & Forests in the Central Government is the Vice-Chairperson.
- The Board is responsible for promotion of conservation and development of wildlife and forests.

Concerns

- This completely defeats the purpose of recognising 10 km around protected areas as areas that need to be recognised for their conservation value.
- It also reads down the importance of ensuring wildlife related scrutiny at the time of environment clearances.

Issues and loopholes

- In many states, **protected areas do not have an ESZ of 10 km** as specified by the Supreme Court. Some have a **buffer zone of a few hundred metres to one-km radius**, while other states still have **not notified an ESZ**.
- In cases where the ESZ notification is in the draft stage, a nod from NBWL is needed and can be applied for along with environmental clearance.
For example, the Jim Corbett National Park has not notified its ESZ, but its draft notification provides a buffer of 1 km, while Bandipur Tiger Reserve has notified an ESZ of 7.7 km radius. ESZ for other tiger reserves like Nagarhole, Biligiriranga Temple Sanctuary and Ranthambore haven't been notified.
- The SC had directed states and the Centre on several occasions to enforce the ESZ .
The SC in its September 2017 order, in the context of reduction of 10 km ESZ to 100m, had strongly observed that since an order of this nature is capable of destroying national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in the country.
- The real worry, therefore is that ESZs around parks and sanctuaries may not achieve

the envisioned goal of acting as shock absorbers and protection of corridors.

Source: Hindustan Times

Aadi Mahotsav

The Aadi Mahotsav, **a nine-day tribal festival** and the Centre's first official function in Ladakh after the government decided to make it a Union Territory, to start in Leh on the evening of 17th August, 2019.

- This is the **first time that the Aadi Mahotsav is being held in Ladakh** as in earlier times, the Tribal Ministry never got a response from the J&K administration.
- Aadi Mahotsav is a **national tribal festival** and a **joint initiative of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India & Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)**.
 - TRIFED came into existence in **1987**. It is a national-level apex organization functioning under the **administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India**.
 - TRIFED has its registered and **Head Office** located in **New Delhi** and has a network of 13 Regional Offices located at various places in the country.
 - The ultimate objective of TRIFED is **socio-economic development of tribal people** in the country by way of marketing development of the tribal products.
- The festival showcases traditional art and handicrafts and cultural heritage of the country.
- The **theme** of the festival is : **"A celebration of the spirit of Tribal Craft, Culture and Commerce"**. An effort is being made to take tribal commerce to the next level of digital and electronic transactions.
- Mahotsav will identify:
 - Food and Forest Produces, which can be processed, value added and marketed under the **Van Dhan Scheme** of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
 - Artisans and master craftsmen and women of Ladakh for empanelling them as suppliers of **TRIBES India, a brand under the TRIFED**. The products can then be marketed all over the country through the 104 retail outlets run by TRIBES India across the country and 190 countries across the world through Amazon, with whom TRIBES India has an agreement.
- In line with the national aspiration to go cashless, **for the first time the tribal artisans will be accepting payment through major credit/debit cards** for which Point of Sale (POS) machines have been provided in each stall.

Source: IE

Geographical Indication Tag

The government has allotted **Geographical Indication (GI)** tags to four new products from the states of Tamil Nadu, Mizoram and Kerala. These products are:

- **Palani Panchamirtham**, is one of the main religious offerings to Lord Dhandayuthapani Swamy, the presiding deity of Arulmigu Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple, situated in palani hills in Dindigul District of **Tamil Nadu**.
 - It is a combination of five natural substances, namely, bananas, jaggery sugar, cow ghee, honey and cardamom in a definite proportion.
 - This is the **first time a temple 'prasadam' from Tamil Nadu has been bestowed with the GI tag.**
- **Tawlhlohpuan**, a medium to heavy, compactly woven, good quality fabric from **Mizoram** is known for warp yarns, warping, weaving & intricate designs that are made by hand.
- **Mizo Puanchei**, a colourful Mizo shawl/textile, from Mizoram, is considered as the most colourful among the Mizo textiles.

It is an essential possession for every Mizo lady and an important marriage outfit in the state. The weavers insert the designs and motifs by using supplementary yarns while weaving to create this beautiful and alluring textile.
- **Tirur betel vine from Kerala**, which is mainly cultivated in Tirur, Tanur, Tirurangadi, Kuttippuram, Malappuram and Vengara block panchayats of Malappuram District, is valued both for its mild stimulant action and medicinal properties.

Source: HBL
