# The Hindu

## City

**Govt. plans to extend Mission Buniyaad (Page no. 2)**
**(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**
The Delhi government said that under Mission Buniyaad, held between April and June, students of government and Municipal Corporation of Delhi schools have shown 20%-30% improvement in literacy, numeracy skills. The government plans to extend the scheme.
Mission Buniyaad was started over the summer holidays to help bridge learning gaps caused by COVID-induced lockdowns.
The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Delhi, held a joint orientation programme on Mission Buniyaad for 2,700 heads of of government schools under the Directorate of Education (DoE) and the MCD to discuss the achievements and learnings from the previous phase of Mission Buniyaad.
It also focused on drawing a road map to further strengthen the foundational learning skills of students in the DoE and the MCD schools.
The programme of the Delhi government concentrates on building the foundational skills of students in Hindi and English literacy as well as mathematics.
MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti, addressing the orientation programme said, "Let us resolve that 100% of our school children can read before October. This is not impossible.
We just need to engage and ensure that we provide our best to our students. We will run Mission Buniyaad till we achieve 100% results. Learning gap has widened beyond limits during COVID-19 and Mission Buniyaad can help us fill that significantly."
The DoE is also focusing on strengthening primary education significantly because 85% of brain development in children happens till six years of age.
Heads of schools were asked to ensure that Mission Buniyaad was successfully implemented in their schools and follow a targeted approach to ensure strong foundation at the primary education level.

## Editorial

**Tunnel vision that is endangering India's history (Page no. 6)**
**(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**
Close on the heels of the unveiling of a bronze statue of the national emblem atop the new Parliament house building, the Government has tersely announced that a Bill will be introduced in the monsoon session to modify a law dealing with ancient monuments.
According to media reports, the Bill will "provide more teeth to the Archaeological Survey of India". This move will align the Bill with the new bronze statue, which has a more aggressive expression than an ancient Ashokan sculpture from Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh) from which its form is derived.
Progressive militarisation of tangible heritage and state agencies are endangering India's history and dismantling public institutions.
Consider a current law. Section 20 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act of 1958, last amended in 2010, prohibits construction within a 100 metre radius of all Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monuments and regulates activities within another 300 metre radius.
The new Bill proposes to revise this section. Henceforth, expert committees will decide on the extent of the prohibited and regulated areas around each monument and activities permitted herein. The ASI protects around 3,700 archaeological sites and ancient monuments.
Taken together, they mark milestones in India's history: the emergence of well-planned cities, the rise of empires inspired by egalitarian ideals, the development and dispersion of Buddhism along trade routes, the flourishing of temple cultures, the establishment of Sultanate polities, creative and competitive encounters among and between the Mughals and the Rajputs, the ascendancy of the British Raj, and a largely non-violent movement that overthrew colonial rule.
Historically, each monument was integrally connected to the landscape around it. Here are a few examples. Rock-cut sanctuaries from Barabar (Bihar) to Ajanta (Maharashtra) and from Masrur (Himachal Pradesh) to Guntupalli (Andhra Pradesh) were physically connected to outcrops and canyons. Pattadakal's temples (Karnataka) were symbolically linked to the Malaprabha river that flowed past them.

Viramgam's Munsar Talav (Gujarat) was the centrepiece of a landscape consisting of interlocking ponds, sluice gates, decanting wells, irrigation canals, and farmlands. Lucknow's *imambaras* were tied to markets, palaces, processional roads, and gardens.

# OPED

**A new legislation that mirrors the old (Page no. 7)**
**(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**
The Union Health Ministry recently published a new draft Bill to replace the antiquated Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. While we salute the Ministry for recognising the need for a new legislation, there is much to disagree with the new Bill.

To begin with, although the Ministry has described it as being consistent with the government's move to review obsolete pre-Independence legislation, most of it is a copy of the old law.
There is nothing new in this Bill regarding drug regulation. And the Bill does nothing to address burning issues thrown up over the last decade since the Ranbaxy scandal.
The original Act was enacted when the Indian pharmaceutical industry was in its infancy. At the time, the guiding theory of this law was based on testing manufactured drugs purchased by drug inspectors from the open market.
If a drug failed quality testing, the manufacturer could be jailed. This was not the most efficient system of regulation because it depended entirely on luck or fate – only if a drug inspector picked a certain drug on a certain day and it failed testing would the manufacturer face legal action.
Much of the world has shifted to a more rigorous system of regulation centered around the compliance of manufacturing units with good manufacturing practices (GMPs).
In theory, a drug manufactured in compliance with GMPs is subject to so many checks that it is unlikely that it would fail quality tests once shipped to the market.
In 1988, India incorporated a system of GMPs via rules framed by the government rather than Parliament. But even then, the government did not make GMPs the centrepiece of its regulatory strategy. In the U.S., the regulator's focus is in ensuring that manufacturing units comply with GMPs.
American law presumes that any drug that is manufactured in a facility that fails to comply with GMPs is 'adulterated'. Given this focus on GMP compliance, U.S. law mandates the publication of reports of inspections conducted by its drug inspectors.
Indian law, on the other hand, contains no such criminal penalties for pharmaceutical companies failing to comply with GMPs. At the most, licences may be cancelled, but since inspection reports are never published, citizens have no idea if drug inspectors are conducting GMP compliance-related inspections.
There is ample evidence to suggest that such inspections are not carried out. The Bill does nothing to change this system. In fact, it does not mention the phrase GMP even once.

# Explainer

**The outrage over the new 'National Emblem' (Page no. 8)**
**(GS Paper 2, Governance)**
**The story so far:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently gave the nation a first glimpse of the national emblem atop the new Parliament House coming up as part of the Central Vista Project.
The first look at the new 6.5 metre bronze emblem designed by Sunil Deore and Romiel Moses disappointed many with its alleged inaccuracies in depiction.
The Opposition, cutting across party ranks, found the lions on the new 9,500 kg emblem 'angry', with their fangs visible, as opposed to the grace and glory of the original. Others found them a distortion of the actual emblem. The Congress Party has called it a "deviation" from the original.
The new emblem is placed at the top of the Central Foyer of the new Parliament building which the government estimates will be ready in time for the winter session this year.
Four Asiatic lions are part of the national emblem with three lions being visible to the naked eye and the fourth one always hidden from general view. They are taken from the Sarnath Lion Capital of the Mauryan emperor Asoka. The seven feet tall sculpture made of polished sandstone represented courage, power and pride.

Built in 250 BC to commemorate the first sermon of Gautama Buddha, where he is said to have shared the **Four Noble Truths of life,** it was mounted on a base of a frieze of smaller sculptures, including a horse (under fire in the new replica for its tail supposedly resembling that of a dog), a lion, a bull and an elephant moving in a clockwise direction.

The four animals are said to be guardians of the four directions — north, south, east and west. They are separated by a wheel, representing the Dharmachakra of Buddhism, on all four sides. Each chakra or wheel has 24 spokes.

The chakra was later adopted as part of the national flag. This abacus was mounted on an inverted lotus which is a symbol of Buddhism. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang has left a detailed account of Asoka's lion pillar in his writings.

The pillar was part of Asoka's plan to spread Buddha's teachings. After the large-scale massacre in the Battle of Kalinga, Asoka was shaken and embraced Buddhism with its emphasis on ahimsa. He decided to propagate his principles throughout his empire through the Major and Minor Edicts.

# News

**All States agreed to GST changes on food items: Finance Minister (Page no. 11)**

**(GS Paper 3, Economy)**

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 19 clarified the GST Council has exempted from Goods and Service Tax (GST), all food items including wheat, pulses, rice, maize, when sold loose, and not pre-packed or pre-labelled. They will not attract any GST. The decision is of the @GST_Council and no one member.

The Finance Minister explained the process of decision making on the GST rate changes for pre-packed and pre-labelled, unbranded food items in 14 tweets.

Recently, the GST Council in its 47th meeting recommended to reconsider the approach for imposition of GST on specified food items like pulses, cereals, flour, etc. There have been a lot of misconceptions about this that have been spread.

She explained that this is not the first time such food articles are being taxed. States were collecting significant revenue from foodgrain in the pre-GST regime. Punjab alone collected more than ₹2,000 crore on food grain by way of purchase tax. Uttar Pradesh collected ₹700 crore,.

Taking this into account, when GST was rolled out, a GST rate of 5% was made applicable on branded cereals, pulses, flour. Later this was amended to tax only such items which were sold under registered brand or brand on which enforceable right was not foregone by supplier.

"However, soon rampant misuse of this provision was observed by reputed manufacturers & brand owners and gradually GST revenue from these items fell significantly.

Disgruntled over the issue, suppliers and industry associations who were paying taxes on branded goods wrote to the government to impose GST uniformly on all packaged commodities to stop such misuse. The Finance Minister said this rampant evasion in tax was also observed by States.

The Fitment Committee — consisting of officers from Rajasthan, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana and Gujarat — had also examined the issue over several meetings and made its recommendations for changing the modalities to curb misuse.

# Business

**'GST: Punjab, Goa may see most stress' (Page no. 14)**

**(GS Paper 3, Economy)**

With the sunset of the five-year assured compensation for States under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime from this month, Punjab, Goa and Chhattisgarh are likely to face the most revenue stress, as per a new working paper by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).

The paper, titled 'Revenue Assessment of GST in India' by NIPFP associate professor Sacchidananda Mukherjee, notes that revenue collections from the GST regime have fallen short of expectations for both the Centre and the States, but the former made up for this by raising non-shareable taxes and levying cesses on commodities such as petroleum products.

The analysis shows that for majority of States the share of State GST collection [with GST compensation receipts] in Gross State Domestic Product [GSDP] do not show much increase during 2017-21 as compared to the share of revenue that is subsumed into the GST in GSDP during 2015-17.

Comparing revenue trends prior to GST's implementation from July 2017 with those since then, the paper found that the share of GST revenues fell for Madhya Pradesh under the new tax regime, while Punjab recorded the largest increase in the share of revenues, followed by Maharashtra.

The revenue compensation assured to States to join the GST framework has helped them cope up with GST shortfalls.

In absence of revenue compensation, States may face revenue shock and it will impact State finances differently for different States. States where dependence on GST compensation (as measured by the share of GST compensation in SGST collection) as well as the share of SGST in own tax revenue are higher [e.g., Goa, Punjab and Chhattisgarh], they may face relatively higher revenue stress than other States.

The Finance Ministry informed Parliament that a few States have requested the Centre to extend the GST compensation period beyond June, 2022. Over a dozen States raised concerns about the sunset of compensation provisions at the recent GST Council meeting that concluded on June 29 in Chandigarh.

The analysis shows that in the face of shortfall in GST collection, the Union government raised "non-shareable taxes" and "Cesses on commodities" on excisable goods under the Union Excise Duty [UED] which helped to mitigate the revenue shortfall in GST. Three petroleum products [petrol/ gasoline, diesel, aviation turbine fuel], natural gas, crude petroleum and tobacco attract UED in the GST regime.