

AIR Spotlight - Cabinet Decisions: Expanding Health Infrastructure and Focus on Farmers' Welfare

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the Cabinet decisions on expanding the health infrastructure and focus on farmers' welfare.

Participants:

- Shekhar Iyer, Political Analyst.
- Neelabh Srivastava, Journalist.

Context:

The first meeting after the Cabinet reshuffle was held on 8th July 2021 and it was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Introduction:

- The revamped Union Cabinet announced major decisions for the health and agriculture sectors after its first meeting, highlighting the government's priority areas in its bid to curb a possible third wave of Covid-19 infections, and ongoing farmer protests against three central laws. Read more on the three [farm laws](#) in the link.
- In March 2020, when India was facing the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister had announced a central sector scheme under which the central government was directly spending about Rs.15,000 crores for what was called emergency response to create the immediate health infrastructure that was necessary at that time.
- Since February 2021, India is facing the second wave of the pandemic, which has been more severe and spread into rural, urban, and tribal areas. Therefore, in the meeting chaired by the PM, a new scheme was introduced which is called **phase two of the Covid-19 Management Emergency Response**.
- This scheme aims to accelerate the preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of creating hospital beds, creating oxygen supply lines, and other things that are required, such as essential medicine and other health infrastructure.
- At the same time, keeping the health of children in mind, there is a provision for paediatric care.
- The Cabinet approved Rs.23,123 crores for Covid-19 emergency response and the upgrading of grassroots medical infrastructure in preparation for a future surge in infections.
- It also cleared a proposal to extend a flagship Rs. 1 lakh crore fund to agricultural produce marketing committees ([APMC](#)), the backbone of farm trade in the country.

Important takeaways of the meeting:

The important highlights of the meeting in the context of health infrastructure are discussed below:

Health Infrastructure:

- Under the new package, the Centre and states would provide Rs 15,000 crore and Rs 8,123 crore respectively, and the plan would be implemented jointly by them across all the 736 districts to improve medical infrastructure at primary and district health centres.
- Around 2.4 lakh normal medical beds and 20,000 ICU beds would be created of which 20% would be specially earmarked for children.
- The health minister said storage facilities for oxygen and medicines would also be created at the district level under the plan.

Paediatric care:

- States and UTs would be supported to create paediatric units in all 736 districts and to establish a Paediatric Centre of Excellence in each state and UT (either in medical colleges, state government hospitals, or central hospitals such as AIIMS, INIs, etc.) for providing tele-ICU services, mentoring and technical hand-holding to the district paediatric units.
- They would be supported to augment 20,000 ICU beds in the public healthcare system out of which 20% will be paediatric ICU beds.

Central sector and centrally sponsored scheme:

- The Phase-II of the package has central sector (CS) and centrally-sponsored schemes (CSS) components.
- Under the central sector component, support would be provided to central hospitals, All India Institutes of Medical Sciences, and other Institutions of National Importance under DoHFW for repurposing 6,688 beds for COVID-19 management.
- The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) would be strengthened by providing genome sequencing machines, besides sanctioning scientific control rooms, epidemic intelligence services (EIS), and other support.

Hospital Management Information System:

- Support would be provided for the implementation of the Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) in all the district hospitals of the country (presently, it is implemented only in 310 DHs), the statement said.
- All district hospitals would implement HMIS through NIC-developed e-Hospital and CDAC developed E-Sushrut software. This will be the biggest impetus for the implementation of the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) at the DHs.

Tele-consultation:

- Support would also be provided for expanding the national architecture of the eSanjeevani teleconsultation platform to provide up to 5 lakh teleconsultations per day from the present 50,000.
- Support would also be provided for IT interventions, including strengthening the Central War room at DoHFW, strengthening the COVID-19 Portal, the 1075 COVID helplines, and the Co-WIN platform.
- Under the CSS components, efforts are aimed at strengthening district and sub-district capacity for an effective and rapid response to the pandemic.

CHCs, PHCs, and SHCs:

- States and UTs would be helped to provide care closer to the community due to the ingress of COVID-19 in rural, peri-urban and tribal areas, by creating prefabricated structures for adding additional beds at the existing CHCs, PHCs, and SHCs (6-20 bedded units) and support would also be provided to establish bigger field hospitals (50-100 bedded units) depending on the needs at tier-II or tier-III cities and district HQs.
- They would be given help to install 1,050 liquid medical oxygen storage tanks with medical gas pipeline system (MGPS) with an aim to support at least one such unit per district and augment the existing fleet of ambulances.

Farmers' Welfare:

The Union Cabinet chaired by PM Modi gave its approval to the following modifications in the Central Sector Scheme of Financing Facility under '[Agriculture Infrastructure Fund](#)':

Interest Subvention Scheme:

- Eligibility has now been extended to State Agencies/APMCs, National & State Federations of Cooperatives, Federations of Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs), and Federations of Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- At present, interest subvention for a loan up to Rs. 2 crore in one location is eligible under the scheme. In case, one eligible entity puts up projects in different locations, then all such projects will now be eligible for interest subvention for loans up to Rs. 2 crores. However, for a private sector entity, there will be a limit of a maximum of 25 such projects.
- This limitation of 25 projects will not be applicable to state agencies, national and state federations of cooperatives, federations of FPOs, and federations of SHGs. Location will mean the physical boundary of a village or town having a distinct LGD (Local Government Directory) code. Each such project should be in a location having a separate LGD code.

Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs):

- For APMCs, interest subvention for a loan up to Rs. 2 crores will be provided for each project of different infrastructure type, e.g. cold storage, sorting, grading, and assaying units, silos, etc. within the same market yard.
- The power has been delegated to the Minister of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare to make necessary changes with regard to the addition or deletion of the beneficiary in such a manner so that the basic spirit of the scheme is not altered.

Financial Facility:

- The period of the financial facility has been extended from 4 to 6 years up to 2025-26 and the overall period of the scheme has been extended from 10 to 13 up to 2032-33.

APMCs will not be removed:

- Meanwhile, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar assured the farmers, who are protesting against the Centre's three contentious farm laws, that the APMCs will not be done away with.
- In fact, he said that the APMCs will be strengthened with the aid of the funds allocated under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- APMCs continue to provide key market linkages and they are creating an ecosystem for public infrastructure which is available to all farmers. Therefore, strengthening the APMCs provides a direct message to the misguided farmer groups who are protesting against the three farm laws.

Other important decisions:

- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Qatar Financial Centre Authority (QFCA)**.
 - The MoU would enhance cooperation between the Institutes to work together to strengthen the accounting profession and entrepreneurship base in Qatar.
- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare to make the post of Chairman, Coconut Development Board as a Non-Executive one. It will be beneficial to the coconut growers at large.
- The Union Cabinet has also approved the **Memorandum on Cooperation (MoC) between the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and Japan Fair Trade Commission (JFTC)** to promote and strengthen cooperation in the matter of Competition Law and Policy.
 - It will promote and strengthen cooperation in the matter of Competition Law and policy through exchange of information as well as through various capacity building initiatives in the areas of technical cooperation, experience sharing, and enforcement cooperation.

Way Forward:

- The war is on with the pandemic and India has to fight with it and for that everyone needs to take all the necessary precautions and get themselves vaccinated.
- At the same time, we should be expressing our confidence in our own ability and our country's strength to overcome this crisis.
- All the decisions taken by the government are intended to prepare the country for a situation in the near future when the covid pandemic will be over and the people will be able to bear fruits of an economy that is not only recovering but also thriving.

Read more Gist of AIR Spotlight [here](#).