



## The Language Friendship Bridge

**For Prelims:** The Language Friendship Bridge, ICCR, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, shared cultural heritage.

**For Mains:** Challenges and opportunities in implementing The Language Friendship Bridge Project.

### Why in News?

The [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\)](#) has envisaged a project called '**The Language Friendship Bridge**', which aims to expand cultural footprint in neighborhoods with whom India has historical ties.

- The project aims to enable India to translate its epics and classics, as well as contemporary literature, into these languages **so that people in both countries can read them.**

### What is the Project about?

- **About:**
  - The Project will create a pool of experts in languages spoken in countries like **Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Indonesia** to facilitate better **people-to-people exchanges.**
  - It will train five to 10 people in the official languages of each of these countries.
    - As of now, the ICCR has zeroed in on 10 languages: Kazakh, Uzbek, Bhutanese, Ghoti (spoken in Tibet), Burmese, Khmer (spoken in Cambodia), Thai, Sinhalese and Bahasa (spoken in both Indonesia and Malaysia).
  - Though a number of universities and institutes offer courses in these languages, only a handful teach any of the **10 languages on the ICCR list.**
    - Sinhala, for example, is taught at the **Banaras Hindu University and the School of Foreign Languages (SFL)** under the Ministry of Defence.
- **Significance:**
  - The project is significant for India's foreign policy and cultural diplomacy, as it will help **deepen India's cultural and economic relations** with these countries.
  - By training language experts in the official languages of these countries, **India will be able to communicate more effectively and build stronger cultural and economic ties** with its neighbors.
  - It is also particularly important in the **current geopolitical context**, as India is looking to strengthen its relations with its neighboring countries to counter **China's growing influence in the region.**
  - By promoting cultural exchanges, India can build stronger people-to-people relations with these countries, which **can help to counter the negative impact of Chinese economic and strategic initiatives** in the region.

### What is ICCR?

- The ICCR is an autonomous organisation of the Government of India under the Ministry of External

Affairs.

- It promotes **cultural diplomacy through cultural exchange** with other countries.
- It was founded in **1950 by India's first Education Minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.**
- ICCR has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of the **International Day of Yoga** by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since 2015.
- ICCR has instituted several awards, including the **Distinguished Indologist Award**, World Sanskrit Award, Distinguished Alumni Award, and Gisela Bonn Award, which are conferred upon foreign nationals for their contributions in different fields.

## What are the Challenges?

- One of the major challenges is the **lack of infrastructure and trained teachers** in India to teach these languages. The project will require **significant investment in setting up language centers** and training teachers to teach these languages effectively.
- Additionally, the project will require significant **resources to provide scholarships to Indian students to study these languages** in the countries where they are spoken.
- Moreover, the project also faces the challenge of expanding the current list of languages, as there are several neighboring countries where India has significant cultural and economic ties, and **whose languages are not currently included** in the project.

## Way Forward

- While the project faces several challenges, it also **presents an opportunity for India to deepen its cultural and economic ties with its neighbors** and counter China's growing influence in the region.
- Experts believe that the ICCR's list of languages needs to be expanded, as India sees a **boom in cultural and economic ties with other neighboring countries as well.**
- For example, **with the rise of medical tourism, there is a need for a pool of translators and interpreters** to facilitate the visits of people from countries like Turkey, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Maldives.
  - JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) will soon be starting a course in Pashto to address this need.

**Source: TH**

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