



# International Mother Language Day

## Why in News

Every year, the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#) celebrates **21<sup>st</sup> February as International Mother Language Day** to promote mother tongue-based multilingual education.

- The theme of the 2021 celebrations, “Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society,” recognizes that languages and multilingualism can advance inclusion, and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) focus on leaving no one behind.
- The world has over 7,000 languages whereas India alone has about 22 officially recognized languages, 1635 mother tongues, and 234 identifiable mother tongues.

## Key Points

### ▪ About the International Mother Language Day:

- UNESCO declared 21<sup>st</sup> February as International Mother Language Day **in 1999** and World has been celebrating the same since 2000. The day **also commemorates a long struggle by Bangladesh to protect its mother language Bangla.**
- The resolution to mark 21st February as the International Mother Language Day was **suggested by Rafiqul Islam**, a Bangladeshi living in Canada. He proposed the said date to commemorate the **1952 killings in Dhaka during the [Bangla Language Movement](#).**
- The initiative is aimed at preserving and promoting mother languages. The aim is to protect the diverse culture and intellectual heritage of different regions of the world.

### ▪ Related Data:

- According to the United Nations (UN), **every two weeks, a language disappears** and the world loses an entire cultural and intellectual heritage.
  - Due to globalization, the rush for learning foreign languages for better job opportunities is a major reason behind the disappearance of mother languages.
- At least **43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered.**
- Only a few hundred languages have been genuinely given a place in education systems and public domain. Also, 40% of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand.
- **Less than a hundred languages are used in the digital world.**

### ▪ Global Efforts for Protection of Languages:

- The UN has designated the period between **2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.**
  - Earlier, the [United Nations General Assembly](#) had proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL).
- The **Yuelu Proclamation, made by UNESCO at Changsha (China)** in 2018, plays a central role in guiding the efforts of countries and regions around the world to protect

linguistic resources and diversity.

▪ **India's Initiatives:**

- The recently announced **National Education Policy 2020** has given maximum attention to the development of mother tongues.
  - The policy recommends that as far as possible, the medium of instruction shall be, at least till class 5, (preferably up to grade 8 and beyond) mother tongue / vernacular / regional language.
  - Instructions in mother tongue empowers students with the subject and language of their choice. It will help in building a truly multilingual society in India, improve attendance and learning outcomes, and the ability to learn new languages.
- **The Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT)** is providing publication grants towards the publications of University Level Books in regional languages.
  - It was established in 1961 to evolve technical terminology in all Indian Languages.
- The **National Translation Mission (NTM)** is being implemented through the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore under which the text books of various subjects prescribed in Universities and Colleges are being translated in all languages of the Eighth Schedule.
- **“Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages”** scheme for conservation of threatened languages.
- The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** also promotes regional languages in higher education courses in the country and supports nine Central Universities under the scheme “Establishment of Centre for Endangered Languages in Central Universities”.
- Other Initiatives by the Government of India include the **Bharatavani project** and the proposed setting up of a **Bharatiya Bhasha Vishwavidyalaya (BBV)**.
  - Further, the Vice President has highlighted other areas for the use of local languages, i.e. in administration, court proceedings, higher and technical education, etc.
- Recently, an initiative **Namath Basai** by Kerala State Government has proved to be very beneficial in educating children from tribal areas by adopting vernacular languages as medium of instruction.
- Google's Project **Navlekha** uses technology to protect mother language. The project is aimed at increasing the online content in Indian local languages.

**Related Constitutional and Legal Provisions**

- **Article 29 of the Constitution (Protection of interests of minorities)** gives all citizens right to conserve their language and prohibits discrimination on the basis of language.
- **Article 120 (Language to be used in Parliament)** provides for use of Hindi or English for transactions of Parliament but gives the right to members of Parliament to express themselves in their mother tongue.
- **Part XVII of the Indian Constitution deals with the official languages in Articles 343 to 351.**
  - **Article 350A (Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage)** provides that it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
  - **Article 350B (Special Officer for linguistic minorities):** The President should appoint a special officer for linguistic minorities to investigate all matters relating to the constitutional safeguards for linguistic minorities and to report to him. The President should place all such reports before the Parliament and send to the state government concerned.
- **The Eighth Schedule** recognises following 22 languages: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009** says that the medium of instruction shall, as far as

practicable, be in a child's mother tongue.

**Source: PIB**

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