Addressing the Issues faced by Old Age Population

What is the issue?

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- India has a serious problem of growing elderly population.
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- India lacks in policy measures to address the problems of elderly.
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What is the status of elderly population in India?

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- According to the 2011 Census, there are 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India.
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- The proportion of elderly was 8.6% in 2011 and is rising.
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- Also, the average Indian can expect to live at least 18 years beyond the age of 60, which means the dependency ratio is also rising.
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What are the problems faced by the elderly population?

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- The joint family system, which sustained the elderly, is virtually a thing of the past.
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- This leaves a rising number of the elderly even those who were at least middle class in their working years in awful straits.
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- There is no institutional support for the elderly, the cost of both living and Medicare is rising, eroding their savings, and the old-age pension.
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- Due to steadily falling interest rates on bank deposits steadily most middle class elderly actually depend on elderly pension to sustain themselves.
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What are the issues with existing government mechanisms?

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- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme has been paying Rs. 200 a month as old-age pension.
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- A sum which has remained unchanged since 2006, when it was introduced.
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- Due to inflation the value of this has depreciated to under Rs. 100 over the past 11 years, less than a day's notified minimum wage.
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- Union government passed a law in 2007 (the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act) to make maintenance of parents/senior citizens by children/relatives obligatory and justiciable through tribunals.
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- The Act also provides for revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives, penal provision for abandonment, etc.
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- But this Act has miserably failed to serve its purpose.
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- The Ministry of Social Justice, the nodal ministry for the elderly, also has a grand plan called the Integrated Programme for Older Persons, which has been operational since 1992.
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- But this is underfunded and languidly administered, the programme managed to reach just 23,095 beneficiaries in 2015-2016.
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What measures can be taken?

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- A minimum universal monthly pension of Rs. 2,000 for the elderly is quite doable for a $2 trillion economy like India.
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- Housing for the aged, particularly the aged poor, must be a priority and be made a subset of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

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- Assisted living facilities for indigent elderly, particularly those with age-related issues like dementia, needs policy focus.
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- Finance ministry can give more tax breaks, or at least removing tax on deposit interest for seniors.
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Source: The Hindu

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