

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

13 JULY 2024

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Centralised hiring leads to cultural barriers in Eklavya schools

GS Paper I: Society
Abhinav Chakravorty
 NEW DELHI

The recent centralisation of recruitment for tribal residential schools across the country, which introduced Hindi competency as a mandatory requirement, has resulted in a flood of requests for transfers.

The large numbers of staff recruited from the Hindi-speaking States are protesting postings to the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) located in southern States, where the language, food and culture are unfamiliar to them.

Though Central government officials point out that the willingness to be posted anywhere in the country was part of the requirement for those applying for jobs, the bigger worry may be the impact on tribal students being taught by teachers who are

unfamiliar with the local language and culture.

Until last year, staff recruitment for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' flagship Eklavya schools was done by the State authorities.

In the 2023 Budget Session of Parliament, however, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the responsibility was being shifted to the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), which has now been given the task of staffing 38,000 positions in over 400 Eklavya schools across the country.

Staff shortage

Officials said the centralisation of recruitment was meant to address a severe shortage of teachers in the EMRS system, and to standardise recruitment rules across States, which had earlier used varying criteria and applied reservation



Officials said the centralisation of hiring was meant to address a severe shortage of teachers in the EMRS system. FILE PHOTO

quotas as per their State legislation.

The examination for this centralised recruitment process – the 2023 EMRS Staff Selection Examination – was entrusted with the National Testing Agency, now beleaguered by several scandals.

The examination was for the first round of 4,000 vacant teaching and non-teaching positions across the Eklavya schools.

In June, NESTS said that 303 principals and 707 junior secretariat assistants had been selected, along with thousands of other teaching and non-teaching

positions.

However, given the new requirement of Hindi competency, a large number of selected candidates hail from Hindi-speaking States, many of whom now want transfers from their postings.

Transfer policy

NESTS has been forced to post a notification on its website, saying, "At present, no request for change of place of posting is being considered."

Government sources said that NESTS will soon roll out a transfer policy, which is likely to be modelled on similar policy for the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNV) and Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV).

They added that there was "nothing unusual" about the requirement of basic Hindi language competency as this is mandato-

ry for JNV and KV recruitment as well.

Unlike in KVs, however, where students hail from across the country as they are often family members of Central government employees, most tribal students in Eklavya schools would benefit from teachers who understand their local cultural contexts.

"The issue is that for EMRSs especially, teachers and school staff being hired from within their local communities is the obvious way to go ahead. These communities have very specific contexts under which learning can be made conducive and it would naturally help to have teachers who understand that context," said Aparna Choudhary, a social worker who runs the Delhi-based Karta Initiative, which has worked with JNVs and EMRSs.

Centralised hiring leads to cultural barriers in Eklavya schools (12 July)

- **Centralised Recruitment:** Recruitment for tribal residential schools (Eklavya Model Residential Schools, EMRS) has been centralised, introducing a mandatory Hindi competency requirement.
- **Transfer Requests:** Many staff recruited from Hindi-speaking states are requesting transfers due to unfamiliarity with the language, food, and culture in southern states.
- **Impact on Students:** Concerns are raised about the impact on tribal students being taught by teachers unfamiliar with their local language and culture.
- **Previous Recruitment:** Until last year, state authorities handled staff recruitment for EMRS.
- **Shift in Responsibility:** In the 2023 Budget Session, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) would handle recruitment, tasked with staffing 38,000 positions in over 400 schools.
- **Teacher Shortage:** Centralisation aimed to address a severe teacher shortage and standardise recruitment rules, previously varied across states.

- **Recruitment Process:** The 2023 EMRS Staff Selection Examination, conducted by the National Testing Agency, faced several scandals.
- **Current Selections:** In June, NESTS selected 303 principals and 707 junior secretariat assistants, along with thousands of other teaching and non-teaching staff.
- **Hindi Competency Issue:** Many selected candidates from Hindi-speaking states now seek transfers due to the new Hindi competency requirement.

Transfer policy

- **NESTS Notification:** NESTS has posted a notification on its website stating that no requests for change of place of posting are currently being considered.
- **Transfer Policy:** NESTS plans to introduce a transfer policy soon, likely modeled after similar policies in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) and Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs).
- **Hindi Competency Requirement:** Basic Hindi language competency is mandatory for recruitment in Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), similar to requirements in JNVs and KVs.
- **Cultural Context:** Unlike KVs, where students come from diverse backgrounds, EMRS primarily serve tribal communities who benefit from teachers familiar with their local cultural contexts.
- **Local Community Involvement:** There is a strong argument for hiring teachers and school staff from within local communities to create conducive learning environments tailored to specific cultural contexts of EMRS students.

13th July 2024

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

GS Paper I: Society

Question: Evaluate the effectiveness of a centralized recruitment system in addressing the teacher shortage in Eklavya Model Residential Schools. (150 Words/10 Marks)

ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce with the reasons behind the central government's decision to centralize the recruitment process for EMRS.
- Then assess the potential benefits and drawbacks of this centralization for the tribal education system.
- Further propose alternative strategies to address teacher shortages while maintaining cultural and linguistic sensitivity.

ANSWER

How Work for Students

Kaziranga's women forest guards help flood-hit animals by patrolling highway adjoining reserve (13 July)

- Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, known for its one-horned rhinos, faced its highest flood in a decade on July 1, 2023, reaching 87.47 meters.
- The flood caused the deaths of 174 animals, with drowning being the most common cause, followed by vehicle hits.
- National Highway 715, running along the park's southern edge, poses risks to animals during floods, forcing them towards Karbi Anglong hills.
- Speed restrictions of 40 km/h are enforced at nine animal corridors on the highway to protect animals from vehicle accidents.
- Since September 2023, 108 women forest guards and foresters, including members of the Special Rhino Protection Force, patrol to manage floods and regulate traffic.
- Despite flood-related challenges, efforts are ongoing to prevent animal deaths from vehicle collisions, with only 2 hog deer reported killed in the first year of women guards' deployment.

Net tax receipts up 19.5%, corporate tax share at 36.6% (13 July)

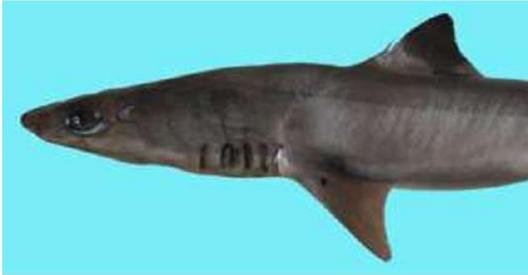
- India's net direct tax collections grew slightly slower, reaching ₹5.74 lakh crore by July 11, 2024, a 19.54% increase compared to the previous year's 21% growth by June 17.
- Personal income tax (PIT) contributed 60.2% of net collections, totaling ₹3.46 lakh crore, showing a 21.4% year-on-year increase.
- Corporate taxes constituted 36.6% of net revenues, amounting to ₹2.1 lakh crore, reflecting a growth of 12.5%.
- Securities Transaction Tax (STT) receipts surged to ₹16,634 crore, a 2.3-fold increase from the previous year, contributing significantly to PIT collections.
- Refunds issued by the Income Tax department totaled ₹70,902 crore by July 11, 2024, marking a 62.5% increase from the previous year.
- Corporate taxpayers received 77.7% of the refunds, amounting to ₹55,076 crore, while personal taxpayers received ₹15,826 crore.
- Gross tax collections prior to refunds amounted to over ₹6.45 lakh crore, growing by 23.2%.

- Corporate tax revenues grew by 20.4%, while PIT and STT revenues collectively grew by 25.3%.
- In the fiscal year 2023-24, net direct tax revenues increased by 17.7% to ₹19.58 lakh crore, with PIT's share rising to 53.3% from 50.06% the previous year.

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GS Paper III: Environment



New species of dogfish shark discovered in Kerala harbour

Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India have discovered a new species of deep-water dogfish shark, *Squalus hima*, from the Sakthikulangara fishing harbour in Kerala. *Squalus* is a genus of dogfish sharks in the family Squalidae, commonly known as spurdogs, and are characterised by smooth dorsal fin spines. The discovery, made by a team of scientists led by scientist Bineesh K. K, was published in the journal *Records of the Zoological Survey of India*. The shark species from the genus *Squalus* and *Centrophorus* are often exploited for their liver oil which is in high demand in pharmaceutical industry, Dr. Bineesh said.



The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)

The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) is a premier organization in India that focuses on the exploration, research, and study of the fauna in the country. Established on July 1, 1916, the ZSI functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. Its headquarters is located in Kolkata, West Bengal.

Key Objectives of ZSI:

1. **Survey and Exploration:** Conducting surveys and studies of various animal groups across different regions in

India.

2. **Research and Documentation:** Documenting the species and disseminating information through research publications.
3. **Conservation:** Assisting in the conservation of endangered species and their habitats.
4. **Identification and Advisory:** Offering identification services for fauna and providing advisory support to other departments, organizations, and researchers.
5. **Collections and Museum:** Maintaining zoological collections and museums with detailed documentation of the Indian fauna.
6. **Training and Capacity Building:** Providing training to personnel in taxonomy and faunal classification.

Divisions

The ZSI comprises several divisions and regional centers spread across the country, such as:

- Entomology Division
- Marine Biology Division
- Freshwater Biology Division
- Mammal and Ornithology Division
- Wildlife Section

Each of these divisions handles specific aspects of zoological research and wildlife conservation.

Publications and Contributions

- ZSI has a rich collection of publications, monographs, and books on various aspects of zoology.
- These include the "Records of the Zoological Survey of India" and "Memoirs of the Zoological Survey of India," among others.

New species of dogfish shark discovered in Kerala harbor (13 July)

- Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India discovered a new species of deep-water dogfish shark named *Squalus hima*.
- The discovery was made at the Sakthikulangara fishing harbor in Kerala.
- *Squalus* is a genus of dogfish sharks known as spurdogs, characterized by smooth dorsal fin spines.
- The finding was led by scientist Bineesh K. K. and published in the journal *Records of the Zoological Survey of India*.
- Sharks from the genera *Squalus* and *Centrophorus* are often exploited for their liver oil, which is highly valued in the pharmaceutical industry.

PatrioticIAS

ED cannot make arrests under PMLA on a whim, says SC

The judgment was based on a petition by Arvind Kejriwal; ED's power to arrest must be based on objective, fair consideration of material, says SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday held that the power to arrest under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) cannot be exercised on the “whims and fancies” of officers of the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

The court wondered if the ED even had a consistent, uniform and “one-rule-for-all” policy on when they should arrest people. It said the ED’s power to arrest must be based on objective and fair consideration of material against a person.

Under the PMLA, ED officers can arrest a person if they have reasons to believe, based on the material in their possession, that the individual is guilty.

A Bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, in a judgment, said the power of arrest given to the ED officers under Section 19 (1) of the PMLA was drastic and ran the risk of violating the right to life and liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.



The Bench said the power of arrest given to ED officers under the PMLA ran the risk of violating the right to life and liberty. REUTERS

The judgment was based on a petition filed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, challenging the validity of his arrest by the ED on money laundering charges. The court granted him interim bail.

Pulling out data on the ED cases from 2023, Justice Khanna, who authored the verdict, said 5,906 Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIRs) were registered as of December 31, 2023. However, search was conducted in 531 ECIRs by issue of 4,954 search warrants. The number of ECIRs against former MPs, MLAs, and MLCs was 176. The number of persons ar-

rested was 513 whereas the number of prosecution complaints filed is 1,142. “The data raises a number of questions...,” he noted.

Highlighting that the PMLA allowed arrests on the subjective opinion of the ED officers, the court said an officer’s “reasons to believe” that a person was guilty and deserved arrest should not be based on mere suspicion.

Justice Khanna agreed with Mr. Kejriwal that an accused should be given in writing the reasons which had led an investigating officer to believe that he was guilty and deserved to be arrested.

ED cannot make arrests under PMLA on a whim, says SC (13 July)

The judgment was based on a petition by Arvind Kejriwal; ED's power to arrest must be based on objective, fair consideration of material, says SC

- The Supreme Court ruled that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) cannot arrest individuals under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) based on arbitrary decisions.
- Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta highlighted concerns over the lack of a consistent policy within the ED regarding arrests under PMLA.
- They emphasized that the power to arrest must be exercised based on objective evaluation of evidence against the accused.
- The court viewed the arrest powers granted under Section 19(1) of PMLA as potentially infringing upon the constitutional right to life and liberty under Article 21.
- The judgment came in response to a petition filed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest by the ED on money laundering charges.
- Justice Khanna cited data from 2023 showing a large number of Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIRs), searches, arrests, and prosecution complaints, raising questions about the ED's practices.
- The court underscored the need for ED officers to provide written reasons for arrest, ensuring transparency and accountability in the process.

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in 2002

- India used FATF recommendations to formulate its own legislation, resulting in the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in 2002.**
- The PMLA primarily targeted the laundering of drug money, reflecting the focus of UN resolutions and FATF recommendations.
- **The Act contained offenses outlined in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.**
- **The PMLA evolved over time through amendments, deviating from its original focus on drug money laundering.**
- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) targets the laundering of "crime proceeds," which includes funds derived from criminal activities.
- Individuals involved directly in the crime, as well as those who participate in the laundering process later on, can be held accountable under this law.
- However, **the PMLA now includes a wide range of offenses in its schedule that go beyond its original purpose, extending to crimes unrelated to drug money laundering.**
- Despite its expanded scope, the fundamental objective of the PMLA remains rooted in addressing the significant threat posed by the laundering of illicit funds from the international drug trade, which has the potential to destabilize the global economy and compromise national sovereignty.

The PMLA's enactment

- The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was enacted by India's Parliament under Article 253, which allows laws to implement international conventions.
- Article 253 restricts such laws to the subject matter of the international decision, as specified in Item 13 of the Union list of the Constitution.
- Originally, the PMLA focused on combating money laundering related to drug trafficking, as per the UN resolution.
- However, amendments to the PMLA expanded its scope, including offenses beyond drug-related crimes, such as those listed in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or covered by special laws.
- For example, the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, aimed at addressing corruption among public servants, was added to the PMLA's schedule in 2009.
- Under the PMLA, accused individuals are presumed guilty until proven innocent, contrary to the fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence.
- Bail provisions in the PMLA make it difficult for accused individuals to obtain bail, as judges can only grant bail if they are convinced of the accused's innocence, leading to prolonged detention without trial.

The Bail Provision

- The bail provision of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Act, Section 45, has significant political implications in present-day India.
- It was initially deemed unconstitutional by a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in *Nikesh Tarachand Shah vs Union of India (2018)* for violating Article 14 and Article 21.
- However, Parliament swiftly reinstated this provision with amendments, which was later upheld by a three-judge Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar in *Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022)*.
- The Supreme Court ruled that this provision is reasonable and aligns with the objectives of the PMLA Act, which aims to combat money laundering and safeguard the economy from destabilization.
- Despite the Act's original purpose, it includes less serious offenses in its schedule, a decision considered within the legislative policy domain.
- The current judicial approach to bail in PMLA cases is seen as technical, with a departure from the perspective laid out by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer in 1978.
- Justice Iyer emphasized the importance of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution and urged a cautious and judicial exercise of curial power concerning bail decisions.
- The evolution of the Supreme Court's stance on bail from Justice Iyer to Justice Khanwilkar reflects a significant journey.

The verdict of 2024, its amplified message

The final turnout in the 2024 general election (66.2%) is a clear indication of the continued interest in, engagement with and participation of the Indian voter in India's democratic processes. This has put to rest the initial and rather hurried speculation about the disenchantment of the Indian voter with Indian elections, going by the initial figures of a lower turnout. **The turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was only 1% lower when compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but this was still the third highest turnout ever in an Indian national election.**

An engagement with the electoral process

Voter turnout is the most robust indicator of voter's electoral participation, and the turnout figures for 2024 only indicate a high level of participation among Indian voters, more so among women voters. There were issues with regard to the schedule and the long duration of the election period. But, finally, **voters braved the heat, set aside other important engagements and participated in the general election with great enthusiasm.**

The enthusiasm shown by Indians for the 2024 election continued even after voting was over. There was keen interest in the exit poll predictions. That there was much debate among Indians on these on the evening of June 1, 2024, is a clear indication of this. The actual results – which were contrary to the exit poll estimates – resulted in continued discussion about the verdict and its fallout. This goes to indicate the intense and continued engagement of Indians with the electoral process. **There is not even the smallest hint of any disenchantment with elections and the electoral process, despite anxieties about the reliability of the electronic voting machines (EVM), increasing defections from one party to another, the declining role of ideology in elections and the quality of representatives getting elected to Parliament, election after election.** A Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) survey indicates **17% of Indians showing no trust in EVMs, while another 43% indicated some trust in it. Nearly 30% of Indians also mentioned decreased trust in EVMs.**



Sanjay Kumar

a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and a political commentator

The composition of the 18th Lok Sabha is a reflection of people's views on the various issues related to governance

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the single largest party but as it fell short of a majority, it formed the government along with its allies. Clearly, larger numbers of people are in support of the ruling BJP, but there is a plurality of opinion among Indians which the new government must take into considerations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi still remains far more popular when compared to any other leader, his popularity rating being 41% when compared to the Congress's Rahul Gandhi at 27%.

Some of the concerns, key issues

But in the Lokniti-CSDS survey, **28% of Indians mentioned that Mr. Modi's image has dented to a great extent. Another 33% mentioned that his image has dented to some extent due to the BJP's induction of leaders from various political parties which has tainted this image.**

Findings of the Lokniti-CSDS survey clearly also indicate an anxiety about the nature of vindictive politics which has risen in the last few years. In the survey, **44% of people mentioned that Opposition leaders have been arrested due to political reasons but only 23% negated this view. In the survey, 67% of Indians also expressed the view that citizens should have the right to ask questions to their elected leaders; 20% did not hold this opinion. It is important to note that 58% of Indians believed that change of government is important for development of the country, while 32% said continuity of the same party in government was better for development.** The importance of courts/the judiciary needs to be taken into account, as in the Lokniti-CSDS survey, **58% of Indians mentioned that courts are important in checking the powers of the government. Only 27% believed this may not be necessary. There was a strongly shared view (66%) that people should have the power to oppose the decisions of the government if necessary, while only 19% were against this view.**

The verdict of 2024 has also indicated that issues of national pride, national identity, and national security are important. **But at the same time, and equally important, are the day-to-day issues of the people such as unemployment and price rise which no political party can afford to ignore for long.** The findings of the Lokniti-CSDS

survey indicate that **unemployment and price rise were the twin issues of disenchantment with the Modi government;** a large number of them also did not want this government to be re-elected. The BJP emerged as the single largest party but suffered a major setback in Uttar Pradesh, the State where the Ram Mandir was built and inaugurated with much pomp and show. This development is an indication of the mistake the BJP made in depending too much dependence on the issue of Hindutva at the cost of the bread and butter issues. **The defeat of the BJP's candidate in the Faizabad constituency (Ayodhya) goes to strengthen this point further.** The verdict of 2024 has indicated that there is a limit to identity politics, whether it is about caste or religion.

More or less an ideal democracy

In a functioning democracy, it is important to have a strong Opposition along with a stable and strong government. The verdict of 2024 resembles the true character of an ideal democracy. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has a majority in the Lok Sabha with 293 seats, with the BJP being the single largest party with 240 seats. **The INDIA bloc/alliance has a strength of 234 MPs in the Lok Sabha with the Congress being the largest Opposition party with 99 seats.**

The numbers in the 18th Lok Sabha are a reflection of people's views on various issues related to governance. In theory there could not be a better government than this in a functioning democracy, though we know there lies a difference between theory and practice, glimpses of which were seen in the tussle between the ruling coalition and the Opposition on the issue of election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha. There are many other issues which are likely to be a bone of contention between the ruling party and the Opposition. This writer only wishes that the views expressed by the people of India are taken seriously and both the ruling party and the Opposition work in tandem for the next five years, trying and resolving issues rather than complicating them.

The views expressed are personal

The verdict of 2024, its amplified message (13 July)

- The final turnout in the 2024 general election was 66.2%, showing continued voter engagement.
- This turnout dispelled initial concerns about voter disenchantment based on early lower figures.
- The 2024 turnout was only 1% lower than 2019 and was the third highest in India's national election history.
- High voter participation, especially among women, indicated strong electoral engagement.

- Despite the long election period and heat, voters participated enthusiastically.
- Interest continued after voting, with keen attention to exit poll predictions and discussions on results.
- Despite concerns about EVM reliability and political defections, there was no sign of voter disinterest.
- A Lokniti-CSDS survey showed varying levels of trust in EVMs: 17% had no trust, 43% had some trust, and 30% had decreased trust.
- The BJP emerged as the largest party but needed allies to form the government.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi remained the most popular leader with a 41% rating, compared to Rahul Gandhi's 27%.

Some of the concerns, key issues

- 28% of Indians believe Modi's image has been greatly damaged, and 33% believe it has been somewhat damaged due to BJP's induction of leaders from other parties.
- 44% think Opposition leaders have been arrested for political reasons, while 23% disagree.
- 67% believe citizens should have the right to question their leaders; 20% do not.
- 58% think government change is important for development; 32% prefer continuity.
- 58% say courts are important in checking government power; 27% disagree.
- 66% support the right to oppose government decisions; 19% do not.
- National pride and security are important, but unemployment and price rise are critical issues.
- Unemployment and price rise caused disenchantment with the Modi government.
- BJP faced a setback in Uttar Pradesh, indicating limits to identity politics.
- The 2024 verdict reflects an ideal democracy with a strong Opposition and stable government.
- NDA has 293 seats in the Lok Sabha; BJP is the largest party with 240 seats.
- The INDIA bloc has 234 MPs; Congress is the largest Opposition party with 99 seats.
- The numbers reflect public views on governance, though there may be contention between ruling and opposition parties.
- It is hoped that both sides work together to resolve issues over the next five years.

The PDS impact on household expenditure

GS Paper III: PDS System

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is an important social security programme in India. Its objective is to ensure food security. Today, up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are eligible for subsidised foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. If the cost of consuming foodgrains from the PDS is subsidised, this then frees up resources for a household to spend on other items such as vegetables, milk, pulses, egg, fish, meat and other nutrient and protein-rich food items. It is an empirical question whether households indeed diversify their food consumption. With the release of data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES):2022-23, there will be renewed interest in the above line of inquiry, i.e., the impact of consumption of free food items from the PDS on expenditure on items other than foodgrains.

On representativeness

To the extent possible, the HCES:2022-23 canvassed information on food and non-food items received by households free of cost through various social welfare programmes. In the HCES:2022-23 report published by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and available on the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation website, there is detailed information on pages 15 to 18. The objective of the survey is not to provide precise estimates of the proportion of households receiving benefits under every scheme. In most cases, survey estimates of coverage of a programme will be lower than that suggested by the administrative data. A common conjecture in the literature on the PDS is inclusion error (when an ineligible household consumes from the PDS) and exclusion error (when an eligible household is not consuming foodgrains from the PDS). For this purpose, researchers will compare the proportion of households consuming PDS items with the coverage under the NFSA. While care should be exercised in terms of interpreting the estimates, one advantage of the survey data is that it allows us to examine the characteristics of households that report benefits from the programmes.



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The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey Data offers the scope to analyse the impact of social transfers

Unless detailed information is sought on the nature of an ailment or disease in the case of health shocks, and waiver of fees or reimbursement in school or college, imputing the value of free medical services and education services received by the households is not possible. In the case of education and health, the NSSO conducts separate surveys where detailed information is canvassed on out-of-pocket expenditure and free services that are availed by a household. One might ask why one cannot use data on information paid by households to impute the value of medical services. Insurance products are treated as an investment and not consumption. The relevant information is sought as part of the All India Debt & Investment Survey, and not as part of the HCES.

In order to provide guidance to analysts and researchers, the NSSO, for the first time, decided to impute the value figures of selected food and non-food items which were received free. This allows us to compute two metrics. The first is the Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) of a household, which is the ratio of monthly consumption expenditure to household size. The second metric is the value of household consumption in a month considering the imputed value of free food and non-food items, i.e., 'MPCE with imputation'. Both metrics are published by the NSSO in its report.

Imputation of values

The NSSO has suggested two sets of values for each State and by sector (rural, urban) for imputation of food and non-food items received free of cost – modal unit price and the 25th percentile unit price. Consumption expenditure refers to out-of-pocket expenditure while value of consumption would include free and subsidised items consumed by households. In the report published by the NSSO, imputation has been done using the modal price only for items received free. The operative word is free and not subsidised. Thus, no imputation is done for the purchase of food items from the PDS at nominal regulated prices.

The main item that a large proportion of households received free was foodgrains from the PDS. Not surprisingly, at the all-India level, we

find that in rural and urban India, about 94% and 95%, respectively, of the value of imputed items is attributable to food items. When we consider all the households, i.e., even those who did not receive any free items, the imputed value for food is ₹82 and ₹59 in rural and urban areas, respectively.

The report published by the NSSO has the average value of MPCE among those in the bottom 5% of distribution by the MPCE, 5-10, 10-20, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 70-80, 80-90, 90-95 and top 5% of distribution. Each interval is called a fractile class. The average MPCE of those in the bottom 5% of MPCE distribution is ₹1,373 in rural and ₹2,001 in urban. This means that the MPCE of 5% of Indians is less than this cut off. When we focus on the imputed value of consumption of those in the bottom end of the rural distribution, we find that 20% of those in this fractile class, or about 1% of India's rural population is actually in the next fractile class, i.e., 5%-10%. In absolute terms this is about 86 lakh individuals in rural India. Similar patterns are observed till the sixth fractile class. In urban areas too, we see upward movement. There are different patterns observed across the major States. Needless to say, depending on their use case, researchers can impute the modal value for calculations for purchases from the PDS at the subsidised rate. This will increase the average MPCE with imputation. In short, there is evidence that even a limited imputation exercise establishes that in-kind social transfers help increase the value of consumption of poorer households.

Implications for poverty

Ever since the release of the report, there have been calls for a larger discussion on where the poverty line should be drawn. Among the issues that need to be considered is whether one needs to estimate the number of poor households based on the expenditure or based on the total value of consumption which includes the value of free items consumed. Needless to say, in-kind social transfers have implications for the well-being of households that are at the bottom end of consumption or income distribution.

The views expressed are personal

The PDS impact on household expenditure (13 July)

- The Public Distribution System (PDS) aims to ensure food security in India, targeting 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.
- Subsidised foodgrains from PDS can free up household resources for other nutrient-rich food items.
- The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES): 2022-23 will provide data to study the impact of PDS on expenditure on non-foodgrain items.
- HCES:2022-23 collects data on food and non-food items received for free through social welfare programmes.

- Survey estimates of programme coverage are often lower than administrative data due to inclusion and exclusion errors.
- Survey data can help examine the characteristics of households benefiting from these programmes.
- Detailed information on health and education expenses is collected separately by the NSSO.
- NSSO has imputed the value of selected free items to compute Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and 'MPCE with imputation'.
- Both metrics are published in the NSSO report for analysts and researchers.

Imputation of values

- NSSO has suggested two sets of values for imputation of free items: modal unit price and 25th percentile unit price.
- Imputation is done for free items, not subsidised ones; no imputation for PDS purchases at nominal prices.
- Foodgrains from PDS are the main free items; 94% in rural and 95% in urban areas' imputed value is from food items.
- Average imputed value for food: ₹82 in rural and ₹59 in urban areas.
- MPCE among the bottom 5%: ₹1,373 in rural and ₹2,001 in urban areas.
- 20% of the bottom 5% in rural areas move to the next higher fractile class with imputation.
- Upward movement observed in urban areas too; patterns vary across states.
- Researchers can use the modal value for PDS purchases to increase average MPCE with imputation.
- In-kind social transfers increase the value of consumption for poorer households.
- Discussion needed on whether to base poverty estimates on expenditure or total consumption value including free items.
- In-kind social transfers impact the well-being of households at the bottom of the consumption or income distribution.

A wobbly walk (13 July)

India did well to assert its ties with Russia, but the optics were bad

- Prime Minister Modi's visit to Moscow was his first stand-alone visit during this tenure, focused on bilateral relations.
- The visit had strong bilateral components but drew global criticism from Kyiv and Washington.
- It was the first visit to Russia since 2019 and the first annual summit in three years.

- Outcomes included reaffirmation of India-Russia ties and Modi's personal rapport with Putin.
- Modi received Russia's highest civilian award and praised Putin's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties.
- Leaders focused on improving economic and trade relations, announcing a trade target of \$100 billion by 2030.
- Modi secured an assurance that Indian recruits in the Russian Army can return to India.
- No new military purchase announcements were made due to delays in supplies and to avoid international censure.
- Modi emphasized that there was "no solution on the battlefield" for the Ukraine conflict and balanced the trip by traveling to Vienna.
- Modi's visit to Moscow was challenging due to global polarization and coincided with a missile attack on Ukraine.
- NATO and Western leaders, along with Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, were in Washington for a summit aimed at isolating Russia.
- The NATO stance was criticized for hypocrisy, as they ignored similar concerns over Gaza due to Israel's actions.
- The U.S. State Department and Ukraine were openly critical of Modi's visit.
- New Delhi needs to manage potential damage to ties with the U.S. and Europe.
- In the long term, India must assert its interests and convince the West that forcing India to choose sides is futile given its independent stance.

Crash course (13 July)

There must be better monitoring of the road-worthiness of transport vehicles

- On July 10, in Uttar Pradesh, a double-decker bus collided with a milk tanker, killing 18 people.
- Reports indicated the bus lacked renewed insurance and an alarm system to alert the driver if the bus drifted from its lane.
- If confirmed by the State government's inquiry, these issues highlight the importance of road safety's multidimensional nature, including road design, roadside businesses, speed control, and visibility.
- Municipal authorities and local bodies are often reluctant to scrutinize public and private infrastructure until after accidents occur.
- In 2022, 1.71 lakh people died and 4.23 lakh were injured in 4.46 lakh road accidents, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.
- A 2023 IIT Delhi report estimated 11.3 road-accident deaths per lakh population in 2021, indicating a public health crisis.
- Speed control is crucial, as it is implicated in most deadly road accidents.

- After the bus accident, police reported that passengers were flung out of the bus.
 - Public officials know how to control speed with measures like speed-breakers, roundabouts, and increased police monitoring.
 - The bus's condition likely violated portions of the Automotive Industry Standards.
 - Local authorities must enforce existing standards, have skilled personnel and proper equipment, and impose harsher penalties on transport service operators who fail to meet safety requirements.
 - Municipal bodies must not dilute standards to facilitate local businesses.
 - The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways needs to collect and publish better data on vehicle registrations, safety certificates, testing centres, criteria, reports, and audits, and improve data quality on injuries and deaths.
 - Greater public awareness is needed on how the health of transport vehicles is assessed and access to each vehicle's latest test report.
 - This may be challenging due to complacent attitudes towards quality control and unscrupulous operators' ability to escape sanction, but it is necessary for improved road safety.
- Taoism has been connected to the philosopher Lao Tzu, who around 500 B.C.E. wrote the main book of Taoism, the Tao Te Ching.
 - Taoism holds that humans and animals should live in balance with the Tao, or the universe.
 - Taoists believe in spiritual immortality, where the spirit of the body joins the universe after death.

Freedom and control in Xinjiang

The north-western province in China is home to more than 50 'ethnic minorities', most of whom are Uyghur Muslim. For several years, the Chinese Communist Party has been accused of persecuting the community and attempting to erase their culture. **Radhika Santhanam** reports on the overarching emphasis on assimilation and nationalism in Xinjiang, a rapidly developing province which is crucial to the country's Belt and Road Initiative

Nine musicians dressed in bright outfits assemble on stage at the centre of an accordion museum in Yining city in Xinjiang province, China. It is June 17, the day of Eid-ul-Adha, and everyone is in celebratory mood. Thousands of tourists and locals have gathered on Liuxing street despite the heat to enjoy street food, watch graceful performances, and drink chilled fresh juice and beer.

In the museum crammed with instruments, each musician holds an accordion. Before bursting into song, they introduce themselves, not by name but by ethnicity – Uyghur, Kazhak, Mongolian, Uzbek, and so on. Then, in chorus, they shout cheerfully in English, “We are all part of the Chinese nation.”

The proclamation of national unity and the carefully curated diversity on stage, particularly on the occasion of Eid, is significant. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in north-western China, is home to 56 ethnic groups, including the Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongol, Manchu, Uzbek, Xibe, and Russian, who are all termed “ethnic minorities” by the state. The vast province is home to followers of many religions such as Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

For years, China has faced accusations from human rights groups of committing crimes against humanity of mostly Muslim ethnic groups in the region. According to several reports, including by the United Nations Human Rights Office, and Human Rights Watch, the Chinese were detaining Uyghurs, who form the majority of the ethnic minorities, in “detention centres” and subjecting them to abuse.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has rubbished these claims. It has repeatedly argued that these are not “detention centres” but “education and vocational training centres”. A booklet issued by the State Council Information Office says these centres were established with the “goal of educating and rehabilitating people guilty of minor crimes or law-breaking, and eradicating the influence of terrorism and extremism.” In 2019, however, the Chairman of the Xinjiang regional government announced that these centres would be gradually wound down “if society no longer needed them.”

Various studies have also claimed that the population of the Han Chinese, the country's dominant ethnic group, has grown in the region, while the Uyghur population has declined ever since the People's Republic of China took over the province in 1949.

However, official data show that the Uyghur population, which was 3.6 million in the first national population census of 1953, grew to 11.6 million (222%) in the seventh census of 2020. The increase has been attributed in part to the fact that Uyghurs and other minorities, along with the rural population, were exempt from China's decades-old one-child policy.

The ‘Sinicisation’ of religion

At the Shaanxi mosque, an important heritage site in Yining, the Imam, Ma Jirong, says all these accusations are “greatly exaggerated”. He points towards the mosque, where 1,300 Muslims had



Chinese people belong to the People's Republic of China, so religion should adapt to socialism in China.

ABUD RAKEV TUMUNYAZ
Imam, Xinjiang Islamic Institute at Kuqa

assembled to pray that morning. “Since you are here, you can see for yourself,” he says. “Foreign countries have a hatred towards China. It is like a tumour in their body.”

The centuries-old mosque behind him, painted in red and dark blue, is built in the “traditional palace style of Chinese architecture,” according to the guide. The structure is made of wood and brick and showcases the characteristically Chinese upturned eaves. The dome and minarets, commonly found in several mosques around the world, are missing. The call to prayer can be heard only within the premises. The ceiling is painted with flowers and plants, and journalists from West Asia wonder loudly about the absence of Arabic script on the inside walls.

Ma shrugs off these observations. “It is a Chinese mosque,” he says. “Mongolian, Uyghur, and many other ethnic communities participated in its construction. It shows that Xinjiang is an inseparable part of Chinese territory.”

This adaptation of religion to Chinese characteristics, and specifically to Chinese socialism, is what Abud Rakev Tumunyaz, the Imam at the Xinjiang Islamic Institute at Kuqa, 280 kilometres away, refers to as “Sinicisation”.

“Religion has no national boundaries, but believers have a motherland. Chinese people belong to the People's Republic of China, so religion should adapt to socialism in China,” Tumunyaz, 62, contends.

Ma believes there is no contradiction between Chinese socialism and Islam. “Both prioritise the happiness of the people,” he says.

The mosque at Kuqa has a dome and minarets. Inside the Islamic Institute's sprawling library, which houses about 30,000 books, the Imam flips through the copies of the Koran laid neatly on a table. The bound books look new and the pages crackle when flipped. There are copies in Uyghur, Arabic, and Chinese. Newspapers in Mongolian, Uyghur, and other languages are stacked in a rack in the reading area.

However, just like the rest of the country, Xinjiang promotes standard Chinese in public edu-



An assembly workshop of the Guangzhou Automobile Group Co Ltd, Xinjiang. The province is crucial to China's Belt and Road Initiative. RADHIKA SANTHANAM

Freedom and control in Xinjiang (13 July)

The north-western province in China is home to more than 50 'ethnic minorities', most of whom are Uyghur Muslim. For several years, the Chinese Communist Party has been accused of persecuting the community and attempting to erase their culture. Radhika Santhanam reports on the overarching emphasis on assimilation and nationalism in Xinjiang, a rapidly developing province which is crucial to the country's Belt and Road Initiative

- Nine musicians dressed in bright outfits perform at an accordion museum in Yining city, Xinjiang, China, on Eid-UI-Adha, June 17.
- Thousands of tourists and locals enjoy street food, performances, and drinks despite the heat.
- Musicians introduce themselves by ethnicity (Uyghur, Kazhak, Mongolian, Uzbek, etc.) and proclaim, "We are all part of the Chinese nation."
- Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is home to 56 ethnic groups and followers of various religions including Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, and Christianity.
- China faces accusations of committing crimes against humanity against mostly Muslim ethnic groups in the region, particularly Uyghurs.
- Reports claim Uyghurs are detained and abused in "detention centres," but China denies this, calling them "education and vocational training centres."
- In 2019, Xinjiang's regional government announced plans to gradually close these centres if they are no longer needed.
- Studies claim Han Chinese population in Xinjiang has grown while Uyghur population declined since 1949.

Official data shows Uyghur population grew from 3.6 million in 1953 to 11.6 million in 2020, partly due to exemptions from China's one-child policy.

The 'Sinicisation' of religion

- Imam Ma Jirong of the Shaanxi mosque in Yining dismisses accusations against China as exaggerated.
- The mosque, built in traditional Chinese architectural style, lacks domes and minarets, and the call to prayer is only heard within the premises.
- The mosque's construction involved multiple ethnic communities, symbolizing Xinjiang's integration with China.
- Imam Abud Rakev Tumunyaz of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute emphasizes the "Sinicisation" of religion, adapting it to Chinese socialism.
- Tumunyaz argues there is no contradiction between Chinese socialism and Islam, as both prioritize people's happiness.
- The Kuqa mosque has traditional Islamic features, and the Islamic Institute's library houses Korans in Uyghur, Arabic, and Chinese.

- Standard Chinese is promoted in public education in Xinjiang, with lessons not taught in Uyghur or other local languages.
- A government booklet claims ethnic minorities are enthusiastic about learning Chinese and that ethnic languages are used in various public domains.
- The Chabuchar Daily newspaper in the Xibo language is published twice a week for the 30,000 Xibo speakers, showcasing government support for ethnic cultures and languages.

Deradicalisation programme

- Ma and Tumunyaz stress the importance of laws and regulations for practicing Islam in China.
- Government designates areas for prayers and religious activities.
- Students at the Kuqa Islamic Institute learn the Koran, Chinese culture and history, and laws and regulations about religion.
- Xinjiang has a history of terror attacks, with the government blaming the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.
- China combats extremism, terrorism, and separatism through "education and vocational training centres."
- The curriculum in these centres includes learning Chinese, studying the law, and acquiring vocational skills.
- Uyghurs have spoken against these centres, and some ethnic minorities have fled China.
- Three Uyghurs who fled to India in 2013 have been in jail since, facing India's Public Safety Act.
- China tightens internet control to combat international influence and terrorism.
- Security in Xinjiang has improved, but some areas still have high security.
- Tumunyaz emphasizes that religion is not extremism but states that overt religiosity is discouraged.
- Tumunyaz, president of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute and vice chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association, handles Islam-related inquiries.

Thrust on development

- The message of national unity is emphasized due to Xinjiang's strategic location, bordering several countries.
- Xinjiang is crucial for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), linking Asia, West Asia, and Europe.
- Historically poor, Xinjiang has seen significant development with improved infrastructure and various industries.
- Xinjiang's GDP grew from \$167.2 billion in 2017 to \$278.4 billion in 2022.
- Tourism is a major revenue source, with attractions highlighting Uyghur culture and heritage.

- The concept of "museum-style multiculturalism" is noted by Professor James Leibold, while China claims it's protecting ethnic minority culture.
- Emphasis on ethnic group involvement in BRI-related projects, e.g., 20% ethnic staff at the Automobile Guangzhou Car Motor Company.
- The Xinjiang Software Park, part of the Digital Silk Road, supports economic development and societal stability.
- Surveillance is used to maintain stability, monitoring traffic, livestock, and movement, attributed to past terrorism influences.

PatrioticIAS

Running on vegetable protein

Foynuts are in demand as a 'super snack', with its prices soaring in domestic and international markets since 2019. In Bihar's Mithila region, which produces most of the country's crop, **A.M. Jigeesh** finds that farmers receive very little of the money earned from this health food pie, despite the intensive labour involved

Sravan Kumar Roy went from Bihar's Darbhanga to Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur to study food technology. Despite their seeming differences, the two places are tied together by water – Darbhanga has wetlands and numerous rivers and ponds; **Thanjavur is on the banks of the Cauvery. Both are known for rich cultivation, a lot of it being rice.**

At the National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management, where Roy did a B'Tech between 2009 and 2013, he was nicknamed 'Makhana Man'. "I introduced my teachers and batchmates to this 'wonder food'. Except for the four north Indian students on my campus, no one had heard about makhana. Everyone else only spoke about the cashew trees on campus," he recalls. **Foynuts were then eaten only in north India during Hindu fasts, along with sabudana (sago) and kuttu ka atta (buckwheat flour).**

Today, Roy owns a business that retails from Darbhanga and online, producing 22 items from makhana, from the traditional kheer to the innovative dosa and idli powder, to cater to customers down south, and even a 100% makhana cookie for the urban health food market.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) estimates that Bihar produces 10,000 tonnes of makhana per annum, about 90% of the country's total. **India contributes to 80% of the world's demand.** The prickly water lily, from which the seed is harvested, is spread across more than 15,000 hectares in Bihar, and traditionally grows wild.

About five lakh families, mostly from the Mallah community, are involved in its processing. Nine districts in the Mithila region now grow it for production: Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Saharsa, Supaul, Araria, Kishanganj, and Sitamarhi.

Makhana, sold in the international wholesale market at about ₹8,000 per kg, up from ₹1,000 about 10 years ago, is in high demand as a source of vegetarian protein in a world burdened by 'meat guilt' from animal cruelty and methane-related temperature rises. **Indian wholesale markets sold makhana at ₹250 per kg a decade ago, with prices now at ₹1,400.** However, rates are cyclical, with price increases during festivals, when demand goes up.

Mukhiya, the master of makhana

The people who harvest the seeds though – traditionally boatmen and fisherfolk – say the government offers them little support, and they now want a minimum support price (MSP) to ensure that the crop is sustainable for cultivation.

The Bihar government runs the Makhana Development Scheme that gives a 75% subsidy on the Suvarna Vaidehi variety of seeds, calculated at ₹97,000 per hectare.

Also, makhana is a product approved under the Union government's One District One Product scheme, under which subsidies are provided



Workers who don't approach the plant carefully get wounded. It needs training to transplant and harvest, especially in big ponds. We have been doing this from childhood

VINOD MUKHIYA
Makhana Farmer

ed to food processors for branding, marketing, and developing infrastructure.

Vinod Mukhiya, 42, is a landless farmer belonging to the Mallah community. He cultivates makhana across the five acres he has leased and partners with landowning farmers in about 20 acres. He also works as a farmhand, something he has done for the last 25 years.

When raised for cultivation, sowing is done in December and January, transplantation in February and March, and harvest between July and October. The wild variety too is harvested at the same time. "The seeds fall into water. We collect them from the bottom of ponds, grade them, and dry them in the shade. Women in our homes roast the seed and break the shell off. They take out the lava (the white food commonly seen) and sell it. Now, makhana has a market," he says.

Tall and lean, Mukhiya does not find it hard to handle the *Euryale ferox*, the lily's scientific term, named after the Greek goddess, Euryale, born of a sea goddess and god, with hair of snakes, protruding teeth, and tongue hanging out. The plant, with dark pink flowers, has thorns all over. Only trained workers like Mukhiya are able to approach it. Workers use countrymade boats to navigate the large leaves.

'Makhane ke patte se mooh pochke aao (Go wipe your face with makhana leaves)' is an old saying of the Mithila region used on someone to check their ego or loose talk. "Workers who don't approach the plant carefully get wounded. It needs training to transplant and harvest, especially in big ponds. We have been doing this from childhood," Mukhiya adds.

The Mallahs of Mithila are considered the original inhabitants of this region. Kamala, a Mallah woman, sells makhana at the Darbhanga market. She pops it at home and brings it here. "I have been doing this since childhood," she says. Women play an important role in increasing the earnings of a family. Farmers sell unprocessed, ungraded makhana seeds at ₹50-₹200 per kg. The moment the shell is removed, the price climbs to ₹400-₹800. For first-grade makhana lava, farmers can demand up to ₹1,100-₹1,250.

"We do not get enough support from the government," Mukhiya says, adding that cooperative societies, formed to help Mallahs cultivate



Deft hands: A worker separates makhana into different grades at a unit; (top left) FT-MBA MakhanaWala founder Sravan Kumar Roy. A.M. JIGEESH

Running on vegetable protein (13 July)

Foxnuts are in demand as a 'super snack', with its prices soaring in domestic and international markets since 2019. In Bihar's Mithila region, which produces most of the country's crop, A.M. Jigeesh finds that farmers receive very little of the money earned from this health food pie, despite the intensive labour involved

- Sravan Kumar Roy, from Darbhanga, studied food technology in Thanjavur, linking two regions known for rice cultivation.
- At the National Institute of Food Technology, Roy introduced makhana to his teachers and batchmates.
- Roy now owns a business producing various makhana products, catering to different markets.
- Bihar produces 10,000 tonnes of makhana annually, about 90% of India's total, and India supplies 80% of the world's demand.
- Makhana is harvested from the prickly water lily, growing wild across 15,000 hectares in Bihar.
- Around five lakh families, mainly from the Mallah community, are involved in makhana processing in nine districts of the Mithila region.
- Makhana prices have risen significantly in the past decade due to high demand as a vegetarian protein source.
- Harvesters, traditionally boatmen and fisherfolk, seek government support and a minimum support price (MSP) for sustainability.
- The Bihar government offers a 75% subsidy on makhana seeds under the Makhana Development Scheme.
- Makhana is part of the Union government's One District One Product scheme, providing subsidies for branding, marketing, and infrastructure.
- Vinod Mukhiya, a landless farmer, cultivates makhana on leased land and partners with other farmers, advocating for proper cultivation training.
- Makhana cultivation involves careful harvesting due to the thorny nature of the Euryale ferox plant.
- Mukhiya highlights the challenges and traditional expertise required for makhana harvesting in the Mithila region.
- The Mallahs of Mithila are the original inhabitants of the region, with women like Kamala selling makhana at local markets.
- Kamala pops makhana at home and sells it; women significantly contribute to family earnings.
- Unprocessed makhana seeds sell for ₹50-₹200 per kg, while processed seeds can fetch ₹400-₹1,250.

- Mukhiya, a Mallah farmer, expresses frustration over insufficient government support and ineffective cooperative societies.
- Mallah rights to harvest are often undermined by landowners controlling the process.
- Many Mallahs seek work in Assam and Bengal for popping, due to a decline in local cultivation.
- Roy, who studied food technology, created a makhana popping machine that gained attention online.
- He founded FT-MBA Makhanaawala, named after his grandmother, with a focus on promoting makhana as a health food.
- Roy invested ₹20 lakh in his startup, which retails makhana for up to ₹2,000 per kg.
- He aims to challenge the perception in Bihar that success only comes from government jobs, preferring entrepreneurship instead.
- Bhushan, Roy's business partner, returned to Bihar to create jobs, motivated by the state's heavy migration.
- During COVID, makhana gained popularity for its nutritional value, mentioned by PM Modi.
- Roy and Bhushan's business sources nearly double the makhana from farmers compared to previous years.
- Makhana has international markets including China, Pakistan, the US, Europe, UAE, and Southeast Asia.
- Their unit employs mostly women, focusing on training both traditional makhana workers and newcomers.
- Kanchan Devi, not from the Mallah community, learned to pop makhana and seeks further training in food processing.
- Roy worries about large corporations entering the market purely for profit.
- Their business processes 20-30 tonnes of makhana monthly and helps some farmers lease ponds for cultivation.
- Value addition to makhana often occurs in urban centers; they aim to ensure value-added products come from their region.
- B.R. Jana, a scientist at ICAR-National Research Centre for Makhana, highlights its protein content and health benefits.
- Scientists are working on cultivating makhana in managed ponds for better hygiene and higher protein content.
- Vidya Nath Jha, a retired botany professor, has extensively researched makhana and published significant literature on it.
- Makhana has cultural significance in Mithila, used in rituals and yagnas.
- Kojagra, a marital ritual, involves gifting makhana, highlighting its importance in Mithila traditions.
- Makhana and fish breeding are interdependent in the pond ecosystem.
- ICAR's efforts helped fisherfolk recognize makhana as a crop.

- The GI tag for makhana was changed from Bihar Makhana to Mithila Makhana after protests.

Big food firms and weather changes

- There has been a gradual decline in rainfall in the region.
- Makhana, which needs five feet of water, is now cultivated in shallower water (one or two feet).
- Women are involved in makhana cultivation due to the ease of handling in shallow water.
- Paras Kumar Singh, a farmer, leases 20 acres of wasteland for ₹8,000 per acre per year.
- The input cost per acre is about ₹40,000.
- In 2021, Singh produced 800 kg per acre; in 2022, production decreased due to lower prices.
- In 2023, production was low due to drought, but prices rose from ₹16,000 to ₹22,000 per quintal.
- Few farmers engage in popping due to lack of resources for stocking or trading.
- Traders bear logistics costs, making it difficult for small farmers to pop seeds.
- Singh struggles to find workers for popping as most women work on their own family's crop.
- Small farmers face challenges without a popping machine.
- Small-scale traders fear competition from big food companies.
- Tarachand Amolak Chand Jain, a wholesaler, believes an MSP is necessary for the sustainability of the business.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Question 1: Consider the following statements about Dogfish Sharks:

1. Dogfish sharks are apex predators in most marine ecosystems.
2. They are an important food source for larger marine animals.
3. Some species of dogfish sharks are considered threatened due to overfishing.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) None of the above

Question 2: Dogfish sharks are important to the marine ecosystem because:

- (a) They play a major role in controlling phytoplankton populations.
- (b) They are a significant source of food for humans.
- (c) They help maintain balance in the marine food web.
- (d) They are responsible for cleaning up marine debris.

Question 3: Some species of dogfish sharks are used for:

- (a) Production of leather goods
- (b) Source of vitamin supplements
- (c) Medicinal purposes
- (d) All of the above

Question 4: Consider the following statements about the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India:

1. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) strengthened the legal basis for the PDS.
2. The PDS is entirely funded by the Central Government.
3. Fair Price Shops are the primary outlets for distributing food grains under the PDS.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) All of the above

Question 5: Which of the following is a major challenge faced by the Public Distribution System (PDS) in ensuring equitable distribution of food grains?

- (a) Inadequate storage facilities for food grains
- (b) Lack of awareness among beneficiaries about their entitlements
- (c) Inefficient targeting of beneficiaries
- (d) All of the above

Question 6: The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was introduced to:

- (a) Increase the coverage of the PDS
- (b) Improve the targeting of beneficiaries under the PDS
- (c) Reduce the cost of food grains for consumers
- (d) Enhance the procurement process of food grains

Question 7: Consider the following statements about the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES):

1. The HCES is conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
2. The primary objective of the HCES is to estimate the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.
3. The HCES collects data on both rural and urban households.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) All of the above

Question 8: One of the challenges faced in conducting the HCES is:

- (a) Accurate estimation of informal sector consumption.
- (b) Lack of trained personnel for data collection.
- (c) Resistance from households to share consumption data.
- (d) All of the above.

<p>Question 1: Consider the following statements about Dogfish Sharks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dogfish sharks are apex predators in most marine ecosystems. 2. They are an important food source for larger marine animals. 3. Some species of dogfish sharks are considered threatened due to overfishing. <p>Which of the statements given above is/are correct?</p> <p>(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) None of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <p>Statement 1 is incorrect. Dogfish sharks are typically mesopredators, not apex predators. They are preyed upon by larger sharks and marine mammals.</p> <p>Statement 2 is correct. They form a crucial part of the marine food chain, serving as prey for larger fish, marine mammals, and birds.</p> <p>Statement 3 is correct. Overfishing has led to population declines in some dogfish shark species, raising concerns about their conservation status.</p>
<p>Question 2: Dogfish sharks are important to the marine ecosystem because:</p> <p>(a) They play a major role in controlling phytoplankton populations.</p> <p>(b) They are a significant source of food for humans.</p> <p>(c) They help maintain balance in the marine food web.</p> <p>(d) They are responsible for cleaning up marine debris.</p>	<p>Answer: (c) They help maintain balance in the marine food web.</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <p>Dogfish sharks are crucial as both predators and prey, helping to regulate populations of other species and maintain ecosystem stability.</p> <p>Incorrect Options:</p> <p>(a) Phytoplankton are controlled primarily by zooplankton and other microscopic organisms.</p> <p>(b) While dogfish sharks are consumed in some cultures, they are not a significant food source globally.</p> <p>(d) Marine debris is cleaned up by various organisms, including bacteria and some marine invertebrates.</p>
<p>Question 3: Some species of dogfish sharks are used for:</p> <p>(a) Production of leather goods</p> <p>(b) Source of vitamin supplements</p> <p>(c) Medicinal purposes</p> <p>(d) All of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (d) All of the above</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <p>Dogfish sharks have multiple uses: Their skin can be processed for leather. Liver oil is rich in vitamin A and D. Some shark cartilage products are used in traditional medicine, though their efficacy is debated.</p> <p>Incorrect Options:</p>

	<p>While each option alone is correct, the question asks for the overall uses of dogfish sharks.</p>
<p>Question 4: Consider the following statements about the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) strengthened the legal basis for the PDS. 2. The PDS is entirely funded by the Central Government. 3. Fair Price Shops are the primary outlets for distributing food grains under the PDS. <p>Which of the statements given above is/are correct?</p> <p>(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) All of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 1 is correct. The NFSA provided a legal framework for the PDS, ensuring its continuity and expansion. • Statement 2 is incorrect. While the Central Government plays a major role, state governments also contribute to the PDS. • Statement 3 is correct. Fair Price Shops (FPS) are the retail outlets where beneficiaries can purchase subsidized food grains.
<p>Question 5: Which of the following is a major challenge faced by the Public Distribution System (PDS) in ensuring equitable distribution of food grains?</p> <p>(a) Inadequate storage facilities for food grains (b) Lack of awareness among beneficiaries about their entitlements (c) Inefficient targeting of beneficiaries (d) All of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (d) All of the above</p> <p>Explanation: All the mentioned options are significant challenges affecting the equitable distribution of food grains through the PDS.</p>
<p>Question 6: The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) was introduced to:</p> <p>(a) Increase the coverage of the PDS (b) Improve the targeting of beneficiaries under the PDS (c) Reduce the cost of food grains for consumers (d) Enhance the procurement process of food grains</p>	<p>Answer: (b) Improve the targeting of beneficiaries under the PDS</p> <p>Explanation: TPDS aimed to focus the benefits of the PDS on the poorest households by introducing a more stringent targeting mechanism.</p> <p>Incorrect Options: While TPDS might have indirectly led to increased coverage, its primary objective was better targeting. The focus was on beneficiary identification, not reducing costs. Procurement is a separate aspect of the PDS.</p>

Question 7: Consider the following statements about the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES):

1. The HCES is conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
2. The primary objective of the HCES is to estimate the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country.
3. The HCES collects data on both rural and urban households.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) All of the above

Question 8: One of the challenges faced in conducting the HCES is:

- (a) Accurate estimation of informal sector consumption.
- (b) Lack of trained personnel for data collection.
- (c) Resistance from households to share consumption data.
- (d) All of the above.

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. The NSO conducts the HCES.

Statement 2 is incorrect. While HCES data is used in GDP estimation, it's not the primary objective. Its primary aim is to understand consumption patterns.

Statement 3 is correct. The HCES covers both rural and urban households.

Answer: (d) All of the above.

Explanation:

All mentioned options are challenges faced in conducting the HCES.

Please confirm if you meant HCES or if there's another term you intended to use.