

Current Affairs - 14 October 2024

THE PROBLEM WITH THE RIGHT TO FREE FOOD

- **World Food Day is observed annually on October 16** by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and this day serves as a **reminder of the global commitment to achieving food and nutritional security.**
- **Despite significant strides in agriculture over the years**, such as increased food production through advanced farming methods and improved incentives for farmers, **achieving true food security remains a global challenge.**
- **The theme for this year's World Food Day, Right to Foods for a Better Life and a Better Future, underscores the ongoing need for a balanced approach** to ensuring access to food, especially in the context of evolving socio-economic dynamics.

The Policy Perspective of India's National Food Security Act (NFSA)

- **Enacted in 2013, NFSA aimed to provide subsidised food grains** to approximately two-thirds of the Indian population, making it one of the most ambitious social welfare programs.
- **The primary focus was to ensure that the most vulnerable sections of society had access to basic food staples** such as rice, wheat, and coarse grains, which would be made available at highly subsidised rates of Rs 3/kg, Rs 2/kg, and Rs 1/kg respectively.
- **The NFSA sought to legally guarantee food security, moving from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based approach**, ensuring that access to food became a legal right for eligible citizens.

Concerns and Criticism of NFSA

- **Economic Sustainability**
 - The implementation of the NFSA raised several questions and concerns regarding its economic sustainability and its long-term impact on India's fiscal health.

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- The NFSA's subsidised pricing structure, while well-intentioned, required a substantial increase in the food subsidy bill, which became a considerable burden on the Union budget.
- **Criticism Regarding Policy's Expansive Scope**
 - At the time of NFSA's enactment, India's poverty ratio was estimated by the Planning Commission to be about 21%.
 - However, this estimate was contested by NGOs and subsequently revised upwards to 29% by the Rangarajan Committee, which led to questions about the targeting efficiency of the NFSA.
- **Challenges Due to Inefficiencies within PDS**
 - The PDS, though instrumental in delivering food to millions, has historically been plagued by issues of corruption, under-reporting, and distribution inefficiencies.
 - Studies revealed that a substantial portion of the subsidised food did not reach the intended beneficiaries, being siphoned off or misappropriated along the supply chain.
- **Debate About the Role of State in Providing Social Welfare**
 - Critics argued that while the Act aimed to fulfil a humanitarian goal, it risked creating a dependency on subsidised food, which could undermine the incentive for beneficiaries to achieve economic self-reliance.

Conclusion

- While policies like the NFSA represent significant efforts towards achieving this goal, a more targeted and efficient approach is needed to ensure that resources reach those who need them the most.
 - As the global community renews its commitment to eliminating hunger, a balanced approach combining subsidies, technological advancement, and strategic investment can pave the way for a future where food and nutritional security is accessible to all.
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KEY FACTS ABOUT EARTHWORMS



Tens of thousands of species of earthworms are likely to be wriggling in the world's soil, yet to be discovered by scientists – which will probably take more than 100 years to do.

Earthworms are **terrestrial worms** of the class **Oligochaeta** (phylum **Annelida**)—in particular, members of the genus **Lumbricus**.

- Earthworms are **harmless**, often **beneficial residents of the soil**.
- Earthworms occur in virtually all soils of the world in which the moisture and organic content are sufficient to sustain them.
- **Features:**
 - The earthworm body is divided into **ringlike segments**. Some internal organs, including the excretory organs, are duplicated in each segment.
 - They **don't have lungs**; they **breathe through their skin**.
 - They also **lack eyes**, so instead **use receptors in their skin to sense light and touch**.
 - Earthworms have five “hearts” that pump blood through their bodies.
 - Their food consists of decaying plants and other organisms; as they eat, however, earthworms also ingest large amounts of soil, sand, and tiny pebbles.
 - Earthworms are **hermaphrodites**, meaning **an individual worm has both male and female reproductive organs**.
- **Benefits:**
 - Earthworms break down dead and decaying organic matter into rich humus soil, thereby supporting plant growth.
 - Earthworms release waste from their bodies called castings. Castings contain many nutrients that the plant can use.
 - They also dig tiny channels and make holes that aerate the soil and improve drainage.

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WHAT IS SERIOUS FRAUD INVESTIGATION OFFICE (SFIO)?



Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) is a corporate fraud investigating agency set up by the Government of India.

- The SFIO was established on 21st July, 2015. Section 211 of the **Companies Act, 2013, accorded a statutory status** to the SFIO.
- SFIO is a multi-disciplinary organization under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**, consisting of experts in the fields of accountancy, forensic auditing, law, information technology, investigation, company law, capital markets and taxation **for detecting and prosecuting or recommending for the prosecution of white-collar crimes/frauds.**
- SFIO takes up for **investigation cases characterized by:**
 - Complexity and having interdepartmental and multidisciplinary ramifications.
 - Substantial involvement of public interest to be judged by size, either in terms of monetary.
 - The possibility of investigation leading to or contributing towards a clear improvement in systems, laws, or procedures.
 - Investigate serious cases of fraud received from the Department of Company Affairs.
 - Investigation into the affairs of a company is assigned to SFIO, where the Government is of the opinion that it is necessary to investigate into the affairs of a company-
 - on receipt of a **report of the Registrar or inspector** under section 208 of the Companies Act, 2013
 - on **intimation of a special resolution passed by a company** that its affairs are required to be investigated
 - In the **public interest**; or on request from any department of the Central Government or a State Government

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- The SFIO can also take up cases on its own only when decided by the Director of the SFIO, and also giving the reasons for taking up the case in writing.
 - Upon assignment of a case to the SFIO, no other investigative agency can proceed with an investigation for any offence under the Act.
 - SFIO is headed by a Director as Head of Department in the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.
 - The Director is assisted by Additional Directors, Joint Directors, Deputy Directors, Senior Assistant Directors, Assistant Directors, Prosecutors, and other secretarial staff.
 - The headquarters of SFIO is in New Delhi with its regional offices in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata.
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WHAT IS X-BAND RADAR?



An X-band radar is a radar that emits radiation in the X-band of the electromagnetic spectrum: 8-12 GHz, corresponding to wavelengths of around 2-4 cm.

- The smaller wavelengths allow the radar to produce images of higher resolution.
- However, the greater the frequency of some radiation, the faster it will be attenuated.
- **Applications**
 - The new radar is expected to be able to monitor the movements of particles, such as soil, to inform landslide warnings.
 - The device will also perform high temporal sampling, that is, rapidly sample its environs, allowing it to spot particle movements happening in shorter spans of time.
 - These radars are typically used for studies about cloud development and light precipitation due to their ability to detect tiny water particles and snow.

What is Radar?

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- Radar is short for ‘**radio detection and ranging**’.
 - The **device uses radio waves** to determine the distance, velocity and physical characteristics of objects around the device.
 - A transmitter emits a signal aimed at an object whose characteristics are to be ascertained (in meteorology, this could be a cloud). A part of the emitted signal is echoed by the object back to the device, where a receiver tracks and analyses it.
 - Weather radar, also **known as Doppler radar**, is a common application of this device. The Doppler effect is the change in the frequency of sound waves as their source moves towards and away from a listener.
 - In meteorology, Doppler radars can reveal **how fast a cloud is moving** and in which direction based on how the cloud’s relative motion changes the frequency of the radiation striking it.
 - A **pulse-Doppler radar** can measure the intensity of, say, rainfall by emitting radiation in pulses and tracking how often they’re reflected to the receiver.
 - This way, modern Doppler radars can monitor weather conditions and anticipate new wind patterns, the formation of storms, etc.
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RUPEE FALLS BELOW 84 PER US DOLLAR MARK

- When it is reported that the rupee has fallen to a low of 80 dollars, it basically means that one needs Rs 80 to buy a single dollar.
 - This is important when buying not just American goods but also other goods and services (say crude oil).
- In a free-market economy, the exchange rate is decided by the supply and demand for rupees and dollars.
- If, in India, demand for dollars is more in comparison to the demand for rupee, the exchange rate will fall or weaken for rupee and rise or strengthen for dollar.

Reasons for falling rupee

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- **Rising Crude Oil Prices:** Increased oil prices have raised concerns about India's trade deficit and inflation.
 - The West Asia crisis has a bearing on the oil prices.
- **FII Outflows:** Foreign investors are moving funds to China, following China's stimulus measures.
 - Foreign investors have been following a strategy of 'Sell India, Buy China' after the Chinese authorities announced monetary and fiscal measures to stimulate the slowing economy.
- **Increased Demand for the US Dollar:** Foreign banks are demanding more US dollars, further pressuring the rupee.
- **Weak Domestic Markets:** Local stock market performance also contributed to the rupee's decline.
- **Impact**
 - It could increase cost of imports, raise overseas education costs, make foreign loans costly for companies and has the potential to stoke inflation, which is already ruling at 7%.

Positive impact

- One positive impact could be that remittances from overseas could become attractive.
 - A fall in the rupee can also benefit India's exporters - unless they import raw materials, which would become more expensive.
 - **Steps that could be taken to prevent the slide**
 - Sell large amounts of dollars to support rupee (by increasing the supply of dollar)
 - Raising interest rates to make Indian investment attractive
 - Removing reserve restrictions on dollar deposits with banks
 - Allowing traders to make settlements in rupee to reduce dollar dependence.
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WHAT ARE DRAGON DRONES?



- Dragon drones essentially release a **substance called thermite** — a mixture of **aluminium and iron oxide** — developed a century ago to weld railroad tracks.

- **Working**

- When ignited (usually with the help of an electrical fuse), thermite triggers a self-sustaining reaction that is quite difficult to extinguish.
 - It **can burn through almost anything**, from clothes to trees to military-grade vehicles, and can even burn underwater.
 - On humans, it causes severe, possibly fatal, burns and bone damage.
 - Combining thermite with high-precision drones that can bypass traditional defences makes dragon drones ‘highly effective’ and ‘dangerous’
- In recent times these dragon drones are believed to have been first deployed in the Russia-Ukraine war around September.

International regulation

- The **use of thermite in war is not prohibited under international law**.
 - However, the use of such incendiary weapons against civilian targets is barred under the **Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons** — Cold War-era guidance issued under the auspices of the United Nations.
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NAGARJUNSAGAR-SRISAILAM TIGER RESERVE (NSTR)



- **Location:** It is located in the Nallamala hill ranges (an offshoot of the Eastern Ghats) of **Andhra Pradesh**.

- This is the **largest tiger reserve in the country**, spreading over an area of 5937 sq. km.



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- It hosts the **largest tiger population** in the **Eastern Ghat**
- It is **named after two major dams** in the area, **Nagarjuna Sagar Dam** and **Srisailem Dam**.
- Two wildlife sanctuaries, namely **Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary** and **Gundla Brahmeswaram Wildlife Sanctuary (GBM)**, constitute the **NSTR**.
- The **river Krishna** traverses through this reserve for a linear distance of around 270 kilometers.

Topography: It consists of plateau, ridges, gorges, and deep valleys.

Vegetation: **Tropical dry deciduous forests** have an undergrowth of bamboo and grass.

Flora: The habitat has several endemics like *Andrographis nallamalayana*, *Eriolaena lushingtonii*, *Crotalaria madurensis* Var, *Dicliptera beddomei*, and *Premna hamiltonii*.

Fauna:

- Top faunal species include **Tiger, Leopard, Wolf**, Wild Dog and Jackal.
 - The prey species are represented by **Sambar, Chital, Chowsingha**, Chinkara, Mouse Deer, Wild boar, and Porcupine.
 - The river Krishna has **Muggers**, Otters and Turtles.
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