

Current Affairs - 25 October 2024

A CASE FOR FOOD SUBSIDIES: AN INVESTMENT, NOT A WASTE

- **India's agricultural sector is at a crucial crossroads**, with challenges ranging from increasing crop productivity to ensuring long-term food security amidst climate change.
- Some renowned agronomists argue that the country needs to invest more in **agricultural research and development (R&D)** rather than spending on food subsidies.
- Their proposition to redirect funds from food subsidies to R&D, while rooted in **logical trade-offs**, requires a deeper examination, particularly regarding the value and purpose of food subsidies.

The Debate on Food Subsidies

- The **debate over food subsidies in India is complex and multifaceted**, touching upon issues of food security, fiscal responsibility, and social welfare.
- **Food subsidies, provided through the Public Distribution System (PDS) under the National Food Security Act (NFSA)**, are crucial for millions of low-income households, offering affordable access to staple grains and ensuring a basic level of food security.
- While proponents argue that these subsidies are essential for **alleviating hunger and supporting vulnerable populations**, critics contend that reallocating these funds toward agricultural R&D would be more beneficial in the long term.
- This **debate raises fundamental questions about the role of food subsidies in India's social policy** and the potential trade-offs involved in redirecting funds to other sectors.

The Case for Food Subsidies and Misconception About the Fiscal Impact of NFSA

- **A Critical Role in Ensuring Food Security**
 - By providing subsidised grains like rice and wheat, **the PDS helps millions of people access a basic level of nutrition.**
 - The **importance of this system became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic**, when disruptions in income and employment left many families struggling to afford food.

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- **An Essential Financial Amnesty**
 - Food subsidies not only help maintain caloric intake but also indirectly support dietary diversity and nutrition, enabling families to achieve a more balanced diet.
- **An Income Transfer and Social Investment**
 - By receiving grains at subsidised rates, families save on food costs and can spend on other essentials like education, healthcare, and diverse food items, which improves overall well-being and economic stability.
 - For these households, the PDS acts as an economic cushion, helping them manage rising costs of living.

Conclusion

- The debate over food subsidies in India reflects a broader tension between immediate social welfare and long-term economic development.
 - While critics argue for redirecting funds from food subsidies to agricultural R&D, this approach overlooks the critical role that food subsidies play in supporting vulnerable populations.
 - Rather than reducing food subsidies, policymakers should seek alternative funding sources for agricultural R&D and optimize existing subsidy programs to ensure efficiency.
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EXERCISE SIMBEX



The 31st edition of the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) is scheduled from 23 to 29 Oct 2024, in the Eastern Naval Command at Visakhapatnam.

- It is an annual bilateral Naval exercise between the Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).
- It has been conducted since 1994.



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- SIMBEX, which began as 'Exercise Lion King' in 1994, has since evolved into one of the most significant bilateral maritime collaborations between the Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).
- It holds the distinction of **being the longest continuous naval exercise** that the Indian Navy has conducted with any other country.
- The exercise will be conducted in two phases: **the Harbour Phase** at Visakhapatnam and the **Sea Phase** in the Bay of Bengal.
- This year's edition aims to further **strengthen the strategic partnership** between India and Singapore by enhancing interoperability, improving maritime domain awareness, and fostering cooperation to **address common maritime challenges**.
- The Harbour Phase will include Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs), cross-deck visits, sports fixtures, and pre-sail briefings between personnel from both navies.
- The Sea Phase will witness advanced naval drills, including live weapon firings, **anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training**, anti-surface and anti-air operations, seamanship evolutions, and tactical manoeuvres.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PORTS AND HARBOURS

- It is a **non-governmental organization** (NGO) established in November 1955.
 - It has been developed into a global alliance of ports, representing today some 185 ports and 160 port-related businesses in 88 countries as of 31 August 2024.
- The member ports together handle well over 60% of the world's sea-borne trade and over 60% of the world's container traffic.
- It aims to be the **global trade association** of choice for port authorities and operators, representing their interests at regulatory level at the International Maritime Organization, the World Customs Organization, the International Standards Organization and other global alliances.
- **Headquarter:** Tokyo, Japan.





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Initiative of Mormugao Port Authority

- The port's **incentive program**, 'Harit Shrey,' launched in October 2023, offers discounts on port charges based on **Environment Ship Index (ESI)** scores, rewarding ships with higher environmental performance.
- Since the introduction of the "**Harit Shrey scheme**," many ships have benefited from the incentives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- This initiative supports the broader goal of achieving **long-term emission reductions** in maritime operations.

What is the Environment Ship Index?

- It identifies **seagoing ships** that perform **better in reducing air emissions** than required by the current emission standards of the International Maritime Organization.
 - It evaluates the amount of **Nitrogen Oxide (NOX)**, **Sulphur Oxide (SOX)** that is released by a ship and includes a reporting scheme on the greenhouse gas emission of the ship.
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GRAM PANCHAYAT-LEVEL WEATHER FORECASTING INITIATIVE



- The initiative is developed in collaboration between the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)** and the India Meteorological Department (IMD), **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**.
- It is aimed at "empowering rural communities and **enhancing disaster preparedness** at the grassroots, and will benefit farmers and villagers across the country".
- The initiative will provide Gram Panchayats with a **five-day weather forecast** and **hourly updates**, enabling rural communities to better plan agricultural activities and prepare for weather-related risks.
- It will deliver weather updates via **e-GramSwaraj**, the **Meri Panchayat app**, and **Gram Manchitra portals**. e-GramSwaraj is already operational.
 - Users can see data on the current temperature, wind speed, cloud cover (in percentage), rainfall, and relative humidity at the level of gram panchayats; five-



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day forecasts of minimum and maximum temperatures, rainfall, cloud cover, wind direction, and wind speed, and an overall weather forecast.

- **Significance:** It will “strengthen grassroots governance and promote sustainable agricultural practices, making rural populations more climate-resilient and better equipped to tackle environmental challenges”.

EOS-06 AND INSAT-3DR SATELLITES



• EOS-06, also known as **Oceansat-3**, is an **Earth Observation Satellite developed** by the Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**).

- It was launched successfully on November 26, 2022, using ISRO’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C54).
- EOS-06 is part of the Oceansat series of satellites, which are designed to monitor and **study various aspects of the Earth's oceans and coastal zones**.
- The **primary objective** of EOS-06 is to provide **continuity to the services of its predecessors** (Oceansat-1 and Oceansat-2) with enhanced payload capabilities to **support oceanographic and atmospheric studies**.
- This includes applications in **ocean surface studies, coastal zone management, and marine weather forecasting**.

About INSAT-3DR:

- Launched in September 2016, INSAT-3DR is the **successor to INSAT-3D, owned and operated by ISRO** (Indian Space Research Organisation).
- It is an **advanced meteorological satellite** of India configured with an **imaging system and an atmospheric sounder**.
- The significant improvements incorporated in INSAT-3DR are:
 - **Imaging in the middle infrared band** to provide **nighttime pictures of low clouds and fog**.



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- **Imaging in two thermal infrared bands** for estimation of **Sea Surface Temperature (SST)** with better accuracy.
- Higher spatial resolution in the visible and thermal infrared bands.
- **INSAT-3DR** will provide service continuity to earlier meteorological missions of **ISRO** and further augment the capability to provide various **meteorological as well as search and rescue services**.

THE INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS (ICCR)?



Indian Council for Cultural Relations

- It is an **autonomous body** under the **Ministry of External Affairs**, Government of India, involved in **India's external cultural relations** through cultural exchange with other countries and their people.
- It promotes, through its **network of cultural centres**, Indian culture abroad.
- ICCR was **founded in 1950** by **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, independent **India's first Education Minister**.

Objectives:

- to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes pertaining to India's external cultural relations;
- to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries;
- to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people;
- It **administers various scholarship programs** annually and awards about 3000+ scholarships **under 21 different schemes to foreign students** from about 180 countries.
 - Amongst these 21 schemes, six are funded by ICCR from its grant, and others are administered on behalf of MEA and the Ministry of Ayush.
 - The scholarships offer studies in a variety of courses **from undergraduate to postdoctoral level** in different leading universities and educational institutions spread all over India.

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WHAT IS SCURVY?



- It is a disease caused by a significant **lack of vitamin C (ascorbic acid)** in the diet.
- Scurvy has been known since ancient Greek and Egyptian times.
- **Causes:**
 - **Humans cannot synthesize vitamin C.** It needs to come from external food sources, especially fruits and vegetables or fortified foods.
 - Thus, scurvy is caused by **not eating enough fresh fruits and vegetables.**
 - Also, **cooking destroys some of the vitamin C** found in food.
- **Symptoms:**
 - It can include anemia, exhaustion, **spontaneous bleeding**, limb pain, swelling, and sometimes **ulceration of the gums and loss of teeth.**
 - It can be **fatal if left untreated.**
- **Treatment:** It is treatable with **oral or intravenous vitamin C supplements.**

Importance of Vitamin C:

- It's responsible for the development, **growth**, and **healing** of your skin, **bones**, and **connective tissue.**
 - In addition, you need vitamin C for your **blood vessels to function properly.**
 - Vitamin C helps **maintain your teeth and gums.**
 - It **helps your body absorb iron**, which it needs to make red blood cells.
 - Vitamin C also **helps heal burns** and other wounds.
 - Vitamin C is an **antioxidant**, meaning it **protects your cells against** damage from **free radicals.**
 - Free radicals are byproducts of normal cell activity which participate in chemical reactions within cells. Some of these reactions can cause damage over your lifetime.
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INDIA-CHINA LAC AGREEMENT

Indian and Chinese negotiators have reached an agreement on "patrolling arrangements" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), leading to a disengagement and resolution of the tensions that emerged in 2020. The announcement was made by India, highlighting progress in the management of the border dispute.

Background: Road to agreement

- **PM Modi's Call for Improved Relations with China**
 - In April 2024, PM Modi, in an interview, emphasized the significance of India's relationship with China.
 - He highlighted the need to urgently address the prolonged border situation to normalize bilateral interactions.
- **Positive Response from China**
 - In response, the Chinese government expressed a positive outlook.
 - A spokesperson from the Chinese Foreign Ministry acknowledged that India-China relations encompass more than just the border dispute.
- **Indian Foreign Minister's Focus on Patrolling Rights (May 2024)**
 - In May 2024, Indian EAM S. Jaishankar expressed optimism regarding the resolution of remaining border disputes with China, particularly in Ladakh region.
 - He emphasized that the key issues still in contention were related to "patrolling rights" and "patrolling abilities" along the disputed areas.

Patrolling Pact: A Key Element of the Agreement

- Patrolling is vital in the India-China border management system due to the absence of a clear physical demarcation on the ground.
- Indian troops regularly patrol up to the Indian-perceived border and then return to their base.

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- During these patrols, soldiers leave behind indicators of their presence, such as Indian-made items like cigarette packets or matchboxes.

Key highlights of the agreement

- **Restoration of Patrolling Rights in Depsang Plains and Demchok**
 - Indian troops will now be allowed to patrol up to Patrolling Points (PP) 10 to 13 in the Depsang Plains and the Charding Nullah in Demchok.
- **Process of Disengagement, De-escalation, and Demilitarization**
 - The agreement is expected to initiate a process of disengagement, de-escalation, and demilitarization in the areas where both nations currently have 50,000 to 60,000 troops each.
 - **Focus on Preventing Future Clashes**
 - The agreement aims to prevent incidents like the 2020 Galwan clashes, which resulted in the deaths of Chinese soldiers and Indian soldiers.
 - **Future Path**
 - The endorsement of the agreement by Indian PM Modi and Chinese President Xi should lead to a reduction in tensions along the LAC and set the stage for normalizing relations between the two countries.

Conclusion: Cautious Optimism in India's Strategic Circles

- There is cautious optimism in India about the path forward, acknowledging that the border agreement has initiated a trust-building process.
 - The three-step process—disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction—is expected to take at least a couple of years to complete if both sides adhere to the agreement.
 - It remains unclear whether these steps will occur in parallel or sequentially.
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