

## Refining India's Pulse Policy

### What is the issue?

- Canadian PM Justin Trudeau is scheduled to visit India shortly.
- As pulse is a significant commodity for both the countries, trade policies regarding pulses are expected to be in focus.

### How significant is Pulse Trade?

1. While India is the world's largest producer and consumer of pulses, Canada is the world's largest exporter of pulses and the largest supplier to India.
2. Hence, pulse is an important commodity for economy, and trade for both countries and for their farmers.
3. The challenge will be to balance the importance of ensuring adequate returns to farmers along ensuring uninterrupted affordable supply for consumers.
4. Finding a shared understanding over dal might even prove to be the engine for the future of trade between Canada and India.
5. These opportunities can be realised through rules-based, predictable and mutually beneficial approaches to business.

### What are the significant aspects of India's pulse policy?

- **The Situation** - India has launched agricultural policies designed to increase self-sufficiency in pulses and to ensure an assured income for pulse farmers.
- There is also a wide recognition of the broader social value of pulses to the environment and to 'human health and dietary patterns'.
- Hence, the details of pulses in domestic food policy and their role in food security and the contribution to food trade needs to be worked out.
- While climate change concerns are emerging in every field, a plan for ensuring food security that accounts for variable production is essential.
- **Market Uncertainty** - India imposed quota restrictions on pulse imports and also increased import duties to arrest the dip in local prices.

- While these measures are intended to support local farmers and foster self-sufficiency in pulses, these are having ramifications on worldwide production.
- Pulses production in 2018 is forecasted to plunge significantly due to lack of demand surety due to unpredictable government policy.
- As India does not yet have a long-term record of self-sufficiency in pulses, a decline in global pulse production ought is of concern.

### **What is needed?**

- Under WTO rules, India has the right to impose these import duties, to safeguard its farmers, but it also has a commitment to global food security.
- Hence, it should be ensured that domestic policy does not unnecessarily impact global pulse production.
- A transparent policy is to be evolved on how India will determine its import duties and export restrictions regarding pulses at various junctures.
- If this is not done, there is the risk of Indian market losing credibility in the eyes of the importers and will consequently affect supply further.
- Predictability in government policy will also provide assurance to farmers and traders on the terms on which Indian markets may move.
- Consequently, it will be ensure that consumers are protected as rising prices for pulses will, result in lowering of import duties and enhance local supply.
- Also, it should be ensured that pulses 'loaded and en route' to India would not be subject to higher duties on arrival.

**Source: Business line.**

### **Addressing Exclusion Errors in Aadhar**

#### **What is the issue?**

- There was considerable euphoria when Aadhaar was envisioned as it was imagined as an effective mechanism to quell leakages considerably.

- But two major concerns with Aadhaar have emerged over time - security of biometrics and authentication failures.
- The latter tends to affect the most vulnerable deeply and this article has dealt specifically with authentication failures in PDS.

### **What are the contours of the problem?**

- It was thought that Aadhaar (like any new technology) would be experimented first in urban areas where the connectivity and demography was suitable.
- Such a start would have helped in detecting implementation and transitional flaws with lesser pain and also made troubleshooting easier.
- After considerable such trials, the scheme could've been expanded to elsewhere.
- Contrarily, Aadhaar Assisted Biometric Authentication (AABA) was piloted in Jharkhand, which has a large tribal population and poor connectivity.
- Inevitably, there have been multiple reports of authentication failures, which has adversely affected the most vulnerable segments of the population.
- As these are the people who have the greatest need for subsidised food, Aadhaar has defeated its primary purpose - ensure proper PDS delivery.

### **How has UIDAI responded?**

- ❖ Official data hasn't been disclosed, but it has been estimated that the exclusion errors were as high as 20% in PDS if biometric authentication was required.
- ❖ While this is shocking, the response of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to such reports is blanket denial.

- ❖ UIDAI maintains that it only provides a platform and Aadhaar applications (such as PDS) are within the domain of the respective ministries.
- ❖ But this does not abdicate UIDAI of responsibility, as the contribution of authentication failures is a significantly high.
- ❖ The limits of technology, whether in terms of the failure to authenticate biometrics or the absence of connectivity, should not hurt the poor.
- ❖ Presently, multiple announcements have been made for using virtual IDs to secure greater privacy and the use of facial biometrics to reduce errors.
- ❖ While the willingness to improve the technology is laudable, for the immediate need, UIDAI must talk with ministries to redesign priority areas like PDS.

### **What was Madhya Pradesh government's design?**

- ❖ The current PDS design places PDS dealer in charge of making biometrics work for each beneficiary every month.
- ❖ As this has proven to be strenuous, the Madhya Pradesh government devised a scheme where the biometric authentication would be done only once a year.
- ❖ Under this scheme, the authentication is secured by agencies unrelated to the PDS department.
- ❖ Once authenticated, households are to be given coupons for the next 1 year, which can be exchanged for buying goods from the PDS.
- ❖ The coupons were bar coded to prevent duplication and misuse, which helped in minimising the exclusion error.
- ❖ But the MP government lost its nerve on the eve of its implementation, and scraped it in entirety.

### **What is the way ahead?**

- Considering the appealing logic, it would be good for center and the UIDAI must take up the MP government's scheme to avoid exclusion errors.
- While weeding out identity fraud is important, they are creating a far more serious problem of exclusion errors which can cost lives (due to starvation).
- Also, smart cards that can be swiped like credit cards rather than the more sophisticated biometric authentication can be considered.
- All of this still the possibility where the dealer just lies to an ignorant customer that authentication has failed, while it hasn't.
- This will give him access to quantities that he can dispose off in the open market.
- Contrarily, MP's coupon scheme will in fact prevent even this as the merchandise has to be provided to secure the distributed coupons.
- A technology is only as good as the judiciousness with which it is used, and hence the Aadhaar needs to be curtailed from reaching menacing proportions.

**Source: Indian Express.**

### **INS Chakra**

- Russian authorities have demanded over \$20 million for rectifying the damage suffered by nuclear submarine INS Chakra.
- INS Chakra is a Russia-made, nuclear-propelled, hunter-killer akula class submarine.
- INS Chakra is one of the quietest nuclear submarines around, with noise levels next to zero.
- INS Chakra has been taken on lease from Russia for 10 years and would provide the Navy the opportunity to train personnel and operate such nuclear-powered vessels.
- The INS Chakra joined the Eastern Naval Command at Visakhapatnam in 2012.

### **Pradhan Mantri LPG Panchayat**

- The LPG Panchayat, which was launched in Gandhinagar last year, is aimed at driving rural households to adopt Liquefied Petroleum Gas.

- Now, the President is planning to conduct one in Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- As a part of it, over 100 beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), from 20 states will share their experiences of how the clean cooking fuel has changed their lives, in the presence of the President.
- After the launch of the PMUY, LPG consumption witnessed an increase of 10 per cent to 21.5 million tons during 2016-17, compared to the previous year.

### Wakhan Corridor

- Wakhan corridor is a narrow strip of inhospitable and barely accessible land in Afghanistan bordered by the mountains of Tajikistan and Pakistan, and extending all the way to China.



- The corridor is also known by its Persian name **Bam-e-Dunya**, or “roof of the world”
- The area is populated by the Wakhins who are the members of a nomadic tribe in the region.
- Created in the 19th century as a **Great Game buffer zone** between tsarist Russia and British India, the corridor has since remained untouched by any kind of government
- It can be reached from surrounding countries through the “Pamir Knot”, where three of the highest mountain ranges in the world converge.

### National Productivity Day

- The National Productivity Council is observed 12<sup>th</sup> February as National Productivity Day, and till 18th February National Productivity Week.
- "Industry 4.0 Leapfrog Opportunity for India" is the theme of the National Productivity Week -2018.
- Industry 4.0 is characterized by the increasing digitization and interconnection of products, value chains and business models.



### National Productivity Council (NPC)

- ✚ NPC is a mission oriented apex, autonomous and not for profit organization.
- ✚ It is established by the Ministry of Industry, Govt. of India in 1958.
- ✚ The council is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.
- ✚ Its objective is to promote the cause of productivity in all sectors of the Indian economy.
- ✚ NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organization (APO), an Inter Governmental Body, of which the Government of India is a founder member.

### State of Forest Report (SFR 2017)

1. SFR is a biennial report published by Forest Survey of India (FSI), which is under the Ministry of Environment.
2. The latest report states that, India posted a marginal **0.21% rise** in the area under forest between 2015 and 2017.
3. The document says that India has about 7, 08,273 square km of forest, which is **21.53% of the geographic area** of the country.
4. The top five States where maximum forest cover has increased are Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Telangana.
5. India's northeast showed a decrease in the forest cover.
6. The **five States where forest cover has decreased** most are Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya.
7. The main reasons for the decrease are shifting cultivation, other biotic pressures, rotational felling, diversion of forest lands for developmental activities, submergence of forest cover, agriculture expansion and natural disasters
8. **Madhya Pradesh** has the **largest** forest cover in the country **in terms of area**, followed by Arunachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
9. In terms of **percentage of forest** cover with respect to the total geographical area, **Lakshadweep** has the highest forest cover, followed by Mizoram and Andaman and Nicobar Island.
10. The survey, which has for the first time assessed water bodies, said that during last decade, the area under water bodies is increased by 2647 sq.km.

Source: PIB, The Hindu, Business Standard

**India records marginal increase in forest cover**

India posted a marginal 0.21% rise in the area under forest between 2015 and 2017, according to the biennial India State of Forest Report (SFR) 2017.

- The document says that India has about 7,08,273 square kilometres of forest, which is 21.53% of the geographic area of the country (32,87,569 sq. km).
- Getting India to have at least 33% of its area under forest has been a long standing goal of the government since 1988.

However various editions of the SFR over the years, have reported the area under forests as hovering around 21%.

- So the government also includes substantial patches of trees outside areas designated as forests — such as plantations or greenlands — in its assessment.
- The total tree cover, according to this assessment, was 93,815 square kilometres or a 2% rise from the approximately 92,500 square kilometres estimated in 2015.

Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala topped the States that posted an increase in forest cover.

- “Much of this increase can be attributed to plantation and conservation activities both within and outside the Recorded Forest areas as well as an improvement in interpretation of satellite data,” the survey notes.
- Currently, 15 States and union territories have 33% of their geographical area under forests.
- In India’s north-east however, forest cover showed a decrease; 1,71,306 square kilometres, or 65.34%, of the geographical area was under forest and this was a 630 square kilometre decline from the 2015 assessment.

The category of ‘very dense forest’— defined as a canopy cover over 70% — and an indicator of the quality of a forest, saw a dramatic rise from 85,904 square kilometres to 98,158 square kilometres this year but the category of ‘moderately dense forest’ (40%-70%) saw a 7,056 square kilometre-decline from 2015.

India is ranked 10th in the world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4% of the world surface area and sustains the needs of 17% of human and 18% livestock population.

The forest survey for the first time mapped 633 districts and relied on satellite-mapping. Earlier this year, the government ceased to define bamboo as a tree to promote economic activity among tribals. The survey found that India’s bamboo bearing area rose by 1.73 million hectares (2011) to 15.69 million hectares (2017).



**How can a convict head a party?’**

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra questioned the logic behind having a criminal and corrupt person to head a political party, and said such a lapse was a huge blow to the purity of the election process.

- This goes against our judgments that corruption in politics to be ostracised from the purity of elections, he orally observed, addressing the government and the Election Commission (EC).
- A man cannot directly contest in an election, so he constitutes a group of persons to form a political party and contest in an election,” he said.

The court said that banning convicted persons from becoming office-bearers of parties would be in consonance with its past judgments against corrupt politics.

**INTERNATIONAL**

**India, Oman agree to isolate sponsors of terror**

India and Oman have agreed to isolate the sponsors of international terrorism.

The declaration on battling terrorism came at the end of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the country during which both sides acknowledged that there was an “inter-linkage” between the stability of the Gulf region and the Indian subcontinent.

- The two sides also emphasised the need to isolate the sponsors and supporters of terrorism and agreed that the international community should take urgent action against all such entities, which support terrorism and use it as an instrument of policy.

On military cooperation, the joint statement said: The Indian side thanked Omani side for facilitating operational visits by Indian Naval ships and aircraft as well as Indian Air Force aircraft to various Omani ports and airports. The Omani side expressed appreciation of the training facilities provided to the Omani Royal Armed Forces personnel by India.

A total of eight MoUs were signed on health, legal cooperation, tourism and military cooperation. Oman also expressed that it would like its scientists to be trained in Indian space research facilities.