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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Recently announced National Mission on Edible Oil-Oil Palm will help India become self-reliant in edible oil and reduce dependence on imports. Critically discuss. (250 Words).

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by writing about the National Mission on Edible oil-Oil Palm.
- Discuss the significance of the mission.
- Discuss the issues associated with the mission.
- Conclude suitably by giving a way forward.

Introduction

Recently, the Prime Minister announced a National Mission on Edible Oil-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP), with an investment of over Rs 11,000 crore over a five-year period. It is a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme and proposed to have an additional 6.5 lakh hectares for palm oil by 2025-26.

Its objective is to harness domestic edible oil prices that are dictated by expensive palm oil imports and become self-reliant in edible oil and to raise the domestic production of palm oil by three times to 11 lakh MT by 2025-26.

Body

Significance of the Scheme

- **Raise Farmers Income:** It is expected to incentivise production of palm oil to reduce dependence on imports and help farmers cash in on the huge market.
- **Rise in Yields & Reduction in Imports:** India is the largest consumer of vegetable oil in the world. Of this, palm oil imports are almost 55% of its total vegetable oil imports.
 - It imports the rest, buying palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia, soyoil from Brazil and Argentina, and sunflower oil, mainly from Russia and Ukraine.
 - In India, 94.1% of its palm oil is used in food products, especially for cooking purposes. This makes palm oil extremely critical to India's edible oils economy.

Issues associated with the mission

- **Impact on Tribal Lands:** The oil palm is a water-guzzling, monoculture crop with a long gestation period unsuitable for small farmers and the land productivity for palm oil is higher than for oilseeds, which create apprehension for more land to be given for oil palm cultivation.
 - In southeast Asia, the plantation of palm oil trees has replaced massive tracts of rainforests.
 - It could also detach tribespeople from their identity linked with the community ownership of land and "wreak havoc on the social fabric".

- **Threat to Wildlife:** Focus areas are “biodiversity hotspots and ecologically fragile” and oil palm plantations would denude forest cover and destroy the habitat of endangered wildlife.
- **Palm is Invasive:** The palm is an invasive species that is not a natural forest product of northeastern India and its impact on the biodiversity as well as on soil conditions has to be analysed even if it is grown in non-forest areas.
- **Health Concern:** Oil palm requires 300 litres of water per tree per day, as well as high Pesticide use in areas where it is not a native crop, leading to consumer health concerns as well.
- **Farmers not Getting Fair Price:** The most critical issue in the cultivation of oil palm has been the inability of farmers to realise a remunerative price of fresh fruit bunches (highly perishable and need to be processed within twenty-four hours of harvest).

Conclusion

If subsidies and support are extended to oilseeds which are indigenous to India and suited for dryland agriculture, they can help achieve self-reliance without dependence on oil palm. Moreover, the success of mission oil palm will also depend on import duty on crude palm oil.