



REFORMING THE PDS IN INDIA

Crisil study using the 'thali index' reveals **50% of rural & 20% of urban Indians can't afford two balanced meals a day**; despite PDS support, **food deprivation remains 40% in rural & 10% in urban areas**.

☞ Thali Index measures food deprivation by assessing if **households can afford balanced meal (rice, dal, roti, vegetables, curd & salad)**.

☞ Reflects nutrition & satisfaction, **revealing hidden deprivation despite low official poverty levels**.

Need to Restructure the PDS for Equity in Food Consumption

- **Limitations of Current PDS:** Equalizes cereal consumption but mainly provides rice & wheat, which are calorie-rich but lack nutrients.
- **Pulse Consumption Gap:** Pulses, essential for protein, remain unaffordable for the poor, creating a consumption gap.
 - ♦ Poorest 5% of rural households consume half as many pulses as the richest 5%; major nutritional gap due to cost barriers.
- **Subsidy Misdirection:** Top 10% in rural areas receive 88% of the subsidies meant for the poorest (5%), showing misallocation.
 - ♦ Urban areas– 80% receive PDS subsidies, even if they exceed the **"two-thali" norm**.
- **Fiscal Burden & Resource Misuse:** Extending **free food grains to 80 cr people** (under NFSA, 2013) in 2024 wastes resources, as many already consume enough cereals, raising costs for FCI.

Challenges in

Implementing Nutrition-sensitive PDS

- ☞ **Accurate Targeting:** Identifying households below the "two thalis a day" norm is difficult, with risks of exclusion and inclusion errors.
- ☞ **Political Sensitivity:** Reducing cereal entitlements may face political resistance, as middle-class families & better-off groups benefit from subsidies.
- ☞ **Procurement & Distribution:** Pulses are harder to procure and distribute due to smaller quantities, price volatility, and storage needs.
- ☞ **Financial Sustainability:** Expanding subsidies for pulses could strain food subsidy bill & increase black market activity and corruption.

Suggestions

- ☞ **Define a Nutrition-Based Norm:** Set a "minimum balanced diet" standard (two thalis/day); as recommended by **Tendulkar Committee (2009)** – poverty estimation should **move beyond calorie norms**.
- ☞ **Target Subsidies Based on Need:** Use **updated HCES data** to identify households below the nutrition norm.
- ☞ **Expand Pulse Inclusion:** To address protein deficiency, prioritizing low-income households & linking procurement with MSP.
- ☞ **Reduce Excess Cereal Allocation:** Trim cereal quotas where consumption is sufficient & use savings to diversify food basket.

MANUAL SCAVENGING IN INDIA

SC fined Delhi's PWD Rs 5 lakh for having labourers clean sewers without protective gear, violating its 2023 judgment (**Dr. Balram Singh v/s UOI**).

SC's Directives in Dr. Balram Singh v/s UOI, 2023 Case

- ☞ Conduct a **national survey** to identify manual scavengers.
- ☞ Fully **mechanize sewer & septic tank cleaning**; human entry only when mechanical cleaning isn't possible.
- ☞ No worker in sewers without proper gear; violations treated as breaches of **Articles 21 & 23**.
- ☞ Provide rehabilitation, compensation, & integrate with **social security schemes (NAMASTE)**; create an online portal for tracking related issues.
- ☞ Ensure full enforcement of the **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013**.

Challenges Faced by Manual Scavengers

- ⌘ **Health Risks:** Exposure to human waste & toxic gases (hydrogen sulphide) leads to diseases– Hepatitis, Tetanus, asphyxiation, etc.
- ⌘ **Social Stigma:** Labeled as “untouchables,” they face caste-based discrimination & social exclusion.
- ⌘ **Economic Challenges:** Paid below minimum wage, with no job security or social protection, keeping them in poverty.
- ⌘ **Psychological Issues:** Social stigma, harsh conditions & marginalization cause anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.
- ⌘ **Substance Abuse:** Many turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with stress & physical hardship.

Manual scavenging is officially **banned since Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993.**

♦ **PEMSR Act** bans employment of manual scavengers, ensures their rehabilitation, and makes **every offence cognizable & non-bailable.**

Out of 766 districts, **732 are manual scavenging-free**, but ~58,000 manual scavengers remain as of 2024.

Suggestions

- ⌘ **Mechanisation:** Promote 100% mechanized cleaning; equip Sanitation Response Units (SRUs) with machines & train skilled manpower.
- ⌘ **Institutional Framework:** Appoint Responsible Sanitation Authorities in each district; set up SRUs with 24x7 helplines.
- ⌘ **Strict Enforcement:** Enforce PEMSAR Act with penalties, treat sewer deaths as culpable homicide & ensure compensation.
 - ❖ Distinguishing sanitation workers from manual scavengers & regulating de-sledging market (NHRC).
- ⌘ **Financial Support:** Provide concessional loans under **Swachhta Udyami Yojana (SUY)** & expand **Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS).**
- ⌘ **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Train manual scavengers under **PM-DAKSH & MGNREGA.**

SAUDI-PAKISTAN DEFENCE PACT

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed **Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA)**, a pact that could affect India’s national interests in **South Asia & Gulf region.**

Implications of the Pact on India	Significance of Saudi Arabia for India
<ul style="list-style-type: none">⌘ Geopolitical Setback: Challenges India’s Gulf diplomacy and may help Pakistan push anti-India narratives on Kashmir in OIC.⌘ Energy & Diaspora Impact: India’s energy security and ties with Saudi Arabia may be strained, affecting its 2.6 Mn strong diaspora.⌘ Counter-Terrorism Pressure: Saudi-Pakistan ties could limit Riyadh’s support for India’s counter-terrorism efforts.⌘ Fueling a Destablizing Arms Race: Saudi financial support, backed by Turkey & China, could help Pakistan modernize its military.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⌘ Energy Security: One of the largest crude oil suppliers for India.⌘ Economic Partnership: India is Saudi’s 2nd largest trade partner, with USD 3 Bn in Indian investments (Aug 2023); Saudi Arabia ranks 5th for India.⌘ Defence Cooperation: Joint exercises— EX-SADA TANSEEQ & Al Mohed Al Hindi.⌘ Geopolitical Leverage: Crucial for India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.⌘ Future Collaboration: India’s green energy & tech initiatives align with Saudi Vision 2030.

Way Forward

- ⌘ **Enhancing Economic Relations:** Focus on economic ties with Saudi Arabia, highlighting energy security, investments (**West Coast Refinery**) & future projects.
- ⌘ **Re-engage with Iran:** Leverage **Chabahar Port** and **accelerate the INSTC** to secure routes to Afghanistan & Central Asia, countering Pakistan’s western influence.
- ⌘ **Strengthen Look West Policy:** Diversify Gulf strategy by deepening ties with UAE & Qatar through trade, LNG, and defense.
 - ❖ Use frameworks (**I2U2**) to reinforce India’s role as a stabilizing, non-threatening partner.



BAGRAM AIR BASE

US President **warned Afghanistan of consequences** if **Bagram Air Base isn't returned**; vacated by US forces before their **2021 withdrawal**.

- ⌘ Located **60 km north of Kabul in Parwan province**; Afghanistan's **largest military base & a strategic gateway**.
 - ❖ Connects Kabul to key cities– **Mazar-e-Sharif, Ghazni, Kandahar & Bamiyan**.
- ⌘ **History**: Built by the Soviet Union in 1950s; gained prominence during **Cold War & Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89)**.
 - ❖ Served as the main hub for American forces in the War on Terror after the **US invasion (2001)**.
- ⌘ **Strategic Significance**: Proximity to sensitive Chinese sites (**Lop Nur nuclear test site & Koko Nur nuclear facility**).



ACHANAKMAR TIGER RESERVE

Tiger population in ATR (Chhattisgarh) **rose from 5 in 2022 to 18 in 2025**.

- ⌘ Wildlife sanctuary (1975), tiger reserve (2009); **part of Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve**.
- ⌘ **Links Kanha and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserves**, supporting tiger movement & genetic diversity.
- ⌘ Home to **Baigas (PVTG), Gond & Yadav communities**.
- ⌘ **Maniyari River** (known as its lifeline) merges with **Seonath River in the Mahanadi Basin**.
- ⌘ Dominated by **tropical moist deciduous forests** (Sal, Saja, Teak, etc); **wildlife**– Tigers, Leopards, Bison, Flying Squirrel, etc.

INTERNATIONAL RED PANDA DAY

Observed on the **3rd Saturday of Sept** each year.

- ⌘ Also called **Firefox, Lesser Panda, or Red Cat-Bear**, found across the Himalayas, from Nepal to China's Sichuan & Yunnan provinces.
- ⌘ **Great Bend of the Brahmaputra** divides population into Himalayan & Chinese Red Panda populations.
- ⌘ Prefers altitudes of 2,200–4,800 m in mixed deciduous & conifer forests with bamboo.
- ⌘ Sikkim's state animal & mascot of Darjeeling Tea Festival.
- ⌘ **IUCN Red List**- Endangered, **CITES**- Appendix I, **WPA, 1972**- Schedule I.

