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No. 5, AKS Nagar, Near Gandhi Park, Coimbatore - 641 001

GS Paper II – International Relations

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India, Australia move to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Amid geostrategic uncertainties, Prime Minister Modi, his Australian counterpart, Albanese, adopt declaration to expand maritime security ties and defence collaboration; the countries also seal pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Thursday adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, committing to significantly deepen military engagement, strengthen defence industrial collaboration, and expand maritime security cooperation amid growing geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries also sealed pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals sectors.

The declaration, adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, outlines an ambitious road map to elevate defence ties through closer strategic consultations, enhanced

interoperability between the armed forces, expanded military exercises, and greater collaboration in defence science, technology, and industrial supply chains.

A statement released by the office of the Australian Prime Minister mentioned that, under the declaration, the two sides agreed to hold regular consultations on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific affecting their shared interests, increase the complexity of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, accelerate efforts to improve interoperability and information sharing between their armed forces, and expand aircraft deployments from each other's territories.

The agreement also envisages deeper personnel



Tactical ties: PM Narendra Modi being greeted by his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, in Melbourne on Thursday. AP

exchanges through education, training, and liaison appointments, while exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting skilled personnel for their respective defence workforces.

Mr. Modi emphasised the importance of a free and stable Indo-Pacific and highlighted the growing

engagement between the two countries in the defence domain. "The Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two oceans. It also symbolises the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia," he said.

The agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of

uranium from Australia to India to fuel nuclear power projects came nearly 12 years after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

"Today, we have signed an important agreement in the field of nuclear energy. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give new impetus to our clean energy objectives," Mr. Modi said.

He also announced the launch of the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains and said both sides will also work together on a critical minerals corridor.

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CALL FOR DIALOGUE

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GS Paper II – Social Issue

Why more Indian couples are being diagnosed with secondary infertility

Analyses of India's National Family Health Survey data show secondary infertility rose from roughly 19.5% in the early 1990s to about 28.6% by 2015-2016 – close to a doubling in a single generation; there are multiple factors that are contributing to this including age-related issues and changes in the body between the first and the second child

Richika Sahay Shukla

A few weeks ago, a couple sat in my consulting room looking almost apologetic. They already had a bright six-year-old waiting at home. "We feel silly taking your time, doctor," the mother said. "We have one child. Everyone keeps telling us to just be grateful." And then, quietly, she started to cry.

I have heard that phrase – "at least you have one" – more times than I can count. It is almost always meant kindly. It almost always lands like a door being shut. And it is one of the reasons the couples I see struggling to conceive a second time carry their grief so silently.

Understanding the condition

The condition has a name: secondary infertility – the difficulty conceiving or carrying a pregnancy after you have already had a baby. For years it was brushed aside as a non-problem. The numbers say otherwise.

Analyses of India's National Family Health Survey data show secondary infertility rose from roughly 19.5% in the early 1990s to about 28.6% by 2015-2016 – close to a doubling in a single generation. It is now one of the most common reasons a "previously fertile" couple walks in, bewildered. "We didn't even try the first time," they say. "Why is it so hard now?"

Part of the answer is the calendar. A generation ago, most couples finished their families in their twenties. Today a first baby often arrives at the age of 31 or 32 – after the degree, the

job, the EMI, the move to a rented flat in a city.

By the time life finally feels "ready" for a second child, the mother may be aged 36 or 38, and fertility, unfairly, does not wait for our life plans. Egg numbers and quality fall with every passing year; clinics in cities including Delhi/NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai and others, have reported a sharp rise in women seeking help only after the age of 35.

But age is just one thread. In the years between the first and second child, bodies change. Weight creeps up. The thyroid quietly slips. As many as one in five Indian women now lives with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS), which tends to worsen with time. A Caesarean section may have left adhesions; an old, untreated infection may have scarred a fallopian tube. And – this matters – the problem is very often on the man's side. Sperm counts fall with weight, stress, smoking and even the polluted air so many of us breathe. Yet in my experience, Indian men will wait years longer than their wives before agreeing to a simple semen test, convinced that "we already have a child, so it can't be me."

Layered over all of this is something



Growing concern: Secondary infertility is the difficulty conceiving or carrying a pregnancy after you have already had a baby. GETTY IMAGES

newer: our phones. Social media has, in many ways, been a gift for fertility awareness. Couples now arrive far better informed than a decade ago; the taboo is finally cracking; brave women share IVF journeys that once would have been whispered about. But scroll through any feed and you also meet the other side – an unending stream of "Baby No. 2!" announcements, and picture-perfect siblings.

For a woman in her fourth month of trying, or recovering from a second miscarriage,

that scroll is a slow bruise. The comparison is relentless – and so is the family WhatsApp group where an aunt asks, yet again, when the "good news" is coming. I have also watched social media do harm the other way: glossy reels promising IVF "success in one cycle," or home remedies that persuade a couple to delay proper testing by a year they cannot afford to lose.

Telling the truth

So what do I tell the couple crying in my room? First, that their pain is real and they are allowed to feel it. Wanting a sibling for the child you adore is not ingratitude; it is love asking

Egg numbers and quality fall with every passing year; clinics in cities including Delhi/National Capital Region, Bengaluru, Mumbai and others, have reported a sharp rise in women seeking help only after the age of 35

for a little more room. Second, that this is a medical condition, not a moral verdict – not a punishment, not *nazar*, not something they did wrong. Third, that timing matters. If a woman is under the age of 35 and has tried for a year, or over the age of 35 and has tried for six months, both partners – together – should be evaluated. Do not let the calendar run, out of politeness.

And I tell them the truth about hope, honestly. Modern fertility care helps a great many couples in exactly this situation, and IVF succeeds for many even in their late thirties and forties. But I will never promise a guaranteed outcome, and I would gently warn anyone against a clinic that does. What I can promise is a clear answer and a plan.

If there is one thing I wish more of us understood, it is this: the woman who "already has one" may be quietly grieving a child who simply has not arrived yet. She does not need to be reminded how lucky she is. She needs to be asked how she is. Often the most healing thing a family member, a friend – or a doctor – can do is stop offering gratitude as a cure, and simply listen.

(Dr. Richika Sahay Shukla is co-founder and medical director, India IVF Fertility. director@indiaivf.in)





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GS Paper II – Governance

Modi hails Australia's social media ban on minors, signals curbs

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday praised Australia's ban on social media access for teenagers, in the clearest indication so far that the Union government is mulling similar curbs. "I have followed you closely, and the way you have legislated and worked to protect society in IT and social media is inspiring the world," Mr. Modi told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in remarks open to the press.

Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024, requires social media platforms to detect and block access to children below the age of 16. Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, had confirmed discussions for similar curbs in India dur-

Digital control

Several countries are following Australia's footsteps to curb social media use by children

Malaysia: under-16s barred from owning social accounts

Indonesia: minors blocked from 'high-risk' platforms

France: Bill passed to ban social media use by under-15s



ing the AI Impact Summit earlier in February.

'Right way to go'

"Certainly there is a need for protecting our children, protecting our society... we are in a conversation regarding age-based restrictions with the various social media platforms... the right way to go about this," he said.

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GS Paper II – Social Issue

AIDS prevention society launches drive to improve HIV diagnosis in Karnataka

Afshan Yasmeen
BENGALURU

More than 56,000 people in Karnataka are estimated to be living with HIV without knowing their status, the highest such number among States in the country. This is posing a major challenge to the State's HIV control programme despite free testing and treatment services being widely available, with the changing nature of sexual networks adding to the complexity.

As per estimates from the Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society (KSAPS), 56,406 people are unaware of their HIV-positive status, making ear-



Over 56,000 in Karnataka are estimated to be unaware of their HIV status.

ly diagnosis and linkage to treatment a key public health priority. While over two lakh people are already receiving treatment, officials said, the focus is now on identifying those

who remain outside the healthcare system.

KSAPS Project Director Padma Basavanhappa told *The Hindu* that one of the biggest hurdles is the changing nature of sexual networks, with increasing numbers of people meeting partners through dating apps.

No voluntary testing

Ms. Basavanhappa said the problem was compounded by the reluctance of people to voluntarily undergo HIV testing. "People still do not walk into testing centres on their own. Many believe they are not at risk, while others avoid testing because they fear stigma and discrimina-

tion," she said, pointing out that awareness about HIV transmission also remained inadequate.

To address the gap, KSAPS has launched the Mobilisation for AIDS Suraksha campaign. As part of the campaign, initiated by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), KSAPS has introduced a BreakFree QR code that links users to a confidential self-risk assessment, nearby HIV testing centres and counsellors.

The self-assessment tool asks users a series of questions to determine whether they may be at risk and guides them to appropriate services while protecting their identity.



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GS Paper III – Economy

Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?

Why has the Centre proposed changing AAY foodgrain entitlements? How will the proposed amendment affect households? Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing? Could the amendment widen regional disparities in foodgrain allocation?

EXPLAINER

T. Ramakrishnan

The story so far:

In July 6, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay urged the Centre to retain the present provision of 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) meant for the poorest of the poor, and not to make it a per capita system. The next day, the CPIM Polit Bureau voiced its concern and demanded that the proposed amendment to the entitlement criteria be dropped. About 30 days ago, immediately after the Union government made public its plan to amend the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Kerala's Food Minister Anoop Jacob expressed reservations over the move.

What is the amendment mooted?

On June 24, the Union Food and Public Distribution (F&PD) Department, while publishing a draft amendment Bill to the NFSA, said every person belonging to AAY households would be entitled to seven kg of foodgrains per month, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household per month. At present, the entitlement is for the entire household with a ceiling of 35 kg per month. The proposed amendment covers the first proviso to sub-section (3) of Section 3 (Right to receive foodgrain at subsidised prices by persons belonging to eligible households) of the Act. The public can comment on the amendments till July 11 and send their views by email to ansud.sachdeva@nic.in and sarabhasmar.ajay@gov.in.

Why is the change being proposed?

The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household, according to the F&PD Department. Smaller households receive a higher per-capita entitlement, whereas larger households receive a lower per-capita entitlement, which may fall below the entitlement available to priority households.

The aim and purpose are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements, a note proposed by the department said.

However, the proposed amendment does not seek to address the inclusion of ineligible persons as beneficiaries, a problem that persists at the State level.

What is the story behind the two southern States' opposition?

It is not for the first time that the two States are articulating their opposition to matters concerning the food policy, as their contemporary political history has an important ingredient – the politics of food. Kerala, which has a long history of the public distribution system (PDS) dating back to the now-abolished princely State of Travancore, introduced informal food distribution mechanisms to mitigate the food shortage of the poor and vulnerable, and was perhaps the first to launch a formal PDS in 1962, three years before the establishment of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). At least on two occasions – 1952 and 1967 – Tamil Nadu saw political upsets, the incumbent regime getting reduced to a minority in 1952 and being shown the door in 1967. The reason was that the governments of

Grains of debate

The Centre's proposed amendment to the National Food Security Act has triggered concerns that foodgrain allocations under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana could fall for many households in the southern States



Table 1: AAY coverage, beneficiaries and foodgrain allocation

State	Calling of AAY households (lakhs)	AAY coverage No. of AAY households (in lakh)	No. of persons (in lakh)	Allocation of foodgrains for 2023-24 (in tonnes)
Andhra Pradesh	9.09	8.68	22.48	3,81,257
Karnataka	12	12.3	42.72	4,80,780
Kerala	5.98	5.83	18.59	2,80,238
Tamil Nadu	18.83	18.57	62.33	7,82,771
Telangana	6.49	5.64	15.66	2,30,074
Puducherry* (UT)	0.32	0.24	0.77	0*
Share of the South	32.51	49.36	162.37	21,33,270
All India	258	257.81	777.42	96,23,042

Source: Foodgrain Bulletin for May 2024, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India

*No Puducherry figures for central of direct benefit transfer, no allocation has been made. **Foodgrain – rice, wheat and coarse grains

the periods in question were not being swift in handling the rice shortage. Since 2017, successive Chief Ministers of the State have been cautious in taking decisions with regard to the subject of rice.

It was no wonder that the two States were vociferous in their stand in the run-up to the formulation of the NFSA. Through the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) took charge in 2011 in Kerala, the government did not agree to the implementation of the 2013 law – an Act of Parliament – despite the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime at the Centre pushing the legislation. The main reservation it had was that the NFSA would lead to the removal of a "large number of poor families" from the list of beneficiaries and put an "enormous financial burden" on the State. However, the then Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, at one point in time, committed himself to the enforcement of the law in his State, though it was left to his successor, Pinarayi Vijayan, to take the formal decision.

In Tamil Nadu, Jayalalithaa, as Chief Minister, virtually opposed the law because immediately after she came to power in May 2011, her government started the distribution of rice, free to all the ration cardholders, regardless of their economic status. She had criticised the government for stating that those who would be left out of the NFSA would not

The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household.

be eligible to receive free rice. Essentially, she extracted a major concession from the Union government that the existing allocations, as they stood in 2013, for all the States would be legally safeguarded.

Hence, it was no surprise that the two southern neighbours joined the rest of the country in November 2016 in implementing the law.

Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing the amendment to NFSA?

Explaining how Kerala would be affected by the latest move, Mr. Jacob has pointed out that States such as his, characterised by nuclear families, will be at a disadvantage as there will be a reduction in the quantity of free foodgrains for families with fewer than five members. He has recalled that even in 2013, when the law took effect, his State took the stand that the AAY cardholders deserved "special consideration," a position that it continues. "As a consumption State, any cut in Kerala's allocation is a matter of concern," Mr. Jacob stated.

Mr. Vijay, who referred in his letter to Mr. Modi about how the amendment

would cause a fall in the monthly allocation of foodgrains from 65,262 tonnes to 42,040 tonnes, stated that the number of AAY cardholders in his State (out of a total of 18.54 lakhs), covering 58.51 lakh beneficiaries (total 69.27 lakhs). "Rice provided to the AAY cardholders is a staple ingredient of all three meals of the day and cannot be substituted with any other commodity from the open market, resulting in substantial out-of-pocket expenses," he said.

Besides, Arunachal Takbar, a functionary of the Right to Food Campaign, said that the amendment would bring a "North-South divide" in foodgrain allocation, as families in southern States would get higher allocations as their average family size was bigger than that of the southern States.

What is the way forward?

Ideally, such a change should have been subjected to greater public scrutiny to arrive at a consensus. However, T. Sadagopan, president, Tamil Nadu Progressive Consumer Centre and veteran activist who served on the State government's panels on food, suggests that the Centre chalk out a middle path by making the allocation of 30 kg per family, irrespective of family members. This would help the Union government to cut down its subsidy bill.

THE GIST

The Centre has proposed amending the NFSA to change AAY foodgrain entitlements from a household-based system to a per capita allocation of 7 kg per person, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household, to address inequities in the existing system.

Tamil Nadu and Kerala have opposed the proposal, arguing that it will reduce foodgrain allocations for households with fewer than five members and increase the burden on poor families, particularly in States with predominantly nuclear families.

While the Centre says the amendment will make foodgrain distribution more equitable, critics warn it could widen regional disparities, and some have suggested a middle path of a fixed 30 kg allocation per household.

Flow balance: The aim and purpose of the amendment are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements. M. SRINATH

Table 2: Off-take and distribution in the Southern States

How the South fared during the current financial year up to the month of May 2023 (tonnes)

State	Allocation	Off-take (tonnes)	Distributed
Andhra Pradesh	62,593	62,583	57,817
Karnataka	76,796	67,918	66,869
Kerala	41,708	38,812	38,468
Tamil Nadu	3,90,482	1,89,185	1,71,769
Telangana	39,873	98,519	58,899
Share of the South	3,57,236	4,38,375	2,79,262
All India	18,50,506	17,24,185	13,75,822