

Mains Master

US rejects India's demand on public food stockholding

India's Demand: Seeking a permanent solution for public stockholding (PSH) for food security as mandated by previous WTO Ministerial Decisions (2013 Bali & 2015 Nairobi). This would alleviate the onerous reporting requirements and potential challenges associated with the current peace clause exemption.

US Stance: Opposes a separate PSH negotiation track and views government-priced food stocks as trade-distortive subsidies. They suggest providing data for further discussions as a potential starting point.

Arguments:

- **India & G33:** PSH is crucial for food security and current peace clause is restrictive. They propose excluding PSH programs from subsidy reduction commitments and adjusting calculations based on current prices.
- **US & Cairns Group:** Government-priced PSH grants unfair advantage and distorts trade. They advocate for PSH within the overall agriculture negotiation framework.
- **EU:** Supports data transparency on PSH programs.

Outlook:

- **Difficult negotiation ahead:** Consensus seems unlikely at MC13 due to opposing positions.
- **Data discussion as potential compromise:** US suggestion to provide data might lead to incremental progress.
- **Long-term resolution uncertain:** Finding a solution acceptable to both sides may require significant concessions and potentially years of negotiations.
- **India's rice exports and US questioning** regarding data notifications add complexity to the issue.
- **G33's joint proposal** outlines specific measures for PSH compliance with WTO rules.
- **EU's disagreement** with India's WTO panel judgement adds another layer of friction.

Overall, the US refusal casts a shadow over India's hope for a quick resolution on PSH. The MC13 may see limited progress at best, setting the stage for potentially protracted negotiations in the future.

Understanding Public Stockholding , Peace Clause , WTO negotiations and stand of India

• **Public Stockholding (PSH) for Food Security: A Fundamental Program**

• **Foundational Initiative:** The government implements a crucial initiative involving the stockpiling and distribution of essential food resources, positioning Public Stockholding (PSH) as a cornerstone in ensuring and safeguarding national food security.

• **National Significance:** The program plays a pivotal role, not just in its scope but in its significance, actively contributing to the resilience and security of the nation's food resources.

• **WTO Rules and Developing Countries' Demands: Balancing Act**

• **Trade Constraints:** Within the international trade framework governed by the World Trade Organization (WTO), rules are in place to limit trade-distorting support, placing a particular emphasis on scrutinizing PSH at prices exceeding market norms.

• **Developing Nations' Advocacy:** In response, developing countries, including India, advocate for an exemption from reduction commitments, recognizing the vital role PSH plays in ensuring food security on a broader scale.

• **Scrutiny on PSH:** The scrutiny on PSH prices reflects the intricate balance required in adhering to international trade rules while safeguarding the interests of developing nations.

• **Peace Clause and the Ongoing Struggle: A Temporary Respite**

• **Temporary Relief:** The introduction of the Peace Clause in 2013 provides a temporary reprieve for existing PSH programs in developing countries, offering a nuanced perspective to navigate the complexities of global trade.

• **Permanent Solution Lacking:** However, the absence of a permanent solution after significant global conferences, such as the Doha Round and Bali/Nairobi Ministerial Conferences, highlights the persistent challenges and ongoing struggles in finding a lasting resolution.

• **India's Firm Position: Shifting the Paradigm**

• **Shifting Priorities:** India stands firm in demanding a shift for PSH from the amber to the green box, emphasizing the need for exemption from reduction commitments, thus underlining a paradigm shift in approach.

• **Critique of Subsidies:** The argument against disproportionately large and distortive subsidies from developed countries forms the crux of India's position, highlighting the critical nature of PSH in ensuring the survival of millions in the country.

• **Humanitarian Emphasis:** Beyond a policy stance, India's emphasis on PSH reflects a humanitarian perspective, acknowledging its essential role in meeting the basic needs of a vast population.

• **Outlook and Challenges: Navigating the Negotiation Landscape**

• **Member Position Gaps:** Despite ongoing negotiations, significant gaps persist between member positions, emphasizing the complexity of the issue at hand.



• **Outdated Reference Prices:** The challenge is further compounded by the use of outdated reference prices, complicating subsidy calculations and necessitating a reassessment of relevant parameters.

• **Pivotal Ministerial Conference(MC) Negotiations:** The WTO MC negotiations become pivotal in the quest for finding an acceptable and sustainable solution, a crucial juncture in the ongoing discourse.

• **Tailored Strategies:** Recognizing the diversity among developing countries, tailored subsidy strategies are deemed necessary, ensuring that the solutions accommodate unique conditions and requirements.

• **Broader Perspective:** A broader perspective underscores the importance of trade prioritizing the well-being of people over corporate interests, reshaping the narrative to focus on the greater good.

Comprehensive Perspective: The Challenge and Opportunity

• **Critical Challenge:** The challenge and critical importance of securing a permanent PSH solution at MC11 underscore the urgency and significance of the ongoing efforts.

• **Significance of India's Stance:** India's unwavering stance assumes greater significance, signaling the need for a transformative approach to address the intricacies of international trade.

• **Acknowledgment of Distortions:** Developed countries may need to acknowledge the distortive nature of their subsidies, fostering a collaborative environment for sustainable solutions.

• **Potential Compromise:** In the pursuit of a compromise, nuanced approaches to PSH categorization and calculations may provide a middle ground, demonstrating a willingness to navigate complex challenges.

• **Addressing Imbalances:** The need to address broader agricultural subsidy imbalances emerges as a long-term imperative, requiring sustained efforts for a fair and equitable global agricultural landscape.

• **India's NFSA Program: Beyond Welfare**

• **Exemplary Program:** Delving deeper, India's National Food Security Act (NFSA) program stands as an exemplary model, surpassing the conventional understanding of welfare by actively contributing to the economic stability of farmers.

• **Economic Stability:** Beyond welfare, the program focuses on ensuring economic stability for farmers through guaranteed prices, actively encouraging their participation in the market, fostering a sustainable agricultural ecosystem.

Addressing Hypocrisy and Ensuring Trade Justice: A Call for Equity

• **Critique of Hypocrisy:** The discourse extends to the critique of developed countries' hypocrisy in scrutinizing India's subsidies, emphasizing the need for a fair and equitable evaluation that considers economic and climatic disparities among nations.

• **Equitable Trade Justice:** This underscores the broader call for equitable trade justice, urging a recalibration of the global trade narrative to prioritize fairness, especially in light of the diverse challenges faced by different nations.

In Summary: Paving the Way Forward

• **Resolute Position:** In summary, India's resolute position underscores the pivotal and non-negotiable role of PSH in ensuring food security, framing it not merely as a policy stance but as a fundamental right.

• **Decisive MC Negotiations:** The MC negotiations emerge as a decisive opportunity to pave the way forward, presenting a momentous occasion to forge a balanced and fair solution that prioritizes the needs of the world's most vulnerable populations.

• **Priority on Vulnerable Populations:** The emphasis on prioritizing the needs of vulnerable populations resonates as the guiding principle, recognizing the global responsibility to safeguard the basic human right to food security.

Food Security Bill is expected to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in India. Critically discuss various apprehensions in its effective implementation along with the concerns it has generated in WTO. UPSC Mains -2013

UPSC Prelims PYQ

The terms 'Agreement on Agriculture', 'Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures' and 'Peace Clause' appear in the news frequently in the context of the affairs of the -

A. Food and Agriculture Organization

B. United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change

C. World Trade Organization

D. United Nations Environment Programme

In the context of which of the following

-do-you- sometimes-find the terms

'amber box, blue box and green box' in the news?

(a) WTO affairs

(b) SAARC affairs

(c) UNFCCC affairs

(d) India-EU negotiations on FTA

Why did Iran carry out strikes in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan?

Iran's Retaliatory Strikes: A Ring of Fire Engulfing West Asia

In response to a series of attacks on its security personnel and allies, Iran launched a wave of retaliatory strikes across three countries, igniting further tensions in an already volatile region. This escalation begs the question: is Iran flexing its muscles or cornered by a growing security crisis?

A String of Attacks:

• December 15: A Sunni Islamist group attacked a police station in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province, killing 11 security personnel.

• December 25: An influential IRGC commander was killed in an airstrike near Damascus, with Iran blaming Israel.

• January 3: Twin blasts at a memorial event for Gen. Soleimani killed at least 94 people, with IS-K claiming responsibility.

Iran's Retaliatory Strikes:

- January 15-16: Iran launched missile and drone attacks in:
 - Erbil, Iraq: Targeting an alleged "Mossad espionage centre," though local authorities disputed the claim.
 - Idlib, Syria: Aiming at IS-K training camps, according to the IRGC.
- January 16: A surprise attack in Panjgur, Pakistan, targeted Jaish al-Adl camps, escalating tensions with the nuclear-armed neighbor.

Motivations and Implications:

- Internal Pressure: The Gaza war and targeted strikes against Iran's allies put pressure on the regime. These attacks might be a show of force for domestic audiences.
- Deterrence: Iran likely aims to deter further attacks from Sunni militants and rivals like Israel by demonstrating its willingness to strike back.
- Regional Power Play: Tehran might be testing the waters, exploiting perceived vulnerabilities of Israel (in Gaza) and the US (with Houthis) to make bolder moves.

Potential Risks:






- Wider War: The escalating tensions could spiral into a larger regional conflict, drawing in other players like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.
- Internal Instability: Public dissatisfaction with the security situation and economic hardships could increase within Iran.
- Fractured Region: Further instability in countries like Iraq and Syria could create breeding grounds for extremism and impede peace efforts.




Moving Forward:

- Diplomacy: De-escalation efforts through dialogue and international mediation are crucial to prevent further bloodshed and regional instability.
- Addressing Root Causes: Addressing underlying grievances, including sectarian tensions and economic disparities, is essential for long-term stability.
- Responsible Regional Powers: All stakeholders, including Iran, Israel, and the US, should act with restraint and prioritize regional stability over narrow interests.




Iran's recent actions signal a dangerous escalation in West Asia. While showcasing its military muscle, these strikes risk pushing the region towards a wider conflict with potentially devastating consequences. Only through responsible actions and a commitment to diplomacy can the flames of this "ring of fire" be extinguished before it engulfs the entire region.

Prelims Booster

-  The Centre has urged the Manipur Government to examine a representation for delisting Kuki and Zomi tribes from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list, following an eight-month ethnic conflict between valley-based Meitei people and hills-based Kuki-Zo (ST) people in Manipur.
-  The conflict was triggered by an order of the Manipur High Court directing the State to recommend Meiteis' inclusion in the ST list to the Centre, potentially widening existing divides among communities in Manipur.
-  Meiteis argue for ST status due to the inability to own land in forested hill districts, where only STs can own land.
-  Historical recommendations include the First Backward Classes Commission (1955) suggesting individual tribe names instead of umbrella tribes for Manipur's ST list, and the Lokur Commission in 1965 noting a "splintering tendency" among Kuki tribes and recommending mentioning tribe names in the ST list.
-  The 1956 revision included 29 entries with individual tribe names, but "Any Mizo (Lushai) Tribe" was retained, and in 2002-2003, "Any Kuki Tribes" was added to Manipur's ST list, leading to confusion per the Bhuria Commission Report of 2002-2004.

-  Constitutional Provisions: Articles 341 and 342 of the Indian Constitution define the process for identifying Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for each State or Union Territory.
-  Article 341 empowers the President, after consulting with the Governor, to specify the castes, races, or tribes deemed to be Scheduled Castes for a particular State or Union Territory. Parliament has the authority to include or exclude any caste, race, or tribe from the list, with the provision that a notification issued under this clause cannot be varied by any subsequent notification.
-  Article 342 allows the President, after consulting with the Governor, to specify the tribes or tribal communities deemed to be Scheduled Tribes for a particular State or Union Territory. Similar to Article 341, Parliament has the authority to include or exclude any tribe or tribal community from the list, with the same provision that a notification issued under this clause cannot be varied by any subsequent notification.

Where do China-Taiwan relations stand?

-  Taiwan's recent democratic elections concluded on January 13, with Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) emerging as the newly elected President, marking the party's third term.
-  Shift in Diplomatic Relations: Nauru announced a shift in its relations from Taipei to Beijing, aligning with a pattern observed during the previous term of Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen.
-  Beijing's Diplomatic Strategy: Beijing employs a pattern of luring smaller nations with promises of financial investment and infrastructure development to shift diplomatic relations, leading to a reduction in Taiwan's diplomatic space.

🇨🇳 China-Taiwan Ties and 1992 Consensus: China's assertiveness is linked to Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to accept the "1992 consensus," acknowledging 'one China,' while Taiwan's pro-independence stance has led to increased pressure from Beijing.

- 🇹🇼 Democracy in Taiwan: Taiwan's functioning democracy contrasts with China's one-party system and challenges the notion of the CPC as the only political option, posing a challenge to China's political aspirations of reunification.

Human Microbiome

- 🦠 Composition of the Human Microbiome: Composed of diverse microorganisms including bacteria, viruses, fungi, and single-celled organisms inhabiting various parts of the human body, influenced by factors such as diet, lifestyle, genetics, and environmental exposures.

- ⚖️ Functions of the Human Microbiome: Crucial role in metabolism, immune function, and potential influence on brain health through the gut-brain axis.

- 💡 Implications of the Human Microbiome: Linked to health conditions and diseases including obesity, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, and mental health disorders.

- 🏥 Diagnostic and Therapeutic Approaches: Advancements in microbiome research have led to the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic approaches, including microbiome-based treatments like fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) and personalized health management through microbiome analysis.

Rainfall rising in over half of India's sub-districts, says four-decade study

- 🌧️ Changing Rainfall Patterns in India: Detailed analysis reveals that over half of India's tehsils have witnessed an increase in rainfall, while approximately 11% have experienced decreasing rainfall, particularly during the critical southwest monsoon.

- 📉 Concerns about Decreasing Rainfall: Teasingly, about 68% of tehsils with reduced rainfall experienced declines throughout the monsoon months, impacting kharif crop sowing, primarily in the Indo-Gangetic plains, northeastern India, and the Indian Himalayan region.

- 📊 Study Details: The analysis, conducted by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), utilized high-resolution meteorological data from 1982 to 2022 recorded by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

- 🌍 District-Level Extremes: While India collectively experienced varying monsoon years, a district-level analysis reveals that 30% of districts faced more years of deficient rainfall, and 38% encountered excessive rainfall, with some witnessing both extremes in varying years.

- 🌍 Changing Rainfall in Historically Dry Regions: Historically dry regions, such as tehsils in Rajasthan, Gujarat, central Maharashtra, and parts of Tamil Nadu, are experiencing increased rainfall, aligning with the broader trend of rising precipitation.

- 🌧️ Localized Wet Rainfall Extremes: The study finds an increase in the frequency of heavy rainfall days during the southwest monsoon, particularly in economically significant states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Karnataka.

- 🌧️ Northeast Monsoon and Winter Rainfall Increase: Rainfall from the northeast monsoon and winter months has increased in various tehsils, calling for hyper-local climate risk assessments and action plans to address the impact of changing monsoon patterns on food, water, and energy transition.

Tamil Nadu Governor revives 'saffron' controversy on Thiruvalluvar Day

- 🏠 Tiruvalluvar: A celebrated Tamil poet-saint, author of the "Tirukkural," a literary masterpiece comparable to global classics like the Bible and Paradise Lost.

- 🏠 Life and Background: Limited information is available about Tiruvalluvar's life, believed to have resided in Mylapore, Chennai, and likely a Jain ascetic with humble origins who engaged in weaving.

- 📖 Notable Work: "Tirukkural": Consists of highly aphoristic couplets offering profound insights into various aspects of life, conveying revolutionary ideas with a reasonable tone.

- 💡 Revolutionary Ideas: Challenged the caste system, emphasizing the value of goodness for its own sake and not merely as a means to a comfortable afterlife.

What are light-emitting diodes and why are they prized as light sources?

- 💡 Evolution from Incandescent Bulbs to LEDs: LEDs have succeeded incandescent bulbs and fluorescent lamps as the primary light source, acknowledged by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 2014, with the Nobel Prize in Physics awarded for achievements enabling the dominance of LEDs.

- 🏠 Understanding Diodes: Diodes, with an anode and cathode, allow current flow in one direction via a p-n junction, comprising p-type and n-type materials.

- 💡 Introduction to LEDs: LEDs are light-emitting diodes where electroluminescence occurs in the p-n junction, with electrons releasing energy upon recombination, emitting visible light.

- 🌈 Band Gap in LEDs: LEDs' band gap determines the energy emitted during electron-hole recombination, creating visible light, with the ability to produce red, green, and blue colors.

- 🌈 LED Colour Production: LEDs can produce diverse colors, with challenges in creating blue LEDs leading to a breakthrough in epitaxy by Japanese researchers in the late 1980s.

- 🌟 Advantages of LEDs: LEDs are more efficient than incandescent bulbs and fluorescent lamps, with higher durability, light contrast, and efficiency contributing to cost savings and less material waste.

- 🌐 Versatile Applications: LEDs find applications in various sectors, including industry, consumer electronics, household appliances, and diverse fields such as greenhouse lighting, barcode scanners, and air quality monitoring.

- 🔬 Ongoing Research and Advancements: Ongoing research explores diverse LED applications, including embedded LEDs in skin, organic LEDs, and more efficient LEDs using perovskite materials.