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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

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HINDUSTAN TIMES

Jan 29

LAB GROWN FISH

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

India undertakes lab grown fish meat project to address growing seafood demand

Context: ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has entered into a collaborative research agreement with a private sector startup seeking cultivated technology solutions to grow fish meat in the laboratory.

Lab Grown Fish Project:

- **About**: A research project to develop lab-grown fish meat has been undertaken by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) for the first time in India.
- **Aim**: To establish India in the field of cultured marine fish meat, thereby addressing the growing seafood demand and reducing excessive pressure on wild resources.

Lab Grown fish:

- **About:** It is merely a type of lab-grown-or cultivated/cultured meat. Seafood without the sea is 'grown' in the same way as other cultivated meats are grown - without the need to raise and kill an animal.
- **Produced by**: Isolating specific cells from fish and growing them in a laboratory setting using media that is free of animal components.
  - The final product is expected to replicate the flavour, texture, and nutritional qualities of 'real' fish meat.
- **Countries growing lab fish**: Israel is the frontrunner, followed by Singapore, the United States, and China.

Need to Grow Fish Meat in the Laboratory

- **Solution to Overfishing**: Ongoing experiments worldwide aim to create commercially viable lab-grown fish meat to meet the increasing demand for seafood and alleviate pressure on wild resources.
- **Marine Ecosystem Impact**: Overfishing has led to a decline in fish populations, affecting entire marine ecosystems. Lab-grown fish meat offers a potential solution to this environmental challenge.
- **Reducing Environmental Impact**: Lab-grown fish meat is anticipated to be free from antibiotics and environmental contaminants. It also avoids contact with microplastics and heavy metals found in polluted seas and oceans.

THE HINDU

Science

HUMBOLDT'S ENIGMA

Syllabus GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

What is Humboldt's enigma and what does it mean for India?

While we expect diversity to decrease away from the tropics, mountains are an exception. This is the essence of Humboldt's enigma. But scientific evidence has been hard to acquire, requiring the use of complex analytical methods and large datasets, but is still incomplete

V.V. Robin
Nameer Goyal

Where is biodiversity concentrated? Explorers and naturalists have been asking this question for centuries. Many have also been curious why some areas are more biodiverse than others.

One of them was Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) – a polymath who recorded observations on various natural phenomena across the fields known today as geography, geology, meteorology, and biology.

Once, when exploring South America, he recorded the distribution of plants on a mountain. He also noted how climates were similar across various mountains in different parts of the world – but where specific features occurred on a mountain varied with elevation.

From his various studies, Humboldt suggested there was a relationship between temperature, altitude, and humidity on one hand and the occurrence patterns of species – or their biodiversity – on the other. His example of choice was the Chimborazo mountain in Ecuador, which has today become an important illustration of mountain diversity.

Two centuries later, a group of biogeographers – scientists who explore the relationship of diversity with geography – used modern tools to take another look at the drivers of biodiversity.

Based on their findings, they proposed their own version of the link between biodiversity and mountains and called it Humboldt's enigma.



A view from one of the Shola Sky Islands. PHOTO: JUST VISUALISING EXPLAINED IN SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

What is Humboldt's enigma?

The world's tropical areas receive more energy from the Sun because of the earth's angle of inclination. So the tropics have greater primary productivity, which then facilitates greater diversity: more ecological niches become available, creating more complex ecosystems and greater biological diversity.

The proponents of Humboldt's enigma have held that the earth's tropical areas by themselves don't contain all the biodiverse regions, that many areas outside the tropics are highly biodiverse. These places are mountains.

Indeed, while we expect diversity to decrease away from the tropics, mountains have been an important exception. This is the essence of Humboldt's enigma. But scientific evidence has been hard to acquire, requiring the use of complex analytical methods and large datasets of various taxonomic groups – and even then remains an incomplete exercise.

A simple way to think of Humboldt's enigma in India is to consider the biodiversity in our tropical areas, south of the Tropic of Cancer passing through Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. These areas are supposed to be the most diverse in the country. The Western Ghats plus Sri Lanka biodiversity hotspot lies in this zone.

However, the eastern Himalaya are much more diverse. Some scientists have even suggested this part of the mountain range is the second-most diverse area of perching birds in the world. For *true* birds, the eastern Himalaya may be the most diverse.

To understand how this might be possible, let's turn to the modern understanding of Humboldt's enigma.

What drives biodiversity?

The history of the earth, its geography, and the climate are the main drivers of mountain diversity. And different biodiversity at different locations is the result of changes in how these factors have intermingled over time and space.

We know mountains host two processes that generate biodiversity. First, geological processes, like uplifts, result in new habitats where new species arise, so the habitats are 'cradles'. Second, species on some climatologically stable mountains persist there for a long time, so these spots are 'museums' that accumulate many such species over time.

Coastal tropical sky islands (mountains surrounded by lowlands), like the Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, are a good example. Here, old lineages have persisted on the mountain tops as climates and habitats fluctuated around them in the lower elevations. This is the reason some of the oldest bird species in the Western Ghats, such as the *Sholicola* and the *Montecincla*, are housed on the Shola Sky Islands.

Sometimes, the same mountain can be both cradle for some species and museum for others, depending on the species' ecologies.

The northern Andes range – including Chimborazo – is considered the most biodiverse place in the world. If we start from the foothills of the Andes and climb, we're going to encounter different temperatures and rainfall levels that support everything from tropical evergreen biomes in the lower elevation to the alpine and tundra biomes near the top. Such a large variation over short distances supports the immense

> The more heterogeneous the geological composition of mountains is, the more biodiverse they are.

biodiversity found in mountain regions – and worldwide.

Another critical force in biodiversity formation is geology. The foundations on which mountains are erected often differ from those on which low-elevation regions rest.

Scientists have found that the more heterogeneous the geological composition of mountains is, the more biodiverse they are. Around the world, all mountains with high biodiversity have high geological heterogeneity as well, especially in the tropics. Even in tropical regions, where we expect higher biodiversity, some mountains with a lower variety of rocks are relatively less biodiverse. We also know plants are influenced by the type of soil, which depends on the type of rocks in that area. So high geological heterogeneity often produces unique habitat patches on mountains within similar climate regimes, and promotes diversification.

Against this backdrop, what drives biodiversity in the eastern Himalaya? Climate dissimilarity is still one crucial factor, something Humboldt also indicated based on his observations of the Chimborazo and understood to be a paradigm. Researchers have also found some groups of birds to have evolved elsewhere and dispersed to the Himalaya, resulting in higher diversity there.

What do we still not know?

Multiple factors drive diversification and the Humboldt's enigma in different parts of the world. Then again, scientists have also advanced more than a hundred different hypotheses on how diversity varies in different parts of the world, and they contend with the enigma in different ways. This article simply presents the big picture.

An important limitation of scientists' attempts to explain biodiversity patterns is the lack of fine data on where species occur. For now, birds are the best-described group around the world, and their diversity patterns suggest mountains play a defining role.

We need more research. In India in particular, several areas are under-studied. We can't expect to understand a place's true biodiversity unless we also use modern tools like genetics. For example, why don't the Eastern Ghats have any endemic passerine birds? The most likely answer is that scientists haven't studied them for more than a century, especially with modern tools.

Some national programmes are trying to address these gaps, including the National Mission on Himalayan Studies, the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, and the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing. They need to be strengthened, bolstered by the will to support basic research on diversity.

Humboldt's enigma is perhaps one of many puzzles of mountain biodiversity – and our backyards are excellent places to study them, to find answers to global problems of climate and landscape change.

V.V. Robin is an associate professor studying bird ecology using genetics and bioacoustics, and Nameer Goyal is a PhD student working on the diversification patterns of birds – both at IISER Tirupati.)

Context: Explorers and naturalists have been asking this question for centuries. Many have also been curious as to why some areas are more biodiverse than others.

- One of them was Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) – a polymath who recorded observations on various natural phenomena across the fields known today as geography, geology, meteorology, and biology.

Humboldt's enigma

- **Proposed by**: Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) – a polymath who recorded observations on various natural phenomena across the fields known today as geography, geology, meteorology, and biology.
- **About:** It proposed that there is a relationship between temperature, altitude, and humidity on one hand and the occurrence patterns of species – or their biodiversity – on the other.
  - Ex: Mountains, like the eastern Himalayas.
- **Biodiversity in mountain region**: Mountains host two processes that generate biodiversity.
  - **First:** geological processes, like uplifts, result in new habitats where new species arise, so the habitats are 'cradles'.
  - **Second:** species on some climatologically stable mountains persist there for a long time, so these spots are 'museums' that accumulate many such species over time.
- **Biodiversity in India**: The tropical areas south of the Tropic of Cancer, including Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, are considered India's most diverse.
  - The Western Ghats plus Sri Lanka biodiversity hotspot lies within this zone, showcasing high biodiversity.
- **Coastal Tropical Sky Islands**: The Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, exemplify biodiversity hotspots.
  - Old lineages persist on mountaintops, showcasing the impact of stable climates and fluctuating habitats in lower elevations.
- **Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Drivers**: Climate dissimilarity is a crucial factor in driving biodiversity in the eastern Himalaya.

PIB

Jan 29

INDIA'S NOMINATION - WORLD HERITAGE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – Art & Culture)

"Maratha Military Landscapes of India" will be India's nomination for recognition as UNESCO World Heritage List for the year 2024-25

Context: The "Maratha Military Landscapes of India" will be India's nomination for recognition as UNESCO World Heritage List for the year 2024-25.

- The twelve component parts of this nomination are, Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Khanderi fort, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijay durg, Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.

About UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- **About**: Any place or site recognised by UNESCO for its **cultural and natural importance** and is considered to be of **outstanding value to humanity**.
- **Recognition:** They are recognised under the **Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,** adopted by UNESCO in 1972 and effective from 1975.
- **Universal application**: Meaning, World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.
- **Selection criteria**: A masterpiece of human creativity; An important exchange of human values; Exceptional cultural testimony; Significant stages in architectural history; A traditional settlement; Outstanding universal significance; Areas of natural beauty; Representing major earth stages; Significant ongoing ecological processes; Important habitats for biodiversity conservation.

Suvarnadurg Fort

- **About**: The Maratha Military Landscapes in India, evolving during the 17th to 19th centuries, depict an exceptional fortification and military strategy conceived by the Maratha rulers.

Panhala Fort

- **About**: The inception of the Maratha Military ideology dates back to 17th Century during the reign of the Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj by the 1670 CE and continued through subsequent rules until Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

DTE Jan 29

MELURSUS URSINUS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

In Jambavan's land: Sloth bears mostly coexist peacefully with humans in Karnataka; but conflict is not non-existent

Context: Recently, a survey conducted in Karnataka's Western Ghats, spanning 38,540 square kilometres during September 2021, revealed that sloth bears exhibited a surprisingly harmonious coexistence with humans, contrary to expectations.

Melursus ursinus

- **About:** It also known as the Indian bear, is a myrmecophagous bear species native to the Indian subcontinent.
- **Characteristics**: Shaggy Coats and Unique Markings: Sloth bears boast shaggy, dusty-black fur, with distinctive cream-colored "V" or "Y" markings on their chests.
- **Taxonomy**: First described by George Shaw in 1791, the species was labeled Ursine bradypus, indicating a bearlike creature with slow feet. Although subsequent research clarified their taxonomic relationships, the confusing common name persists.
- **Size**: Sloth bears typically grow 5 to 6 feet in length, stand 2 to 3 feet tall at the shoulder, and weigh around 200 to 300 pounds.
- **Habitat**: Dry and moist forests, as well as tall grasslands, where boulders and scattered vegetation offer shelter.
- **Found**: India, Sri Lanka, and southern Nepal, with historical records in Bangladesh and Bhutan, though their current presence in the latter two is uncertain.
    - **Karnataka is a home to one of India's largest sloth bear** (Melursus ursinus) populations.
- **Sloth Bear Sanctuaries**: India boasts four dedicated sanctuaries that provide a habitat for over 620 sloth bears.
- **Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary**: The Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, located in Karnataka, is one of the key habitats for sloth bears in India.
- **Asia's Pioneering Sloth Bear Sanctuary:** The Ballari district in Karnataka is home to Asia's inaugural sloth bear sanctuary, covering an expansive area of 82.72 sq km.
- **Bilikallu Reserve Forest**: Originally known as the Bilikallu Reserve Forest, this area underwent a significant transformation when the government officially declared it as the Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary in 1994.

ALL INDIA RADIO

Jan 29

MAHATMA GANDHI

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – History)

Nation pays homage to the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi on his 76th death anniversary

Context: The nation pays homage to the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi on his 76th death anniversary.

Mahatma Gandhi

- **Early Life**: Gandhi, born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, India,
- **Title**: Mahatma and Father of the Nation.
- **South Africa Years**: Gandhi spent 21 years in South Africa, fighting for Indian rights and opposing racial discrimination, earning the title "Mahatma."
- **Natal India Congress and Protests**: Founded Natal India Congress in 1894 and protested against restrictions on Indian trade, movement, and residence in the Transvaal, burning registration certificates.
- **Contribution to National Movement**
- **Champaran Movement**: Situated in Bihar, was orchestrated by Gandhi as a form of civil disobedience. Its aim was to compel the British authorities to accede to the demands of farmers who were coerced into cultivating Indigo.
- **Kheda Movement**: This movement advocated for the non-payment of taxes and enforced a social boycott of revenue officials.
- **Ahmedabad Mill Strike**: It was spearheaded by Gandhi against mill owners. The primary grievance centered around the issue of a plague bonus for workers. Ultimately, the strike culminated in a 35% wage increase for the laborers.
- **Khilafat Movement (1919)**: Played a key role in uniting the nation during the Khilafat Movement, preventing British attempts to divide on religious lines.
- **Non-cooperation Movement (1920)**: Advocated non-cooperation as the path to Independence, setting the goal of Swaraj or self-governance.
- **'Unity' Fast (1924)**: Undertook a 21-day fast to ease Hindu-Muslim tensions, promoting unity.
- **Dandi March**: Led the 388-kilometer Dandi March against the salt tax, marking the start of the civil disobedience movement.
- **Quit India Movement**: Led the Quit India Movement in 1942 with the slogan "Do or Die" against British rule and India's involvement in World War II.

PIB Jan 29

SADA TANSEEQ
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

INDIA- SAUDI ARABIA JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE 'SADA TANSEEQ' COMMENCES IN RAJASTHAN

Context: The inaugural edition of the joint military exercise 'SADA TANSEEQ' between India and Saudi Arabia has officially started at Mahajan, Rajasthan.

Exercise 'SADA TANSEEQ

- **About:** It serves as a platform to strengthen the bond between the contingents and aims to achieve shared security objectives.
- **Duration**: The exercise is scheduled to take place from January 29th to February 10th, 2024, allowing for an extensive period of collaborative training.
- **Participation and Representation**
    - **The Saudi Arabian contingent**, consisting of 45 personnel, is being represented by the Royal Saudi Land Forces.
    - **On the Indian side**, a Battalion from the Brigade of the Guards (Mechanised Infantry) is representing the contingent with an equal number of 45 personnel.
- **Objectives**: To train troops from both nations for Joint Operations in Semi-Desert terrain, aligning with Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
- **Sharing Best Practices**: The exercise provides an opportunity for both sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures for conducting operations in the sub-conventional domain.
- **Specific Training Activities**: The exercise will involve various activities, including the establishment of a Mobile Vehicle Check Post, Cordon & Search Operation, House Intervention Drill, Reflex Shooting, Slithering, and Sniper Firing.
- **Fostering Bilateral Relations**: Ultimately, 'SADA TANSEEQ' serves as a platform to foster and strengthen bilateral relations between the two friendly nations, providing a valuable avenue for collaboration and understanding.

INDIAN EXPRESS Page 13

ISLAMIC RESISTANCE OF IRAQ
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

What is IRI, that 'killed US soldiers in Jordan'

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 29

THREE US military servicemen were killed in a drone attack on their outpost in Jordan on Sunday night, marking the first time US soldiers have died in the ongoing Middle East conflict. US President Joe Biden said in a statement that "radical Iran-backed militant groups operating in Syria and Iraq" were behind the strikes.

A group known as the Islamic Resistance of Iraq (IRI) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Why were US troops stationed in Jordan?

The strikes targeted Tower 22, a US military outpost in Jordan. The country is bordered by Israel to its west, Saudi Arabia to its southeast, Iraq to its northeast and Syria to its north.

A *Reuters* report said the outpost has around 350 US Army and Air Force staffers. "Jordan's army is one of the largest recipients of Washington's foreign military financing. The kingdom has hundreds of US trainers and is one of the few regional allies that hold extensive exercises with US troops throughout the year," the report added.

Tower 22 is near the Al Tanf garrison, located in Syria. US troops used the garrison while fighting against the Islamic State (IS), which emerged amid the Syrian Civil War, between those who supported and opposed the rule of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attempted to establish an Islamic caliphate amid the chaos in the region. It also carried out attacks and beheadings of foreigners, raising international concern.

What is the Islamic Resistance of Iraq?

According to a recent report in the *Financial Times*, "In Iraq and Syria, US forces have come under repeated assault by a newly created group of Iran-backed militias known as the Islamic Resistance of Iraq."



Satellite view of Tower 22 in Jordan on Oct 12, 2023. *Planet Labs PBC/via Reuters*

The thinktank Washington Institute noted in an October 2023 analysis that the IRI refers to "an umbrella term used to describe the operations of all Iran-backed militias in Iraq, including strikes into Syria during the October 2023 conflict between Israel and Hamas."

On October 17, the group said it carried out a drone attack on Harir Air Base in Iraqi Kurdistan.

What are the concerns here?

Some Republican politicians in the US criticised the Biden administration. "He left our troops as sitting ducks," said Republican US Senator Tom Cotton. "The only answer to these attacks must be devastating military retaliation against Iran's terrorist forces, both in Iran and across the Middle East."

Former President Donald Trump, who is also the frontrunner Presidential candidate from the Republican party, said the attack was a "consequence of Joe Biden's weakness and surrender."

For months, analysts have raised concerns that the widening ambit of the conflict could risk a bigger war, given the regional, religious and ethnic rivalries in the Middle East and the presence of multiple powerful non-state actors.

Context: Recently, three US military servicemen were killed in a drone attack on their outpost in Jordan, marking the first time that US soldiers have died in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

- The strikes targeted Tower 22, a US military outpost (a smaller version of a military base) in Jordan. The country is bordered by Israel to its west, Saudi Arabia to its southeast, Iraq to its northeast and Syria to its north.

Islamic Resistance of Iraq (IRI)

- **About:** In Iraq and Syria, US forces have come under repeated assault by a newly created group of Iran-backed militias known as the Islamic Resistance of Iraq."
- **Iran's Anti-Western Alliance**: The IRI is part of the 'Axis of Resistance,' a coalition of Iran-backed militias opposing Western and US influence, according to analysts.
- **Powerful Militias Integrated into the State**: The IRI is considered a front for Iranian-backed factions within the powerful Hashd al-Shaabi militias, which wield significant military and political influence in Iraq.
- **IRI's Role in October 2023 Conflict**: The term IRI encompasses all Iran-backed militias in Iraq, including their operations in Syria during the October 2023 conflict between Israel and Hamas.
- **Drone Attack:** On October 17, the IRI claimed responsibility for a drone attack on Harir Air Base in Iraqi Kurdistan, possibly linked to the Shiite group Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba.
- **Israel's Offensive and Regional Solidarity**: Following Hamas attacks on Israel, the Israeli military's response triggered a continuing offensive in Gaza.
  - Iran-backed groups like Hezbollah and the Houthis launched counter-attacks in solidarity with Palestine, contributing to the escalating conflict.

ALL INDIA RADIO

Jan 29

INS SUMITRA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

INS Sumitra Rescues 17 Hostages, Thwarts Piracy Attempt on Iranian Fishing Vessel 'Iman' near Somalia

Context: INS Sumitra, on Anti-Piracy Operations along the East coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, responded to a distress message regarding hijacking of an Iranian flagged Fishing Vessel 'Iman'.

INS Sumitra

- **About**: It is an indigenously built naval offshore patrol vessel (NOPV), was commissioned into the naval fleet on September 4.
    - This is the Navy's largest offshore patrol vessel.
- **Tone Vessel**: The 2200-tonne vessel is the biggest NOPV to be developed at Goa Shipyard.
- **Indigenous NOPV**: The vessel is the fourth in the series of indigenous NOPV developed for Indian Navy.
- **Weapons installed**: It also has medium and short range weapons installed in it.
    - They include 76mm guns, Close-in Weapon System (CIWS), electronic support and a communication intelligence system.
- **Helipad**: It has a helipad to operate one light weight Dhruv helicopter.
- **Advanced weapon sensor platform**: There is an advanced weapon sensor platform, making INS Sumitra effective for surveillance and ensuring security of offshore installations, including oil filling stations.
- **Coastal surveillance**: The vessel will give a boost to coastal surveillance and anti-piracy and counter maritime terrorism operations of the Navy.
- **Eastern Naval Command fleet**: It is suitable for monitoring sea lanes of communication, defence of offshore oil installations and other critical offshore national assets.
    - The latest generation warship will join the Eastern Naval Command fleet for maritime surveillance and coastal security.

INDIAN EXPRESS Page 13

UNRWA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – International Organization)

Why some nations have paused UNRWA funding

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 29

UN OFFICIALS Sunday urged countries to reconsider their decision to suspend the funding for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), assuring that it would take strict action against any staff member found to be involved in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.

The officials said two million Palestinians in Gaza are dependent on UNRWA services that would be scaled back by February if the funding is not restored. The US and eight other countries, which provided more than half of UNRWA's 2022 budget, cut the money after Israel accused some of the agency's staffers of involvement in the October 7 attack.



A Palestinian man holds a flour bag provided by UNRWA in Khan Younis in November 2023. *Reuters*

What is UNRWA?

UNRWA stands for UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. It was founded in 1949 to provide aid to about 700,000 Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

The UN agency operates in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. According to its website, it runs education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and emergency assistance programmes. Currently, around 5.9 million Palestine refugees — most of them are descendants of original refugees — access the agency's services.

UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions by donor states like the US.

What has Israel accused UNRWA of?

The details of the accusations are scant. Israel has alleged that 12 staff members of UNRWA were involved in the October 7 attack. It has also claimed that Hamas siphons off funds given to UNRWA and fights from in and around the agency's facilities. Israel has alleged that "Hamas tunnels (are) running next to or under UNRWA facilities and accuses the agency of teaching hatred of Israel in its schools," the *Associated Press* reported.

How has UNRWA responded?

The UNRWA has denied all the allegations, saying it has no links to Hamas. In the statement, UN officials said out of 12 staff members who were accused of being involved in the attack, nine have been terminated. One is confirmed dead and the identity of the two others is being clarified.

Chris Gunness, a former UNRWA spokesman, told *Al Jazeera* that the allegations against the agency are a "coordinated political attack" by Israel.

What happens now?

UNRWA is crucial for the survival of people living in Gaza, which has plunged into a humanitarian crisis. The agency has been the main supplier of food, water and shelter to civilians of the enclave. UNRWA, however, would run out of money needed for its aid work within weeks if the funding isn't restored, according to Gunness, which would exacerbate the situation in Gaza.

Context: UN officials urged countries to reconsider their decision to suspend the funding for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), assuring that it would take strict action against any staff member found to be involved in Hamas' attack on Israel.

UNRWA

- **About:** UNRWA, an acronym for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, was established in 1949.
- **Objective**: To provide assistance to approximately 700,000 Palestinians who were compelled to leave their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, now residing in various countries.
- **Refugee Support**: UNRWA operates in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, along with Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan—nations where the displaced Palestinians sought refuge.
- **Focus**: On delivering education, health, relief, and social services, as well as implementing microfinance and emergency assistance programs both inside and outside refugee camps.
- **Refugee Population**: Presently, UNRWA serves approximately 5.9 million Palestine refugees, primarily comprising descendants of the original refugees.
- Notably, over 1 million people in Gaza, constituting 85% of the enclave's 2.3 million population, are seeking refuge in UNRWA schools and facilities following the recent Israel-Hamas conflict.
- **Funding**: UNRWA relies heavily on voluntary contributions from donor states, with the United States being a significant contributor. Additionally, the agency receives a limited subsidy from the UN, specifically designated for administrative expenses.

FINANCIAL EXPRESS

Page 3

NUTRIENT BASED SUBSIDY SCHEME

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Agriculture)

Non-urea fertilisers now under pricing control

HARISH DAMODARAN
New Delhi, January 29

THE NARENDRA MODI government has brought di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), muriate of potash (MOP) and all other such fertilisers that receive nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) support, under "reasonable pricing" controls.

NBS fertilisers – unlike urea, whose maximum retail price (MRP) is fixed by the government – are technically decontrolled. Under the NBS scheme, introduced in April 2010, their maximum retail prices (MRPs) are supposed to be market-determined and set by the individual companies selling them. The government merely pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy on each of these fertilisers, linked to their nutrient content or specific percentage of nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and sulphur.

The department of fertilisers (DoF) has now, in an office memorandum dated January 17, issued detailed guidelines for the evaluation of "reasonableness" of MRPs for all non-urea fertilisers covered under NBS.

The guidelines, to be effective retrospectively from April 1, 2023, have prescribed maximum profit margins that will be allowed for fertiliser companies – 8% for importers, 10% for manufacturers and 12% for integrated manufacturers (those producing finished fertilisers as well as intermediates such as phosphoric acid and ammonia). Companies earning "unreasonable profit", i.e. over and above the stipulated percentages, in a particular financial year will have to refund the same to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal.

If they don't return the money within the said time limit, "an interest @12% per annum on pro-rata basis would be charged on the refund amount from the next day of end of financial year (i.e. in case of FY 2023-24, the interest would be charged from April 1, 2024)," the memorandum has said. The unreasonable profits would also get adjusted against subsequent fertiliser subsidy payments by the government. Simply put, the new guidelines impose indirect MRP controls on non-urea fertilisers by capping the profits that companies can earn from their sales. These will be based on their "total cost of sales", which would cover cost of production/ import, administrative overheads, selling and distribution overheads, and net interest and financing charges. Deduction for dealer's margin will be allowed to the extent of 2% of the MRP for DAP and MOP, and 4% for all other NBS fertilisers.

The guidelines have mandated fertiliser companies to "self-assess" unreasonable profits, based on the cost auditor's report along with audited cost data approved by their board of directors. This report and data has to be furnished to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal year. The DoF will then scrutinise the "reasonability of MRPs", as submitted by the companies, "by 28th February for each completed previous financial year (i.e. for FY 2023-24 by 28 February 2025)". Following that, it will finalise a report on unreasonable profits earned, if any, to be recovered from the firms.

An industry source said the new guidelines basically extend the regime of detailed cost monitoring and price control currently applicable on urea to other fertilisers. The MRP of urea has remained at ₹5,360 per tonne since November 1, 2012. The only change that has taken place is companies being permitted to charge 5% extra (₹268) for neem-coating of urea, made mandatory from May 25, 2015.

REVISING RULES

- Under the NBS scheme, introduced in April 2010, NBS fertilisers' price are market-determined
- The govt pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy on each of these fertilisers



- Now, the new guidelines have prescribed maximum profit margins allowed for fertiliser companies
- These are 8% for importers, 10% for manufacturers and 12% for integrated ones

Context: The indian government has brought di-ammo- niumphosphate (DAP), muriate of potash (MOP) and all other such fertilisers that receive nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) support, under "reasonable pricing" controls.

Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme

- **About:** Under the NBS policy, **the government annually declares a fixed subsidy rate** for key nutrients, including Nitrogen (N), Phosphate (P), Potash (K), and Sulphur (S).
- **Implemented by**: Since 2010 by the Department of Fertilizers
- **Nodal Ministry**: Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers
  - Fertilizer **manufacturers and importers provide farmers with subsidized prices** for Urea and 25 P&K fertilizer grades as part of the government's initiative.
- **Aim**: The NBS policy strives **to enhance the utilization of P&K fertilizers** to attain the desired NPK fertilization equilibrium, with a ratio of 4:2:1 for Nitrogen (N), Phosphate (P), and Potash (K).
- **Fertilizer Covered** : Nitrogen(N) , Phosphorus(p) , Potassium (K) and Sulphur(S).
- **Fortification/Coating Incentive:** Fortified/coated variants of subsidized P&K fertilizers, adhering to Fertilizer Control Order (FCO) provisions for Boron and Zinc, receive additional per tonne subsidies.
- **Objective of NBS**
  - To guarantee the nation's food security.
  - To enhance agricultural productivity.
  - To ensure the equitable use of fertilizers.
- **Benefits**
  - It helps farmers in **ensuring availability of essential nutrients** at subsidized prices.
  - It rationalizes the **subsidy on P&K fertilizers**, ensuring effective and efficient utilization of government resources.

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