

Editorial of the Day – 19.01.2026

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1. Crisis in education- On the Supreme Court, higher education and student well-being (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighborhood- relations.

Sub Topic- Higher Education System in India, Governance in Higher Education, Judiciary (Judicial Activism/Intervention).

Crisis in Higher Education- Systemic Reforms and Supreme Court Intervention

1. Introduction

The Higher Education sector in India is currently facing a critical juncture characterized by deep-rooted systemic failures. The Supreme Court of India has recently intervened decisively in the matter of student suicides, identifying them not merely as isolated incidents but as symptoms of broader institutional decay. This decay is attributed to rapid privatization, inadequate institutional capacity, and persistent vacancies in faculty and governance roles.

2. Supreme Court Intervention on Student Suicides

The Court has issued firm directions to the Central and State governments to ensure accountability and transparency.

Context of Intervention- The directions stem from an ongoing case regarding student suicides.

Root Causes Identified

Unchecked Expansion- Rapid expansion of higher education driven largely by privatization without a corresponding improvement in educational quality.

Student Distress Factors- Acknowledgment of growing distress caused by

1. Financial pressures.
2. Social factors and social injustice.
3. Severe academic stress.

3. Constitutional Mechanisms and Specific Directions

To ensure these directions are not ignored, the Court invoked its extraordinary powers.

Use of Article 142- The Court invoked Article 142 of the Constitution to ensure the effective and mandatory implementation of its directions.

The Nine Directions

Data Management (7 Directions)- Focus on systematic record-keeping, mandatory reporting, tracking of student suicides, and ensuring separate data treatment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Institutional Capacity (2 Directions)- Immediate filling of critical posts- Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Faculty. Explicit recognition that these administrative and academic roles are critical to maintaining student well-being.

4. The Crisis of Faculty Vacancies in Public HEIs

The shortage of human resources is a primary driver of institutional failure.

Magnitude of the Issue- Ground reports indicate approximately 50% faculty vacancies in many public universities across India.

Direct Impact- This chronic shortage directly compromises

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

1. Teaching Quality- Overburdened existing staff and reliance on ad-hoc teachers.
2. Research Output- Stagnation in knowledge creation.
3. Student Support- Lack of adequate mentoring and support systems, which are crucial for preventing student distress.

5. Case Study- The Decline of the University of Madras

The University of Madras serves as a microcosm of the wider crisis affecting State-run HEIs.

A. Historical Significance

Legacy- A leading institution in Tamil Nadu, known for its high-quality research and conduct of examinations for affiliated colleges.

Regional Context- Tamil Nadu leads India in higher education enrolment and has a strong legacy of women's education.

Expansion- Teaching activities expanded significantly from the late 1970s.

B. Institutional Decline (Last Decade)

Staffing Crisis

Zero Appointments- No new faculty appointments have been made in the last decade.

Reduced Strength- Teaching strength has plummeted to nearly half of the sanctioned posts.

Erosion of Research Capacity

Weakened Centers- Once-prestigious centers for advanced studies in Philosophy, Botany, and Mathematics still exist but are functionally weakened.

Neglected Fields- Research in Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences has suffered.

Policy Gap- Research focused on Tamil Nadu, which is vital for evidence-based public policy, has been largely neglected.

6. Governance Paralysis and Appointment Bottlenecks

The inability to fill vacancies is exacerbated by administrative and political hurdles.

Vice-Chancellor Appointments- Stalled due to conflicts involving

- a. Recalcitrant Governors.
- b. Legal uncertainties following the Supreme Court's observations on a Presidential reference concerning the powers of Governors.

Faculty Recruitment Challenges

Procedural Delays- Recruitment must follow UGC-prescribed procedures, which typically require at least six months.

Financial Constraints- Demands substantial financial commitment, necessitating support from the Union government.

Talent and Integrity Issues

- a. Limited pool of qualified faculty.
- b. Issues of corruption in recruitment.
- c. Political or ideological appointments that weaken academic standards.

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Supreme Court has set a demanding four-month timeline for compliance, serving as a wake-up call for the education sector.

Prerequisites for National Goals- Rebuilding institutional foundations is not optional. Adequate staffing, effective governance, and robust research ecosystems are essential prerequisites.

Risk to Vision- Without these systemic reforms, ambitious national visions like 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) risk remaining purely aspirational rather than achievable.

Final Imperative- Student well-being is intrinsically linked to sound governance. Restoring academic integrity and strengthening public universities are urgent necessities.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/crisis-in-education-on-the-supreme-court-higher-education-and-student-well-being/article70522242.ece>

2. India has surpassed China in rice production. But this love for paddy is not without pitfalls (IE)

General Studies 3– Economy

Topic– Major crops–cropping patterns in various parts of the country; Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; Food processing and related industries.

Sub Topic– Food Security, Public Distribution System (PDS), Buffer Stocks, Agricultural Exports, and Environmental Impact of Agriculture.

India's Record Rice Output– Agricultural Triumph and Policy Implications

1. Introduction

India has achieved a historic milestone in the 2024–25 agricultural year by producing approximately 150.18 million tonnes of rice, surpassing China's output of 145.28 million tonnes. This achievement firmly positions India as the world's largest rice producer. This record output is not just a statistical victory but a testament to long-term improvements in agronomy, irrigation, and institutional support, signaling a major shift in global food supply chain dynamics where India is now a central pillar.

2. Driving Factors Behind Record Output

The surge in production is the result of a convergence of climatic, technological, and institutional factors

Favourable Monsoons– The 2024 monsoon season provided adequate and well-distributed rainfall. This created ideal conditions for paddy cultivation in major rice-bowls of India– West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh.

Expanded Cultivation Area– The net sown area for rice has increased, driven by positive market signals.

Institutional Support– Assured government procurement at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) incentivized farmers to dedicate more land to paddy.

High-Yielding Varieties (HYV)

Scientific Innovation– Collaborative efforts by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and state universities have led to the adoption of superior seed varieties.

Recent Release– 184 new crop varieties across 25 crops were recently released, significantly boosting per-hectare productivity.

Technology and Mechanisation

- Enhanced access to fertilizers and pesticides.
- Increased mechanization of farm operations (sowing, harvesting).
- Improved irrigation infrastructure reducing dependency on erratic weather in some regions.

3. Economic and Policy Significance

This surplus production has dual implications—strengthening domestic stability while enhancing global influence.

A. Food Security and Domestic Stability

Buffer Stocks– The record output ensures robust buffer stocks for the government.

Social Welfare– It secures the supply chain for the National Food Security Act (NFSA), allowing the government to provide subsidized food grains to vulnerable populations without fear of shortage.

B. Export Competitiveness and Global Impact

Global Leadership– India is the leading global exporter of rice.

Export Surge– Following the removal of export curbs, rice exports rebounded by approximately 19.4%, reaching 21.55 million tonnes in 2025.

Geopolitical Soft Power

- Price Stabilizer–** Abundant Indian supplies dampen global food inflation.
- Market Share–** India has reclaimed markets in Asia and Africa, benefiting net food-importing nations with lower costs.

4. Challenges from Surplus (The Problem of Plenty)

Paradoxically, record production brings its own set of economic and logistical challenges.

Excess Stocks & Storage Crisis-

- Government granaries hold reserves far exceeding the strategic buffer norms.
- This increases carrying costs (storage, maintenance, wastage) and strains infrastructure.

Price Deflation- Oversupply leads to a crash in domestic and international market prices.

Farmer Distress- Without effective MSP intervention, open market prices may fall below the cost of production, squeezing farmer incomes.

5. Policy Responses to Manage Surplus

To manage the "excess," the government has pivoted from restriction to liberalization and diversification.

Export Policy Adjustments

reversal of Restrictions- The government lifted export bans/curbs, allowing free shipment to clear domestic stockpiles.

Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)

- Diversion for Fuel- Surplus rice stocks are being diverted for ethanol production.
- Dual Benefit- This reduces the storage burden on the Food Corporation of India (FCI) while helping India meet its renewable fuel targets.

Procurement Strategy- Continued procurement at MSP acts as a safety net to prevent a price crash for farmers, despite the fiscal pressure it puts on the exchequer.

6. Impact on Rural Economy

Income Boost- Higher yields generally translate to higher income, provided price stability is maintained via MSP.

Employment Generation- The boom stimulates allied sectors including transportation, warehousing, milling, and export logistics.

Risk- If demand (export or domestic) lags behind supply, farm-gate prices could collapse, necessitating state intervention.

7. Environmental and Sustainability Concerns

The focus on quantity has raised serious ecological questions that need addressing for long-term viability.

Water Intensity- Rice is a water-guzzling crop; intensive cultivation depletes groundwater tables, especially in semi-arid regions like Punjab and Haryana.

Methane Emissions- Flooded paddy fields are a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Need for Reform- The current success relies heavily on resource-intensive practices that may not be sustainable.

8. Conclusion and Way Forward

India's emergence as the top rice producer is a victory for its agricultural policies and scientific capabilities. However, to sustain this without ecological or economic collapse, the following measures are essential-

Market Diversification- Aggressively expand export markets and promote value-added rice products (e.g., rice bran oil, processed foods) to absorb surplus.

Ethanol Utilization- Scale up rice-to-ethanol infrastructure to responsibly manage buffer stocks.

Sustainable Farming- Promote System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) to save water. Encourage crop diversification away from rice in water-stressed areas.

Price Stability Mechanisms- Implement robust crop insurance, calibrate MSP scientifically, and use demand forecasting to protect farmers from volatile price cycles.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-has-surpassed-china-in-rice-production-but-this-love-for-paddy-is-not-without-pitfalls-10475138/>