



Current Affairs of the Day

- 'It is a long journey to distribute fortified rice at govt. Schools'
- Activists urge FSSAI to reconsider planned fortification of rice, oil
- Fast radio bursts detected in the Milky Way for the first time



'It is a long journey to distribute fortified rice at govt. schools'

GSII: Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger.

Experts warn that a long journey lies ahead to implement the distribution of fortified rice at government schools and Anganwadi centres in 15 States as there is need to bring millers and snack manufacturers on board and improve quality control.

Highlights:

1. The government announced earlier this week its plans to expand the supply of rice fortified with iron, vitamin B-12 and folic acid on a pilot basis from 15 districts to 15 States with the aim to curb anaemia.
2. Fortified rice can provide 30-50% of the recommended dietary allowance of iron that adults need to consume daily, based on average Indian consumption.
3. The other immediate step is bringing the country's 28,000 rice millers on board, to install blending machines which can mix the fortified rice kernels into the normal rice in a 1:100 ratio.

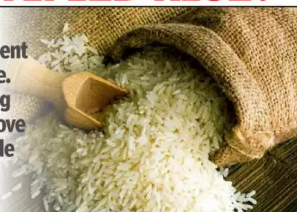
The concern with centralization:

4. Some public health experts also warn of adverse consequences of "the corporatisation of the food system" by insisting on processes that demand a centralisation of supplies.
5. However, some are also wary of its nutritional outcomes and caution that fortification of staples such as cereals may hurt local economies.

Learn through Graphics:

WHAT IS FORTIFIED RICE?

Fortification is the practice of deliberately increasing the content of an essential micronutrient, i.e. vitamins and minerals (including trace elements) in food to improve its nutritional quality and provide a public health benefit with minimal risk to health



► The fortification factor does not last for more than **45 days**, so it isn't advisable to store fortified rice for long

► According to National Family Health Survey, **78.7%** children and **75%** in the district are anaemic and suffer from malnutrition

► In the first phase, fortified rice will be distributed in Badangi, Bobbili, Ramabhadrapuram and Terlam mandals



Activists urge FSSAI to reconsider planned fortification of rice, oil

GS II: Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger.

Bottom line: The Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) called upon the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to reconsider its planned fortification of edible oil and rice, citing a number of negative outcomes. Instead of food fortification, the food regulator needed to promote organically grown, biodiverse food for people, ASHA said.

Highlights:

1. The FSSAI is considering mandatory fortification of edible oil with Vitamin A and Vitamin D and rice with Vitamin B12, Iron and Folic Acid.
2. While ASHA agreed with FSSAI's diagnosis that India faced a huge nutritional challenge, it strongly disagreed with the prescription offered.

Concerns:

1. The primary reason for ASHA disagreeing with the decision was that the benefits of rice fortification were unproven. There were also health risks associated with fortification.
2. ASHA cited a global meta-analysis on fortification of rice with vitamins and minerals. The researchers concluded that fortification of rice with iron alone or in combination with other micronutrients made little or no difference in the risk of having anaemia.
3. ASHA also warned that there were concerns regarding overdose due to fortifying rice. A study last year had cautioned that food fortification and iron tablet supplementation may expose women to excess iron.
4. Another reason why ASHA was opposed to FSSAI's planned move was that it would create an assured market for multinationals, which in turn would threaten the livelihoods of small rice and oil processing units across India.
5. A third reason was that such a move would further erode biodiversity, push monocultures and deplete soil health.

ASHA's alternatives

ASHA suggested that instead of fortifying rice and edible oil, the FSSAI could take other steps to meet the nutritional challenge in India.

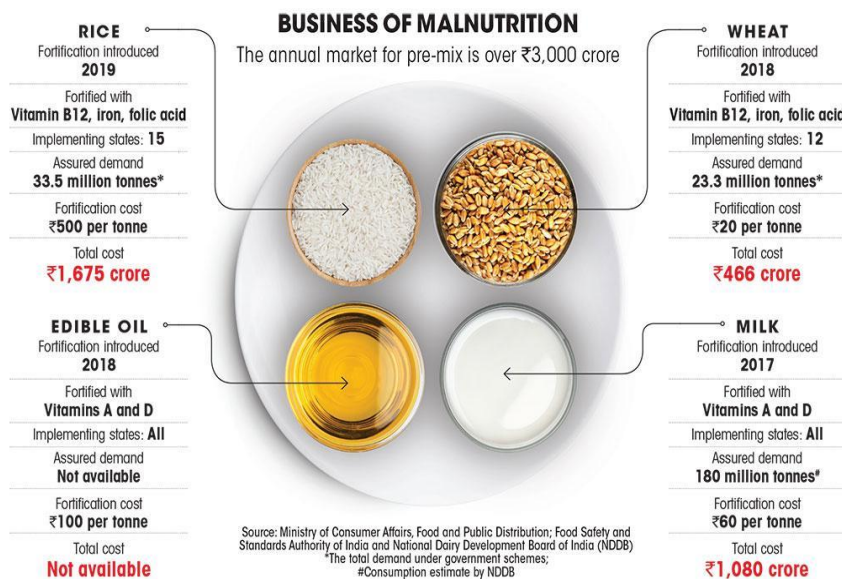


1. One such option was food grown through Amrut Krishi, an organic farming technique that would lead to an increase in food nutrition.
2. Another solution was breastfeeding with proper latching techniques. It could make critical impacts on nutrition deficiency in the critical first 1,000 days.
3. A third way was kitchen gardens. A study in Maharashtra had shown how vegetables grown in organic kitchen gardens have been found to increase haemoglobin levels.
4. A fourth option was to include less processed or unpolished rice in the public distribution system. This would make sure that rice bran, a rich source of various micronutrients reached people.
5. Lastly, FSSAI could play a greater role in building awareness about the diverse grains, vegetables, fruits and other crops grown in India.

Mains:

1. Food fortification plan should be favourable to biodiversity, supportive of local economies and effective in combating nutritional challenges without any adverse impact. Critically discuss the latest food fortification plan of FSSAI in this context and suggest innovative, local and sustainable measures.

Learn through Graphics:



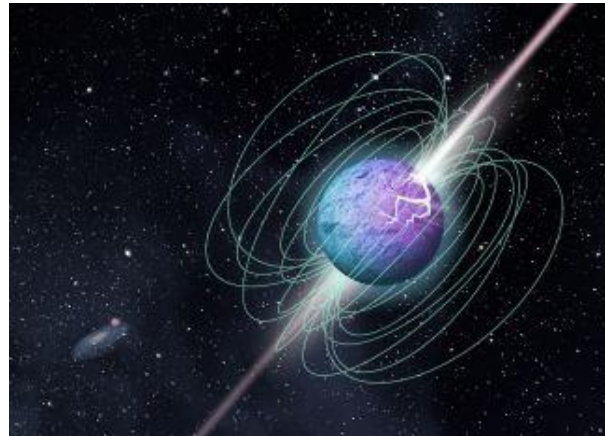
Fortification is a lucrative business and a government backing translates into an assured market worth crores of rupees.



Fast radio bursts detected in the Milky Way for the first time

Only Prelims

Intense pulses of radio waves known as fast radio bursts (FRB) that have been frequently detected in other galaxies, have now been found in the Milky Way, new studies have shown. The source of the FRB lies in the centre of the Milky Way, in the constellation Vulpecula.



Highlights:

1. FRBs were first discovered in 2007 and there are still many gaps in information regarding them.
2. The latest studies have now confirmed that FRBs are in fact generated by a rare type of neutron star known as a 'magnetar'.
3. Magnetars are the most powerful magnets in the cosmos. Their magnetic fields are 5,000 trillion times more powerful than that of the Earth.
4. The FRB generated by this magnetar was so powerful that it emitted as much energy in one millisecond as the sun does in 30 seconds, according to the scientists.
5. The FRB was not only the closest such signal ever recorded near the Earth. It was also 3,000 times brighter than any other magnetar radio signal detected till now.