

1. Do you think the decision to withdraw the three farm laws was a retrograde move? Critically comment.

Approach-

Candidates need to write about the how much prudent it was to repeal the farm laws candidates has to highlight both side of arguments and also write implications in short.

Introduction

The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 repeals the three farm laws passed by Parliament in September 2020. The laws sought to reorganise India's agriculture sector more in accordance with the principles of market economy.

Body

Farm law was to diversify its cropping pattern into export-oriented and high-value crops. Repealing of laws stood as the retrograde move because:

- Improving Storage infrastructure: Similarly, the advocacy for the amendment to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 rested on the view that private corporate investment can be incentivised into storage and warehousing if stock limits are relaxed for traders.
- Marketing Freedom to Farmers: The Centre's farm laws were an attempt to ensure that farmers get the right price for produce, and have the freedom to sell where they want to.
- Incentivising Private entry: The APMC Acts discriminated against farmers by not allowing them to interact directly with the big corporate buyers and exporters. So, the APMC Acts must be amended so that any private market or rural collection centre can freely emerge anywhere without approval of the local mandi or the payment of a mandi tax, and so that contract farming can be popularised.

Repeal of the farm laws was the prudent idea step:

- Bihar's example showed that private investment was unlikely to flow into agricultural markets even if APMC Acts were annulled. In fact, the exploitation of farmers by unscrupulous traders intensified in Bihar after 2006.
- Maharashtra delisted fruits and vegetables from the ambit of APMCs in 2016. Still, the inflow of private investment into agricultural markets was only marginal.
- Possibility of Fragmentation of market: Thus, what was likely was that a formal and regulated market (through APMC) might fragment itself into an informal and unregulated market if the APMC Acts were weakened.

- Criticism of Grievance Redress Mechanisms: Eradicating the power of civil courts and their substitution with a weak mechanism led by the sub-divisional magistrate threatened to be a serious impediment to a just redress of complaints. It was feared that this may benefit corporate sponsors more than the contracting farmers.
- Mishandling of Farmer protests: Efforts were made to break, divide, buy out, demean, denigrate, demonise and shame the protesters, who were conveniently branded as terrorists and Khalistanis.
- Violation of Federal principles: The Union government invoked Entry 33 of the Concurrent List to intervene into matters in Entry 14, Entry 26 and Entry 27 of the State List. Thus, to begin with, the farm laws were reasonably and justifiably argued to be unconstitutional.

Implications of move:

- Democratic Victory: Marks a historic victory for the farmer's movement in India. For more than a year, thousands of farmers had barricaded Delhi, and their protests were gradually evolving into a pan-Indian movement of resistance. Repealing of farm laws has helped put an end to the protests.
- End of Confrontation: The repeal of the farm laws has, at least temporarily, put an end to confrontation between the Union government and the farmers.
- Positive Politicisation: The agitation has led to a positive politicisation of several agrarian demands, including the need for stable markets and remunerative prices.
- Set a precedence: A confidence has grown that committed struggles matter and even aggressive governments can be made to kneel. New rural mobilisations around demands to address the larger and persistent agrarian crisis are likely to emerge and grow.

Conclusion

Government has done well to acknowledge that laws are not as good as their enforcement by state machinery, but only as good as their capacity to win people's trust. Most important process of economic reforms has to be more consultative, more transparent and better communicated to the potential beneficiaries.

2. What are the key issues in India's current MSP regime? Discuss. What urgent reforms would you recommend to address the market distortions caused by MSP? Discuss.

Approach

Students are expected to write about the what is the MSP regime and what are the key problems in it. Recommend suggest measures how recent market distortion caused by MSP can be rectified.

Introduction

MSP is the minimum support price. It was first introduced in the 1965-66 season (July-June) for wheat, and it now covers 23 crops. Now that the farm laws are withdrawn there is pressure on the government to legalize the MSP with few reforms in it.

Body

Key issues in MSP regimes:

- In most crops grown across much of India, the prices received by farmers, especially during harvest time, are well below the officially-declared MSPs.
- While the MSPs technically ensure a minimum 50% return on all cultivation costs, these are largely on paper.
- As per Shanta kumar committee MSP only helps 6 per cent of farmers.
- Under WTO Norms, that grain stocks with the FCI (being heavily subsidized due to MSP) cannot be exported.
- The economic cost of procured rice and wheat is much higher for the FCI than the market price of the same. Due to this there is divergence of funds from being invested in agriculture infrastructure.

Market distortion due to high MSP:

- MSPs in Favour of Paddy and Wheat: Skewed MSP dominated system of rice and wheat leads to overproduction of these crops.
- Inflation: Giving unrealistically high prices to farmers pushes inflation. This makes domestic prices much higher than global prices, which will strongly hit exports and make way for cheaper imports.
- Decline in market competitiveness: If the MSP crops are procured at prices far higher than other crops, there will be little incentive for efficiency and diversification in the crop sector. This will also impact the competitiveness of the market negatively.

Recommendations and Wayforward:

- The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) constituted in November 2004 and chaired by Professor M.S. Swaminathan also recommended the use of C2 to determine MSP.
- Alternatives to MSP: Examine options for including private traders operating in markets to complement the minimum support price (MSP) regime through a system of incentives and commission payments.
- Unified National Market: Raising MSP or prices can only be a partial solution to the problem of assuring remunerative returns to farmers, a long-term solution lies in the creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market to enable better price discovery and a long-term trade regime favourable to exports.
- Proper and rigorous implementation of ambitious projects like e-NAM, doubling farmer's income by 2022, price stabilisation fund, recommendations of Swaminathan and Shanta Kumar committee is required.
- Strengthen the Farmers Producer Organization (FPO) in whole farm and non-farm sectors. It will increase bargaining power of farmers on one hand and provide a suitable investment climate on the other.
- Agriculture Tribunal: The government should consider replacing the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) by an agriculture tribunal in line with the provisions of Article 323B of the Constitution.

Conclusion

Apart from it, the government should shift its focus from providing only price support to farmers and focus on building better infrastructure, minimizing the gap between farmers and the market, land reforms, policy reforms to increase flow of credit to farmers, establishing food-processing industries for perishable goods, providing better irrigation facilities etc so, that agriculture emerges as a viable means of sustenance.

3. What are some of the most important initiatives taken by the Ministry of Water Resources to conserve and augment India's water bodies? Discuss.

Approach-

Candidates need to discuss/widely cover some of the most important initiatives taken by the Ministry of Water Resources to conserve and augment India's water bodies.

Introduction:

Water scarcity is one of the serious concerns for countries across the world. In 2019, Chennai made international headlines when the civic bodies declared 'Day Zero', as the city ran out of water and all the reservoirs dried up.

Some of the most important initiatives taken by the Ministry of Water Resources to conserve and augment India's water bodies:

The Government of India has created the Ministry of Jal Shakti by integrating the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation and the Department of Water Resources River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, with a goal of integrated water resources management under one umbrella, so that all the issues relating to water are dealt with in a holistic manner.

Some of the most important initiatives taken by the Ministry of Water Resources to conserve and augment India's water bodies includes:

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti under the Indian government launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan in 2019. It is a nation-wide water conservation campaign that aims at encouraging citizen participation to promote water conservation at the grassroot level.
- Jal Shakti is monitoring Interlinking of River (ILR) programme with the mission of ensuring greater equity in the distribution of water by enhancing the availability of water in drought prone and rain-fed area.
- On the World Water Day, March 22nd 2021, the government launched the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' with the theme 'Catch the rain, where it Falls When it Falls' under which, the government focuses on creation/maintenance of water conservation and rainwater harvesting structures, renovation of various traditional water bodies tanks, reuse and recharge of bore wells, watershed development and intensive afforestation.
- Jal Shakti Abhiyan – Har Ghar Jal Scheme (National Water Conservation Scheme 2019-20) was launched to ensure water security and providing safe

water to all Indians with the aim to provide drinking water supply for all rural households in the country by 2024.

- The Jal Jeevan Mission is set to stress on local infrastructure for rainwater harvesting, management of waste water for sustainability of source as well.
- Focus is on various water conservation efforts like point recharge, desilting of minor irrigation tanks, use of grey water for agriculture and source sustainability.
- The Jal Jeevan Mission will connect with other Central and State Government Schemes to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

Conclusion:

A report by NITI Aayog, a government think-tank, said that if methods for water conservation in India were not adopted, another 20 cities including Bengaluru, Delhi and Hyderabad, would run out of groundwater in the next few years. The only solution to avoid this grim situation, is to adopt universal methods of water conservation, which could be replicated across households.

