



NEWS ANALYSIS

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BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can play a significant role in tackling malnutrition by combining economic empowerment, education, and community engagement. Discuss.

Why public health nutrition policies need precise targeting

A medley of nutrients prevents anaemia, and the whole diet works better than the sum of its parts. Therefore, rather than focusing on select nutrient deficiencies, it is time to diversify diets effectively.

Anura Kumari
Harshpal Singh Sachdev

Global Nutrition Targets (GNTs) were set by the World Health Assembly as key national indicators of the effect of public health policies in alleviating maternal and child malnutrition. Some of the targets were – to reduce stunting by 40% in under-5 children, reduce anaemia by 50% in women of reproductive age, and no increase in childhood overweight.

A recent evaluation of the global progress toward the achievement for most of the targets was published in *The Lancet*. This colossal analysis provided estimates of progress at a regional and national level in 204 countries from 2012 to 2022, with projections up to 2030. In general, there appeared to be slow and insufficient progress across countries. By 2030, it was projected that few countries (not India) would meet the targets for stunting, and more would meet low birthweight, anaemia and childhood overweight.

We are now in the last year of the first quarter of the 21st century. Fresh thinking is needed if the same sorry situation is to be avoided at the end of the next quarter of this century. The immediate questions are why is there slow progress, and what next?

Slow progress can be blamed on poor programme implementation. However, other important aspects merit consideration too. For instance, the prevalence of anaemia has remained static in India for the last two decades. First, let's PRIZI WhatsApp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/00297aa2783d8031680f>

How to reduce stunting, anaemia

The prevalence of anaemia has remained static in India for the last two decades.

■ No case of anaemia checks is presumed to be iron deficiency.

■ But large surveys reveal that iron deficiency accounts for only a third of anaemia. Unknown causes account for a third of anaemia.

■ Rather than focusing on select nutrient deficiencies, the focus should be diversified diets effectively.

■ Strongly advocate using capillary blood for iron bioassay. Women knowledge awareness intervention is enough to halve the capillary blood

prevalence.

■ Energy intake is the driver of growth in the first two years. The most energy-dense food is oil. It is disbarmenting that the average fat intake of poor

children in India is just 7 grams per day (NNMB reports), versus their requirement of 30-40 grams per day. But it is encouraging to note that the new POSHAN guidelines for feeding children aged under 5 with take-home rations now include oil, which was not specified earlier.

Finally, *The Lancet* paper showed that overweight had increased in children in almost all countries but was less than the prevailing undernutrition. This might mean that policy should continue to focus on undernutrition. But overweight does not capture the risk of 'metabolic overnutrition' in children. It has been shown that metabolic risk occurs in no less than 50% of Indian children aged 5-9 years, even in those stunted and underweight. Therefore, the burden of childhood overnutrition should be an important policy target.

The slow progress in GNTs on undernutrition, notwithstanding the considerations pointed out above and the hidden overweight burden, tells us that the need of the hour is to make

and precisely focus on double-duty actions to simultaneously address the under- and over-nutrition burden. Else, ongoing efforts that are skewed towards undernutrition will continue to fuel overnutrition and related non-communicable diseases.

Anura Kumari is Professor of physiology and nutrition at St John's Medical College, Bengaluru. Harshpal Singh Sachdev is a senior consultant in paediatrics and clinical epidemiology, Siram Bharati Institute of Science and Research, New Delhi

with no national surveys, we do not know the cause of anaemia in India. This is presumed to be iron deficiency, resulting in policies to improve dietary iron intake through fortification and supplementation. But recent large-scale surveys reveal that iron deficiency accounts for only a third of anaemia, while unknown causes account for another significant third. A medley of nutrients prevents anaemia, and the whole diet works better than the sum of its parts. Therefore, rather than focusing on select nutrient deficiencies, it is time to diversify diets effectively.

Second, the static anaemia prevalence begs the question of the metrics of measurement, which vary by context and method. In

India, a national survey of children showed that venous blood-based anaemia prevalence (as recommended by WHO) was roughly half the capillary blood-based prevalence in comparable national surveys. Third, the actual diagnostic cut-off for anaemia (true for stunting as well) is the subject of much science: one cut-off might not fit all populations. Accurate metrics are crucial for successful public health interventions.

The consequences

As for the sustained negligible progress in the target for stunting, the knee-jerk response might be to feed even more. But this has unintended consequences – children are more likely to grow fatter

rather than fatter when overfed after two years of age. This is because stunting actively occurs within the first two years of life; in India, stunting increases from about 7-8% at birth to nearly 40% at two years of age. On average, children reach half their adult height in two years. If already stunted at two, it is difficult to un-stunt children by overfeeding in the hope of faster growth. Prevention in the first two years is most important, even though the global nutrition target refers to stunting in under-5 children.

Second, energy intake is the driver of growth in the first two years. The most energy-dense food is oil. It is disbarmenting that the average fat intake of poor

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Food for thought

Diseases and deficiencies in Indian children sharply differ depending on their location of residence. Some data excerpts from the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey released on Monday shows how problems in children differ according to the rural-urban divide

● RURAL CHILDREN
● URBAN CHILDREN

Breastfed upto 1 year



Children had frequent meals



Vitamin D deficiency (1-4 yrs)



Iron deficiency (1-4 yrs)



Zinc deficiency (1-4 yrs)



Severe acute malnutrition (5-9 years)






In malnutrition, the body becomes **deficient in vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients required to maintain healthy tissues and organs**. It occurs in people who are either undernourished or over nourished.

India has **5,772,472 children below five years affected by severe wasting**, the most in the world, alerted UNICEF. It had been reported in 2017 by the **National Health Survey** that approximately 19 crore people in the country were compelled to sleep on an empty stomach every night.

Consequences of malnutrition

- ❑ Malnutrition results in a **reduced ability to work and increased susceptibility to disease**, and depending on the nutrients lacking: anaemia, blindness, mental retardation, or death.
- ❑ **Undernutrition increases the risk of infectious** diseases like diarrhoea, measles, malaria and pneumonia.
- ❑ **Chronic malnutrition can impair a young child's physical and mental development**. Cognitive impairment resulting from malnutrition may result in diminished productivity in academic performance.

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- ❑ **Undernutrition puts women at a greater risk of pregnancy-related complications** and death (obstructed labour and haemorrhage).
 - ❑ **Widespread child undernutrition** greatly impedes a country's socioeconomic development and potential to reduce poverty.
 - ❑ **India loses 4% of its GDP** annually due to malnourishment.

Role of SHG in tackling malnutrition

- ❑ **Women's self-help groups (SHG)** are fast emerging as an ideal platform to effect change in health and nutrition behaviors.
- ❑ As forums of adult women, they **directly reach target populations of pregnant and lactating women**, as well as other women within the household who might play an instrumental role in decision making.
- ❑ In addition, these platforms are often specifically aimed at the poor and marginal households within rural communities who are at the greatest risk.

- ❑ Finally, through the activities that SHGs engage in– **savings and credit, agriculture and livelihoods, support for women**– they are already building social capital .

Way Forward

- ❑ Government programs on malnutrition can be implemented through SHGs.
- ❑ Constant and enduring structural handholding support from the self-help group promoting institutions (SHPIs).
- ❑ Frequent awareness camps can be organised by the Rural Development department authorities to create awareness about different schemes.
- ❑ Periodic capacity-building of all members, to make the group the collective.

Manipur Violence and Exploring solutions

New Governor suggests use of NSA in Manipur

At his first security review meeting, Ajay Kumar Bhalla calls for employment opportunities for 'misguided' youth; top officials attended the meeting, but Chief Minister did not participate

Vijaya Singh
NEW DELHI

A day after assuming charge, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla held a security review meeting on Saturday and suggested that the State police use legal options such as the National Security Act, 1980, which allows detention for a year without trial, against miscreants and troublemakers, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

Security Adviser Kuldeep Singh, Director-General of Police Rajiv Singh and other officials attend-



Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla chairing a meeting at Raj Bhawan in Imphal on the law and order situation in Manipur. PTI

ed the unified command meeting. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh was not present.

Mr. Bhalla discussed employment opportunities for the "misguided" youth, and asked the security

agencies to prepare dossiers on key suspects who were fuelling violence and initiate action against them. The Central Reserve Police Force and the Border Security Force flagged the violation of ceasefire ground rules by the Pambai faction of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the oldest armed Meitei insurgent group, which signed a peace agreement with the Union Home Ministry and Manipur government on November 29, 2023.

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- ❑ **Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla** held a security review meeting, a day after assuming office, to address the State's law and order situation, particularly in border areas.
- ❑ He urged the use of legal measures, including the **National Security Act, 1980**, against troublemakers and emphasized **creating employment opportunities for misguided youth**. The Governor also directed security agencies to prepare dossiers on key suspects inciting violence.

National Security Act, 1980

- ❑ **Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA, 1971):** Introduced by Indira Gandhi, repealed in 1977 by the Janata Party.
- ❑ **NSA (1980):** Brought back by Indira Gandhi after her return to power, drawing parallels with MISA.
- ❑ It empowers the central or state government to detain individuals to prevent activities jeopardizing national security or disrupting public order.

Constitutional Basis

- ❑ **Article 22(3):** Allows preventive detention for state security and public order.
- ❑ **Article 22(4):** Restricts detention beyond three months unless approved by an advisory board comprising High Court judges.
- ❑ **44th Amendment Act (1978):** Reduced the detention period without advisory board approval to two months, though this provision is not yet enforced.

Key Provisions of NSA

- Detention can extend up to 12 months**, subject to fresh evidence for further extension.
- No formal charges are necessary during the detention period.
- Detention is permissible to:
 - Prevent disruptions to public order.
 - Ensure supplies and services essential to the community.

Grounds for Detention

- Under Section 3 of the NSA**, the Central/State Government has the power to order any person's detention and detain them if it thinks it is necessary to prevent them from harming:

Criticism of the NSA

- Authorities have been accused of using **NSA as an extra-judicial power**.
- Detainees are often held without formal charges, leading to **concerns about human rights violations**.

NSA against miscreants in Manipur

About the news

- ❑ A day after assuming charge, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla held a security review meeting.
- ❑ In this meeting, the Governor suggested that the State police use legal options such as the National Security Act, 1980.

Highlighted ceasefire violations

- ❑ The meeting highlighted **ceasefire violations by the Pambei faction of the UNLF**, a Meitei insurgent group advocating secession, despite its peace pact signed in November 2023.

Buffer zones have been created since June 2023 to prevent clashes between **Meiteis (valley) and Kuki-Zos (hills)**.

- ❑ Intermittent firing between the communities, particularly from bunkers in strategic locations, has fuelled tensions.

Digital Personal Data Protection Rules

Experts hopeful, but flag data localisation, parental nod plans

They find the draft as leaving the door open for government to restrict the overseas processing of Indians' data; the rules mandate that platforms verify parents' identity first for minors to sign up for online services, raising concern

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Experts working with the tech industry tentatively welcomed the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, issued on Friday. The draft rules document "gives broad direction to the industry to start preparing for compliance", Aparajita Bharti, a founding partner at TQH Consulting, which works with tech companies in complying with Indian laws, said in a statement.

"It is encouraging to finally witness progress on this front," Shreya Suri, senior partner at IndusLaw, said in a statement.

They highlighted gaps, but they hope that the ensuing consultation process will resolve them. Industry associations have so far not directly commented on the draft.

"The draft rules provide some clarity on framing and displaying notices [to users, or "data principals"]

Safeguarding information

The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules are still in draft form, and further discussion is expected to resolve any gaps

Data fiduciaries must obtain verifiable parental consent before processing data of minors. Methods include relying on identity details, virtual tokens, or digital locker services

Future government orders may define specific requirements for processing the data of Indians abroad

The public can submit feedback till February 18 through MyGov portal

under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, but they fall short in offering guidance on the mode of delivery or issuance – something well-defined under GDPR," Ms. Suri said, referring to Europe's General Data Protection Regulation.

"One key concern in the rules is potential room for bringing data localisation requirements for significant data fiduciaries as they mention that a committee may do so in the future," Ms. Bharti said, referring to the draft leaving the door open for the go-

vernment to restrict the overseas processing of Indians' data. Tech companies are likely to seek particular clarity on this front, as they usually store and process user data in servers around the world.

Parental consent

The draft rules around minors having to get parental consent to sign up for online services raised some eyebrows, as the rules mandate that platforms verify parents' identity first.

"How do you know if someone is a parent or not,"

Nikhil Pahwa, editor of the tech policy website MediaNama asked. This could mean that "platforms will have to verify EVERYONE," he speculated on X.

Ms. Suri opined that the government's "approach might rely on self-declaration by users, allowing them to indicate whether they are minors or adults," but hinted at broad data collection. "Depending on the implementation, this "could potentially lead to broader processing of parental or guardian data, which raises interesting considerations regarding the scale and scope of such data collection," she said.

Exemption concerns

The DPDP Act, 2023 already exempts government organisations from the law, and the Rules set out the "standards" for such exemptions.

However, Ms. Bharti said, "The draft rules also do not explicitly address exemptions, processing grounds, or other frame-

works specifically tailored for AI model training purposes."

The Internet Freedom Foundation flagged a lack of specificity in the draft, saying in a statement that terms such as "reasonable safeguards", "appropriate measures", or "necessary purposes" are used without adequate elaboration in the text. Since the Data Protection Board will not be a fully independent entity, the IFF added, "large parts of the implementation and enforcement will be administered by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology raising apprehension."

"We want to ensure that in finality, the age verification process, complaints and enforcement are easier for people and not yet another burdensome run-around with no recourse where their data is illegally collected, used, shared and breached," Mishi Choudhary, founder of the New Delhi-based Software Freedom Law Centre said.

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- ❑ The Government of India released the **draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, under the Digital Data Protection Act, 2023**, outlining provisions for data privacy, compliance, and processing mechanisms.

Major Provisions of the Draft Rules:

Parental consent for children's data:

- ❑ Social media and online platforms must obtain verifiable parental consent before children create accounts.
- ❑ Parents' age and identity must be validated through government-issued identity proof.
- ❑ Health, mental health establishments, education institutions, and daycare centers are exempt from this requirement.

Key Terms in PDP Act



Data Fiduciary

who decides the purpose of data processing

Data Processor

who processes data on behalf



Critical Personal Data

Categories of data which require most protection as defined by the PDP Act

Data Principal

Individual whose data is processed



Data Processing

Personal data and Sensitive Personal Data

Role and responsibilities of data fiduciaries:

- ❑ Entities collecting and processing personal data are categorised as "**Data Fiduciaries.**"
- ❑ **Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs)** are those processing high volumes or sensitive data, impacting national sovereignty, security, or public order.
- ❑ **Security measures:** Fiduciaries must ensure encryption, access control, and monitoring for unauthorised access.
- ❑ Entities entrusted to manage consent records must comply with robust verification processes.
- ❑ **Grievance redressal:** Data fiduciaries must establish mechanisms to address grievances and allow withdrawal of consent.
- ❑ **Oversight:** A government-formed committee will determine the categories of data restricted from cross-border transfer.

Data breach reporting:

- ❑ **Uniform treatment of breaches:** No differentiation between minor and major breaches; all require reporting.

No- Detention Policy

Why was the no-detention policy rolled back?

What led to the amendment of the Right to Education Act, 2009 Rules? What have schools been allowed to do? Is there something wrong with the appraisal system? What are some of the best ways to test a child's learning? Who should be made accountable?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

The Union government amended the Rules of the Right to Education Act, 2009 in December 2024 to allow schools to detain students in Classes 5 and 8 if they are unable to meet the promotion criteria after a year-end examination. Students will be given a second chance re-examination after two months of extra teaching. This rollback of the RTE Act's vision of a no-detention policy was initially brought through an amendment of the law in 2019, following which 18 States and UTs have reinstated the option to detain students; the 2024 amendment now extends the option to Central government-run schools too.

What was the rationale behind the original no-detention policy?

When the RTE Act was passed in 2009, it included Section 16, which stipulated that "No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education [Classes 1 to 8]". "The spirit of a no-detention policy was to ensure that children can learn without unnecessary pressure. Detention is demoralising to children. There was also an understanding

No detention became no testing, and in many schools, no teaching. It was a slippery slope'

that a single final year-end examination is not the best way to assess learning and decide on their progress," said Vimala Ramachandran, a former professor at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. "But it was implemented very shoddily. No detention became no testing, and in many schools, no teaching. It was a slippery slope."

She noted that government schools in many States simply stopped testing in any form until Class 5, automatically promoting children without bothering to find out if they had acquired grade-specific skills and knowledge. Monitoring systems focussed on inputs or maybe indicators, rarely on outcomes.

Efforts to introduce a Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) programme instead, in coordination with UNICEF, were largely stymied by a lack of resources and training, and teacher apathy. In many schools, NCERT's CCE forms were simply filled en masse by teachers without an assessment of individual children's skills. A number of boards abandoned the model of multiple formative and summative assessments, retreating to the familiarity of a final year-end examination.

Why has it been rolled back?

Surveys conducted by both government and private entities in recent years have documented an alarming learning gap in India's schools.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), a respected survey spearheaded by the NGO Pratham, found that only 42.8% of Class 5 students could read a Class 2-level text in 2022, a fall from 50.5% in 2018. Only 25.6% of them could do basic arithmetic problems in 2022, a slight drop from 27.5% in 2018.

Even more worryingly, ASER 2023 tested foundational skills in youth aged 14 to 18 years and found that a quarter of them still cannot read a Class 2 level text fluently in their regional language. More than half struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems, a skill taught in Class 3 and 4.

The Department of School Education's National Achievement Survey 2021 also showed clear declines as students moved up the school ladder. Out of a maximum 500, Class 3 students

scored an average of 323 in language and 306 in Mathematics. By Class 5, the scores dropped to 309 and 284 respectively, and to 302 and 255 by Class 8.

A government analysis of Classes 10 and 12 results across 59 State and national boards in 2023 showed that more than 65 lakh students had failed to clear their examinations, with a failure rate ranging from 12% in national boards to 18% in State boards.

"In the name of promoting all students in the younger classes, we are adversely affecting them in later life," said Joseph Emmanuel, who was academic director of the Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE) till a few months ago, when he took charge of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). "There is a clear learning gap that was exacerbated by the COVID disruptions. This [rollback of the no-detention policy] is a good example of evidence-based decision making."

Dr. Ramachandran said the amendment represents a regression, and instead called for better mechanisms to assess children's learning and hold teachers accountable.

What is the way forward?

"Timely remedial action is needed at every stage. There must be regular assessment done at the school level in every class, not at the board level. Who is the best judge of a child's learning? It is their own teachers. We must trust teachers and equip them," said Dr. Emmanuel.

He noted that the Rules require the class teacher to "provide specialised inputs after identifying the learning gaps at various stages of assessment" and stipulate that the school Head personally monitor the progress of the children who are held back. "More accountability is being brought in," he said.

Dr. Ramachandran said the focus of accountability must change. "Instead of detaining and punishing the child for not doing well, we need a way to hold the teacher responsible and accountable," she said. Too many teachers only focus on the children in the front rows of their classroom, often discriminating against those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may struggle more and are more likely to be detained. "Rigorous teacher appraisal is needed to ensure inclusive teaching. There must be some consequences for the teacher, not just the student, as well as incentives to ensure this," she urged.

- ❑ In December 2024, the Union government amended the Rules of the **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**, allowing schools, including Central government-run schools, to **detain students in Classes 5 and 8 if they fail year-end examinations.**
- ❑ Students will have a **second chance to pass through a re-examination** after two months of additional teaching. This move aligns with a 2019 amendment that rolled back the **RTE Act's no-detention policy**, with 18 States and UTs already reinstating the option to detain students.



New rules: Students appear for exams at a school in Gurugram in 2024. (PI)

Rationale behind the no-detention policy

Original No-Detention Policy under RTE Act (2009)

- ❑ The RTE Act, 2009, included Section 16, which prohibited detention or expulsion of students from Classes 1 to 8.
- ❑ The aim was to create a stress-free learning environment and shift away from high-pressure, single-exam assessments.
- ❑ **Misinterpretation of No-Detention Policy:** Many schools misapplied the policy, leading to the absence of testing and reduced accountability for teaching outcomes.
- ❑ Government schools often promoted students automatically without assessing whether they acquired grade-specific skills.
- ❑ **Implementation Issues:** Efforts to introduce CCE with support from UNICEF were hindered by inadequate resources, teacher training, and lack of commitment.
- ❑ Experts highlighted that the poor implementation of the no-detention policy and CCE led to a **decline in teaching standards and learning outcomes.**

Call for Timely Remedial Action

- Regular assessments must be conducted at the school level for every class, rather than relying on board-level evaluations.
- Class teachers are required to identify learning gaps and provide specialised inputs at various stages.
- School Heads are mandated to personally monitor the progress of children who are held back, introducing more accountability.
- Detaining students punishes them for not performing well, instead of addressing the root cause.
- Teachers must be held accountable for inclusive teaching and their focus on all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Introduce rigorous teacher appraisals to ensure inclusivity and fairness in teaching.



Thank you

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