Malnutrition Crisis in India

Why in news?

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According to official reports Maharashtra has high level of malnutrition among children in the tribal belts.

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What is the malnutrition crisis in Maharashtra?

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- According to NFHS 2015-16, every second tribal child suffers from growth restricting malnutrition due to chronic hunger.
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- India’s malnutrition crisis is worse than in some of the world’s poorest countries Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Mozambique.
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- This level of poor nutrition security disproportionately affects the poorest segment of the population.
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- In 2005, child malnutrition claimed as many as 718 lives in Maharashtra’s Palghar district alone.
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- Even after a decade of double digit economic growth (2004-05 to 2014-15), Palghar’s malnutrition status has barely improved.
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- Due to this National Human Rights Commission issued notice to the Maharashtra government over reports of 600 children dying due to malnutrition in Palghar,
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How the stunting status has been calculated?

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- Stunting is caused by an insufficient intake of macro- and micro-nutrients.
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- It is generally accepted that recovery from growth retardation after two years is only possible if the affected child is put on a diet that is adequate in nutrient requirements.
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- A critical aspect of nutrient adequacy is diet diversity, calculated by different groupings of foods consumed with the reference period ranging from one to 15 days.
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- The eight food groups include - cereals, roots and tubers, legumes and nuts, dairy products, flesh foods, eggs, fish, dark green leafy vegetables, and other fruits and vegetables.
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What are the concerns with diet pattern in tribal areas?

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- In most households it was rice and dal which was cooked most often and eaten thrice a day and these were even served at teatime to the children if they felt hungry.
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- There was no milk, milk product or fruit in their daily diets, Even the adults drank black tea as milk was unaffordable.
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- Only 17% of the children achieved a minimum level of diet diversity they received four or more of the eight food groups.
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- This low dietary diversity is a proxy indicator for the household’s food security too as the children ate the same food cooked for adult members.
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- Such acute food insecurity in tribal households is due to a loss of their traditional dependence on forest livelihood and the State’s deepening agrarian crisis.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- Systemic issues and a weakening of public nutrition programmes have aggravated malnutrition problem in India.
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- Analysis of the various State’s Budget also shows that the nutrition expenditure as a percentage of the State Budget has drastically declined.
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- It is time the government looks at the root cause of the issue and finds a sustainable solution for tackling malnutrition.
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- Employment opportunities for the marginalised which would improve their purchasing power and, in turn, reduce malnutrition
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- Respective governments need to properly implement schemes like Integrated Child Development Services to check malnutrition.
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Source: The Hindu

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