

Supreme Court's order on NFSA

Why in news?

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Centre has been asked by the Supreme Court to ensure that States implement key aspects of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013.

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What was the case about?

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- NFSA empowers the common person in securing subsidised food.
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- It mandates providing of highly subsidised foodgrains to targeted households with a ceiling of 75% of the population in rural areas and 50% in urban areas.
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- The beneficiaries are chosen by the State governments.
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- Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the act require the setting up of a grievance redress mechanism and a State Food Commission (SFC).
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- SFC has the responsibility to monitor the implementation of the law.
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- But they have been done only in name.
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- In the Swaraj Abhiyan Case, the court pointed out the SFC in Haryana and said that it has been sitting “jobless” and “without proper infrastructure”.
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- This was due to the state government's lacklustre response to the NFSA.
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- The judgment also listed nine other States — Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.
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- These states responded poorly to NFSA by lack of proper implementation.
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What should be done?

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- **Responsibility** - Union Food Minister claimed in November 2016 that the Act covers the entire country.
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- This is not consistent with the underlying facts.
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- Union Government cannot push the blame over state governments.
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- Article 256 casts a responsibility on the States and the Union to ensure compliance with laws made by Parliament.
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- **Implementation** - The system should have in-built mechanisms to allow for the entry of new households that suddenly find themselves in financial distress, while others can exit it based on changed circumstances.
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- Modernisation of the PDS, with the use of information technology, could incorporate such dynamic features and eliminate deficiencies and fraud.
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- This can be made only when there is a full-fledged, independent machinery in the form of a Food Commission, and district-level grievance redress, besides social audits.
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- All these are provided for under the Act, but have been ignored.
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- This is mainly due to a lack of political will.
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- **Grievance redressal** - Food Ministry data presented to Parliament showed that a mere 1,106 complaints received from beneficiaries nationwide in 2016.
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- This shows that the present system does not reflect the true scale of public grievances which should be improved.
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Source: The Hindu

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