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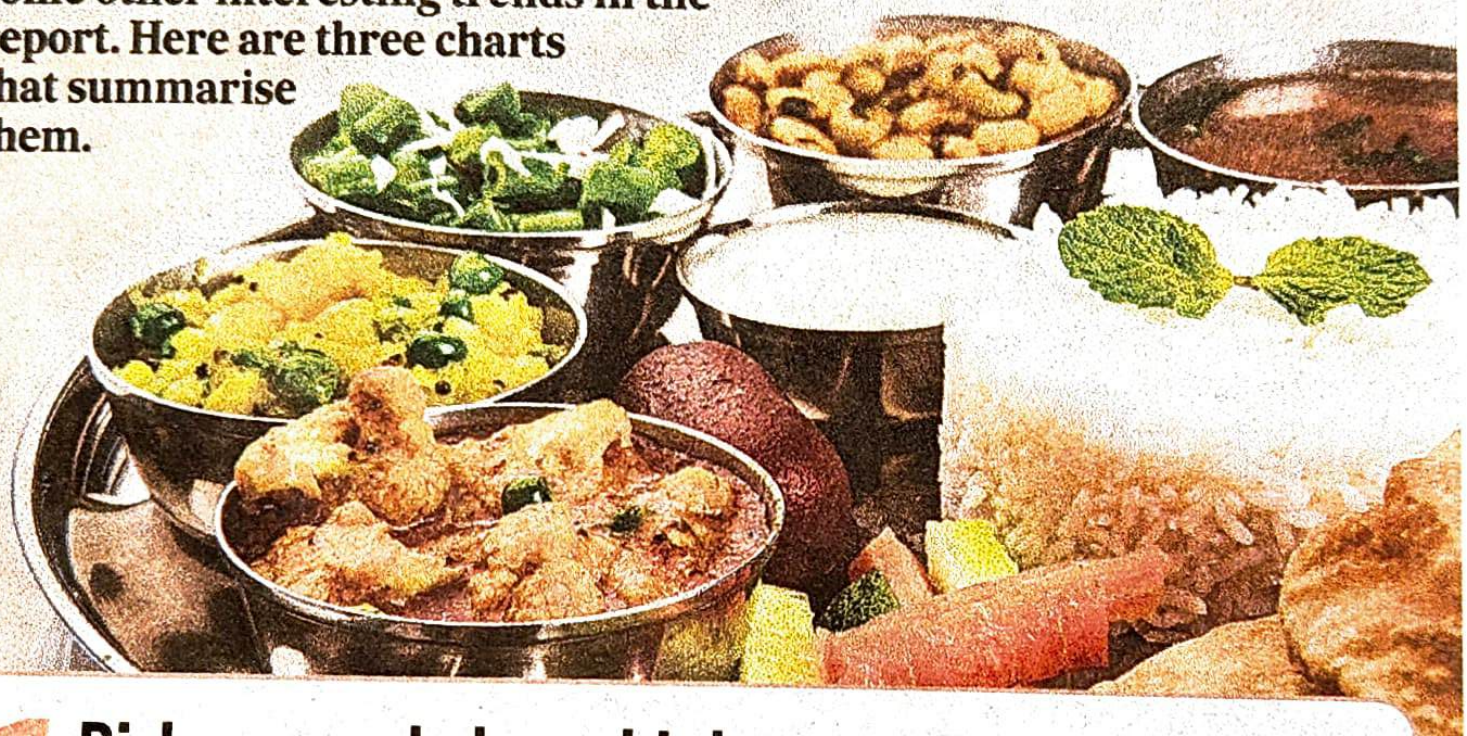
NUMBER THEORY

3 major takeaways from nutritional intake data

By Abhishek Jha and Roshan Kishore

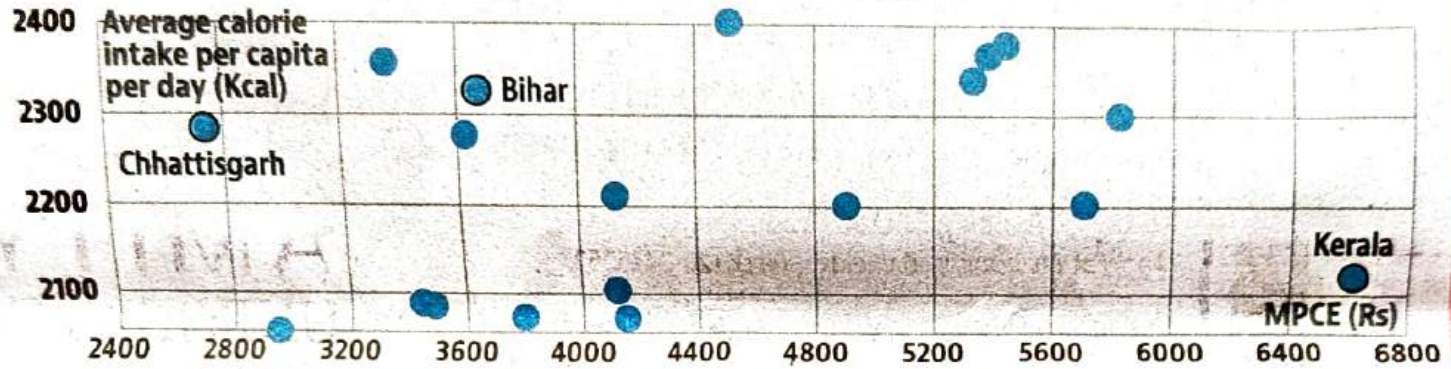
The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) released its report on nutritional intake in India after more than a decade earlier this week. The latest report gives data for 2022-23 and 2023-24. To be sure, the nutritional intake surveys are essentially extrapolated numbers using quantities of food items consumed as seen in Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys (HCES). HT has already reported that the latest report largely shows an improvement in nutritional intake between 2011-12 and 2023-24. This key takeaway notwithstanding, there are some other interesting trends in the report. Here are three charts that summarise them.



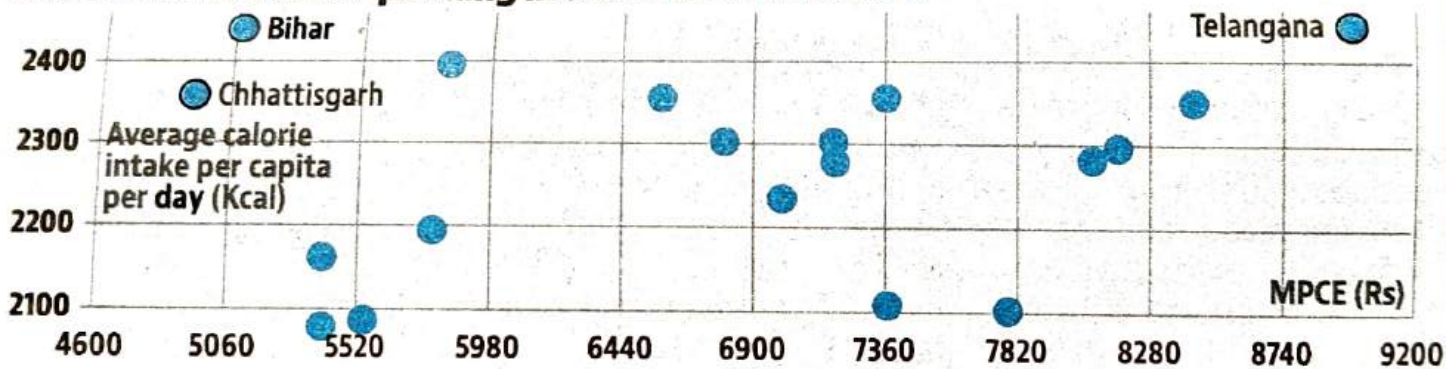
1 Richer people have higher nutritional intake but richer states not so much

One of the most important (and intuitive) trends in the nutritional intake data is that people's nutritional intake rises with their overall spending levels (a proxy for income). The top 5% of the population consumes at least 1.7 times more calorie, protein and fat than the poorest 5%. One would believe that a similar relationship should hold between rich and poor states as well. However, data shows that the correlation between average spending level and calorie intake across states is significantly weaker than between calorie intake and overall spending levels in general. For example, Bihar, the second poorest of 18 major states by the MPCE (monthly per capita consumption expenditure) of urban India, consumes the second highest calories per capita. To be sure, it is possible MPCE classes are correlated with calorie consumption intrastate. However, this data is not available in the report released June 30.

Calorie intake versus spending in rural India in 2023-24



Calorie intake versus spending in urban India in 2023-24

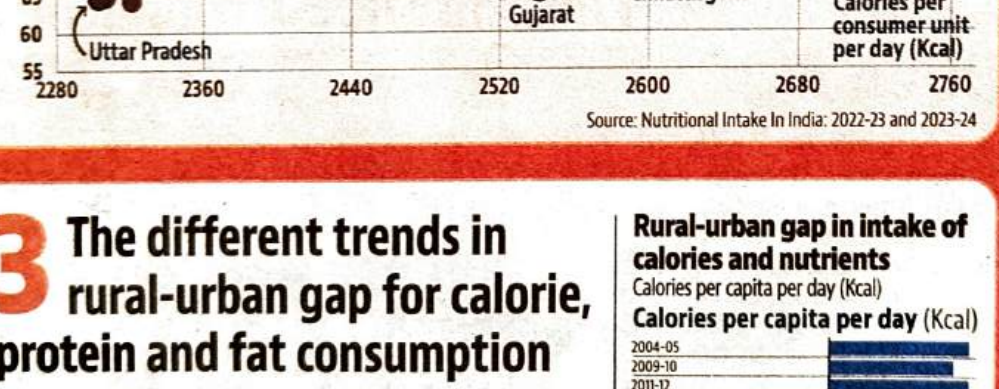


Source: Nutritional Intake In India: 2022-23 and 2023-24

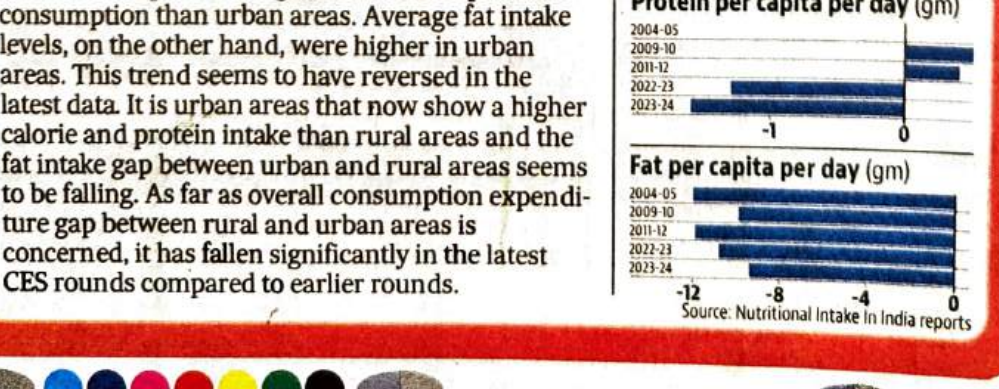
2 States also show a divergent trend between protein and calorie intake levels

45.9% of the protein consumed by an average Indian in rural India and 38.7% in urban India comes from cereals, which also account for 48% and 40.6% of their average calorie intake. This is why calorie and protein intake levels show a strong correlation across classes in India. However, even this relationship weakens in state-level trends. For example, Kerala's protein consumption is the highest among major states but its calorie consumption is relatively lower. Chhattisgarh and Odisha, both poorer than Kerala, consume more calories than Kerala, but far less protein. Gujarat eats less protein than Kerala, but more calories than Kerala in urban areas. A similar discrepancy can be seen between calorie and fat consumption across states as well. Is this a result of different food habits where states such as Kerala show a higher protein consumption because of eating more fish and meat? Answering this with certainty may not be possible even with unit-level data of HCES, since it has clubbed some food items whose nutritional content has been published separately.

Protein versus calorie intake in rural India in 2023-24



Protein versus calorie intake in urban India in 2023-24



Source: Nutritional Intake In India: 2022-23 and 2023-24

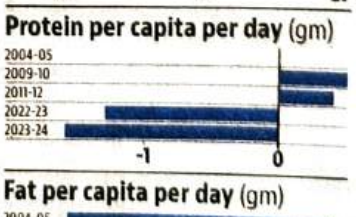
3 The different trends in rural-urban gap for calorie, protein and fat consumption

This is another interesting trend in the data. In the 2004-05, 2009-10, and 2011-12 nutritional intake data, rural areas reported a higher calorie and protein consumption than urban areas. Average fat intake levels, on the other hand, were higher in urban areas. This trend seems to have reversed in the latest data. It is urban areas that now show a higher calorie and protein intake than rural areas and the fat intake gap between urban and rural areas seems to be falling. As far as overall consumption expenditure gap between rural and urban areas is concerned, it has fallen significantly in the latest CES rounds compared to earlier rounds.

Rural-urban gap in intake of calories and nutrients

Calories per capita per day (Kcal)

Calories per capita per day (Kcal)



Protein per capita per day (gm)

Fat per capita per day (gm)

Source: Nutritional Intake In India reports

Provide RTI info via pen drive and email, Delhi high court tells Centre

Shruti Kakkar

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NEW DELHI: The Delhi high court on Wednesday directed the Union government to evolve a mechanism within three months to facilitate the provision of information to Right to Information (RTI) applicants through modern digital formats such as email and pen drives.

A bench of chief justice DK Upadhyay and justice Tushar Rao Gedela observed that while the Right to Information Act, 2005, and the RTI Rules, 2012, provide a robust framework for ensuring access to information, they fall short of recognising or facilitating the use of contemporary electronic formats. The bench held that this gap undermines the very objective of the Act, and called for an urgent overhaul to realise the true spirit and purpose of the RTI regime.

HC DIRECTED THE GOVERNMENT TO EVOLVE THE MECHANISM IN THREE MONTHS

"Thus, a conjoint reading of section 4(4), which relates to dissemination of material considering various factors, and section 7(9), which provides for furnishing information in the form requested by the applicant unless it disproportionately diverts resources or endangers the safety or preservation of records, makes it clear that information sought under the RTI Act ought to be provided through all viable electronic modes, including email or pen drive," the court noted.

However, the bench pointed out that the RTI Rules, 2012, do not accommodate requests for information in these modes. "When we peruse the RTI Rules, what we find is that the said rules do not address the situation where information is sought in a particular mode," HC said.

The direction came in response to a petition filed by Aditya Chauhan, a law student, who sought the creation of a clear, legally backed framework that would enable RTI applicants to receive information through digital platforms.

Chauhan's plea argued that the current legal provisions continue to rely on outdated and obsolete formats.

Take steps to fast-track and streamline forest clearances, says FAC

Jayashree Nandi
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NEW DELHI: In a bid to streamline the forest clearance process, the forest advisory committee (FAC) has recommended curbing multiple enquiries for essential details, not insisting on hard copies of project details, and reviewing pendency of forest clearance applications every fortnight.

Prior forest and environmental clearance are mandatory for any major industry or infrastructure project which is coming up in or near forest land. FAC, a statutory body under the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) has also decided that some proposals need not be referred to it or regional empowered committees (RECs).

These include proposals involving: a change in the name of the user due to inheritance by legal heir; change in name of company, etc; transfer of approval from one user to another such as transfer of mining leases; change in some of the patches of compensatory afforestation (CA) sites due to unforeseen reasons; delay in submission of compliance of in-principle approval conditions after the stipulated period when this is done with valid and cogent reasons for the delay.

In an FAC meeting on June 12, the deputy director general of forests (central), various regional officers, and nodal officers of states discussed how forest clearances can be granted in a time bound manner.

FAC also decided that some proposals need not be referred to it or regional empowered committees. HT PHOTO

FAC has stressed that the authorities, while processing proposals, need to adhere to the timelines as provided in the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023. The nodal officer, along with the concerned divisional forest officers in the state/UTs may review the pendency of proposals on a fortnightly basis to process and dispose of the case within the prescribed time lines, it said.

Dredging of rivers

FAC has also decided that dredging of rivers with the objective of removing debris that accumulated during and after natural disasters, or after extreme weather events, intended to safeguard the natural course of the river, and with the objective of ecological restoration, with a specified plan and for a specified period, prepared for the purpose, cannot be considered as a commercial mining activity.

Earlier guidelines said that in case the dredged out material is to be used as minor mineral, prior forest approval is needed.

How basic structure doctrine protects constitutional rights

The Constitution of India enshrines a vision of justice — social, economic, and political — and a commitment to equality in status and opportunity. But history has shown us that these ideals are often contested terrain.

In the early decades after independence, as India grappled with urgent demands for land reform, social equity, and economic stability, the pillars of democracy — the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary — often stood at odds.

Insiyah Vahanvaty

From the 1950s until the 1970s, India was crying out for reforms — agrarian and economic. Land redistribution was key, but it clashed directly with the constitutional right to property — then a Fundamental Right under Articles 19 and 31.

After years of wars, economic disparities, and political turmoil, public pressure on the government was mounting, and so the government moved to abolish the *zamindari* system by acquiring private property. But this clashed with the Fundamental Right to Property under Articles 19 and 31 of the Constitution. These reforms were challenged in courts; some were struck down. In response, Parliament passed the First Amendment in 1951, introducing Article 31A, Article 31B, and the Ninth Schedule to shield such laws from judicial review.

Ashish Bharadwaj

Shankari Prasad v. Union of India (1951) was the first case to test this. Shankari Prasad Singh Deo, a *zamindar*, challenged the First Amendment Act, arguing that the State cannot make any law which takes away fundamental rights. But the Supreme Court disagreed. The court ruled that Parliament could indeed amend the Constitution — including the part on Fundamental Rights. Soon after *Shankari Prasad*, a Jalandhar-based family, the Golaknaths, which owned vast farmlands, reopened the same questions. This time, the Punjab Security and Land Tenures Act, 1953 was challenged.

Once again, the spotlight was on a single, seismic question: Could Parliament rewrite the Fundamental Rights? In *Golaknath*, the Supreme Court — by the slimmest of margins, 6:5 — drew the line. Fundamental Rights are "transcendental" and "immutable" — and therefore are beyond the reach of Parliament. This sent shockwaves through political corridors.

Riding on a landslide victory in the fifth Lok Sabha elections, the government wasted no time in flexing its muscle. Within five months Parliament bulldozed through the 24th Amendment, expressly granting Parliament the power to amend any provision of the Constitution and tied the President's hands by mandating assent to any constitutional amendment bill.

The battle wasn't over. The clash between Parliament's desire for reform and the judiciary's role as guardian of the Constitution was about to reach its biggest showdown in the history of India — *Kesavananda Bharti v State of Kerala* (1973). *Kesavananda Bharti* challenged the limit of property one can hold under the Kerala Land Reforms Act. The question — can Parliament amend Fundamental Rights — rose again.

The courtroom witnessed the finest from the Bombay Bar — Nani Palkhivala, Fali Nariman and Soli Sorabjee — defending the petitioner and a determined HM Seervai represented the government in what would become India's longest argued case with the largest constitutional bench ever assembled.

The Supreme Court overturned the *Golaknath* verdict, ruling that while Parliament has the power to amend any part of the Constitution, it cannot alter its "basic structure". That structure — a democratic, secular, federal republic which preserves separation of powers — is the very DNA of India.

It gave birth to the basic structure doctrine, a safeguard against unchecked parliamentary power. But, this legal victory was only the beginning. Two years later, the judiciary faced the same questions at a time when India's political waters churned with unrest. Severe fiscal and oil crises resulted in bold economic reforms. An electoral triumph in light of powerful social movements led a presumptuous government to take drastic steps to cling to power. On June 25, 1975, a national Emergency was declared. Civil liberties were suspended, dissent was crushed, and the very essence of democracy was threatened.

The Emergency was more than a political crisis — as the government suspended fundamental rights, the Constitution's basic structure was once again under siege. As we mark 50 years since that day, the lessons remain urgent. The "basic structure" isn't just a legal doctrine — it's the first and last line of defence. The memory of this dark day urges us to protect judicial independence, civil liberties, and tolerate dissent — because without checks, freedoms, and the liberty to speak out, democracy is just a word.

Insiyah Vahanvaty is an author and journalist and Ashish Bharadwaj is professor and dean of BITS Law School. The views expressed are personal.

48 Stunden in Brüssel

Bar Magritte

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La Grand-Place

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Mont des Arts

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The View

Horta Museum

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