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West Bengal's Children Need Eggs in Their Mid-Day Meal, Not Ideology

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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West Bengal's Children Need Eggs in Their Mid-Day Meal, Not Ideology

 **The Indian Express** 26 June 2026 **GS2** **GS1**

Source: ujjyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"When a welfare programme's nutritional goals collide with a private donor's belief system, whose preference should set the menu, and why?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

A move to replace eggs in West Bengal's mid-day meals with vegetarian food supplied by a faith-based organisation has reopened a recurring national argument. The mid-day meal, now part of the PM POSHAN scheme, is one of the world's largest school feeding programmes and a frontline tool against child undernutrition. When the menu of such a programme is reshaped by a donor's dietary beliefs rather than by what poor children nutritionally need, the stakes are concrete: protein intake, attendance, anaemia rates and learning. The episode forces a clear question about who should decide what goes on a hungry child's plate.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Eggs are a cheap, complete protein that lifts attendance and fights anaemia among poor children. Replacing them with ideology-driven vegetarian meals, supplied by a religious body, puts belief above measurable nutritional need. A child-welfare scheme must be governed by nutrition science and choice, offering eggs as default with an equal non-egg alternative, not by a donor's doctrine.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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| CONCEPT | WHAT IT MEANS | WHY IT MATTERS |
|------------------------|--|--|
| PM POSHAN | National school feeding scheme (formerly Mid-Day Meal) for nutrition and retention | Sets the legal and nutritional frame for what children are fed |
| Complete protein | Protein with all essential amino acids, as in eggs | Critical for growth, cognition and immunity in undernourished children |
| Nutrition vs ideology | Menu set by dietary science vs by belief systems | Determines whether welfare goals or doctrine govern the plate |
| Right to choice | Egg default plus guaranteed non-egg option | Reconciles nutrition with religious and personal sensibilities |
| Role of private actors | Donors in logistics vs donors in menu design | Defines the limits of outsourcing a state welfare function |

THE ANALYSIS

- 1 Eggs are nutrition policy's best buy.** They deliver complete protein, iron, vitamin B12, vitamin D and energy density at a low per-unit cost. They need no refrigeration, resist adulteration and can be served as a single verifiable unit, which makes them ideal for large-scale, accountable feeding.
- 2 The evidence on outcomes is strong.** Studies across states associate egg provision with higher attendance, reduced anaemia and better concentration, with **disproportionate** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocabulary/disproportionate/>) benefits for girls and the poorest children, for whom the school meal may be the day's most nutritious food.
- 3 The ideology problem is the core issue.** When a faith-based supplier reshapes the menu around vegetarianism, the programme's goal shifts from meeting nutritional need to expressing a dietary doctrine. A child-welfare scheme cannot let a donor's belief override a child's measured requirement.
- 4 Vegetarian substitution is harder than it sounds.** Pulses, dairy and fortified foods can supply protein in principle, but at equivalent quality they are costlier to procure, more prone to dilution and harder to monitor portion by portion, which weakens accountability.
- 5 The Indian template already exists.** Several states resolve the tension by serving eggs as the default while guaranteeing a nutritionally equivalent non-egg option, such as bananas or fortified items, for children who abstain. This honours both nutrition and conscience.

- 6 **The limit on private actors must be clear.** Donors and NGOs are welcome in kitchens, logistics and supplementation, but the menu is a public-policy decision that should rest with the state and nutrition standards, not with the dietary preferences of a sponsor.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

CARRY THESE INTO THE EXAM HALL.

PM POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman): centrally sponsored scheme, restructured from the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in 2021, covering crores of schoolchildren.

Mid-Day Meal origins: scheme expanded nationally after the Supreme Court's 2001 order in the right-to-food case (PUCL v Union of India).

POSHAN Abhiyaan: national nutrition mission targeting stunting, wasting and anaemia.

Anaemia Mukht Bharat: programme to reduce anaemia across age groups, including schoolchildren.

NFHS data: persistent child anaemia and undernutrition underline the need for high-quality protein.

Concept anchors: complete protein, micronutrient deficiency, hidden hunger, food security as a justiciable (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/justiciable/>) interest.

THE DEBATE

For eggs: Cheapest complete protein; proven attendance and anaemia benefits; easy to store, serve and audit; welfare scheme must be driven by nutrition, not belief.

For ideology-driven vegetarian menus: Respect for community and religious sensibilities; protein can come from pulses and dairy; some families prefer vegetarian fare for their children.

Balanced verdict: The legitimate concern, respecting those who abstain, is fully met by an egg-default-plus-guaranteed-alternative model. What is not legitimate is letting a single donor's doctrine remove a proven, low-cost protein from every child's plate. Nutrition and choice can coexist; ideology need not dictate the menu.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

In any welfare dispute, identify the intended beneficiary and test whether the contested decision serves their measurable interest or someone else's preference. Here the beneficiary is the undernourished child, so the menu must answer to nutrition and choice, not to a donor's belief. This beneficiary-first test cuts through emotive framing in GS2 governance answers.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

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Child undernutrition + anaemia -> school meal as key intervention -> eggs: cheap, complete protein, easy to audit -> better attendance and learning -> donor ideology replaces eggs -> nutrition subordinated to belief -> corrective: egg default + guaranteed non-egg alternative -> nutrition and choice both protected

THE WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Anchor the menu in nutrition standards.** Let PM POSHAN norms and dietary science, not donor preference, set protein requirements.
- ❷ **Adopt the egg-default-plus-alternative model.** Serve eggs by default with a guaranteed, nutritionally equivalent option for those who abstain.
- ❸ **Confine private partners to logistics.** Welcome donor help in kitchens and supply, but keep menu design a public decision.
- ❹ **Strengthen monitoring.** Track attendance, anaemia and portion compliance to keep the programme accountable.
- ❺ **Protect equity.** Ensure the poorest and girls, for whom the meal matters most, are not deprived of high-quality protein by an avoidable ideological choice.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

Examine how a welfare scheme's nutritional objectives should be insulated from dietary ideology and from the preferences of private donors, using mid-day meal eggs as the case.

"A hungry child's plate must answer to nutrition and to choice, never to a donor's doctrine."

PM POSHAN; Mid-Day Meal and the 2001 Supreme Court right-to-food order; POSHAN Abhiyaan; Anaemia Mukh Bharat; complete protein; hidden hunger; NFHS.

Conflict between a private donor's beliefs and a beneficiary's needs; the duty of the state to keep welfare governance beneficiary-centred and evidence-based.

GS2 questions on government welfare schemes and their design, and GS1 questions on poverty, hunger and social empowerment.

food security, the right to food, federalism (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/federalism/>) in centrally sponsored schemes, and the limits of outsourcing public functions.

Sources: *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in>), *Ministry of Education* (<https://www.education.gov.in>)

Source: West Bengal's Children Need Eggs in Their Mid-Day Meal, Not Ideology - Ujjyari.com | Free UPSC & Ujjyari Current Affairs · ujjyari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS
 State PCS Editorial Analysis

● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

Substituting eggs in school meals with ideology-driven vegetarian fare, supplied by a faith-based organisation, subordinates the measurable nutritional needs of poor children to belief, when eggs are among the cheapest sources of high-quality protein.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Eggs deliver complete protein, micronutrients and energy density at low cost and are easy to store, cook and distribute uniformly.
- Evidence links egg provision in school meals to better attendance, reduced anaemia and improved learning outcomes among undernourished children.
- School feeding is a child-welfare and equity programme; its menu should be set by nutrition science and local need, not by a donor's dietary doctrine.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Vegetarian alternatives can supply protein through pulses, dairy and fortified foods, and dietary inclusion must respect community and religious sensibilities.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Anchor menus in nutritional standards; offer eggs with a non-egg protein alternative for those who abstain; keep private partners to logistics, not menu design; strengthen monitoring.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

Mid-day meal programmes are instruments of nutrition and equity, not vehicles for dietary ideology. Discuss with reference to the inclusion of eggs and the role of private actors in school feeding. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The PM POSHAN scheme exists to nourish children and keep them in school, so its menu must answer to nutrition and equity rather than to the dietary beliefs of any donor.

BODY

Eggs are among the most efficient foods available to a school feeding programme. They provide complete, high-quality protein, key micronutrients and energy density at low cost, store easily without refrigeration, resist adulteration and can be served as a uniform, verifiable portion.

Field evidence from several states associates egg provision with higher attendance, lower anaemia and better concentration among undernourished children, especially girls. Replacing eggs with meals shaped by a faith-based organisation's vegetarianism risks subordinating these gains to ideology.

The counter-view, that pulses, dairy and fortified foods can substitute, has merit in principle, but in practice these are costlier to deliver at equivalent quality and harder to monitor. The defensible balance is well established in Indian practice: offer eggs as the default protein while guaranteeing a nutritionally equivalent non-egg option for children who abstain on religious or personal grounds.

Private partners may help with kitchens and logistics, but the menu must be set by nutrition standards and the state, not by donor doctrine, so that child welfare, not belief, drives the plate.

CONCLUSION

A welfare scheme for hungry children must be governed by nutrition and choice, ensuring eggs for those who want them and an equal alternative for those who do not.


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Bharat Choudhary

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/ie-midday-meal-eggs-nutrition-2026/>

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