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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Rethinking Food-Security Targeting

INDIAN EXPRESS

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Rethinking Food-Security Targeting

 **The Indian Express**

29 June 2026

GS2

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


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A reform that is fairer per person can still leave a widow living alone with less grain than before. When equity by formula collides with protection of the weakest, which principle should a welfare state choose?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Indian Express](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

In **June 2026**, the Centre published a **draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill** proposing to replace the flat **35 kg per household** Antyodaya entitlement (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/entitlement/>) with **7 kg per person**, capped at **35 kg** a household, with public comments invited till **July 13, 2026**. For an aspirant, this is a GS2 and GS3 case on **welfare targeting, equity and the right to food**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

The **Antyodaya Anna Yojana** gives every poorest household a flat **35 kg** of grain, which is unfair per person: small families gain, large families lose. The draft amendment ties grain to **family size (7 kg a head, 35 kg cap)**, fairer for big households. But tiny poor households, **widows and the elderly living alone**, could see deep cuts. Reform must protect the weakest and add **nutrition**.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Flat household entitlement	35 kg per family regardless of size	Rewards small families, penalises large ones per head
Per-capita formula	7 kg per person, capped at 35 kg	Matches grain to household size more fairly
The floor problem	Tiny households lose grain	A one-person poor home drops 35 kg to 7 kg
Nutrition gap	Cereal-only support	Calories without protein and micronutrients

THE ANALYSIS

- ❶ **The current inequity is real.** A flat 35 kg gives a two-member family 17.5 kg a head and an eight-member family roughly 4 kg a head. The per-capita case for reform is strong.
- ❷ **But Antyodaya targets the poorest of the poor.** A redesign that improves the average while cutting the smallest, often elderly, widowed or disabled households contradicts the scheme's founding purpose.
- ❸ **The cap protects large families, not small ones.** The 35 kg ceiling shields big households within a fixed grain budget, but offers nothing to one and two-member homes facing the steepest cut.
- ❹ **Quantity is not nutrition.** A debate fixated on kilograms of cereal misses India's protein and micronutrient deficit; reform is the moment to mainstream millets and pulses.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), launched 2000, for the poorest of the poor; current entitlement **35 kg per household per month**. **The proposal:** *Draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026*, **7 kg per person, capped at 35 kg a household; comments till July 13, 2026**. **The parent law:** **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**, covers up to 75 percent rural and 50 percent urban population; Priority Households get 5 kg per person. **Concept:** universal vs targeted PDS; per-capita equity; right to food (Article 21); nutrition security.

THE DEBATE

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Argument for the reform: A flat household quota is indefensible per person. Tying grain to family size removes an arbitrary bias, directs more to large poor families, and rationalises a fixed grain budget.

Argument against: Antyodaya exists for the poorest, including widows, the elderly and disabled who often live alone. A formula that slashes their ration by up to 80 percent betrays the scheme's purpose, however neat the arithmetic.

Balanced verdict: The per-capita principle is sound, but it must not be applied blindly. A dignity floor for one and two-member households, protection for vulnerable categories, and a nutrition shift toward millets and pulses can deliver equity without abandoning the weakest.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

Before accepting any allocation rule, plug in the smallest and largest cases. A rule that looks fair on average can be cruel at the tail. Asking "what happens to the one-person household?" instantly reveals whether a welfare reform protects the vulnerable or merely tidies the spreadsheet.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Flat 35 kg per household -> small family wins, large family loses per head -> shift to 7 kg per person (35 kg cap) -> large poor households gain -> BUT lone widow/elderly drops 35 to 7 kg -> add dignity floor + millets/pulses -> equity that still protects the weakest

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Set a dignity floor.** Guarantee a minimum well above 7 kg for one and two-member households so the weakest are not penalised.
- ② **Grandfather the vulnerable.** Protect existing elderly, widow-headed and disabled Antyodaya beneficiaries from any reduction.
- ③ **Shift from calories to nutrition.** Add millets and pulses to tackle protein and micronutrient deficiency, not just hunger.
- ④ **Update the data base.** Anchor any redesign in fresh Census and HCES figures, not the 2011 baseline that still governs coverage.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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Per-capita equity and protection of the most vulnerable can pull food-security targeting in opposite directions; the Antyodaya redesign must protect the smallest household before perfecting the average.

“A formula can be arithmetically fair and socially cruel at the same time.”

Antyodaya Anna Yojana (2000); NFSA 2013; draft NFSA (Amendment) Bill 2026; 7 kg per person, 35 kg cap; Priority Households (5 kg); right to food, Article 21.

When equity by formula collides with protecting the weakest, a welfare state (<https://ujivari.com/terms/welfare-state/>) should err toward protection.

UPSC has asked on PDS reform, targeted vs universal subsidies and nutrition security; this connects all three to a live draft law.

PDS leakage and One Nation One Ration Card, malnutrition and POSHAN, fiscal cost of food subsidy, directive principles.

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>), *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>), *The Tribune* (<https://www.tribuneindia.com>)

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KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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Tying the Antyodaya entitlement to family size corrects a real per-capita inequity between small and large households, but a per-person formula with a floor risks cutting grain for tiny poor households, so reform must protect the most vulnerable and pair quantity with nutrition.


SUPPORTING

- A flat 35 kg per household rewards small families and penalises large ones on a per-person basis, which is genuinely inequitable.
- A per-capita formula of 7 kg a person better matches entitlement to need and frees grain for larger, often poorer, households.
- But single-member and two-member poor households, often the elderly, widows and disabled, could see their ration fall sharply.


COUNTER

The government argues the change rationalises entitlements and removes an unjustified bias, and that the 35 kg cap still protects large families within a fixed grain budget.


WAY FORWARD

Set a dignity floor for tiny households, grandfather the most vulnerable, add millets and pulses for nutrition, and base any redesign on updated Census and HCES data rather than 2011 numbers.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"Per-capita equity and protection of the most vulnerable can pull food-security targeting in opposite directions." Critically examine the proposed shift from a flat household entitlement to a per-person formula under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Food security is not only about how much grain a state distributes, but how fairly. The proposed Antyodaya redesign forces a hard choice between per-capita equity and protecting the smallest, poorest households.

BODY

Under the NFSA, 2013, every Antyodaya household receives a flat 35 kg of cereals a month, irrespective of size. A two-member family thus gets 17.5 kg a head while an eight-member family gets barely 4 kg a head, a clear per-capita inequity.

The draft amendment proposes 7 kg per person, capped at 35 kg a household, so a one-member family would get 7 kg, a five-plus family the full 35 kg. For large, poor households this is fairer.

The danger lies at the bottom of the size distribution. A widow living alone, today entitled to 35 kg, could drop to 7 kg, an 80 percent cut, even though her vulnerability has not changed.

Antyodaya was designed for the poorest of the poor, so a reform that improves average equity but hurts the weakest defeats its own purpose. The answer is not to abandon per-capita logic but to temper it: a dignity floor for single and two-member households, protection for the elderly and disabled, and a shift from cereal-only support toward nutrition, adding millets and pulses.

Crucially, any redesign must rest on current Census and consumption data, not the 2011 base.

CONCLUSION

A formula can be arithmetically fair and socially cruel at the same time. Good food-security policy must protect the smallest household before it perfects the average, and feed nutrition, not just calories.


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