

India's Makhana Revolution: How the Government Plans to Transform the Foxnut Industry

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Makhana Latest News

- At a rally in **Samastipur, Bihar**, PM Modi described the newly inaugurated **National Makhana Board** as a “revolutionary step” for farmers.
- Bihar, which produces nearly **90% of India's makhana (foxnut)**, has been central to the government's recent efforts to promote the industry through infrastructure support, branding, and exports.
- The renewed focus on “**makhananomics**”—a term linking makhana to rural development—also carries a political dimension, aimed at appealing to local farmers and cooperatives ahead of the upcoming state Assembly elections.

Makhana: From Traditional Snack to Global Superfood

- Makhana, or **foxnut**, is the **dried seed of the prickly water lily (Euryale ferox)**, a freshwater plant native to **South and East Asia**.

- Recognised for its violet-white flowers and large prickly leaves, the plant thrives in ponds and wetlands.

India's Makhana Hub: Bihar's Mithilanchal Region

- India's makhana production is concentrated in Bihar, which accounts for around 90% of the country's total output.
- The key producing districts — **Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Saharsa, Supaul, Araria, Kishanganj, and Sitamarhi** — lie in the Mithilanchal region, with the first four contributing nearly 80% of Bihar's production.
- According to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (2020), makhana cultivation spans 15,000 hectares, producing about 10,000 tonnes of popped makhana annually.

A Superfood on the Rise

- Once used mainly in ritual and festive settings, makhana has now emerged as a fitness and wellness food, thanks to its low-fat, high-nutrient profile.
- Nutritionists endorse it as a healthy snack, fuelling a surge in domestic and global demand.
- Globally, the **makhana market was valued at \$43.56 million in 2023** and is projected to reach \$100 million by 2033, according to Spherical Insights, underscoring its growing economic and export potential.

India's Makhana Industry: Bihar Leads in Production but Lags in Value

- Though Bihar produces nearly 90% of India's makhana, **the state remains a minor player in exports**.
- The largest exporters — Punjab and Assam — either process or repackage makhana sourced from Bihar, reaping the bulk of profits.

Lack of Processing and Export Infrastructure

- Bihar's underdeveloped food processing sector and poor export infrastructure prevent it from capitalising on the crop's potential.
- Most of its makhana is **sold as raw material to food processing units (FPU)**s in other states at low prices.
- These FPU's then add value through flavouring, roasting, and packaging, earning significantly higher margins.
- As a result, farmers and the state government lose out on both income and tax revenue.

Fragmented Market and Low Farmer Returns

- The makhana supply chain in Bihar is dominated by intermediaries, leaving farmers with a small share of the final market price.
- With no organised market structure, producers are unable to negotiate fair prices despite high demand.

Low Productivity and Manual Labour Challenges

- Makhana cultivation remains labour-intensive and inefficient.

- Farmers sow seeds in ponds, then dive underwater to harvest them. Processing — including drying, roasting, and popping — is still done manually, increasing labour costs and limiting productivity.

Slow Adoption of High-Yield Varieties (HYVs)

- Although agricultural institutes have developed high-yield varieties (HYVs) such as Swarna Vaidehi and Sabour Makhana-1, adoption remains low.
- Traditional methods yield only 1.7–1.9 tonnes per hectare, compared to 3–3.5 tonnes achievable with HYVs, as per ICAR (2020).

Limited Mechanisation and Future Needs

- Attempts to mechanise the harvesting process have failed due to the lack of efficient machinery suited to pond-based cultivation.
- Experts stress that awareness drives and technological innovation are vital if Bihar is to move from a raw material supplier to a value-added makhana powerhouse.

Building a Makhana Ecosystem: Bihar's New Push for Industry Growth

- The newly established **National Makhana Board**, launched with an initial budget of ₹100 crore, aims to transform Bihar's makhana industry through improved production, processing, value addition, and marketing.
- Announced in the Union Budget 2024, the Board will train farmers, ensure they benefit from relevant schemes, and promote sustainable growth across the makhana value chain.

Mithila Makhana Gets GI Tag: Bihar Seeks MSP Support

- In 2022, 'Mithila Makhana' earned a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- Following this recognition, the Bihar government urged the Centre to introduce a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for makhana to ensure fair prices for farmers and promote the crop as a profitable, identity-based agricultural product.

Infrastructure and Export Vision

- As per the officials, the Bihar government plans to create an integrated food processing ecosystem with new processing units, cold storage chains, and export facilities.
- Upcoming cargo-enabled airports in Patna, Purnea, and Darbhanga are expected to play a key role in enabling direct makhana exports.

Need for Greater Investment and Accountability

- Experts cautioned that the success of the initiative will depend on adequate financial commitment and consistent policy attention from both the Centre and the state.
- Past efforts—such as the National Research Centre for Makhana established in Darbhanga (2002)—failed due to neglect.

- As of July 2024, the centre had only 10 employees against 42 sanctioned posts, no administrative staff, and no full-time director, highlighting the need for institutional focus and accountability.

The Road Ahead

- For Bihar to truly harness its makhana potential, the government must bridge gaps in research, training, and infrastructure.
- It should also focus on ensuring the new Makhana Board delivers real benefits to farmers and processors rather than becoming another underfunded bureaucracy.

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