

Food Ministers' meet today to discuss PDS portability

[TV Jayan](#) New Delhi July 31, 2019

The Union Food Ministry has convened a meeting of State Food Ministers on Thursday to discuss among other things distribution of fortified rice through public distribution system (PDS) and national portability of PDS under One Nation One Ration Card system.

The government wants One Nation One Ration Card to be a reality by 2020.

Pilot scheme

The government approved a pilot scheme for fortifying rice and distributing it through PDS in February this year, which will be implemented on a pilot basis in 15 districts in predominantly rice-eating States. The government has approved a financial outlay of ₹147.61 crore for implementing the scheme over the next three years.

“The idea of keeping the cost of fortification outside the purview of price at which PDS rice is sold at fair price shops is to ensure that poor people who are price conscious would not stay away from buying fortified rice,” said an official source.

The cost of rice fortification is estimated to be 60 paise per kg of rice and it will be shared between the Centre and the States at ratio of 90:10 for the North-Eastern, hilly and island States and at the ratio of 75:25 for the rest, the source said.

Among the districts where the pilot project to be launched soon are West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh, Bongaigaon in Assam, Narmada in Gujarat, Ernakulam in Kerala, Yadgir or Raichur in Karnataka, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and Trichy in Tamil Nadu. Malkangiri in Odisha and Chandauli district in Uttar Pradesh would also participate in the project.

Conference agenda

One of the agenda items of the conference is said to be exploring the nationwide implementation of the scheme at the earliest. Niti Aayog is said to be of the view that instead of a pilot, the scheme should be rolled out in all States where rice is the staple grain at one go. The ministers' meet is expected to deliberate on it.

As per the plan, the rice to be sold through PDS would be fortified with iron, folic acid and vitamin B12, mainly to address the acute problem of anaemia and malnutrition in India. According to studies, nearly 58.5 per cent of young children between 6 and 59 months, 53 per cent of women in reproductive age group and 22.7 per cent of men in 15-49 age group suffer from anaemia. Besides, micronutrient deficiency is also quite rampant among Indian men and women.

PDS portability

The conference is also scheduled to discuss the ambitious plan of implementing portability of PDS in the country, under the scheme, integrated management of PDS. As a step towards national portability, the Centre roped in four States which would implement this on a pilot basis in two clusters.

These clusters – Andhra Pradesh & Telangana and Gujarat & Maharashtra) would come into being from next month. Once implemented, people from Andhra will be able to buy their PDS goods from any fair price shops in Telangana and vice versa, the source said, adding that migrants would be the major beneficiary of the scheme as this would provide them hassle-free access to PDS entitlement.