

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION No. 724

TO BE ANSWERED ON 08.12.2023

EFFICIENCY OF PDS

724. SHRI DEREK O' BRIEN

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

- (a) the strategies implemented to ensure effective and transparent distribution of essential commodities, particularly in remote or vulnerable areas;
- (b) the measures taken to address challenges such as food adulteration, hoarding, or any malpractices affecting the quality and availability of essential goods; and
- (c) the steps in place to strengthen the Public Distribution System (PDS) and ensure that it efficiently reaches the intended beneficiaries?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE, CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

(SHRI ASHWINI KUMAR CHOUBEY)

(a) & (b) : Central Government issues advisories to States/UTs for strict enforcement of Essential Commodities Act, 1955 (EC Act) & Prevention of Blackmarketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980 (PBMMSEC Act) from time to time. The States/UTs as enforcement agencies for EC Act, 1955 and PBMMSEC Act, 1980 take action against unscrupulous trading, blackmarketing, hoarding, profiteering and speculative trading of essential commodities.

To ensure adequate availability of essential food items at affordable prices in the market the Government, from time to time, issues enabling orders to fix stock limits to carry out de-hoarding operations against hoarders of specified essential foodgrains based on which State take appropriate decision for imposing limits. Recently, the Central Government has imposed stock limits on pulses namely Tur and Urad vide orders dated 02.06.2023, 25.09.2023 and 06.11.2023; and on Wheat vide order dated 12.06.2023.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), through States/UTs and its regional offices, conducts regular surveillance, monitoring, inspection and random sampling of food products to check compliance of the standards laid down under Food Safety and Standards Act 2006, Rules and Regulations made thereunder. In cases where the food samples are found to be non-conforming, penal action is initiated against the defaulting Food Business Operators as per provisions of FSS Act, Rules and Regulations made thereunder. FSSAI has developed a pan-India surveillance system that helps to collect the data regarding the safety and quality of food and to ensure that the food supplied in the market is safe and wholesome. The aim of such surveillance activities to identify hotspots of food safety non-compliances and adulteration.

(c) : Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central and the State/UT Governments. Central Government is responsible only for procurement, allocation as per National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA, 2013) and transportation of such foodgrains upto the designated depots of the Food Corporation of India in the State/UT. The operational responsibilities for lifting and distribution of foodgrains within the States/UTs, identification of eligible beneficiaries, issuance of ration cards to them, redressal of grievances and licensing, regulation, monitoring and operation of Fair Price Shops (FPS) rest with the concerned State/UT Governments.

End to-end computerization of Public Distribution System (PDS) operations in all States/UTs has resulted in significant progress achieved at the national level in terms of 100% digitization of ration cards, online allocation modules for generation of monthly foodgrain allocation orders up to the Fair Price Shops (FPS), installation of electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices, computerization of supply chain management, online grievance redressal systems and initiation of transparency portals. Backed by the sustained technological progress, the Department had implemented One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) plan in August 2019 with 4 states and by the end of June 2022 ONORC was operational across all 36 States/UTs of the country. Since its inception around 124 Crore portability transactions have been recorded under the ONORC plan, which includes both inter-State and intra-State transactions ensuring the food security of around 80 Crore National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA) beneficiaries in the country.

To give further impetus to the technology-driven PDS reforms and bring in more homogeneity a need was felt to operationalize a new scheme to ensure continuous support to all States/UT for strengthening technology components (server infrastructure, software) and technical capacities for sustaining & institutionalizing the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) plan,

Government is implementing the new Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) - “Scheme for Modernization and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART-PDS)” for the development/implementation of advanced integrated supply chain software in States/UTs. Under this scheme, provisions have been made to replace existing servers/data centres by leveraging cloud infrastructure

The scheme also has provision to continue the support of various application modules, portals, dashboards, integration with other ministries/departments, etc. developed under earlier end-to-end Computerization and Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS) schemes. This also includes the continuation of Data Centre Services procured under IMPDS covering Central System and PDS applications of State/UTs.

The scheme envisages not only introducing the major technological reforms but also strengthening the technology-driven infrastructure in the Public Distribution System (PDS) for transformative change in the entire PDS ecosystem. The scheme is to be implemented in collaboration with all States/UTs, with a total cost of Rs. 349.9 Crore for a period of 3 years from 2023-24 to 2025-26.

The SMART-PDS offers a software suite along with advanced features and functionalities for States / UTs to leverage future-ready IT Tools for enabling the modernization of Supply Chain Management at their levels SMART-PDS intends to continue to sustain the systematic information technology-led reforms brought in the functioning of Public Distribution System (PDS) operations by overcoming the State level of technological limitations with respect to Server, Software & Technical Manpower, leveraging cloud infrastructure and institutionalizing an integrated Central System covering all PDS related operations across- the country.
