

Business Standard

Centre gives 1-yr deadline to states for rolling out one nation, one ration card'

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The Centre has given states and Union Territories time till June 30, 2020 to roll out the 'one nation, one ration card' system, under which beneficiaries can buy subsidised foodgrains from ration shops in any part of the country.

Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said already 10 states -- Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana and Tripura -- are providing portability of Public Distribution System (PDS) entitlements.

"By next June 30, 2020, 'one nation, one ration card' should be implemented without fail in the entire country. We have written letters to the state government to fast track the implementation of this system," Paswan told reporters.

The new mechanism will ensure no poor is deprived of PDS entitlement if that person shifts from one place to another. The system will also help remove fake ration card holders, he added.

Paswan further said there are 11 states, including Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh, which can easily implement PDS portability within their state as Point of Sale (PoS) machines have been installed in all ration shops.

This is one of the 100-days agenda of the Modi 2.0 government, he added.

Since November 2016, the government is implementing the National Food Security Act, under which foodgrains are supplied every month at highly subsidised rates of Rs 13 per kg to over 80 crore people in the country.

Elaborating about the new system, Paswan said beneficiaries are required to show their Aadhaar card to buy foodgrains from any ration shop in the country. Only ration card will suffice if beneficiaries want to get their PDS entitlement only from a particular registered ration shop.

So far, Aadhaar cards of about 89 per cent of beneficiaries have been linked with the system, while 77 per cent of ration shops have installed PoS machines, he said.

As many as 22 states have 100 per cent PoS coverage and there is no problem in implementing the new system. Delhi had rolled out portability of PDS entitlement a year back but later stopped, Paswan added.

Asked whether a beneficiary who moves to another state where PDS foodgrain is given for free is entitled for the same, a senior Food Ministry official said, "In such cases, the beneficiary will get the entitlement as per the rates fixed by the Centre, that is Rs 1-3 per kg."

To ensure that one member of a family after shifting to another place does not buy the entire family quota in one go, a maximum limit of buying will be fixed, the official said.

In such cases, the beneficiary will be allowed to buy maximum 50 per cent of the family quota. This will ensure other members are not deprived of their entitlement, he added.

The food ministry will issue detailed guidelines in this regard soon, the official added.

Besides, Paswan announced distribution of fortified rice under the PDS on a pilot basis in one district each in 15 states from October-November.

Rice grown in Kharif season of 2019 will be fortified with iron, folic acid, vitamin A and B12 at the milling stage as per the standards fixed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), he said. The scheme in this regard was approved in January.

The minister also said the Centre has given a six-month deadline to states to automate the operations of their foodgrain depots in order to minimise storage losses.

The depots of Food Corporation of India (FCI) and Central Warehousing Corporation are fully automated at present.