

Address by Hon'ble MOS (IC), CA, F&PD

(Conference with Food Ministers of States/UTs on NFSA, 2013; 1st October, 2013)

Hon'ble Agriculture Minister, Food Ministers and Food Secretaries of States and Union Territories, Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution, senior officers of Central Ministries and Departments, other distinguished guests, friends from media, ladies and gentlemen.

2. As you all know, in pursuance of our commitment to the people for right to food, National Food Security Act was enacted with the approval of the Parliament and notified on 10th September, 2013. This historic law marks a paradigm shift in our approach to food security as it aims to ensure food security in a right based manner.

3. We have gathered here to discuss the issues relating to implementation of the Act. Successful implementation of this Act is a challenge for all of us. Indeed, a coordinated approach is required by Central and State Governments to ensure its success. It is heartening to note that some of the States like Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh have either already started implementation or are going to implement the Act shortly, while a few are likely to follow suit.

4. States/UTs are required to play a crucial role in implementation of the Act. It was therefore thought appropriate to hold a discussion with you all so as to discuss in detail various implementation issues. I understand that a very fruitful discussion has taken place in the meeting of Food Secretaries yesterday, during which various action points were discussed. The Food Secretary in his remarks has already given an account of yesterday's meeting. I would take this opportunity to stress a few points upon the Food Ministers who are present today.

5. One of the most critical issues for successful implementation of the Act is identification of beneficiaries under Targeted Public Distribution System. It is extremely important that the benefits intended under the Act, reach the targeted beneficiaries. First thing that State Governments need to do is to evolve a fair and transparent criteria with involvement of all stakeholders. Once the criteria is finalized, the next step is to identify the beneficiaries correctly. The States should take this opportunity to eliminate the errors of inclusion and exclusion. Please bear in mind that lack of fairness and transparency may render the whole exercise of identification meaningless, besides leading to legal scrutiny.

6. The next crucial issue which comes to my mind is door-step delivery of foodgrains which needs to be ensured by State Governments as provided in the Act. My Ministry has been emphasizing the States to undertake doorstep delivery even before the Act came into existence. Hon'ble Supreme Court has also given directions in this regard. It has now become all the more essential for States to create infrastructure for doorstep delivery to prevent leakage and diversion of foodgrains. As per information available with us, 15 States/UTs are yet to start doorstep delivery. I understand some of the States have expressed their inability to implement doorstep delivery. I must remind the State Governments here that not only States/UTs are required to do door-step delivery under NFSA, this is also essential for ensuring viability of fair price shops. With meagre margins paid to the FPS dealers, this additional responsibility eats into their already paltry income, giving rise to temptation for diversion. I would therefore urge the State Food Ministers to personally review the position with a view to overcome the impediments in the way of doorstep delivery.

7. I would also like to stress the need for creation of scientific storage capacity at various levels. A lot of initiatives needs to be taken by States to create intermediate storage facilities. They should take advantage of the

Private Entrepreneur Guarantee (PEG) scheme for construction of godowns through private investments under a PPP mode, which is being implemented by the Department to augment the covered storage capacities. Focus should be on a time bound completion of storage capacities sanctioned in the State, through constant monitoring and review. I would urge the Food Ministers to use their good offices to resolve issues slowing down the progress of the scheme in their States.

The Government has taken the historic step of enacting the legislation on food security. It, however, needs to be implemented in the true spirit in close coordination and cooperation between Central and State Governments. I look forward to a fruitful discussion and valuable suggestions from this august gathering.

With these words, I welcome you once again and thank you for your participation.
