

14– 06 – 2022

News: Centre to boost supply of fortified rice

- Union Food and Public Distribution Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said that the Centre had started the second phase of distribution of fortified rice from April 1st. A total of 90 districts have been covered and the Centre is targeting 291 more districts.

Food Fortification

- Fortification is the **addition of key vitamins and minerals** such as iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A & D to staple foods such as rice, milk and salt **to improve their nutritional content.**
- These **nutrients may or may not have been originally present** in the food before processing.
- Food fortification is a “**complementary strategy**” and not a replacement of a balanced & diversified diet to address malnutrition.
- Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs recently approved **a centrally-sponsored pilot scheme on fortification of rice and its dispersal through the Public Distribution System (PDS).**

- Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018 has prescribed standards for fortification of various food products such as all fortified foods must not fall below the minimum level of micronutrients.

Mandatory food Fortification

- Some food items are to be compulsorily fortified in India.
- Last year, FSSAI considered it mandatory to fortify edible oil with vitamin A and D ‘so that people of India can enjoy better immunity with good health’.
- The country is also considering ‘compulsory’ fortification of rice with Vitamin B12, Iron, and Folic Acid from 2024 to address malnutrition and anaemia crisis in the country.
- The Union Government has also started distributing fortified rice through the mid-day meal scheme and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) programme citing widespread nutritional deficiencies.
- The central government has also initiated a three-year pilot scheme on rice fortification and supply via public distribution (PDS) in 15 districts across the country.
- Recently, experts have flagged issues against mandatory food fortification.
- In the letter, the signatories including Right to Food Campaign, a non-profit working for food rights, and the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic

Agriculture, an informal network working to strengthen food diversity and nutrition, pointed out that the **mandatory fortification is detrimental to health and “it would bring socio-economic impacts such as market shifts in favor of large corporations, loss of livelihoods for small and informal players, monocultures in diets and reliance on packaged foods.”**

- Experts also pointed out that **in undernourished populations such as India’s, the key problem is protein inadequacy** as a result of monotonous cereal-based diets along with low consumption of vegetables and animal source foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and fish. **The fortification can lead to toxicity, including gut inflammation**, they say.

PM Poshan / Midday Meal Scheme

- The **Midday meal scheme (under the Ministry of Education) is a centrally sponsored scheme which was launched in 1995.**
- It is the **world’s largest school meal programme aimed to attain the goal of universalization of primary education.**
- The objective of the scheme is to **address hunger and malnutrition, increase enrolment and attendance in school, improve socialisation among castes, and provide employment at grassroot level especially to women.**

- The scheme provides cooked meals to every child within the age group of six to fourteen years studying in classes I to VIII who enrolls and attends the school.
- Earlier, the fund was allocated by Centre only to procure, wheat, rice, pulses and vegetables. If a state decides to add any component like milk or eggs to the menu, the Centre does not bear the additional cost. Now that restriction has been lifted.
- The central government will ensure Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) from states to schools, which will use it to cover cooking costs.
- Earlier money was allocated to the states, which then included their share of the money before sending it to a nodal midday meal scheme authority at district and tehsil levels.
- This is to ensure no leakages at the level of district administration and other authorities.
- A nutrition expert is to be appointed in each school whose responsibility is to ensure that health aspects such as Body Mass Index (BMI), weight and haemoglobin levels are addressed.
- The Body mass index (BMI) is defined as the body mass divided by the square of the body height, and is expressed in units of kg/m^2 , resulting from mass in kilograms and height in metres.

- India has ranked 179 out of 196 territories assessed and ranked by Lancet International on the basis of average BMI of boys and girls.
- AGMARK (issued by Directorate of Marketing and Inspection) quality items are procured, tasting of meals are done by two or three adult members of the school management committee.
- If the Mid-Day Meal is not provided in school on any school day due to non-availability of food grains or any other reason, the State Government shall pay food security allowance by 15th of the succeeding month.
- The State Steering cum Monitoring Committee (SSMC) oversees the implementation of the scheme including establishment of a mechanism for maintenance of nutritional standards and quality of meals.
- Cooked meal having nutritional standards of 450 calories and 12 gm of protein for primary (I-V class) and 700 calories and 20 gm protein for upper primary (VI-VIII class).
- All government and government aided schools, Madarsa and Maqtabas supported under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are presently covered under the scheme. It will be extended to students studying in pre-primary or Balvatikas running in government and government aided primary schools.
- Balvatika is the pre-school that was started in government schools last year to include children aged younger than six years in the formal education system.

- The concept of **TithiBhojan will be encouraged extensively.**
- TithiBhojan is a **community participation programme in which people provide special food to children on special occasions/festivals.**
- Recently, **the central government requested state governments/union territory administrations to explore the possibility of introducing millets under the PM POSHAN Scheme** preferably in the districts where eating millets is a culturally accepted food habit.

News: New norms for sentence remission

- The Union Home Ministry recently issued a set of guidelines to the States and the Union Territories on the grant of special remission to prisoners to commemorate the 75th year of Independence. As part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations, the special remission would be granted to a certain category of prisoners, and they would be released in three phases — August 15, 2022, January 26, 2023 and August 15, 2023.

Eligible prisoners

- The prisoners who would qualify for premature release under the scheme are **women and transgender convicts of ages 50 and above and male convicts of 60**

and above who have completed 50% of their total sentence period without counting the period of general remission earned.

- Among others eligible for remission are physically challenged or disabled convicts with 70% disability and more who have completed 50% of their total sentence period, terminally ill convicts, convicted prisoners who have completed two thirds (66%) of their total sentence and poor or indigent prisoners who have completed their sentence but are still in jail due to nonpayment of fine imposed on them by waiving off the fine.

Those who are not eligible for remission

- Persons convicted with death sentence or where death sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment or persons convicted for an offence for which punishment of death has been specified as one of the punishments would not be eligible for the grant of special remission.
- Persons convicted with sentence of life imprisonment, convicts involved in terrorist activities or persons convicted under the Terrorist and Disruptive (Prevention) Act, 1985, Prevention of Terrorist Act, 2002, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, Explosives Act, 1908, National Security Act, 1982, Official Secrets Act, 1923, and Anti Hijacking Act, 2016.

News: Russia is now 2nd biggest oil vendor to India

- Russia has overtaken Saudi Arabia to become India's second biggest supplier of oil behind Iraq as refiners snap up Russian crude available at a deep discount following the war in Ukraine.
- Indian refiners bought about 25 million barrels of Russian oil in May, or more than 16% of all their oil imports.
- Iraq remained the top supplier to India in May and Saudi Arabia is now the third biggest supplier.