

Govt extends fortified rice scheme till December 2028

Our Bureau

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The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the continuation of fortified rice distribution under the food security law and other welfare schemes until December 2028, which may cumulatively cost the government over ₹17,000 crore since the fortification programme began in 2022.

Fortified rice is made as per the standards fixed by food safety regulator FSSAI, which has prescribed blend-

ing rice with three micronutrients — iron, folic acid and vitamin B12. The process involves the addition of fortified rice kernels (FRK) enriched with micro-nutrients to regular rice (custom milled rice).

Experts said the benefits are far more than risks in the fortification programme, which is implemented in 140 countries. As India has the highest mortality in the world due to bleeding during delivery, rice fortification aims at helping the government offset it. The micronutrient content in fortified

rice is much higher than brown or parboiled rice, according to some experts.

Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the total financial implication to supply free fortified rice will be ₹17,082 crore, fully funded by the Centre.

MALNUTRITION COST

The annual expenditure on fortification varies as it is based on the procurement quantity of paddy, and the government has taken a decision to fortify all quantities it is buying under the MSP

operations, officials said. Last year, Food Ministry officials had estimated the fortification cost at ₹2,680 crore per year.

The cost of fortification for the rice miller also gets reduced based on the volume, officials said, and added that though there is a cap of ₹0.73 per kg fixed by the government as fortification cost, the States are getting it at cheaper rate, derived through tender.

According to the Food Ministry, malnutrition costs India at least ₹77,000 crore annually in terms of lost pro-

ductivity, illness and death. It also earlier said that the country loses about 1 per cent of GDP due to iron deficiency (anaemia). One rupee spent on nutritional interventions could generate ₹34.1-₹38.6 in public economic returns in the country, it had projected.

The rice fortification initiative will continue as a central sector initiative with 100 per cent funding by the Centre as part of PMGKAY, thus providing a unified institutional mechanism for implementation, a statement said on Wednesday.