

30% PMGKAY recipients yet to get grains for May

Centre urges States to issue more ration cards to vulnerable

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Almost a third of all ration card holders are yet to get their free foodgrains allocation for May under the Centre's COVID-19 relief scheme, according to the Food Ministry. At a press conference on Thursday, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey also said it was up to the States to take further action on providing rations to migrants and others without ration cards in compliance with a Supreme Court order, indicating that the Centre does not intend to revive last year's scheme meant for these vulnerable populations.

Out of the 79.25 crore beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), only 55 crore have so far received their 5 kg per person quota of free wheat or rice under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), which was announced to mitigate the economic distress caused by the pandemic. Thus, more than 30% have still not got their benefit. However, almost 90% of beneficiaries have received their regular subsidised grain for the month, raising questions over why the free grain has reached



Not enough: Only 55 crore have received their 5 kg per person quota of free wheat or rice under PMGKAY. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

fewer beneficiaries. Food Ministry data showed that Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Odisha and Rajasthan did not even begin distribution of the May quota under PMGKAY until June 1.

On Wednesday, the Centre issued an advisory to all States asking them to launch a special drive to issue ration cards to the most vulnerable sections of society, including migrant workers and street dwellers, noting that "some of the poor and needy people who do not have address proof may be finding it difficult to obtain a ration card".

However, this must be done within the existing coverage allowed for each State under the NFSA. Mr. Pandey told presspersons that there was a nationwide coverage

gap of 1.97 crore beneficiaries. However, he admitted that 14 States had already reached their quota limits and would not be able to enrol any new beneficiaries.

An analysis of NFSA data shows that the only major States which have significant coverage gaps are Himachal Pradesh (23%), Madhya Pradesh (14%) and Gujarat (9%). Most other large States have less than a 5% gap, which can be used to issue new ration cards. In a May 24 order, the Supreme Court had directed that migrant workers and poor people without ration cards should be provided with dry ration under the Atma Nirbhar scheme – which was implemented last year – or any other scheme found suitable by the States and Centre.