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Cabinet Approves SARTHAK-PDS Scheme

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The Union Cabinet has approved the SARTHAK-PDS (Scheme for Assistance in Ration Transport and Handling-Income with Automation in Public Distribution System) with a financial outlay of ₹25,530 crore for the period 2026-27 to 2030-31. The scheme aims to modernise India's Public Distribution System (PDS), improve transparency in foodgrain distribution, strengthen logistics, and ensure efficient delivery of subsidised ration to beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Objective of the Scheme:

The primary objective of the scheme is to create a technology-driven and efficient PDS system by reducing leakages, improving grievance redressal, and ensuring timely delivery of foodgrains across the country. The scheme will strengthen the end-to-end supply chain from procurement to distribution and improve the functioning of Fair Price Shops (FPSs).

Key Features of SARTHAK-PDS:

Under the scheme, the government plans to integrate existing components related to foodgrain transportation, handling assistance, FPS dealer margins, and SMART-PDS reforms into a single umbrella programme. Advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Blockchain, and Natural Language Processing (NLP) will be used to improve beneficiary identification, logistics management, and monitoring systems.

The scheme also introduces three major digital pillars:

Nirmal – AI-based beneficiary database management system

ASHA – AI-powered multilingual grievance redressal platform

Saksham – Smart logistics and vehicle tracking system

The ASHA platform is expected to manage nearly 3 lakh citizen interactions daily, improving public service delivery and transparency.

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040
Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Supply Chain and Technology Reforms:

The scheme will focus on modernising foodgrain transportation and monitoring through QR-code based tracking, vehicle tracking systems, state command centres, and demand forecasting tools. These measures are expected to reduce transportation distances and logistics costs significantly while improving accountability in the ration distribution process.

Importance of Public Distribution System (PDS):

The Public Distribution System is one of India's largest food security programmes aimed at distributing subsidised foodgrains to economically weaker sections of society. It operates through Fair Price Shops under the provisions of the National Food Security Act, 2013. Around 81 crore beneficiaries currently receive foodgrains under the NFSA.

One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC):

The scheme will complement the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) initiative, which allows beneficiaries to access ration from any Fair Price Shop across India using Aadhaar-based authentication. The ONORC system is especially beneficial for migrant workers and mobile populations.