

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O letter addressed to Dr. Manmohan Singh, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on 20.12.2011 is reproduced below :

" The Union Government has sent the Draft National Food Security Bill, 2011, and has invited the views of the State on the same. Now, I have come to know that the proposed Bill has already been approved by the Cabinet and is likely to be introduced in Parliament shortly. I have gone through the provisions of the Bill which contemplates securing food security through Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and nutritional support to vulnerable sections of the public like pregnant women, lactating mothers and children from 6 months to 14 years of age. The Bill also aims to address the issues of malnutrition, starvation or condition akin to starvation. Under the Targeted Public Distribution System, the Bill advocates the provision of food entitlement at 7 kg. per person per month and 3 kg. per person per month to persons belonging to Priority House Holds (PHH) and General House Holds (GHH) respectively at different subsidized rates.

As you are aware, my Government has been successfully implementing the Universal Public Distribution System for the last several years. Through this Universal Public Distribution System, the Government has been able to address the issue of food security for all without exception. In addition, my Government has ordered the supply of rice free of cost to all under the Universal Public Distribution System. This has been well received by the public. Apart from rice, wheat and sugar, special PDS commodities like Toor dhal, Urid dhal, fortified Palmolein and fortified Atta are also supplied to the public at heavily subsidized prices. Another unique feature of the Universal Public Distribution System in my State is that no private individuals are permitted to run fair price shops. Only the Co-operative Societies and the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation, apart from a few Women Self Help Groups, are permitted to run the fair price shops which number 32,977. The annual food subsidy for the State is Rs.5000 crores. There is a strong administrative monitoring, vigilance and grievance redressal mechanism operating in the State in respect of PDS.

In contrast, the proposed Central Bill on food security is replete with confusion and inaccuracy. For instance, the proposed classification of target groups into PHH and GHH for the purpose of delivery of food entitlements will surely invite sharp criticism and furious opposition from everybody concerned. The very basis of such classification is unscientific and unacceptable. Similarly, no reason has been adduced for restricting the coverage under TPDS to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population under the proposed Central Bill. Like the BPL norms proposed by the Union Planning Commission, the categorization of households and arbitrary restriction of coverage as contained in the Central Bill will lead to controversy and make a mockery of providing food security. The most significant point is that forced implementation of TPDS as contemplated under the Central Bill will entail an additional financial burden of about Rs.1800 crores per annum with no statutory commitment forthcoming from the Government of India.

In view of the foregoing reasons, I would like to register my strong opposition to the Draft National Food Security Bill, 2011. On the contrary, I request the Union Government to not only continue to supply food grains to Tamil Nadu at the existing price and along the same pattern but also to restore the monthly allotment of kerosene. In a federal structure like ours where the States are in close and direct contact with the people, the choice of designing and implementing popular welfare schemes is best left to the States. The Union Government should not attempt or be seen to attempt encroaching into the domains of the States. I therefore, request that Tamil Nadu may be exempted from the purview of the Food Security Bill and my views as expressed above may be taken on record while deciding the matter."

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