

Centre suspends rice fortification scheme citing IIT study; activists welcome move

Fortification not a scientific method to curb anaemia, say activists

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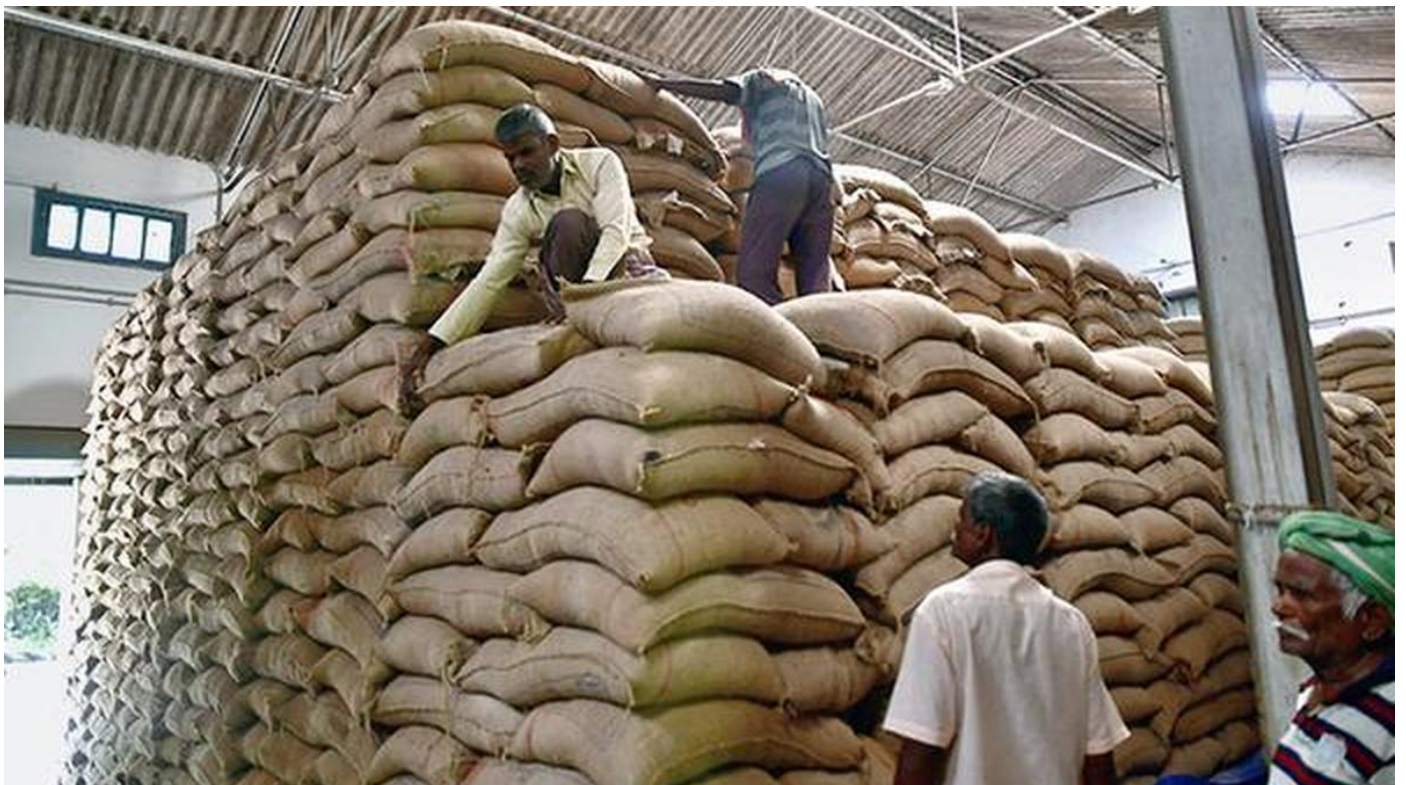


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As the Union Food Ministry decided to temporarily discontinue the process of rice fortification “until a more effective mechanism for delivery of nutrients to beneficiaries is identified”, activists who had challenged the scheme in the Supreme Court welcomed the move and said fortification is not a scientific method to curb anaemia.

On Friday (February 27, 2026), the government announced that it had reviewed the implementation of rice fortification under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) and other welfare schemes. “Based on this review, it has been decided to temporarily discontinue the process of rice fortification under PMGKAY and allied schemes until a more effective mechanism for delivery of nutrients to beneficiaries is identified,” the Food Ministry said, citing a study by IIT Kharagpur to assess the shelf life of fortified rice kernels (FRK) and fortified rice (FR) under actual storage conditions in diverse agro climatic zones in the country.

“The report concludes that factors such as moisture content, storage conditions, temperature, relative humidity, and packaging material critically influence the stability and shelf life of FRK and FR. They are susceptible to micronutrient reduction and shortening of shelf life during prolonged storage and routine handling. This reduction is rendering the effective shelf life shorter than expected and, in turn, limiting the intended nutritional outcomes,” the release added.

The government maintained that the decision does not entail any reduction in foodgrain entitlements and will not affect operations under the public distribution system, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), or the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

Welcoming the decision, social activist Kavitha Kuruganti said rice fortification is an expensive and ineffective intervention, which is unsafe and toxic. “While the government is citing a study to stop this large-scale fortification, we had shown much evidence that not all anaemia is linked to iron deficiency, nor is fortification an effective solution. We had filed a public interest litigation petition in the Supreme Court on this matter and the government could not justify so far their aberrant and inconsistent behaviour with regard to statutory regulations on fortified food,” she said.

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