

The National Food Security Bill, much diluted from its original version, got the nod from the Lok Sabha on 26th August 2013 and immediately the already free-falling Rupee famished further.

Though this UPA-2's most ambitious effort is criticized to be an "Vote Securing Bill" for the Congress in the ensuing Parliamentary Elections, the prescribed one-year implementation period would help the non- Congress States to deny the advantage, if any, by actually implementing the provisions only after the General Elections.

By this Food Security Bill, two – third of the country's population (75% of rural and 50% of urban population), which is about 800 million people, are to receive 5 kg of wheat, rice and coarse cereals at Rs 3, Rs 2 and Rs 1 a kg respectively, which would require 62 million tonnes of food grain a year.

The Highlights of this Food Security Bill are:

- Pregnant women and lactating mothers would receive a maternity benefit of at least Rs.6,000/-
- Children aged six months to 14 years would get take-home ration or hot cooked food.

- The Centre would also provide money to States and Union Territories if it runs low on grain.
- The Union Government also would provide “assistance” towards the cost of intra-state transportation, handling of grains.
- In a bid to give women more authority in running their households, the oldest adult woman in each house would be considered the head of that household for issue of ration card.

Like other major Bills, this FSB also comes with many concerns. Apart from possible large-scale leakages and malpractices in implementation, this Bill could be a potential threat to the private traders of the grain market and also could force the small farmers to shift to other crops, thus affecting the food grain output.

With the various other existing food schemes like, Below Poverty Line (BPL), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Above Poverty Line (APL), Mid-day Meal Scheme, Annapurna Scheme, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls, already the Govt’s food subsidy is hovering around Rs 90,000 crore and this FSB would only increase it to a further mammoth Rs 130,000 crore, thus causing inflation fears apart from affecting the Government’s ability to control the fiscal deficit.