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## Discontinuation of fortified rice

### Suspension of Distribution

- The Central Government has temporarily suspended the nationwide distribution of fortified rice after realizing that flaws have occurred in the scheme
- Studies have indicated that storing fortified rice in warehouses for long periods leads to a gradual reduction in the potency of the added micronutrients
- Consequently, the government has taken this decision because it can no longer be assumed that the distribution will effectively eliminate micronutrient deficiencies in the population as originally intended.

### Rice

- Fortified rice is produced by grinding rice into flour, mixing it with micronutrients specifically iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12 and then re-extruding the mixture through machines to resemble rice grains
- This fortified rice is then blended with regular rice in a ratio of 1 kilogram to 100 kilograms.

### 2022

- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS), conducted across the country between 2019 and 2021, revealed that anemia is a significant issue among men and women of various age groups.
- Beginning in 2022, it was decided to provide fortified rice to beneficiaries of various welfare schemes through the Public Distribution System (PDS) across the nation.

### Thalassemia

- This scheme, implemented by the Central Government at a cost of approximately Rs.17,000 crore, has been halted even though there were three years remaining for its completion.

- A confidential report submitted by NITI Aayog and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) may be the reason behind this, as they indicated that excessive iron accumulation in the bodies of individuals with conditions like Thalassemia and Sickle Cell disease could lead to further health complications.
- Studies conducted in the pilot project areas revealed defects in the quality, taste, texture, and appearance of the fortified rice. Consequently, the scheme was not considered successful.
- It appears that NITI Aayog pointed out to the government that there were fundamental flaws in the project's implementation in several locations
- Furthermore, allegations surfaced that foreign companies manufacturing the micronutrients added to the rice were exerting pressure through unethical means to capture a market worth approximately Rs.1,800 crore annually.
- "Plastic Rice"
- There were reports from hilly regions that people were afraid to consume the fortified rice distributed to them, labeling it as "plastic rice."
- Above all, experts warned that fortified rice would only provide limited benefits in addressing anemia and would not serve as a complete solution
- They emphasized that creating awareness to encourage dietary diversity by changing eating habits and promoting a varied diet would be a more effective and sustainable solution.
- Although cases were filed against the distribution of fortified rice in the Supreme Court and several High Courts, the Central Government remained firm in its stance.
- It proceeded with the implementation, asserting that there were no significant adverse health effects caused by fortified rice and that it was the most cost-effective strategy to address the issue of anemia.

## Weekly Current Affairs

### Tamil Nadu

- 'Implanon NXT', a modern and safe contraceptive device for women, has been introduced in Tamil Nadu.

### India

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to rename the state of Kerala as 'Keralam'.
- The Delhi government will award Rs.25,000 to individuals who transport road accident victims to a hospital within one hour.
- The Delhi government announced that it would implement the Central Government's 'Rah-Veer' scheme in the capital for this purpose.
- The first hour after an accident, which is critical for saving the lives of the injured, is referred to as the "Golden Hour."

### World

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was awarded the 'Knesset Medal', the highest honor of the State of Israel.

### Science

- Chennai-based air mobility startup, 'The ePlane Company', has signed an agreement with the global technology leader 'NVIDIA' to develop India's first electric 'Air Taxi'.

### Economy

- The Central Government has made it mandatory to sell E20 petrol (20% ethanol-blended) with a minimum octane rating of 95 across the country, effective from April 1st.
- According to the EY Economy Watch report, India's economic growth is projected to be between 6.8% and 7.2% in the financial year 2026-27.

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