

## '16% of elderly women suffer abuse by family members'

Sons were the main perpetrators of abuse in 33% of the cases and abuse by daughters 12%, finds survey. It found that 20% of older women victims lacked awareness of redress mechanisms

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

In a survey among older women, 16% revealed that they suffered in some form or other at the hands of their family members, with physical abuse coming out as one of the top forms of abuse.

On the eve of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, HelpAge India released its national report on 'Women and Ageing: Invisible or Empowered?' after surveying 7,911 older women aged 60 to 90 years across the country.

Giving out the Tamil Nadu findings of the survey, during which 350 older women were surveyed, Edwin Babu, director-programs, HelpAge India, Tamil Nadu, said that there was a lack of awareness on elder abuse among the women. While 66% older women consider that elder abuse prevailed in the society, of those abused, only 16% reported the abuse. The abuse was mostly in the form of physical abuse (52%), verbal abuse (51%), disrespect (60%), neglect (51%) and economic exploit-



**In need of care:** With the elderly population increasing, meticulous planning is essential to help them, says expert. FILE PHOTO

tation (25%). Sons were the main perpetrators of abuse in 33% of the cases, he said, adding that abuse by daughters was 12%. Daughter-in-laws, spouses and other relatives were also perpetrators of abuse.

Fear of retaliation or further abuse, lack of awareness of available resources and thoughts that their concerns were not taken seriously were among the barriers and challenges for reporting elder abuse, the report said. The survey found that 20% older women lacked awareness of redress mechanisms available for abuse. The health status of older women was one of the key components of the survey. While 18% said they did not have any

chronic health conditions, 55% had up to two health complications and 27% had multiple complications. Mr. Babu pointed out that awareness on health insurance was very low in India. "Unfortunately, 92% of the elderly women have no access to any health insurance, while some have access to the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme," he added.

Limited transportation facilities and high cost of medical care and medicines were among the reasons for not accessing regular health interventions.

About 24% older women considered time spent by their children with them as not enough. "In

this digitally connected society, the women wanted their children and grandchildren to talk to them for at least for 10 to 15 minutes," he said.

The survey found that 60% older women had never used digital devices. About 59% of older women did not own smartphones.

Justice S. Vimala, former judge, Madras High Court and full time member, State Law Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu, observed many elderly were living in imposed isolation. She raised the need to teach youngsters on caring for the elders. G. Vanitha, deputy commissioner of police, Crime against Women and Children, Greater Chennai Police, elaborated on the various helplines and measures in place for the elderly. G. Jayalakshmi, Additional Director, Commissionerate of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department, said institutionalisation should be the last resort and every family should accommodate elders. With the elderly population increasing, meticulous planning was essential to help them, she said.

## W20 meet sees rural women sharing their life stories

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

The Women 20 (W20) engagement group, which is holding its final summit here in Mamallapuram, will submit a communique on efforts by rural women to empower themselves and the community around them in the G20 countries.

From the communique, the G20 summit is expected to pick up a few suggestions during its meeting in September and develop a policy to address the issues faced by women and take forward their development, said Sandhya Porecha, W20 Chair.

The W20 group, created in 2015 under Turkey's presidency of the G20, focuses on gender equality. Its primary objective is women's empowerment, advocating for women's rights, and raising women's voices in society.

It was started on the idea that domestic initiatives needed to be incorporated into an international strategy to see appreciable changes because progress towards gender equality had been slow and peripheral.

Additionally, it aims at ensuring that the G20 Leaders' Declaration includes commitments and measures supporting gender equality and women's economic empo-

**The W20 group, created in 2015 under Turkey's presidency of the G20, focuses on gender equality**

werment. The W20 engagement group held its first meeting in Aurangabad and the second in Jaipur.

Dharitri Patnaik, W20 coordinator, said the summit brought to the table learnings from its participants from various countries. Representatives from the G20 countries would share their experiences with grassroots women empowerment movements in their respective countries at the three-day session, which got under way on Wednesday.

At the *Janbhagidhari* (public participation) session held later in the day, women spoke about how they developed themselves from being inconsequential even to their families to becoming a force to reckon with in their community.

Women from rural Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka shared their stories. Most of them were married in their teens and are from poor rural households. They had to work hard to get their family's support.

## Base boost

Inflation should not be allowed to erode the purchasing power of the poor

The pace of retail inflation slowed to a 25-month low of 4.25% in May, propelled largely by the elevated level of year-on-year price gains in May 2022, when the month's print had exceeded 7%. Headline inflation extended its decelerating trend for a fourth month, in some measure validating the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s decision to pause monetary tightening till it could assess the impact of past interest rate increases. Still, month-on-month, the provisional Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed price gains at 0.51% in May, unchanged in pace from April's six-month high sequential inflation reading. A key contributor to the deceleration in year-on-year price gains in May was the inflation in food items, which slowed by 93 basis points to 2.91%. Oils and fats contributed to the easing in food item prices, posting a 16% deflation. A continuing deflation in the cereals and products category, which has an almost 10% weight in the CPI, also helped. Cereals inflation eased by more than 100 basis points from April's print to 12.7%. The risk of reading too much into the year-on-year moderation in inflation was, however, most evident in the food and beverages group that accounts for 46% of the CPI, with nine of its 12 sub-groups witnessing sequential increases in price levels.

Crucial food items including vegetables and the key protein sources of milk, meat and pulses all posted appreciable quickening in prices from a month earlier. Vegetable prices, which deflated 8.2% from the year-earlier levels, logged 3.35% sequential inflation, a pace that was almost twice April's 1.7% month-on-month gains. Milk and dairy, and pulses are the other food categories of concern. While year-on-year inflation in milk hovered close to the 9% level in May, sequentially too the reading was at a three-month high at 0.67%. Prices of pulses, the primary protein source in vegetarian consumers' diets, have also been rising at a disconcerting clip, with the year-on-year rate quickening by 128 basis points to a 31-month high of 6.56%. Sequentially, the category that includes lentils such as *tur* and *urad dal*, posted 1.21% inflation. Acknowledging the sensitivity of *dal* prices, especially when key State elections are due, the Centre, on June 2, imposed limits on the holding of stocks of *urad* and *tur* till October 31. With households' perception of current inflation found to be running at 8.8%, and three-month and year-ahead forecasts pegging price gains at more than 10% in the May round of the RBI's inflation expectations survey, policymakers have their task cut out to convince consumers that inflation will be tamed so as to not erode their purchasing power and savings.



# T.N. withdraws general consent granted to CBI

The agency will now have to seek prior permission from the State government for investigations; decision comes after the arrest of Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister Senthilbalaji by the ED

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

The DMK-led government in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday announced that it has withdrawn the general consent given to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, allowing the agency to investigate cases without its permission in the State. The move came on the day when Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister V. Senthilbalaji was arrested by another central agency, the Enforcement Directorate (ED). "The CBI should henceforth seek prior permis-

## Permission denied

States that have withdrawn general consent to the CBI to probe cases



sion from the Tamil Nadu government for undertaking investigation," said an official release from the State government.

In March this year, Union Minister Jitendra Singh told the Parliament that several States including

Mizoram, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Kerala, Jharkhand, Punjab and Meghalaya – had withdrawn their general consent given to CBI.

As per Section 6 of the DSPE Act, 1946, the CBI needs consent from the

respective State governments for conducting investigation in their jurisdiction. A general consent to CBI granted by State governments enables the central agency to carry out investigations without such hindrances.

Many offices of the CBI, including that of the Joint Director and Head of Chennai Zone, Anti-Corruption Bureau, Special Crime Branch, Economic Offences Branch, Special Unit, and Scientific Aid Unit are located in Chennai and Madurai of Tamil Nadu. While Mizoram withdrew its general consent in July 2015, West Bengal did it in November 2018 and Chhattisgarh in January 2019.

## Strengthening the ICDS Scheme

Notwithstanding contention regarding the assessment methods of various global surveys, it is true that India's high prevalence of stunting, wasting, and anaemia continues to pose public health risks for children and women. India must strengthen its existing social sector schemes, such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), to tackle this. The ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers; addresses non-formal pre-school education; and breaks the cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.

### What studies show

Empirical research highlights the correlation between early-life poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate stimulation, and later cognitive and economic challenges. Studies have shown that interventions focusing on nutrition, education, and health during early childhood can significantly improve human capital, particularly in developing countries. A study published in *World Development* demonstrated the ICDS's positive impact on cognitive achievements, especially among girls and those from economically disadvantaged families. Another peer-reviewed study in *The University of Chicago Press Journals* found that children who were exposed to ICDS during the first three years of life completed 0.1-0.3 more grades of schooling than those who were not. In a study published in the *Natural Library of Medicine*, it was found that adolescents aged 13-18, who born in villages with proper ICDS implementation, showed a 7.8% increased likelihood of school enrolment and completed an average of 0.8 additional grades compared to their peers who did not have access to the ICDS.

As we commend the remarkable strides made by ICDS, it is imperative to acknowledge the pressing need for a thorough reassessment of our approaches.



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Despite four decades of relentless efforts, the ICDS still faces the herculean task of ameliorating the nutritional and health outcomes for children aged 0-6 years.

A significant first step towards fortifying the programme is to empower Anganwadi workers. Though the cornerstone of the ICDS, they are frequently stretched beyond their limits. As principal operatives in the Poshan 2.0 initiative, these workers bear the onus of advancing child nutrition, health, and education in their communities. Their roles vary widely from employing modern technology, like smartphones and applications, to practical tasks such as delivering health education, managing feeding programmes, and liaising with auxiliary nurse midwives and other healthcare professionals.

### Advantages of more workers

An additional Anganwadi worker could be added to each of India's 13,99,661 Anganwadi centers to lessen the load of these workers. Implementing this approach could yield at least five advantages. First, it would lead to better health and educational outcomes. A large-scale randomised controlled trial by Alejandro Ganimian, Karthik Muralidharan and Christopher Walters in Tamil Nadu, conducted to evaluate the effects of increasing staff levels within the ICDS framework, revealed significant outcomes. The addition of a half-time worker effectively doubled the net preschool instructional time, which led to improvements in math and language test scores for children enrolled in the programme. Second, children who remained enrolled also exhibited reduced rates of child stunting and severe malnutrition.

Third, the cost of a nationwide roll-out of this model is relatively insignificant in comparison to the potential advantages it offers. The estimated long-term benefits, based on expected improvements in lifetime earnings, would be around 13 to 21 times the

expenses.

Fourth, the new Anganwadi worker can be given the responsibility of concentrating only on preschool and early childhood education. This would allow existing workers to dedicate more time to child health and nutrition. It would also enable the Anganwadi workers to expand their outreach and serve a larger number of families.

Fifth, apart from improving the well-being of rural communities, this would create job opportunities for local residents, particularly women. It would lead to the creation of 1.3 million new jobs for women across India.

The operationalisation of the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 proposal hinges on its status as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme. State governments oversee its execution, including administration, management, and monitoring. Consequently, Anganwadi worker recruitment falls under their jurisdiction, guided by regulations and region-specific criteria. This decentralised approach promotes tailored, efficient implementation. The Government of India provides funds for Anganwadi workers' and helpers' honorariums on a cost-sharing basis.

Apart from this, the data have shown a significant variation in implementation of the ICDS and the level of skills of Anganwadi workers. This requires further investments in the training programme. Additionally, the exigency for infrastructural improvement in India's Anganwadi centers cannot be overstated. A disconcerting 2.5 lakh centres operate without functional sanitation facilities and 1.5 lakh centres lack access to potable water. Approximately 4.15 lakh Anganwadi centers do not possess their own pucca building.

To unlock the ICDS' full potential and address persistent issues, it is essential to revisit and re-evaluate its strategies and implementation. Empowering Anganwadi workers is just a start.

## News consumption falls in India, says study

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 finds a sharp decrease in access to online news, while television, too, sees a decline as a news source; globally, platforms such as TikTok are gaining ground as sources of news among the youth; trend of news avoidance continues in many countries

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

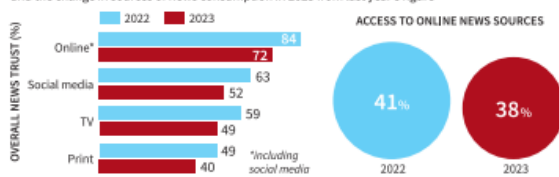
Overall consumption and sharing of news declined in India from last year's figures, along with a sharp decrease in access to online news (-42 percentage points), while television, too, saw a 10 percentage points decline as a news source, according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2023, released on Wednesday.

The 12th edition of the report, produced in collaboration with the Asian College of Journalism, surveys the news consumption habits of consumers across 46 markets.

As per the report, India registered a small decrease of 3 percentage points in overall trust in news (38%) from last year's figure, and was ranked 24th among 46 countries in this regard. Finland remained the country with the highest levels of overall trust in news (69%), while Greece had the lowest levels (19%), globally. "Among individual news brands, public broadcasters like DD India, All India Radio, and BBC News retained high levels

### News consumption, trust declines

The latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report showed a modest decrease in the general trust in news in India in 2023, from the previous year's figures. Access to online news (including social media), the top source of news in India, also saw a decline. The charts show the change in overall trust in news and the change in sources of news consumption in 2023 from last year's figure



of trust among survey respondents in India, emphasising the importance of public service media," the report noted.

YouTube was the most preferred social media platform for news with 56% of the respondents accessing it. WhatsApp (47%) and Facebook (39%) were the next two preferred social media platforms for news in India among the survey respondents. *Dainik Bhaskar*, a Hindi daily, featured among the top 10 brands accessed both online and offline by the survey respondents.

Globally, the report found that "video-based content, distributed via

networks such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, is becoming more important for news, especially in parts of the Global South, while legacy platforms such as Facebook are losing influence".

Barely 28% of respondents said they accessed news via Facebook in 2023, as against 42% in 2016. Part of the reason for this, the report observed, was Facebook pulling back from news at the same time that YouTube and TikTok began to attract larger chunks of young audiences.

On the other hand, news usage for the other social media giant, Twitter, remained relatively stable

following Elon Musk's takeover, with the usage of alternative networks such as Mastodon extremely low.

The fastest-growing social network used by the survey respondents for any purpose was TikTok (used by 44% of the 18-24 age group), with 20% of them using it for news. The app was most heavily used in parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

#### Worrying signs

Interestingly, and worryingly for traditional media, the survey found that users of TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat paid more attention to celebrities and social media influencers than

they did to journalists and media companies when it came to news topics. This was in sharp contrast to legacy social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, where news organisations still attracted the most attention.

In a related finding, the report noted that "stated preferences by audiences to directly visit news websites continue to decline". Globally, "the proportion that say their main access point is via a news website or app has fallen from 32% in 2018 to 22% in 2023", while dependence on social media access for news has grown from 23% to 30%, the report noted.

Summing up this trend, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, observed, "Younger generations increasingly eschew direct discovery for all but the most appealing brands. They have little interest in many conventional news offers oriented towards older generations' habits, interests, and values, and instead embrace the more personality-based, participatory, and personalised options offered by social

media, often looking beyond legacy platforms to new entrants, many of whom drive few referrals to media organisations and do not prioritise news."

The report also found that news podcasting continued to resonate with educated and younger audiences though it remained a minority activity overall. About 34% of the respondents accessed a podcast monthly, while 12% accessed a show on news and current affairs. The report also flagged a continuing trend – which it highlighted in last year's report as well – of news avoidance (partly for mental health-related reasons) in a large number of countries. Among news avoiders, around half (53%) tried to avoid all news periodically, while 32% tended to avoid "difficult topics".

For this report, the Asian College of Journalism provided support in identifying news brands and other specific details relevant to the Indian market in the survey questionnaire, verifying the Hindi translation of the questionnaire, and contextualising the main findings for India in its country profile.



# May wholesale prices drop 3.48%

Wholesale price index remains in deflationary zone for a second month in a row on high base; economists note that apart from base effects, there has been a sequential decline in wholesale prices on a seasonally-adjusted basis since February

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

India's wholesale prices remained in deflationary mode for the second month in a row in May, with prices falling 3.48%, and all categories reporting a contraction in prices compared with May 2022, when inflation had hit a record high of 16.6%.

The effects of a high base from last May, when taxes on petroleum products were slashed near the month-end, dragged fuel and power prices lower into a 9.2% deflation,

## Falling prices

Wholesale prices continued to fall for yet another month driven by a high base, with all categories of goods reporting deflation



■ Wholesale inflation had hit a record high of 16.6% in May last year

■ Fuel and power prices shrank 9.2% in May helped by a reduction in fuel taxes

■ Deflation is likely to persist in June too as WPI inflation was 16.2% in June 2022

while manufacturing products' prices shrank 3%.

Primary articles recorded a deflation of 1.8% and the wholesale food index

dropped 1.6% compared with a 0.2% rise in April 2023, when overall wholesale prices had recorded a 0.92% deflation.

"Decline in the rate of inflation in May 2023 is primarily contributed by fall in prices of mineral oils, basic metals, food products, textiles, non-food articles, crude petroleum & natural gas, and chemical & chemical products," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

While base effects partly contributed to the decline, the sequential momentum had been weaker than expected, IDFC First Bank said in a note. On a seasonally-adjusted basis, the index had been declining

(month-on-month) since February, it added.

"Importantly, after a gap of 26 months, industrial raw material inflation is lower than non-food manufacturing inflation. Producer pricing power has improved as domestic demand conditions remain resilient," the bank added.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said this was the lowest WPI inflation since November 2015 and deflation was likely to persist at about 2.5-3.5% in June due to base effects from last year, when wholesale prices rose 16.2%.

## Law Commission seeks fresh inputs on Uniform Civil Code

**Shita Mishra**  
NEW DELHI

The 22nd Law Commission of India on Wednesday sought fresh suggestions from various stakeholders, including public and religious organisations, on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

The previous 21st Law Commission had also examined the subject and solicited the views of stakeholders through its appeal. The previous commission has also issued a consultation paper on "Reforms of family law" in August 2018.

Pursuant to the same, overwhelming responses have been received by the commission, it said in a communiqué.

"Since more than three years have lapsed from the date of issuance of the said consultation paper, bearing in mind the relevance

**Those willing to share views on UCC can write to the commission through email**

and importance of the subject and also the various court orders, the 22nd Law Commission considered it expedient to deliberate afresh over the subject," the panel said.

Those willing to share their views, suggestions on the UCC can write to the commission through the email of the member-secretary or via its website.

The panel said a unified nation did not necessarily need to have "uniformity" and that "efforts have to be made to reconcile our diversity with universal and indisputable arguments on human rights".

# The status of transgenic crops in India

What are the different processes to regulate transgenic crops in India? Why did States like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana defer the proposal to test Cry2Ai cotton? What is the next move of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee? How long before there is greater acceptance for testing genetically modified crops?

## EXPLAINER

Jacob Koshy

### The story so far:

Three States, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana, have deferred a proposal, approved by the Centre's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), to test a new kind of transgenic cotton seed that contains a gene, Cry2Ai, that purportedly makes cotton resistant to pink bollworm, a major pest. This conflict shows that a broad acceptance of genetically modified crops continues to be elusive.

### What is the status of transgenic crops in India?

There are an array of crops – brinjal, tomato, maize, chickpea – in various stages of trials that employ transgenic technology. However, cotton remains the only transgenic crop that is being commercially cultivated in India. After a long hiatus, the GEAC, the apex technical body charged with evaluating proposals for testing genetically modified (GM) seeds, approved the environmental release of Mustard hybrid DMH-II and its parental lines, during its 147th meeting on 18 October, 2022 for seed production and testing. This is one step away from full commercial cultivation.

However, the GEAC, which is under the Union Environment Ministry, isn't the final arbiter in the case of GM crops. There is a long-standing litigation in the Supreme Court on the permissibility of allowing transgenic food crops in farmer fields based on petitions filed by activist Aruna Rodrigues and Gene Campaign, an NGO. Following the GEAC approval for DMH-II, the petitioners approached the apex court asking for a stay on the release of the crop because it would encourage farmers to spray herbicides, which are banned in India. Hearings on this case are still ongoing. In 2017, the GEAC had accorded a clearance for GM mustard, but



Sneak attack: A pink bollworm infestation in the Bt cotton fields in Andhra Pradesh. MURALI KUMAR K

went back on its decision and imposed additional tests. In 2010, the GEAC had approved GM brinjal, but this was put on an "indefinite moratorium" by the United Progressive Alliance government.

### What is the process of regulating transgenic crops in India?

The process of developing transgenic crops is an elaborate one as inserting transgenic genes into plants to elicit a sustained, protective response is a mix of both science and chance. There are multiple safety assessments done by committees before they are cleared for further tests in open plots of lands, which are located at either agricultural universities or are plots controlled by the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR). A transgenic plant can apply for

commercial clearance, only after it has proven to be demonstrably better than comparable non-GM variants on claimed parameters (for instance, drought tolerance or insect resistance) without posing ecological harm to other species that may be being cultivated in the vicinity. Open field trials often take place over multiple crop seasons, and types of geographical conditions, to assess its suitability across different States.

### Why have Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana rebuffed the GEAC?

The cotton seed has been developed by the Hyderabad-based Bioseed Research India with Cry2Ai which makes it resistant to pink bollworm. The first generations of transgenic cotton had been developed to inure cotton against a more widespread

pest called American bollworm. The Cry2Ai seed has passed preliminary, confined trials and was recommended by the GEAC to be tested in farmer's fields at Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Haryana. Agriculture being a State subject in most cases, companies interested in testing their seeds need approvals from the States for conducting such tests. Only Haryana gave permission for such tests.

This was after the GEAC in October 2022 sent letters to all States to "communicate their views/comments" within two months on the proposal. Telangana requested GEAC for a 45-day extension to consider the proposal. On May 16, Telangana responded that it would not allow trials to be conducted in the current cropping season. Gujarat later responded that the proposal was "unacceptable" to them, but did not furnish reasons.

Following these responses, the GEAC has asked the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the ICAR to "jointly organise capacity-building activities with regard to GM crops for apprising the State/UT Government(s) about the technology involved and the regulatory framework in place for evaluation of these GM crops."

Activist groups objected to the GEAC asking States to furnish reasons for disapproval and said that it was tantamount to a "biased lobbying approach", according to Kavitha Kuruganti, a member of the Coalition for a GM-free India.

### Are there changes in the offing in process of regulation of GM crops?

The GEAC consists of a panel of plant biotechnologists and is headed by a senior official of the Environment Ministry and co-chaired by the scientist of the DBT. To resolve the issue of States not according approvals on testing, because of differing attitudes to GM crops, the GEAC is considering a proposal by the DBT to declare some regions across India as 'notified testing sites'. There are 42 such proposed sites and, if it goes through, companies wanting to conduct trials of GM crops at these locations won't need the permission of States for trials.



# Why did the govt. impose a ceiling on wheat stocks?

Has there been a decline in the production of wheat in the country? How is this going to manage the overall food security? Will it stabilise the price of the essential commodity and prevent "unscrupulous speculation"?

Saptaparno Ghosh

## The story so far:

**I**n June 12, in a move endeavouring to manage the "overall food security and to prevent hoarding and unscrupulous speculation", the Union Government imposed limits on stock of wheat that can be held by traders, wholesalers, retailers, big chain retailers and processors. The objective here is to stabilise the price of the essential commodity by steadying supply. Secretary at the Department of Food and Public Distribution Sanjeev Chopra stated that there was enough stock of wheat in the country. The order stood effective with immediate effect until the end of March next year.

## What are the limits?

The permissible stock that traders/wholesalers can hold is 3,000 metric tonnes. Retailers and big chain retailers can

hold up to 10 metric tonnes at each of their outlets, while the latter can hold up to 3,000 metric tonnes at all their depots combined. Processors would be able to stock 75% of the annual installed capacity.

The mentioned entities are expected to declare their stock positions and update them regularly on the Department of Food and Public Distribution's portal. If the stock held by them are higher than the limit, they will have 30 days from the day of issue of notification to bring the same under the prescribed limits.

## What are the additional orders?

The government has also decided to offload 15 lakh tonnes of wheat from the central pool via the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to flour mills, private traders, bulk buyers, manufacturers of wheat products through e-auction. The idea is to control retail prices of wheat. They would be sold in lot sizes of 10 to 100 metric tonnes. This would be the first tranche, and more could be released

depending on the prices and demand.

The Food Secretary also announced that the government would offload rice under OMSS to moderate its prices. The quantity of the first phase of the e-auction (for rice) would be decided shortly.

## Why is there a concern?

The moves come in the backdrop of rising concerns about the overall wheat output taking a hit after the unseasonal rains and hailstorms towards the end of March and early April alongside hotter temperatures in February.

Lower production leads to higher prices of the crop. This could in turn create conditions for local prices exceeding the government's purchase prices and thus, bothering the latter's endeavour to stock up supplies.

The daily average price of wheat at the retail level, on June 14, stood at ₹29/kg compared to ₹27.54/kg a year back. At the wholesale level, it stood at ₹2,593.5 for each quintal against ₹2,557.89/quintal for

the previous month and about ₹2,423/quintal a year back.

The Food Corporation of India is entrusted with the responsibility to ensure food grains are accessible at reasonable prices to the vulnerable sections of society under the Public Distribution System. The government had set a target of procuring 341.5 lakh metric tonnes of wheat for the Central Pool in the ongoing Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2023-24. RMS rolls from April to March with the maximum proportion acquired around April and June.

As on June 12, 261.99 lakh metric tonnes of wheat have been procured. News agency *Reuters* learnt from government officials and traders that India's wheat procurement in 2023 could fall by a fifth from the initial estimate as government purchases have slowed down in the last few days after local prices jumped. As of June, the government had 313.9 lakh metric tonnes of wheat in the central stock compared to 311.42 lakh metric tonnes in the year-ago period.

## What about production?

Notwithstanding the warnings from experts about the potential effects of El Nino, the Agricultural Ministry estimates the production of wheat at a record 1,127.43 lakh metric tonnes for the agriculture year 2022-23, higher by 50.01 lakh metric tonnes from previous year's production. The optimism is premised around the increased area of wheat sowed and better yield.