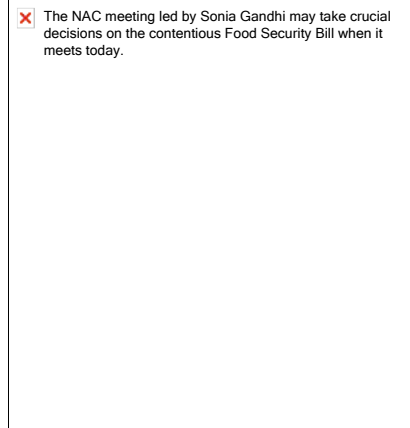


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NAC close to finalising Food Security Bill

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The Hindu The NAC meeting led by Sonia Gandhi may take crucial decisions on the contentious Food Security Bill when it meets today.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, officials from Ministries will be present

The Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC) may be close to finalising the contentious Food Security Bill when it meets here on September 24.

Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia and officials from Ministries concerned, including Women and Child Development Secretary, will be present to try and help bridge the differences between the NAC and the Commission/Ministries, sources told *The Hindu*.

At the last NAC meeting on August 30, while pushing for uniform universalisation of food security — the position also of the Campaign for Food Security — Ms. Gandhi had pointed out that the poor might wonder why the rich were being given the same entitlements, a comment that paved the way for the view that there should be a system of two prices and differential entitlements. She had also underlined the importance of taking the government's opinion — that of the Ministries concerned — on board.

Since then, key members of the NAC's Working Group on Food Security, including Harsh Mander, Jean Dreze and N.C. Saxena, have had detailed discussions on the issue with Mr. Ahluwalia and Commission Member Narendra Jadhav, who doubles as an NAC member.

Sources say a system of differential entitlements is being worked out so that those living below the poverty line (BPL) — at the enhanced Tendulkar Committee report's figure of about 42 per cent — can be given 35 kg of foodgrains, with rice at Rs.3 a kg and wheat at Rs.2 a kg. Sources indicated there was already agreement on this.

At the NAC meeting on September 24, a decision will have to be taken on how much the rest of the population will get — 25 kg of foodgrains as promised in the Congress manifesto and in the President's address last year, or enhanced entitlement of 35 kg, and at what price.

The government is still pushing for status quo, while the NAC would like it to be increased to 35 kg; however, the price, sources said, at which the foodgrains will be made available to the non-BPL population is likely to be pegged at 75 per cent of the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

However, while this part of the Bill looks headed for a consensus, the more significant part relating to securing the nutritional requirements of those at the bottom of the economic ladder, and which has huge financial implications, will also have to be sorted out.

At the August 30 meeting, Mr. Mander, who heads the Working Group on Food Security, had listed a range of eight entitlements apart from an inclusive and enhanced Public Distribution System. These included schemes for children such as Integrated Child Development Services and maternal nutrition, community kitchens for those suffering from tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS, homeless children and destitute people and old age pensions. It is in this context that officials from the Ministries that deal with these subjects are expected to attend the September 24 meeting.

While the focus will be on food security, the other issue on which Mr. Ahluwalia, sources said, will be interacting with the NAC members is the question relating to tribals — discussing how to effectively implement the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area (PESA) Act and the Forest Rights Act, and deal with the key issue of land and displacement.

The pending Land Acquisition Bill — which the government has promised to bring in the winter session of Parliament — may also come up, if time permits. Since the last meeting, the NAC's Working Group on Tribal Development has met officials from the Union Ministry of Tribal Development and held workshops on issues concerning tribal welfare with experts on the subject.

Keywords: [Food Security Bill](#), [NAC](#), [Planning Commission](#), [BPL families](#)

