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Rs 9,000-cr nutrition schemes for women likely

They aim to benefit pregnant women and the young.

The programme for young and adolescent girls integrates two existing schemes — Kishori Shakti Yojana and Nutritional Programme for Adolescent Girls.

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The Centre plans to spend Rs 9,000 crore in the remaining years of the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) on two nutritional programmes for girls and pregnant women, respectively.

Union Finance Ministry officials, who are examining these proposals from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, said that Rs 4,500 crore may be set aside for a “conditional maternity benefit scheme”. Under this, cash would be provided directly to pregnant women, who suffer wage loss in the absence of maternity benefits at the workplace.

State governments may be asked to participate by making a matching contribution. Officials said that Tamil Nadu was the only State to implement a similar programme, with its Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme for pregnant women below the poverty line.

The other programme, for which another Rs 4,500 crore will be set aside, is for young and adolescent girls, and has been conceived as an integration and expansion of two existing nutritional schemes — the Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) and the Nutritional Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG). “The expansion of this programme is an effort to reach out to the entire adolescent population, and the anganwadi will be the implementation centre,” Ministry officials explained.

State governments are expected to make a matching contribution in this scheme, as per the directive of the Supreme Court.

In line with court ruling

The integration of the schemes is in pursuance of the April 22, 2009, ruling of the Supreme Court on the writ petition People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India (no 196 of 2001). The apex court observed: “As far as adolescent girls are concerned, they would continue to be covered by the entitlements of the NPAG and KSY till such time as a comprehensive universal scheme for the empowerment of adolescent girls called ‘The Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls’ is implemented within six months from the date of the order.”

The Supreme Court ruling says that “for pregnant and lactating mothers, a food supplement of 600 calories of energy and 18-20 gm of protein per beneficiary per day would be provided as take-home ration”.

“States/UTs would make requisite financial allocation and undertake necessary arrangements to comply with the stipulations...” the ruling observes.

KSY is a health, literacy and vocational training programme for adolescent girls. NPAG is a nutritional scheme, which is meant to provide six kg of free foodgrain to undernourished

adolescent girls. While both these schemes work through the network of the Integrated Child Development Scheme, the integrated scheme will work out of anganwadis.

According to Dr B Sesikera, Director, National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad: "The most critical nutrient deficiency to be addressed is that of calories and micro-nutrients. Protein deficiency comes later."