Wheat procurement in Punjab

Why in news?

Wheat procurement in Punjab is taking place despite the challenging circumstances during Covid-19.

Why this procurement is important?

- It is important because Punjab is the country's highest contributor of wheat at over 46% of the central pool.
- Punjab has already procured three-quarters of its procurement target of 13.5 million tonnes for the national pool.

What is the challenge?

- Punjab needs a **labour force** of 3.5 lakh to 4 lakh.
- 90% of its usual labour force comes from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- They were meant to have reached Punjab during the first week of April, ahead of the procurement season starting April 15.
- This did not happen once the lockdown was announced.

How were the labour arranged?

- Punjab used the networking skills of its 27,000 registered commission agents.
- Each of them engaged 15 to 20 workers, mostly people working in urban sectors such as construction, catering or as taxi drivers.
- These agents have provided them with masks, soap and sanitisers.
- They also arranged for accommodation of those who want to stay in the mandis.
- Also, each agent is responsible for 20 to 200 farmers, whose crop he sells, and coupons for entry in the mandis.

What was the restriction imposed?

- The government **restricted the number of people in mandis** by setting a target of 27 lakh coupons for farmers.
- A farmer can come to the mandi only when his/her turn arrives.
- Every day, 70,000 to 1 lakh coupons are being issued.

- The government has **extended the procurement season** by a month (April 15 to June 15), to prevent a rush in mandis.
- The procurement has been staggered at the rate of less than 7 lakh tonnes daily, even during the peak phase (April 20-May 1).
- In previous years, the peak days would see 9 to 11 lakh tonnes daily.

How the number of mandis was increased?

- The Food and Civil Supply Department along with the Punjab Mandi Board (PMB) have set up 3,447 wheat purchase centres.
- This is up from the existing 1,849 grain markets.
- This increase is achieved by converting the rice sale centres into wheat purchase centres.

What are the other measures?

- **Designated trucks** are doing transportation to godowns and storage units of the FCI (Food Corporation of India).
- Less than 5 lakh tonnes is being transported daily across the state.
- The government has loaded 25.77 lakh tonnes of wheat and rice on 1,031 special trains.
- PMB is preventing crowds in mandis by issuing the coupons in a staggered manner.
- It has set up a **control room** for enquiries and complaints.

Source: The Indian Express

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