

## **Cabinet defers Food Bill Ordinance; eyes special session of Parliament**

The government plans to convene a special session of Parliament for passage of the Food Security Bill as a divided Cabinet on Thursday shunned the idea of promulgating an Ordinance to implement the watershed legislation.

A meeting of the Cabinet could not arrive at a decision on bringing an Ordinance to implement the UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi's pet programme and instead decided to court Opposition parties for passage of the bill in a special Parliament session.

Home Minister and Leader of the Lok Sabha Sushil Kumar Shinde, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kamal Nath and Food Minister K V Thomas will meet opposition leaders to elicit their support for passage of the key legislation, Finance Minister P Chidambaram said after the Cabinet meeting.

"The Food Security Bill is ready. We would like to pass it as a bill but Ordinance version of bill is also ready. We decided on Thursday that we would like to make one more effort to ask the Opposition parties whether they will cooperate in passing the bill in a special session of Parliament," he said.

Thomas said the Ordinance route has not been completely shelved and remains an option available to the government.

The Food Security Bill was tabled in the Budget session of Parliament but could not be taken up for discussion due to pandemonium in the Lok Sabha over various scams.

The Bill aims to give legal rights to 67 per cent of the population over a uniform quantity of 5 kg food grains at a fixed price of Rs 1-3 per kg through ration shops.

Chidambaram said if the support from the Opposition parties is "forthcoming" then the food bill will be passed in a special session of Parliament.

"Based on the response of the main Opposition, we will have to take a view. Our intention is to get it (Food Bill) passed in a special session of Parliament and we are making one more effort to ask the Opposition parties to support us," the Minister said.

If the Opposition parties agree for passage of the bill in Parliament,

Chidambaram said, "a special session could be called pretty early, We would like to pass the bill as early as possible."

Briefing separately, Thomas said: "We have taken a decision because many political parties including BJP have requested it should be discussed in Parliament.

"The Prime Minister has consulted everybody, so we have decided lets have a special Parliament session. ...only thing is that political parties should take a positive view."

Thomas said the proposal of Ordinance is still with the Cabinet. "We are deferring the decision on Ordinance but it is not withdrawal. ...We will start the discussion with all the political parties (on Food Bill) and if they are willing to cooperate, then will have a special Parliament session."

Congress considers the proposed Food law, which was promised in the election manifesto of 2009 general elections, as a game changer for the next elections.

The government would require 62 million tonnes of food grains annually to implement the Food Bill. It would cost the exchequer about Rs 1.25 lakh crore subsidy annually which will be about Rs 25,000 crore more than the current level.

*(Economic Times)*