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## House panel members want free grain scheme extended

The COVID-19 package scheme ended on November 30

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

At a meeting of a parliamentary committee held on Tuesday, members demanded the extension of the free foodgrain scheme started by the government as part of the COVID-19 relief package. The scheme ended on November 30.

The issue was raised at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution headed by Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandhopadhyay. The members were of the view that till a vaccine was approved and distributed to the public, the scheme should be extended.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana was announced in March by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as part of the package. The scheme covers 80 crore ration card holders. Each household gets five kg

**Till the time we are really through with this pandemic, the scheme should continue**

STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER

of rice or wheat each month and one kg of pulses. The scheme was announced only for three months in the first round till June 30 and later it was extended till November 30.

"The pandemic is not over yet and the number of cases are also rising. Our view is that till the time we are really through with this pandemic the scheme should continue," a member said on condition of anonymity. The officials deposing in front of the committee only said that the suggestions would be considered.

According to informed sources, a few States have demanded an extension. Senior officials at the Depart-

ment of Food and Public Distribution indicated that an extension was unlikely.

"We are a country with a huge buffer stock, so it is absolutely illogical to leave these stocks for rodents to feed on rather than giving it to the hungry," a member said.

Reetika Khara, Associate Professor of Economics, IIT, Delhi, who has been involved with food security issues, said the FCI website showed that the buffer stock in October should be 307 lakh tonnes, whereas it was more than 700 lakh tonnes in September. Since then, the data were not available.

"It appears that the stocks are far in excess of the buffer stock norms. Continuing the Garib Kalyan Yojana will provide relief to millions of poor households facing uncertainty and food anxieties, and will help government reduce storage costs," she said.