

# WFP TO ALLOT INDIAN WHEAT IN AFGHANISTAN

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Helping hand: India had promised 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan as part of its humanitarian aid. File photo | Photo Credit: [NARINDER NANU](#)

India signed an agreement with the United Nation's World Food Programme (WFP) for the distribution of 50,000 tonnes of wheat that it has committed to sending Afghanistan as part of humanitarian assistance.

Diplomatic efforts are under way to begin sending truck convoys through Pakistan by road, and the transport is expected to begin after the Punjab election on February 20.

The agreement was announced by the Indian Embassy in Rome, where Ambassador Neena Malhotra handed over the MoU for the WFP to take charge of the wheat convoys when they reach Afghanistan, and to distribute them to those Afghans who are facing a humanitarian crisis. In a tweet, the WFP, headquartered in Rome, called it a "landmark" agreement thanking India for the "generous contribution of wheat in support of the people of Afghanistan facing severe food shortages".

According to the MoU, the wheat will be taken through Pakistan to the Afghan border crossing and handed over to WFP officials in Kandahar beginning February 22. The wheat will eventually be divided into five batches of 10,000 tonnes, to be distributed across the country on approximately 200 trucks that are run by the WFP.

The WFP runs its own logistics network inside Afghanistan, partnering with civil society groups, and has launched a global campaign for enough food and aid for the population facing malnutrition — estimated to be half the population or 22 million Afghans.

"India's commitment for 50,000 tonnes is extremely important, especially in times of the pandemic, and we remain hopeful that the Indian government will extend its generosity for even more grain stocks when possible," Bishow Parajuli, WFP's India Country Director, told *The Hindu*.

## Delayed due to polls

Officials said some details are still being finalised among Indian, Pakistani and Afghan officials for the transport. Although Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan had cleared an Indian proposal to use the land route in November 2021 and the Taliban regime had welcomed the offer, officials said the Pakistani government had held up the process by insisting that Indian trucks would not be allowed to ply and eventually only cleared Afghan trucks to carry the wheat. More recently, the process has been delayed on the Indian side due to arrangements for the Punjab election, sources said. They now expect to see the first trucks carrying about 3,000 tonnes of wheat across the border to begin after polling.

Iran has also offered to facilitate transfer of the wheat through the Chabahar port and then on to Afghanistan's border via Zahedan. According to an official, "all clearances" have been issued for the transport from Tehran, after Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian spoke to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on January 8. It is unclear whether India will use the Chabahar route, which it had employed from 2017-2020 to transport about one million tonnes of wheat, before the Taliban took control of Kabul.

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