

Govt may raise relief limit for crop damage

Move Likely To Benefit Farmers From 14 States

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Centre is likely to raise the compensation limit for farmers affected by recent rains and hailstorms in as many as 14 states. A final decision will be taken after arriving at the quantum of loss next month.

Under State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) norms, state governments can provide assistance to farmers at the rate of Rs 4,500 per hectare for rain-fed areas, Rs 9,000 per hectare for irrigated areas and Rs 12,000 per hectare for perennial crop areas.

However, it has been felt that the compensation amount may not be sufficient for small and marginal farmers who might have lost more than 50% of their standing rabi crops and horticulture products due to rains, hailstorms and strong winds during February 28-March 16.

A similar spell of rain and hailstorm, in fact, continued over the last two days in many states including Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

"The agriculture ministry has asked affected states to submit their memorandums to the Centre after working out the financial details of damaged crops. A final decision about compensation will be taken in consultation with the finance ministry next month," an official said.

Finance minister Arun Jaitley on Sunday talked about a hike in compensation for farmers during his visit to Rajasthan, a badly affected state which lost rabi crops on 45.52 lakh hectares during the recent rains.

"The PM is deeply concerned about the loss to farmers... The government will raise the compensation limit to help farmers whose crops have been affected by rain and hailstorm," Jaitley said while interacting with farmers in Timeli, one of the worst affected villages in Bundi district.

Assuring farmers of all possible help from the Centre, the finance minister was



A farmer in Bihar upset over crop damaged due to unseasonal rain

Farmer suicides in UP rise after freak rainfall

Agra/Meerut: On March 26, Shree Prakash, a farmer from Lalpur, a village near Agra, went to his fields where he took one last look at his crop, damaged by the unseasonal rains. He then pulled out a pistol, put it to his head, and shot himself. The 60-year-old is among the long list of UP's farmers who, unable to face the prospect of paying their debts after huge rain-inflicted losses, are either committing suicide or dying of shock-induced heart attacks. "More than 20 farmers have died in Aligarh and Hathras alone this month," says Chaudhary Harpal Singh, an office-bearer of the Bhartiya Kisan Union.

Accurate numbers are hard to come by, since government officials seem keen to play down the situation. An official in Hathras near Ali-

garh, one of the worst affected areas in western UP, for instance, told TOI on Saturday that "as far as he knew, there had been no suicides by farmers." This, when there are daily reports of farmer deaths from across the district. **TNN**

quoted by a news agency as saying, "We take the responsibility to help you stand up again after this huge loss of crops and livestock." Jaitley, who took an aerial survey to assess the damage to crops, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed central ministers to visit most affected areas so that assistance and compensation could be facilitated to farmers.

The Centre had last week asked state governments to

BITTER HARVEST

► Chickpea and lentils constitute 60% of the crops affected by the rains in UP, followed by wheat and potatoes

► Bundelkhand, the area where maximum farmer deaths have been reported, has almost 80% farmers under debt, as per bank reports

► Bulk of the farmers have not insured their crops, and are not entitled to crop insurance benefits, adding to their woes

render immediate assistance to farmers from SDRF, which has Rs 5,270 crore for utilization in this fiscal. "In case there is any shortfall of money in the states' kitty under SDRF, the Centre will chip in with money from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)," said an official.

As per the latest report of the agriculture ministry, rains and hailstorms have damaged rabi crops on 106.73 lakh hectares in 14 states.

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