

21-3-16

# Another crisis hits the farms

Contingency plans for India's villages must be ready, given unseasonal rains in March

**T**he unpredictability in climate patterns is hitting India's farm sector year after year. The damage so far has mercifully been less than that of last year, when about 20 million hectares of farmland were flattened by rains. The loss this year has, however, not been negligible at least in Punjab and Haryana, where the wheat, pulses and mustard crops have been severely affected. This has been compounded by several other problems: Two consecutive droughts in 2014 and 2015 (the rainfall deficit was 14% last year and 12% in 2014), and virtually no winter rain, leading to water reservoirs becoming almost dry. Though the Union Budget's focus this year has been the farm sector, to which the allocation was ₹35,984 crore, apart from the ₹38,500 crore to the MGNREGS, the government may have to come up with mid-term palliatives if the problems mount.

India's farm sector had a relatively good run from 1987, the year of severe drought, to 1999, when the monsoon was less than bountiful. From 2001, India's villages went into a phase of crisis, particularly in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, with problems ranging from farmer indebtedness resulting out of the slightest crop failures, leading to suicides; weakening social welfare, resulting in malnourishment and migration of the rural people, etc. The situation went from bad to worse, reaching a climax in 2006, when then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had announced a ₹3,750 crore debt relief package for six districts of Vidarbha. In 2009-10, the worst drought in three decades shrunk farm growth to almost zero from 1.6% the year earlier. On rough estimates 40% of India's landmass is now drought-affected, with there being scarcity in drinking water, irrigation water, energy to run pumpsets, etc. The government's new crop insurance plan, which promises to compensate farmers when 33% of the crop (it was 50% earlier) is damaged and gives a 50% hike in compensation, may do some damage control, but crop loss estimates are done by a corrupt system run by lekhpals and patwaris.

India's GDP, a sixth of which comes from agriculture, is projected to grow at 7.6% in 2015-16. And the more worrying fact is that agricultural GDP has been growing at 2-4% over the past 15 years, which include years of high growth. However, the good news is that the El Nino factor, which crippled the monsoon in the past two years, is wearing out, giving hopes for good rains this year. However, the government must have its contingency plans ready for India's villages, where close to 70% of the population lives and which generates a lot of demand for several industries.

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## Bahadurgarh farmers await special girdawari

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

BAHADUR, MARCH 20

Farmers of 40 villages under the Bahadurgarh sub-division are a resentful lot after the state government failed to announce special girdawari to assess the damage caused to wheat and mustard crop during the recent spell of rain and hailstorm.

Accusing the state government of being 'insensitive' towards their plight, farmers of these villages have threatened to launch a stir if their demand was not met.

Ram Prakash, a farmer from Jassaur village, said he had cultivated mustard and wheat crops in 10 acres but the hailstorm ruined everything. While the mustard crop was totally destroyed, the wheat crop suffered 80 per cent loss, he added.

The rains struck when mustard crop was in its ripening stage, some farmers had begun harvesting it too at cer-

Horticulture market to come up at Sonapat

Jind: The chairperson of the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board Krishna Gahlawat has asserted the state government will set up an international horticulture market in 537 acres at Gannaur. She said a food processing unit would also be set up in the market. "The farmers can sell their yield at profitable rates in the international market instead of going to other states. The government would ensure smooth functioning of four agro malls located in the state," she said.

tain places. Rajesh, sarpanch of Ladravan village, said though the damage had been videographed, girdawari had not been ordered yet.

Matu Ram Nehra, tehsildar, said a report on the loss to the rabi crops had been sent to the government.

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