

65 farmer suicides in 21 days in Maha

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Punjab farmer & mother kill themselves, moneylender held for bid to grab land

Aurangabad: Drought and debt continue to claim lives in Marathwada, with as many as 65 farmers committing suicide in the first three weeks of April alone. With this, the total number of farmer suicides in the drought-hit region has risen to 338 this year.

The highest number of farmer suicides was reported from Beed district — 60. Aurangabad (57) and Nanded (50) follow close on its heels.

Latur and Osmanabad, both severely drought-affected districts, have reported 44 and 43 farmer suicides, respectively, while 37 cases have been reported from Jalna, 27 from Parbhani and 20 from Hingoli.

A farmer and his mother have reportedly committed suicide in Punjab's Barnala district following a moneylender's attempt to forcibly seize their two-acre plot. Officials said the agent, Teja, arrived at Baljit Singh's plot after he failed to repay a Rs 4.5-lakh loan he had taken from him. Barnala SP Swaran Singh Khanna said Teja was arrested along with two others on Wednesday for pushing Baljit and his mother Balbir Kaur to suicide, adding that efforts were underway to arrest Teja's two sons. Authorities also announced a compensation of Rs 6 lakh for the family of the deceased, while also offering a government job to one of them and a waiver of any loan in their name.

Neel Kamal | TNN

Officials said 146 cases had been declared eligible for compensation, with investigation pending in 117 others. The administration has rejected 75 claims.

The administration is continuing to undertake efforts to reach out to farmers

and offer counsel on health problems, as well as boost their morale.

A senior official said the administration was trying to get them jobs under MGNREGS as well as assure medical assistance. "Divisional commissioner Umakant

Dangat has urged doctors in both the private and government sectors to extend every possible assistance to farmers in distress, and ensure they do not miss out on proper treatment for want of money," he said.

The official said the district administration had roped in health department officials in Osmanabad to boost the morale of farmers, particularly those in the district's drought-affected pockets. "Accredited social health activists (Ashas) are counselling the farmers. One Asha worker is expected to reach out to 1,500 people. The administration has thus surveyed 2.21 lakh houses in the district where families have been counselled to fight the drought conditions," he said.

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