

Elders concerned over farmers' suicides

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Members in the Rajya Sabha today expressed concern over the rising cases of suicides by farmers and demanded an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for foodgrains.

Initiating the short duration discussion on the suicide by the farmers in various parts of the country and the demand to increase the MSP, Congress MP M.S. Gill said: "The country is dependent on farmers as more than 65 per cent of its population is in villages."

Noting that the country has to take them along to achieve the goals of agrarian progress, he expressed concern over reports farmer suicides being reported from many states, including Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.

"When the farmers of Punjab are committing suicide, then what to talk of other states," he said.

He said a majority of

farmers were having only small holdings of up to two acres and their income was meagre.

"There are no riches in rural areas whereas the number of billionaires is increasing in the country," he said, demanding that the MSP for next wheat crop should be announced in advance so that farmer could decide which crop to produce.

Mr Rajnath Singh (BJP) also reiterated that maximum population of the country is engaged in agriculture sector and their condition is worsening day by day, leaving them with no other alternative but to suicide.

"Other sectors can wait but this sector needs immediate succour otherwise the situation worsen further," he said.

Criticising the government's decision in March this year to import wheat from USA and Australia, he said the imported wheat would be costing between Rs 9 and Rs 10 per kg but the domestic farmers were only being paid in the range of Rs 6.50 to Rs 7 per kg. Even after the

bonus of Rs 50 per quintal, announced this year, the difference between imported and domestic wheat remained at Rs 2.50 per kg.

Mr Rajnath Singh said the price of diesel had been increased seven times in the past few years.

"Farmers have been bearing the brunt of these increases frequently. Natural calamities also play their role in destroying the crops," he noted, charging the government with not being "sympathetic" towards farmers and termed most of its policies "faulty."

He said 10 big multinational companies were selling seeds in the country, including Monsanto's Bt cotton, at exorbitant high prices of Rs 1,600 for 450 grams with a royalty of Rs 1,200 per packet.

The BJP leader urged the government to look into the farmers' problems in all respects and dissuade them from the extreme step.

Mr Janeswar Mishra (SP) demanded that peasants be given right price for their produce by increasing the MSP.