



Rabba Rabba Meenh Wasa

It's a measure of how bad the drought currently affecting India is: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told a meeting of chief secretaries of states that the country is facing a "difficult situation" and set a target that "in no case should we allow citizens to go hungry".

The possibility of more Indians going hungry is real enough, with 141 of the country's 626 districts hit by drought.

There has been an overall deficit of 25 per cent in rainfall this monsoon. With about 60 per cent of the country's population dependent on agriculture for a living, things look grim.

Food prices, too, have been rising, and the prime minister has warned that reduced food production in the kharif (summer and monsoon) season crop is likely to have a "further inflationary impact on prices of food items".

"The contingency plan for crops, drinking water, human and animal health, fodder, etc should be brought into operation without delay and a close watch kept on availability of foodgrains and prices of essential commodities," Singh told the meeting.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party announced on Saturday that it

would launch a nation-wide agitation against price rise on August 17, the day the prime minister meets state chief ministers to discuss the issue.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked state governments to complete the paperwork to seek central assistance, start relief operations to help farmers overcome the current drought in the country, and come down heavily on hoarders who try to profit from the reduced foodgrain production. "I am told that no state has so far sent its memorandum seeking assistance," the Prime Minister told



FIGHTING DROUGHT

a conference of chief secretaries convened here to discuss the response of states.

There has been an overall deficit of 25 per cent rain this monsoon. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Jharkhand, Assam and Himachal Pradesh are among the worst affected states. Singh also spoke of the Centre and the States working together to contain the increase in prices of essential commodities. "We will also have to ensure effective enforcement of stock holding limits and strong action against hoarders and black marketeers," he told the states. He also emphasised on the need to activate the public distribution system, an important safety net to cushion the poor against price rise.

MP worse than Ethiopia in hunger index

New Delhi: One of the biggest Indian states, Madhya Pradesh, is increasingly turning out to be the Asian poverty bowl and has left behind even Ethiopia in terms of hunger, a report by an authority no less than the Planning Commission of India has deduced. The hunger index for Madhya Pradesh is now extremely alarming at 30.9 while Chattisgarh and Jharkhand, widely considered as poor states, have a hunger index of 26.6 and 28.7, respectively. The BJP ruled Madhya Pradesh has failed for a long time in hunger management efforts and available figures suggest that its

hunger problem worsened between 1994 and 2008, the years of the two hunger indexes. The number of underweight children, less than 3-years old, has increased from 53.5 per cent in National Family Health Survey-II to 60.3 per cent in NFHS-III. The number of anaemic children has increased from 71.3 per cent to 82.6 per cent between the two surveys. The reason for poor human development indicators is probably the low per capita income of the citizens. The per capita income of the state has increased slightly from Rs 12,384 in 1999-2000 to Rs 14,346 in 2007-08 whereas the national average has almost doubled from Rs 16,258 to Rs 33,000.



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