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Scheme soon to help tobacco growers during crises: Minister

E-auctioning platform opened at Periyapatna

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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry D. Purandeswari inaugurates the e-auctioning platform at Periyapatna in Mysore. Photo: M.A. Sriram

Union Minister of State for Commerce D. Purandeswari said here on Friday that the Centre had almost finalised a Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) scheme to help tobacco growers during crises, including providing crop insurance for losses owing to various reasons.

She was addressing tobacco farmers after inaugurating the e-auctioning system at platform number 4 here. With this, the demand of growers for introduction of electronic auctions has come to fruition. The Government of India would contribute 50 per cent of the funds to the PSF, State Government 25 per cent and another 25 per cent by the grower himself. However, the Tobacco Board was considering contributing half of the grower's contribution (12.5 per cent) towards the fund, Ms. Purandeswari said.

The inauguration of the e-auctioning platform would make things easy for the growers not only in terms of ushering in transparency in the auctions but also realise remunerative prices. The penalty being levied on the growers for growing excess tobacco than the prescribed quantity was being spent by the Tobacco Board to provide assistance to the growers such as loans for education and wedding of the children of the growers and even during loss of lives of the growers.

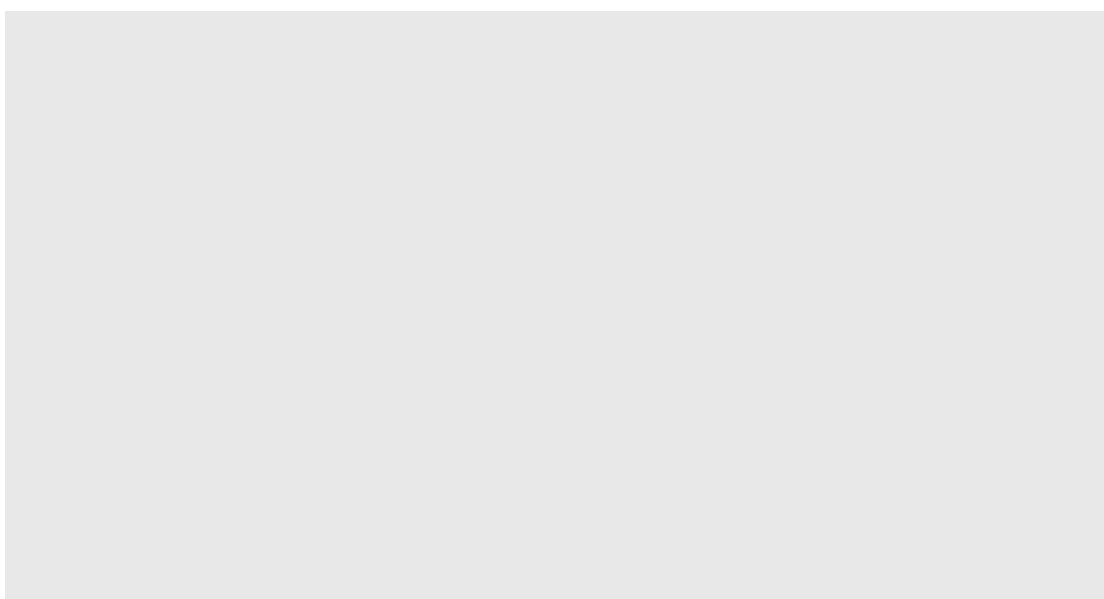
The Minister heard the Periyapatna MLA K. Venkatesh, Hunsur MLA H.P. Manjunath and Arkalgud MLA A. Manju on various problems of the growers, including disparity in the fixation of crop size in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. E-auctioning would do away with the 'cartelisation' in the auctions, bring in transparency and secure good price to the growers. The Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) must help growers to realise higher yields, she said.

On the pleas made earlier by the MLAs for loan waiver to the growers in Karnataka owing to drought, Ms. Purandeswari cited the Andhra Pradesh example of waiving loans of farmers to the tune of Rs. 65 crore last year due to crop loss because of cyclone. She appealed to Mysore MP A.H. Vishwanath and the MLAs to take up the issue with the State government. The decision to waive input loans should be taken by the State Level Bankers Committee.

Cash crops did not enjoy the benefit of minimum support price, but traders must offer a good price to the growers. A meeting of the growers, elected representatives and the Board officials would be convened soon to thrash out the problems, she told Mr. Vishwanath.

Mr. Vishwanath, who presided, noted that about Rs. 4,000 crore was accruing to the Central exchequer every year from tobacco exports and the government ought to consider the pleas of the growers, especially prices. He appealed to Ms. Purandeswari to take steps to appoint Kannada knowing persons to the vacant posts in the Tobacco Board in Karnataka and order installation of CCTV in the offices and godowns.

The price of the crop should be ensured on a par with the cost of inputs such as labour, firewood, transportation and the like. Additional platforms were needed to ensure speedy transactions in the platforms, Mr. Vishwanath urged. He recalled efforts to appeal to the Commerce Minister, Anand Sharma, to waive crop loans of growers in Karnataka in the wake of drought. Chairman of the Tobacco Board G. Kamala Vardhana Rao welcomed. Director (Auctions), Manju P. Pillai, Members of the Board, were present.



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