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THE HINDU

‘Budgets must make up for demonetisation losses’

Mumbai: Civil society groups on Monday asked the State government to divert at least 20% of its budget for the next fiscal year towards alleviating losses due to demonetisation. The scrapping of 500- and 1,000-rupee notes, they said, has hit farmers, daily wage labourers and small-scale industries the worst, and has affected healthcare, education and jobs.

Vishwas Utagi, convenor, Trade Unions Joint Action Committee (Maharashtra), said as per their estimate, semi-permanent and contract-based workers have lost jobs across several sectors, roughly totalling 45 lakh.

Agriculture and agro-based industries have suffered too, he said. “Banks store people’s money, so why aren’t they concerned for their welfare? Now, small-scale traders have neither jobs nor money.”

Mr. Utagi’s take on the situation was echoed by most speakers at the press meet, who stressed on the urgency to increase duties levied by the State government, mainly excise duty and taxes, for increase in revenue. At the same time, the State government must divert a considerable amount to social sector needs and offset demonetisation losses, they said.

Budget analyst Ravi Duggal said doubling excise duty on alcohol would bring in an extra ₹15,000 crore for the State government . “As of now, Maharashtra levies only half the duty as Tamil Nadu.”

There were recommendations for education and nutrition sectors too. “The gap between public and private schools in Maharashtra needs to be bridged,” said educationist Simantini Dhuru. “Government school teachers for children aged three to six years are overwhelmed with work and burdened with administrative tasks that are out of their purview. Poor families send their children to private schools instead, which they cannot afford.”

Ms. Dhuru suggested an increase in the State budget for women and child development, which fell in 2016-17 to ₹2,525 crore from ₹3,607 crore in 2015-16. This, she said, would lead to an increase in fund allocation for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which covers children aged up to six years and comes under the women and child development ministry. This, in turn, will allow for hiring and training more teachers in government schools, which the Jagnyachya Hakkache Andolan says is a priority.

Suggesting a formula to fix compensation for farmers and workers, Mr. Utagi said a 2% rate of interest on loans for farmers and 4% for small-scale industries must be applied with immediate effect. Improving these sectors must be prioritised to increase employment and for the economy to find its level, he said. “The Central government earns from taxes, so there is a possibility in the surplus budget to wipe out the 6 per cent fiscal deficit,” Mr. Utagi said.

Dutch promise help in farm technologies

TS, The Netherlands sign memorandum of understanding to cooperate in agriculture research

HYDERABAD: Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University and the Wageningen University and Research Centre of The Netherlands have agreed to extend mutual cooperation in the field of agriculture research.

A memorandum of understanding to the effect was signed here on Monday by Vice Chancellor V. Praveen Rao on behalf of PJTSAU and Consul General of The Netherlands in Mumbai Guido Tielman in the presence of Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy.

Agro-processing units

Commissioner of Agriculture M. Jaganmohan and a delegation from the Embassy of The Netherlands in New Delhi participated in the meeting. The Minister requested the visiting delegation to set up agro-processing units suitable for the local conditions in the State for making end-to-end products in agriculture and allied sectors.

Representatives of The Netherlands explained to the Minister that theirs was one of the top countries in the world in the matter of agriculture and food products, meat and dairy production although it was a small country. Further, The Netherlands was highly developed in polyhouse cultivation and it was ready to help Telangana in that regard, they said.

Central team visits drought-hit areas

DINDIGUL: An assessment report will be submitted to the Centre this weekend to enable for action, said Santosh, Central team member.

Talking to press persons at Pallapatti in Nilakottai block after inspecting drought-hit areas in the district here on Monday, he said that four teams were in the State to assess the situation.

“Our team had been covering Namakkal, Dindigul, Karur, Madurai and Salem. Other teams had been covering the rest of the districts. We would compile the report and submit to the Centre, he added.

The team comprising Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation Assistant Advisor Santosh, Trade Extension and Drought Management (Ministry of Agriculture) Director Vijay Raj Mohan and TWAD Board Chairman Dheeraj, senior officer in Tamil Nadu, who accompanied the team, inspected Pallapatti, Nadupatti, Sempatti, Silukuvarpatti and nearby affected areas.

Several farmers narrated their plight, the impact of drought and how the drought wiped out all their livelihood activities. Drinking water crisis haunted all the villages, they told the team.

Jambudhuraikottai farmer B. Ganesan said that he had spent Rs.1500 to buy a lorry load of water to protect beans crop. More than 150 acres of crop withered at his village, he said. He had invested Rs.4.5 lakh in total to raise the crop, he said.

With no farm activities, farm workers stated that they were jobless. Acute drinking water crisis had been haunting them. People had to shell out Rs.15 per pot of drinking water, he added.

Another farmer M. Thangapandian stated that grape plantations were completely destroyed and appealed to construct a check-dam below Sirumalai to improve groundwater.

Collector T.G. Vinay said that acute drought and depletion of groundwater were due to failure of the north-west monsoon and over exploitation of groundwater.

At Nadupatti, a farmer M. Subramanian said that jowar crops in 150 hectares completely withered. They appealed to desilt wells around the Athoor dam to improve supply to their village. Many villagers sought removal of karuvelam plants as it sucked 50 per cent of irrigated water in the farm.

Horticulture officials said that 80 per cent of standing crops in all blocks except in Kodaikanal completely withered. Joint Director of Agriculture M. Thangasamy accompanied the team.