

State eyes central aid to mollify protesting sugarcane growers

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Stepping in to seek central aid for the ever-beleaguered co-operative sugar industry, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and union minister of state for food and civil supplies Raosaheb Danve Patil will meet union finance minister Arun Jaitley.

Danve, who is also the state BJP chief, addressed the plight of sugarcane farmers at a function at party headquarters on Tuesday to induct former MNS legislators Pravin Darekar, Vasant Gite and Ramesh Patil.

Former Shiv Sena MLA Kashinath Mengal, who had jumped ship to the MNS, also joined the saffron party with 12 district chiefs of the Raj Thackeray-led outfit, indicating a vertical split in the party's rank and file.

Incidentally, Raj had met the chief minister on Tuesday morning.

Centre is planning to give a subsidy of Rs4,000 per tonne for raw sugar

— Raosaheb Danve Patil

The sugar industry is in trouble because of a supply glut which has pulled down prices.

Agitating farmers in Maharashtra are demanding remunerative prices for their cane from cooperative sugar mills. The protesters had even vandalized the sugar commissionerate in Pune on Monday.

Danve said while the country had old sugar stocks of around 70 lakh metric tonnes (LMT), the production in the current season was expected to be around 250 LMT.

However, the annual consumption was expected to be around 240 LMT, which would lead to a surplus of around 70

to 80 LMT, he added. The monthly consumption is to the tune of 20 LMT.

Danve said that while the government maintained a buffer stock of around 60 LMT for three months, this would still leave around 20 LMT of excess sugar. He added that hence, the Centre was planning to give a subsidy of Rs4,000 per tonne for raw sugar which would be exported. This is expected to result in around 17 LMT of exports.

On the supply side, the Narendra Modi-led government has also hiked the import duty on sugar to 25% from the previous 10%.

Danve said he, chief minister Fadnavis and other leaders would meet Jaitley to seek aid for the troubled sugar industry.

The government has issued notices to 107 sugar mills for not paying the mandated fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane, he added.