

No farm freebies, expect a tight Budget, says Pawar

New Delhi, Jan 9: Amid tight fiscal situation, agriculture minister Sharad Pawar on Wednesday said he does not expect big freebies like cheap crop loans in the forthcoming Budget for 2013-14 which is likely to be "a tight Budget".

"This budget will be a tight budget. I am little worried," Pawar said. Finance minister P Chidambaram in February-end will present UPA government's last full budget before general elections.

The budget will be presented in the backdrop of slowing economic growth, rising subsidies, run-away fiscal deficit and moderation in revenues.

Pawar also said that he does not expect further reduction in interest rate on crop loans on those farmers who pay in time. At present, the interest rate on farm loan is 4% for timely repayers.

However, Pawar wished the finance minister gave more funds for irrigation projects in the budget keeping in view the country's half of the farm land is not irrigated. "My wish in fact is that the finance minister should provide maximum money for irrigation projects. We expect more financial support for various schemes implemented by various ministries for water conservation like drip irrigation," he said.

"There is too much wastage of water and we have to utilise water properly. This area should be given priority in the budget," he stressed.

When asked about government's new initiatives to make country self-sufficient in pulses and oilseeds, Pawar said, "We are in the process of budget preparation. Many things will be part of FM's budget speech. I won't be in a position to tell about



new schemes."

Pawar said that schemes like National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and Bringing Green Revolu-

tion in Eastern India announced earlier have yielded results as production of rice, wheat, pulses and horticultural crops have increased.

On winter crops like wheat, the minister said the crop prospect is good as of now. Area under the crop is higher and productivity is expected to be better than last year in some states like Madhya Pradesh.

More farmers are shifting to wheat as some states have announced bonus over and above the support price of wheat at ₹1,350 per quintal for 2012-13 marketing year, he added.

Wheat has been sown in 28.63 million hectare so far, as against 28.18 million hectare in the year-ago period.

Asked if wheat production will exceed last year's level, Pawar said, "Area under wheat will be more and this weather is con-

venient for crop growth. Total production will be somewhat near to last year's level. There will be problem of storage."

In 2011-12 crop year (July-June), the country had harvested a record 93.90 million tonnes of wheat, while overall food-grains production was 257.44 million tonnes. Asked if procurement of pulses and oilseeds by government would help increase production of these crops, Pawar said: "To be frank, no farmer is selling (these crops) to the government. By and large, farmers are getting food price in the market. Sometimes, farmers do get lower prices because of gap in demand and supply."

He also said that pulses are rainfed crops and efforts are being made to develop high yield varieties to raise production and reduce the country's dependence on import.

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