

● SWEET START

Govt asks sugar firms to advance cane-crushing as output may rise

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SUGAR COMPANIES HAVE been asked to start their mills from October beginning as sugarcane output is expected to be higher this year, food secretary Preeti Sudan said on Tuesday.

Sugarcane has been sown in more area at 49.15 lakh hectare till last week of 2017-18 crop year (July-June), as against 45.22 lakh hectare in the year-ago period, as per agriculture ministry's data.

"Sugarcane sowing is very good. We are expecting overall sugar output to be more than the normal level. We are hoping for a good year," Sudan told PTI.

Normally, companies commence their mills between Dussehra and Diwali in second half of October.

However, mills have been asked to advance the crushing operation of this season, she said.

This year, Dussehra and Diwali fall on September 30 and October 19, respectively.

There are 361 sugar mills in the country, of which cooperative mills are about 247.



The food secretary said the early crushing will not only boost supply of new sugar but also help mills harvest better sugar recovery as cane crop will be in matured stage then.

Asked if there are enough supplies to meet the demand till new sugar comes in the market, Sudan said: "There is no issue. We have enough supplies.

"Mills are offloading more quantities in the market and prices are under control!"

The retail sugar rates were inching up after the GST rollout but further increase

in prices has been contained by asking mills to offload more sugar in the market.

Sugar output in 2016-17 season (October-September) is expected to be 20.3 million tonnes against 25.1 million tonnes previous year.

The country has old stock as well as imported 5 lakh tonnes at zero duty to meet the shortages.

To check prices, the government has restricted imports by raising import duty to 50% as also imposed limits on holding stock by both wholesalers and retailers.

