

CABINET MEETING

Govt OK's ₹13,000 cr package for Maha

Drought-hit Vidarbha, Marathwada to benefit, Govt hikes sugarcane price by ₹20 per quintal to ₹275

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a ₹13,000-crore special package for the drought-hit Vidarbha and Marathwada regions in Maharashtra and also increased the minimum price that sugar mills would have to pay to cane growers by ₹20 per quintal to ₹275 for the next marketing year starting October.

The Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi also decided to give amnesty to prisoners above 60 years in case of men and 55 years in case of women who have served half of the conviction to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. While the Cabinet approved setting up of a Central University in Andhra Pradesh, it nodded the setting up of a medical college in Deoria in Uttar Pradesh.

Terming the special package as "out of the box" decision, Water Resources Minister Nitin Gadkari said that this package will create 81 irrigation projects covering 3.77 lakh hectares of drought-hit regions of Maharashtra. "The completion of these projects will ensure assured source of water to the farmers in the command area of these projects. This will increase yield of their crops and thereby increase the income of the farmers," he said.

The projects included under the special package are besides the 26 major/medium projects of Maharashtra, having ultimate potential of 8.501 hectare, being funded under



the 'Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana'. Gadkari said that the projects that have been short-listed are low-hanging fruits and plan is to complete them by May next year.

"The Government has recently taken several steps in the interest of sugarcane growers. Today's decision to increase the fair and remunerative price (FRP) shows the Government's concern towards farmers," Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad told reporters after the meeting. Elaborating more, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said the Government has fixed the FRP at ₹275 per quintal for a recovery rate of 10 per cent for the 2018-19 marketing year.

"This is 77.42 per cent higher than the cost of production of sugarcane which is estimated to be ₹155 per quintal," he told media in separate briefing. If the recovery rate is higher than 10 per cent, then a premium of ₹2.75 per quin-

tal would be given for each 0.1 per cent increase in sugar recovery, he said.

Women convicts aged 55 years and above and male convicts of 60 years or more, who have completed half of their sentence, and a few other categories of prisoners in jails across the country will be released under an amnesty scheme during the year-long celebrations to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi beginning October 2.

However, prisoners convicted for crimes such as dowry death, rape, human trafficking and under POTA, UAPA, TADA, money laundering law and FEMA, among others, will not be released under the scheme.

The prisoners will be considered for special remission and released in three phases. In the first phase, the prisoners will be released on October 2, in the second phase on April 10

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next year, the anniversary of Champaran satyagrah, and in the third phase on October 2, 2019.

As for the Central University in Andhra Pradesh, HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar took to *Twitter* to say, "In a historic first, Central University of Andhra Pradesh will start academic session on 5th August, 2018. Earlier the practice was different — First the Cabinet will take decision, then the Bill will be passed in Parliament. That meant loss of at least one year."

The Cabinet also approved the proposal for continuation of pre-matric, post matric and merit-cum-means based scholarship schemes for the students belonging to minority communities at a cost of over ₹5,000 crore up to 2020. Under the schemes, around 70 lakh scholarships are likely to be disbursed annually, an official statement said.