

## Locust attacks pose a threat to kharif crops

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- *More Locust swarms are expected to reach India next month, according to FAO*
- *The extent of damage to the kharif crop will largely depend on whether the locusts are contained by Rajasthan and Gujarat*

**NEW DELHI:** Locust swarms over Gurugram created panic among residents of the national capital on Saturday morning.

Later in the day, as the swarm moved to Uttar Pradesh bypassing Delhi, it came as a relief. Earlier, desert locusts had invaded Jaipur and Bhopal.

While locust swarms are a nuisance for urban India, such pest attacks during the kharif season are a real threat to the rural economy.

Since April, transborder locust swarms have travelled as far as Maharashtra and Bihar, prompting the governments of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra to initiate pest management measures across over 127,000 hectares of farmland.

In June, ratings agency Crisil said the agriculture sector is likely to clock a modest 2.5% growth in 2020-21, but locust attacks were a likely downside risk. Planting of kharif crops surged this year due to a favourable monsoon, but going by the forecasts of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization more locust swarms are expected to reach India next month, all the way from the horn of Africa.

"There is a great deal anxiety among farmers in Rajasthan," said Bhagirath Choudhary, founder director of the Delhi-based South Asia Biotechnology Centre. The locust incursions could inflict only minimal damage (on early-sown cotton and pearl millet) since crop fields were empty, but the situation could be different in July after planting of summer crops are over, he added.

"As a remedial measure the central government should designate locust attacks as a natural disaster. This will enable farmers to claim insurance compensation. It is beyond the means of individual farmers to manage swarm incursions," Choudhary noted.

The extent of damage to the kharif crop will largely depend on whether the locusts are contained by Rajasthan and Gujarat, who share the international border with Pakistan. If the



swarms manage to reach far-off states like Maharashtra and Bihar, the damage could be heavy.

“Currently swarms are scattered in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and have reached Nepal. We are taking the help of state agriculture departments for control operations,” said K.L. Gurjar, deputy director, Locust Warning Organisation, the federal agency which issues early-warnings and helps states in pest management.

Gurjar said locust incursions could pose a problem in July due to the standing crop, but added that the department was well prepared to tackle the menace.

But incursions beyond Rajasthan and Gujarat over the past two months showed that locust attacks are a clear and present danger. Currently, 60 ground control teams and drones have been deployed for control operations, the agriculture ministry said. India has imported 25 sprayers from the UK and another 45 will reach in July, it added.

**Source:** <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/locust-attacks-pose-a-threat-to-kharif-crops-11593570530232.html>