

'Won't lift wheat export ban till domestic needs are met'



India will not lift its ban on wheat export till such time it is "comfortable" about meeting domestic needs, said Food Corporation of India (FCI) chief Ashok Kumar Meena, adding that recent rain and hailstorms would not impact the wheat crop. "Wheat output will not be impacted by the recent rains and we are confident of the country achieving its production target," Meena said at a briefing on Tuesday. There are no official estimates of losses to the main winter staple due to untimely rains and stormy weather that have been battering farms since the middle of March. A fresh spell of rain is expected around March 30. Farmers and traders from several wheat growing states have said wheat had been impacted, as heavy rain soaked fields and strong winds dislodged crops. India has estimated wheat production this year to be 112 million tonne, the highest ever. Wheat is sown in November and harvested towards the end of March.

→P17

Govt to continue wheat export ban: FCI chief

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Farmers and traders from several wheat growing states, such as Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, have said wheat had been impacted in many farm belts, as heavy rain soaked fields and strong winds dislodged crops. Hailstorms have hit large parts of Rajasthan.

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Wheat is sown in November and harvested towards the end of March. Wheat procurement has started and 10,727 tonnes have been bought in Madhya Pradesh so far, Meena said. Procurement refers to the government's purchases of cereals at federally determined minimum support prices.

The government has targeted to buy 34.1 million tonne of wheat. A heatwave in 2022 crimped wheat output by 2.5% to 106 million tonne, stoking a shortfall. The government's procurement fell to a five-year low of just 18.7 million tonne.

The chief ministers of UP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh have ordered surveys to assess losses from inclement weather to wheat growers, announcing compensation.

"The main concern with wheat is not so much about a fall in output but damage to quality of grains. Farmers done with harvesting are bringing soggy and discoloured grains to market, which affects their price," said CP Gupta, proprietor of Cheshta Enterprises, a commodity trader in Kota, Rajasthan, commenting on the situation in a report published on Saturday.