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Oppn slams govt over poor MSP effort

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The state government came under fire from opposition parties on Tuesday over its failure to buy farm produce — mainly maize, ragi, tur dal and paddy — under the minimum support price (MSP) scheme. Congress and JD(S) members staged a walkout in the assembly over the issue.

While responding to points raised by opposition leader Siddaramaiah in a debate, law and parliamentary affairs minister JC Madhuswamy said that the government was not in a position to procure crops like maize as they cannot be distributed under the public distribution system. He added that there was a lack of demand for some of the crops in the market.

"The use of crops like maize is limited to cattle feed. Besides, a severe shortage of funds also poses a big challenge. So, we cannot buy some crops, especially maize, this year," Madhuswamy said.

Ragi, paddy and tur also cannot be procured beyond a certain limit. "The state government cannot fall back on the Centre on this issue as the onus of distributing any crop after procuring lies on states," he said.

Opposition members protested saying that when the Centre had fixed the MSP of Rs 1,850 per quintal for maize, the government cannot go back on its word. "If the Centre refuses to lift the stock, then utilise the money available under the revolving fund to

buy crops like maize at MSP. Revolving fund of about Rs 2,000 crore is lying unused. Why don't you use it?" said senior Congress member and former minister HK Patil. "We cannot accept this helpless attitude of the government. It is the moral and legal obligation of the Centre and state government to procure crops and they cannot escape from it."

The issue of MSP is a central element in the protests against the central government's new farm laws.

The central government has clarified that the MSP system would continue.

About 41 lakh tonnes of maize has been produced in Karnataka this kharif season and farmers are struggling to find buyers. JD(S)

member HD Revanna said that Hassan district alone had unsold maize stocks of more than 4 lakh tonnes. "Farmers grew maize only after the Centre announced the minimum support price. They were hoping that the government would honour its word, but they have been let down," said JD(S) member KM Shivalinge Gowda.

Congress members walked out first and JD(S) members followed suit.

"Like Kerala and Punjab, the Karnataka government should enact a law enabling criminal proceedings against people who buy farm produce below the minimum support price. This will help farmers get better prices," Siddaramaiah said. "The government should also buy all vegetables, fruits and grains directly from farmers at MSP."

