

India airs concern at fertiliser smuggling into Nepal, Bangladesh

Chemicals and Fertiliser Minister Ram Vilas Paswan Sunday expressed concern over the smuggling of fertilisers into Bangladesh and Nepal from West Bengal and Bihar, two of India's eastern states.

'The illegal entry of fertiliser into Bangladesh and Nepal is a matter of concern. We have raised the issue with the ministry for home affairs to increase vigil and check such practices,' Paswan told reporter after chairing a meeting of the fertiliser advisory forum (FAM), his ministry's arm to monitor the availability of the commodity and other related issues.

West Bengal Agriculture Minister Naren Dey, who raised the issue during the FAM deliberations, said: 'Given the high cost of fertilisers in Bangladesh, a substantial chunk of it allocated to the state gets into the neighbouring nation. It creates a deficit situation in the local market.'

Agreed Nagmani, Bihar's Agriculture Minister, saying Nepal was receiving quite a large quantity of fertilisers through illegal channels, and urged the government to plug such loopholes.

'Indian fertilisers getting into Nepal is a problem,' said Nagmani during the deliberations, while asking for more fertiliser to the state for the October and November crops, particularly tobacco.

Dey, however, did not quantify the amount of fertilisers being smuggled into Bangladesh from West Bengal. 'I do not have the figure with me, but the quantity is very high,' he told IANS.

Though Paswan recognised the problem, he put the onus on the states for curtailing illegal transnational trade into fertiliser, saying local vigilance was the responsibility of the provincial governments.

'The state governments should intensify vigilance along the potential routes to smuggle fertiliser into Nepal or Bangladesh,' said Paswan.

He also shared the speakers' concern over the increased use of fertilisers not being reflected in agriculture productivity, and asked for testing of soil countrywide.

'The compounded annual growth in fertiliser has been 8.75 percent between 2002 and 2009 financial year. The agriculture output has not gone up accordingly,' he said.

The ministry estimates the fertiliser subsidy to rise to Rs.119,772 crore (Rs.1.19 trillion) in the current financial year from Rs.11,835 crore (Rs.118.35 billion) in 2003-04.

India is estimated to use over 54.4 million tonnes in 2008-09.

'Food grain production has risen from 174.78 million tonnes in 2002-03 to around 235 million tonnes in 2007-08,' said a fertiliser ministry document distributed at the FAM meet.

'Even if a production of 240 million tonnes is estimated for 2008-09, the total increase since 2002-03 is only 65.22 million tonnes, which at current import price of wheat at \$300 per million tonne translates into Rs.88,047 crore (Rs.880.47 billion) only,' says the document, a copy of which is with

IANS.

'There is a need for effective use of fertilisers in order to utilise the subsidy in a judicious manner,' said Satish Chander, director general, Fertilizer Association of India (FAI), a leading body of private firms.

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