COVID-19 lockdown: Centre assures farmers' organisations to exempt harvesting machines, farm labour

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Centre has assured the farmers' organisations on exempting harvesting machines and farm labour from the 21-day nation-wide lockdown to combat the outbreak of COVID-19.

The assurance was given by Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar to the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh (RKMM) chief Shiv Kumar, who had flagged concerns of the farm community ahead of the harvest season for Rabi crop beginning next week.

"Farmer, labourers and harvesting machines will be included in the essential list and they will be allowed to go to farming fields," the minister told the RKMM chief over the phone.

RKMM functionary Abhimanyu Kohar said the second demand of the organisation about making arrangements at the village to procure farm produce also received a positive response.

Kohar said the Minister said the Centre was discussing with state governments whether the Food Corporation of India officials could be sent to villages for procurement of the Rabi crop.

The action came in response to a letter RKMM has sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging concerns of the farm community regarding the 21 day lockdown affecting the harvesting operations.

Besides, the organisation also underlined concerns of guarding the farms from wild animals, who pose a threat to the almost ready-to-harvest crop in the fields.

The recent spell of heavy rains and hailstorms have delayed the harvesting operations, which usually begin by March 15 in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The crop in most regions is yet to ripen and become harvest-ready.

The agriculture ministry's second advance estimates of production of foodgrains, released on February 18, has pegged wheat production at a record high of 106.21 million tons.

Source: https://www.deccanherald.com/business/economy-business/covid-19-lockdown-centre-assures-farmers-organisations-to-exempt-harvesting-machines-farm-labour-817837.html