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Grain storage

Improve facilities to curb post-harvest losses

THE Union Cabinet has approved a Rs 1 lakh crore plan aimed at creating 'the world's largest grain storage capacity in the cooperative sector'. The government intends to provide modern storage facilities to farmers in their respective blocks through Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) so that they are able to get a fair price for their foodgrains. It's a cause for concern that the country's storage capacity is less than half of its foodgrain production. With the granaries overflowing, a portion of the produce is exposed to pest attacks and inclement weather. The Centre had told the Lok Sabha in December last year that post-harvest losses were in the range of 4-6 per cent for cereals and 5-8 per cent for pulses. This is a criminal waste of grains in a country where millions go to sleep every night on an empty stomach. It is also a huge disincentive to farmers who toil hard to ensure the nation's food security.

Inadequate and unscientific storage not only damages foodgrains but also makes farmers resort to distress sale of their produce. It is laudable that the government is prioritising food protection along with food production by establishing godowns at the PACS level. The plan envisages operating these credit societies as procurement centres for state agencies or the Food Corporation of India and also as fair price shops for farmers. However, of the 1 lakh PACS in the country, only around 63,000 are in operation. The rest need to be reactivated at the earliest in order to maximise the potential of these societies, which have crores of farmers among their members.

With climate change posing a major challenge to the cultivators, it is imperative to minimise post-harvest losses by improving storage facilities quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Saving every grain must become the credo in view of the variations in crop production and productivity, triggered by heatwaves and other extreme weather events that are likely to increase in intensity and frequency in the years to come.
