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Govt unlikely to achieve 15m cotton bales target

KARACHI: The country is unlikely to produce the projected 15 million bales of cotton during the 2019-20 season mainly due to lesser area coming under cultivation for the crop.

This means that the country will have to spend huge amount of foreign exchange for importing around 2.2-2.5m bales to meet the expected shortfall. Last season the import bill for 4m cotton bales stood at \$1.3 billion.

According to official figures the total area under cotton cultivation this season was achieved at 69 million acres against the target of 71.54m acres. Undoubtedly, this area stands 14.3 per cent higher over 2018-19 when cotton was sown on 67.01m acres and a production of 10.07m bales was achieved.

Analyst Naseem Usman told Dawn that the Punjab agriculture minister had already put the province's cotton production at 8m bales for current season this means the total production will stand at around 12-12.2m bales on including Sindh's 4 to 4.2m bales and 0.1m bales of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Even when looked at historic perspective it could be easily stated that the area under cotton sowing this season still stands less than 73.17m acres when the country produced a record 14.871m bales in 2014-15 season. The successive governments have failed on a number of accounts in enhancing cotton production which is a cash crop and could earn invaluable foreign exchange for the country even on achieving higher production than the domestic consumption. The domestic consumption stands at around 15-16m bales whereas cotton production is stagnant at around 11-12m bales for the last many years. Pakistan has very low yield of cotton at around 680kg lint per hectare against other cotton producing countries of the world have above 1,700kg lint per hectare.

It is high time that the government on a war-footing should take necessary measures to enhance cotton production by providing proper certified seed and also crack down on those supply poor quality pesticides and other inputs to growers.

The fibre length also had been a big issue because in 70 years the country failed to produce long staple fibre due to poor quality of seed and lack of research on this account.

As a result the textile industry annually has to import huge quantity of long staple cotton on spending huge foreign exchange.

Asif Inam, former chairman All Pakistan Textile Mills Association, Sindh Balochistan Zone, said that textile industry had been importing cotton from India to meet the shortfall but now they will have to pay extra cost towards freight on importing cotton from far-away countries after suspension after New Delhi illegally changed Occupied Kashmir's status.

He said the government had proposed to fix indicative price for phutti (seed-cotton) to encourage growers to cultivate more cotton but this was never done and no announcement was made in this regard.