

### **Govt plans commodities' early warning system to check food inflation**

ISLAMABAD: The government will roll out the nation's first countrywide commodities early warning system, aiming to curb food inflation, a minister said on Thursday.

Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar, minister for national food security and research (NFS&R) said Pakistan being an agrarian economy is largely a food secure country "but challenge of food inflation emerges very recurrently due to gaps in demand and supply management system".

"The government has focused to curb food inflation for which a robust early warning system would be developed," the minister told Illango Patchamuthu, World Bank's country director and Bank's regional head John Roome.

"We are looking to vertically promote growth of cotton with high quality seed and pest management" the minister said.

He apprised that the government has launched a holistic program of Rs300 billion with five year gestation period.

This program addresses key areas of agriculture including fisheries, livestock, water management and productivity enhancement of major crops. "We need to mobilise our farmers for their participation in the initiatives of the government for sustainable development of the sector," Bakhtyar said.

The minister further underlined the need for harmonising the crop estimates worked out by provincial crop reporting services and estimates through satellite imagery and remote sensing to come up with more precise data for devising effective and timely policies.

He also expressed that the government and the Bank may together work out their short term and long term agenda for agricultural cooperation.

"Short term collaboration may include designing of a model of Early Warning System (EWS) for management of food inflation," he added. "This EWS would save the interests of both farmers and consumers."

Bakhtyar said long term collaboration may be worked out in other common areas of interest like water management, fisheries and climate smart agriculture.

The minister shared that the government is also committed to rationalize agricultural subsidies to ensure diffusion of their benefit to the farming community.

World Bank's senior officials brief the minister about their interest for working with the government in various areas of agriculture.

Illango said the Bank would like to work in "close collaboration with the government on the commonalities like climate smart agriculture, high value crops and water management".

He apprised that the Bank is in process of hiring an agriculture expert for Pakistan. Furthermore, a team of experts on agriculture is likely to visit Pakistan in a couple of weeks.