

## **Govt. pitches for 40 lakh jute producing farmers and mill workers**

- [Devesh K. Pandey](#)

*India accounts for an estimated 70 per cent of the world's total production of jute products. Over 90 mills are currently operational, 67 in West Bengal alone.*

In a move that may bring about a sea change in the lives of over 40 lakh distressed farmers and workers across the country, the Union Textiles Ministry has urged State governments to help diversify the ailing jute industry by exploring new avenues for promoting use of jute bags.

The Centre has offered a wide range of products: from office stationeries like waste paper baskets, folders and laptop bags to moulded items and, most importantly, jute geo-textile products used in civil engineering works such as road construction and protection of hill slopes.

“An important characteristic of jute is that it absorbs and retains moisture. This makes it very effective in the construction of roads that last longer and protection of hill slopes by inducing vegetation growth. It also helps in stabilising sand dunes,” a government official said.

Apart from these products, the government has now suggested that State governments can also promote jute bags for school-going students. “This move will help generate employment,” the official said.

Union Textiles Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar has himself written to the Chief Ministers requesting that they can also consider introducing jute school bags.

Observing that the industry supports about 40 lakh farmers and 3.7 lakh jute labourers, Mr. Gangwar said: “To make the industry competitive and sustainable, it is necessary to diversify and move away from the traditional activity.”

He added: “In this context, I seek your help in the promotion of diversification in the jute industry. You may please consider introducing jute bags for school-going children under the HRD schemes in your State.”

The proposal, initially suggested by activist Gouri Shankar Jain from Odisha, has been made at the time when the industry is beset with scams and growing unrest among jute producing farmers and mill workers.

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West Bengal alone. The rest are in Bihar, Assam, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.

However, the industry's overdependence on government orders is considered to be a major factor behind the current state of affairs. The government buys jute sacks worth Rs.5,000 crore a year for packaging of food grains and sugar under the public distribution system (PDS).

Another cause of worry is that export of jute products has been badly hit in the recently pasty. Moreover, large-scale import from Bangladesh, which offers 10 per cent subsidy on domestic jute products and also, huge funding to its mills and exporters, have added to the stress. However, a series of measures taken recently by the Jute Commissioner's Office has contained the situation to a great extent.

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