

availability for domestic consumers. Similarly, when there is bumper production and price crash, MEP is fixed at lower level to increase the outflow of onion from the country for the benefit of the onion growers. It is therefore a regulatory mechanism aimed at balancing the interest of producers and consumers.

Any move to waiving off MEP system may adversely affect the domestic availability and prices of onion as there may not be any control on the export and the domestic consumers may suffer due to less availability and high prices of onion and in case bumper crop of onion, the onion growers may suffer as they may not get remunerative price for their produce.

#### **Settlement of reimbursement of losses**

3063. SHRI SHARAD ANANTRAO JOSHI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that nonsettlement of demand for reimbursement of losses amounting to rupees 30,000 crores in cotton procurement has been a contributory factor to the large number of suicides taking place in Vidarbha by cotton producing farmers; and

(b) whether the Ministry assures that the matter of reimbursement would be settled before the commencement of the cotton purchasing season this year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS):  
(a) and (b) The payment to the cotton growers in the State of Maharashtra under Minimum Support Price (MSP) has already been made and dues are pending.

#### **Potential of employment generation in agriculture sector**

†3064. SHRI AMIR ALAM KHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether employment generation avenues have declined in agriculture sector;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government has worked on any action plan for the creation of additional opportunities of employment in agriculture sector; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF. K.V. THOMAS):  
(a) and (b) As per Population Census data released by the Registrar General of India, the number of persons engaged in agriculture sector comprising cultivators and agricultural labourers has increased from 210.68 million in 1991 to 234.10 million in 2001, registering an increase of 11.11% in ten years. According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), (61st Round) as per Usual Status, the estimated number of workers employed in agriculture, has increased from 239.73 million in 1999-2000 (55th round) to 258.59 million in 2004-05 (61st round), showing an increase of 7.86% in five years.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.