

Textile Ministry keen to improve jute quality, boost diversified products

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The Union Textiles Ministry proposes to widen the scope of Jute I-CARE (Improved Cultivation and Advanced Retting Exercise) programme to improve the quality of raw jute and farmers' yield in India as part of jute product diversification drive.

The programme was launched by the Agriculture Ministry in 2015 as a pilot scheme in five jute growing States, including West Bengal, which produces 80 per cent of total raw jute supplies.

It aims to reduce the time of retting jute fibre from 22 days to eight or nine days by using specific micro-organisms. Farmers were offered certified seeds at 50 per cent subsidy, farm implements and training on improved agronomics.

Though India is the world's largest raw jute producer, 60 per cent of the produce is rated as average (CD-5) or below, which is

not suitable for producing diversified products. With 75 per cent of raw jute supplied to mills enjoying purchase protection from the Centre under a mandatory packaging order, the sector suffers from limited interest in diversifying jute goods beyond sacking products.

Quality push

While phasing out of the protection remains a debatable issue, the Textiles Ministry is keen to increase supply of better-quality raw jute to encourage production of diversified commodities.

The Ministry recently held a meeting with the Union Agriculture Ministry to discuss ways and means to involve State governments in the project and to expand the scope of the programme.

"The quality of raw jute should be improved to encourage production of diversified jute products," Textiles Minister Smriti Irani told *BusinessLine* on

the sidelines of a recent conference in Delhi on Indo-Bangladesh co-operation, organised by the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies.

Drawing a parallel with Bangladesh, she said: "India tops in raw jute production but, Bangladesh earns six times more export revenue."

Bangladeshi jute mills do not enjoy any purchase protection from the government. Nearly 80 per cent of the country's 10-12 lakh tonnes of jute products are exported. A sizeable chunk (150,000 tonnes) of total exports is shipped to India.

Responding to questions about the anti-dumping duty imposed by India on Bangladeshi jute products, Irani said it was imposed following due procedure and after one-and-a-half-year-long enquiry proceedings.

According to sources, Bangladesh was exporting jute products to India at prices lower than its domestic rates.