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Vilasrao package for stricken state farmers

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MUMBAI: On the eve of the winter session of the Maharashtra Legislature that will commence in Nagpur on Monday, Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh indicated that special measures will be taken to lower the interest rates of farm loans, which is presently higher than that of home and car loans.

This will not be done in isolation but as part of a comprehensive package that government will be announcing during this session. CM has also shown willingness to accept a recent report by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) that has concluded that till December 2004, as many as 644 farmers have committed suicide because of indebtedness.

Till date, government has been claiming that suicides were not because of the indebtedness but due to various other reasons like critical illness and addiction to liquor. It is only after Bombay High Court-commissioned study conducted by TISS proved otherwise, government accepted that debt was causing the suicides.

Majority of these suicides have been recorded in Yavatmal, Wardha, Akola, Amravati, Washim and Buldhana districts of Amravati revenue division in Vidarbha region. However, other revenue divisions like Nagpur, Nashik and Aurangabad too have recorded some suicides in the past few years.

DNA, in its issue dated September 15, 2005, had first reported a spate of suicides in the Vidarbha region following which a team from the National Commission for Farmers, including its head noted agriculturalist M S Swaminathan, had visited the region.

Giving a broad outline of the package that government might announce, CM said various measures like direct financial assistance to the tune of Rs 1 lakh to the family of the deceased, lowering of interest rate of crop loan and making available soft loans to farmers for doing some business in farm related activities, would be adopted by the government.

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