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PM seeks greater synergy between agricultural, water policies

Voicing concern over climatic distortions adversely affecting ground water table and impacting crop productivity, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday sought greater synergy between agricultural and water policies.

"This year we had floods in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. At the same time around 300 districts of the country were declared as drought affected. These imbalances will only intensify with climatic distortions. Moreover, there are concerns that climate change may also adversely impact ground water table and its quality, affecting crop productivity," he said.

Improvement in irrigation is key not only to step up agricultural productivity but also the strategy for sustainable water use, he said.

"There has to be greater synergy between our water and agricultural policies with a view to securing food supply," the Prime Minister said.

Addressing the inaugural session of the 5th Asian Regional Conference of International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage here, Singh said that in order to address the complex inter-relationships between different sectors of the economy, the government has formed the National Water Commission, which is among the eight missions part of National Action Plan on Climate Change.

With climate change set to have unpredictable consequences on water regime, the action plan, he said, aims at increasing water use efficiency by 20 per cent and promote basin level integrated water resources management.

Singh said the target of doubling annual growth rate of agriculture to four per cent during the 11th Plan is the top priority of his government.

"To achieve this, we are sharply increasing public investment in agriculture. The most important area for investment in agriculture relates to the provision of water and its efficient use. In fact, we hope to be able to add 16 million hectares to the irrigated area during the Plan period," he said.

Noting that efficient use of crop water can increase the gross irrigated area either by increasing the irrigated cropped area or the irrigation intensity, the Prime Minister said the second green revolution could come from technologies developed in the private sector.

"It is essential that private investment and innovation be incorporated with a broader vision and strategy of development in the agriculture and water sectors," Singh said.

Describing farmers as principal stakeholders in agricultural water management initiatives, the Prime Minister said, "Water related issues need to be addressed with full involvement of local people and taking into account the local conditions. Farmers should be consulted in any agricultural water management initiatives. Women too play a key role in food production activities in many countries. A special effort should be made to involve them in decision making."

Minister for Water Resources Pawan Kumar Bansal was also present on the occasion.