

CM SEEKS SPECIAL PACKAGE FOR STATE FROM THE FINANCE COMMISSION

ASSERTS PUNJAB SHOULD BE REWARDED FOR SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION IN MAKING COUNTRY SELF RELIANT IN FOOD PRODUCTION AND SACRIFICES IN BOTH PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE ERA

DEMANDS FUNDS WORTH RS 1,32, 247 CRORE FROM THE FINANCE COMMISSION TO GIVE IMPETUS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE BATS FOR MAJOR PUSH TO CROP DIVERSIFICATION FOR BAILING OUT FARMERS FROM ONGOING CRISIS

Chandigarh, July 22:

Making a strong case based on financial prudence and facts, the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann today sought a special package for the holistic development of the state from the team of 16th Finance Commission, currently on a visit to the state.

The Chief Minister, while welcoming the Commission including Chairman Dr Arvind Panagariya, Members Ajay Narayan Jha, Annie George Mathew, Dr Manoj Panda and Dr Soumyakanti Ghosh besides Secretary Ritvik Pandey, said that due to immense contribution of Punjab in making country self sufficient in food production, obtaining and preserving independence, the state should be given a special economic package. He said that Punjabis have already carved a niche for themselves in every country across the globe and the package will further give impetus to economic growth of the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann expressed hope that the Finance Commission will give a sympathetic view to the genuine demands of the state government and generously allot funds to Punjab.

The Chief Minister sought funds worth Rs 1,32, 247 crore from the Finance Commission to give impetus to the development of the state. He said that this includes development funds worth Rs 75,000 crore, Rs 17,950 crore for Agriculture and Paddy Diversification, Rs 5025 crore for Stubble Burning, Rs 8846 crore for tackling narco terrorism and drug abuse besides Rs 6000 crore for Industry Revitalization. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that apart from it Rs 9426 crore should be given for Urban Local Bodies and Rs 10,000 crore for Rural Local Bodies.

The Chief Minister welcomed the Commission to the land of great Gurus, saints, seers and the martyrs. He said that Punjab is known as the food bowl of the country as the hard working farmers of the state had contributed immensely in making the country self-reliant in food production. Likewise, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that being the sword arm of the country the state has made maximum sacrifices during the freedom struggle of the country and now to defend the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country in the post-independence period.

The Chief Minister said that the state government has embarked on a journey of profound reforms aimed at bringing efficiency, transparent governance, and robust economic growth to Punjab. He said that the state government has undertaken a slew of pro-people reforms designed to improve the lives of our citizens. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that with improved sustainability and self-sufficiency, the state has been doing everything in its power to mobilize resources.

The Chief Minister said that in the last two years alone, the major heads of State's Own Tax Revenue have witnessed an impressive growth by surpassing national growth rates. He said that GST revenue has gone up by 33% and Excise alone has gone up by more than 50%. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this has been possible with robust administration and honest governance, which the state government has provided from day one.

The Chief Minister said that the state Government is also reviewing various expenditure items and looking at rationalising unproductive expenditure. He said that through solarization, the state government intends to rationalize power subsidies in the long-term and improve the reliability of our power infrastructure. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that Punjab's problems are

not new and have a legacy nature adding that many of these problems came into existence due to ill-advised political decisions of previous Governments just before the election days.

Citing examples the Chief Minister said that CCL Loan of Rs 30,584 Crore that was taken in March, 2017 or substantial untargeted subsidies given right before elections in 2021 has ruptured the state's economy. He said that the repercussions of these actions are still being felt today, as we strive to achieve financial consolidation amidst these inherited challenges. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government is making concerted efforts for carving out Rangla Punjab for which support of the people of state is must.

The Chief Minister said that in addition to legacy problems, the state has unique challenges currently not being faced by any other state. He said that being a border state, Punjab is incidental to narco-terrorism and hostile border activity due to which a large number of Police force is recruited. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the Punjab Police is defending the unity and integrity of the country by manning more than 500 kilometres of the international border.

The Chief Minister urged the Finance Commission to magnanimously allot funds to the state for modernization of the state Police force so that national duty can be discharged efficiently. He also said that the state government has taken a path breaking initiative of constituting first of its kind Sadak Surakhya Force (SSF) in the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this force has played a key role in saving more than 1000 precious lives after its launch in February 2024. The Chief Minister said that the hard working and resilient farmers of the state had produced food for the country by over exploiting its only available natural resources in terms of fertile soil and water. He said that almost all the blocks of the state have gone in black zone as far as the groundwater is concerned due to which the water of the state is rapidly depleting. Showing deep concern over the gravity of the emerging situation following the fast depleting water table, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that it is really pathetic to learn that the same high powered motors that are used to extract oil in Dubai and other Gulf nations are being used for gushing out ground water in the state.

Chief Minister said that the only way out to save the water of state is to promote crop diversification adding that it is a matter of immense pride and satisfaction that the Finance Commission has recently accepted the proposal of state government to incentivize diversification by providing Rs 17,500 per hectare to farmers for other crops adding that this will go a long way in breaking the two-crop cycle. He said that Punjab Agriculture University had pioneered the green revolution in the country and it is now headed by world acclaimed Tissue culture expert, who can play a great role in promotion of crop diversification. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that to save the groundwater, the state government is ensuring promoting usage of canal water adding that as compared to earlier 30%, now Punjab is using 70% of canal water for irrigation.

The Chief Minister said that this will save ground water on one hand and the power on other hand thereby reducing burden on the state exchequer. He said that in the industrial sector big industrial giants like Tata steel and others are making a beeline to invest in the state due to investment friendly policies of the state government. However, Bhagwant Singh Mann bemoaned that the tax holiday in other states is acting as an impediment to the industrial growth of the state as industrial units are shifting there.

The Chief Minister said that the state government has introduced several out of the box ideas and has introduced unique colour coded stamp papers, which is a step forward towards ushering a new era of Industrial Revolution in the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that Punjab is the first state to introduce green colored stamp papers to facilitate the entrepreneurs for setting up their units thereby giving much needed fillip to industrial growth of the state. He described it as a revolutionary step aimed at promoting ease of doing business for the entrepreneurs desirous of setting up their units in the state.

The Chief Minister urged the Finance Commission to recognize the unique challenges faced by Punjab and extend the necessary support to enable the state to overcome these hurdles. He said that the help of the commission is crucial for Punjab to make a significant improvement in our state's finances and to continue its journey towards sustainable development and prosperity for all. Bhagwant Singh Mann asserted that Punjab has always risen to the occasion, no matter how tough the circumstances were.

The Chief Minister said that in the face of adversity, Punjab has always come out stronger than ever and we will continue this glorious tradition. He said that with the support and guidance of the Commission the state government will revitalize Punjab's economy by making it more resilient and capable of fulfilling its potential. Bhagwant Singh Mann reiterated that the state government is committed for restoring the pristine glory of the state and no stone will be left unturned for this noble cause.