

## Sugar politics erupts in Maharashtra; Farmers begin 48-hour bandh

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The 48-hour strike in the sugarcane belt of the state called by Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) to demand for higher price for sugarcane started today. SSS has blamed the state government for its failure to listen to the woes of sugarcane farmers which has resulted in this bandh call. SSS alleged that most of the sugar factories in the state are run by politicians from the Congress, NCP and the BJP and they are depriving the farmers of their rights. It has demanded the government to announce Rs. 3000 per tonne as Minimum Support Price (MSP) for sugarcane this year. Last year, the prices ranged from Rs. 2700 in west Maharashtra to Rs. 2,300 in the Marathwada region. The farmers have been agitating for better price of their crops, but the state government has failed to arrive at any consensus in the matter. Cooperative sugarcane factories have expressed their inability to give the price asked by farmers which they say is way beyond their means. The sugarcane rich parts of Maharashtra last year also had erupted in violence over the issue, with two farmers losing their lives in police firing. Many state transport buses were also torched and life had come to a halt in those parts. With the deadlock continuing, only 96 units of the 170 in the State have begun crushing operations. While in Uttar Pradesh, the deadlock between sugar mill owners and government is threatening to impact the production of sugar. Crucial talks to break the logjam over cane crushing operations failed yesterday, with sugar mill owners refusing to run their plants at current high sugarcane prices. While the Centre fixes a fair and remunerative price (FRP) that mills have to pay growers, States came up with an advised price higher than FRP. In Uttar Pradesh, the State Advised Price was raised from Rs 125 a quintal in 2007-08 to Rs 280 in 2012-13 by the Mayawati government. This year, the Akhilesh Yadav Government has kept it unchanged following pressure from the mills.

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