

Ban on imports of soya, green gram, cowpea in the offing

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The Government is contemplating a ban on the import of crop varieties, soy, green gram and cowpea in a move to place agriculture development in the Eastern Province on fast track and to benefit all crop farmers by ensuring that they get a fair price for their crops, Nation Building Minister Susantha PUNCHINILAME said.

The Government banned the import of corn about two weeks ago on the instructions of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a similar move aiming to uplift the corn farmers. The ban was announced by Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Bandula GUNAWARDENA.

Nation Building Minister

Susantha PUNCHINILAME yesterday told the *Daily News*, President Rajapaksa has instructed them to place agriculture development in the Eastern Province on fast track with the people's participation.

He said, the farmers of the Eastern Provinces have cultivated 150,000 hectares of land which have neither seen plowshares nor hoes over the past 20 years under the rule of terrorism.

"Action has been placed to boost agriculture in the area on a firm footing on the President's advice in addition to developing infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, houses and reconstruction of bridges," he said.

"It is important to ensure that the people in the

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region, who have been hard hit by terrorism for years, get a fair price for their efforts made in the process of agriculture," he pointed out.

"It is expected that they too will get a better price for their efforts if the imports of these crops are curbed," he said and added that the ban on soy, green

gram and cowpea would take place within the next few months."

The Government banned the imports of corn with the lands under cultivation having increased from 43,000 hectares to 61,000 hectares.

"We have built 17 bridges, constructed roads and given away houses to 325,000 people with the help of the National Engineering Research and Development (NERD)," he said.

"International organizations are also helping us. NECDAF will develop the Cotbay fisheries harbour in Trincomalee in the next two months. Presently we have started freshwater fisheries because of humanitarian operations in the Vanni," he added.