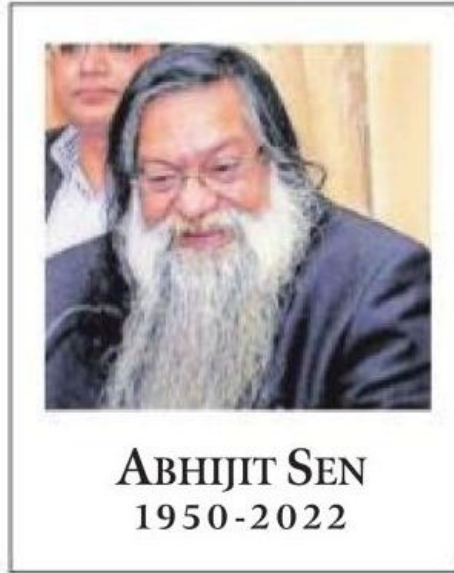


# Advocate of MSP, PDS: Agri economist Abhijit Sen no more

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RENOWNED AGRICULTURE economist and former member of the Planning Commission under the UPA government, Abhijit Sen, passed away on Monday.

The 72-year-old, who led the Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) as chairman during the first Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government, authored the report of the High Level Committee on Long Term Grain Policy submitted in July 2000. The landmark report recommended that the CACP be made an empowered statutory body and its fixation of minimum support price, or MSP, (which the Centre was bound to accept) be based on the 'C2' cost of production. This recommendation — to include all paid-out cultivation expenses in cash and in kind, plus the imputed value of unpaid family labour and rent/interest forgone on owned land and fixed capital assets — paved the way for the 'Swamina-



than formula' that captured the imagination of farmer groups.

The MS Swaminathan-headed National Commission on Farmers, that gave its final report in April 2006, recommended that MSPs of crops be at least 50 per cent more than the 'C2' costs.

The Abhijit Sen-committee had, however, proposed that comprehensive 'C2' costs of only the efficient producing regions be considered. It also favoured a universal public distribution system (PDS) with uniform central issue prices for rice and wheat, while doing away with 'below

poverty line' and 'above poverty line' categories. This went on to be incorporated in the UPA government's National Food Security Act of 2013, which now provides wheat and rice to over a third of India's population at a uniform Rs 2 and Rs 3 a kg price.

Apart from policymaking, Sen had a distinguished academic career with a PhD in Economics at the University of Cambridge in 1981. The topic of his thesis was 'The agrarian constraint to economic development: The case of India'. He joined the Centre for Economics and Planning at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1985. This centre, which had other well-known scholars like Prabhat and Utsa Patnaik, Krishna Bharadwaj, Amit Bhaduri, Deepak Nayyar, CP Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh (Sen's wife) — earned a reputation for critical economic thinking with a strong Left-liberal orientation that was backed by quantitative research.

Sen is survived by his wife Jayati and daughter Jahnvi, who is a deputy editor at *The Wire*.