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Biotech, a boon to farmers and the country: Vice-Chancellor

Staff Reporter

COIMBATORE: India is self-sufficient in food grain production with a total production of 234 million tonnes. Also, Bt cotton has enabled India become a potential cotton-exporting country. This has been possible with use of biotechnology which has helped farmers and the country, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) P. Murugesu Boopathi said here recently.

Speaking at a training programme on 'Bioinformatics and Tools for Genomics Research' organised by the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, at the TNAU, he said that India still faced the challenge of meeting the food grain requirements of the rapidly growing population which was about to cross 1.3 billion. "While globally India is ranked high in production of rice, fruits, vegetables and cotton, in respect of pulses and oilseeds, the situation is not favourable. There is a dire need to increase the production which is possible only through bio-technological tools," Mr. Boopathi said.

Pointing out that Bt cotton had made a huge impact on the country, he said the cotton area had doubled owing to introduction of Bt cotton since 2002. As a result, cotton production had jumped from about 15 million bales to 33 million bales.

TNAU had developed four Bt brinjal varieties by incorporating the Bt gene inside the brinjal varieties, viz., CO2, KKM1, MDU1 and PLR1. As they were not hybrids, farmers were at an advantage. The university had also released the Anna 4 rice variety with drought tolerance

capacity, capable of yielding 3.7 tonnes per hectare on an average. This three-fold increase was made possible only through effective application of biotechnology tools.

R. Samiyappan, Director of the Centre for Plant Molecular Biology, TNAU, said the biotechnology industry growth was pegged at about 30-40 per cent at the national level indicating its enormous potential

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Interest on co-op. farm loans may be cut

S. Rajendran

Budget unlikely to have fresh taxes on goods purchased by common man

— Photo: V. Sreenivasa Murthy



all set:Staff of the Vidhana Soudha cleaning

Bangalore: The sixth budget to be presented in the Legislative Assembly by Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa, who holds the Finance portfolio, is expected to be markedly different from the earlier budgets. The interest on cooperative farm loans is likely to be reduced to 1 per cent from 3 per cent.

Sources in the State Secretariat told The Hindu that this reduction would be one of the salient features of the State Budget for 2011-12, which is being termed as an “agri-budget”.

It will be first time that the Chief Minister will present a budget in two volumes, with the first part being dedicated to agriculture, horticulture, irrigation and allied activities, and the second part

with allocations for other departments. Like budgets of the last few years it is likely to be a surplus one.

The Government will seek a vote-on-account for the first four months. The budget will come up for discussion and its passage will be only in July.

If the previous governments reduced the rate of interest on farm loans from 11 per cent to 7 per cent over a period of four years, Mr. Yeddyurappa initially reduced the interest rate to 5 per cent, then to 3 per cent, and now may further lower it. It is expected to be a populist budget with no fresh taxes imposed on goods and items purchased by the common people. It is aimed at enabling the ruling party to switch over to an election mode if the circumstances call for it.

The Chief Minister, who spent nearly two months with senior officials, including Chief Secretary S.V. Ranganath, in the preparation of the budget, is stated to have elicited the views of experts.

It is said the budget for 2011-12 will be the State's first exclusive "agri-budget", outlining the initiatives for agriculture and horticulture sectors, apart from irrigation.

Interestingly, the State Budget is being presented ahead of the Union Budget, although it is not the first time that it is being done so.

15-day session

The presentation of the budget will mark the commencement of a 15-day session, scheduled to conclude on March 17. Unlike the first legislature session in January, which was boycotted by the Opposition resulting in the Government winding up the session four days ahead of the schedule, the ensuing session is expected to enjoy the attendance by the Opposition. However, the Government will have a trying time in tackling the Opposition, particularly Congress leader Siddaramaiah, who has presented seven budgets when he held the Finance portfolio in the Janata Dal and the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition governments.

Speaker K.G. Bopaiah has sought the cooperation of all legislators for the smooth functioning of the House.

For Tamil Nadu farmers, amla cultivation bears fruit

Special Correspondent

In 2000, it was grown in a mere 46 hectares in State Cultivation peaked during 2010-11 in 9,020 hectares

SALEM: The commercial cultivation of the Indian Gooseberry (*Emblica Officinalis*), popularly known as Amla, is fast gaining ground in Tamil Nadu.

Amla, called 'Nelli' in Tamil, took commercial roots in the State a decade ago. It was a humble beginning then for this wild fruit at a time when other crops such as mangoes, citrus etc were accorded top priority.

In 2000, it was grown in a mere 46 hectares in the State with 5684 tonnes of production. A series of awareness programmes, seminars and workshops, especially by Salem-based The Aonla (Amla) Growers Association of India, has started bearing fruits.

Association president Sreekant S Mehta, who has been spearheading the 'Amla Movement' in Tamil Nadu said, "It has now been a focus crop of the National Horticulture Mission, which offers many schemes to the farmers to promote the commercial cultivation of amla. The crop which was rain-fed earlier, now has been brought under micro-irrigation. The use of chemicals will cause adverse reaction since it was being consumed for its medicinal and therapeutic values."

Mr. Mehta has been instrumental for successfully hosting three national-level workshops and seminars on amla cultivation, twice at Salem where the production was high and one at Madurai, mainly to woo the farmers and stakeholders in the cultivation of this fruit.

He said that in 2003, the area under cultivation was 2,143 hectares with a production capacity of 30002 tonnes. And in 2007-08, it had extended to 6,000 hectares for a 1.03 lakh tonnes production. The cultivation has peaked during 2010-11 with 9,020 hectares for a production of 1.50 lakh metric tonnes. "The average production worked up to 6.66 tonnes per acre and the total annual revenue came to a staggering Rs 270 crore. "Tamil Nadu farmers would soon reap Rs 1000 crore worth of production next year," he said.

The farmers in almost all the districts, especially in Salem, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, Tuticorin, Erode, Sivagangai, Dindigul and Udumalpet have gone in for amla cultivation since "the demand was huge." At the recent South Zone Silver Jubilee Conference held at the natural environ of 'The Nursery,' situated at the foothills of Yercaud near here, a large number of farmers and stakeholders gathered and discussed amla's potential for export.

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Rs.2 a kg ration rice for all cardholders

Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan on Wednesday announced that the scheme for supply of ration rice at Rs.2 a kg would be extended to all cardholders, including APL cardholders, subject to certain conditions. People with high incomes and landholdings would not be eligible.

Briefing the media on the Cabinet decisions, the Chief Minister said the Cabinet had approved the recommendations of the Ninth Pay Revision Commission with changes proposed by the Cabinet subcommittee which scrutinised the proposals.

He said government employees and teachers would receive salaries based on the new pay scales from February. The revision would be effective from July 1, 2009. However, arrears from July 2009 to January 31, 2011 would be merged with the Provident Fund.

The Cabinet had decided to introduce pension schemes for the employees of the Regional Cancer Centre, Malabar Cancer Centre and the Centre for Development Studies. The pension

age of the Kerala State Warehousing Corporation and the Kerala Shipping and Inland Navigation Corporation would be raised to 58 years.

Mr. Achuthanandan announced that the procurement price of paddy would be increased to Rs.14 a kg against the current procurement price of Rs.13 a kg. When the LDF government came to power, the procurement price was Rs.7 a kg.

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Adopt modern cultivation technologies to get maximum profit, farmers told

Staff Reporter

Overwhelming response from farmers for Rajarajan 1000

— Photo: N. Bashkaran



For their benefit:Collector V. Arun Roy (right) giving away agricultural inputs to a beneficiary at the Farmers' Day celebrations at the Regional Research Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University at Paiyur in Krishnagiri district on Wednesday.

KRISHNAGIRI: Farmers should adopt modern technologies in cultivating food crops to get maximum profit with minimum investment, said Collector V. Arun Roy on Wednesday.

Presiding over the Farmers' Day celebrations at the Regional Research Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University at Paiyur here, Mr. Roy said according to world renowned economists, the food prices would go up in another 20 years.

Hence, the farmers should adopt modern technologies in cultivating crops to get maximum profit.

The new rice cultivation technology, 'Rajarajan 1000', introduced by the State government, had received overwhelming response from the farmers, as the yield per hectare was much higher than the conventional method of paddy cultivation.

The Collector advised the farmers to cultivate crops taking into consideration the available soil, weather condition and water availability. Using drip/sprinkler irrigation methods would help reduce water usage, he added.

K. Rajan, Joint Director, Agriculture Department, said the area covered under the 'Rajarajan 1000' method in the district was around 13,400 hectares. Subramani, a farmer from A. Kothapalli, got the maximum yield of 13,138 kg of rice under the method.

Many farmers, who adopted this method, were getting 30 to 40 per cent more yield, he added.

A.K. Mani, Head and Professor, Regional Research Station, Paiyur, spoke.

On account of the Farmers' Day celebrations, ten stalls were put up by the various agriculture-related departments on the RRS Paiyur campus.

Various equipment utilised for crop cultivation such as Double Disk Harrow, Bund Farmer, Broadbed Burrow, Konoweeder and a steam boiler to boil turmeric developed by the Dr. Perumal KVK were on display at the stalls. At the end of the inaugural session, some of the farmers were given agriculture inputs and equipment.

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Agriculture department's advice to farmers

R Vimal Kumar

Tirupur: Farmers opting for maize, pulses and sunflower in the summer-irrigated season starting this month end could expect high returns for their investment.

This is the forecast by the Department of Agriculture officials here based on the findings of the market update assessment carried out by them recently. “We are advising the farmers to opt for the said three crops based on water availability in the wells and the soil conditions in the tracts following the recent spells of rain across the district,” Deputy Director of Agriculture P. Santhanakrishnan told The Hindu.

To ensure high yields, the farmers needed to adopt pre-sowing treatment of soil and seeds. For maize, the cultivators should add bio-fertilisers like azospirillum into the soil just before sowing to fix the atmospheric nitrogen and make it available to the plants in the growing stage. The same treatment could be carried out by the farmers who wanted to raise sunflower.

In the case of pulses, rhizobium culture could be mixed with the seeds before sowing so that the symbiotic bacteria could take the nitrogen to the root nodules of the plant and ensure its good growth. Mr. Santhakrishnan said that the farmers should get their soil samples tested at the mobile soil testing laboratory set up by the department in the district so as to take corrective steps pertaining to salinity, alkalinity, nutrient status and physical properties, if deficiencies were detected. “Soil testing plays a paramount role while raising the crops like maize, sunflower and pulses,” he added. The department also wanted the farmers to opt for weather-based insurance scheme, extended by the Central and State governments, to safeguard themselves from any loss due to adverse weather conditions.

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Effective response to climate change threat stressed

Staff Reporter



Subodh K. Sharma, Adviser, Ministry of Environment and Forests, speaking at the stakeholders' conference on ClimaRice in Coimbatore recently.

COIMBATORE: The greatest challenge that mankind is facing is climate change. It is a major threat that is affecting all spheres of economic activity. Effectively responding to climate change will be in two ways, Subodh K. Sharma, Adviser, Ministry of Environment and Forests, said here recently.

Inaugurating a stakeholders' conference on ClimaRice at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, he said the response could either be by reducing causes that bring about climate change or by adopting strategies to combat the changes that were likely to occur as a result of climate change.

One of the projects dealt with sustainable agriculture. It studied the proposal to minimise losses that occurred due to temperature rise.

At the State level, the Governments were instructed by the Central Government to prepare a State Action Plan for climate change which had to be sent to the Centre by March 31.

The Plan would be reviewed and acted upon based on the priority, Mr. Sharma said.

To give an impetus to research on climate change at the national level, the Indian Network of Climate Change under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment and Forests would be set up.

“P. Subbian, Registrar of TNAU, said the Agro Climate Research Centre of the university was carrying out a collaborative research ‘ClimaRice’ with the goal of sustaining rice productivity amid changing climate. It was a unique project that integrated all aspects of climate change in agriculture including adaptation, mitigation and socio-economic components.

Ole Rieder Bergum, First Secretary, The Royal Norwegian Embassy, said farmers faced a problem where rice was being produced in places where water was scarce and where there were high incidences of pest and diseases..

Organic farming

Photo: T. Vijaya Kumar



Secretary of NRI Educational Institutions, Alapati Rajendra Prasad shows farm grown capsicum at a press conference in Guntur on Wednesday.

'No plan for meters on farm pumpsets'

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: Finance Minister Anam Ramanarayan Reddy has asserted that the State government has no plans to instal meters on agricultural pumpsets to gauge consumption by farmers.

Addressing a press conference, the Minister said the government would, however, focus on providing the benefit of free power to genuine farmers, which would enable significant reduction in line losses and pilferage. It was proposed to streamline the process in this direction after the unique identification number, Aadhar cards, were issued to farmers.

Mr. Ramanarayan Reddy was replying to queries on the marginal reduction in allocation of subsidy amount to the power sector at a press conference in the Assembly on Wednesday. He said there were no plans to cut down subsidies to any sector and the government tried to strike a balance between different sectors.

Mr. Reddy said the protest in the House during the presentation of the budget was a new experience and no Finance Minister had witnessed such scenes in the past. "This is a totally new experience and my successors will hopefully learn from this," he said.

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AITUC activists protest against rise in food prices

Special Correspondent



Curb price rise: A large number of activists under the banner of All-India Trade Union Congress staged a demonstration in Mysore on Wednesday against the rise in prices of essential commodities.

MYSORE: Activists belonging to All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and supported by people from various organizations staged a protest in the city on Wednesday against the spiralling price of essential commodities.

The protest was part of the nation-wide agitation and 'Parliament chalo' convened by various trade union organisations including the CITU, the AITUC and the INTUC. The demonstrators assembled at K.R. Circle and raised slogans against the Government and its economic policies. They flayed it for pursuing 'anti-labour' policies. Expressing concern over the rise in

unemployment levels and increase in the violations of rights of the workers, the activists drew the attention of the Government to the plight of the workers in the unorganised sector.

The AITUC, CITU and other trade unions said though the working class in the country have protested against the economic policies of the Government including the abolition of the administered price mechanism with regard to petroleum, the decision makers had persisted with the policies which has affected the living conditions of the salaried class and the working class people across the country. The Government has failed to stem the unemployment rate and was silent on the practice of employing contract labour while a majority of workers responsible for implementing key programmes like the anganwadi workers, were eking out bare minimum wages, said the trade union activists.

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State intent on boosting pulse production

T. Ramakrishnan

Since 2001-2002, the State's productivity in pulses has been around 375 kg per hectare

Accelerated Pulses Production Programme being implemented in eight districts

Productivity of Pulses	
Year	Productivity (Kg per hectare)
2001-2002	395
2002-2003	356
2003-2004	374
2004-2005	367
2005-2006	337
2006-2007	541
2007-2008	303
2008-2009	312
2009-2010	381

Source: State Agriculture Department

TIRUPATTUR (Vellore District): Tamil Nadu, which has been lagging behind the rest of the country in the production and productivity of pulses, is making all-out efforts to catch up with others.

Since 2001-2002, the State's productivity in pulses has been around 375 kg per hectare. The area coverage has been 5.7 lakh hectares.

The production has been of the order of two lakh tonnes annually.

However, at the national level, the productivity is nearly 660 kg per hectare and the State's contribution in pulses production is a little more than one per cent.

But, Tamil Nadu is known as one of the major consumer of pulses. For example, the State government is supplying through the special public distribution system approximately 14,000 tonnes of toor dhal and 10,000 tonnes of urad dhal every month.

Given the fact that Tamil Nadu is a pulse-deficit State, the Union and State governments are seeking to promote the production of pulses under the Accelerated Pulses Production

Programme (APPP) as part of the National Food Security Mission (NFSM). Farmers are given inputs free and technical advice on nutrient and pest management.

Fully funded by the Central government, the APPP is being implemented in eight districts, of which four are in the northern belt. Except Vellore where red gram is being raised, black gram is produced in other seven districts – Tiruvannamalai, Cuddalore, Villupuram, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Thanjavur and Tuticorin. The Union government has sanctioned about Rs. 7.1 crore.

Besides, the production of pulses is encouraged through the National Agriculture Development Programme, under which Rs. 2.7 crore has been sanctioned for the production of red gram.

Yield increase

Thanks to such programmes, the State hopes to double its productivity this time, a senior official of the State Agriculture Department says. As of now, in the demonstration fields of Tirupattur block, the yield has gone up to around 870 kg per hectare from 465 kg per hectare, which was the previous year's average.

Compared to 2009-2010, the State-wide coverage of pulses this year is about one lakh hectares more.

At present, it is 8.4 lakh hectares. Eventually, the State will reach about 9.5 lakh hectares.

The official explains that traditionally, farmers of the State do not raise pulses as a pure crop. They have been treating pulses as an inter-crop or a bund crop or rice fallow. This is why the productivity has been low.

Now, under the Central government-funded programmes, the authorities are providing quality inputs and helping the farmers with their expertise on pest and nutrient management. For every hectare covered under the demonstration project of APPP, inputs of 20 kg are given to the farmers at a cost of Rs. 5,400. Also, the support is given to them on a cluster basis.

The farmers are encouraged to form groups so that they get better returns, while dealing with traders. It is on these lines that the APPP is being implemented over two units of 1,000 hectares in Tirupattur and Kandhili blocks of the Vellore district.

Pointing out that red gram is essentially raised as a rain-fed crop in districts such as Vellore, the official adds that the plan is to cover the crop under micro irrigation.

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Hybrid crops that breed true, from cloned seeds

M.A. SRIRAM



Plants have for the first time been cloned as seeds. The research by scientists at the University of California, Davis, is a major step towards making hybrid crop plants that can retain favourable traits from generation to generation.

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FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

Why agriculture policies are outdated and contradictory

M.J. PRABU

The Government does not bother to know what crops are being sown

-Photo M.J. Prabu



Helping hand: Valli, CEO, Efarm interacting with a papaya grower.

“India's daily turnover from vegetables and fruits could be easily about Rs. 275 crores (US\$ 59 million). The estimated cost of ‘wastage’ per day, is around Rs. 130 crores (US\$ 27 million). In summary, it's a lot bigger than some of the Indian IT sector's daily turnover”, says Mr. Venkat Subramanian, Founder and Managing Director, Matchbox Solutions, a company that uses technology to solve critical issues in agriculture.

Efarm, one such solution, uses technology to provide supply chain efficiency for procuring and delivering fruits and vegetables grown on rural farms.

“And what makes it worse is that agriculture is being always run by uneducated, rural people lacking advanced technologies. Whereas the Indian IT industry employs the cream of the world,” he adds.

Short supply

Food, shelter, and clothing, are considered the basic things any growing economy cannot do without.

“Of these, the only sector perennially going to be in short supply is food — for the simple reason, people are quitting agriculture and moving to cities. Most important, the youth do not fancy an agri-career,” he emphasises.

Absence of valid data to provide a forecast for this industry correctly makes things more difficult.

“Many term agriculture as a risky business, but can you name any one industry devoid of risk? Typically high risk implies high return. But how come people perceive agriculture to be a ‘high-risk, low-return’ venture?” he wonders.

According to Ms. Srivalli, CEO, risks and unpredictability are part of any industry. Compared to such ‘man-made’ disasters, the agri-economy endures mostly the ‘natural’ ones that are far more predictable.

All the odds

“In spite of all the odds stacked against a farmer, it is surprising that we are actually able to get food on our plates every day. Today, the farm price for tomatoes hovers around Rs 5/kg.

“In the city, whole sale is being priced at Rs.9/kg and in retail it may be between Rs 17-20/kg. On an average, the markup in vegetables is 5 to 6 times,” she explains.

In every industry, the prices are always being driven by customer demand and tastes. But in India, it is the suppliers - middlemen - who control the the agriculture sector and customers face the brunt.

Need assistance

“Ironically a rather Utopian concept prevails in our country's agriculture system — a farmer can do all these tasks himself, from farm to fork.

“Farmers need assistance in planning cultivation, marketing produce, managing finances, but there is no one to help. Agriculture institutions and many NGOs only assist cultivation, and aren't competent to handle management-related tasks,” says Ms. Valli.

Confusing

Farm policies are confusing and contradictory, according to Mr. Venkat.

“There are Central departments involved, but States control their local implementation.

There are innumerable ministries and schemes that are often redundant and over-lapping.

The prime vote bank being villagers — it is a major turf war for several vested interests,” he adds.

Overlapping

Instead of letting such contradictions and overlapping continue to dog agriculture, the Centre and States can sit together to make it a complete, comprehensive package for farmers with a seamless implementation mechanism in place.

So how can this be changed?

“Most government statistics on agricultural sector are at least five years old, and often projected from the last census. Absence of a proper system to track the exact cultivation patterns, makes things difficult.

“And in the name of improving cultivation the Government pumps in several thousand crores, not bothering to know what crops are being sown in different regions” asserts Ms. Valli.

“Be a conscious consumer. Ask questions. Watch the price bill carefully for signs of price rise. Find where the products came from (in Chennai, they may say the carrot comes from Nilgiris, real Nilgiris vegetables often hardly reach Chennai market).

Questions

Ask your agricultural minister or at least the department official through email if possible whether they visit villages or talk to a farmer?” says Mr. Venkat.

For more details contact Mr. Venkat at email: venky@matchboxsolutions.in and efarm.venky@gmail.com, mobile: 98847 61354, phone:044- 43577236(off) and 24450613 (res).

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Turmeric as intercrop boosts mango yield

It also controls termite attack

Among the various diseases that attack mango crop, gummosis is of great economic importance since the trees die within a very short time.

The fungus responsible for mango decline is a common soil-borne saprophyte or wound parasite, distributed throughout the tropics and subtropics.

The trees show abundant gum secretion from branches and main trunk right from the tree base to tree top, wilting, dieback, vascular browning and death of several trees.

Trunk borers

The observed gummosis in mango trees was often accompanied by damage caused by a new species of trunk borers.

The grubs cause severe damage by feeding on the bark inside the trunk, boring upward, making tunnels, thus weakening and causing hindrance to transport of water and nutrients from roots to shoots resulting in wilting and drying of the shoots.

Acting as a wounding agent and vector, the trunk borers probably assist in rapid spread of the disease in the orchard. Several chemicals tried to control mango decline show little or no success.

Turmeric plantation as intercrop in mango has been found not only to assist in suppressing the population of trunk borers, termites and gummosis causing pathogens in the soil, but also provided additional income from the harvest of the rhizomes, 9 months after planting.

Disease suppression

Turmeric root exudates or curcumin in rhizomes present in soil probably assisted in disease suppression by reducing the activity and population of trunk borer larvae and soil-borne fungus.

Another advantage

The orchard was also found to be free from termite attack after planting turmeric as intercrop in mango.

Turmeric plantation as intercrop can find application in organic farming systems, to control various soil borne pests and diseases in several fruit orchards.

K.Usha

Principal scientist
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Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi

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Farm Query

Paddy thresher

Is there any machine that threshes paddy chaff as whole without cutting the chaff into bits and pieces?

L.Narayana Reddy,Andhra Pradesh

Mr. Mohammed Fazlul Haque from Assam developed a paddy thresher that does not cut the paddy chaff into bits and pieces but throws them out whole. According to Mr. Fazlul, by using his machine the whole paddy stalk can be obtained instead of chopped pieces. The nutritional value is conserved in the whole stalk and fed to cattle or sold. The unit is priced at Rs. 35,000 (excluding prime mover and cost of transportation). For more information readers can contact Mr. Mohammed Fazlul Haque, Moirabari village, Morigaon district, Assam-782126, Mobile: 98648 67012.

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Honey bees

Photo: K.R. DEEPAK



In which part of honey bee is nectar stored till it is deposited in bee hive?

MUSHTAQ SHERIFF

Chennai

Bees are social insects. They belong to order hymenoptera, class insecta. A bee colony have a single queen (fertile female), few hundreds of drones (males) and thousands of worker bees (unfertile female).

The worker bees, three weeks after emergence, visit flowers. During this visit, the entire body of bees gets smeared with pollen.

These worker bees have legs with certain adaptations to collect by brushing the pollen all over the body, to pack the pollen and deposit in pollen basket (corbicula), which is present in the hind leg.

Apart from pollen, bees collect nectar from flowers and store them in their stomach (crop). Honeybee stomach is technically called crop.

The digestive/alimentary system is adapted in such a way that the liquid food consumed could be stored and regurgitated back if required.

In the stomach, the nectar is mixed with saliva. The invertase of saliva converts sucrose of nectar into dextrose and levulose.

The bees, when they return to hive, vomit (regurgitate) the stomach contents into the comb cells meant for that. The cell is closed with natural air tight flat capping.

Apart from pollen and nectar, the bees also collect propolis, a gum like substance from buds, leaves and other parts of trees.

Water requirement of the hive is taken care of by the foraging workers of the hive.

The collection is done by a set of workers, and the other workers in the hive receive the pollen and propolis from the foragers and the same is stored in the bee comb.

Bees make several thousand trips a day for the collection of nectar. Bees work together, share their work perfectly and have clear caste differentiation based on the work carried out by them. Hence, they are highly evolved, social insects.

T. JEYALAKSHMI

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Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Thursday, Feb 24

Max Min

30.6° | 22.1°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 84%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 6:28

Sunset: 18:16

Barometer: 1012.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Rainy

Friday, Feb 25

Max Min

30° | 24°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday Feb 26	Sunday Feb 27	Monday Feb 28	Tuesday Mar 1	Wednesday Mar 2
29° 22°	29° 21°	30° 22°	30° 23°	30° 24°
Partly Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy

A farmer's wishlist

By Vijay Jawandhia

Feb 24 2011

The farmers are very clear about what they expect from the finance minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee's Budget this year and even though beggars would ride if horses were wishes, one wishes that the finance minister, who has just returned from the Group of Twenty (G20) meet where there was a lot of emphasis on the need to invest in agriculture, refashions his Budget in favour of agriculture and the millions who produce food for the country.

The farmers' wishlist:

* Increase allotment to agriculture to 40 per cent of the Budget as agriculture has stagnated at around 13 per cent of the gross national produce (GNP) during the last three five-year plans. This money could be used for giving increased support price as recommended by the first Farmers' Commission chaired by Dr M.S. Swaminathan.

* Mr Mukherjee needs to frame a good crop insurance scheme at the village level. Eighty per cent of the premium should be paid equally by the state and the Central government and 20 per cent by the farmer.

* Agriculture crop loan should be given at four per cent interest and zero per cent interest to farmers with rain-fed land.

* Economic support should be given for promoting organic farming — for animal raising and promoting fodder and food crop like sorghum and bajra.

* Free quality education and health service at the village level should be a priority.

Mr Mukherjee should now start taxing agriculture income and sale of produce above Rs 10 lakhs per annum. Below this farmers can be exempted. Unless he taxes the rich he will have little money to help the poor.

Whenever the government talks about fiscal correction (read, cutting subsidies) it is always the farmer and the unorganised sector that are at the receiving end. In his last Budget, instead of taxing the rich taxpayers he gave them maximum benefits. A person with an income of Rs 8 lakhs and above received benefit of Rs 50,000.

True, he announced a loan waiver of Rs 70,000 crores, thereby accepting that there was a crisis. The non-irrigated farmer is always fighting the vagaries of nature and the market, yet, no proper insurance scheme was announced to protect his minimum income and losses. The non-irrigated farmer does not have any crop till next November 2011. So extending the loan waiver scheme limit for payment to June 2010 as he did had no relevance.

I must accept that Mr Mukherjee was generous in accepting the long-standing demand that a special policy support is needed for rain-fed agriculture. But I do wish that in this Budget he is realistic. In his last Budget he announced Rs 300 crores for the 60,000 villages selected to grow oilseed and pulses in rain-fed land, which means each village will get just Rs 50,000.

When you compare this to an individual taxpayer earning Rs 8 lakhs and getting a benefit of Rs 50,000 with a whole village getting just Rs 50,000 you see how skewed the Budget is against the producer of food who toils from sunrise to sunset to cajole the golden wheat from the ground.

Also, he gave Rs 200 crores to one city, Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, to fight pollution made by textile industry!

It is important for the finance minister to junk the old format of the Budget and keep it in tune with the times.

Since globalisation and liberalisation of the economy, the gap between the rich and the poor and urban and rural has been increasing speedily. The implementation of Fifth and Sixth Pay Commissions has added fuel to the fire. Increasing prices of urban properties is proof of accumulation of wealth in urban India.

Maybe in this Budget Pranabda may not be able to bridge the gap between the rich and poor but at least we can expect that he will not widen the gap further.

After the new economic policy the cost of education, health and transportation has been increasing. In short, the cost of living is increasing. The government has announced a slew of yojanas it thinks will help the poor, like the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (which has not been properly implemented).

My point is that in MGREGS, the minimum wage is Rs 100 per day and only 100 days work are guaranteed. Against the Sixth Pay Commission is the minimum wage of Rs 100 justified? I will explain this injustice. In my village in 1970 the wage of a farm labourer was Rs 90 to 100 per month. At that time the salary of a schoolteacher in the same village was Rs 150 to 200 per month. Now, after the Sixth Pay Commission, the minimum salary of a schoolteacher is `16,000 per month. My question to Mr Mukherjee is, why shouldn't the minimum wage of farm labour be at least Rs 8,000-9,000 per month? This means that the minimum wage in MGREGS must be Rs 300 per day. Now if this minimum wage is to be paid then the Commission for Agricultural Cost and Prices must take this into account for calculating the cost of production and announce support prices on this basis. The finance minister will also have to make provisions for food subsidies in his Budget on this basis. Now a common question that will be asked is where will the money come from? To answer this I have to ask, from where did money for Fifth and Sixth Pay Commissions come from?

To raise money the rich must be taxed, but except for the last Budget, all previous Budgets decreased taxes on the rich. Excise duty on cars was reduced and now the finance minister is expected to give Rs 6,000 crore subsidy for Metro Rail for three cities. The subsidy for urbanisation is increasing. This urban bias must change. The farmer is not demanding packages, but is waiting for policy support.* Vijay Jawandhia is former president of the Shetkari Sanghatana and All-India Kisan Coordination Committee and a member of La Via Campesina, an international peasant's organisation

Source URL:

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/dc-comment/farmer%E2%80%99s-wishlist-302>

24 Feb, 2011, 06.28AM IST, Sutanuka Ghosal,ET Bureau

Banks stay away from sugar firms without allied biz

KOLKATA: With sugar prices below cost of production, banks are not willing to lend to sugar companies without downstream capacity in ethanol and power generation. In a few cases, banks are refusing to increase working capital limits for such companies despite them being long-standing customers.

Kishor Shah, director and CFO of Balrampur Chini Mills , among India's top three mills, said: "Banks are taking a tough stance towards the sugar sector." Sugar companies have now approached industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association to present their case before the Indian Banks Association and the Reserve Bank of India. Sanjay Tapriya, chief financial officer of Simbhaoli Sugars , said: "Banks are not very keen to finance sugar expansion and modernisation projects if the company does not have presence in ethanol and power sector. That's why we are seeing companies are holding back on major expansion plans."

At present, the sugar price is ruling at 29 per kg as against the production cost of 32 per kg. The delay in sugar exports under the Open General Licence by the government has also compounded the problem. A senior official of Punjab National Bank , which has sugar companies as customers , said: "Last fiscal, when there was a shortage in sugar, some companies failed to book profit. This year, there has been a bumper production of sugarcane and therefore it is becoming difficult for banks to ascertain whether the companies will perform well or not."

24 Feb, 2011, 06.00AM IST,ET Bureau

Pawar favours allowing wheat, rice exports

NEW DELHI: Farm Minister Sharad Pawar on Wednesday said the government should consider allowing exports of limited quantities of wheat and rice as stocks were good. Pawar also said a ministerial panel on food was likely to clear sale of 5 lakh tonnes of sugar under the Open General Licence (OGL) scheme, held up since December, and reduce the minimum export price for onion.

"This year, stocks are ample for wheat and crop condition is extremely good... I am sure the next meeting of the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) this week will give a serious thought to exports," Pawar said.

Pawar was speaking on the sidelines of a conference hosted by the Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) in New Delhi for the VCs and directors of its institutes here. The assertions come at a time when official statistics show that India's exports have dropped noticeably even as imports have grown by leaps and bound. Wheat and rice (non-basmati) exports were banned in February 2007 and April 2008.

More recently, however, the Centre conditionally opened up limited export (1.5 lt) of select premium non-basmati varieties including, "Ponni", "Matta" and "Sona Masuri".

24 Feb, 2011, 05.54AM IST, Prabha Jagannathan,ET Bureau

Call for minimum farmgate price for Pusa 1121 rice

NEW DELHI: Punjab and Haryana have asked the government to declare a minimum farmgate price for the Pusa 1121 variety of basmati in order to protect farmers from price fluctuations. This is the first time that such a demand has been raised for basmati.

The proposed farmgate price is similar to the government support price declared for key crops to protect interests of growers. The request that the government declare a minimum farmgate price and link the minimum export price (MEP) to it was made at a preparatory meeting by officials of the Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices, state government and farmer group representatives in New Delhi over the weekend.

The move highlights the feeling that exporters often shortchange Pusa 1121 farmers on a proportionate farmgate price, despite the variety fetching record prices in the export market. Citing volatility in prices (anywhere between \$900 a tonne and \$1,600 a tonne) over the last few years for the modern basmati variety, representatives at the meeting in fact stopped just short of a minimum support price (MSP).

“The suggestion was more on the lines of a declared support that traders should mandatorily pay in any year, irrespective of price volatility,” an official who attended the meeting said. With falling water tables, the area under Pusa 1121, which reportedly uses less water, has been growing rapidly and the variety now accounts for 50% of the total exports.

On an average, the variety fetches 35-45 % higher price than the average rice varieties even in the worst of times. In 2009-10 rice sowing year, an estimated 1 million hectare was under the Pusa 1121 variety in Punjab and Haryana alone, which was more than twice the area in the previous year.

With a total crop size of 5 million tonne, full-grain rice production averaged 2.4 million tonne to 2.5 million tonne. At present, the variety fetches around \$950 a tonne in the export market and despite the political turmoil in the key West Asian market, traders and exporters see no drop in exports.

“Exports may get a little delayed, but the average exports will remain around 1 million tonne to 1.2 million tonne,” Karan Chanana of Amira Foods said. Although some sections of the All India

Rice Exporters Association have been known to acknowledge that exporters exploit farmers at times, the organisation would not comment on the issue of making a minimum farmgate price mandatory for popular export varieties, such as Pusa 1121, and linking this to the MEP.

However, an official acknowledged, "It is true that at the current \$900 a tonne MEP, minimum farmgate price would work out to around Rs 21 a kg. But the exporter's price could be as high as Rs 40 a kg. The problem is farmers want Pusa 1121 to fetch the peak price of \$1,650 a tonne every year. That's not possible and the exporter takes the risk of political, logistical, phytosanitary and other threats to his trade by himself, after he has paid the farmer for his produce to supply contracted exports.



Farmers threaten to halt work on F-1 track, Yamuna Expressway

February 24, 2011 11:34:54 AM

Purusharth Aradhak | Greater Noida

Greater Noida's enraged farmers have threatened to stop the construction work of Yamuna Expressway and Formula One track, two days after six of protesting farmers were injured in a police firing. On Wednesday a meeting was held at Gurjar Bhawan near Pari Chowk in which a protest plan to halt the project work was discussed.

Anticipating the tense situation, the district administration has deployed additional security and has covered the Bhatta Parsaula village with security blanket. No villager is being allowed to move from one village to another village.

On Wednesday, a silent march was conducted in Greater Noida in which scores of farmers participated. The angry farmers in the past had halted the construction work of the projects.

Speaking to The Pioneer, farmer leader Manvir Singh Taiwatiya said that for the last many months farmers are working patiently, but now enough is enough, and if the administration does not come to the table to discuss the issues the protesters will halt the construction work on Yamuna Expressway and Formula One racing track. A resolution has been passed to take strong action against the current stand of administration and authority.

Veer Singh, another farmer leader said teams had been formed which will be posted at various locations between Noida and Agra. In this connection most of the farmers have already reached Agra. Only after getting a go ahead from their leaders will they take positions to halt the work.

“From the beginning the administration and authority are exploiting the innocent farmers. Knowingly on the order of administration the farmers were shot at in Bhatta Parsaula. Even after that, the administration is not in a mood to discuss the genuine issues of farmers,” Singh said.

Meanwhile, the district administration has geared up security to tackle any kind of untoward incident. On Wednesday, two kilometre area of Bhatta Parsaula was crawling with PAC and RAF teams, where protest by agitating farmers has been continuing since the last 36 days.

Govt committed to provide relief to every frost-hit farmer: CM to House

February 24, 2011 11:36:41 AM

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday told the State Assembly that his Government was committed to provide relief to each and every frost-hit farmer. The State Government would not leave any stone unturned to make farming a profitable business, he added.

He announced that all the cases related to power theft implicating farmers would be withdrawn.

Chouhan was replying to the adjournment motion brought by the main opposition Congress in the State Assembly on Wednesday. On the walkout by Congress members during his reply, Chouhan stated that this was evident that the Opposition was not interested on the sensitive issue of farmers, and they were not concerned about peasants' problems.

"If putting forth the problems of farmers and common people before the Central Government is a crime, I have committed a crime. I would continue to struggle on the issues of farmers and common people even in the future," he added.

He termed his decision to observe fast against the step-motherly treatment to Madhya Pradesh by the Centre on farmers' issue, as constitutional. "The Opposition members had demanded dismissal of the Government," he said stressing that nobody can dare topple the BJP Government in Madhya Pradesh. Nobody has courage to dismiss the elected Government, he added.

Talking about his demands to the Centre, Chouhan said that the Prime Minister belongs to the whole country, not to a particular party. It is the right of any Chief Minister to write letters to him and meeting him raising public peoples.

Chouhan termed the relief of Rs 424 crore sanctioned by Centre for frost-hit farmers, as a mere eyewash. This was only an installment of the previously sanctioned regular relief fund, which was a right of the State.

Expressing concern over the decreasing agricultural land in the State, he said that a Bill would soon be brought in the Assembly to prevent purchase of agriculture land by non-farmers. He stated recovery of loan by non-authorized moneylenders has been banned.

Stating that farmers' suicides was not an issue of Madhya Pradesh alone, Chouhan said that it

was not a partisan issue but a nationwide problem. Referring to the statistics, he said that total number of farmer suicides in the last five years was far less in comparison to the farmers' suicide during the term of former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. He said it was a sensitive issue and parties should not indulge in mud slinging.

Chouhan claimed his Government has made all out efforts to help the frost-affected farmers of the State. He said that he himself had inspected the situation first hand and ordered for stock taking of the losses suffered by the farmers.

For the farmers who had suffered over 50 per cent crop loss or more, for the first time in the State's history were being compensated for their entire crop.

One the demand of the deputy leader of the opposition in the State Assembly, which was to include the members of the Opposition in the distribution of aid to given by the Central Government under the calamity relief fund, Chouhan said that the Opposition members were not included, because when they are invited they do not contribute but walk out instead.

He reminded that the Opposition had earlier boycotted the special of the State Assembly called to deliberate for progress of the State. He said the Opposition was a divided House, that had failed to decide its leader in the House till date.

THE HINDU Business Line

Budget to take food inflation head-on



New Delhi, Feb. 23:

Tax sops for the dairy segment and schemes aimed at shoring up the supply chain for perishable products are among the measures expected in the Budget aimed at addressing the supply-side constraints in the food sector.

The focus is likely to be on quelling inflation in protein-based food products and vegetables in the medium-to-long term, with possible tax exemptions for the setting up of integrated dairy units. Schemes for encouraging investments in cold storages, apart from augmenting foodgrain storage capacities, are likely. Also on the cards could be increased budgetary support for schemes aimed at boosting production of pulses, oilseeds, vegetables and fruits, along with sops for the poultry sector.

All this comes in the wake of the sustained inflation that continues to remain among the highest in Asia despite seven rate hikes by the Reserve Bank of India since last March. According to Government sources, measures to combat inflation are expected to figure prominently in Budget 2011-12, with the focus on increasing productivity and better utilisation of agri-products as a

lasting solution to food price inflation, especially in the wake of envisaged supply problems in the international markets. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, and the Planning Commission have been entrusted to jointly work out schemes for encouraging investments in supply chain, including provisions for cold storages, officials said.

As a step in this direction, a proposal for creating a Special Purpose Vehicle to undertake detailed studies on foodgrain storage, handling and transportation is also on the anvil. Part of the mandate is to assess the cold chain infrastructure requirement and encourage private sector participation in the creation of such facilities.

Besides, plans for the creation of two million tonnes of additional storage through modern silos as part of the 15 million tonnes of new storage capacity under the Public Entrepreneurs Guarantee scheme of FCI are expected to be announced.

Pepper futures fall on liquidation



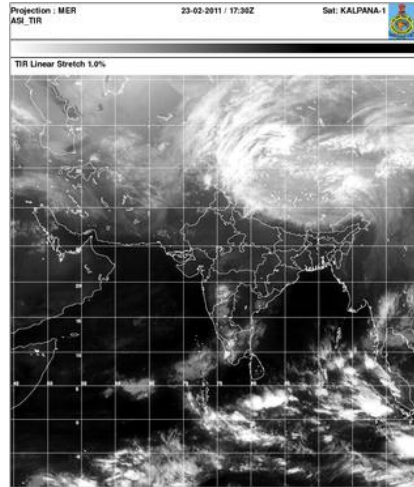
Kochi, Feb. 23:

Pepper futures fell sharply on Wednesday on bearish activities and consequent liquidation.

Validity expired stocks and farm grade pepper were being offered at Rs 6 below the March delivery price. But, there were no takers apprehending the quality to be inferior. Added to this, bears were spreading the message that 2,500 tonnes of pepper of which delivery was taken would enter the market in March itself and that would change the market scenario with a selling pressure. All these propagandas have pulled down the market sharply contrary to the market fundamentals, market sources told *Business Line*. The market is controlled by operators who are pushing it up and pulling it down according to their “whims and fancies”, they said.

Arrivals continued to remain thin and there was no selling pressure also and yet the market dropped, they said. March contract on the NCDEX fell sharply by Rs 702 to Rs 22,897 a quintal. April and May dropped by Rs 727 and Rs 744 respectively to Rs 23,046 and Rs 23,305.

Early forecasts favour normal pre-monsoon, monsoon seasons



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 23:

India might just be looking at enhanced probabilities for normal to slightly above normal rainfall during both the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons as per earliest available assessment by leading global long-range weather forecasters.

These are early indicators subject to updates on a month-to-month basis and should be viewed with caution, independent analysts warn.

The La Nina conditions in the equatorial and east Pacific, which are normally identified with a successful Indian monsoon without direct cause-effect relationship, has peaked over.

The hyper-active equatorial Pacific is now expected to relapse into what is said to be 'neutral' conditions (neither La Nina nor contra-indicative El Nino) to coincide with the Indian monsoon.

But the very fact that the probabilities of much-feared El Nino, whose tenure in the warmer east and equatorial Pacific has in the past suppressed rainfall over this part of the world, may not rear its head is reassuring enough, according to one expert.

The last word has not been said yet, he cautioned.

But global models – including the International Research Institute for Climate and Society at Columbia University; the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts; the UK Met Office; and the Tokyo Climate Centre as well as the Regional Institute for Global Change under the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology - projected a normal to slightly above-normal Indian monsoon, 2011.

There are bound to be individual pockets of below-normal rainfall, though, a list of which would be closely watched. Global models differed in their interpretation of the spatial distribution of rainfall.

Some of them indicate southern peninsula may witness some deficiency because of anticipated above-normal pre-monsoon (March-April-May) showers and incidental cooling of the landmass.

Some others see the regional deficit panning out in a pattern reminiscent of the season before (2010 monsoon) that saw east, east-central and northeast India bearing the brunt of the deficit.

A third opinion looked to the usual suspect, northwest India, to throw up a deficit but without attributing any specific reason.

Panic sales sap spot rubber



Kottayam, Feb. 23:

Physical rubber prices fell further on Wednesday. Sharp declines on the National Multi Commodity Exchange kept traders under pressure during early trades but prices managed to sustain at the prevailing levels following a partial recovery in domestic futures. RSS 4 was hit badly as buyers stayed back letting the grade to fall freely on an almost panic selling from dealers and growers.

Sheet rubber nosedived to Rs 230 (237) a kg, according to traders. The grade declined sharply to Rs 231 (238) a kg both at Kottayam and Kochi, as quoted by the Rubber Board.

RSS 4 surrendered at its March series to Rs 229.20 (232.56), April to Rs 239.01 (241.89), May to Rs 245.50 (247.91), June to Rs 250.36 (253.36) and July to Rs 252 (254.66) a kg on the NMCE.

The March futures weakened to ¥514.4 (Rs 280.94) from ¥521.8 during the day session but then recovered to ¥521.6 (Rs 284.85) a kg in the night session on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) slipped to Rs 289.31 (292.05) a kg at Bangkok.

Spot rates were (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 230 (237); RSS-5: 225 (230); ungraded: 220 (225); ISNR 20: 230 (238) and latex 60 per cent: 145 (146).

Bt cotton puts India at 4th slot in GM crop acreage



New Delhi, Feb. 23:

India has the world's fourth largest area under genetically modified (GM) crops.

The country's GM crop acreage in 2010, at 9.4 million hectares (mh), was next only to the US (66.8 mh), Brazil (25.4 mh) and Argentina (22.9 mh), while ahead of Canada (8.8 mh) and China (3.5 mh), according to the latest global status report of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA).

The 9.4 mh GM area in India consisted entirely of Bt cotton. This was unlike in the US, where the 66.8 mh acreage was distributed among maize (31.7 mh), soyabean (30 mh) and cotton (3.9 mh), besides canola, alfalfa, sugarbeet and potato.

In Brazil, too, the 25.4 mh area was split between soyabean (17.8 mh), maize (7.3 mh) and cotton (0.25 mh), while in Argentina, soyabean (19.5 mh), maize (3 mh) and cotton (0.375 mh) accounted for the total 22.9 mh coverage.

But even within the area planted under GM cotton in India, there have been some interesting new developments. Till 2005, the entire GM cotton area was occupied by hybrids incorporating a 'single gene' event.

In 2006, farmers, for the first time, planted hybrids featuring two foreign genes, cry1Ac and cry2Ab, expressing proteins toxic to the American bollworm as well as armyworm insect pests. In 2009, the area under 'multiple gene' Bt cotton hybrids exceeded that of 'single gene' hybrids.

In the latest planting season of 2010, Bt cotton accounted for 9.4 mh or 85.5 per cent of the total estimated 11 mh area sown under cotton in India. And within the 9.4 mh, 6.6 mh or 70 per cent was occupied by dual or multiple gene hybrids.

According to ISAAA, the number of cotton hybrids approved for marketing in India has gone up from a mere three in 2003 and four in 2004 to 20 in 2005, 62 in 2006, 131 in 2007, 274 in 2008, 522 in 2009 and 780 (including one open pollinated variety) in 2010. Of the total 780, 438 hybrids incorporated the dual gene Bollgard-II event of Monsanto.

The coming planting season could see the commercialisation of a new event featuring three genes. These include, apart from cry1 Ac and cry2Ab (coding for insect resistance), the cp4-epsps gene to impart tolerance to the glyphosate herbicide.

“In 2010, four cotton hybrids incorporating this three-gene event ('Bollgard-II Roundup Ready Flex') were approved for seed production in an area of 25 acres per hybrid. This could pave the way for their commercial release in 2011-12, making it the first GM event in India to feature stacking of two traits (insect resistance and herbicide tolerance)”, said Mr Bhagirath Choudhary, India Coordinator at ISAAA.

The ISAAA report estimated the total global GM crop acreage in 2010 at 148 mh, up from 134 mh in 2009 and just 1.7 mh in 1996. Of the 148 mh, 73.3 mh was under soyabean, 46 mh under maize, 21 mh under cotton (with India being No. 1), 7 mh under canola, 0.5 mh under sugarbeet and 0.1 mh under alfalfa.

Profit-booking crushes castorseed



Rajkot, Feb.23:

After rising sharply in the past few days, castor seed price dropped more than 3 per cent in the futures as well as spot market as market participants covered profit.

At Rajkot Commodity Exchange, castor seed March contract dropped by Rs 173 from Rs 5,466 to Rs 5,293 per quintal and June contract declined by Rs 170 to Rs 5,190 from Rs 5,360. RCX spot price was quoted at Rs 5,465 with a fall of Rs 174 a quintal. About 45,000-50,000 bags arrived in Gujarat and price was Rs 1,130-1,140 per 20 kg, in Saurashtra 1,600 bags arrived and price was Rs 1,130-1,176.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, castor seed March contract came down by Rs 223 or 3.99 per cent to Rs 5,363 per quintal, with an open interest of 9,200 lots. April contract decreased by Rs 214 to Rs 5,263 with an open interest of 3,450 lots.

SLACK DEMAND

Market analysts said profit booking by traders on existing higher levels mainly pulled castor seed futures prices down. Slackness in demand from consuming industries against fresh arrivals in physical markets too affected the trading, they added.

The Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) said that in 2010-11, India's production of castor seeds is likely to rise by 22 per cent to 11.90 lakh tonnes against 9.78 lakh tonnes in 2009-10.

Meanwhile, the Neilson India survey carried out by the SEA said that the maximum rise in production has been estimated in Andhra Pradesh, followed by Rajasthan and Gujarat.

S. India may overtake Colombo in manufacture of tea bags



Business Line Tea bag making is a growing industry in Coimbatore. Photo: K. Ananthan
Coimbatore, Feb 23:

South India will soon overtake Colombo in the manufacture of tea bags, according to tea industry sources.

'The concept of making dip-tea is catching fast. And Coimbatore in the South has become the hub for manufacture of tea bags, which the industry had hitherto been sourcing from Colombo. Considering the demand for tea bags, the city is expected to beat Colombo soon,' trade sources said.

While they were not able to quantify the market size for tea bags as yet, industry sources said that the shift was happening. "This is obvious from the sharp increase in the number of units that are engaged in making tea bags. The investment on machinery alone is around Rs 2 crore."

Coonoor tea auction volume declines



Business Line Plantation workers using a harvester in a tea garden in the Nilgiris.
Coonoor, Feb. 23:

A volume of 9.50 lakh kg will be offered for Sale No: 8 of the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association (CTTA) to be conducted tomorrow and on Friday, reveals an analysis of the listing by brokers.

This is 38,000 kg less than last week's offer but 5.60 lakh kg less than the offer this time last year.

Of the 9.50 lakh kg, 6.66 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and 3.84 lakh kg to the dust grades. As much as 8.86 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 0.64 lakh kg is orthodox. The proportion of orthodox teas continues to be low in the leaf and dust grades. In the leaf counter, only 0.38 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 6.28 lakh kg is CTC. Among the dusts, only 0.26 lakh kg belongs to orthodox while 2.58 lakh kg is CTC.

In the 9.50 lakh kg, fresh tea accounts for 8.67 lakh kg and 83,000 kg comprises teas remaining unsold in previous auctions. Although the offer is lower than last year, demand has been inadequate. Export purchases were weak in last few weeks. Purchase has practically come to a standstill for West Asian markets following internal unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya, besides Iraq. Last week, unsold stock was depleted only by reducing prices by Rs 3 a kg.

Darjeeling tea growers worried by threat to block first flush



Kolkata, Feb. 23:

The tea growers of Darjeeling have appealed to the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) to let the first flush tea — due to arrive in the market shortly — come out of the gardens. “Our appeal has

already been sent to the GJM leadership”, a spokesman for the Darjeeling Tea Association, the body of Darjeeling planters, told *Business Line* over phone from Darjeeling. On Tuesday, the GJM, spearheading an agitation in support of a separate State of Gorkhaland, announced that it would stop first flush tea to come out of tea gardens.

“Only about 18 to 20 per cent of the total Darjeeling production of nine to 10 million kg (mkg) is first flush tea, which commands a premium price. The production has already started in some of the gardens, particularly those located in lower altitude, and number of such gardens will be about one-third of the total of 85,” he said. “The production in the gardens located in higher altitude will start in another 10 to 15 days.”

Whether the threat is real or not, both workers and owners of gardens in the hills are apprehensive of uncertainty during the forthcoming peak season. There are about 55,000 permanent tea-garden workers in Darjeeling, and another 16,000 temporary. The owners are worried because the foreign buyers might cancel the orders. Already, a few orders have been cancelled. The cancellations might cause piling up of stocks, and accumulation for long might hurt the quality, yielding lower prices. If the despatch is stopped, then the owners will have to meet all the expenses, including payment of wages to workers, leaving a hole in their pockets. This might also push up the demand for Nepal tea, inferior in quality. Some Darjeeling teas might even be smuggled to Nepal.

The owners do not foresee yet another call for bandh in the hills by the GJM. The recent bandh hit a large section of its followers dependent on tourism for their livelihood. The board-level school examinations due shortly is yet another factor. The GJM leadership therefore is turning to the tea industry, presumably to press indirectly both the State and Union Governments.

“Last year, the Darjeeling tea production was a little less than eight million kg against the normal nine to 10 mkg, and the drop was due to bad weather. We were hoping good crops this year following good rains in January and February, unlike last year,” said a Darjeeling tea planter. “But we're now keeping our fingers crossed.”

Against odds, India's marine exports surge 19%



Kochi Feb. 23:

For the first time, Indian marine exports have crossed the \$2-billion mark during first nine months of a fiscal. Marine exports touched \$2.028 billion during April-December 2010, registering a growth of 6.60 per cent in quantity, 18.92 per cent in value and 24.70 per cent in dollar realisations.

What is noteworthy is the fact that the feat could be achieved in spite of recession in global markets, a strengthening Indian rupee against major currencies and economic tremors in Greece, Spain and Portugal which triggered all-round depreciation of the euro against the dollar, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) pointed out.

Major export items

There was considerable increase in export of frozen shrimp and squid during the period. The trigger for this growth came from increased export of Vannamei shrimp, whose introduction and cultivation in India's coastline was a recent phenomenon as well as increased landing of squid from Indian waters. Frozen shrimp continued to be the major export item accounting for over 48 per cent of the foreign exchange earnings.

Shrimp exports increased by 12 per cent in quantity, 34 per cent in value and 40 per cent in dollar earnings. Unit value realisation for shrimp surged over 25 per cent during the period.

Frozen shrimp export also showed a smart increase to major destinations such as the US and Japan. Export of Vannamei shrimp grew to 7,363 tonnes during the period.

Frozen fish was the principal item of export in quantity and second largest export item in terms of value: accounting for 36 per cent of the total quantum of export and 18 per cent of the value realisation. Export of frozen squid accelerated by close to 88 per cent in terms of dollar earnings, 78 per cent in rupee realisation and 60 per cent in quantity.

Despite rapid growth in unit value realisation of frozen cuttlefish by 30 per cent, the volume of exports declined by 21 per cent and rupee realisation fell by 2 per cent.

The spurt in unit value realisation ensured that dollar earnings from cuttlefish grew by over 2 per cent.

The EU continued to be the largest export market for Indian marine products, accounting for over 26 per cent of the value realisations. This was despite a fall of close to 5 per cent in quantity.

The US was the second largest export destination accounting for 17 per cent of the total exports followed by Japan with 15.12 per cent. Exports to South-East Asia and China are fast catching up accounting for 15.07 per cent and 14.09 per cent respectively.

Medicinal traits found in 'Khapli' wheat



Business Line Lady farm workers engaged in their works at a wheat cultivating field in Rajasthan (file photo): K K Mustafah
Dharwad, Feb. 23:

Emmer wheat, commonly known as “Khapli,” is found to have curative properties for treating diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Its capacity to lower blood glucose and lipid levels and high temperature stress tolerance compared to other cultivated species makes it therapeutic.

According to Dr R R Hanchinal, Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences-Dharwad, looking at the importance of this species, the university has initiated a programme in development of newer semi-dwarf, management responsive varieties in the background of local species (quality attributes).

“These new species besides possessing high yield potential of 42 to 45 quintals per hectare also possess resistance to biotic and abiotic abiotec stresses. As a result of systematic research effort, the world's first semi-dwarf dicoccum variety – DDK-1001 was released induring 1996. The other varieties released by the university include DDK-1009, DDK-1025 and DDK -1029,” he added.

Emmer wheat is grown in an area of 0.2 million hectare with an approximate production of 0.5 million tonnes and is traditionally cultivated in Karnataka, southern Maharashtra, Sourashtra region of coastal Gujarat, parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Emmer wheat, due to hard and vitreous nature of its grains, milling quality is very superior especially for semolina preparation. Semolina of dicoccum wheat needs less cooking time and has more cooking tolerance.

“Products of this variety are softer, tasty, and have high satiety value. These nutritional and functional qualities make emmer wheat more suitable than durum wheat for the manufacture of dense foods and other local semolina products and are also more suitable as therapeutic food,” explained Dr Hanchinal.

Frost spells bad news for potato growers



February 23, 2011:

In the next couple of months, you may have to foot a higher price for potato chips and wafers. This is because the potato crop in Madhya Pradesh that is mainly used in making chips has been affected by frost this year.

“The crop is lower this year and surely, prices of chips will rise,” said Mr Ajay Agrawal, a trader at the New Aloo-Piaz Mandi.

Arrivals

The potato crop usually arrives during February in Madhya Pradesh. “All arrivals get over in 25 days time since farmers wouldn’t want to hold the produce for a longer time,” said Mr Agrawal.

Usually, arrivals of 40,000-50,000 bags (60-kg each) spread out evenly for 25 days. “This year, the arrivals got over in 15 days. This should give a fair idea about the crop,” said Mr Agrawal. “Arrivals are at least 50 per cent lower than same time last year,” said Mr Naushad Khan, a trader at Sanwer Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) yard in Indore district.

Farmers in districts such as Indore, Dewas and Ujjain have reported severe damage to potato crops due frost and cold weather. “The crop I had sown in two hectares has been totally affected by frost,” said Mr Rustam Patel of Dhonk Khurd village in Dewas district.

Potato in Madhya Pradesh is grown in some 80,000 acres with production in the State being a little over 1 million tonnes (mt), making it the fifth largest producer. However, its importance can be gauged from the fact that companies such as Parle, ITC, Pepsi and others source potato from this central Indian State for potato chips and wafers. “The most crucial aspect deciding overall potato price as also for chips will be the Uttar Pradesh crop,” said Mr Agrawal.

The crop in Uttar Pradesh will begin arriving in markets from this weekend. There are, however, disturbing reports of rain in the growing areas. In Uttar Pradesh, potato is grown in over 5.5 lakh hectares and production in the State is nearly 14 mt. West Bengal, with a production of over 8 mt, is the second largest producer.

Meanwhile, the overall sentiment in the potato market is bullish with prices rising over 10 per cent this month. At the Agra APMC, potato prices increased to Rs 340 a quintal on Wednesday against Rs 305 at the beginning of the month. Arrivals are steady at over 1,250 tonnes a day.

Chana rules flat on poor offtake



Indore, Feb. 23:

Chana prices ruled almost flat on slack demand. On Wednesday , desi chana in Indore *mandis* was quoted at Rs 2,500 but some traders sold it at Rs 2,525 a quintal.

However, compared with Tuesday, chana prices did not witness major fluctuation and remained stable at Rs 2,500 throughout the trading session. Besides poor demand from both retailers and

the millers, increased arrival of new chana in Maharashtra *mandis* also supported bearish sentiments at Indore *mandis*.

Though delayed by a month, new chana has started arriving in Indore mandis with roughly 800-1,000 bags being offloaded in both the *mandis* on a daily basis.

Bearish sentiment is also attributed to a rise in arrivals. New chana in Indore *mandis* was quoted at Rs 2,400-2,520 a quintal. There are some complaints of moisture in new chana.

According to Mr Rahul Vohra, a trader, notwithstanding the estimate of increased production, chana output in Madhya Pradesh may witness a decline of 10-15 per cent because of damage to the crop by frost, rains and delayed sowing.

Dollar chana stable

Dollar chana or chickpea ruled flat at Rs 5,200-5,400 a quintal on subdued demand, while container quality of dollar chana (42/44 count) saw a gain of Rs 50 at Rs 5,900 a quintal.

Nabard to hold awareness programme for bankers

Madurai, Feb. 23:

A three-day awareness programme on post- watershed approaches for bankers will be held during February 24-26, in the city.

The programme, organised by the Tamil Nadu Regional Office of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) in association with the Regional Training College at Mangalore, is aimed at enabling banks play a catalytic role as there are greater opportunities now for banks to lend and expand their banking activities in watershed developed villages as the perceived risk is minimised or almost eliminated, according to Mr R. Shankar Narayan, AGM, Nabard, Madurai.

He told Business Line on Wednesday that Nabard has been supporting implementation of participatory watershed projects in various States since 1992.

In Tamil Nadu, so far 160 watershed projects have been implemented. Over 15 watershed projects are under implementation in various stages in Madurai.

Branch managers/officers of the Commercial Banks, RRBs and Co-operatives from six southern districts will be participating in the programme and faculty support is being rendered by Mr R. Srinivasan, DGM, Regional Training Centre, Mangalore, and the deliberations will be guided by Mr S. Natarajan, DGM, Nabard, Watershed Project Unit, Madurai. Mr P. Rangaraj, DGM, Canara Bank Circle Office, Madurai will be the guest of honour, he added.

Scientists growing drought, disease resistant wheat

London, Feb 23:

British scientists are developing a new wheat variety which they say could be resistant to drought and diseases, an experiment, if successful, may lead to better crop yields.

A consortium of researchers, who will spend about seven million pounds on breeding the special wheat crops, believe that better productivity could help cut prices and improve availability worldwide.

The project, which is funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, will use information on wheat genetics obtained last year to track key traits through generations of plants, the Daily Mail reported.

The researchers hope that exploiting traits found in wild wheat will allow them to grow strains that are resistant to drought, disease, salt and other pests and problems.

Higher yielding crops should cut prices and improve availability an ever more populated world, they said, adding that there are, however, no plans to create GM crops.

Project leader, Professor Graham Moore, of the John Innes Centre in Norwich, said: "There is an urgent need to improve yields of wheat; it is estimated that in the next 50 years we will need to harvest as much wheat as has been produced since the beginning of agriculture 10,000 years ago."

Wheat is the second most popular staple crop after rice, with more than 550million tonnes harvested each year around the world.

But it is at the mercy of nature, with last year's Russian harvest devastated by drought and wildfires. Flooding in Pakistan and mudslides in China also contributed to soaring prices.

Science Minister, Mr David Willetts, said: "This investment has the potential to make a real difference to people and farmers, whilst at the same time increasing our body of scientific knowledge."

Pawar makes strong case for bringing down onion MEP



Business Line The Union Agriculture Minister, Mr Sharad Pawar (file photo). Ramesh Sharma
New Delhi, Feb. 23:

Making a strong case for bringing down the \$600 a tonne export benchmark price for Indian onions which has made them uncompetitive, the Agriculture Minister, Mr Sharad Pawar, today said the minimum export price is double the prevailing rate in international markets.

"I have enquired from the states from where onions are exported to different countries and got information that the prevailing international export price is around \$250-300, but our MEP at \$600 a tonne, is almost double," Mr Pawar told presspersons here.

"This (higher MEP) will create obstacles in exporting onions from India," Mr Pawar said on the sidelines of an agriculture function.

“I think it is a fit case for giving a second thought to bring down MEP to make Indian onions internationally competitive,” he said.

Mr Pawar expressed confidence that the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) meeting this week will give serious thought to the issue (of lowering MEP).

The Government had, last week, decided to lift ban on exports of onions following farmers' protest over crash in domestic prices within two months of touching Rs 80 a kg.

The decision to this effect on February 17 last was taken at the meeting of EGoM on food, headed by the Finance Minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee.

But, as a precautionary measure against possibility of prices shooting again, the EGoM decided to allow shipments of onions at a MEP of \$600 (about Rs 28,000) a tonne.

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