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Agriculture varsity's initiatives earn praise

Special Correspondent

COIMBATORE: The Planning Commission is in the process of preparing an approach paper for XII Five Year Plan, according to K. Kasturirangan, member of the Commission.

Speaking to reporters after visiting Tamil Nadu Agricultural University here on Saturday, he said Tamil Nadu is in the forefront of the agricultural sector and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) was well-known for its agricultural education and research. Some of the initiatives of the university could be replicated in other parts of the country.

The institute was working in areas related to rice production intensification. In an effort to increase paddy production with less water, the system of rice intensification (SRI) developed by it could be adopted in other paddy cultivating areas.

The Planning Commission was discussing with TNAU to see how human intervention could be further reduced for paddy cultivation as several areas were facing labour shortage.

In Dharmapuri district, the university was implementing dry land farming with optimum use of resources. This could also be adopted in other parts.

The university was offering a degree programme for farmers in farm technology and about 250 of them had registered for it. This could be adopted by other States.

The plan outlay for the agriculture sector in the Tenth Plan was Rs.25,000 crore. In the Eleventh Plan it was Rs.1 lakh crore.

Mr. Kasturirangan, who is the former Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation, denied there was a scam in the allocation of S-band spectrum. The government was seized of everything that goes on in the organisation. What would show the success and continuous success of ISRO were the forthcoming mission programmes that were planned.

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'Multicropping of vegetables can help farmers stay afloat'

Staff Reporter

It is helpful when commercial crops fail, says a nonagenarian AIKMS leader

Tenant farmers are the most vulnerable but are not getting subsidised inputs, he says

Asks the government to identify share croppers on its own



T. Buchaiah shows his healthy vegetable crops in Jagarlamudi in Yaddanapudi mandal of Prakasam district.

ONGOLE: A nonagenarian leader with Leftist leanings and passion for farming wants farmers under stress to diversify into multicropping of vegetables to sustain themselves under adverse conditions.

Showing the way out to growers, who are finding it difficult to make ends meet in the wake of increasing cost of farm inputs and unremunerative price for their produce, the 90-year-old Tondepu Buchaiah of Jagrlapudi village in Yaddanapudi mandal of Prakasam district says "growing vegetables using organic manure involves very little cost".

"Growers who take to multi-cropping of vegetables will be able to sustain themselves when commercial crops like cotton and chillies involving high cost of production fail," he says.

Still active in taking up the cause of tenant farmers as also farm labourers in the district, Mr Buchaiah, veteran leader of the All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha (AIKMS), while analysing the causes of suicide among farmers, says that "tenant farmers are the most vulnerable but they are not getting subsidised inputs and compensation in case of failed crops in view of informal tenancy".

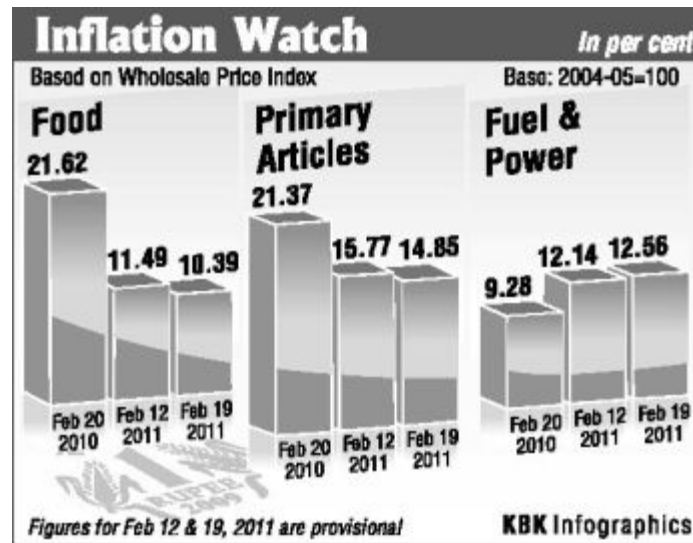
The government on its own should identify share croppers by holding gram sabha and arrange for institutional credit and subsidised farm inputs, feels Mr Buchaiah while proudly showing healthy vegetable crops.

Attributing the falling minimum support price to a spate of suicides among farmers at a time when the cost of farm inputs was going up, Mr Buchaiah says the farmers should collectively fight for their rights. He has unsuccessfully fought many an electoral battles, including the one for the Parchur Assembly seat in 1983 as CPI(ML) New Democracy nominee.

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Maintaining growth while checking inflation

The Government plans to step up measures to help lower-income households, particularly in rural areas, to deal with the recent sharp increase in food prices.



Growth continued to be the mantra of Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee in his Union Budget for 2011-12 too. However he has done that with a pinch of salt as inflation and inflationary pressures were growing. This fiscal would be a challenge for the government as it had to maintain growth while checking inflation as well as achieving fiscal consolidation.

Markets greeted the budget for 2011-12 with remarkable enthusiasm. On the budget day, February 28, the Bombay Stock Exchange benchmark index, Sensex, rallied by 595.62 points intra-day before closing at 17823.40, a gain of 122.49 points. In the post-budget rally on March 1, the Sensex, recorded a rise of 623.10 points to close at 18446.50, its biggest single-day jump since May 2009. For the week ended March 4, it closed at 18486.45, a gain of 785.54 points as compared to the previous week's close of 17700.91.

In his budgets for 2009-10 and 2010-11, he had taken a calculated risk to achieve bountiful growth even on the face of a rising inflation. Even though managing inflation and inflationary pressures are the job of the central bank, fiscal measures of the government would give the required support for the monetary measures of the central bank in its fight against rising inflation. Reserve Bank of India Governor too in the recent policy pronouncements made tacit remarks sending out message to the government that the central bank was doing enough and now the government had to act to contain inflation with fiscal measures, including a strong and efficient public distribution system.

After the presentation of the budget for 2010-11, the Finance Minister had acknowledged that his tax proposals would have a “marginal inflationary impact”.

Last year, his argument was that while preparing the country's economy for a higher growth trajectory, inflation was bound to rise. But he expected only a marginal inflationary pressure. Today, rising food prices has become a major issue for the government to resolve and the political uprising in the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries further complicated it. Mr. Mukherjee, however, this year, has sought to rein in inflation by capping the increase in total expenditure. The budget has also stepped up social spending to soothe the pain for the economically weaker sections.

“We believe the government may struggle to meet its fiscal deficit target for 2011-12 as pressure to step up spending mounts,” said Standard & Poor's credit analyst Takahira Ogawa. “Unlike in the previous fiscal year, it will also not have any one-off revenues to fall back on.”

In fiscal 2010-11, the government benefited from revenues from 3G licensing and proceeds from divestment of State-owned corporations. Such inflows had boosted 2010-11 revenues by about 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Mr. Mukherjee has sought to cap the increase in total budget expenditure at 3.4 per cent (over revised estimate for 2010-11) to Rs.12.60 lakh crore. The government has also targeted fiscal deficit for 2011-12 at 4.6 per cent of GDP, slightly less than 4.8 per cent recommended by the 13th Finance Commission in December 2009, and the revised estimate of 5.1 per cent for 2010-11. The Finance Minister has also announced that amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Bill will be introduced in 2011-12 to maintain fiscal prudence in the medium-term.

The extent to which the government can achieve its deficit targets depends on the pace of economic growth and the movement in global and domestic fuel, fertilizer and food prices, said Mr. Ogawa.

Direct Taxes Code

On the revenue side, the government plans to introduce the new Direct Taxes Code (DTC) in 2011-12, Nevertheless, no time frame has been set for the rollout of Goods and Services Tax

(GST). The rating agency anticipates that GST will be introduced only after April 1, 2012. The tax initiatives would significantly benefit the economy and improve the fiscal position in the medium to long term. The government has also budgeted Rs.40,000 crore from divestment of state-owned companies. Further, it has budgeted to inject Rs.6,000 crore capital into public sector banks.

One of the key officials of the Finance Ministry S. D. Majumdar, Chairman, Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), said in Mumbai that the Central excise duty was not increased due to three main reasons: it would help contain inflation, sustain high growth, and finally to increase profits of the manufacturing companies, leading to larger investments and employment, thereby generating greater revenues for the government.

However, he reiterated the need to increase the contribution of manufacturing sector from 16 per cent to 25 per cent in the next ten years in order to sustain the high growth trajectory.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr. Majumdar also said that the government was constituting a GST net comprising Central and State governments and the technology partner, NSDL. With regard to the peak customs duty, he said the government was trying to follow the ASEAN rate (2-14 per cent) while also tracking a median rate of 6-7 per cent.

However, Mr. Ogawa believes the government is likely to face pressure to increase spending, at least in the near future. Fuel and commodity prices are rising, which will increase the need for subsidies on oil, fertilizer and food.

The government plans to step up measures to help lower-income households, particularly in rural areas, to deal with the recent sharp increase in food prices. Social sector spending is up 17 per cent and it accounts for 36.4 per cent of the government's total current expenditure.

Separately from the budget speech, the government is preparing to implement the national food security bill this year. "The food subsidy burden could increase by Rs.20,000-32,000 crore as the bill's coverage is wider than existing schemes. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the increase will depend on the final contents of the bill," said Mr. Ogawa. India is likely to face a challenging year, trying to maintain economic growth, control inflation, and achieve fiscal consolidation.

OOMMEN A. NINAN

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Food Security Bill: media can help



S. Viswanathan

Two key issues Budget-2011 is seen as having failed to address are inflation and mass hunger. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee announced in his budget speech that the long-promised National Food Security Bill would be moved in Parliament “during the course of this year” but failed to make any financial allocation to back up this statement. Against the backdrop of fresh warnings by experts that the outlook is grim given the continuing West Asian crisis and its impact on oil prices and inflation, this failure is politically inexplicable, especially considering that elections to five State Legislative Assemblies are round the corner.

Significantly, a number of mainstream newspapers across the country have editorially called attention to this failure. In a leader on the budget, The Hindu registered its unhappiness that “the big idea of food security that was announced in the last budget is still to be operationalised with differences having cropped up between the National Advisory Council and the government on the target group, extent of coverage, and the estimates of the outlays that will be called for.” It called upon the government to finalise and put in place “this very worthwhile programme over the next few months.” It expressed its unease over the Finance Minister's indication that the government was considering moving to a system of direct cash transfers. In two insightful

articles on the subject, one published in Frontline and the other in The Hindu, the economist Jayati Ghosh explained why direct cash transfers, the new mantra, could not possibly be the answer to the problem of mass hunger and deprivation in India. She strongly criticised the tendency in current government policy thinking to see cash transfers, which at best could be a supplementary benefit, as a substitute for the public provision of essential goods and services.

The New Indian Express took sharp issue with “the silence of the Minister on inflation, deficit and corruption.” The Times of India argued that “mega-schemes like food security need better preparation to be executed well,” adding that “be it schools, hospitals or basic amenities, poor service delivery, not lack of money to throw around, hobbles efforts.”

An opinion page article in DNA noted that “the common man is unhappy about the indifference shown by the government to basics like inflation and rising prices.” The writer, who spoke with a cross-section of people, found that many of them were unhappy that the budget had not done enough to fight the rising costs of food items and inflation. A woman the writer spoke to said: “The prices of fruits and milk are going up day by day. I need to give good nutrition to my growing daughters. But the skyrocketing prices are forcing us to reduce the consumption of fruits from daily to thrice a week.” It is good that people are becoming more aware of the need for improved nutrition and healthy diets but the brutal impact of food inflation on the daily lives of families that belong to the middle or lower middle classes is captured poignantly in this bit of information. The plight of those who live in extreme poverty can well be imagined.

The issue of food security for all remains unresolved at the policy level — with the government bent on confining the benefits of food security to people below the poverty line and Congress president Sonia Gandhi apparently batting on the side of the advocates of a universal public distribution system in the United Progressive Alliance's National Advisory Council (NAC). Over the past two years, several rounds of deliberation within the NAC failed to produce a good enough set of ideas for a Food Security Act. What is clear is that after all this effort, the government remains far from convinced of the financial feasibility, or indeed the need, for extending the benefits of a PDS beyond a targeted number that grossly underestimates the prevalence of hunger and deprivation across the length and breadth of India.

Even the diluted recommendations of the NAC were not acceptable to the C. Rangarajan Committee, appointed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to advise him. All the NAC was able

to do was to get its views published in the newspapers just ahead of the budget. Harsh Mander, head of the NAC's working group on the National Food Security Bill, made this brave statement: "We have been given the full mandate to go ahead with framing the Bill based on our own recommendations." He added that the NAC's view of its job was to "advise" the government and "not to be influenced" by its predilections. Where this leaves the issue of food security is anyone's guess.

At stake here are the lives and welfare of hundreds of millions of people, including children. At stake here is inter-generational equity and the future of 'rising India.' But within the corridors of government there is absolutely no sense of urgency about tackling mass hunger at a time of deadly inflation. This is certainly an area where the media could do much more by way of agenda-building — and stepping up the pressure on the system for the public good.

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Watermelons, a hot favourite now

Staff Reporter

Tuticorin: Huge arrival of watermelons (*Citrullus lanatus*) in the prevailing hot weather will certainly have a soothing effect on residents.

People are seen thronging fruit stalls to enjoy the bite of watermelon, a juicy fruit. Most consumers prefer watermelon to other fruits as also, unlike other fruits, watermelons are affordable.

"The watermelon fruit was being sold on the basis of kilograms. A kilogram of the fruit was sold at Rs. 15. Normally, consumers prefer to have a bite rather than prepare juice. Since fruit juices are being prepared with preservatives, those are harmful to consumers. Even without ice-cubes, people can have watermelon," said S. Balasubramanian, a fruit-seller.

By consuming this fruit, people could even economise on refrigeration. Since people wanted to stay away from the scorching sun, they were engaged in buying the fruit on a large scale.

For sweetness, the fruit must weigh between three and four kilograms, he said. When the temperature rises, the sweetness would also be increased, M. Syed Ahmed Miranji, Deputy Director, Department of Horticulture, Tuticorin said.

Farmers in Udangudi, Nazareth, Sawyerpuram, Sathankulam and Kovilpatti were depending on its cultivation during November and December. The fruit has the richest source of iron among fruits.

The requirement of water was minimal for this drought-resistant and short duration yield variety at a period of eighty to ninety days. A maximum of sixty tonnes of watermelons could be cultivated on one hectare, Mr. Miranji added.

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Acute milk shortage in two districts

P. Sudhakar

TIRUNELVELI: The unprecedented and sudden diversion of over 20,000 litres of milk to Chennai every day from Aavin, Tirunelveli, has denied milk to over 40,000 households in Tirunelveli and neighbouring Tuticorin districts, official sources said.

Seizing this opportunity, private milk suppliers have started to rope in most of the customers.

Aavin – Tirunelveli, which used to procure over 68,000 litres of milk a day during the 'peak season' from the suppliers in Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts, effectively fulfilled the milk requirement in these two districts while around 1,000 litres of milk was used for much sought after value added products of Aavin and 4,000 litres were sold in Kanyakumari district. During summer, the procurement quantity would dip to 55,000 litres owing to various reasons. Even as the demand stands at 63,000 litres a day, Aavin – Tirunelveli, receiving only 55,000 litres of milk a day now, is reportedly diverting milk to meet the demand in the State capital, Aavin sources said while explaining the reasons for the acute shortage of milk prevailing in the market.

Caring for State capital

“As the government doesn't want to have any problem regarding milk supply in the State capital , huge quantity of milk is being diverted to Chennai, which is the only reason behind the problems prevailing in milk supply in the two districts,” the sources said. Personnel manning the retail outlets admit that the sudden diversion of milk has also affected their business.

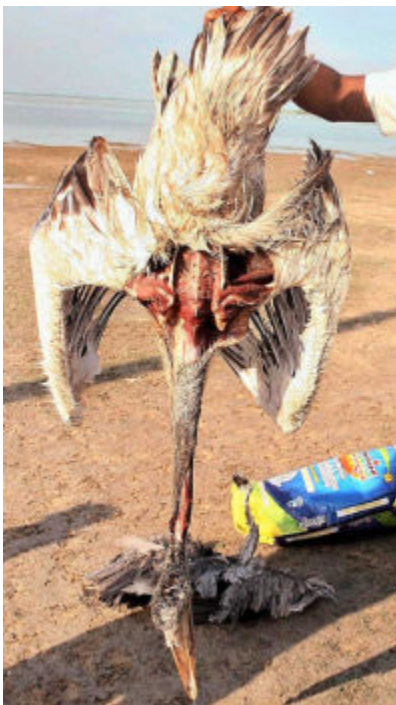
Unable to meet demand

“We used to get over 500 litres a day... but we are now receiving only around 200 litres and hence we cannot meet the demand,” said a salesman in the retail outlet near Palayamkottai bus-stand.

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Mystery death of migratory birds

Poachers' involvement suspected



ILL-FATED VISITOR:A pelican, one of many migratory birds, found dead off Sakkarai kottai tank in Ramanathapuram.

RAMANATHAPURAM: Mystery shrouds the death of birds, including Pelicans, an endangered migratory species, at Sakkarakottai tank here.

Forest officials of Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park (GMMNP), ornithologists and veterinarians visited the spot on Sunday based on information that some birds were found dead in the tank. Pelicans and egrets were among the birds found dead.

Though there were no noticeable wounds in the body of the birds, the stomach part of all birds seem to be cut.

It is suspected that they might have died three days ago. It was in the same season and the same spot last year that migratory birds were found dead.

It was then suspected that they were poisoned to death.

Though there was no report of death of migratory birds since April last year, the issue has come to the fore again.

Enquiries with boys in the locality revealed that the birds might have been poisoned again. Gangs involved in poaching of birds usually follow such a practice whenever migratory birds visit the tank — from January to April every year.

The modus operandi of the gang is to mix poisonous chemicals in a few tanks where migratory birds arrive in large numbers.

Fish in that area would die within moments. Birds that eat the dead fish would fall unconscious and subsequently picked up by the gang.

The gang members would sell the birds after removing the dead fish from its stomach.

M. Sundarakumar, Wildlife Warden, GMMNP told The Hindu that though the post mortem report was yet to be received, it seemed that it could be the repeat of last year's episode. Officials had

been directed to monitor activities of poachers in the area. It was a serious crime under the Wildlife Protection Act. Tough action would be taken against those indulged in poaching.

Officials had been alerted to monitor the Mela Selvanoor-Keela Selvanoor bird sanctuary and other sanctuaries in the district to prevent such incidents, he said.

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3.72 lakh tonnes of paddy procured

Special Correspondent

Five-lakh tonnes target by September

THANJAVUR: The Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) has procured 3.72 lakh tonnes of paddy in the district during this Kharif season.

M.S.Shanmugham, Collector, said procurement was going on smoothly and expressed hope to achieve the target of five lakh tonnes before September 30, 2011 when the Kharif season ends. Last year the procurement was 4.53 lakh tonnes.

A total of 364 direct purchase centres (DPCs) are functioning in the district. "Adequate gunnies and cash had been provided to all the DPCs and the paddy procured is quickly moved from the DPCs to cap storages and other districts to avoid glut," said Mr. Shanmugham.

The Corporation is paying Rs 1,050 per quintal for common variety of paddy and Rs 1,100 per quintal for fine variety of paddy.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Department is selling Kuruvai paddy seeds for the Kuruvai season beginning June. While Kuruvai will be raised early in pumpset irrigated areas in the district, it will be taken up after the Mettur dam is opened in canal irrigated areas.

Farmers have raised summer paddy crop in the district. Horticulture Department is popularising cultivation of chillies, brinjals, ladies finger, banana, cocoa and pepper under the National Horticulture Mission.

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Farmers call off fast

Basavana Bagewadi: Farmers of Basavana Bagewadi taluk, who were on a fast for the past few days, called off their agitation on Sunday afternoon following assurance given by Large and Medium-scale Industries Minister Murugesh Nirani, who is in charge of Bijapur district.

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District farmers accuse Tobacco Board of bias

Special Correspondent

MYSORE: Tobacco cultivators staged a demonstration in the city on Saturday, demanding reduction of the penalty imposed on them by the Tobacco Board and seeking remunerative prices for their crops.

More than 300 farmers from Hunsur, Periyapatna, K.R. Nagar, H.D. Kote and other tobacco-growing areas in the region assembled in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in support of their demands.

'Discrimination'

They accused the board of discriminating against tobacco farmers by classifying them as 'licensed' and 'unlicensed', alleging that this led to the exploitation of small and marginal farmers cultivating tobacco.

The committee leading the protest said the penalty imposed on farmers for excessive production of tobacco in 2011 was high, fixed at 15 per cent on the value of tobacco sold in excess of the authorised limit, in addition to Rs. 2 a kg on the unlicensed produce.

They said the penalty would break the backs of small and marginal farmers, and wanted the authorities to reduce it to five per cent of excessive produce plus Rs. 2 for every kg of excess tobacco cultivated by them.

The farmers warned that if their demands were not met by March 10, they would intensify the agitation.

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'No funds for draft plan on climate change'

Satyasundar Barik

Forest and Environment Department responds to an RTI query on the subject

Experts from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Spain consulted: RTI

The budget for climate change response actions has been estimated to be Rs. 17,000 crore

BHUBANESWAR: It may sound strange, but true. Orissa government has not spent a penny for the preparation of the draft Orissa Climate Change Action Plan (OCCAP), which is touted as the most important strategy note to guide the government's response on vagaries of nature during the next five years.

To a Right To Information query comprising a set of nine questions sought by one Chitaranjan Barik from Cuttack district, Forest and Environment Department replied that "no funds have

been received either from State government or Central government for preparation of draft OCCAP till date.”

Surprisingly, the State government did not spend any amount for regional stakeholders' meeting held at Bhubaneswar, Berhampur, Balasore and Angul. One of those meetings was organised in a top hotel in the capital.

The department clearly chose to evade questions as to which agency or person was hired to prepare the draft OCCAP 2010-15 although at consultation meetings in Bhubaneswar, the State government proudly announced C-TRAN, an environment consulting firm, as its knowledge partner for the preparation of the plan. The RTI reply said experts from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and Spain were consulted. But the department was not forthcoming as to who footed the bill for experts' involvement.

The State government admitted that DFID had prepared the initial scoping report on OCCAP in consultation with officials of government.

When asked what could be the intention of DFID behind framing such a crucial strategy for Orissa, the Forest and Environment Secretary Aurobindo Behera, who assumed charge after preparation of the plan, said, “it wanted to do a few good things here and there. That could be the reason why it involved itself in framing OCCAP.”

Mr. Behera, however, said scientists and officials of State government had spent considerable time in the preparation of OCCAP. The budget for climate change response actions has been estimated to be Rs. 17,000 crore for a 5-year period between 2010 and 2015.

“The strategy to combat climate change challenges is considered as the most important government action in the twenty-first century. But importing the strategy framework from an outside agency is nothing but allowing oneself to be dictated by others,” said Himanshu Patra, an environmental researcher.

“There is a gift of Rs. 5,500 crore of public money to the power distribution companies as the amount required to reduce transmission and distribution losses.

Three of the four power distribution companies are being run by the country's leading private company," said Biswajit Mohanty, an environmentalist.

Mr. Mohanty said there was no talk about limiting mining or checking the setting up of large mines in forest areas as the World Bank funds large coal and other mine projects.

Meanwhile, the Forest and Environment Secretary said the draft plan would be finalised soon.

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Increased farmers' fund will help yield good crop

Special Correspondent

Recent two-fold increase in their welfare fund Rs.1,400 cr. for crop insurance scheme released

JAIPUR: Rajasthan Minister of State for Agricultural Marketing Gurmeet Singh Kunnar has said the recent two-fold increase in the Farmers' Welfare Fund and the release of Rs.1,400 crore to agriculturists under the crop insurance scheme would enable farmers make "significant investments" in getting a good crop yield.

Inaugurating the newly constructed Kisan Bhavan at Pali over the weekend, Mr. Kunnar said the condition of agricultural mandis across the State would be improved and the approach roads repaired for facilitating easy movement of agricultural produce.

According to an official release here, the Minister affirmed that the State government was serious about the welfare of farmers and would take more steps for ensuring remunerative prices for their crops.

State Parliamentary Secretary Dilip Chaudhary, Pali MLA Gyanchand Parakh, Municipal Council chairman Kewalchand Gulecha and panchayat samiti pradhan Shobha Solanki were among those present at the function.

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dated March 07, 1961: Mechanised farming

The State Government will soon establish a model farm in Tanjore district for demonstrating the Japanese method of paddy cultivation and in the light of its success the method would be extended to other areas in the State, announced Mr. M. Bhaktavatsalam, Minister for Agriculture, in the Legislative Assembly on March 6. The farm would demonstrate under Indian conditions how rice production could be raised to higher levels by the use of improved implements operated by Japanese farmers and by adopting their techniques and practices. It would also train Indian farmers in the use of such implements in their own farms.

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Farmers meet

Special Correspondent

PUDUKOTTAI: The Pudukottai district farmers association has condemned the continued attack on fishermen. A resolution to this effect was adopted at its meeting held here recently.

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Chilli farmers in doldrums

Staff Reporter

Traders refuse to offer better prices due to 'poor quality'

—Photo A.V.G. Prasad



At odds: A mirchi farmer dries his produce at a village near Buttayagudem in West Godavari district.

BUTTAYAGUDEM (WEST GODAVARI DIST): Hit hard by rains and market vagaries, chilli farmers in the upland parts of West Godavari district are in deep trouble this year. The crop area has come down drastically because of the damage caused by rain which the district experienced in December last. The output has come down significantly when compared with last year's.

But the growers failed to receive a better deal from the traders for the produce. According to Satyanarayana, a supervisor at the chilli market yard at Jangareddygudem, the arrivals to the market did not cross 90 bags this week. The produce comes to the yard from 7-8 villages around Jangareddygudem.

The price is hovering around 16,000 per quintal as the traders refuse to offer better prices on the ground of 'poor quality'.

The district witnessed a sharp decline in the crop area in the last 5-6 years in a gradual manner as the farmers tended to diversify into more lucrative crops such as Virginia tobacco, maize and sugarcane. "Chilli is more risky in terms of pests and diseases and economic viability when compared to the other cash crops," says a farmer from Buttayagudem. Chilli is widely grown in the upland parts and in the Agency along with Virginia tobacco, cotton, maize and sugarcane.

Seminar on cage fishing from March 7

Correspondent

Fishing business has been facing manmade dangers The availability of good quality fish has been declining

Karwar: The Central Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) is introducing the floating fishing cage in 14 places in the coastal India. CMFRI with the help of local fishermen in Karwar has taken up the project in Karwar.

This new method of fish development had good scope in Karwar. So, the CMFRI had arranged a seminar on cage fishing with the help of National Fish Development Corporation.

The seminar would be held from March 7 to 16 in Karwar, said K.K. Philipose, scientist, CMFRI. Uttara Kannada Deputy Commissioner B.N. Krishnaiah will inaugurate the programme on March 7. Vijay Mohanraj, Chief Executive Officer of the Uttara Kannada Zilla Panchayat, will be the chief guest. Marine scientists, Vivekanandan, Gopakumar, Ayub Pasha, and Sujata will be the resource persons.

Candidates from West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Goa will participate in the training. The fishing business in the sea had been facing danger from manmade as well as natural reasons and the production had been declining from two years.

Thousands of fishermen in the coastal area were facing the threat of the unemployment. Many mechanised boats had been facing the problem. The availability of good quality fish was declining and only low quality fish was available. Unscientific fishing, catching of fish lingers, and the variation in the climate were said to be main reasons for it, said marine scientists. The centre had been encouraging the cage fish development, people of Karwar and surrounding areas should make use of the seminar, said Mr. Philipose.

CPCRI develops new technology to extract virgin coconut oil

Raviprasad Kamila

Conventionally, coconut oil is extracted from copra

Oil extracted from coconut kernels is called virgin coconut oil CPCRI recently trained a group of farmers from Hassan on this technology



New method: Farmers undergoing training in extracting virgin coconut oil at the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod.

MANGALORE: Scientists at the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasaragod, have developed an indigenous technology to extract virgin coconut oil from fresh coconut kernels, according to its Director George V. Thomas.

Conventionally, coconut oil is extracted from copra. Oil extracted from fresh coconut kernels is called virgin coconut oil. If this latest technology is used, broken coconut need not be dried to make copra,

Dr. Thomas told The Hindu. The technology is ready for commercial transfer and the CPCRI had recently trained a group of persons from Hassan on its use.

The CPCRI functions under the Indian Council for Agricultural Research. One of its three regional stations is at Vitla in Dakshina Kannada.

High-value product

Dr. Thomas said virgin coconut oil is a high value product and has export potential. He said using the CPCRI technology, virgin coconut oil can be extracted in three methods – fermentation method, hot and cold process methods. "Virgin coconut oil has medicinal and antioxidant properties," he said. Dr. Thomas said those who want to use the technology can approach the CPCRI.

A similar technology developed by a group of Australian scientists costs about Rs. 25 lakh.

Meanwhile, the website of Coconut Development Board, Kochi, said the Board and Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysore, have also developed a technology to produce virgin coconut oil and dietary fibre. To a question, Dr. Thomas said the CPCRI's technology developed has nothing to do with the one developed by CFTRI.

Date:06/03/2011 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2011/03/06/stories/2011030651250300.htm>

Committed to development of agriculture and industry: Naveen

Special Correspondent

Biju Patnaik birth anniversary celebrated

BHUBANESWAR: A function organised by the Biju Janata Dal to pay tributes to the memory of Biju Patnaik on the late leader's birth anniversary here on Saturday turned out to be forum to blame the Centre for allegedly neglecting the State and criticise the opposition parties for attacking Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik over various scams.

With their government facing serious criticism from the opposition parties over the mining scam, coal scam and the dal procurement scam, senior leaders of the party who addressed the gathering at their party headquarters tried their best to protect the "clean

image” of Mr. Patnaik.

Opposition criticised

Many senior leaders and several Ministers came down heavily on the opposition for “making a futile attempt” to cause a dent to Mr. Patnaik's image. Mr. Patnaik was the only leader who could take the State forward on the path of progress, they said.

Mr. Patnaik said his government was committed to development of agriculture and industry to achieve development in the State. Mr. Patnaik was congratulated by his party men on completing 11 years as Chief Minister on Saturday. He had taken charge as Chief Minister for the first time on March 5, 2000. The opposition parties – Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party – had had put the government in a tight spot in the State Assembly recently for supply of substandard dal under the mid-day meal scheme, supplementary nutrition programme and emergency feeding programme.

Outside the Assembly, both parties had also demanded Mr. Patnaik's resignation alleging that he had not taken any action though irregularities in the procurement and supply of rotten dal purchased at a high price was supplied under the three feeding programmes.

Although senior party leader Pramila Mallick had resigned as Women and Child Development Minister in the wake of the unearthing of the dal scam, the opposition parties have been continuing with their campaign against the government and demanding that the probe being conducted by the vigilance department cover all the 30 districts of the State. The opposition parties were likely to continue their attack on the government over the dal scam when the second phase of the ongoing budget session of the Assembly resumes next week.

Series of programmes

A series of programmes such as mini marathon, rallies and meetings were organised during the day to pay tributes to Biju Patnaik on his birth anniversary, which is also observed as Panchayati Raj Divas in the State.



Press Trust Of India

Coimbatore, March 06, 2011

First Published: 20:44 IST(6/3/2011)

Last Updated: 20:45 IST(6/3/2011)

'Indian economy expected to reach USD 6 trillion by 2020'

1Former ISRO chairman and Planning Commission member K Kasturirangan on Sunday said if India sustains a 9% GDP growth then by 2020 its economy is expected to approach USD six trillion.

Kasturirangan said that the size of Indian economy would expand close to USD 1.8 trillion in the next 2-3 years.

"If the present expectations which are reasonable and realistic, fructify, India is poised to become a world power," he said.

"If we maintain the present rate of growth of GDP at around nine per cent, by the end of the present decade, 2020, this economy is expected to approach USD six trillion, with per capita GDP crossing USD 4,500 from the present USD 1,500", Kasturirangan said in his Graduation Day address at Kumaraguru College of Technology here.

"If all goes well," the economy could even grow to 9-10 USD trillion and per capita income could rise to in excess of USD 6,000 by 2025, he said. Talking about India's space programme, Kasturirangan said since its inception, the secret behind its success has been "team work". "India is globally recognised today as a significant space faring nation. This is the result of teamwork in facing several challenges squarely and maintaining focus on our goals," he said. In the case of India, the role of technology is important since we became independent from colonial rule only about six decades ago and the need for development on several fronts is acute, he said.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/670240.aspx>

Weather

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Clear

Monday, Mar 7

Max Min
32.6° | 20.5°

Rain: 00 mm in 24hrs

Humidity: 83%

Wind: Normal

Sunrise: 6:22

Sunset: 18:18

Barometer: 1012.0

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Tuesday, Mar 8

Max Min
32° | 20°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday

Mar 9



32° | 21°

Partly Cloudy

Thursday

Mar 10



32° | 21°

Sunny

Friday

Mar 11



31° | 21°

Partly Cloudy

Saturday

Mar 12



30° | 22°

Cloudy

Sunday

Mar 13



31° | 24°

Cloudy

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Bad debts on farm loans pile up

Pradeep Thakur, TNN | Mar 7, 2011, 06.40am IST

NEW DELHI: The government has enhanced credit to the agriculture sector by Rs 1 lakh crore in the Budget but the pressure to meet the target has been showing on the bottom lines. All government banks are reporting an increase in their bad debts on farms loans ranging between 80% and 2000% in the first nine months of 2010-11.

State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur reported the highest increase in non-performing assets (NPAs) on agriculture loans at 2,000% in April-December 2010. In the last fiscal, ending March 2010, the bank had reported NPAs in farm loans category to the tune of Rs 7 crore. It has now gone up to Rs 106 crore.

The total lending by all public sector banks till December 2010 stood at Rs 2,94,000 crore. The net NPAs of these banks in this period increased by 70% compared to 46% in 2009-10.

The country's largest bank, SBI, reported bad farm loans of around Rs 3,717 crore, highest by any bank in the first nine months of 2010-11. The increase in SBI's bad loans has gone up by 80% compared to the bank's total farm loan NPAs in the previous fiscal, according to finance ministry data. In 2009-10, SBI's agriculture NPAs were Rs 2,322 crore.

Andhra Bank reported a 168% rise in NPA while in case of Allahabad Bank, it was more than 157% and for Corporation Bank, it was 205%. Bad farm loans of Bank of India increased by 100% in the current fiscal till December 2010.

In the 2011-12 Budget, the government enhanced agriculture credit limit to Rs 4,75,000 crore from Rs 3,75,000 crore in the previous year. Banks have been asked to step up direct lending for agriculture and credit to small and marginal farmers with an aim to increase productivity.

Considering that the banks face pressure from the government to meet the credit target within the financial year, the high level of NPAs indicate that there could be some compromise in due diligence.

Asimilar problem that had occurred a few years ago, impacting banks' credit lending and reserves, had to be compensated by the government by recapitalization and reimbursement through a farm loan waiver scheme. The government announced a Rs 70,000 crore farm loan waiver scheme in 2008-09 to compensate banks.

7 Mar, 2011, 02.22AM IST, Nidhi Nath Srinivas,ET Bureau

Something fresh: Get a Life Beyond Exports

NEW DELHI: It's quite clear India will stop being a farm produce exporter sooner than we thought. The big-ticket items — rice, wheat, sugar and cooking oil — are already cordoned. Government has taken power through this Budget to also hobble sales of tea, coffee, basmati, spices, tobacco, cotton and animal feed with export tariffs the moment inflation becomes uncomfortably high.

Is that a problem? Exporters will no doubt be peeved. No one likes becoming a dinosaur. Or watch their business model die. Processors who use export to boost revenue from local market will be at a loss. Multinational traders who treat India as the “origin” for proteins, fibre and spices will grumble at political risk. Farmers will complain of being denied the opportunity to maximise returns. It will be called sheer waste of a great profit opportunity.

In short, it boils down to price. Till Indian consumers pay less than foreign consumers, exporters and farmers indeed have a point. But what about the day when we start paying as much, if not more, than people overseas? That could be a bigger business opportunity.

It is no secret that erratic weather , coupled with shrinking land , expensive cultivation , and rising demand , means dwindling crop surplus . Most Indians are between 15 and 50 years old. They eat more than children and old people do.

Rising incomes mean bigger budgets. More dry fruit, peanuts, mangoes and grapes are now eaten locally than exported. Domestic basmati demand is rising faster than demand abroad. More poultry and dairy farms need more corn and protein to feed animals. More textile factories

mean more cotton is woven. Soon, there will be no export surplus to ship out. But local prices will be to die for. For astute companies it could be the start of a beautiful relationship with the new, more confident, affluent Indian consumer, beyond the ken of traditional agri-business. Consumption is no longer guilt-ridden. It comes with a sense of entitlement.

Signs of corporate foresight are evident. Refineries are popping up at ports to process imported raw sugar and bridge domestic shortfall. Companies marketing affordable basmati varieties we can eat daily are investing in changing palates. Cashew and coconut companies that create innovative products from the same boring nut are signing an insurance cheque. With most major global cafe chains here, plantations that can produce the beans these brands want will sign up customers for life.

The cotton market came of age this year. No one expected our textile mills to compete head-on with the Chinese for each bale when prices were at 140-year highs. But they did. Farmers who shift to premium super fine cotton need not fear the future. Soyabean processors that diversify into animal feed need never worry about competing overseas against cheaper Latin American oilmeal. Instead of merchant trading, MNCs are discovering greater value in building factories, supply chains and brands customised to local tastes.

Focus within would allow India to introduce seed technology that we want, not what appeals to foreign customers. China introduced GM wheat that gives extraordinary yields because it knows wheat will never be exported. We could do the same. We haven't introduced GM soya that could overnight solve our protein and oil crunch mainly because Japan and south-east Asia won't buy the meal.

Truth is most Indian farm produce is uncompetitive. It is sold at a discount in the world market (which depresses farmer prices), propped up by export subsidy, or faces stiff quality norms that act as entry barriers. Focus within rids the need to plead with finicky Europeans, be burdened

with foreign rules, or seek government largesse. Yet quality would still be king. In a food-importing nation, overseas competition lands at your doorstep. Flabby and complacent Indian companies will die.

In cooking oils, foreign players are already building larger factories and much faster. India and China together today have more families with an annual income of at least \$10,000 than the USA. Citibank says by 2050, India could be the world's largest economy.

How to prolong India's presence in the global food, feed, and fibre market is no longer the question. The big deal is how to create an agri-business geared to profit from India as a large premium market and eventually a net importer. Intelligent companies are rapidly hunting for answers. So should investors and farmers. It is the only way to survive disruptive change.

express[™]
buzz

By PTI

06 Mar 2011 07:44:16 PM IST

Pranab wants RBI to focus on inflation

NEW DELHI: Concerned over worsening political turmoil in the Middle-East and the impact of rising global crude prices on the domestic economy, the Finance Ministry has suggested the Reserve Bank to focus on steps to contain inflation.

An indication to this effect was given by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee to the RBI, which is slated to announce its mid-quarterly review of the monetary policy on March 17.

The central bank has for the seventh time since March 2010, raised the key policy rates to tame inflation, which of late has started declining.

However, with the surge in international crude oil prices following political turmoil in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, it is unlikely that inflation would continue to fall in the months ahead.

Mukherjee in his address to the RBI Board last week stressed on the need for sustaining post-crisis economic recovery and growth momentum, while keeping inflation in check against the

uncertainty of oil price rise.

"This (keeping inflation in check) is essential for furthering the government's agenda on inclusive development", the Minister had told the central board of the Reserve Bank, headed by Governor D Subbarao.

Crude prices in the international market have escalated to USD 116 a barrel. India is 75 per cent dependent on oil imports and such a spurt in price would have adverse affect on the economy.

The government and the RBI have been under pressure due to inflationary pressures in the economy, particularly the high food prices.

Food inflation, though moving downward, has been in double digits for the most of the current fiscal. The latest data puts the food inflation at 10.39 per cent for the week ending February 19 in comparison to the year-long period.

Further, the headline inflation has also been declining; it stood at 8.23 per cent for the month of January from 8.43 per cent in December this fiscal. However, this is still much above the comfort level and the government expects it to descend further to 7 per cent in March.

On its part, the government has taken several steps like banning exports of certain items like wheat and reducing or eliminating duties on some products to increase their availability in the domestic markets.

As a measure to boost investment in agri-infrastructure, Mukherjee in the Budget for 2011-12 announced extension of the Viability Gap Funding Scheme (VGFS) for public private partnership (PPP) projects for setting up storage capacities.

Besides, the government has also put on fast track the creation of additional 15 million tonnes of storage capacity through PPP mode.

Rs 25,000 cr allocated in farm schemes: Jha

March 07, 2011 11:12:21 AM

Staff Reporter | Bhopal

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) State president Prabhat Jha said `25,000 crore have been allocated in various agricultural schemes by the State Government. He was addressing the workers of BJP Kishaan Morcha in Morena on Sunday.

Jha said if the policies of the farmer friendly State Government continue to be implemented, the dreams of Gandhi, Deen Dayal and Jai Prakash would be fulfilled.

The BJP State head mentioned the importance of farmers, who he said are the backbone of the economy and their well-being is a priority of the State Government. He alleged that since independence, Congress has been responsible for lack of development of the farmers.

Jha said that the role of farmers and the Kishaan Morcha is crucial for the formation of any Government. He said that an effective Kishaan Morcha would lead to the success of BJP. He said that the welfare of the farmers should be a top priority of the Morcha workers, who should serve the farmers.

BJP organisational general secretary Arvind Menon also had discussion with the Morcha office bearers. Talking to the workers, he said that the Kishaan Morcha is the backbone of the party. He appealed to the Morcha workers to reach every farmer to ensure that benefits of the State Government's pro-farmers schemes are availed by all the farmers.

The present in the meeting were MLA Alkesh Arya, Kishaan Morcha national president Om Prakash Dhankadh, Kishaan Morcha State president Bansilal Gujar, Subedar Singh, Sandeep Patel, Ved Prakash Sharma, Sathpal Singh and Gujraj Singh among others.

Cong responsible for farmers' condition: Tomar

March 07, 2011 11:12:15 AM

Staff Reporter | Bhopal

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has alleged that the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the Centre has failed to provide cheap fuel to the rural people, that constitutes about 77 per cent of country's population.

BJP general secretary and MP Narendra Singh Tomar in a statement here on Sunday said, "The eleven five year plans would come to an end in 2012 and the time period for achieving the millennium development goal would also come to an end in 2015, but unfortunately the report of the National Sample Survey says that over 77 per cent of the total 70 per cent rural population of the country still cook their food on limekiln, only 9 per cent of them are able to cook their food on LPG, this proof is enough to ascertain that the UPA Government has failed to save the interest of village and the poor."

Tomar further said, "That only 60 per cent of the rural families are able to use electricity whereas 40 per cent of them are forced to use kerosene or other resource for lighting purpose."

The BJP general secretary said that it is unfortunate that the rural people could spend only `25 per day for his daily use whereas India was given the target under Millennium Development Goal that it would reduce by half the number of below poverty line and malnourished people.

He alleged that the funds for the development of farmers and to eradicate poverty are either going to Swiss banks or is reaching into the pockets of special class through corruption. The country would never forget this decade of corruption and inflation because not only corruption and inflation but the poor condition of the rural India and farmers also marred this decade, he added.

Business Standard

Monday, Mar 07, 2011

Higher oil prices, low IIP may hurt rupee appreciation next week

BS Reporter / Mumbai March 07, 2011, 0:45 IST

The rupee is expected to be in appreciation mode next week, too, provided oil prices do not rise further and industrial production data for January show improvement. "We expect the rupee to trade between Rs 44.90 and Rs 45.00 against the dollar. Oil prices are already high but if they move up further, the rupee will come under more pressure," said Ramanathan K, chief investment officer, ING Investments.

The Indian currency closed at Rs 44.98 against the dollar after trading at Rs 44.91-45.03 on Friday. The rupee closed with a gain of 0.74 per cent for the week ended March 4 as compared to Rs 45.33 in the earlier week.

A falling dollar against its global peers may support rupee appreciation next week but the gain will be limited if rising oil prices spark a dollar purchase. The industrial production data for January is due to be announced on March 11, while weekly food inflation data will be out on March 10. "A desired combination of better IIP and lower food inflation will help the rupee," said Sandeep Gonsalves, forex consultant and dealer, Mecklai & Mecklai.

Another factor that may work in favour of the rupee is the mid-March advance tax payments that will worsen the prevailing liquidity crunch and raise demand for the rupee.

THE HINDU Business Line

UAS Dharwad kisan mela begins today

Hubli, March 6:

The University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) Dharwad is holding rabi-summer kisan mela on Monday to showcase the recent technologies to the farming community in north Karnataka. According to Dr R.R.Hanchinal, Vice-Chancellor, UAS, Dharwad, the one-day mela is organised for the first-time this year on a trial basis. In this mela, nearly 4,000-5,000 farmers, farm women and extension workers from seven districts of northern Karnataka are to participate. The mela is to witness field demonstrations on recently developed technologies, which are laid out for the benefit of the farming community. Also technical information is expected to be provided on research and extension activities concerned to rabi-summer crops conducted at different centres of UAS, Dharwad.

Campco seeks minimum support price for red arecanut

Mangalore, March 6:

The Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd has urged the Central and the Karnataka Governments to extend a minimum support price of Rs 148 a kg to red arecanut and to increase the minimum support price for white arecanut.

In a statement here, Mr K. Padmanabha, President of Campco, said that the Karnataka Government has released Rs 25 crore for the purchase of white arecanut with a minimum support price of Rs 75 a kg. A panel of experts, which submitted its report to the Karnataka Government recently, has fixed the production cost of white arecanut at Rs 114 a kg and red arecanut at Rs 148 a kg.

Stating that Rs 75 a kg is not sufficient to meet the production cost of white arecanut, he said the Government should increase the minimum support price for white arecanut.

He said the Union Government's decision to ban marketing of 'gutkha' in plastic sachets has affected the red arecanut market badly. This has affected the interests of growers and arecanut cooperatives in red arecanut growing areas.

Mr Padmanabha urged the Union Agriculture Minister and the Karnataka Government to revise the minimum support price for both white and red varieties of arecanuts, and to begin buying them with revised support prices.

Cashing-in on weeding woes

New Delhi, March 6:

Crops genetically modified for herbicide tolerance will enable farmers to rely less on manual weeding, while simultaneously boosting sales of glyphosate formulations, including Monsanto's own 'Roundup'.

According to Dr M. Ramasami, Managing Director of Rasi Seeds Pvt Ltd, a cotton farmer harvesting 10 quintals an acre now spends roughly Rs 20,000, of which Rs 7,000-8,000 is incurred on picking and Rs 5,000-6,000 on weeding.

"Weeding is his second largest expense. Getting labour itself is a problem. Even when available, the going rate is anywhere from Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 an acre for every round of weeding. And you require 2-3 rounds", he notes.

Moreover, the weeding operations happen in the first 60-70 days after sowing, when the plant is yet to fully establish itself and the weeds compete with the crop for nutrition and water.

"The demand for weeding labour is concentrated during this period. If it rains continuously and the fields are wet, you will not even get anybody. Weeding costs in Tamil Nadu have more than doubled after the coming in of NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)", claims Dr Ramasami.

No wonder, Monsanto India is seeking regulatory approval next for incorporating 'cp4-esp' (the gene conferring glyphosate tolerance) in corn. The American life agri-biotech giant is currently conducting BRL-2 trials on two of its corn hybrids – '900M Gold' and 'Hishell' – containing cp4-esp, stacked along with two Bt genes targeting lepidopteron insect pests.

If all goes well, Monsanto will be in a position to commercialise its Roundup-Ready Bt corn as well in kharif 2012.

Nearly 25% of Coonoor tea offer unsold

Coonoor, March 6:

Nearly a quarter of the 9.72 lakh kg on offer was withdrawn for want of buyers even after shedding Rs 3 a kg. Teas worth Rs 1.79 crore remained unsold.

“In the leaf market, CTC lost Rs 2-4 a kg but orthodox gained Rs 1-2. In the dust market, orthodox gained Rs 1-5, but high-priced CTC eased sharply Rs 5-10 and others, Rs 1-3”, an auctioneer said.

CTC Grades

For the fifth consecutive week, Homedale Estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped CTC market in Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions fetching Rs 145 a kg at Sale No: 9. “Our Pekoe Dust (PD) fetched this price. In all, our 9 grades got Rs 111 and more”, Homedale Managing Partner, Mr Prashant Menon, told *Business Line*.

Vigneshwar Estate topped leaf market at Rs 141. “Our Broken Orange Pekoe (BOP) got this price. In all, our six grades got Rs 126 and more”, Vigneshwar Managing Partner, Mr Ramesh Bhojarajan, said.

Blue Monte Estate special got Rs 136, Hittakkal Estate and Shanthi Supreme Rs 135 each, Sree Tea Supreme Rs 133, Darmona Estate Rs 131 and Kannavarai Estate Rs 130. In all, 90 marks fetched Rs 100 and more.

Among orthodox teas from corporate sector, Curzon got Rs 185, Chamraj Rs 179, Highfield Estate Rs 171, Kairbetta Rs 167, Havukal Rs 163, Tiger Hill clonal Rs 162, Glendale and Prammas Estate Rs 160 each. In all, 33 marks got Rs 100 and more.

exports

Export purchases were the weakest so far in 2011. Pakistan bought very selectively in a wide range of Rs 50-80 a kg. "We are facing payment problems", an exporter said.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs 44-56 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs 85-130 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged Rs 51-60 for plain dusts and Rs 85-135 for brighter liquoring dusts.

India to plant first herbicide-tolerant GM crop

Approved GM Cotton 'Events' in India			
Event Name	Developer	Foreign Genes	Approval
MON-531 (BG-I)	Monsanto/Mahyco	cry1Ac	2002
MON-15985 (BG-II)	Monsanto/Mahyco	cry1Ac, cry2Ab	2006
Event-1	JK Agri Genetics*	cry1Ac	2006
GFM Event	Nath Bio-Genes India	cry1Ac, cry1Ab**	2006
BNLA-601	Public Sector+	cry1Ac	2008
MLS-9124	Metahelix Life Sciences	cry1C	2009
MON-15985 + MON-88913	Monsanto/Mahyco	cry1Ac, cry1Ab, cp4-epsps	2011?

*With IIT-Kharagpur; **Single fusion gene; +Central Institute of Cotton Research, Nagpur & University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad.

New Delhi, March 6:

The coming kharif season could witness plantings of the first 'stacked trait' genetically modified (GM) crop in the country.

The Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco) has already completed the second-stage Biosafety Research Trials (BRL-2) for four cotton hybrids that harbour two sets of traits – the first for insect resistance and the second for herbicide tolerance.

The hybrids will, in all, incorporate three foreign genes. The first two, *cry1Ac* and *cry2Ab*, are isolated from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Bt. While the *cry1Ac* gene produces proteins toxic against the American bollworm, spotted bollworm and pink bollworm, the *cry2Ab* gene confers resistance to spodoptera pests (beet and fall armyworms).

New Gene

The third gene, cp4-epsps, codes for a totally different trait of tolerance against glyphosate. The latter is a herbicide used to control grasses and broad-leaf weeds that grow along with the crops and impact yields by competing for nutrition and water. Being a non-selective, systemic chemical that kills all plants in the field of application – be it weeds or the crop in question – glyphosate cannot be used on ordinary cotton hybrids and varieties.

The cp4-epsps gene – sourced from yet another soil bacterium, *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* – expresses a protein, which inhibits the action of glyphosate. Plants that are genetically engineered to contain this gene are, hence, rendered 'tolerant' to glyphosate, enabling farmers to apply it in place of manual weeding.

The Mahyco cotton hybrids that have undergone confined BRL-1 and BRL-2 multi-location field tests over three seasons (2008, 2009 and 2010) are set to be the first GM crops in India to harbour herbicide-tolerance trait.

The GM crops being cultivated now are all cotton hybrids containing various Bt genes imparting only insect pest resistance. These are based on proprietary 'events' – a series of steps and protocols developed to insert a foreign gene into a host plant – of Monsanto, JK Agri Genetics, Nath Bio-Genes, the Rallis India-controlled Metahelix Life Sciences and the Central Institute for Cotton Research, Nagpur (CICR).

The latest Mahyco hybrids combine two Monsanto events: MON-15985 (which is already incorporated in the existing Bollgard-II cottons being grown since 2006) and MON-88913 (a new event). That would make them the first 'stacked event/trait' GM products to be introduced in the country.

Appraisal before Approval

"The BRL-2 trials were conducted under the supervision of the CICR, which is likely to submit its report to the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) by the month-end. As the GEAC normally meets every second Wednesday, it may consider the matter on April 13, paving the way for commercial planting in kharif 2011", sources told *Business Line*.

Mahyco, they added, has already undertaken production of around 55,000 packets, containing 450 grams each of the four new GM hybrids, of which two (MRC-8017 and 8031) are for northern States and the remaining (MRC-8347 and 8351) for the south and central zones. The 55,000 packets would suffice for 50,000-odd acres, which can go up in subsequent seasons.

In 2010, GM hybrids/varieties accounted for 9.4 million hectares (mh) out of the country's total 11 mh cotton area. Within the 9.4 mh, 90 per cent incorporated Monsanto's MON-531 and MON-15985 events, with the latter alone covering 6.6 mh.

Pepper futures see high volatility, decline

Kochi, March 6:

Pepper futures continued to witness high volatility and a declining trend on bearish sentiments during the week despite the fundamentals remaining unchanged. Reports from overseas, of late, have been bullish.

Indonesia and Brazil showed firmer trend while Vietnam which has been offering lower grade pepper at slightly lower rates, has not shown any interest to sell higher grade black pepper. It is more lucrative for the Vietnam farmers to convert the bold berries into white pepper at a comparatively much lower cost and earn very high prices at the local/international markets. Consequently, availability of black astar grade pepper in Vietnam is appeared to be limited.

The supply projections for the current year by the IPC and other agencies have not been encouraging. If these estimates are turned out to be true then there is a likely squeeze in availability this year. Given the consistent consumption growth of an estimated 3 per cent a year, there could be a mismatch between demand and supply in 2011. This, in turn, could keep the market firm.

Astar grade pepper prices have been, by and large, stable at above \$5,000 a tonne, even after the harvesting in Vietnam has commenced and it could be construed as a reflection of the squeezed supply scenario. Even in India where harvesting of the current crop is in its final stages, the arrivals continued to remain thin when compared with that of the previous seasons. The squeeze in supply could be attributed to replenishment of stocks by the major growers who had liquidated their 3-5 year old stocks when the prices were ruling above Rs 200 a kg and to

the direct buying from the primary markets by upcountry dealers. Both these factors reduced the arrivals at the terminal market considerably. There is material available but in a limited quantity, market sources told *Business Line*.

All the contracts during the week declined after high volatility. March, April and May contracts dropped by Rs 291, Rs 133 and Rs 111 respectively to Rs 22,421, Rs 22,786 and Rs 23,024 a quintal.

Total turn over fell by 13,600 tonnes to 39,174 tonnes. Total open interest however increased by 1,148 tonnes indicating good additional purchases and yet the market declined.

Spot prices in tandem with the futures market trend dropped by Rs 200 to Rs 21,800 (un-garbled) and Rs 22,600 (MG 1) a quintal.

Global trend

According to International Pepper Community (IPC), black pepper market development at sources remained mixed with limited activity. Local prices in Kochi, Lampung and Sarawak were down by 1 per cent. At other sources, however, the price increased marginally. In Kochi, the market was calm. Trading activity at the Commodity Exchange was limited. In the beginning of the week, the price decreased from the last week's close. On Thursday, March 3, the prices have recovered. On average, however, the prices was lower marginally by 1 per cent from the previous week's price.