THE HINDU

TODAY FARM NEWS

19.12.2012 A.M

‘Productivity of sugarcane to be increased’

The present focus of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and its institutions such as the Sugarcane Breeding Institute here was on increasing productivity and combating climate change, according to ICAR Director General S. Ayyapan.

Average

While the average production of sugarcane in India stood at 70 tonnes a hectare, the target was to reach 100 tonnes a hectare.

At 345 million tonnes, India stood second in the world in sugarcane production.

He was here on Tuesday to attend the valedictory of centenary celebrations of the institute, which was one of the 99 institutes and 53 agriculture universities coming under ICAR, the apex body for coordinating, guiding, and managing research and education in agriculture.

Research

"Research is also on to increase the recovery rate of sugar from sugarcane to 13 per cent from the 10 per cent now. While the present level of sugar production stood at 23 million tonnes, the target is to attain 33 million tonnes in a decade's time."

While the country was importing pulses and oilseeds, sugar was being exported. The institute played a major role in attaining this feat.

To combat climate change, research was on to develop disease-resistant seed varieties.

Dr. Ayyapan said that investment would be made in improving the facilities at the institute during the 12th Five Year Plan to enable it to focus on emerging areas such as bio-technology and genomics.

The next ten years would be a "big period" for the institute.

Success

The success of the institute, he said, could be gauged from the interest it evoked aboard in Caribbean and East African countries from where experts come here for training and collaboration.

Later addressing the valedictory, the Director General said that climate was fast becoming tricky and research institute must come up with solutions to problems like the high water use for sugarcane.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy; the institute Director, N. Vijayan Nair; spoke.

Cotton farmers on agitation path

Cotton farmers from Medak district on Tuesday gheraoed the market yard at Gajwel here, protesting the decision of the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) to procure the produce only on two days in a week.

The farmers locked up the gates of the market yard for some time, demanding that the CCI the produce everyday. The CCI officials started procuring cotton after the intervention of the higher officials.

The officials at the market yard had stopped procuring cotton for the past four days stating that they are unable to stock the produce. They have been stating that all the ginning mills were already full.

Repeated appeals by farmers did not yield any result. Infuriated over the prevailing conditions, farmers burnt cotton at the market to register their protest.

Farmers Federation leader Rang Goud alleged that though the CCI has been offering a price of Rs. 3,900 per quintal, many farmers are forced to sell their produce to the traders as they were unable to meet the conditions laid down by the CCI.

“The farmers prefer to sell the produce to government agencies at the market yard, but are unable to do so because of the stringent conditions,” he said.

TDP leader Pratap Reddy was also present during the protest.

Farmers training

A farmers’ training programme on scientific cultivation and production technology of spices is being organised on January 10 jointly by the Directorate of Arecanut and Spices Development, Kozhikode, and Regional Science Centre and Planetarium. Agricultural scientists will speak at the programme. Interested farmers may contact 0495- 2369877 for more details. — Special Correspondent

Call for measures to arrest fall in natural rubber price

Kerala Congress(M) general secretary Joy Abraham, MP, has urged the Central government to implement measures that would limit the import of natural rubber (NR) so as to prevent the further fall of its price in the domestic market. He also called for the reinstatement of the import duty of 20 per cent that was in effect.

He was inaugurating a mass dharna that was organised by the KC(M) and the Karshaka Union(M) in front of the Rubber Board headquarters here on Tuesday.

Mr. Abraham criticised the government decision to reduce import duty to 7.5 per cent and held the move responsible for the present slump in NR price.

According to him, the decision had been adopted at a time when rubber growers were facing several challenges including increase in production costs due to hike in prices of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as climatic vagaries that affected the productivity of crops.

The unrestricted import of natural rubber would ultimately affect nearly 11 lakh small-scale growers and those dependent of the growth of the sector, he said.

Union State president Mathew Stephen, ex-MLA, presided over the public meeting. Other leaders including M.S. Jose, Francis George, T.V. Abraham, E.J. Augusthy, Thomas Chazhikadan, Reji Kunnamkottu and Viji M. Thomas were among those who spoke on the occasion.

Meanwhile, KC (M) leader Jose K. Mani, MP, held talks with Union Commerce secretary S.R. Rao at New Delhi on the issue, according to a press release.

During the meeting, Mr. Mani called for immediate measures to alleviate the problems of rubber growers.

Farm expo in Kannur from today

To promote small scale entrepreneurs, the Kannur district panchayat is organising an exhibition-cum-sale of agricultural and other indigenous products at the police ground here from December 19 to 31.

Announcing this at a press meet here on Tuesday, district panchayat president K.A Sarala said the expo was one of the noticeable public welfare programmes hosted by the district panchayat.

Host of participants

Kudumbasree units, women's industrial units, cooperatives, public sector undertakings such as Regional Agro Industrial Development Cooperative, Kerala State Rubber Cooperative Limited, Kerala Soaps, Rural Development and Self-Employment Training (RUDSET) and Dinesh Foods would be part of the fair.

97 stalls

The fair would put for sale a variety of products from seeds, saplings, ayurveda products, earthen vessels, curry powder, pickles, soaps and so on in as many as 97 stalls. A sale of Rs.1 crore was expected at the expo, Ms. Sarala said.

The official inauguration of the fair would be held on December 20.

GSL launches project to boost agriculture productivity

In an effort to enhance the livelihood opportunities through increasing agriculture productivity, Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), south Goa-based defence shipyard, launched an agriculture co-operative project as a CSR initiative with National CSR Hub as the executing agency.

The project was launched at economically backward Canacona taluk of south Goa on Monday.

Ramesh Tawadkar, Minister for Sports, Youth Affairs, and Tribal Welfare and local MLA inaugurated the project in the presence of Vineet Bakhshi, Chairman and Managing Director of GSL.

The project with a term of three years is aimed at empowering community for employment generation through nurturing agriculture and allied activities, resource mobilisation and fund-raising for entrepreneurial initiatives, said an official of the GSL on Tuesday.

The Minister appreciated the GSL for spearheading such community initiatives. He said almost 80 per cent of the population in the hinterland of Goa was engaged in agriculture, but due to inadequate irrigation facilities, agricultural activities were restricted to seasonal kharif crops.

"Villagers are not engaged in extensive cattle farming, dairy or poultry and most of these products are imported from neighbouring States leading to reduction in employment opportunities. With a proper agriculture extension support system, crop diversification and by following allied activities the agriculture productivity in the region can be increased," said Mr. Tawadkar.

"This project with duration of three years will see the project developed into a Sustainable Project", CMD of GSL said and added that the company would provide necessary financial support under its CSR to develop the project. Crop rotation of paddy with vegetables and pulses and diversification with other agriculture activities like vermi compost, poultry, honey beekeeping, and dairy would possibly enhance yield further, Mr. Bakshi said.

'Irrigation project will be completed in a year if farmers give land'

Minister for Minor Irrigation Govind Karjol has promised to get the work on Karjol Lift Irrigation Project completed within a year if farmers "cooperated with the authorities" by giving up the land required for the project.

The Minister was addressing presspersons after laying the foundation stone for the project here on Tuesday. Mr. Karjol said that owing to prolonged dry spell and deficit rainfall, the groundwater level had receded in the district, primarily affecting the agriculture sector.

The project would help irrigate around 5,000 acres of land in the four villages of Karjol, Dudihal, Mulawad and Kakhandaki and it required 132 acres of land, Mr. Karjol added.

Farmers can sign up for crop insurance schemes

Farmers who want to avail themselves of the weather-based crop insurance scheme for rabi and summer crops for 2012-13 can submit their applications before December 31.

The scheme is being implemented by the State government through the Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd.

Official sources in the Agriculture Department said here on Tuesday that the national crop insurance scheme for rabi crops would be extended to farmers in the following hoblis: Athani taluk – Anantpur, Athani, Kagwad, Telsang; Bailhongal taluk – Bailhongal, Kittur, Nesargi; Belgaum taluk – Belgaum, Hirebagewadi, Kakti, Uchagaon; Chikkodi taluk – Chikkodi, Nagarmunolli, Nipani, Sadalga; Gokak taluk – Arabhavi, Gokak, Koujalgi; Hukkeri taluk –

Hukkeri, Sankeshwar,Yamkanmardi; Raibag taluk – Kudachi, Raibag; Ramdurg taluk – K. Chandargi, Katkol, Mudkavi, Sureban; Saundatti taluk – Munvalli, Murgod, Saundatti, Yargatti.

Hoblis covered under the weather-based crop insurance scheme, which is not available to farmers who have taken loans, are: Athani taluk – Anantpur, Athani, Kagwad, Telsang; Bailhongal taluk – Bailhongal, Kittur, Nesargi; Chikkodi taluk – Chikkodi, Nagarmunolli, Nipani, Sadalga; Gokak taluk – Arabhavi, Gokak, Koujalgi; Hukkeri taluk – Hukkeri, Sankeshwar, Yamkanmardi; Raibag taluk – Kudachi, Raibag; Ramdurg taluk – K. Chandargi, Katkol, Mudkavi, Sureban; Saundatti taluk – Munvalli, Murgod, Saundatti, Yargatti.

Farmers who haven't taken a loan can submit their applications for the national crop insurance scheme for summer crops by February 28, 2013, while farmers who have can apply by March 31, 2013.

For more information on the schemes, farmers may contact the Agriculture Department officials at the nearest taluk centre, bank, cooperative bank or Raitha Sampark Kendra.

FDI in retail not good for farmers

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail sectors will not be good for farmers as claimed by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) General Secretary K.Varadarajan said.

At a public meeting convened here on conclusion of three-day State conference of the sabha on Monday Mr. Varadarajan said "Chidambaram claims that multinationals like walmart if allowed in the retail sectors of the country, will purchase directly from farmers and that would benefit farmers, but government will eventually discontinue minimum support price for agricultural produce.

Hence entry of multinationals in retail sectors is going to affect the farmers, he said. He charged the Manmohan government for not acting on recommendations of M. S. Swaminathan Committee report on farmers' distress. Former secretary of Communist Party of India (Marxist) N. Sankariah, AIKS State president K. Balakrishnan and general secretary P. Shanmugam participated. Earlier, cadres of AIKS from the State thronged near Anna Arch on Vellore Road and took a rally towards meeting venue near Anna statue.

GAIL begins reassessment of compensation to farmers

The Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) has commenced reassessment of compensation to around 650 farmers in Tirupur district on whose land through which it would be laying underground pipeline to take liquefied natural gas from Kochi to Bangalore.

“This exercise is taken up only with an aim to enhance the compensation scale as many farmers have been expressing that the amounts initially fixed for laying the underground pipeline through their fields was inadequate to offset the cost of crops displaced to facilitate digging of earth,” GAIL officials told *The Hindu* . Accordingly, the fresh valuation process would be increasing the compensation on two parameters namely ‘land’ and ‘standing crops’ in the areas where the pipeline would be laid.

A senior official of GAIL said that as per the revised norms, the new guideline value for the respective plots that came into effect this fiscal would be obtained in the case of all the 650 farmers so as to calculate the compensation afresh on the ‘land component’.

“Earlier plan was to give an indemnity to the tune of 10 per cent of the old guideline value, as the initial survey been taken prior to the current financial year, and it will now become 13 per cent of the ‘new guideline’ value of the respective plots meaning that the net hike will be around eight times of the previously fixed compensation,” the official added. The GAIL officials had once again clarified that only ‘Right of Use’ of land provision alone would be exercised during the laying of gas pipelines which means that the ownership of land will remain with the farmer and farming activities will get disturbed only for the brief period when the pipeline laying works were underway.

Farmers’ grievances day

The monthly farmers’ grievance meeting is scheduled to be held on December 28, at the Collectorate. Farmers are requested to participate in the meeting to be presided over by Collector T.Munusamy.

Cotton prices firm up

Cotton prices are moving up steadily as demand picks up in the domestic and export markets.

The price of Shankar-6 variety of cotton was at Rs. 34,000 a candy on Monday. It was about Rs. 400 less last week.

According to the Southern India Mills' Association, cotton prices are moving up because of steady export orders. Further, domestic textile mills in the country were also doing well, except those in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh which suffered from power shortage. Demand for coarse count yarn was high in China and many mills were exporting yarn to that country. Another reason for the strengthening of cotton prices was the expected shortfall in production this year.

In Tamil Nadu, mills that had dedicated feeders and windmills were able to perform better than others. The big mills were buying cotton now. Cotton prices were expected not to shoot up or fall sharply this season.

K.N. Viswanathan, vice-president of Indian Cotton Federation, said cotton arrivals increased on Monday and Tuesday. About 1.5 lakh bales were coming to the market every day. This was expected to touch two lakh by the end of this month. The prices had firmed up because of export enquiry and better buying in the market.

Panel finds lapses in development of 'first indigenous Bt cotton'

In a damning indictment of the way some Bt cotton varieties were developed and commercialised in the country, a committee headed by Prof. S.K. Sopory, Vice-Chancellor of JNU, found that indigenous Bikaneri Nerma (BN) Bt cotton variety was contaminated by a gene patented by Monsanto.

Having found lapses in the "BNLA106 event", the committee has held as "invalid" the data obtained from bio-safety studies and field trials with BNBt as these were conducted with material that contained Monsanto's "MON531 event". The committee's finding raises disconcerting questions over the claims made by developers, the role of regulatory body, the public sector research institutions and their ethical standards.

"The purified BNBt, as far as its bio-safety and evaluation studies are concerned, is a new event that must now go through the regulatory process as a fresh application, if ICAR intends to commercialise it," the committee observed.

Touted as the “first indigenous public sector-bred Genetically Modified crop in India”, the BNBt cotton variety and Bt NHH hybrid were developed in a collaborative effort of the National Research Centre on Plant Biotechnology, New Delhi, the Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR), Nagpur, and University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Dharwad.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the apex regulator, approved it for commercial release in 2008 and it was cultivated in about 8,400 hectares in Kharif of 2009.

But a few months later, cotton growers and State seed agencies complained that performance and yields did not match their expectations and that the BNBt seed samples contained Monsanto’s gene/ event. Consequently, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) ordered suspension of seed multiplication and commercialisation and instituted this enquiry with senior scientists.

The committee had other startling findings. The fundamental flaw found was that the whole BNBt project rested on a single event and there were no other events to carry out an event selection process. “Event specific primers were not developed for BNBt,” it observed.

The panel felt the project was “poorly planned” and implemented with inappropriate distribution of work elements. It listed several institutional and ethical failings, lapses on regulatory front and found conflict of interest with developers sitting in the GEAC meeting as regulators and approving their own product.

Reacting to the report, the Coalition for a GM-Free India, congratulated the Committee for its thorough investigation and exposing “one of the worst cases of scientific fraud within the ICAR institutions”.

The Coalition expressed dismay at the way the ICAR was “shielding the errant officials” by delaying the report. The report was submitted to the Union Ministry of Agriculture in August but has been made public now. “Apparently the establishment waited for the retirement of a senior official while another senior technocrat was protected as he does not figure in the enquiry or the report, though he was the coordinator of this project.”

NABARD restores credit limit to KSCB

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has restored its credit limit to Kerala State Cooperative Bank (KSCB) to Rs.600 crore "initially" on Tuesday for disbursing short-term seasonal agricultural loans during the current financial year.

This would enable the KSCB to extend loans to farmers up to the sanctioned limit through the various district cooperative banks, NABARD's regional office in Thiruvananthapuram, said in a press release.

Additional capital

The NABARD had also written to the KSCB and the district cooperative banks to take measures for mobilising additional capital to comply with the licensing norms of the Reserve Bank of India on a sustainable basis, the press release added.

The NABARD was not providing any credit limit to the KSCB for the last few years, as the KSCB had been consistently failing in fulfilling the eligibility norms.

In 2011-12, however, the NABARD sanctioned a credit limit of Rs.500 crore to the KSCB on the strength of a guarantee issued by the State government.

Subject to the cooperative banks in the State improving their financial performance, the NABARD could provide an aggregate credit limit of Rs.1,085 crore for seasonal agricultural operations in the State during the current financial year.

Eligibility norms

This was the proposal drawn up the NABARD. The KSCB and cooperative banks had been advised to improve their financial strength and continue to comply with the eligibility norms in order to sustain the flow of credit at a concessional interest rate to the farmers, the NABARD said.

The State government pumped in Rs.136 crore as the KSCB's share capital last year. Further, the member district cooperative banks contributed an additional share capital amounting to Rs.80 crore last year.

These measures helped the KSCB to just about comply with statutory requirements and the eligibility norms for credit flow from the NABARD.

Biodiversity expo from Friday

An exhibition featuring the biodiversity of the Western Ghats, tribal health traditions, ethnic dishes, native species of livestock, cut flowers, ornamental fish, handicrafts and folk arts will be the highlight of the National Biodiversity Congress to held under the auspices of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) here this month.

KSBB chairman Oommen V. Oommen and member secretary K.P. Laladhas said the expo beginning on Friday would have stalls put up by the National Museum of Natural History, National Biodiversity Authority, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Central Tuber Crops Research Institute, Fisheries University, Tea Board and various NGOs, public sector units.

The ticket fare for the exhibition to be held at Kanakakunnu Grounds is Rs.20 for adults and Rs.10 for children.

Ryots protest power cuts

Irate farmers laid siege to the electric sub-station at Balkonda mandal headquarters here on Tuesday, protesting against the indiscriminate power cuts which badly affected the standing crops. They withdrew the agitation only after they received an assurance from the authorities concerned. - Staff Reporter

Farmers told to launch united struggle against fiscal policies

Artistes performing at the two-day State-level convention of the Rythu Coolie Sangham in Vijayawada on Tuesday.— PHOTO: V. RAJU

Only by waging a united struggle against the economic policies of the country farmers can get out of the crisis they were facing, former professor of the Acharya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University, K.R.Chowdary.

Inaugurating the State convention of the Rythu Coolie Sangham, Andhra Pradesh, (affiliated to the All India Khet Mazdoor Kisan Sabha) here on Tuesday Prof. Chowdary said different farmers' associations were making separate demands for subsidies, remunerative prices for their produce, crop insurance and quality control on inputs, but the primary cause for their plight was the faulty economic policies of the country.

He said despite the promises made by leaders such as former Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy the suicides of farmers continued even till today. Stating that there was a lot of difference in the statistics being published by different agencies on the number of suicides, Prof. Chowdary said he believed that two farmers were committing suicide every hour in the country.

There was a great variation in the figures published by different agencies because the government agencies were not recording tenants as farmers at all.

The percentage of farmers ensnared in the debt trap was also growing. Currently 82 per cent of the farmers were caught in the debt trap. According to a survey up to 50 per cent of the farmers in the country do not want to continue in agriculture, he said.

Giving these figures Prof. Chowdary said the crisis in the agricultural sector was predicted by revolutionary leader Tarimela Nagi Reddy decades ago.

The agricultural system of the farmers which was more environment-friendly was totally destroyed to give control to the multi-national companies and 'imperialist nations', he said.

He said this should not be seen as a crisis of the farmers alone, because it had an affect on rural economy. Rural poverty was on the rise from 35 per cent a few years ago to 50 per cent today.

A report submitted by Arjun Sengupta put rural poverty in the country at 70 per cent.

Prof. Chowdary said corporate agriculture that was suggested a while ago and contract agriculture that was coming into vogue more recently would end up counter productive resulting in farmers losing rights over their lands and becoming landless peasants.

Rythu Coolie Sangham State secretary K Kotaiah welcomed the gathering and president Simhadri Jhansi presided. Sambalpur University economics professor Gholak Biharinath, AIKMKS central secretariat members Vindhai Vemdan, Srikanth Mohanti, State vice-president Gurram Vijaya Kumar, joint secretary J Kishore Babu, and State leader M. Bhargavasri were on the dais.

Allay farmers' apprehensions about WGEEP report: CPI

The government should allay the fears of farmers before implementing the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report, CPI State secretary Pannian Ravindran has said.

Briefing reporters about the decision of a two-day State council meeting here on Tuesday, Mr. Ravindran said that farmers were apprehensive about the recommendations. A healthy co-existence of man and nature was imperative. Certain recommendations were said to be against the farmers. Hence, the government should hold discussions with them before implementing the report, Mr. Ravindran said.

The State government should take the initiative to ensure that People's Democratic Party leader Abdul Nasir Maudany jailed as under-trial prisoner in Karnataka was getting justice and medical care. It should hold bilateral discussions with the Karnataka government and if needed seek the Centre's intervention, he said.

The State government was responsible for the inflation. No serious steps had been taken so far to arrest the price rise. The government had increased price of rice sold through ration shops. It could not effectively contain hoarding and black-marketing. The public distribution system which was a model for the nation has been upset. Distribution of welfare pensions had gone awry, Mr. Ravindran said.

Agitation

The party had decided to launch an agitation at the panchayat-level from January 13 to January 20, 2013. State, national, and district leaders would participate in the marches to be held all over the State. Party workers would lay siege to the village offices on January 22.

About five-lakh people, including members of feeder organisations and family members of party activists would participate in the siege. The council declared solidarity with the State government employees strike announced from January 8, the national strike by central trade unions on February 21 and 22 and the bank employees strike on December 20.

The CPI State leadership had not taken any decision on inducting Janakeeya Vikasana Samithi leader M.R. Murali into the party. It should be discussed by the district and State leadership, he said

The CPI was for widening the base of the LDF, and groups which cherish the Left ideology should be brought to the front. If those who had quit the LDF express willingness to return they should be accepted. None in the UDF has so far shown such interest, he said.

hindustantimes

TODAY FARM NEWS

19.12.2012 A.M

weather

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Partly Cloudy

Wednesday, **Dec 19**

Max	Min
30.0°	22.7°

Rain: 0
Humidity: 88
Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:25
Sunset: 05:47
Barometer: 1012

Tomorrow's Forecast

Cloudy

Thursday, **Dec 20**

Max	Min
30°	24°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
Dec 21	**Dec 22**	**Dec 23**	**Dec 24**	**Dec 25**
31° | 24°	26° | 23°	26° | 24°	26° | 24°	26° | 24°
Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast

Airport Weather

Delhi **Delhi**

Rain: 0
Humidity: 82
Wind: normal

Sunrise: 07:08
Sunset: 05:28
Barometer: 1016

THE HINDU Business Line

TODAY FARM NEWS

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Pepper futures close higher

The pepper market continued to move up on buying support amid limited arrivals on Tuesday. All active contracts closed much above the previous day's closing.

Bull operators were liquidating their position in Dec and getting out of the market while some of those who are short were covering.

About 15 tonnes of new pepper arrived today and that were traded at Rs358 - Rs372 a kg depending upon the quality, bulk density and area of production. Domestic buyers covered to meet the upcountry demand, market sources told *Business Line*.

December contract on the NCDEX increased by Rs 105 a quintal to close at Rs 39,255 a quintal while that of February and March went up by Rs 515 and Rs 490 respectively to close at Rs 35,670 and Rs 35,380 a quintal.

Turnover

Total turnover rose by 354 tonnes to close at 2,437 tonnes. Total open interest fell by 338 tonnes to close at 3,511 tonnes.

December open interest decreased by 311 tonnes while that of February and March dropped by 37 tonnes and 14 tonnes respectively to close at 2,149 tonnes and 506 tonnes.

Spot prices continued to remain steady at previous levels of Rs37,200 (ungarbled) and Rs38,700 (MG 1) a quintal on limited activities.

Indian parity in the international market also remained more or less steady at $7,450 a tonne (c&f) and remained out priced. Overseas buyers are said to be on a wait and watch mode hoping the prices would decline once the new crop started arriving in large quantities next month.

Imports amid slack offtake pull down chana

Weak demand and import of about 2 lakh tonnes of chana from Australiahave dragged down chana in local *mandis* by Rs 200 a quintal in the past eight days. On Tuesday, kanta chana ruled at Rs 4,000-4,025 a quintal, while desi chana declined to Rs 3,800. Chana had been ruling at Rs 4,200-4,200 before shipments from Australia began arriving. Prices are expected to go down further as imports continue. In the past one and half month, kanta chana has fallen by about Rs 800 a quintal.

Weak demand for chana has also pulled down its dal by about Rs 150 a quintal in the past one week, with average dal being quoted at Rs 4,800-4,825 a quintal, medium dal at Rs 4,875-4,900 and bold dal at Rs 5,175-5,200.

Improved domestic demand has lifted dollar chana in the past two days by Rs 200 a quintal to Rs 4,700-5,500 a quintal amid arrival of 4,000 bags. Compared with last week, dollar chana is still ruling Rs 500 a quintal lower. In container also, dollar chana is ruling lower on weak export demand falling by Rs 350 a quintal in the past week. On Tuesday, dollar chana (42/44 count) ruled at Rs 6,900 a quintal, 44/46 count at Rs 6,500, 46/48 count at Rs 6,100 and 60/62 count at Rs 4,000.

Spot edible oils volume drop on lower buying

Spot imported palmolein rose by Rs 2 for 10 kg on Tuesday, while soyabean and sunflower oils ruled unchanged. Soya oil futures dropped by Rs 9 tracking weak overseas markets. Groundnut oil jumped by Rs 15 following a sharp rise in prices in Saurashtra. Rapeseed oil increased by Rs 3 and cottonseed refined oil dropped by Re 1. Poor demand kept volume subdued. Malaysian palm oil futures closed unchanged with range bound trading on Tuesday, with slowing export demand weighing at a time when inventory levels remain at record highs.

During the day, Ruchi sold 200-250 tonnes of palmolein at Rs 475.

Daily arrivals of groundnuts in Saurashtra declined to 15,000-20,000 bags and to 5,000-7,000 in Rajasthan, pushing up prices. Tracking firm reports from main producing centres, groundnut oil rose by Rs 15 for 10 kg here.

At the close of the day, Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs 482-484, super palmolein at Rs 537, soya refined oil at Rs 692, and sunflower refined oil at Rs 785. Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs 480, soyabean refined oil at Rs 690 and sunflower refined oil Rs 780. Allana was offering palmolein at Rs 477 and super palmolein at Rs 535.

A commodity analyst said in Malaysia, demand from the major consuming countries remains uncertain due to economic slowdown and tightening measures on imports of vegetable oils. But traders hope higher palm oil exports, as Malaysia has removed export tax for crude palm oil for January. At home, lower output will reduce supply of seeds for crushing.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, soyabean refined oil's January contracts declined to Rs 706.80 (Rs 715.80), February to Rs 695.65 (Rs 704.15) and March to Rs 690.60 (Rs 698.60). Malaysia's crude palm oil's January contracts settled at MYR2,197 (MYR2,197), February at MYR2,280 (MYR2,280) and March at MYR2,341 (MYR2,350) a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,275 (1,260), soya refined oil 690 (690), sunflower exp. ref. 710 (710), sunflower ref. 780 (785), rapeseed ref. oil 810 (807), rapeseed expeller ref. 780 (777) cottonseed ref. oil 624 (625) and palmolein 477 (475).

Vikram Global Commodities quoted Rs 552 for 10 kg for Malaysian super palmolein (excluding Chennai).

Spot turmeric gains on North Indian orders

North Indian demand lifted spot turmeric by Rs 300 a quintal on Tuesday. Futures were up 2 per cent.

"Futures increased by 2 per cent at Rs 6,500 a quintal. So, local buyers, too, quoted higher," said Erode Turmeric Merchants Association President R.K.V. Ravishankar.

An upward trend has started and prices may go up another Rs 200-300 a quintal, he said.

Farmers said that producing one quintal cost them around Rs 8,500, but they were getting at most only Rs 5,500. So, they want the Union Government to fix a minimum support price of Rs 8,500-9,000.

In this regard, Erode Member of Parliament A. Ganesamoorthy along with Federation of All India Turmeric Farmers Association's representatives recently met President Pranab Mukherjee.

Arrivals of the fine variety in the Regulated Market pushed up the highest price to Rs 6,021 a quintal, an

increase of Rs 460. Of the 4,500 bags that arrived, 60 per cent was sold. Stockists purchased 10-20 per cent of the stocks.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 3,899-5,811 a quintal, the root variety at Rs 3,696-5,319.

Salem hybrid crop: The finger variety was sold at Rs 5,964-6,339, the root variety at Rs 5,255-5,589. Of the 1,120 bags that arrived, 302 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,266-6,021, the root variety at Rs 4,169-5,439. Of the 559 bags that arrived, 539 were sold.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,716-5,869, the root variety at Rs 4,389-5,510. All the 503 bags kept for sale were sold.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,899-5,772, the root variety at Rs 4,869-5,544. All the 164 bags kept for sale were sold.

Poor local orders pull down dara wheat

Sluggish domestic demand amid higher stocks on Tuesday pulled down dara wheat and flour marginally. Desi wheat ruled unchanged even as sales were tepid.

In the physical market, dara eased by Rs 10 and quoted at Rs 1,520-1,530 a quintal. Around 700 quintals of dara variety arrived from Uttar Pradesh and were directly offloaded at the mills. Mill delivery was at Rs 1,520-1,525, while delivery at the chakki was Rs 1,530.

Though demand is low, wheat will remain flat and a large drop in prices is unlikely, said trader Sewa Ram.

Desi wheat varieties continued to rule flat on low stocks and quoted at Rs 2,500-2,550. Because of poor demand, traders are not buying desi wheat despite depleting stocks, said Sewa Ram.

Futures remained bearish. On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for December delivery decreased by Rs 5 and traded at Rs 1,616 a quintal; it touched a high of Rs 1,620 earlier in the day. The January contract was up Rs 2 to Rs 1,592. Market experts said futures were moving in a narrow range and may decline further. Spot wheat on the exchange was Rs 1,540 a quintal.

Following a downtrend in wheat, flour prices, too, eased by Rs 10 and quoted at Rs 1,740 a quintal. *Chokar* ruled flat and fetched Rs 1,550 a quintal.

exports

State trading company PEC Ltd has floated a tender to export 1 lakh tonnes of milling wheat between January 10 and February 15.

Need-based demand pulls down sugar

Sugar dropped by Rs 5-15 a quintal on the Vashi wholesale market due to need-based demand and ample supply. *Naka* rates declined by Rs 5-20 as the mill-level markets turned bearish.

Mill tender rates were down Rs 10-20, as producers continued sales. Domestic futures fell by Rs 12-14 even as transport charges at the producing level rose by Rs 5-10 a bag.

Mills in Maharashtra have been selling in the State, as orders from other States have dried up, said a Vashi-based wholesaler. Consequently, stockists are fully covered, the wholesaler said. Besides, slack local demand has also forced traders to keep away from buying more.

As of now, Vashi has more than 100 truckloads. Prices in other consuming States ruled on par with those in Maharashtra, bringing down upcountry demand. Moreover, the 70-lakh-tonne free-sale quota for December-March is more than sufficient to meet local demand.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, the January contract was down Rs 3,277 (Rs 3,291), February to Rs 3,323 (Rs 3,336) and March to Rs 3,358 (Rs 3,370) till noon. In Vashi, 64-65 truckloads (each of 100 bags) arrived, while 62-63 truckloads were despatched. On Monday evening, about 18-20 mills offered tenders and sold 63,000-65,000 bags (each of a quintal) to local traders at Rs 3,180-3,260 (Rs 3,200-3,270) for S-grade and at Rs 3,260-3,340 (Rs 3,270-3,340) for M-grade.

Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade Rs 3,322-3,411 (Rs 3,326-3,411) and M-grade Rs 3,402-3,561 (Rs 3,416-3,561).

***Naka* delivery rates:** S-grade Rs 3,280-3,315 (Rs 3,270-3,320) and M-grade Rs 3,350-3,500 (Rs 3,370-3,500).

Groundnuts shortage lifts its oil

Shortage of nuts pushed up a 15-kg groundnut oil tin above Rs 2,200. In the past four days, groundnut oil has increased by Rs 70 a tin. Cottonseed oil declined on lower demand.

Loose groundnut oil was traded at Rs 1,320-1,325 for 10 kg. A new 15-kg tin was Rs 2,210-2,220. A 15-kg *telia* tin was quoted at Rs 2,022-2,023. About 50-60 tonnes of the oil was traded in Saurashtra mills. In Gujarat, 5,000 bags arrived in Rajkot, 9,000 in Gondal and 350 in Jamnagar.

Nuts output has tumbled because of poor monsoon this year, said a miler in Gondal. Only about 15,000 bags of groundnuts are arriving daily in the State, which is not enough for millers. Moreover, peanut traders have bought almost half of the arrivals creating a shortage for crushers.

Cotton oil (wash) declined by Rs 5 to Rs 617-620 for 10 kg and a 15-kg new tin by Rs 5 to Rs 1,095-1,105.

Short supply in poppy seeds may continue into 2014

Poppy seeds prices continue to rise as demand outstrips supply in domestic and international markets

Prices have surged by Rs 20 a kg in one day lifting it Rs 355-380 a kg and it is expected to top Rs 400 as imports now cost over Rs 400 a kg, upcountry market sources told *Business Line*.

There are no new imports as shipment costs are high, following short supply, they said.

A sharp cut in growing area world-over enforced by the Narcotic Control authorities will reduce production significantly and that, in turn, will push up prices to record high in 2013, the sources said.

Poppy seeds “farmers are not selling as the crop in the next two years will be too small, they said adding that prices in the international market currently are ruling at $4,500 a tonne.

Next year, the crop is will be small and the new crop will come only in September and hence, there is a long way is to go. Markets will soon see more and more shortage, pushing prices up, they said.

Reduction in area under poppy is being attributed to cancellation of export orders of opium from the US. In international markets, prices have increased from $2,100 a tonne in March to $4,500 a tonne now, the sources said.

Indian exports of opium alkaloids are to US, Europe and Japan. During 2010-11 the country Exported 1,500 tonnes of it to US, where as in 2012-13 US would purchase only 500 tonnes. Similarly Japan also has reduced purchase from India from1,200 tonnes to only 400 tonnes, they said.

Following a reduction in sales of opium alkaloids during 2012-2013 and also 2013-2014, the NCB has reduced cultivation “patta” or permission by 80 per cent. While permission for cultivation of poppy in 2011-2012 was for 24,000 hectares, it has been reduced to 5,700 hectares for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. The area is only 20 per cent of last year, trade sources said. A notification to this effect has been issued by the Narcotics Control Board on 21 September.

The Narcotics Control Board under the Union Ministry of Finance grants permission for production of opium, a by-product of poppy seeds, which is used for manufacturing alkaloids for Pharmaceuticals and Medical usage.

India produced 18,374 tonnes of poppy seeds in 2012. Against this, the output is estimated to be around 4,400 tonnes in 2013. Availability, according to the trade, during the period from May 2012 to April 2013 is estimated at 10,576 tonnes.

Indian annual requirement is estimated at between 35,000 tonnes and 40,000 tonnes. Consequently, dependence on imported poppy seeds is on the rise and during 2011-12 fiscal, imports stood at 24,075 tonnes valued at Rs 268.48 crore against 9,050 tonnes valued at Rs 127.64 crore the previous fiscal, according to official sources.

Kerala coop body seeks ban on rubber imports

The Kerala State Cooperative Rubber Marketing Federation (RubberMark) has called for steps to impose a total ban on import of rubber as well as encouraging exports by extending subsidy.

T.H. Musthaffa, President, RubberMark, said that the quantity of rubber produced in Kerala is sufficient for domestic consumption and there is no need for import under any circumstances. The production in the last financial year was 9.04 lakh tonnes and consumption during the period was 9.64 lakh tonnes.

Out of this, 48,200 tonnes were exported.

Up to August, 2,13,785 tonnes were imported, he said and stressed the need to take steps for exporting the surplus quantity over own consumption.

In a memorandum submitted to the Union Commerce Ministry, Musthaffa pointed out that the fall in rubber price is the result of RSS IV and ISNR 20 to help rubber companies.

It is only because of the pressure from tyre companies rubber imports were being allowed.

It is significant to note that when the price of rubber was in the downward trend, prices of tyres have not declined and in turn, they had gone up, he added.

Prices of RSS IV, which was Rs 201 a kg in April has come down to Rs 160 in December.

The price of crumb rubber also declined from Rs 198.50 to Rs 159 during the same period.

When the prices were ruling high, rubber growers extended wages hike and other benefits to workers.

However, it is not possible to reduce these benefits, while the price realisation has come down. Moreover, the increase in fertiliser costs also added to the woes of rubber growers, he said.

The Federation also requested the Ministry to grant a short term loan of Rs 50 crore as a need-based working capital and Rs 1 crore each to the member societies to reinforcing the cooperative marketing set up.

Spot rubber rules soft on slack demand

Spot rubber was mixed on Tuesday. The undercurrent continued to remain weak on low demand as major consuming industries kept away from the market. Arrivals were also low, probably on expectations following recovery in the global trend.

The TOCOM rubber futures hit another seven-month high catalysed by a weak yen on growing hopes for further monetary easing in Japan. But concerns over demand from China remain as its rubber inventories are still at the highest level in more than two yeaRs

Sheet rubber declined to Rs 162 (163) a kg, according to traders. The grade dropped to Rs 162.50 (163) a kg at Kottayam and Kochi, according to Rubber Board.

The January series weakened to Rs 165.60 (166.28), February to Rs 168 (168.56), March to Rs 170.33 (171.06) and June to Rs 177.79 (183.21) a kg, while the April and May series remained inactive on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) closed firm at Rs 172.17 (170.12) a kg at Bangkok. December futures dropped from ¥ 267.2 a kg to ¥269.4 (Rs176.37) a kg in the night session on Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Physical rubber rates (Rs/kg) were: RSS-4: 162 (163); RSS-5: 156 (157);

ungraded: 151.50 (152); ISNR 20: 152 (152) and Latex 60%: 106 (106).

Statistics plays prime role in farm research, saysSen

Statistics plays an important role in research and planning in all areas including farm sector, the Planning Commission Member, Abhijit Sen said today.

“Agricultural statistics together with judicious use of informatics provides the foundation for sound agricultural research and planning,” a release quoted Sen as saying.

Informatics is the study of the processing, management, and retrieval of information.

Indian Statisticians have made significant contributions in areas of design of experiments, sampling technique, statistical genetics, modelling and forecasting techniques, he said.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Director General, S Ayyappan expressed satisfaction on the efforts made by statistician in National Agriculture Research System (NARS).

Indian Tea Association to hold charity auction

Indian Tea Association (ITA), the North Indian tea producers lobby, will hold a charity auction on the inaugural day of second Darjeeling Tea & Tourism Festival on December 20.

Proceeds from the auction will be donated towards the welfare of the people of Darjeeling hills in West Bengal. The 15-day festival is organised by the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA).

According to an ITA release, seven lots of whole-leaf Darjeeling tea from seven valleys in the hills will be offered for sale at the auction.

Major buyers will participate in the auction to be handled by J Thomas & Co Pvt Ltd in the presence of Mr Bimal Gurung, Chief Executive of GTA.

Business Standard

TODAY FARM NEWS

19.12.2012 A.M

Sugar production recovers after UP mills become operational

Sugar production recovered well in the first few weeks of the current season despite delayed commencement of crushing in Uttar Pradesh, India's second largest sugar producing state.

Data compiled by the apex trade body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) estimated sugar production at 4.91 million tonnes by December 15, up two per cent from 4.82 million tonnes in the same period last year.

The delay in the commencement of mills' operationalisation had pulled down sugar output by 2.7 per cent by the end of November 2012.

But with crushing starting well in Uttar Pradesh, which actually commenced late, the sugar production upto December 15, 2012 has crossed the production achieved around same time last year, a note from ISMA said.

Currently, 455 mills are operational December 15, 2012, lower by 18 as compared to 473 mills last year.

Maharashtra produced 1.88 millon tonnes of sugar as against 1.83 million tonne of sugar last year, with 155 mills operational to-date, 10 less than last year (14 less in the cooperative sector, but 4 more in the private). Nevertheless, capacity utilisation of Maharashtra mills is better, when they have crushed more cane, as compared to last year.

ISMA has estimated around 6.5 million tonnes of sugar production from Maharashtra in 2012-13, though with a shorter season, mainly due to lower production and also diversion of sugarcane to fodder in Maharashtra. Recoveries are almost same at last year level i.e. 10 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh has already produced 1.03 million tonnes of sugar. This is about 20 per cent less than last year same time. Last year, 121 mills were operational as against 116 mills this year.

This is because a few mills is East UP have to still start their crushing. With 8.56 per cent sugar recovery till now, it is better than last year. ISMA is expecting a total sugarcane production of 140 million tonnes, of which 85-86 million tonnes would be available to the sugar industry, at about 61 per cent drawl.

Karnataka has produced 1.1 million tonnes of the sweetener against 905,000 tonnes last year.

Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh both have produced about 25 per cent more sugar than last year till date. While Tamil Nadu produced 200,000 tonnes with 29 of operational mills, Andhra Pradesh, with a lesser number of operational mills, has produced about 170,000 tonne of sugar with higher cane crush but little lesser reported recoveries as compared to last year.

ISMA is expecting that sugar millers will pay about Rs 66,000 crore for the sugarcane during 2012-13. With lower sales realisation and higher sugarcane payment to farmers, ISMA has already requested the government to increase the import duties on raw sugar from current level to the normal rate of 60 per cent, so as to avoid cane price arrears during the season.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

TODAY FARM NEWS

19.12.2012 A.M

ICAR scientists used patented gene to develop BT cotton, says panel report

COIMBATORE: The Sopory panel report which blamed scientists of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) for developing Bt cotton with Monsanto patented gene and passing it off as desi cotton will be looked into, said S Ayyappan the Director General of ICAR while speaking to reporters on the side lines of the valedictory function of the Centenary Celebrations of Sugarcane Breeding Institute (SBI) in the city on Tuesday.

S K Sopory, the vice chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University who headed a committee which looked into the Bt cotton developed by ICAR scientists released their report recently saying that the cotton variety was made using a patented Monsanto gene. Ayyappan said the incident was as an isolated one. "We are still in the learning phase and mistakes are part of the process," he said.

Ayyappan said that SBI would aim to increase the sugarcane productivity of the country. Around 70 tonnes of sugarcane is produced from a hectare. This should increase to 1,00 tonnes per hectare in the coming years. Apart from this several studies are been undertaken by the scientists to study the emerging challenges in the agricultural sector. Climatic changes have brought many new diseases as well as shortage in water levels for irrigation.

He added that the institute will be developed in the coming years. Infrastructure and resources will be pooled in. New courses and programmes would be initiated. At the same time there are several countries which are showing an interest to cooperate with the institute. "Countries like Trinidad, Brazil and some from East Africa are interested in gaining expertise, technology and seeds from the institute. Some of them already have tie ups," he said.

Paddy farmers a distressed lot

KORAPUT: Farmers in Koraput district are in a fix over ways to sell their bumper kharif harvest with the state government setting a procurement target of only 82,000 metric tonne. They fear distress sale as 288,366 metric tonne has been produced.

"We have had a good harvest this year. If the government stops procuring paddy after achieving the target of 82,000 metric tonne, then we will be forced to sell our produce at a price lower than the minimum support price of Rs 1,250 a quintal," said farmer of Ghatbagra village in Jeypore block Krushna Chandra Pradhan. "Millers and middlemen will be the ultimate gainers then," he added.

Fearing distress sale, farmers are rushing to the 31 mandis opened by the administration for procurement. "Last year, the kharif procurement target was one lakh metric tonne despite the crop loss. But this season, the target has been decreased though we have had a bumper harvest. Steps should be taken to prevent distress sale," said president of Congress, district unit, Meenakshi Bahinipati.

The administration has procured 40% paddy amounting to 38,000 metric tonne since opening of the mandi on December 5. Koraput district has 93,700 agricultural families, who cultivate 46,240 hectare of land. There might be a ray of hope for these farmers. "Given that there has been good crop in the district, we are planning to write to the government to increase the present procurement target. But we can only do so after achieving the target at hand," said civil supplies officer (Koraput) Pitambar Acharya.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

TODAY FARM NEWS

19.12.2012 A.M

Farmers have nothing against me'

In this Idea Exchange programme at The Indian Express office, Sugar Commissioner Vijay Singhal talks about sugarcane pricing, the recent protests by farmers and the government's stand on the issue

Manoj More: We will begin with the latest controversy around the price of sugarcane. Can you explain the dispute, which led to protests that turned violent?

I will give you an overview of the issue. Both sugar and sugarcane are controlled commodities. The government decides the price of sugarcane, which is called Fixed and Remunerative Price (FRP). Earlier, it was SMP — Statutory Minimum Price (SMP). This FRP is a guaranteed price to be given to the farmer. At the national level, we have an independent body called Commission for Agricultural Cost and Prices (CACP), which, after considering various factors and discussing with various stakeholders, including agriculturists, sugar factories, unions and the government, fixes the FRP for that year. The body also studies the input cost for the crop and the realisation of sugar from the market and also the fact that had the growers gone for any other crop what price would they have got. So, the price calculation depends on these four-five factors. On the basis of this marathon exercise, they come up with a price, which is then fixed as the FRP for that particular year. Once they recommend it, the figure goes to the Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs, after which it has to be cleared by the Cabinet. Once the Cabinet approves it, a formal notification is issued on the FRP. So, the FRP is the amount that has to be given to the farmers by virtue of the Sugarcane Control Order under the Essential Commodities Act.

The current controversy is because the farmers' leaders think the price fixed is much less and they are demanding a higher price as the cost of inputs and that of production have gone up. In Maharashtra, most sugarcane factories are cooperative. We know that cooperatives work on a principal of no profit and no loss. Also, in Maharashtra, the price of sugarcane is generally given in two-three installments. The first installment is something that shouldn't be less than the FRP. If the first installment is not given above the FRP, the sugar commission is empowered to take action against the erring factory. The first installment is paid after 15 days of getting the sugarcane in the factory. The second installment may be given after six to seven months or as and when the sugar factory gets the money. To pay to the farmers, the money should be available with the sugar factory.

The factory gets the money from banks by pledging the sugar to it. While giving the loan, the banks consider the last year's sugar price and then give 85 per cent of the total money the factory would get by selling all the sugar. The banks may also have some additional deductions.

Sunanda Mehta: But in the last two years, the government intervened. And this year the government decided to stay away. Why is that?

What the farmers' organisations are demanding is a higher first installment. If you consider the final price of the sugarcane that the farmers get, it is good. I am not saying each and every factory is paying well. But many factories, which are doing good, are giving a good amount to the farmers. Factories which are in losses are not paying that well. But even then the factories have to give an amount higher than the FRP.

Nanda Kasbe: Why is the 'first advance' such a big issue in Maharashtra? One doesn't hear similar clamour in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and UP.

Farmers fear that all the money that they will get for their produce is the first installment. They will not get any second or third installment. They always treat the second or third installment as a bonus. There are very high demands. Some organisations are demanding Rs 4,500 per tonne as the first installment. Such a high price cannot be paid. It's not that these people do not understand the economics. Such a high demand cannot be met. It is possible to pay a final price of Rs 3,000 per tonne but not as the first installment.

Manoj More: Is there an unhealthy competition among the factories to pay a higher price for political reasons? What is the role of the Sugar Commissioner in stopping this?

We have an important role to play. I will tell you what we have done to improve the situation and reduce the unhealthy competition. We have taken measures to reduce the conversion cost. For the first time in Maharashtra, we have come up with an energy audit and a cost audit, which is compulsory for every sugar factory. We are hoping that this will have a tremendous impact in cutting down the cost of conversion.

The other thing that we have done is to bring transparency in the system. We have come up with a fantastic website, www. mahasugar.gov.in. We are trying to keep each and every information on the website. Every piece of information, including the balancesheets of factories, is uploaded on the website. Earlier, the shareholders of the cooperative factories used to complain that they weren't informed about the balance funds and other things. Now they will get to see everything. I personally ensure that the website is updated everyday.

Anuradha Mascarenhas: Sugar factories are also supposed to generate electricity. How much are they adding to the state grid? And how efficient are they?

Currently, there are 60 cooperative factories and 12 private factories, which are involved in co-generation projects. As of now, we have sanctioned generation of 1,337 MW, out of which we are contributing 825 MW costing more than Rs 5,000 crore at the moment. We will reach our target in four to five months. And by next year, we will definitely cross 1,600 MW because most of the projects have already been sanctioned. Now we have moved towards BOT co-gen(eration) projects. A number of factories had shown interest in BOT co-gen projects. So we invited tenders and have appointed an independent observer to supervise. Currently, there are three BOT projects that are functional in the state — D Y Patil, Varna and Pravara. Another four are in the pipeline. This is the first time we are inviting tenders for co-gen projects. Till now it was done with an agreement between the two. When I took over as the commissioner, I said it was a big project and had to be done through a transparent bidding process.

Nisha Nambiar: What about the sugar cultivation? Sugarcane requires a lot of water and currently the state is facing a severe water scarcity. We don't know what will happen in future. How are you planning to deal with it?

The situation was very pathetic this year. We had sugarcane on 770 lakh hectares last year. This year, it has come down to 540 lakh ha — a reduction of about 30 to 40 per cent. Next year also, it is likely to be bad. It would be too early to comment on the 2014-15 season but given the cyclic nature of monsoon, we can hope to have a good crop then. But yes, we need to increase the yield and work towards increasing the productivity. Sugarcane is the raw material for the industry and if it is scarce, the industry cannot function. The average productivity in Maharashtra is 77 tonne. In Tamil Nadu, it is 100 tonne. There’s scope for improvement. But when I ask this question to my officials, they tell me that with the current productivity we have too much of cane to crush. We need to increase our crushing capacity, after which we will increase the productivity.