

GI-tagged rice varieties to get a boost

The government has chalked out plans to promote the cultivation of four special traditional rice varieties in the State that have been included in the Geographical Indications (GI) registry of India. An amount of Rs.2 crore has been earmarked in the annual Plan to bring 2,000 hectares of land under cultivation of Pokkali, Njavara, Jeerakasala, and Gandhakasala rice varieties that have received the GI tag, signifying the unique qualities attributable to their place of origin. Farmers will be offered an incentive of Rs.10,000 a hectare to take up the cultivation of these unique rice varieties. Agriculture Director R. Ajithkumar said efforts were on to work out a marketing mechanism for the special rice varieties with the help of Oil Palm India. The GI tag not only acts as a certification, but also offers legal protection and boosts the export potential of the rice varieties.

Scented rice: Jeerakasala and Gandhakasala are scented rice varieties grown by farmers and tribal communities in Panamaram, Sultan Bathery, and Mananthavady in Wayanad district. Njavara rice is a unique cultivar of the State endowed with medicinal properties. Njavara is cultivated mainly in the northern parts of the State.

Pokkali: Known for its special taste and high protein content, Pokkali is a saline-resistant rice variety organically cultivated in the coastal regions. Pokkali farmers alternate between paddy cultivation during the low saline phase from June to early November and prawn farming during the high saline phase from mid-November to mid-April. The Plan scheme seeks to promote the cultivation of Jeerakasala and Gandhakasala in 1,350 hectares in Wayanad, Njavara in 30 hectares in Palakkad and Wayanad, and Pokkali in 610 hectares in Ernakulam, Alappuzha, and Thrissur districts. It also envisages the promotion of Basmati rice cultivation with the help of Padasekhara Samithies, self-help groups, and non-governmental organisations.

“Paddy farming assumes significance in terms of food and water security and ecosystem conservation. It is heartening to note that more farmers are coming forward to take it up,” Mr. Ajithkumar said.

Business-friendly land acquisition Act proposed in Rajasthan

Pushing through major reforms in the labour laws, the Rajasthan government has now come up with a draft Land Acquisition Bill that seeks to make the process of acquiring land easier but enhances the quantum of compensation for the owners. Project-affected persons can take resettlement and rehabilitation amount on a monthly basis as well. There is no provision of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) in the proposed law and the percentage of consent of landowners has been reduced if the land is acquired for public

private partnership projects, and totally done away with for core infrastructure projects like roads, pipelines, railways, communication, ports, airports and bridges. On the other hand, the Rajasthan Land Acquisition Bill, 2014 seeks to increase the quantum of compensation to the owners and proposes a ceiling on the quantum of land that can be acquired by a single project promoter. The proposed law will apply when the State government acquires land for public-private partnership where the ownership of the land continues to vest with the State and for private companies for public purpose. In the case of acquisition of private companies, the prior consent of at least 80 per cent of the landowners and in the case of public private partnership projects excluding infrastructure projects, the prior consent of at least 60 per cent of the owners would be required. In case the land to be acquired is situated within a radius of 5 kms from the end of urban agglomeration or municipal limits, the compensation would range between 1.25 to 2.5 times of the land value, in the case where land is barren, or waste land compensation will be 2.25 to 4.5 times the market value. If the land is classified as irrigated or double cropped in the revenue records, the compensation will be 2.5 to 4.5 times the market value. In addition, an interest of 12 per cent per annum would also be paid to the owner for the period between the official notification for acquisition and actual taking over of the land. Importantly, the compensation would have to be awarded within two years of the notification failing with the entire proceeding for the acquisition shall lapse. The Bill, which has been put on the government website for inviting suggestions, also provides for a lump sum amount equal to 10 per cent of the compensation as resettlement and rehabilitation cost to the project-affected persons where land is acquired by the government for creating core infrastructure. Where the land is acquired by the government for any other purpose except for a private company, the lump sum amount would be 30 per cent of the compensation. But where the acquisition process displaces an entire village or a number of villages, the endeavour would be to resettle such village or villages at an alternative land, preferably in command area of a river or a canal, or on land which is as near as possible and feasible to the original village of the project affected persons. More interestingly, where the land is acquired for a private company, the project affected persons shall have the option either to receive a lump sum amount equal to 30 per cent of the compensation amount as resettlement and rehabilitation cost or to receive an annuity of Rs. 3,000 per month for 20 years or a one-time settlement of Rs. 7.5 lakh per person.

Seizure of potato continues

Seizure of potato-laden trucks bound for other States and neighbouring countries continued all over West Bengal for the third consecutive day on Tuesday, even as the State administration made arrangements for the seized tubers' sale in local markets at the government-regulated price. "Altogether 252 potato-laden trucks carrying 4,117 tonnes have been seized in the last three days State-wide," State Agriculture Minister Purnendu

Bose said, adding, the measures had yielded results with the check in rising potato price. "Potato price is under control all over the State," he said. Clampdown on potato-laden trucks for other States and neighbouring countries began here following a directive from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The State administration also earmarked a ceiling for potato stock in both wholesale and retail markets to prevent its hoarding. "The State administration has arranged to sell the seized potato (Jyoti variety) at Rs. 12 per kg to the retailers who will sale them at Rs. 14 per kg in local markets," he said.

'Interest-free crop loan up to Rs. 2 lakh'

Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao on Tuesday declared that the State government would provide crop loans upto Rs. 2 lakh without levying interest. The Minister told a gathering of farmers at 'Polam Pilustondi,' programme at Chandreyepalem village in Bellamkonda mandal that the interest free fresh crop loans would be provided to farmers to take up Kharif operations. He also added that the government would soon waive off crop loans though it has entailed a burden of Rs.45,000 crore. Asserting that he was committed to making farming a profitable endeavour to ryots, Mr. Pulla Rao said agricultural tools were being provided to farmers at subsidized rates. He asked farmers belonging to SC/ST communities to make complete use of subsidies. Collector Kantilal Dande advised farmers to opt for crops like maize, sorghum which consume less water. He said that efforts were being made to impound 11 TMC of water in Pulichintala project by August 15.

Millets more sought after now

Have you tried making 'thinai' tomato rice or 'varagu puliodharai'? These are really great preparations that are easy to cook, are healthy and taste great. "The recipe is simple. Cook the 'thinai' with water and some salt in a heavy pan, till it is three-quarters cooked. Crackle mustard, urad dhal and green chillies, sauté tomatoes, toss it all in with the thinai and cook till it dries. But be careful to not overcook the millets," says food enthusiast Janaki Lakshman, who likes to try out millet-based recipes. Millets such as 'kuthiravali', 'saamai' and 'varagu' are becoming quite popular, so much so that even rice wholesalers are stocking them as health-conscious customers ask for these varieties. D. Saravanan, who runs a rice wholesale store near Adyar bus depot, says that despite a recent increase in prices, sales have been good. "When I started stocking them about nine months ago, I used to sell just one bag each, but that has now increased to 15 bags a month. I have now placed orders for 'maapillai samba' since customers are asking for it," he says. V. Suseela of Thoraipakkam is trying out millets, including 'naattu kambu' and 'cholam', as they have more fibre and a lower glycemic index when compared to rice or wheat. "I am diabetic and have to cut down on my rice intake. I have now included millets in my diet. I mix powdered 'kambu' and 'cholam' with dosa/idli batter along with some asafoetida

powder, chillies, chopped onion and curry leaves. Though the colour of the idli and dosa changes, it is very tasty,” she says. Ananthoo of Safe Food Alliance says people must, however, take care the millets are not polished as they lose their fibre that way. “‘Varagu’ is supposed to be dark brown in colour, ‘thinai’ should be a strong yellow, and ‘samai’ and ‘kuthiravali’ look greyish,” he says. However, with millets becoming more popular, department stores seem to be capitalising on the demand. Organic stores that directly procure from farmers are selling them at a nominal rate. Customers should check out various stores before buying them, says a consumer activist.

TNAU inks MoU with HRD Ministry

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University has inked a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Human Resource Development for setting up the Centre of Excellence under frontier areas of science and technology. A release says that the Centre will function at the Department of Agricultural Microbiology with an outlay of Rs. 4 crore. The Centre will work on optimising the microbes that live in and around plants, plant-microbe interaction, plant activating proteins and small molecules and volatiles that can substantially reduce the need for chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides and boost productivity. Vice Chancellor K. Ramasamy said the dependence on fossil fuel-based fertilisers has increased the country’s import bill and that has set the Government into looking for alternatives. The MoU to establish this centre was a fallout of the thinking, he said.

Cane farmers ‘beg’ pay arrears

Sugarcane farmers on Tuesday staged a novel protest by ‘begging’ in front of the Puducherry Co-operative Sugar Mills protesting against the delay in payment of arrears. Armed with bowls about 100 farmers gathered in front of the cooperative sugar mills and alleged that they had not received payment for supply of sugarcane for the last six months. The farmers would intensify their agitation if the government did not provide compensation within one week, he said.

Expired food products, banned goods seized

In a surprise raid conducted simultaneously on all the four major streets in the town, Food Safety and Drug Administration unit officials in coordination with other department officials, seized expired food articles, banned ghutkas and tobacco mixed goods on Tuesday. Divided into four teams -- each team comprising 15 officials from the Food Safety and Drug Administration unit, Labour Department and municipality — the officials seized the food products, most of them stocked beyond expiry date. “The value of the goods was about Rs. 65,850 and were destroyed immediately,” said V. Varalakshmi, Designated Officer, Food Safety and Drug Administration who led the raid. The officials conducted the inspection at 183 shops located on the East, North, South

and West Main streets. "Under the directive of the district administration, notices have been issued to the shop keepers warning them against the sale of the banned goods or expired eateries," the official said.

Details

All the details of the traders would be recorded in the official registers and in case of recurring offences, legal action would be initiated against them," she said. Such raids would also be conducted in other parts of the district, according to official sources.

Farmers practising integrated farming get increased yield, income and awards too

The district administration has honoured 22 progressive farmers who had practiced integrated farming and enhanced their income by adopting organic farming and new technologies. After the departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and other sister departments unveiled various schemes to motivate farmers to take up integrated farming to double the yield and triple the income, many farmers evinced interest in integrated farming. The departments selected 22 best progressive farmers, two each from 11 blocks in the district and honoured them with cash awards for successfully practicing integrated farming. On Monday, Collector K. Nanthakumar distributed Rs. 10,000 each to the farmers to encourage them to continue integrated farming and be role models to other farmers. Similarly, four best performing Self Help Groups (SHGs) in farm activities from Paramakudi, Mudukulathur, Kamuthi and Kadaladi were honoured with cash awards of Rs. 20,000 each. The Collector advised the Self Help Groups to utilise the amount as seed money for getting bank loans and then diversify their activities. Joint Director of Agriculture N.V. Krishnamurthy, S.S. Shaiek Abdullah, Assistant Director of Agriculture (Quality Control) and S.M. Uduman Mohideen, Nodal Officer, Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) were present on the occasion.

Rain, discharge from Periyar dam raise water level in Vaigai dam

Water level was rising steadily in Vaigai dam here on Tuesday bringing cheers to farmers in southern districts and relief to officials in Madurai and nearby areas, thanks to the heavy discharge from Periyar dam and moderate showers in Vaigai dam catchments. However, the storage level slumped to 124.2 feet from 124.3 feet in Periyar dam as the quantum of discharge was more than the inflow into the dam in the morning. Even as the inflow into Periyar dam scaled down to 1,101 cusecs from 1,511 cusecs (on Monday), the Public Works Department engineers have been maintaining the discharge at 1,311 cusecs with the sole aim of improving storage in Vaigai dam to meet irrigation needs of farmers under its authorised ayacut and the drinking water needs of Madurai city, and Dindigul and Theni districts till next summer. The water level in Vaigai dam touched 46.52 feet. The inflow into the dam was 937 cusecs and the discharge 40

cusecs. Farmers in southern districts were happy as the steady increase in storage brightened the chances of releasing water for irrigation of 2.05 lakh acres of land under its ayacut in Dindigul, Madurai and Theni districts. The storage was 1,568 mcft.

Dindigul

Heavy rain lashed Dindigul, Kodaikanal and some other pockets in the district paralysing routine life on Monday night. Temperature came down sharply in Kodaikanal. All streams in Kodaikanal were flooded with rainwater. The flow was heavy at Silver Falls and Moolaiyaru stream. Kodaikanal recorded the highest rainfall in the district and Chatrapatti received the lowest. Rainwater flooded prime roads and low-lying areas in Kodaikanal. Minor showers were recorded in Dindigul and nearby areas on Tuesday evening too. However, there was no rain in Nilakottai and Palani. The total rainfall recorded in the district on Monday was 215.6 mm and the average rainfall 21.56 mm. The rainfall recorded at various places in Kerala, and Theni and Dindigul districts at 8 a.m. on Tuesday was (in mm): Periyar – 3.6, Thekkadi – 2.8, Dindigul – 45.2, Kodaikanal – 53.1, Natham – 21, Vendasandur – 3.8, Vendasandur tobacco research station – 7, Chatrapatti – 0.2, Kodaikanal Boat Club – 56.5 and Kamatchipuram – 27.

Farm-level cooling units to come up in Tirupur

To help the farmers reduce post-harvest losses and increase their value-addition capabilities, the Department of Horticulture is set to extend back-ended subsidies for setting up two cooling units and nine packaging houses at farm levels in the district. An outlay of Rs. 82 lakh has been earmarked towards the extension of back-ended subsidies for enabling farmers to considerably offset the total project cost of Rs. 2.24 crore envisaged for the creation of the said facilities to improve the market value of fruits and vegetables. The subsidy amount would be provided from the corpus created by the Union Government under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture, which aims at improving the post harvest management. Each of the farm-level cooling units would have the capacity to store six tonnes of farm produces and could be used by a cluster of farmers. “Setting up farm-level cooling units will be a big boon to the farmers considering that the post-harvest losses are very high. Such facilities will help the farmers to immediately store the produces harvested from the farms and keep them fresh till the wholesalers come to purchase from them,” K. C. M. Balasubramanian, a retired agriculture economist and a farmer himself, told *The Hindu*. Deputy Director of Horticulture M. Tamilselvan pointed out that storing of fruits and vegetables immediately after harvest would help prevent the bacterial attacks on the farm produces.

Packaging houses

The packaging houses at the farms itself were aimed at helping the farmers to come out with value-added products from fruits and vegetables before its freshness was lost.

Private partnership model under consideration for farm investment

The Agriculture Price Commission has mooted the idea of Private Cooperative Partnership (PCP) to ensure inflow of investment in the farm sector. Speaking at a workshop to receive feedback from the farmers over fixing of support price for onion here on Tuesday, commission chairman Prakash Kammaradi said this new concept, if materialised, would help develop agro-based industries and strengthen the agricultural sector. Mr. Kammaradi said this idea needed to be discussed in length.

Perishable produce

Under PCP, farmer's cooperative organisations and private industrial houses would jointly set up agro-based industrial units with the farmer members of cooperative organisations as share holders. While the industry would go for value addition of farm products, the farmers would supply produce. This idea would help growers of perishable produces, he said. At present, only farmers and the government was investing in the farm sector. Mr. Kammaradi said the private sector should also get involved to strengthen the sector. The commission, in association with the Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), would soon hold a workshop to deliberate on this issue and give it a concrete shape, he said. KCCI chairman Vasant Ladwa, who was present, assured all cooperation from the chamber. He also suggested making use of the schemes of the Department of Horticulture for this purpose. Mr. Kammaradi received feedback from farmers on fixation of support prices of produces. The farmers said the government should announce the support price prior to sowing and the price should not be below Rs. 1,000. Besides, the government should announce proper trade policy for the onion and also to allow export, they said.

KRRS bitter over non-payment of dues to sugarcane growers

As sugar mills have failed to clear the dues to sugarcane growers, the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) has decided to launch protracted protests across the State. The KRRS has criticised the State government and the Ministers for not initiating measures against the mills that owe a huge amount to the growers. "The mills have to pay at least Rs. 1,700 crore to sugarcane growers across the State," KRRS leader K.S. Puttannaiah said. Around 58 factories, including 14 State government-owned and run by cooperative sector, had purchased and crushed 390 lakh tonnes of sugarcane in the State during 2013-14.

To launch agitation

The government had directed the factories to pay Rs. 2,500 a tonne to growers in the last crushing season. However, except MPM Sugar Factory in Shimoga district, Bannari Amman in Chamarajanagar district and Mysore Sugar Company Ltd. (Mysugar) and Pandavapura Sahakari Sakkare Kharkhane (PSSK) in Mandya district, none of the others have cleared the dues yet, Mr. Puttannaiah told *The Hindu*. "The sugar factories have to pay over Rs. 1,700 crore to the growers. Our repeated pleas and protests have not yielded any results. So, we have decided to launch massive agitations," he said. He demanded that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Minister for Cooperation and Sugar H.S. Mahadeva Prasad and Minister for Housing M.H. Ambareesh look into the matter. Later, Mr. Puttannaiah convened a meeting of KRRS members at the Inspection Bungalow on Bangalore-Mysore highway. KRRS will stage protests near the Deputy Commissioner's office for four days starting Wednesday and will launch a 'jail bhara' agitation on August 18.

State awards for farmers announced

The State government has announced its awards for farmers, agriculture scientists, and Agriculture Department officials for 2012-13. The Mithranikethan Padma Shri K. Viswanathan Memorial Nelkathir award for the best group farming initiative has gone to the Kinassery Central Padasekhara Nellulpadaka Samithi, Palakkad. The award comprises a cash prize of Rs. 2,00,000, a gold medal, citation, and plaque. Farmers under the samithi cultivate paddy on 70 hectares of land twice every year. M.A. Muhammed, Vadakkumuri, Thrissur, who won the Karshakothama award for integrated farming. He generates an annual income of Rs. 20 lakh from his 18-acre farm. Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan announced the awards at a press conference here on Tuesday. Ranjith P. Chitteth, Ashtamichira, Thrissur, won the award for the best young farmer for his open farming venture on five acres using drip irrigation, hybrid seeds, grafting methods, and farm mechanisation. Simi K.V. from Bakkalam, Kannur, who bagged the Yuva Karshaka award for women cultivates plantain, vegetables, and pepper on 35 cents using organic methods. K. Mohanan, Kulathur, Thiruvananthapuram, adjudged the best vegetable farmer, cultivates various crops on his 10-acre farm using the open precision method. J.C. Sisil Chandran, Nallurvattam, Thiruvananthapuram, was chosen as the best hi-tech farmer while the Kerakesari award for the best coconut farmer has gone to Kumaraswamy, Adamamparakalam, Palakkad. The six awards comprise a cash prize of Rs. 1,00,000, a gold medal, citation, and plaque each. C. Narayanankutty, Professor, Agricultural Research Station, Mannuthy, was chosen as the best farm scientist. Suraj C.S. Sultan Bathery and Neenu Elias, Ernakulam won the award for homestead farming by students. Thazhakarapanchayat, Alappuzha, bagged the Rs. 10-lakh award for fallow land farming. Prakash K. Shenoy, Alappuzha, was adjudged the best dairy farmer and Shaji Elias Antony, Palakkad the best integrated dairy farmer. Awards for soil

conservation were also announced. The awards will be given away in Kozhikode on August 16.

Poultry screening at check-posts

The government has initiated moves to strengthen antibiotic screening of poultry birds at border check-posts, Minister for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry K.P.Mohanan has said. He was addressing a press conference organised to announce the State agriculture awards here on Tuesday. The Minister said the precautionary measure was adopted to ensure that chickens with excessively heavy antibiotic residues were not imported from other States.

Alternative to tobacco crops, is there a way out?

Notwithstanding the future of raising flue-cured Virginia tobacco following concerns expressed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and government's efforts to discourage them, majority of farmers in the tobacco growing districts in the State, barring Guntur, are unwilling to leave the 'lucrative option' and go in for alternative crops. Farmers in West Godavari and Prakasam districts are unwilling to shift to alternative crops like black pepper, sugarcane, oil palm and maize as suggested by the Rajahmundry-based Central Tobacco Research Institute. After becoming signatory to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the first international treaty adopted by the WHO in 2003 on controlling 'tobacco epidemic', the Union Health Ministry proposed to discourage tobacco cultivation by promoting alternative crops in the tobacco growing areas, with the stated objective of 'saving at least four million lives'. Yet the response to alternative crops has been lukewarm. According to Gadde Seshagiri Rao, spokesman of West Godavari District NLS Area Tobacco Growers Welfare Association, none of the alternative crops advised by the CTRI was feasible in the NLS area in terms of economic viability, climatic conditions. The Centre should, instead, work on reining in non-FCV tobacco consumption such as tobacco chewing and beedis under its regulation. "Any hasty decision would displace over one lakh farming families living on tobacco cultivation in the country," he said. The situation is no different in Prakasam where farmers' underwent severe hardship after opting for bengal gram cultivation, 22 lakh quintals of which is still lying in cold storages for want of buyers. Tenant Farmers Association State general secretary N. Ranga Rao said that undeterred by hefty penalty of 15 per cent on the unauthorised crop, farmers here produced close to 34 million kg over the permissible crop size of 104 million kg. Farmers realised a relatively better price of Rs. 112 a kg, marketing 131.44 million kg so far. "They have no other option but to go for tobacco this year too as the price of bengal gram touched a low of Rs. 2,800 a quintal," he said, asserting that loan waiver as and when implemented would leave enough cash with farmers to go for tobacco crop in more area this year. The

situation is a shade better in Guntur where farmers have shown the way by switching over to other commercial crops like chilli and cotton. The district hitherto was lifeline for tobacco growers fetching them higher returns riding on the huge global demand for quality leaf and strong seed-to-sale culture built in by the Tobacco Board. But the spirited anti-tobacco campaign and global pressure on India to implement the provisions of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control forced the government to make tobacco growers to look for alternative crops. The Tobacco Board has been proactive in regulating the crop size. “We are ensuring that there is a strict control on regulating the crop size (172 million kg for 2014-2015) and promoting reduction of Tobacco acreage,” Tobacco Board Chairman Koothati Gopal told *The Hindu*. Apparently switching over to alternative crops would need a systematic approach and careful planning. If poorly executed, it could result in penury of farmers, say experts. Clearly, tobacco growers are caught in a dilemma whether to grow crops that fetch assured returns but has no future or alternative crops with lot of risks.

Decline in production, consumption of small millets

Despite their nutritional qualities and climate resilience, the consumption of finger millets in India declined by 47 per cent, while intake of other small millets fell by 83 per cent in the last five decades, according to DHAN Foundation. The reason for the decline has been attributed to easy availability of rice and wheat through PDS that resulted in food consumption away from the small millets in the producing regions, during 1961-2009. Similarly, cultivation of small millets declined from 7.22 million hectare to 2.2 million hectare during 1961-2009 period, M Karthikeyan, Project Leader of the foundation, said. Inadequate investments on product development and commercial ratio, low social status of small millet food, resistance to dietary habits and lack of knowledge on the use of small millets in the daily diet have been constraining its consumption, Mr. Karthikeyan said. The project has adopted farmer-led context specific technology development and innovative promotional approach through private and public channels in order to increase the production and consumption of millets in eight regions including India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, he said. Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), one of the partners of the project, led by the Foundation, has developed an improved centrifugal dehulling prototype, which has reduced the drudgery of women by 70 per cent, he said. While cereals in the current market context provide a cheaper source of dietary calories, small millet offer better nutrition with various micro nutrients like calcium, iron and sulphur, he claimed. Besides, Foundation and TNAU, WASSAN, All India Coordinated Small Millets Improved Project, ICAR, and Canadian Mennonite University are core partners of the project, he said. For enhancing demand, research was undertaken by University of Guelph, along with TNAU for proving the health benefits and highlighting 36 attractive small millet products, both traditional and modern ones, as part of the project, Mr. Karthikeyan said.

RBI's scheme of rescheduling farm loans comes with riders

The Reserve Bank of India has finally agreed for rescheduling of crop loans for which the Andhra Pradesh government lobbied hard but with several riders that include restricting the coverage to “some farm loans” in four districts and not including those taken against gold. In a letter sent to the Chief Secretary, I. Y. R. Krishna Rao on August 7, the RBI further restricted the relief only to short-term production loans extended by commercial, cooperative and regional rural banks in the four districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Nellore and Krishna which it said, was based on normative criteria. Loans taken for allied agriculture activities would not be eligible. The other loans not eligible for “crop loan scheme for reschedulement” include advances against pledge or hypothecation of agriculture produce other than standing crop, “tied loans” and closed crop loan accounts. The reschedulement will be limited to a period of three years, comprising one -year moratorium and two years reschedulement. The RBI has also made it clear that the banks will not forego the right to recovery from farmers if the loan remains overdue after the lapse of three years. The eligible amount for reschedulement would be limited to the amount of crop loan together with applicable interest which is disbursed between April and October 2013, as of March 31 or Rs. 1 lakh per farmer, whichever is lower. Where the amount is paid by the government, it must be deposited in cash directly in the farmer's account. The RBI said it had taken a “considered and sympathetic” view to enable unimpeded flow of credit to the farmers in the ongoing kharif season and to ensure that the present agricultural operations are not hampered.

Pushpa Bhargava questions DBT guidelines on transgenic crops

Even as the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) decided to constitute a sub-committee to review the toxicology data generated by two applicants for genetically modified brinjal, biologist and Padma Bhushan award winner Dr. Pushpa M. Bhargava has questioned the guidelines of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) on transgenic crops. Dr. Bhargava and others had asked for the raw data on toxicity studies on rats using transgenic brinjal which were carried out by Dr. Sesikeran, former Director of National Institute of Nutrition at Hyderabad. He found statistically quite significant differences between rats fed on Bt Brinjal and those fed on a normal meal in respect of several important parameters, said Dr. Bhargava. However, Dr. Sesikeran had said that as all the values (both of the control and of the experimental animals) fell within the normal range of variation, the differences were not significant, and that there was no need to repeat the experiment. “Our point was that if on repetition the same differences are found again, they are bound to be significant,” Dr. Bhargava pointed out. Further, he used only 20 animals (10 female and 10 male) in both experimental and the control groups which is the minimum number for such tests. Dr. Sesikeran must explain why only a minimum number was used, he said.

Letter to GEAC official

In a letter to Dr. Ranjini Warriar, member secretary, GEAC, on July 23, Dr. Bhargava, who was responding to the two e-mails of July 20 from Dr. Sesikeran to all the members of GEAC, said, "According to Dr. Sesikeran, DBT guidelines of 2008 say the following in regard to "Interpretation of results of safety studies": "The design and analysis of the study should be kept as simple as possible, avoiding unnecessarily complex, sophisticated statistical techniques. If the design is simple, the statistics are likely to give straightforward results. Non-statistical knowledge must be applied in study design and proper interpretation of the biological significance of the results. Just because two treatments are statistically significantly different does not mean that the difference is large enough to have any biological importance or any practical significance."

Dr. Bhargava said he would like to know which international body endorsed this, as scientifically it does not make any sense. He said he didn't understand what that meant and sought a clarification. The GEAC meets next in August.

Mettur inflow dips

After receiving more than 80,000 cusecs (cubic feet per second), the Stanley Reservoir at Mettur and Biligundlu in Krishnagiri where the Cauvery enters Tamil Nadu, got just 20,000 cusecs, as water release from the Karnataka dam was reduced, officials said. Two days after the dam was opened for irrigation in the delta region, the level stood at 111.39 feet, against the full reservoir level of 120 feet on Tuesday. The storage was 80.400 tmcft against the capacity of 93.470 tmcft. The outflow was 9,002 cusecs. The officials said the inflow would drop further with the reduced release from the Karnataka dams.

Water level at Mettur

The water level in the Mettur dam stood at 111.42 feet on Tuesday . The inflow was 10,614 cusecs and the discharge 8,996 cusecs.



Agricet-2014 Results Out

Results of Agricet-2014 held on July 6 were released here on Tuesday by Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University vice-chancellor A Padmaraju. The results have been posted on the university website - www.angrau.ac.in. Out of the 1,974 agriculture polytechnic course students who appeared for Agricet, 725 qualified and of 258 seed technology diploma students who wrote the test, 125 qualified. Those who got through the entrance test will now be admitted to BSc Agriculture. Counselling for admissions into Home Science course offered by ANGRAU will be held on August 21 and 22 at Home Science College in Saifabad.

Rs 404.58 Crore Subsidy to Rain-hit Farmers

Chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday directed the officials to release Rs 404.58 crore towards input subsidy to the affected farmers, whose crops were damaged due to natural calamities from 2009 to 2014. The government's decision would benefit 26 lakh farmers. The CM also issued instructions to release Rs 75.84 crore towards input subsidy for farmers whose crops were damaged due to hailstorms and rains during 2009-2013 period. The subsidy will be paid directly into the bank accounts of farmers within a period of 90 days from the date of release of funds.

Farmers to Get Interest-free Loan Up to Rs 2 L: Prathipati

Agriculture minister Prathipati Pulla Rao said that the government was committed to provide interest-free loans up to `2 lakh to help farmers, if crop is damaged or if the produce does not get good price. Pulla Rao launched 'Polam Pilustondi' programme at Chandrajupalem village in Guntur district Tuesday. On the occasion, the minister said that the government was planning a slew of activities to make agriculture profitable. He urged farmers to adopt advanced farming techniques for better production and instructed officials to create awareness about the modern agriculture techniques among farmers. "With soil testing crop produce will increase. To help farmers zinc, sulphate and gypsum are provided at half the rate. Production will increase by 10-20 per cent by these minerals," Pulla Rao told farmers on the occasion. He further said that, "In case of shortage of water and proper rains drip irrigation is the best method for cultivation. The government is giving drip irrigation equipment to SCs and STs with 100 per cent subsidy. Farmers can purchase the agricultural equipments at half the price and the farmers who are unable to purchase the equipment can hire the equipment in groups." He added that a total of `45,000 crore was required for the loan waiver of `1.50 lakh for each farmer and the government was committed to the loan waiver. Guntur collector Kantilal Dande exhorted farmers to follow the modern farming technologies for better crop yields. He said that farmers were preferring corn next to paddy for cultivation in the district and said that by Aug 15, 11 TMCs of water would be released from Pulichintala project and the necessary measures for the rehabilitation of eight submergence-prone villages were taken. Pedakurapadu MLA K Sridhar was present at the programme.

SBH to Reschedule Small Farm Loans in 4 Dists Soon

Rescheduling of small farm loans in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Nellore and Krishna districts will start soon, State Bank of Hyderabad (SBH) managing director Shantanu Mukherjee has said. Launching the new combo loan scheme in the city Tuesday, he said that this new scheme will offer car loans at concessional rate of interest and zero processing fee to the existing or new housing loan borrowers. The implementation of financial inclusion plan to provide banking services in rural and urban areas, as envisaged by the Central government under Sampoorna Vittiyea Samaveshan' would start in this

month, after getting an approval from the prime minister. Meanwhile, the SBH will hold a financial literacy camp on August 28 or 30, he added. "We allot one per cent of bank profits for corporate social responsibility activities. As part of it, nearly 200 police barricades are donated in the city to regulate the vehicular traffic and the Vijayawada SBH network sponsored 15 poor students of IIT-Nuzvid to present their award winning papers at NASA, USA." More than 100 police barricades were donated by the SBH to ACP (Traffic) S Srinivas Rao on the occasion.

Farmers Seek Rejig of GO on Floor Price

Paddy farmers termed the government order on paddy procurement prices as flawed. According to the government order issued on March 3, 2014, farmers whose produce had been procured after the aforesaid date only will obtain the revised price of `19 per kg. This has landed the farmers, whose produce had been bought by Supplyco before March 3, in a quandary. These farmers are set to lose Rs 1 per kg for their produce even though it had been procured in the same season. The Government order GO (MS) No 69/2014 F & CSD dated 3/3/ 2014 had raised the procurement price of paddy from `18 per kilogram to `19 per kilogram. "Due to the adoption of scientific methods in agriculture, it is possible to cultivate paddy earlier than usual. These fields get harvested earlier too. And it is these farmers who stand lose money due to the government order. Supplyco usually procures the second paddy crop in February, March and April. The paddy fields at Alathur in Palakkad are the first to be harvested and hence, these farmers stand to lose in a big way," said the general secretary of the Desiya Karshaka Samajam Muthalamthode Mani.

Farm Awards Announced

The Department of Agriculture has announced the state awards for farmers, agriculture scientists and department officials for 2012-13. The Mitraniketan Viswanathan Nelkathir award for the best group-farming venture has gone to the Central Padasekhara Nelluthpadana Samithi in Kinassery, Palakkad. The award comprises a purse of ` 2,00,000, gold medal, citation and a statuette. M A Mohammed, Kadavallur, Thrissur, bagged the Karshakothama award for integrated farming whereas Simy K V, Kanul, Kannur, has won the award for young woman farmer. Renjith, Mala, Thrissur, has been selected the best young male farmer. The Kerakesari award for the best coconut farmer has gone to Kumaraswamy, Meenakshipuram, Palakkad and the Haritha Mitra award for the best vegetable farmer was bagged by K Mohanan, Uchakkada, Thiruvananthapuram. The Udyanashreshta award for the best garden farmer was bagged by Johnny Thomas, Venkitadang, Thrissur. K Raman of Wayanad has been selected for the Karshaka Jyothi award, instituted for the farmers in the SC/ST category. The awards carry a cash prize of `1,00,000, gold medal, citation and a statuette each. Minister for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry K P Mohanan announced the awards at a press

conference here on Tuesday. While the Karshaka Thilakam award for the best woman farmer has gone to Aisha Beevi of Pattazhi in Kollam, the Shramashakthi award for the best agricultural labourer was bagged by Sunitha Shaju of Thrissur. The awards carry a gold medal, citation and a statuette. The award money of `25,000 will be divided between the two women. C Narayanakutty of Agricultural Research Centre, Mannuthy, had been adjudged the best agricultural scientist

THE HINDU BusinessLine

IMD forecasts weakest monsoon in 5 years

The Monsoon this year will be the weakest in five years, with the Government indicating that rainfall across the country will be 'deficient' compared with its earlier prediction of 'below normal' precipitation for the season. A 'deficient' or weak rainfall may impact the agriculture output besides triggering concerns on the inflation front. On Tuesday, the Government revised its forecast downward for the season, despite the recent pick-up in rainfall across the country, while ruling out any possibility of a drought. However, the probability of an occurrence of El Nino – a warmer sea surface condition in the Pacific that triggers drought in Northern Hemisphere – has now receded. "The latest estimate suggests the 2014 south-west monsoon rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be 87 per cent of the long period average (LPA)," Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Earth Science told reporters here after reviewing the second half of the Long Range Forecast for the season. LPA is the average of seasonal rainfall over the country from 1951 to 2000, estimated at 89 cm. Earlier, in April, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted a 'below normal monsoon' and said that rainfall will be 93 per cent of the LPA. The revision in IMD forecast is triggered by the poor monsoon coverage in June. Rainfall deficit in June was 43 per cent. However, a subsequent pick up in rainfall in July has reduced the deficit, which was 17 per cent as on Monday. "There is 68 per cent probability for the season rainfall over the country as a whole to be deficient (less than 90 per cent of LPA). The probability for below normal rainfall (90-96 per cent of LPA) is 24 per cent," IMD said in a statement. Rainfall during the second half of August and September is expected to be 95 per cent of the LPA. North-west India is likely to be worst hit this year and is expected to receive 76 per cent of rainfall, while central India is expected to receive 89 per cent, the Southern peninsula 87 per cent and North-East India is expected to receive 93 per cent. However, Singh ruled out the possibility of a drought. "There is no scientific evidence to suggest that there is drought. Overall, it's not a pessimistic picture. As per the IMD, conditions of drought like situation are reviewed by September 30," he said. DK Joshi, Chief Economist at CRISIL, said IMD's forecast is a bit of both good and bad news for the economy. "While the rains are expected to be

deficient, the probability of occurrence of El Nino has reduced. El Nino is likely to be less disruptive. Though, the overall agriculture output is likely to take a hit, we still expect the agri-and-allied sectors to grow at around one per cent this year”.Joshi believes that inflation can still be contained at around eight per cent. Retail inflation for July stood at 7.96 per cent, mainly on account of costly vegetables, fruit and milk.Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Credit Analysis and Research Ltd, said deficient rains, mainly in parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan could impact the output of pulses, cereals and oilseeds thereby stoking inflationary concerns.Kharif acreages for pulses, oilseeds and coarse cereals have been lower compared with last year and stood at 76.09 lakh hectare, 152.23 lakh ha and 140.15 lakh ha, respectively.

Spot rubber stays near 5-year low

Spot rubber prices turned weak on Tuesday and the market is almost at its 5-year-low. Sheet rubber declined to Rs. 132 (Rs. 133) a kg, according to traders. The grade weakened to Rs. 132.50 (Rs. 134) and Rs. 129.50 (Rs. 131) respectively as provided by the Rubber Board and dealers. August futures slipped to Rs. 130 (Rs. 130.52), September to Rs. 130 (Rs. 130.88) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. August futures closed at ¥189.0 (Rs. 112.95) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 132 (133) RSS-5: 128 (129) Ungraded: 122 (123) ISNR 20: 112.50 (114) and Latex 60%: 103 (105).Our Correspondent

Tackling the vagaries of weather

The life of the Indian farmer is indeed daunting. If farming itself was not hard enough, it has only become even more complex with the drastic change in the weather patterns. In between the cycle of floods and droughts has also come the El Nino effect that has created havoc to the cropping pattern. There are already signs that the normal sowing cycles of kharif crops, especially oilseeds and pulses, have yet again been disturbed due to delayed arrival of the monsoon along with deficit in rainfall. Although the rainfall deficit has shrunk to 18 per cent from 43 per cent in July, all hopes are pinned on the August rains for India’s major summer crops such as rice, soyabean, cane and cotton. A more worrisome feature under these circumstances is that farmers tend to switch crops in order to survive the season, thus disturbing the balance. Another reason to worry is the uneven rainfall distribution. While the sowing window is open till early-August and coverage is likely to improve as the monsoon progresses, the distribution will be the key to determining crop output. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at the foundation day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, summarised the challenges that

farmers face today in one phrase: “ *Kam zameen, kam samay, zyaada upaj* ” - Less land, less time, more productivity. To combat the changing weather patterns, farmers need to grow crops in a shorter period. There are many examples in rice hybrids that have reduced the harvesting cycle from 90-100 days to around 80-85 days with good yield and plant stand. With the advent of the private sector, there has been an assortment of hybrids that can withstand climate changes and grow throughout the year in sub-tropical or temperate conditions. There are vegetable hybrids such as cauliflower, capsicum, hot pepper, tomato, sweet corn that can either withstand various stresses or extreme climate conditions and have reduced the growing cycle by almost 10-15 days. Advancements in research have enabled a fruit like watermelon to be grown in all seasons. Many innovative water-efficient technologies, drought-tolerant seeds, crop protection products and optimised irrigation systems are available today. There are corn hybrids that use moisture more efficiently to give higher yields on drought-stressed land. There are herbicides that reduce the need for ploughing and improving soil's ability to absorb water, protecting it against erosion and water run-off. It is important to look at biotechnology also in this context. The GM technology, while introduced in crops, helps fight the various stresses that affect growth and addresses them. The herbicide tolerant technology addresses weeds that compete with the plant for sunlight, nutrients and water. The GM technology addresses pests that affect plant productivity. There are others that address various climatic stresses like moisture, drought etc. Combined with the advancements in the private sector, according to official reports, there are also currently 5,365 agricultural scientists working in different capacities in Indian Council of Agricultural Research and its institutes including Indian Agricultural Research Institute. Last year itself, scientists developed several technologies in the field of water harvesting, resource conservation technologies, integrated water and nutrient management, micro-irrigation, integrated farming system models, including agroforestry interventions, efficient cropping systems etc to enhance crop productivity in the country, including dry land areas. The Government has also devised a scheme under National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture, where about 25,000 farmers have been trained on climate-resilient agricultural practices/technologies. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research have also established 638 Krishi Vigyan Kendras in the country for technology application through assessment, refinement and demonstrations of technology/products under different agro-ecosystems to facilitate faster adoption of technologies developed by the National Agricultural Research System. The need of the hour is to create an environment where the capabilities of the public and the private sectors can be harnessed to its full potential. There is also a need to look at any technology adoption including biotechnology not just from the point of food security but as a tool that is essential for the very survival of the farmers. We are already faced with the situation where it is becoming difficult to motivate the existing farmers to continue farming and it is only going to be difficult in future if we do not equip them with the requisite technologies to break away from the cycle of El Nino,

floods and droughts. The public and the private sector need to come together to make available the entire tool-box from genetics to chemistry and other technologies for the farming community.

(The writer is Vice-President, Commercial Acceptance and Public Policy, South Asia, Syngenta. Views expressed are personal.)

Business Standard

Crop loans waived in Telangana

The Telangana government issued orders on Tuesday waiving farm loans to an extent of Rs 1 lakh each, which is estimated to cost the state exchequer Rs 19,000 crore. The waiver is in accordance with the electoral promise made by the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi. The orders were issued according to a decision taken to this effect by the state Cabinet late on Monday night. According to an official press release, the Cabinet has decided to "impress upon" the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to consider other districts also for loan reschedulement "in view of the wide spread damage to crops in the last five years". It had directed the state finance secretary to rush to Mumbai to discuss the matter with the RBI. Last week, the RBI had allowed banks to extend the loan restructuring facility to crop loan borrowers in about 100 mandals across three districts in Telangana. The new state has a total of 475 mandals and the state government has sought reschedulement of crop loans in about 415 mandals.

A perfect storm threatens Maharashtra's cotton farmers

As the skies stayed clear till the second week of June, Ramesh Gulabhrao Digde's mood darkened. His two acres were ploughed at great expense, the seeds were purchased, and a sack of fertilisers lay in a corner of his thatch-roofed hut in Parsodi village in western Maharashtra's Yavatmal district. But the rains had played truant. On June 17, Ramesh tired of the wait and swallowed a phial of pesticide. "He kept saying 'moneylender, moneylender'," said his son, who found Ramesh in a delirious state and took him to a hospital, where the 56-year-old farmer breathed his last. That night, clouds gathered over the baked fields in Parsodi and the rains finally poured down

ALSO READ: Back to the future in Vidarbha for cotton farmers

Ramesh's neighbour, Sureshrao Ramdas Digde, 55, had planted early this year. On June 6, he sowed 12 bags of cottonseeds on his five-acre farm; the seeds never germinated. A day after Ramesh's death, he sowed another 12 bags. The rains, however, stopped as mysteriously as they had begun and Sureshrao's second crop failed, too. On July 26, when the farmers of Parsodi went out to their fields to sow the cotton crop for the third time in

a month, Sureshrao stayed at home and reached for the pesticide. (COTTON BY NUMBERS)"He was dead when I came home," said Rajendra Dighde, Sureshrao's younger brother. "He needed this crop to repay his earlier debts, but the rains failed him."Erratic rains in Maharashtra's cotton belt have forced farmers to sow their fields a number of times. This, in some instances, has increased individual debts, as farmers who exhausted their institutional credit have borrowed money from informal moneylenders to finance the replanting of fields, raising the spectre of further deaths around harvest time. In 2012, 3,786 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra, according to the most recent data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau. The number of farmers who committed suicides due to crop-related issues this year isn't known.Recent reports suggest the rainfall deficit in Maharashtra's cotton belts of Vidarbha and Marathwada has widened; Marathwada is now facing a 60 per cent deficit, while the shortfall in Vidarbha is 23 per cent. Statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture indicate farmers across the country have planted more cotton this year compared to the last, as the crop is considered drought-resistant compared to other options such as soybean.Farmers hope a revitalised monsoon could yet result in good yields and good profits, but a perfect storm of local, national and international factors could mean low cotton prices, lower profits and persistent indebtedness."International cotton prices have fallen this year," said Faiyaz Hudani, associate vice-president (research) at Kotak Commodities. "October futures for cotton on the ICE benchmark index have fallen 26 per cent in the past month, while October futures on Indian exchanges have fallen 15 per cent."Globally, cotton prices have been depressed by a very good harvest in the US, which has brought additional supply to the market, while global demand for cotton has slowed, as China, the world's largest cotton producer and importer, has imported 42 per cent less in the first six months of this year.This year, the Chinese government is replacing a 2011 cotton stockpiling policy with a crop-subsidy programme. It hasn't released any further details.Hudani said it was difficult to predict spot prices in October but added he expected prices to be slightly below last year's levels. "Price movement will be sideways to negative," he said."International prices are the main drivers of domestic cotton prices in India," said D K Nair, secretary-general of the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry. He added cotton futures trading in India was negligible, adding traders took price cues from domestic and international exchanges. "The price will also be affected by the exchange rate and the market's anticipation of the price in the following year."Nair cautioned cotton procurement by China was hard to predict. As the world's largest player in both cotton and textiles, China, like India, must strike a balance between adequately compensating its cotton farmers and providing raw materials at competitive prices to the textile sector."China has very large stocks; a big appetite for cotton; and little public information," Nair said. "If it decides to reduce stocks, prices could fall; if they increase stocks, prices could rise."He estimated this year, cotton prices would be lower than last year, though these would be more than the government's minimum support price of Rs

4,050 a quintal for long-staple cotton. In Parsodi, farmers are making their own calculations. "Cotton planting costs about Rs 15,000 an acre," said Rajendra, the farmer. "In a good year, the yield could rise to 10 quintals to the acre, which means a reasonable profit of Rs 25,000 an acre." A study by S Parasuraman and T Rajaretnam of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences shows 40 per cent of Vidarbha's farmers own between two and five acres of land that yield an average 6.5 quintals of cotton each. Only 10 per cent of these households have irrigated land. The median household income in 2008-09, the survey showed, was Rs 39,000. "I have sowed my fields thrice this year; so, my input costs have gone up a great deal," Rajendra said, adding he had also taken a loan of about Rs 30,000 from a private money lender at five per cent a month, or 60 per cent a year. The monthly interest means farmers sell their produce early to pay off their loans, rather than hold on to the cotton until the price is right. Last year, for instance, Ujwala Pedkar, a cotton farmer in the neighbouring district of Wardha, grew 30 quintals of cotton, 25 quintals of which she sold at the minimum support price of Rs 4,000 a quintal to pay her debts. She sold the remaining five quintals at the end of the season, at Rs 5,500 a quintal. Pedkar is uncomfortably aware of the implications of creeping interest rates - 12 years ago, her husband Prabhakar Pedkar killed himself when he couldn't repay a moneylender who appropriated part of the family farm. "Now, I pay my debts as soon as I can," she says. "The trader takes a loan at 12-13 per cent a year to buy cotton from a farmer who borrows money at 60 per cent," said an industry representative. "Who do you think can hold out longer?"

Onion prices calm but turmoil not ruled out later

Onion prices have been in check over recent weeks, helped by government action in discouraging export and threatening hoarders. However, worries remain. Experts do not rule out prices rising, since kharif sowing is expected to be lower and cold storage stock entering the market might not be enough to meet the demand if there is a shortfall in the months to come. In the first week of July, the price quoted was Rs 21 a kg at the big Lasalgaon (Nashik, Maharashtra) wholesale market. It was Rs 16.25 a kg on Tuesday. The government had asked National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India to import 70,000 tonnes. However, said an official in the know, the current price in wholesale mandis was nearly 20 per cent lower than the price abroad and, hence, imports were currently not happening. However, the good thing, he said, "is the preparedness to import if prices spiral". Cold storage stock is presently enough to meet demand for a month to six weeks. Prices in wholesale markets have moderated as this stock is coming to the market. However, says R P Gupta, director, National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation: "While prices have moderated on continuous supply coming in, sowing for kharif is expected to be lower and that crop will come to the market sometime in October. Any disruption could jeopardise demand-supply equations." India last year produced 19.3 million tonnes and sowing took place in 1.2 mn hectares. Around 30 per cent of the sowing takes place in kharif; the rest is late kharif and rabi.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Traders face Rs 100 cr loss as West Bengal restricts movement of potato

Potato traders in West Bengal say they are staring at losses of around Rs 100 crore because chief minister Mamata Banerjee remains stubborn on her decision not to allow movement of the tuber to other states. "We are staring at a huge loss which could be around Rs 100 crore as traders in other states are delaying payment since they are not being able to procure the commodity on time," Gopal Mondol, chief advisor of West Bengal Progressive Potato Traders Association, told ET. "Traditionally traders from neighbouring states enter into a six month contract from May to November for supply of the tuber," he said. Potato traders from Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and are now reluctant to pay their suppliers from Bengal unless the supply line is resumed. West Bengal government re-imposed restrictions on carrying potatoes to other states on Sunday after relaxation for two days, in a bid to check retail prices within the state. But traders say potato stock in the state is more than what it can consume. "If movement of potatoes is not allowed then the tuber will rot which will increase our loss many a times," Mondol said. He said the core committee of the traders association will meet on Wednesday to find out a solution to the present crisis. Dilip Pratihar, a leading potato trader in the state, said, "We are losing the national market. The cold storages in Bengal have a stock of 30.5 lakh tonnes of potatoes. Meanwhile, the Bengal decision has forced states such as Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand to turn to Uttar Pradesh, the largest producer of potato, to meet their requirements. Shyam Pansari, president of Cold Storage Association of Odisha, said dependence on UP has increased. In Odisha, potato is being available in the market at a price of Rs 30-35 per kg. The Mamata Banerjee government has fixed potato price at Rs 12 per kilogramme in the wholesale market and Rs 14 in retail market. Traders say this rate is absurd as in most of the cases the wholesalers buy a 50 kilogram packet at a rate ranging from Rs 850-900. "The retail price, if at all, should be fixed at Rs 17-18 per kg. That makes some sense," said Mondol of the traders association. "We will try to talk to the chief minister once again to work out a workable formula so that the stakeholder .