

Rs. 2,800 cr. paid to farmers, HC told

A sum of Rs. 2,800 crore was paid as compensation to over 31 lakh farmers whose crops were destroyed in the hailstorms in Maharashtra in February and March, the State government told the Bombay High Court on Thursday. Responding to a bunch of public interest litigation petitions seeking relief, the government said in an affidavit that Rs. 2,548 crore was directly credited to the farmers' accounts between March and August. The balance was with the offices of the District Collectors as the affected farmlands had multiple shareholders, Milind More, Assistant Government Pleader, told a Division Bench headed by Chief Justice Mohit Shah.

Farmers seek compensation of Rs. 3,000 for every coconut tree felled by Cyclone Thane

Thirty-two months after Cyclone Thane has left a trail of devastation in Cuddalore district, the coconut farmers have raised their voice demanding compensation at the rate of Rs. 3,000 for every uprooted or destroyed coconut tree per annum for eight years. Such a demand has been set out by P. Senthamaraikannan, former president of the Kudikadu panchayat here, in identical representations addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, the National Human Rights Commission, the State Human Rights Commission, the National Disaster Management Authority and the Special Officer for Cyclone Relief. Mr. Senthamaraikannan stated that according to statistics as many as 1,62,086 coconut trees were either uprooted or destroyed in the gale that ripped through Cuddalore district on the night of December 30, 2011.

Raise minor millets, farmers told

Farmers of Dindigul district have been advised to raise minor millets and other drought-resistant crops in view of the poor water availability. Officials said at the farmers' grievance day meeting here on Thursday that 2,055 irrigation tanks were completely dry and 95 per cent of the 91,488 wells had poor storage owing to drought condition and lack of rainfall. Collector N. Venkatachalam said 95 per cent of the wells had water that could be pumped only for less than an hour, and the rest had storage that could be pumped for an hour. Cultivation of minor millets would require less water and low investment but the profit margin would be high. Steps were taken to distribute seeds of minor millets and sufficient stock of fertilizers was kept ready for distribution, he noted. Athoor farmer Fathima Rajarathinam demanded a reduction in interest rate for farm loans offered by cooperative banks and scaling down of hiring charges for farm machinery and equipment owned by PACBS and Department of Agriculture. Farmers in Viralipatti demanded construction of a building for the veterinary clinic now functioning in a cramped place. Nilakottai farmers complained that persons who had taken a water tank, constructed by town panchayat, on lease at the wholesale flower market demanded flowers instead of cash for wetting them before sale. They collected a large quantity of flowers from farmers and sold them in the market for a better price. The town panchayat should cancel the lease and allow free use of water from the tank, they said.

Poor rain

PWD officials said rainfall this year was far below the 50-year average. In January and February, the district recorded 1.45 mm and 3.02 mm of rainfall respectively, compared to the 50-year average of 33.9 mm and 10.8 mm. In May, there was 211.36 mm of rainfall against the average of 76.4 mm. Rainfall in June and July was just 30.75 mm and 9.5 mm respectively against the average of 32.3 mm and 30.6 mm. But rainfall received so far this month was more than the month's average. The district received 354.92 mm rainfall (average is 328.6 mm).

Mullaperiyar: all set for thanks-giving

Finance Minister O.Pannerselvam and Minister for Cooperation Sellur K. Raju inspect the public meeting venue in Madurai on Thursday. –Photo: S. James

AIADMK workers and farmers of five southern districts have geared up for a rally to thank Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Friday for her government's efforts to convince the Supreme Court to allow Tamil Nadu to raise the water level in the Mullaperiyar dam to 142 feet. "But for the Chief Minister's efforts, Tamil Nadu would have failed to raise the level and could have lost the century-old dam to the desperate efforts of Kerala to replace it with a new one," said Minister Sellur K. Raju. The ruling benefitted not only the farmers but also the entire population of the five districts, he said.

"First step"

The invitation printed by the Mullaiperiyar farmers said the function was to thank the Chief Minister for enabling the State to get justice through a "historic" judgment that allowed it to increase the water level to 142 feet as a "first step." They also thanked her for "executing" the court order by downing the 13 shutters at the dam site. Farmers' representatives and Ministers will participate in the rally. Thousands of farmers from Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram and AIADMK workers would converge on the city. The venue near Pandikoil is seen as auspicious because it has brought good tidings to the party in the past. Ms. Jayalalithaa's protest rally at the same venue in October 2010 attracted a huge crowd, which turned out to be the trend-setter for the Assembly elections held the next summer. In the same venue, Ms. Jayalalithaa sought votes for her party candidate for the Lok Sabha elections in April 2014. The party pulled off a thumping victory, the first-ever success since it was founded, in the Lok Sabha elections from the Madurai. "It was at the same venue where our 'Puratchi Thalavi' said she would free Madurai from the clutches of the DMK and promised to increase the water level of the Periyar dam. She has now fulfilled both promises," Mr. Raju said. A

huge water-proof pandaal to accommodate over 50,000 persons has been put up. A giant model with penstock pipes, representing the Periyar dam and the Vaigai dam, would be a big attraction.

Farmers seek more water

With water released from Grand Anicut on August 14 yet to reach tail end areas in the Cauvery, Vennar, and Grand Anicut canal systems, farmers of Cauvery delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam have appealed to Public Works Department to increase the quantum of water released into these systems. At present, 4,000 cusecs is released into the Cauvery, 3,000 into the Vennar, and 2,500 into the Grand Anicut Canal. Cauvery and Vennar can carry a maximum of 12,000 cusecs each and Grand Anicut canal can carry 3,500 cusecs. As water was now needed more for transplantation of samba crop, farmers demand increase in the quantum of water released. S. Ranganathan, Secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association, said water had not reached tail-end areas in the three systems. But rain was helping to some extent. But this was not widespread and confined to upper reaches. So, the PWD had a responsibility to increase the water flow. "The Public Works Department managed the water flow efficiently last year. This year also we hope they will do so," Mr. Ranganathan said. S. Kannan, a farmer from Thirukuvalai, in Nagapattinam district, said that water had not reached villages such as Thiruvoimoor, Thirukuvalai, Thirupoondi, and Ettukudi which got water supply from Vellaiyar, a branch of Vennar. "The PWD should increase the quantum of water released," he said. C. Painthamil Selvan, Chief Engineer, PWD, Water Resources Division (WRD), said that drawing from Mettur dam has been increased to 20,000 cusecs. As this quantum was realised at Grand Anicut, quantum of water released into Cauvery, Vennar and Grand Anicut canal systems would be increased. About 7,000 cusecs each would be given into the Cauvery and Vennar systems and 3,000 into the Grand Anicut canal system. About 2,000 cusecs would be released into the Kollidam.

8.8 tonnes of seeds seized during raids

With a view to distribute quality samba seeds to farmers, seed certification department inspectors conducted surprise checks at seed companies in Kumbakonam, Pattukottai, and Thanjavur areas in Thanjavur district. They took seed samples and sent for examination. Action has been taken against two companies which had not properly stocked the seeds under Seed Certification Act. Special team led by Gunasekaran, Deputy Director, Seed Certification, seized 8.8 tonnes of seeds brought from other States without getting Form 2. The seeds were withheld from sale. The value of the withheld seeds was Rs. 2.5 lakh

Samba cultivation to be taken up on 87,250 acres of land

Samba cultivation is expected to be taken up on 87,250 acres of land this year in Tiruchi district, according to a press release here on Thursday. Nurseries are being raised in delta areas of the district such as Thiruverumbur, Manikandam, Anthanallur, Lalkudi, Pullampadi, Manachanallur, Musiri, and Thottiyam taluks. Nursery had been raised on 200 acres of land under the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method and 2,800 acres under the conventional method. There is a stock of 535 tonnes of Andhra Ponni, improved Vellai Ponni, CO43, and Ambai 19 seeds with Agriculture Department, and 118 tonnes with Primary Agriculture Co-operative Credit Societies. So far, 49 tonnes had been distributed. Fifteen tonnes of paddy micro nutrients, and 20 tonnes of bio-fertilisers were kept as stock and distributed. There was a stock of 3,878 tonnes of Urea, 3,250 tonnes of Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), 3,864 tonnes of Potash, and 4,678 tonnes of complex fertilisers. Last year samba was raised on 82,500 acres, said an official release.

Set up agriculture university in Tiruchi, demand farmers

The Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association has appealed to Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to establish an agriculture university in Tiruchi. In a letter

sent to the Chief Minister, Mahadhanapuram V. Rajaram, Executive President of the association, said agriculture experts and technocrats were more needed to the country. Another agriculture university was required for Tamil Nadu and it should be established in Tiruchi. He appealed to the Chief Minister to establish a horticulture university comprising Salem, Dharmapuri, and Krishnagiri districts.

TNAU working to prove cane can be chewed all through year

Sugarcane Research Station at Melalathur in Vellore district is concentrating on jaggery making and has released a good variety. A sugarcane field at Polur in Tiruvannamalai. Chewing sugarcane is good for dental health, but it is mainly available during Pongal festival and its cultivation is limited to a few pockets. Considering its health benefits, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, is working on making chewing cane available throughout the year. In fact, this is one of TNAU's research priorities now, said K. Velayudham, director in-charge, Crop Management, TNAU. "Now, research is being concentrated on raising chewing cane and making it available throughout the year. Chewing cane improves dental health and gives strength," he added. He was here for a national seminar at Adhiparasakthi Agricultural College, Kalavai. There are local varieties of chewing cane in Madurai, Karur, Namakkal and Vellore, he said, pointing out that it needs to have all chewing properties such as soft rind to make chewing easy. Experts said that nowadays, children rarely eat chewing cane and this was mainly available during Pongal. They raised the need to make it into a commercial product. "A small piece of chewing cane can actually be part of the noon meal scheme," he suggested.

Jaggery variety

Mr. Velayudham also pointed out that TNAU was keen on improving the production of quality jaggery. "People add sulphur to enhance the colour of jaggery and make it attractive to customers. This is unfit for consumption. We

have to ensure production of quality jaggery,” he said. R. Rajendran, director in-charge, Tamil Nadu Rice Research Institute, said one of the three sugarcane research stations at Melalathur in Vellore district was concentrating on jaggery making and has released a good variety. The research stations, located at Cuddalore and Sirugamani at Tiruchi, were coming up with high sugar recovery varieties of the crop. “We are focusing on research to increase sugarcane productivity and enhance sugar recovery. The average sugar recovery is 10 per cent, and we will be happy if we can enhance it by two per cent more,” he mentioned. With sugarcane trashing being a highly laborious process, steps are on to get a cane variety that gets naturally de-trashed. In addition, TNAU is also looking at developing varieties with smooth leaf blades. He also stressed the need to come up with varieties with a shorter duration as sugarcane was a long duration crop.

A decade of decline for sugarcane production in Tamil Nadu

When compared to other States, sugar production has declined in Tamil Nadu in the last 10 years. From 22 lakh tonnes in 2005-2006, sugar production stood at 14 lakh tonnes during 2013-2014, according to R. Panneerselvam, professor and head, Sugarcane Research Station, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Cuddalore. “The sugar recovery for 100 kg of sugarcane is nine per cent in TN. This recovery rate is very less in the country. Maharashtra has a sugar recovery of more than 10.5 per cent. This is only because we are in the tropical belt,” he said. He was here for a national seminar on “Improved Technologies for Sustainable Sugarcane Production” at Adhiparasakthi Agricultural College on Thursday. Warm days and cool nights are conducive to the formation of sugar. Tamil Nadu has this kind of climate only for one-and-a-half months from January, whereas this persists for four months in Maharashtra, he added. Other States have significantly increased their sugar production, while Tamil Nadu’s production has dipped by seven tonnes. Maharashtra has improved its sugar production from nearly 52 lakh tonnes to 75 lakh tonnes, while Karnataka has also increased production from 19 lakh

tonnes to 44 lakh tonnes, the professor added. Addressing the gathering, K. Velayudham, director in-charge, Crop Management, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said one of the constraints facing sugarcane agriculture was red rot that is a devastating and widespread disease of sugarcane. “The disease is present in subtropical India especially Bihar, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. It has now spread to coastal Tamil Nadu and Gujarat,” he said. Drought coupled with water logging is becoming a serious productivity constraint in many areas, followed by problems due to salinity and high temperature. In severe drought, yield loss is estimated to be 60 to 70 per cent, he noted. Strategies such as early plantation, use of tolerant/resistant varieties, irrigation during critical period, adopting drip irrigation and timely disease management could help, he summarised.

‘Utilise ethanol’

Stressing the need to utilise ethanol, a by-product of sugar industry, S. Nanthakumar, dean of Adhiparasakthi Agricultural College, said it was utilised for operating automobiles in Brazil, while neighbouring State of Karnataka was also using 40 per cent ethanol in running State transport vehicles. “Ethanol is going to be a substitute as fuel is not going to last long,” he added.

‘Declare Perambalur as drought-prone’

Farmers’ associations have appealed to the State government to declare Perambalur district as drought-prone in the wake of crop loss suffered due to below-normal rainfall in the district in 2013-14. A memorandum in this regard was handed over by the representatives of various farmers’ associations to the district administration for being forwarded to the State government. The memorandum was submitted during the farmers’ grievances redress meet held at the collectorate here on Thursday. Severe drought condition in the district had led to steep drop in groundwater level affecting farmers dependent on wells and tubewells for irrigation, the memorandum said. Agricultural production had been hit by up to 30 per cent in rain-fed areas in the district.

Taking into account all these factors, the district administration should recommend the State government to declare Perambalur as drone-hit. Besides seeking drought relief for farmers, the memorandum appealed to the government to waive interest charged on loans and postpone the recovery of the principal amount by three years. Dredging of tanks and canals, speedier power connection for farm operations and according permission to lift silt were among the other demands raised by the farmers at the meeting. Presided over by the District Revenue Officer V.Rajan Durai, the meeting was attended by officials of various departments, a press release said.

Study on giving fillip to organic farming gathering dust

An innovative organic package, developed by the University of Agricultural Sciences-Dharwad (UAS-D), to give a fillip to organic farming has been lying in cold storage for nearly three years. If implemented on a large-scale, this package of practices is expected to strengthen agriculture, especially in drought-hit areas. The UAS-D has already submitted the plan to the Department of Agriculture suggesting implementation on a large-scale. But the government is yet to take a call on this. The package of practices addresses some of the serious concerns in organic farming, like decreasing levels of productivity and cost of production, sources said. H.B. Bablad, scientist at the UAS-D's Institute of Organic Farming (IOF), said this package had been developed based on the outcome of a seven-year research project on organic farming, funded by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). It is the first of its kind research in the country, and it had authentically established that organic farming could be rewarding, cost-effective and sustainable, if a suitable package of practices are adopted. The IOF has developed the package for 12 cropping systems which were selected for the research. The research outcome indicated 20 to 25 per cent increase in net returns, 10 per cent higher yield and 15 to 20 per cent lower cost of production in organic practices, when compared to inorganic farming systems, he said. Although the yield was similar in organic and integrated systems, the cost of production was more in the latter because of the use of chemicals.

Water retention

The organic package of practices facilitates 10 to 15 per cent increase in the soil's water-holding capacity, which in turn helps induce drought tolerance in

crops. Besides, the carbon content in soil too increased from 0.41 per cent to 0.65 per cent, a phenomenon which would help strengthen the roots of plants. The incidence of disease was lower, he said. Here, the scientists have also addressed the problem of non-availability of organic manure mainly due to the drop in cattle population. A holistic model has been designed to supplement the nutritional requirement of the crops by way of green manure, vermicompost, biofertilisers and liquid organic manure. The research also established that the organic package of practices will help in reducing the damage caused to the soil from excessive use of chemicals and enhances the water-holding capacity, which in turn would increase productivity, he said.

National seminar on plantation crops

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) will host a two-day national seminar on sustainability of coconut, areca, and cocoa farming from Friday.

Topic

The seminar, 'Sustainability of coconut, areca and cocoa farming: echnological advances and way forward,' will discuss technological advances in the field and also evolve ways to streamline research programmes on the crops. Experts from institutes under Indian Council for Agricultural Research; Coconut Development Board; directorates of Arecanut and Spices Development and Cashew Research; National Research Centre for Banana, Tiruchirapalli; and Kerala Agricultural University would take part in the function, CPCRI director George V. Thomas told a press conference here on Thursday. As many as 70 research works would be presented. T.K. Jose, Coconut Development Board chairman, would inaugurate the function at the CPCRI auditorium here at 10.30 a.m. C. Thamban, Principal Scientist, told reporters that there had been shrinkage of 18 per cent in the area of coconut cultivation in the State since 2001.

'Small farmers will dominate Indian agriculture'

Small, marginal farmers will continue to dominate Indian agriculture with their number and share in the holdings and cultivated area increasing. They will go in for improved crops and agricultural practices bearing the risks of rising costs, volatile commodity market and difficulties in accessing inputs. "Their role in the food security of the country is certain. But what is uncertain is their security," said Prof. D. Narasimha Reddy, ICSSR National Fellow. He was delivering a lecture on "Future of small farming and small and marginal farmers in India" as part of the first Prof. G.S. Bhalla memorial lecture here on Thursday. The lecture was organised by the Indian Society of Agricultural Marketing and Centre for Economic and Social Studies. In the foreseeable future, Prof. Reddy said, India would continue to be a country with world's largest share of rural population. Whether the small marginal farmers would move to a decent life or witness some of them taking their own lives would depend on what the regime would do for their cause. However, the percentage of employment provided by agriculture sector had come down from 68.6 in 1983 to 48.9 in 2011-12 while in industry the employment generation increased from 13.8 to 24.4 in the same period. In services too the employment potential jumped from 17.6 to 26.7 per cent, Prof. Reddy said. Small farms were still more efficient though they faced challenges in the large emerging economy. Can they compete in the more globalised marketing strategies like contract farming and value chains, Prof. Reddy wondered. He regretted that nearly 60 per cent of farmers were left without institutional credit though the credit flow doubled in the 11th plan.

Ensure fruits of research reach people: Jitendra Singh

Union Minister of State for Science & Technology Jitendra Singh has urged scientists to ensure that the fruits of their research reach public and asked them not to work in isolation. Speaking at a function organised to commemorate 70 years of CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology here, he said an area of

knowledge could not flourish in isolation. Calling for bringing labs and their work into public focus, he said “unless we share with people, they think we are not doing anything”. Emphasising the need for inculcating scientific temper among children at a young age, he mentioned that his Ministry has launched new initiatives to encourage young scientists as also women scientists. Efforts were also on to popularise science, especially in smaller towns. He wanted scientific institutions to utilise the R & D infrastructure of other institutes. Union Minister for Urban Development M. Venkaiah Naidu, who released a souvenir brought out on the occasion, charged the “western nations” with trying to exploit the developing countries by placing all kinds of restrictions on the latter. He said the western nations were being “more than clever”. Those nations were developed but do not want others to develop, he said. Observing that India has the largest coast and unique biodiversity, he wanted scientists to exploit them and discover new drugs. “India should also tie-up with developing nations and join hands with them to exploit this wealth”, he added. Referring to the “Make in India” call given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, he said it should not be a mere slogan but a motto. Stating that India was repository scientific knowledge in ancient times, he urged scientists to re-invent and place the nation in forefront of education, research and technology. To mark the occasion, IICT entered into an MoU with AP State Biodiversity Board to evaluate forest and other bio-resources. Later, Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated hostel and guest house complex of LaCONES by unveiling the plaque at CCMB main campus.

Farmers told to go in for jowar and green gram

Farmers who have sown maize should water the crop urgently to prevent crop damage. Maize was sown in 50,389 hectares in the district as against the normal extent of 46,000 hectares as many preferred not to take risk with the cotton as it involves lot of expense and needs more water compared to maize. Speaking to *The Hindu*, District Agricultural Technology & Transfer (DATT) centre director R. Uma Reddy said many farmers at the expense of maize are focusing

on saving paddy and cotton crops. Paddy can be given rotation irrigation and cotton just needs foliar spray of water and nutrients. But maize should be irrigated first as it reaches harvesting time soon, he explained. The farmers in the district who sow cotton in 2.29 lakh hectares, sowed 2.4 lakh hectares. Similarly as against the normal sowing of paddy in 1.42 lakh hectares, only 52,150 hectares was sown. There is no rain and no power in villages. Farmers are getting just four hours of power supply, which is not sufficient to their needs. There is little water in open, and borewells, but power shortage is very much in place, he said. Farmers were advised to sow jowar, which is 100-day crop, needs less water and provides fodder to cattle. Similarly, farmers could also go for green gram which is 60-day crop. By this time last year, the district received 509.5 mm rainfall but this year, the district witnessed only 270.2 mm, which is 53 per cent of deviation. Hence, farmers were advised not to go for paddy but jowar and pulses. If the farmers still insist on paddy, they should go for more plants at closer spacing, cut the tips of plants and supply more fertilizer at base, said Dr. Uma Reddy.

Water level at Mettur Dam

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 110 feet on Thursday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 6,621 cusecs and the discharge 21,000 cusecs.

Sundargarh Breaks 25-Year Jinx to Revive Potato, Onion Cultivation

Smarting under trader manipulated market which swings vegetable prices in either ways, the Sundargarh district administration has launched fresh attempts to boost local production of potato and onion. The farmers in the tribal-dominated district had abandoned potato and onion cultivation almost 25 years back due to lack of storage facilities. Sources said the move comes after the district having a total population of above 21 lakhs was affected by steep hike in prices of the two staple vegetables recently. Deputy Director of Horticulture (DDH) Basudev Sahu said about 210 hectares (ha) of land having sandy loam soil across 17 blocks of the district have been taken up for potato farming. Shortly, 4,200 quintals of seeds would be supplied and cultivation activities are expected to start from first week of September. He said each hectare would require 20 quintals of seed and after 105 to 120 days of farming, the district would be able to harvest about 42,000 quintals of potato. About 20 ha with loamy soil will be taken up for onion cultivation and 20 quintals of seeds have reached seedling stage, he added. Sahu said transplantation of onion seedlings would begin by mid-September. By December, the district would be able to harvest 3,000 quintals of onion with each hectare producing between 150 and 200 quintals. On the flip side, the farmers may face trouble in case of bumper harvest as the district lacks Government-owned cold storage facilities. The administration pins hope on a private cold storage at Rourkela. Seven new cold chamber facilities with combined capacity of 65 tonnes in Nuagaon and Bisra blocks have been lying defunct in absence of three-phase power connection. At the Zilla Parishad meeting on Wednesday, Sundargarh Collector Bhupendra Singh Poonia asked WESCO officials to ensure power supply to the facilities at the earliest. Agriculture officials admitted that potential farmers of Panposh and Bonai sub-divisions had abandoned potato and onion farming 25 years back,

the reasons being closure of two Government-owned cold storages at Kuanrunda and Rajmunda. According to a marketing intelligence officer, Rourkela city needs around 600 quintals of potato and 200 quintals of onion on daily basis. While bulk of the tuber comes from West Bengal and the rest from Uttar Pradesh, Nasik in Maharashtra supplies onion. Civil Supplies Officer (CSO) Abhiram Pradhan claimed that the district's daily requirement of potato is around 1600 quintals and 600 quintals of onion. The department is keeping a close watch on the price of the two items. A wholesaler Arun Prasad welcomed the district administration's move towards gaining self-sufficiency in potato and onion production.

Farm Loans

Pangappara unit of Mahatma Gandhi Deshiya Gram Shree distributed agricultural loans to Gram Shree workers with assistance from State Bank of India, Sreekariyam branch. Loans were distributed by district chairman of Mahatma Gandhi Deshiya Gram Shree Valsalakumar.



Mixed trend at Kochi tea sale

Prices for almost all varieties of tea at the Kochi tea auction were mixed this week. The teas which came under the selection of major blenders ruled steady to firm and sometimes dearer following quality. Others were irregular and tended to ease. The quantity on offer in CTC dust category was 9,96,500 kg. According to auctioneers Forbes, Ewart and Figgis, the decline in prices were less for grainer varieties compared to powdery grades. A fair demand was noticed from upcountry buyers and exporters.

Orthodox grades

The quantity on offer in orthodox grades was 16,500 kg. The market for

primary grades was steady, while others were irregular and lower. A small quantity of orthodox dust on offer was absorbed by exporters. In the best CTC dusts, good varieties quoted Rs. 90-156, medium category fetched Rs. 70-90 and plain grades stood at Rs. 57-69. In the leaf sales, the quantity on offer in orthodox varieties was 1,59,500 kg. The market for Nilgiri Whole Leaf was firm to sometimes dearer following quality. Others were irregular and easier. CIS continued to be the mainstay of the market. Of the 77,500 kg on offer in CTC varieties, the market for good liquoring broken was firm to dearer. Others were irregular and sometimes lower. There was a subdued demand from exporters. In dust varieties, both Injipara (Prm) SFD and Injipara (Prm) RD quoted the best prices of Rs. 161 each followed by Monica SFD at Rs. 158. In leaf grades, Chamraj FOP (S) Green Tea fetched the best prices at Rs. 316 followed by Pascoe's Woodlands Hyson Green Tea at Rs. 292.

Ageing plantations may sap rubber yield

An estimated 45 per cent of natural rubber plantations in India are in the low-yielding 'aged' category, according to the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA). Members of the Association are the largest consumers of natural rubber in India accounting for 70 per cent of the total consumption. ATMA analysed the age profile of plantations since the year 2000 for deriving trends. It concluded that the age profile has taken a turn for the worse over the last few years. Long-term availability of natural rubber for meeting increasing demand is a subject of utmost concern now, says Rajiv Budhraj, Director-General, ATMA. Growers are apparently not willing to replant in view of the long gestation period and high prices which even at lower yields have been considered to be remunerative. So they continue to tap aged trees. Growers should be encouraged to re-plant with higher subsidies for re-plantation. Since natural rubber prices have come off from their peak levels currently, they will be more receptive towards re-plantation initiatives of the Rubber Board. "In the next meeting of National Rubber Policy working group,

we plan to raise this issue,” Budhraj said. This comes at a time when other consuming countries are consolidating supplies by even developing plantations overseas. While recent instances of drop production or cut in projected estimates were attributed to inclement weather, yields had already come under pressure in view of aging of trees.

Pest control

Visitors looking at a vial carrying semiochemicals or synthetic pheromones hanging over a pheromone trap for pests developed by the Centre for Semisoils, Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, Hyderabad, on Thursday. Decadienyl Acetate is poured into the vial to attract pests that fall off into the plastic bag, avoiding chemical pest control over cotton, potatoes, groundnut and brinjal farms. PV SIVAKUMAR

Coonoor tea auction volume drops

The volume offered for the auction of Coonoor Tea Trade Association has fallen again this week. For Sale No: 34 ending Friday, a volume of 17.74 lakh kg has been catalogued. This is as much as 3.32 lakh kg lower than last week's offer. Of this, 12.87 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and the rest to the dust grades. As much as 16.84 lakh kg belongs to the CTC variety. In the leaf counter, only 41,000 kg belong to orthodox while 12.46 lakh kg to CTC. Among the dusts, only 49,000 kg belong to orthodox while 4.38 lakh kg to CTC. In the leaf auction last week, among corporate buyers, Hindustan Unilever Ltd bought brighter liquoring varieties. Tata Global Beverages Ltd was fairly active on good medium sorts. Duncans Tea Ltd operated on the good medium bolder broken. In the dust auction, HUL was fairly active on good medium varieties and orthodox dusts. Tata Global and Duncans Tea did not operate. Indcoserve expressed interest for good medium smaller grades. There was good demand for brighter liquoring teas from upcountry buyers. Overall, internal buyers were less active.

National Bulk Handling Corp to expand further

Expansion of the agricultural commodities under its management will be the major focus area for National Bulk Handling Corporation (NBHC) Ltd in the coming days. It offers services such as warehousing and collateral management for farm produce. In an interaction with *Business Line* during his visit to Mangalore on Wednesday, Anil K Choudhary, Managing Director, said that the company maintains around 1,300-1,500 warehouses across the country. "Increased geographies and increased commodities, how can we bring in more commodities, farmers and processors into our fold is a priority," he said. The company, which was part of Financial Technologies India Ltd, was acquired by India Value Fund in April this year. The company has agreements with 42 banks in the country to finance its warehouse receipts. In the last five years, the company has managed commodities worth around Rs. 62,000 crore for banks, and banks have lent around Rs. 42,000 crore against warehouse receipts, he said. If the company is handling Rs. 6,000-7,000 crore worth of commodity on an average now, how it can reach an average of Rs. 15,000 crore will be a focus area, he said, adding that maintaining Rs. 15,000 crore worth commodities gives a lot of strength.

Huge potential

Stating that the potential is humongous in this area, he said: "We are just scratching the surface." Explaining that, he said the recent Budget has asked the banks to lend around Rs. 8 lakh crore for agriculture sector. Of the total agriculture lending till now, a major share went to pre-harvest lending. Post-harvest was getting hardly one or two per cent of the total credit disbursed during the period, Choudhary said. Stating that pre-harvest lending has more potential to become NPA than post-harvest, he said the collateral in post-harvest lending is tangible. Though the company handles around 160 commodities, produce such as paddy, wheat, maize, mustard, soyabean, cotton, pulses and chana constitute around 60-70 per cent of its total basket of assets

under management, he said. To a query on its geographical expansion plans, he said the company has already started to expand in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. It would also like to expand in Orissa, he said. Referring to India Value Fund's investment in the company, he said: "I believe that we will be able to start moving meaningfully towards reaching our true potential."

Priority areas

On the recent appointment of Vijay Kelkar, former finance secretary, as the Chairman of the company, he said the perspectives that the company will get be much more mature and meaningful now. To a query on the other priority areas, Choudhary said NBHC will focus more on investing in IT (information technology) infrastructure. The more it invests on IT, better control it gets on the system. It will help effectively and economically control the risks, he added.

Heavy rains forecast for South as 'low' looms

The India Met Department has warned of heavy to very heavy rainfall for the peninsula for next three days under the influence of a low-pressure area taking shape just off the Kerala-Karnataka coast. The 'low' is expected to materialise over the south-east Arabian Sea and adjoining coasts of north Kerala and Karnataka as early as Saturday, the Met said on Thursday.

Enabler zone

A preparatory upper air cyclonic circulation over south interior Karnataka has now moved west to the Lakshadweep-Comorin area and is embedded into an east-west shear zone of monsoon turbulence. A key monsoon enabler, the shear zone features opposing winds in an area rising from three km and six km into the atmosphere. This is the height where the monsoon is most active in the atmosphere. The shear zone also sets up the platform for rain-bearing systems (low-pressure area) to play around in. The current scenario nearly depicts

normal monsoon onset conditions, replete with a rain-friendly Madden-Julian Oscillation wave transiting the region in the higher levels of the atmosphere.

Rain outlook

Given this, the peninsula is forecast to slip under a pulsating wet spell especially along the south-west coast covering Kerala and Karnataka as also the Lakshadweep islands. In fact, the Met forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall for Lakshadweep for Thursday. Heavy rain was also forecast for entire Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Marathwada and Madhya Maharashtra.

Beware Karnataka

A warning sounded for Saturday said heavy to very heavy rainfall with extremely heavy falls could batter coastal Karnataka. Heavy to very heavy rain has been forecast for Kerala and south interior Karnataka. Heavy rain has been forecast also for Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, interior Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Lakshadweep. Meanwhile, an outlook from the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction shows the low-pressure area clambering up along the edge of the coast up to Goa-Konkan and getting dissipated.

It also indicated the possibility of the eastern end of the seasonal trough now hugging the Himalayan foothills reverting and dipping into north-east Bay of Bengal by Wednesday next. It remains to be seen whether it can dig out a low-pressure area from the seas, which can fan monsoon winds back into the plains of north-west India.

Business Standard

Paddy sowing in Punjab, Haryana on target despite weak monsoon; cotton, maize coverage hit

"Deficient" rains have had no impact on sowing of paddy - a major Kharif crop - in Punjab and Haryana, even as the input cost of paddy growers went up significantly for watering the crop. Though crop sowing in Haryana almost remained insulated from the "weak" monsoon, sowing of cotton and maize was hit in Punjab in the wake of poor rains. Punjab, which is a well-irrigated state, has witnessed 60 per cent deficient rains while Haryana saw 57 per cent lesser rains during the kharif sowing season, officials said here. Even as apprehensions were expressed over lesser area coverage under paddy because of deficient rains, the area under paddy crossed the targeted area to 2.82 million hectares in Punjab. An official of the Punjab Agriculture Department said here on Thursday, "Area under paddy has finally reached 2.82 million hectares. Crop sowing is over now." A target of 2.65 million hectares was set for paddy during the current season as the state government had proposed to bring down area by 200,000 hectares under "water guzzling" crop as part of crop diversification programme. However, that could not take place. Punjab paddy growers' cost is expected to increase by Rs 6,000 to Rs 7,000 per acre because of "deficient" rains as farmers had to spend extra money on diesel and deepening of tubewells for irrigating paddy in the wake of lesser rains. In Haryana, 1.13 million hectares were brought under paddy against the target of 1.15 million hectares, said an official of the Haryana Agriculture Department. As far as other kharif crops are concerned, cotton area in Punjab could not reach the targeted 520,000 hectares, which will lead to lesser cotton output this year. "Area under cotton could reach only 450,000 hectares as against target of 520,000 hectares," he said. Cotton area in Haryana zoomed to 642,000 hectares, surpassing the target of 600,000 hectares. Area under maize, which was being promoted by the Punjab government as an alternative crop to

paddy, was also not up to the mark as only 163,000 hectares could be brought under it against the target of 200,000 hectares.

UP sugar mills start laying off workers

Private sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh have started laying off workers following the notice of suspension of operations in the coming 2014-15 crushing season. All major sugar companies, including Bajaj Hindusthan and the Balrampur groups, have informed their seasonal, temporary and contractual staff about the suspension of operations, meaning their services were not required currently. The lay-offs have hit the labourers and supervisory-level staff the most, which form the bulk of the mills' headcount. Permanent staff, including managerial and those coming under the wage board, have been spared for the time being. Labourers include unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers. Even during off-season, the seasonal staff are paid about 50 per cent of their salary as retention compensation. The mills had decided not to start crushing, unless the state government yielded to their long-pending demands of linking cane and sugar prices and paying Rs 9 a quintal as promised last year for clearing arrears. Sixty-six mills have given suspension notices so far. There are 95 private and 23 cooperative sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh. All the mills collectively employ about 150,000 workers during the crushing season. The Indian Sugar Mills Association (Isma) sought to downplay the development. "It is a normal thing for the mills to withdraw staff when the operations have been suspended," Isma director-general Abinash Verma told Business Standard. "If the economic loss is greater in running a mill than remaining idle, the mills would not run," he added. The private mills are saddled with massive cane arrears of about Rs 5,000 crore and the Allahabad High Court is hearing a case in the matter. The mills contend high cane price was the major contributor to arrears year after year and to the current crisis. "Nearly 10,000 highly-skilled employees in UP have been sitting idle, adding to the woes of the already-ailing sugar industry," said A K Shukla,

former secretary-general of Sugar Technologists' Association of India. According to him, managerial and technical staff, both permanent and contractual, have been advised to go on leave. "At a time when the state government should have come forward to support the sugar industry, cases have been lodged against the mill owners," Shukla noted. He said mills had no choice other than shutting down units and sending workforce on forced leave. Uttar Pradesh's sugar-sector economy is pegged at Rs 30,000 crore annually and it contributes handsomely to the exchequer by way of taxes.



Column: Agriculture not out of the woods yet

Concerns over monsoon have diminished a lot in recent weeks because of four positive developments. First, rainfall deficiency has reduced sharply from a century-high of 45% for June to 17% as on August 18. Second, sowing has caught up significantly from 40% below normal in mid-July to just 2.3% below normal on August 14. Third, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has lowered the probability of a weak El Nino to 50% from 70% earlier, implying a less disruptive end to the monsoon season. Finally, reservoir storage, which was 14% above the last 10-year average by the middle of August, will have a salutary impact on rabi—or winter—crop. The current momentum in rains is expected to continue for the rest of the monsoon season. The IMD, in its second long-range forecast, has estimated that rainfall is expected to be only 5% deficient in August-September. So, what does this mean for agricultural production and food inflation?

Agricultural GDP

We expect agriculture growth to be capped at 1% this fiscal due to a statistical 'base effect' from the high 4.7% farm growth seen last fiscal. Also, the timeliness and distribution of rains have been haphazard this year. This will lower crop yields, particularly in the arid and semi-arid regions. In addition, while overall sowing may have improved, it is still 5.5% below the levels seen

same time last fiscal. Crop-wise analysis also shows that some pulses (tur) and coarse cereals (jowar, bajra) have already suffered. Sowing of coarse cereals and pulses was 12.2% and 7.7% below normal, respectively, as on August 14. The CRISIL Deficient Rainfall Impact Parameter (DRIP) scores, which capture both magnitude of the shock (measured as the deficiency of rainfall) as well as the vulnerability of a region (measured as a percentage of unirrigated area), show jowar, bajra and tur have been severely impacted this year. A major portion of jowar (43%) and tur (36%) are produced in Maharashtra. Even though rainfall deficiency in Maharashtra is lower than many states, it has high unirrigated area (80% of total farming area), and therefore the most vulnerable to rainfall deficiency. In the case of bajra, Haryana and Maharashtra, which account for 20% of India's production of the cereal, have had very deficient rains, which compound the problem of an already large unirrigated area for the crop. The saving grace this year is that rice, which accounts for 70% of India's kharif season foodgrain production, has been less

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government cuts minimum export price of onion to \$ 300/tonne

Government today slashed the minimum export price (MEP) of onion by a steep \$ 200, \$ 50 more than what the Union Cabinet decided yesterday.

The decision follows softening of prices and increased availability of the vegetable in the domestic market. Telecom and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad yesterday had said after the Cabinet meeting that "the MEP of onion has been brought down to USD 350 per tonne as its availability has increased".

In June this year, the MEP on onion was re-introduced at \$ 300 per tonne, which was further raised to \$ 500 per tonne in July this year as prices moved upwards. Onion prices were rising due to speculation amid anticipation of below normal monsoon despite sufficient supply in the country. During June, the wholesale price of onion at Lasalgaon in Maharashtra - Asia's largest onion

market - had risen by about 80 per cent to Rs 18.50 per kg. At present, the rates are hovering around Rs 13-14 per kg at Lasalgoan. Onion production is estimated to have risen to 192 lakh tonnes during 2013--14 crop year (July--June), from 168 lakh tonnes in 2012--13. Exports meanwhile fell to 13.58 lakh tonnes last fiscal from 18.22 lakh tonnes in 2012--13. The domestic demand during the lean period from June to November is met through stored rabi (winter) and fresh kharif (summer) produce.