

Solar pumpsets

The government has proposed to promote solar pumpsets for new agricultural connections with a target to install 10,000 of them every year for next five years. It would enable distribution companies to provide electricity during day time to farmers, Mr. Pulla Rao said. Existing non-ISI pumpsets would be replaced with energy efficient ISI pumpsets in a phased .

Three days after hooting at a rally, Modi calls Hooda for tea

Three days after the hooting incident in a public rally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday appeared to reach out to Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda by inviting him over a cup of tea. Mr. Hooda met Mr. Modi at his residence and discussed development issues relating to the State. "The Haryana Chief Minister was invited by the Prime Minister for tea and he went to meet him to uphold the dignity of the office of the Prime Minister. A lot of discussion took place including issues concerning Haryana's development," Mr. Hooda's media adviser Shiv Bhattia told PTI. It was not known whether the issue of hooting cropped up during the short meeting. The meeting comes three days after Mr. Hooda was left fuming as a hostile crowd hooted him at a function in Mr. Modi's presence at Kaithal in Haryana. The Chief Minister had later blamed the BJP for the incident and vowed to stay away from such events in future. Mr. Modi and the BJP have come under attack over the hooting incidents with detractors saying the two have done nothing to check their supporters from indulging in it. PTI

For delta farmers, more water spells woes later

On Friday evening, the level in the Mettur dam stood at 111.15 feet, with the inflow dwindling to 6,248 cusecs. The present storage may last only for another 50 days, against the samba crop requirements till January. With the Public Works Department keeping the discharge from the Mettur dam at 21,000 cusecs and the rains abating in the Cauvery catchments in Karnataka, the delta farmers are worried at water availability for seeing through the entire samba paddy crop season. They want the water managers to assess the situation and plan accordingly. On Friday evening, the level in the dam stood at 111.15 feet, with the inflow dwindling to 6,248 cusecs. If the current trend holds, 1.50 tmcft will be drained every day. After provisioning a dead storage of 30 tmcft, the present storage may last only for another 50 days, against the samba crop requirements till January. The Tamil Nadu government took a calculated risk, opening the dam for irrigation on August 10, prompted by the heavy inflow brought on by vigorous monsoon rains in Coorg. Sections of the farmers were surprised at the decision, though many chose to remain silent. Like PWD officials and the government, they hoped for the southwest monsoon to remain active till September-end to bring enough rains to help raise samba nurseries and save the kuruvai crop standing on an estimated two lakh acres across Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts. Belying their hopes, the monsoon played truant and showed definite signs of withdrawal. This has brought down the flow into Mettur dam, leaving the kuruvai crop at the mercy of groundwater. At present, the standing kuruvai crop is in various stages of growth, with harvest expected to commence in another three-four weeks, lasting up to September-end. Farmers in many areas in the delta have now raised samba nursery. They require continuous supply to sustain the crops, ranging from 120 days for the medium-duration varieties to 160 days for long-duration varieties. As per the present indications, they need to depend solely on the Cauvery water for seeing the samba crop through. On the other hand, farmers

in the tail-end areas of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts have been demanding more discharge, despite the fact that several main channels are silted up.

Tardy de-silting

Worse still, farmers at the grievances day meeting held in Thanjavur on Friday alleged that the tardy de-silting in large stretches compounded the problem. “The PWD officials know the problem, and we want them to act diligently,” they said. “The need of the hour is seamless coordination as well as absolute understanding among the delta farmers and PWD officials for professional water management to see through the samba crop. Water management was commendable during the last three years, and we expect that this year too,” says Mannargudi S. Ranganathan, general secretary of the Cauvery Delta Farmers’ Welfare Association. “Nothing will go wrong if the government reduces the discharge for the moment and maintains the optimal discharge and increase it as demanded by the situation later on,” says groundwater expert P.M. Natarajan of Thanjavur, reflecting the aspirations of the prudent delta farmers.

New law on sinking borewells piques farmers

Farmers expressed reservations over the State Government's new law regulating digging of borewells, necessitating prior permission from the local body concerned, at the monthly grievance redressal meeting on Friday. While endorsing the State Government’s view that digging of eight inch borewells must be kept under scrutiny due to the fatalities caused to children falling into them accidentally, they were at a loss to understand why the restriction was extended to borewells of smaller diameters as well. The law will not just encourage corruption, it will be used as a handle by local body administrators to settle scores with farmers, Thalapathy, a representative of farmers in Thadapalli-Arakankottai ayacut apprehended. The gestation between making an application to the local body

authorities and drawing water from the borewell will go up to two months in the event of the law taking effect. The law will severely affect farmers who decide on sinking borewells for meeting emergency water requirement at times when the supply from canals become insufficient, Mr. Thalopathy explained. Shortcomings in the crop insurance, the need to enhance target for agricultural loans, and necessity to rule out sale of uncertified seeds and spurious fertilisers were among the other issues discussed at the meeting. Highlighting the inadequacies in the crop insurance scheme, C. Nallasamy, president of Lower Bhavani Farmers' Welfare Association, questioned the practice of deducting the premium before disbursing farm loans. But, when there is a calamity or pest attack, insurance compensation is not provided to individual farmers. The reasoning by the insurance company that the benefit will be provided to affected farmers only if the impact is caused in fields spread over a minimum of 10 revenue villages was outrageous, Mr. Nallasamy said. Mr. Nallasamy questioned the district administration's reluctance to prevail upon the three private sugar mills procuring sugarcane from farmers in the district to implement payment of the State Administered Price. Farmers urged the Central Government to desist from restraining State Governments from fixing higher procurement price for paddy, sugarcane and other crops, over and above the levels recommended at the national level. Speakers at the meeting said the target for loan disbursement must be enhanced and the seed distribution must also be broad-based further since 80,000 acres in LBP (Lower Bhavani Project) ayacut area would be brought under paddy cultivation.

CM promises to raise water level of Periyar dam to 152 feet

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Friday said that her government would make all efforts to raise the water level of Mullaperiyar Dam to its full reservoir level (FRL) of 152 feet after carrying out the residual strengthening works. Ms. Jayalalithaa was accepting felicitations at a rally here, organised by farmers from five southern districts to thank her for the resolute efforts to raise the level to 142

feet here. She recalled that her government had raised the water level of the reservoir by downing the 13 shutters on July 17, 2014. Firm conviction and unrelenting efforts helped in Tamil Nadu upholding its rights over the dam. "I considered the dam issue as my personal crisis and acted on it (raising the water level) without any delay to improve the farmers' livelihood. You also gave me full cooperation. This is the secret of the success. This is our victory," the AIADMK chief declared. Ms. Jayalalithaa said she used to discuss in detail with engineers of the Public Works Department, technocrats and legal experts the State's stand on the issue before every hearing in the Supreme Court when the case was going on. "Based on the strong arguments put forth by Tamil Nadu, the Supreme Court in 2006 allowed the State to increase the water level of the dam to 142 feet in the first step," she said. In May 2014, the apex court finally allowed Tamil Nadu to raise the level to 142 feet. Ms. Jayalalithaa accused the Congress-led UPA government and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which were ruling at the Centre and the State then, of having taken no steps to find solutions to the riparian issues with the neighbouring States as promised during the 2006 Assembly election campaign. The Chief Minister, who was earlier accorded a rousing reception at the Madurai airport by the party functionaries, left for Chennai after the meeting by a special flight.

"Take up integrated farming"

Expressing concern: Collector K. Nanthakumar presiding over the farmers' grievance day meeting in Ramanathapuram on Friday. Impressed with the fact that a farmer practising integrated farming in the neighbouring Virudhunagar district was earning Rs.80,000 a month, Collector K. Nanthakumar has exhorted the farmers in the district to take up integrated farming and assured them of all assistance by the district administration. After K. Thandapani, a farmer from Vararotti in Virudhunagar district, shared his successful experience of integrated farming at the monthly farmers' grievance meeting here on Friday, the Collector

said it was amazing that the farmer was earning about Rs.80,000 per month and the farmers in the district could emulate him. At least farmers in Mandapam, Nainarkoil and Kamuthi blocks could resort to integrated farming, he said, and assured them that the district administration would give them full support. As the farmers complained that availability of water was the major problem, the district administration could help them with bigger farm ponds, he said. "Even digging of farm ponds in an area of one acre is possible," he said, adding "if a farmer in a neighbouring district could be successful in integrated farming, the farmers in this district could also be successful." Thandapani said he had taken up integrated farming in five acres of land and was cultivating sapota, guava, amla and papaya as intercrops. Besides, he was rearing goats, native chicken, *kinnikozhi* (Guinea fowl), turkey, broiler rabbits and ducks, and used their droppings to prepare organic manure. As he used organic manure in his farm and completely avoided the use of chemical fertilizers, he could sell the fruits for better price, he noted. Marketing was not a problem as people were even prepared to pay higher amounts for quality products, he said, and invited the farmers to visit his farm and offered to share the secrets of his success.

Farmers protest hike in insurance premium

Farmers in Ramanathapuram district were up in arms against the increase effected by the National Agriculture Insurance Company (NAIC) in the premium for crop insurance from 2 to 12 per cent and the cut in the compensation. As the farmers voiced protest at the grievance redress meeting held here on Friday, Collector K. Nanthakumar said he would write to the company and seek a clarification on the increase in premium for 2014-15 under the Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS). He said he had received the communication from the NAIC only two days ago and could not understand the basis on which the company increased the premium and cut the compensation. Under the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS), farmers had paid 2 per cent premium

during 2013-14, amounting to Rs. 324 a hectare and Rs. 129 an acre, and the compensation amount was Rs. 32,360 a hectare and Rs.12,944 an acre. However, this year, the NAIC told the district administration that the premium would be Rs. 555 a hectare and Rs. 222 an acre and cut the compensation to Rs. 4,625 a hectare and Rs. 1,850 an acre, sources said.

Farmers seek more water for transplantation

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. At the same time, water should not be wasted. The rainwater might be sufficient for a fortnight. But farmers who had gone for direct sowing should wait for the next spell of rain without using the canal water. They should not fritter away the canal water which was needed for transplantation.

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. “Rivers and A channels in Cauvery delta have been dredged at a cost of Rs. 40 crore this year. B and C channels are cleared by the district administration under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MNREGS). So there will not be problem in water reaching tail end areas once the quantum of water released is increased,” the Chief Engineer said.

One-stop solution for all inputs for farmers

Soon, farmers in Vellore district can walk into facilities that will be a one-stop solution for their input requirements. Four integrated agricultural extension centres will be set up across the district. R. Jayasundar, Joint Director of Agriculture, Vellore said the centres will house the agriculture department, horticulture department, marketing department, seed certification office, seed inspection facility and godown. Each centre will come up at a cost of Rs. 1.5 crore.

“When a farmer comes to this complex, he can meet officers of all departments. Farmers will get all inputs at these complexes including seeds and technology. We will prepare the estimate for setting up the centres. Work will commence once funds are allocated,” he said. Already, land has been identified for setting up two centres at Kaveripakkam and Arcot. The official asked the farmers to identify suitable places in other parts of the district for the remaining two centres.

For delta farmers, more water spells woes later

On Friday evening, the level in the Mettur dam stood at 111.15 feet, with the inflow dwindling to 6,248 cusecs. The present storage may last only for another 50 days, against the samba crop requirements till January. With the Public Works Department keeping the discharge from the Mettur dam at 21,000 cusecs and the rains abating in the Cauvery catchments in Karnataka, the delta farmers are worried at water availability for seeing through the entire samba paddy crop season. They want the water managers to assess the situation and plan accordingly. On Friday evening, the level in the dam stood at 111.15 feet, with the inflow dwindling to 6,248 cusecs. If the current trend holds, 1.50 tmcft will be drained every day. After provisioning a dead storage of 30 tmcft, the present storage may last only for another 50 days, against the samba crop requirements till January. The Tamil Nadu government took a calculated risk, opening the dam for irrigation on August 10, prompted by the heavy inflow brought on by vigorous monsoon rains in Coorg. Sections of the farmers were surprised at the decision, though many chose to remain silent. Like PWD officials and the government, they hoped for the southwest monsoon to remain active till September-end to bring enough rains to help raise samba nurseries and save the kuruvai crop standing on an estimated two lakh acres across Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts. Belying their hopes, the monsoon played truant and showed definite signs of withdrawal. This has brought down the flow into Mettur dam, leaving the kuruvai crop at the mercy of groundwater. At present, the standing kuruvai crop is in various stages of growth, with harvest expected to commence in another three-four weeks, lasting up to September-end. Farmers in many areas in the delta have now raised samba nursery. They require continuous supply to sustain the crops, ranging from 120 days for the medium-duration varieties to 160 days for long-duration varieties. As per the present indications, they need to depend solely on the Cauvery water for seeing the samba crop through. On the other hand, farmers

in the tail-end areas of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts have been demanding more discharge, despite the fact that several main channels are silted up.

Farmers breathe a sigh of relief as Raichur receives rainfall

The rain that lashed throughout the district on Friday ultimately brought smiles on the faces of lakhs of farmers who were desperately waiting for the last couple of months. The standing plants of cotton, red gram, pearl millet and groundnut that were drying up in around 2 lakh hectares of cultivated black soil have finally germinated, giving hope to farmers. Around 1 lakh hectares of unsown fields are expected to witness extensive farming within a couple of days. As per the details provided by the office of Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, Javalagera in Sindhanur taluk recorded highest rainfall with 114 mm followed by Gunjalli (105 mm), Hutti (96 mm), Sindhanur (91 mm), Turvihah (71 mm) and Guddadur (70mm). The lowest rainfall is recorded by Gillesugur in Raichur taluk with 9.5 mm followed by Lingasugur (10 mm), Gajaral (12.6 mm), Salagunda (12.8 mm) and Kavital (16 mm). "The total rainfall received in the district in the month of August came up to 80 mm as against the normal rainfall of 112.7 mm for the month. The district received an average of 244.2 mm (69%) since January this year as against 356 mm normal rainfall for the period," Rudreshappa, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, told *The Hindu*. "The cotton and red gram crops on black cotton will survive. However, the standing crops on red soil have little hope. The Deputy Commissioner had called a meeting of all the senior officers of concerned departments to assess the situation. The survey of the situation would continue," he told *The Hindu*.

Chennithala calls for more benefits for agricultural workers

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala has stressed the need of providing additional benefits to agricultural workers in order to ensure the progress of the agriculture

sector. He was speaking at the State-level launch of distribution of benefits of Kerala Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund here on Friday. Mr. Chennithala pointed out that farm workers were a vital component of the sector and their contributions could be retained only by ensuring their welfare and providing them with attractive benefits. Presiding over the function, Board chairman K.T. Itihass said benefits worth Rs. 1 crore would be disbursed by Onam. Awards were distributed to children of agricultural workers who have excelled in academics. Cash awards worth a total of Rs. 3.25 lakh were distributed among 253 students hailing from the district. Assistance worth Rs. 12 lakh for marriage, healthcare and other purposes were also disbursed on the occasion. According to Mr. Itihass, cash awards worth Rs. 50 lakh will be distributed to 3,794 students across the State for their impressive performance in the SSLC examinations. An amount of Rs. 2,000 each will be handed over to 601 students who secured A+ in all subjects. Cash awards of Rs. 1,250 and Rs. 1,000 will be presented to students who scored aggregates in the range of 80-89 and 75-79 respectively. He said the Board had requested the government to increase the workers' share in benefits, sanction the grant the Board deserved, and to impose cess whenever agricultural lands were being used for non-agricultural purposes. Alappuzha municipal chairperson Mercy Diana Macido, former MLA A.A. Shukoor; municipal vice chairman B. Ansari, Board members B. Raghavan, M.A. Lalichen, P.K. Shaji, P.K. Krishnan, Josekutty Francis, Kurkkolly Moitheen, Mathai Mannappally, E. Haridasan and chief executive Sunil Thomas were among those who spoke on the occasion.

Water level at Mettur

The water level in the Mettur Dam stood at 111.15 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 6,248 cusecs and the discharge, 21,000 cusecs.

THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Rs 5,000 Cr Set Apart for Crop Loan Waiver

Though much was said about loan waiver scheme, one of the important promises made in the ruling party's election manifesto, in the maiden Agriculture Budget of the Andhra Pradesh government, 'how' and 'when' with regard to the scheme implementation was not explained much. Presenting the Agriculture Budget, Minister for Agriculture P Pulla Rao limited himself to stating that Rs 5000 crore is proposed for the waiver of agriculture crop loans and agriculture gold loans to the extent of Rs 1.5 lakh per family. He said balance money will be mobilised based on actual requirement which is being worked out in the field. Allocations to the tune of Rs 6,736.44 crore under plan and ` 6,373.95 crore under non-plan were made in the agriculture budget for 2014-15 financial year to help the crisis-ridden agriculture sector. According to him, the foodgrain production target for the current fiscal has been fixed at 127.04 lakh metric tonnes as against the foodgrain production of 116.64 lakh metric tonnes during 2013-14. A provision of ` 212 crore has been made for supply of certified seeds on subsidy to the farmers and Rs 90 crore for supply of farm equipment. "Interest-free crop loans will be extended to all farmers up to Rs 1 lakh and on Pavala Vaddi from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 3 lakh if repaid in time and it will be continued," he said. A new programme 'Polam Pilustondi' has been launched aiming at improved extension programmes. Adarsha Rythus (Progressive farmers) will be discontinued and qualified multi purpose extension officers will be recruited to improve extension in agriculture. Seven strategies will be adopted for improvement of horticulture and on farm water management will be taken up with an outlay of Rs 348.33 crore. Stress will be on research in YSR Horticulture University, which has been allotted Rs 30.61 crore. Equal importance has been given to sericulture, for which Rs 122.92 crore has

been allocated in the current fiscal. In case of animal husbandry, Rs 723.32 crore has been allocated for the current fiscal. Several initiatives like creation of additional warehousing facilities, revival of soil testing labs, modernisation of market yards and checkposts for strengthening of agriculture marketing and Rs 156.87 crore was allocated to cooperation department. According to the Minister, for the current fiscal, State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) has approved credit plan for agriculture and allied sector to a tune of Rs 56,109.16 crore. An amount of Rs 3,188 crore was allocated for power subsidy and plans were put forth for replacing 36,000 non-ISI pumpssets with energy efficient ISI pumpssets in a phased manner. Increasing power supply to 9 hours in a phased manner is on the agenda. An allocation of Rs 1,386 crores for agriculture and allied sectors under MGNREGA has been made. "The government accords highest priority to agriculture sector and welfare of the farmers. Every effort is being made to make it more profitable and every measure in that direction is being initiated," Minister concluded.

Spl Package for Farmers in Edamon-Kochi Sector

Finally, an expensive solution to the Edamon-Kochi impasse. The State Government has issued orders approving a Rs 341-crore 'Special Compensation Package' for farmers and landowners in Edamon-Kochi sector of the 400 kV Tirunelveli-Madakkathara transmission corridor who had objected to the line being drawn over their lands. This line is imperative for evacuating Kerala's share of power from Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) in Tamil Nadu to Madakkathara sub-station in Thrissur. Work on the stretch has been delayed for several years owing to the protests. Earlier this year, the High Court had instructed the government to resolve the matter quickly so that Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd (PGCIL) can get on with the work. The cost of implementing the package will be shared equally by the State Government and the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). The KSEB will meet the cost by availing of a loan. The

government's share will be granted subsequently, as per the order dated August 19. Essentially, for the new package, what the government has done is to overhaul a compensation package announced in 2009 by ramping up the compensation amount. The compensation amount has been upped from 70 per cent to 100 per cent of the land value for damages caused to plantations while erecting transmission towers. For paddy fields, the compensation has been hiked from 40 per cent to 100 per cent of land value. The ex-gratia payment for land area covered under the conductors along the line in private land has been increased from 20 per cent to 40 per cent. This will not be applicable to lands falling in the existing corridors of the KSEB which will be used by the PGCIL. As many as 380 houses have been identified as existing along the route of the proposed corridor. In the inevitable situation where the line is drawn over any of the houses, a one-time payment of Rs 1 lakh will be made. The Special Compensation Package, the Government Order dated August 19 has emphasised, is "meant exclusively for the construction of the 400 kV transmission line in the Edamon-Kochi sector, in recognition of the peculiar facts and circumstances involved in the issue, as a special case, and subject to the condition that the same will not be applicable in any other case or quoted as a precedent". PGCIL had completed the Tirunelveli-Edamon (in Pathanamthitta) and Madakkathara-Pallikkara (Kochi) segments, when Right of Way issues and protests on the Edamon-Kochi sector hit work. Kerala's share from the first two 1,000 MW units at KKNPP is 266 MW. The first 1,000 MW unit was synchronised with the Southern Grid last year, and although commercial generation is yet to be started on a formal basis, Kerala has started receiving power. Now this quota is being brought to Madakkathara via the circuitous Udumalpet route. This is unviable as transmission losses will be high when the second unit also begins operations. Earlier, following the protests, the government had proposed converting an existing 220 kV line of the KSEB to a multi-circuit line as an alternative, but this idea had been found unviable and scrapped.

Farmers Hail Jaya as the 'Living Pennycuick'

Hailing Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa as 'living Pennycuick', farmers' leaders said, by winning the Mullaiperiyar dam case she brought a new lease of life to the agrarian community. "We have never seen Colonel John Pennycuick, who had sacrificed his life to build the dam, but now we are seeing him through CM. Amma has emerged victorious in the decades-long legal battle to increase the storage from 136 feet to 142 feet in the dam," said R Arul Prakasam, Panning Committee Member of Periyar Irrigation System. Recalling the British engineer Col. Pennycuick pledging his property back home to construct the dam 130 years ago, he said Kerala, fanning unfounded fears, brought down the storage from 152 to 136 feet. Squarely blaming the previous DMK government for failing to take decisive steps on this issue, Prakasam said in contrast, Jayalalithaa, with her unwavering leadership, secured victory. "It is no ordinary struggle and as such the victory is historic. Hence, to farmers she is living Pennycuick," he said. Going a step further, Panaiyur A Azhagu Servai, Madurai district secretary, Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam said, "People of the five southern districts would sacrifice their lives for Jayalalithaa to win this case." A Madurai Veeran, Ramanathapuram district Secretary, Vagai Irrigation Farmers Association, said fishermen of Ramanathapuram were also confident of the CM retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring their traditional fishing rights. The CM who was very attentive to every speaker, appreciated farmer Azhagu Servai before commencing her address. Finance Minister O Panneerselvam, was among those present.

Potato Crisis: Govt Orders Crackdown on Hoarders

With potato price in retail markets ruling high despite regular supply from West Bengal, the State Government on Saturday directed the district Collectors to crack

the whip on potato traders resorting to hoarding. "The district enforcement squads may be deployed to inspect business premises of potato traders along with police personnel and take appropriate action against the traders, who have hoarded large quantity of potato as per the provision of Essential Commodities Act, 1955," said Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Secretary MS Padhi in a letter to the Collectors. The State Government's direction to the Collectors is a pre-emptive measure following reports that potato traders are trying to create an artificial scarcity of the vegetable in the market in view of the uncertainty in supply of potato from the neighbouring State from August 24. "There is no such move by the West Bengal Government as of now. Such rumours need to be scotched," Padhi said. Though the State is getting more potato than its average daily requirement for nearly a week, price remains high at `28-30 per kg across the State. The West Bengal Government has allowed a daily supply of 5,000 tonnes of potato for a week from August 17 to 23. Official sources, however, said they have no clue about the next move of the West Bengal Government. "We have no idea whether Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will reimpose restriction on potato transportation to Odisha from August 24 onwards," sources said. Secretary of Aiginia Potato Merchants' Association Shakti Shankar Mishra said he is equally clueless on the issue. It will only be known on Sunday, he said. Mishra said 27 trucks of potato have arrived from West Bengal on Saturday and the position is very comfortable. The price remains high due to panic buying by the people. Potato price will come down only when the demand will be normal. Panic Attack

West Bengal allowed supply of 5000 tonnes of potato from Aug 17 to 23 Price remains unchanged between `28 and `30 People resorting to panic buying as situation from Aug 24 is uncertain

FACT to market agro input products

Aimed to enhance its trading activities, public sector FACT has ventured into marketing of imported agro input products. The company has signed an MoU with Trinity AgroImpex Pvt Ltd, Mumbai for marketing the natural biotechnology agro input products in South India under the brand name Penergetic. The product Penergetic P (Jeevan Vanaspati) is a plant tonic which can influence water metabolism, absorption and nutrient content in the soil, whereas their other product Penergetic K (Jeevan Bhoomi) stimulates the organisms in the soil and helps the plant's intake of important minerals. The products are certified under the National Programme for Organic Production of the Union Government. The unique attributes of these products will facilitate the farmer community to get better yield along with preservation of the soil, a press release said.

AP to set up 4 bio-fertiliser units

Andhra Pradesh will soon establish four bio-fertiliser units. They are aimed to meet the fertiliser needs of farmers in the 13 districts of the State. These units will be distributed in Rayalseema, north, south and central regions of coastal Andhra. At present, there is one unit in Amaravathi in Guntur district, which would also be strengthened, according to the Chief Secretary, IYR Krishna Rao. Rao conducted a review of bio-fertiliser sector with the concerned secretaries and officials. He said for Rayalaseema, the unit with a capacity of 300 tones will be located at Anantapur. For the other regions, sites will be identified with the co-ordination of the concerned Agriculture University. The units should be made operational within three months. Funds would be raised from the Central Market Fund, Rajiv Krishi

Yojana etc.He also instructed the Commissioner, Agriculture to take immediate action for the functioning of one Vermi compost unit in each of the 40 vegetable and cattle markets in the state.

Business Standard

Soyabean coverage low in almost all States; rain deficit shrinks to 19%

With paddy transplantation picking up across key producing States, sowing of kharif crops has seen a steady increase this week.For the first time this season, paddy acreage has topped last year's levels and stood at 335.18 lakh hectares against 333.79 lakh ha during the corresponding period a year ago. The acreage in paddy had been lagging due to delay and scanty rain in the first half of the four-month monsoon period.Total kharif acreage stood at 935.06 lakh ha on Friday, compared with 975.87 ha in the year-ago period.Besides paddy, cotton is the only other crop that has exceeded last year's level in acreage. Cotton has been sown on 118.81 lakh ha against 111.34 lakh ha in 2013-14. Acreages of pulses, coarse cereals and oilseeds continued to lag last year's levels. In the case of soyabean, the acreage was lower by about nine per cent at 109.03 lakh ha against previous year's 120.32 lakh ha.Soyabean planting, impacted by delayed monsoon and poor quality seeds, was lower in almost all major States, including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. However, in Karnataka soyabean has gained marginally.Despite revival of rains in several parts of the country, the seasonal deficit till August 21 stood at 19 per cent. Water storage levels in 85 important reservoirs of the country as stood at 101.253 BCM (billion cubic metres), which is 65 per cent of total storage capacity of these reservoirs.The present storage position during current year is less than storage position of last year but better than the average storage of last ten years, according to the Central Water Commission.

Groundnut exports jump 50% in April-July

Groundnut export has seen significant rise during April-July 2014 owing to increased demand from West Asian countries. Export of groundnut during these four months rose by about 50 per cent, according to data provided by the Indian Oilseeds and Produce Export Promotion Council (IOPEPC), and the market still remains good, industry sources say. IOPEPC chairman Kishor Tanna said, "India has exported about 179,000 tonnes of groundnut during April-July 2014, which is higher by 60,000 tonnes or 50 percent from last year's 119,000 tonnes in the corresponding period. "Tanna added, "There was good demand from West Asian countries before Ramzan. Consequently, we have been able to export close to 180,000 tonnes of groundnut in just four months of this financial year. Overall demand still remains good and domestic demand is likely to pick up in coming days with festivals approaching." Total export of groundnut from India, however, reduced marginally in 2013-14. Groundnut export, according to IOPEPC data, in 2013-14, stood at 511,662 tonnes as against 535,635 tonnes in 2012-13, down by 23,973 tonnes. Commenting on the rise in exports, a leading Rajkot-based groundnut exporter and trader said, "Demand is still good at this point of time mainly from China, Malaysia, Middle East and Indonesia. Domestic buying is also good. We are expecting the demand in domestic market to remain stable with various festivals coming." High demand also ramped up prices of groundnut to a record high this time. The price of best quality groundnut for export is currently ruling at Rs 90,000 per tonne, which rose by almost Rs 30,000 per tonne, over the past three months. At domestic front, it has gained from Rs 700 per 20 kg four to five months back to Rs 950 per 20 kg in July-August 2014 in local markets. Tanna says, "The way export has begun, India's total groundnut export may touch about 600,000 tonnes in 2014-15. However, it all depends on kharif production."

Farmers against bringing onions under Essential Commodities Act

Arjun Kadam, a farmer here, has vowed not to sow the onion crop next season because of the government's frequent intervention to keep prices low, in many cases lower than the cost of production. Thousands of farmers such as Kadam have voiced concern over the Centre's decision to put onions under the Essential Commodities Act. They also want state governments to de-list this commodity from the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC). "Now, we are forced to sell onions at suppressed prices because of fear of state government raids and seizures of godowns housing bulk quantities of onion," Kadam said. This small town in Maharashtra's Nashik district houses Asia's largest onion mandi and auctions an average of 2,500 tonnes a day. Lasalgaon, which sets the benchmark price for the country, contributes about 10 per cent to India's annual onion production of about 19 million tonnes. "In India, no harvest takes place between March and September. Therefore, farmers and traders store the rabi crop for supply through the year. Bringing onions under the Essential Commodities Act and putting a stock limit will force farmers and stockists to avoid stocking. Does the government have any plan to feed India's rising demand during this period? It might focus on importing at high prices. Why not encourage domestic producers rather than increasing our dependence on imports?" asked Nanasaheb Patil, chairman, APMC, Lasalgaon. Hoping prices would rise to Rs 50-60 a kg (as was the case last year) and expecting significant profits during the lean period of August-October, most farmers didn't release their produce, despite prices rising to Rs 20-24 a kg about a month ago. Now, they are gradually releasing it in small quantity, amid fears of spoilage and a further decline in prices. Data provided by APMC, Lasalgaon, showed the average cost of production was Rs 12-13 a kg, compared with the National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation's data of Rs 8-9 a kg. "We are urging the government to announce a minimum support price of Rs 15 a kg and be ready to procure when the price falls below this level. Otherwise, we will not sow onion next season. This might lead to a huge

scarcity, for which the government will be responsible,” said Sachin Pardeshi, another local farmer. Against the model auction price of Rs 15.5 a kg in the Lasalgaon mandi on Thursday, consumers in Mumbai pay Rs 28-30 a kg. Farmers auction the commodity in Lasalgaon, from where it is supplied to the Vashi mandi. Here, traders pick up onions in bulk and sell to large traders who supply other middlemen, from where local retailers buy the product. Thus, there are at least four channels between farmers and consumers. Considering at least 30 per cent weight loss in a channel and profit at every stage, retail prices should not be more than double the auction price. “The government’s major worry is food inflation and trade deficit. While onion exports generate huge foreign exchange, its weightage in food inflation stands at a negligible 0.18 per cent. Therefore, the government’s intention of putting restrictions on onion is unjustifiable,” said Sandeep Gaikwad, an onion trader. Meanwhile, the Centre has initiated talks with state governments to scrap APMCs, raising farmers’ concerns further. “APMC is required for both data collection and setting benchmark prices. Scrapping the APMC will create a mess, as farmers and stockists will not go directly to consumers to sell onion in small denominations, say half a kg,” said Uttam More, a trader. As of now, onion sowing is 15-20 per cent less than usual. But prices are unlikely to rise as the early kharif crop has started hitting Karnataka mandis. And, it is expected the arrivals will intensify in the coming weeks.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

Area under soyabean falls 9% in 2014 kharif season

The area sown under soyabean during kharif 2014 has reduced by 9% as compared to the kharif crop of 2013. Soya plantation has reduced by 9.6% in Madhya Pradesh, 8% in Maharashtra and by 19.3% in Rajasthan as compared to the previous year, estimates given by Soyabean processors Association of India (SOPA) showed. The total area sown with soyabean this season has come up to 109.032 lakh hectares as against 120.327 lakh hectares the previous year, SOPA

Rajesh Agrawal, spokesperson and coordinator said. Last month, he had maintained that sowing is expected to be near 80-90 % by the month end.

"Sowing operations are in full swing in Maharashtra and have been completed in Madhya Pradesh. There could be a 3-4% shortfall at most compared to last year," he had said. This year, soya has been planted on 35.556 lakh hectares in Maharashtra as against 38.704 lakh hectares in the last season. Madhya Pradesh leads in terms of acreage. The plantation, however, has reduced by 9.6% this year as against 2.605 lakh hectares in the state last year, he said. In Rajasthan, plantation has gone down to 8.5 lakh hectares this year as compared to 10.588 lakh hectares last season. Soya plantation has also marginally reduced in Andhra Pradesh to 2.616 lakh hectares but increased in Karnataka to 2.950 lakh hectares from 2.470 lakh hectares the previous season. In Gujarat, plantation came down to 0.676 lakh hectares and in Chhattisgarh, plantation reduced to 1.440 lakh hectares. Earlier, a fear was expressed by industry observers that farmers will switch to soya from cotton due to the delay in rains. The country, however, is heading for a record harvest in the 2014-15 season ahead of China as well.

Import duty on sugar raised to 25%

The government has raised the import duty on both raw and refined sugar to 25% from 15% to discourage cheaper inflows from overseas, as mills are struggling to clear cane arrears running into thousands of crores even more than two months after crushing is over. However, the hike in import duty is still much lower than the 40% promised by the government in June if mills gave an undertaking that they would clear all cane arrears at the earliest. Sources said the government sought to moderate the hike to balance the interests of producers with those of consumers.

Earlier this month, food minister Ram Vilas Paswan said that of the total cane arrears of R8,703 crore, UP alone accounted for as much as R5,304 crore.

“At the current global prices of sugar and rupee-dollar exchange rate, the move to increase import duty to 25% will make sugar imports unviable. This will check unnecessary import of cheaper sugar," Abinash Verma, director-general of Indian

Sugar Mills Association, said, while hailing the government's decision. With the uncertainty of sugar imports no longer being there, domestic market sentiments would improve and traders will show better buying interest, arresting any possible drop in prices, Verma said. This will also improve revenue realisation for sugar mills and help them clear cane arrears of farmers at the earliest, he added. However, the industry wants the government to raise the sugar import duty to 40% in the long run to check imports in case global prices fall, he said, adding that the country is already reeling under about 2.5 million tonne of surplus sugar. Millers say sugar prices may inch up slightly with the latest move but won't flare up due to huge stock lying with producers. At current global prices, the cost of producing refined sugar from imported raw sugar would be around R35.50 to R36 per kg, factoring in a 25% import duty, he said. The cost of sugar production in mills in Uttar Pradesh this month is around R37 per kg, although the mills get some relief by selling other cane byproducts such as ethanol. So with 25% duty, imports won't be attractive. Domestic sugar producers had complained that since they were made to pay a hefty price for cane in states like Uttar Pradesh, any scope to import sugar when global prices were low would bleed them. This is because returns from sugar sales had not kept pace with rise in