

Curbs on onion trade leave Nashik farmers in tears

With a dejected expression, Narhari Nagri stood next to a truck laden with 20 quintal of onions. Having travelled all the way from his village to auction his produce at Lasalgaon Mandi — Asia's largest wholesale market for onions — it was another disappointing day for Narhari. He had to be content with a selling price hovering around Rs 14-15 per kg, much lower than he had desired. “That doesn't even cover the costs,” he pointed out in distress. Onion cultivators in Maharashtra faced devastating losses this season due to crop damage by hailstorms. Things had only just begun to improve when the Central government recently decided to include onion in the essential commodities list. The government purportedly took the step in a bid to check rising prices and clamp down on hoarding by traders as they now cannot stock more than a prescribed quantity. It, however, hampered farmers' chances of recouping their losses as prices have fallen. Since onion is perishable and tends to lose weight over time, and most farmers do not have adequate storage facilities, they have no option but to sell their produce at the drastically lower rates. The government had also hiked the minimum export price (MEP) of onions to \$500 a tonne from \$300 a tonne, making exports costlier. Though the government on Wednesday reduced the MEP to \$350, farmers and traders in Lasalgaon see no relief and have staunchly opposed the government decisions. Some farmer groups, including cultivators and the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC), in Lasalgaon have threatened to go on agitation if onion is not removed from the essential commodities list soon. Nanasahib Patil, chairman of Lasalgaon APMC says there is no justification to include onions in the essential commodities list. “But even after declaring onion an essential commodity, the government has not declared an MSP (minimum support price) for it. The first responsibility of the government should have been towards the producers,” he said. Mr. Patil has written to the Union and State agricultural ministries demanding the exclusion of onion from the essential commodities list and bringing down the MEP to zero. The farmers and traders have also contested the government's plans to dismantle the APMCs and bring onions out of their purview. In the absence of a substitute system, a ‘farmer to consumer’ mechanism was not practical, said B.S Jadhav, a lawyer-cum-farmer. The APMCs, where the onions are auctioned, ensure competition and a better price for the farmers, he added. Though the purpose of APMCs is to protect farmers from

exploitation of intermediaries and traders, some analysts argue they do little for farmers' interest. But Mr. Patil does not agree. "The onions are supplied in bulk at the APMC. Farmers will not be able to go to distant markets in the country supplying onions in bulk to consumers," said Mr. Patil.

NASA satellite to help farmers combat drought

NASA scientists, including one of Indian-origin, have developed a new satellite that can predict the severity of droughts worldwide and help farmers maximise crop yield. Currently, there is no ground-or satellite-based global network monitoring soil moisture at a local level. Farmers, scientists and resource managers can place sensors in the ground, but these only provide spot measurements and are rare across some critical agricultural areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America. NASA's Soil Moisture Active Passive (SMAP) satellite mission, scheduled to launch later, will collect the kind of local data agricultural and water managers worldwide need. SMAP uses two microwave instruments to monitor the top 5 centimetres of soil on Earth's surface. Together, the instruments create soil moisture estimates with a resolution of about 9 kilometres mapping the entire globe every two or three days. Although this resolution cannot show how soil moisture might vary within a single field, it will give the most detailed maps yet made. "Agricultural drought occurs when the demand for water for crop production exceeds available water supplies from precipitation, surface water and sustainable withdrawals from groundwater," said Forrest Melton, a research scientist in the Ecological Forecasting Lab at NASA Ames Research Centre in Moffett Field, California. "Based on snowpack and precipitation data in California, by March we had a pretty good idea that by summer we'd be in a severe agricultural drought," Melton added. "But irrigation in parts of India, the Middle East and other regions relies heavily on the pumping of groundwater during some or all of the year," Melton said. Underground water resources are hard to estimate, so farmers who rely on groundwater have fewer indicators of approaching shortfalls than those whose irrigation comes partially from rain or snowmelt. For these parts of the world where farmers have little data available to help them understand current conditions, SMAP's measurements could fill a significant void. Some farmers handle drought by changing irrigation patterns. Others delay planting or harvesting to give plants their best shot at success. Currently, schedule modifications are based mostly on growers' observations and experience. SMAP's data will provide an objective assessment of soil moisture to help with their management strategy. "If farmers of rain-fed crops know soil moisture, they can schedule their

planting to maximise crop yield,” said Narendra Das, a water and carbon cycle scientist on SMAP’s science team at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. “SMAP can assist in predicting how dramatic drought will be, and then its data can help farmers plan their recovery from drought,” said Das.

Pineapple farmers meet amid mounting concerns

Farmers’ representatives, marketing and agricultural experts will speak at a convention in Mannuthy on Monday on ‘safe cultivation of pineapple’ amid mounting concerns that increasing local resistance has substantially reduced acreage under pineapple cultivation in the State over the last few years. The aim of the farmers’ meet, scheduled to be inaugurated by Agriculture Minister K. P. Mohanan, is to create awareness among farmers about the safe use of fungicides and pesticides as well as to dispel wrong notions among the public about them, said a senior official in the Department of Agriculture on Sunday. The meeting is sponsored by Kerala Pineapple Mission and backed by Kerala Agricultural University and Department of Agriculture. Resistance to pineapple cultivation has grown in some of its traditional areas in Ernakulam, Kottayam and Idukki districts. But these actions were largely due to misconceptions, said the Department official. He pointed out a widespread notion among people that the hormone used in pineapple plantations for flower induction is used to fatten fruits or increase yield just as hormones are allegedly deployed in poultry farms. The idea among the public was completely off the mark, he said. Similarly, the use of weedicides and pesticides in pineapple plantations too had given rise to lot of allegations against the farmers, who mostly resort to leasing land for large-scale cultivation. Most of the pineapple cultivation is as intercrop with rubber. Resistance to pineapple cultivation had forced farmers to abandon their leased lands at several locations, said the official. He said acreage under pineapple had come down from 12,000 to 13,000 hectares in the State to about 9,000 hectares now. There are about 700 registered members in one of the pineapple farmers’ associations based in Vazhakkulam. There are hundreds of others in other associations. Kerala produces about 82,000 tonnes of the fruit annually with a productivity of 9.22 tonnes per hectare.

Dalit farmers still in search of land allotted to them

These landless Dalit families are still searching for their land allotted under the Land Ceiling Act. Paramesh, a Dalit farmer from Dongarampur village in Raichur taluk, has been running from pillar to post for the last one year in Raichur to find his 2.26 acres of land that his father Jambappa had been allotted under the Act about a decade ago. He is yet to succeed in his endeavour. The problem started a year ago when officials of the Forest Department evicted Paramesh and two other farmers from the land that they had been cultivating for the last seven years or so, believing that the land was allotted to them under the Act. They realised that something was wrong only when the Forest Department asked them to vacate claiming that the land was not the one that they had been allotted. As per the documents *The Hindu* has secured, an excess land of 9.27 acres in survey number 84 and 0.39 acres in survey number 82 of Dongarampur village have been confiscated from a village landlord who earlier owned it, and allotted to Janglappa, Jambappa, Burralla Savareppa, Kareppa and Mahadeva, all Dalit and landless farmers of the village. The order of Assistant Commissioner issued on June 14, 2004 confirmed the transaction. Even the related land records downloaded from the government's website a few days ago confirmed the ownership of these five families over two acres of land each. Yet, they are not in possession of the land. "The village landlord had shown us uncultivable and barren land beside the hill as the one that had been allotted to us. We believed him and started cultivating it. Since the land was insufficient, only three of the five beneficiaries started farming. The other two did not take up farming on their own but continued to toil as agricultural labour. One fine morning, after almost seven years of cultivation, the Forest Department evicted us claiming that the land belonged to it," Paramesh said. Paramesh has alleged that the landlord forged documents, sold the land allotted to him and others without their knowledge to the district administration for construction of Aasare houses for the 2009 flood victims. "The district administration, in turn, handed over the land to the Mata Amritanandamayi Trust that latter built houses for the flood victims on the same land," he said. "We have nothing to do with the farmers. As per a court order, we have handed over excess land to the government which has, in turn, allotted it to landless Dalit farmers. Now, we are not responsible if they don't know where their land is," Venkatarama Reddy, original landowner, said. "Thousands of Dalit farmers across the State, particularly in the Hyderabad-Karnataka area, face the same problem. In many cases, the original owners are still enjoying the excess land that had been confiscated and allotted to landless peasants by the State government," Kumar

Samatala, State committee member of Karnataka Janashakthi, said. He was in the forefront of a struggle by beneficiaries of the Land Ceiling Act whose allotted land continued to be enjoyed by the original owners for the last 30 years. He demanded that the government conduct a comprehensive survey of land distributed under the Act to find out whether or not beneficiaries are actually enjoying the land.

Secularism must be for all: N. Ram

Secularism belongs to all faiths and social sections and to both sexes and there can be no discrimination against anyone on grounds of religion, caste, race, ethnicity, language and gender, N. Ram, Chairman, Kasturi & Sons Ltd., said here on Sunday. In the backdrop of increasing incidents of communal violence, Mr. Ram said the constitutional guarantee of the special rights of religious and linguistic minorities is an extension of this equality-and-fairness principle. "Secularism as the equality-and-fairness principle must be based on justice if it is to survive and flourish. The unmet demand for justice in India has many dimensions — the constitutional-political, the social, the economic, gender, and so on. Discrimination and the denial of elementary justice in these dimensions weaken and sap the practice of secularism," he said, while delivering the 16th D.S. Borker Memorial Lecture. Critical of the idea of a "Hindu Rashtra", a concept favoured by the right wing RSS, Mr. Ram said the ideology flagrantly denies this equality-fairness-and-justice principle. He also raised questions on whether 67 years after gaining Independence, India had kept its tryst with destiny. "The path India took in 1947 was a brave experiment in trying to address underdevelopment and extreme deprivation in a large, highly populated, poor country, within the framework of parliamentary democracy. But the experiment largely failed Nehru's litmus test — of ending poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. What is worse, there is no indication that policy-makers have lost much sleep over the palpable reality of India having a greater mass of basic deprivations today than any other country on earth," Mr. Ram added.

Salem farmers evince interest in solar-dried bananas

The farmers, who attended the grievances redress day meeting here on last Friday, were pleasantly surprised when they were given a value-added product from banana specially fetched from Thottiyam in Tiruchi district. The discussion for the next 15 minutes revolved around the sweet taste of the banana by-product, as the farmers one after another started making enquiries about the product and the preparation method. It all began when S. Sivakumar, Executive Engineer of the

Agricultural Engineering Department, explained about the significance of the announcement made by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa in the recent Assembly session on the proposal of the government to provide financial assistance for setting up 100 solar powered dryers in the current year for processing agricultural produce. Individuals and groups could set up the dryer units at a maximum outlay of Rs. 4 lakh, for which the government will provide a subsidy of 50 per cent. The farmers of Vazhappadi area, which is abundant in banana, and the Kolathur where chilly crop is raised could take advantage of this scheme and set up the solar powered dryer units by forming groups, Mr. Sivakumar said. To drive his point home, he said that a group of banana growers of Thottiyam area in Tiruchi district have commissioned a solar energy operated unit for drying banana and have been producing 'chocolate banana'. The fruits are dried for three days continuously and the green house dryer has a capacity to dry 4,000 fruits or 25 tonnes. After the fruits are ripened uniformly, they are taken to the solar dryer unit where the banana skin is removed and dried for three days. The banana fruit now turns into a tasty chocolate. With attractive and hygienic packing of the chocolate banana, the farmers could attract consumers. The initiative will help bring down post-harvest loss, a major problem in banana cultivation. Mr. Sivakumar said that the Thottiam initiative was a novel one and the farmers of Salem district too could set up similar units with government subsidy. "Mere oral explanation will not help in convincing you all. Hence I sent my staff to fetch the chocolate banana from Thottiyam for distributing at the meeting", he said.

Follow Kerala policy on prohibition, say farmers

The recent order of the Kerala Government giving effect to the new liquor policy aimed at total prohibition in the State by 2023 has come in handy for the Federation of Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Associations to make a demand to the Tamil Nadu Government to follow suit. According to the new liquor policy announced by Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, the bar licence issued to all hotels, excluding those with five-star rating, will be cancelled and the outlets of the Kerala State Beverages Corporation and Consumerfed will be closed down at the rate of 10 per cent every year. The Kerala Government's initiative is a laudable move, a resolution adopted at an office-bearers' meeting of the federation held here on Saturday said. Contrary to the expectations, the government itself is running the TASMALC bars in Tamil Nadu. The argument of the State Government that the revenue fetched from TASMALC bars is being utilised for the implementation of welfare programmes has only brought much disrepute and

shame to Tamil Nadu. The State Government should take a cue from Kerala and attempt to follow its policy in the prohibition front, the resolution said. Another resolution urged the State Government to lift the ban on toddy tapping as promised by the Chief Minister during the 2011 Assembly election campaign. It is more than three years, since the AIADMK Government assumed charge in the State. But, no initiative was taken to fulfil the poll promise of lifting the ban. The palm and coconut farmers expect the government to lift the ban on toddy with immediate effect. The report of Justice K.P. Sivasubramanian Commission, set up by the previous DMK regime, to go into the issue of toddy tapping, has not been released even by the present rulers. The government should release the Commission report and revise the prohibition policy of the State based on its recommendations. Yet another resolution referred to the severe drought conditions prevailing in the State and said that a large number of palm and coconut farmers have been badly hit. It demanded compensation of Rs. 10,000 per coconut tree and Rs. 5,000 per palm tree, which have withered in the drought. M. Balasubramaniam, treasurer of the Federation, presided, and S. Nallasamy, its secretary, and others spoke.

CPI(M) urges State to declare delta districts as drought-hit

The Communist Party of India (M) on Sunday urged the State government to declare delta and other districts as drought-hit. Speaking to reporters here, G. Ramakrishnan, State secretary, said many districts across the State have been reeling under severe drought. Most of the farmers couldn't take up kuruvai harvest in Delta districts due to the delay in opening Mettur dam, resulting in huge loss to farmers and job loss to farm workers. Moreover, acute drinking water scarcity had been reported in several areas of the State. Hence, the State government should carry out a survey on drought-hit areas in order to take up drought relief measures immediately. On the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, he said though it was about to complete three months in office in a few days, it had totally failed to initiate any tangible measures to revive economy. It was just following the policies and programmes of previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. The decision to increase the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) cap in defence and insurance sectors indicated that the NDA was following the footsteps of UPA. It meant that the NDA was also taking wrong decisions. Mr. Ramakrishnan added that the move to cut subsidies would affect the common man, particularly the poor and urban middle class. In turn, it would ultimately benefit the corporate houses.

Claiming that the Law and Order situation in the State had taken a beating under the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) rule, he said the crime against women had gone up considerably during the last 3 years. The incidents of honour killing have also increased during the current year. The party has decided to observe fast in all district headquarters of the State on September 1 to protest against the anti-people and anti-democratic policies of the State and Central governments.

ICAR asks scientists to come up with solutions to face drought-like condition

A souvenir being released at the Foundation Day celebrations of the National Research Centre for Banana near Tiruchi. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has advised scientists to initiate strategies for overcoming the drought-like condition likely to arise in the wake of failure of monsoon across the country, said M.M. Mustaffa, Director, National Research Centre for Banana (NRCB). Addressing plantain growers and banana entrepreneurs at the 'foundation day' celebrations of the NRCB at Podhavur village near here recently, Dr. Mustaffa said that a shortfall in rainfall of about 25 per cent had been predicted and the ICAR had sounded an alert to scientists all over the country to come up with technological solutions to address problems due to water shortage.

In fact, the topic for the current year celebrations was 'drought management in banana', he said. Adequate awareness must be created among banana growers about drought management strategies. Hence, NRCB had organised a *kisan mela* to sensitise farmers and consumers to banana production and post-harvest protection technology, he said. The director also explained the research programmes taken up by the centre over the last decade to minimise adverse impact of soil moisture on banana cultivation. K.P. Krishnan, MLA, in his address, spoke on various schemes being implemented by the State government for promoting agricultural productivity. He also released technical bulletins and folders to benefit banana growers in the State and the first copy was received by Tharpakaraj, District Revenue Officer. An exhibition was held as part of the celebrations. Techniques of increasing banana production, selection of quality planting inputs, strategy for value-addition, pest management and disease prevention were some of the topics of the exhibits. Scientists participated in technical sessions on 'management of drought and salt stress in banana', and 'nutrient deficiency and remedies'.

Kadambai Farmers' Club wins award

The Farmers Club of Kadambai village in Vandavasi taluk wins the second prize under the Nabard annual award scheme. Esakolathur and Kondaiyankuppam villages have been selected for consolation prizes.

Fish prices come down

P. Abdu, treasurer of the Vellore fish market, said that a week ago, the prices of most of the fish was double. Vellore gets its fish supply from Mangalore, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Most of the freshwater fish are sourced from Andhra Pradesh. "The supply had reduced during the 45-day trawl ban in Kerala. Supply has improved after the ban came to an end, hence resulting in the drop," he said. In fact, a week ago, one kg of vanjaram costs Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,200, while sankara was priced at Rs. 300. Mr. Abdu said that the fish prices have been slashed by at least 40 per cent a kg now. Vanjaram and sankara are the most popular fish among consumers in Vellore, he said, adding that vanjaram had two to three varieties and was priced accordingly. One kg of big-sized vanjaram cost Rs. 600 to Rs. 800, while the small ones cost Rs. 300-Rs. 400. The small-sized sankara was priced at Rs. 100 to Rs. 120, while the bigger one was priced at Rs. 200. Vaval costs Rs. 400 to 500 depending on the size. Freshwater fish like katla and rohu were priced at Rs. 120, while mathi was Rs. 50 and ayala was Rs. 120, he added. Meanwhile, crab was priced from Rs. 200 to Rs. 250 depending on the size. He pointed out that the prices usually got reduced during weekdays.

Rural job scheme workforce to be drafted for creating farm assets

It has been proposed to draft the workforce enrolled with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for agriculture and allied activities in Villupuram district. As the scheme envisages creation of assets, a portion of the workforce would be diverted for other farm activities, said V. Sampath, District Collector. He was addressing the farmers' grievance day session held here on Friday. He said that to start with, it was proposed to rope in 1,270 workers from the job scheme for erecting cow sheds, sheep pens and poultry sheds. In these tasks the workmen would be appointed in consultation with the agriculture department. Similarly the coordinators of the job scheme would work in cooperation with the horticulture department to divert a section of the workforce for levelling land holdings of small and marginal farmers for raising vegetables and fruits and setting up farm ponds. The Collector emphatically told the sugarcane farmers that

efforts were on to prevail upon the sugar mills to clear the arrears for the supply of cane. The Collector also stated that to prevent foot and mouth disease it had been proposed to vaccinate the cattle in the district from September 1 to 21. For storing the vaccines and retaining its potency, cold storage facilities had been created at Tindivanam, Ginjee, Thirukkoilur, Ulundurpet, Kallakurichi, Chinna Salem and Sankarapuram, the Collector added.

Guttedar using drought to pressure CM for ministerial berth, says Patil

The former MLA and senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) M.Y. Patil has accused the former Minister and Afzalpur MLA Malikayya Guttedar of using the drought situation in the district to pressure Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to accommodate him in the Ministry. "It is shameful that Mr Guttedar, after failing to get a ministerial berth is now using the drought situation to become a minister," he said. Mr. Patil said that the State government had failed to help the farmers who were in distress due to the failure of the rain. He said that the government should immediately declare Afsalpur taluk as drought-hit and start relief work. Mr. Patil said that the BJP will hold a protest demonstration in Afsalpur on August 28.

'Govt. ignoring farmers' issues'

Farmers led by Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) staged a demonstration outside the Deputy Commissioner's office here protesting against the government's "insensitivity and deliberate ignorance" towards farmers' issues. The protesters said that the Department of Water Resources had failed to safeguard the interests of farmers at the tail-end of both Tungabhadra Left Bank Canal (TLBC) and Narayanpur Right Bank Canal (NRBC). "Farmers in Sirwar and Yermaras irrigation divisions under TLBC have readied over 3 lakh acres of land for paddy transplantation and have been waiting for water for the last twenty days. Though sufficient water was realised from Tungabhadra Reservoir to TLBC on August 2, it has not yet reached to tail-end owing to illegal utilisation of water by the powerful landlords in the upper reaches of the canal," Chamarasa Malipatil, State president of the organisation said. The tail-end areas of NRBC are suffering from water scarcity, he added.

Mettur Dam level

The storage level at Stanley Reservoir in Mettur continues to recede as it dropped from 79.436 tmcft on Saturday to 78.422 tmcft on Sunday. The water level stood

at 110.10 feet against the Full Reservoir Level of 120 feet. The inflow was 10,158 cusecs while the discharge 21,600 cusecs.

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Cows Instead of Extra Cash Incentive for Dalit Milk Producers

In a bid to avoid any fresh controversy in implementation of welfare schemes, the state government is likely to have a rethink on Social Welfare Minister H Anjaneya's proposal to offer an additional incentive to milk producers of SC and ST communities. Anjaneya had announced his proposal to pay an additional incentive of ₹2 for SC/ST community members supplying milk to KMF. The minister wanted to utilise funds allocated for welfare of these communities under the Special Component Plan (SCP) for the purpose. Anjaneya's proposal drew criticism from the opposition BJP and a few organisations accusing the Siddaramaiah government of trying to discriminate between even milk producers on caste basis. Having faced flak for its Shaadi Bhagya scheme for Muslims and study tours for dalit schoolchildren, the Siddaramaiah government is not ready to trigger a fresh controversy in implementing welfare schemes. Preferring to tread cautiously in its plans to help dalits take up dairy farming in a big way, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T B Jayachandra has submitted a new proposal. If everything goes according to the plan, the new scheme to provide a pair of cows at just ₹25,000 for dalits will be announced soon. "I have submitted the proposal to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. A ministerial committee headed by the CM and comprising Anjaneya and me will discuss the proposed scheme and take a final decision soon. Under the proposed scheme, a dalit family willing to avail the programme would get a pair of cows at ₹1 lakh, in which ₹75,000 would be provided by the state government as subsidy. The beneficiary family will have to pay just ₹25,000," Jayachandra told Express. The proposed scheme is being seen as more beneficial and could steer clear of any controversy. It could encourage dalit families to adopt dairy farming and help in their economic progress, Jayachandra said.

New Agri Training Institute to Come Up at UAS Dharwad

The University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Dharwad is all set to get a new agricultural training institution - the International Centre for Agricultural Development - shortly as the government has agreed to fund it in principle. The government has already released `2 crore for it. Being set up at a total cost of `10 crore, the institute is a joint initiative between the university and the Texas Agricultural and Management University (TAMU) of the US. The institute will facilitate the process of student exchange programmes. Speaking to Express, Vice-Chancellor Dr D P Biradar said the new facility will help students and scientists from both the institutions immensely. "Apart from exchange programmes, we will also encourage research in the field of food technology, which is growing. There is scope in this area of study, and students opting for this course will be charged slightly higher than those opting for other streams," he said. However, no new structure will be built for this institute. The existing campus will be used for the institute as the university already has related laboratories and other equipment. Biradar said a few rooms on the campus will be renovated and equipped with facilities needed for research. "It will also help host scientists visiting from America," he added. The Iowa State University, US has also agreed to send its students for training. Students and researchers from other countries have been visiting the university for some time now. Just recently, the university separately hosted 12 students from the Iowa State University, a five-member Chinese delegation and another five-member group from Malawi in Africa. The institute will be set up in memory of the late Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug, referred to as the Father of the Green Revolution. Biradar said Borlaug's name will help attract more funds as they have plans to seek further monetary assistance from organisations like the Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others. Apart from working research scientists, the institute will also involve those who have retired. Borlaug conducted research in agricultural practices till he was 95. Retired scientists willing to work will be recalled and paid a stipend for their work, added Biradar. The institute is likely to be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during the Krishi Mela that will be held in Dharwad in the last week of September

Bit of a Relief after Week-long Heavy Rain

The state that witnessed heavy rains last week got a relief on Sunday with the rains abating a bit. Though many places received less rain, the Met Department warned of heavy rains till Monday. With seven more deaths reported till Sunday morning,

the overall death toll in rain-related incidents touched 109. Two deaths each were reported from Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Pathanamthitta and one from Malappuram. Kannur has reported the highest toll with 15 deaths reported till Sunday. In the heavy rains which lashed on Sunday, 47 houses were totally destroyed and 286 partially damaged. Standing crops on 318.77 hectares of land were destroyed and the loss is estimated at about Rs 84.34 lakh. During the season, crops in 17,447 hectares were destroyed and a loss of Rs 121.85 crore was estimated. A total of 8042 people are now being housed in 98 relief camps across the state. Thiruvananthapuram has the largest number with 57 camps and 2688 people housed in them. In the last two days, the state had witnessed landslips in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Kozhikode, and Wayanad districts. In many places, the low-lying areas are still flooded and the water in rivers has not subsided. According to the Met Department, rain/thundershowers will occur at many places in the state for the next 48 hours. It also warned of strong onshore winds from the westerly direction with speeds occasionally reaching 45-55 kmph likely to occur along or off Kerala coast and over Lakshadweep area during next 24 hours. While Piravom recorded 8 cm of rain, Peermade and Vadakara received 7 cm of rain each. Munnar, Idukki and Chalakudy received 6 cm of rain each. When Karipur AP and Amini (Lakshadweep) received 5 cm of rain each, 4 cm of rain was recorded at Kozhikode, Quilandy, Cherthala, Perumbavoor, Thodupuzha, Kanjirappally, Ittappalam, Thrissur, Kodungallur and Enamackel. Kottayam, Agathi (Lakshadweep), Vellanikkara, Irinjalakuda, Vadakkancherry, Kunnankulam, Ernakulam South, Manjeri, Mannarkad, Pattambi, Parambikulam and Vythiri had received three cm of rain each.

Vegetable Farming Takes A Hit Sans Cold Storage Units

Even as Sundargarh has huge potential in cultivation of vegetables, it continues to be the victim of artificial shortage and price rise. Seven cold storage chambers with a combined capacity of 65 tonnes in Nuagaon and Bisra blocks are lying unutilised in the absence of power supply. Two other Government owned cold storage units, having a combined capacity of 2000 tonnes, are been lying defunct for the last 25 years. Nuagaon block has been a leading producer of vegetables, but this does not provide any relief to the poor farmers here or people of the district. Horticulture wing of Agriculture Department and the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Panposh, last year had installed five cold chambers with collective capacity of 45 tonnes in Nuagaon and recently, two more cold chambers with total

capacity of 20 tonnes were set up in Bisra. Assistant Director of Horticulture, SP Nayak, said trial run of the cold chambers was successfully done and power supply is awaited to make them functional. Panposh ITDA Project Administrator, Manoranjan Nayak, said applications to install separate transformers for the cold storage facilities are pending with the power distribution company, Wesco. As a result, four newly set up packing houses in Nuagaon are lying idle and plan to set up six more such facilities have been dropped. The commercial hub of Rourkela and its suburbs have six lakh population, which offers a large market. Farmers lamented that amid lack of logistical support including lack of cold storage facilities, the district has failed to become a vegetables production and processing hub. Problems started in 1989 when a 1500 tonne capacity cold storage at Jamunakhatiguda in Kuanrunda block of Panposh sub-division was closed down. Located along NH-143, the facility was commissioned in 1968, but was made operational in 1972. The Agriculture Department used it from 1972 to 1982. Subsequently, Horticulture wing took charge but in 1989, it was closed down completely. Deputy Director of Horticulture, Basudev Sahu, said a proposal placed seven months back to run this facility on PPP mode evoked no response and they are exploring new ways. It was designed to store vegetables, fish and potatoes. Another cold storage set up in 1960s by the Regional Cooperative Marketing Society (RCMS) along NH-520 at Rajamunda in Bonai sub-division, faced similar fate. It had the capacity of 500 tonne. Now, only the dilapidated building structure stands amidst ruins as machines and equipment were auctioned in early 2000. A senior officer in Cooperative Department said it requires fresh investment of `3 crore and a proposal to run it on PPP mode failed. Sundargarh Collector, Bhupendra Singh Poonia, said the new cold storage facilities will be operationalised shortly.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

'Low' weakens as Met points to successor brewing in the Bay of Bengal

The well-marked low-pressure area off the Kerala and Karnataka coasts has weakened this afternoon into conventional 'low' over the same region. This has brought down the intensity of rainfall over the south peninsula from overnight yesterday which had set off floods at a number of places. In another significant development, India Met Department has put out a watch of a fresh 'low' in the

west-central Bay of Bengal off the Andhra Pradesh coast. This system is expected to materialise by Thursday, the Met said, something which had been already reported in these columns. Peninsular India will likely come under another spell of heavy to very heavy spell of rain from Andhra Pradesh into the interior and the west coast.

Early available forecasts indicated that the system might strengthen over land as it approaches the Konkan-Mumbai coast towards the end of the week.

On alert

Also this afternoon, the Met put on alert the western parts of the peninsula for sustained heavy to heavy rainfall from the prevailing 'low.' The warning is valid for the next couple of days for Konkan-Goa; coastal, south interior and north interior Karnataka; Madhya Maharashtra; and Marathawada. Meanwhile, the monsoon deficit for the country stands at 18 per cent for the country as a whole despite the rain surge in the South. A welcome change is the conversion of Marathawada from 'rain-scanty' (deficit ranging from 60- to 99 per cent) to 'rain-deficient' (20- to 59 per cent) category. That leaves Punjab (63 per cent) and Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi (64 per cent) as the only 'rain-scanty' Met subdivisions as the monsoon readies to withdraw from the northwest as it runs into the last of the four-month season. The 13 'rain-deficient' subdivisions left now are Jammu & Kashmir; Himachal Pradesh; west Uttar Pradesh; east Uttar Pradesh; east Madhya Pradesh; Saurashtra and Kutch; Gujarat; Vidarbha; Marathawada; Telangana; Rayalaseema; and coastal Andhra Pradesh. The monsoon could well have ended its run over northwest India bar the shouting. But rains are due for central and adjoining peninsular India during this week too.

CACP recommends Rs. 50/qtl hike in wheat MSP

The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), a statutory body that advises the Government on the pricing policy for major farm produces, has recommended increasing the minimum support price of wheat by a nominal Rs. 50 to Rs.1,450 a quintal this year. CACP has submitted its minimum support price (MSP) proposals of wheat and other winter crops for 2014-15 rabi season to the Agriculture Ministry. Rabi crops of this year will be marketed in 2015-16 starting

April. "CACP had recommended a Rs. 50 a quintal increase in the MSP of wheat for the 2014-15 rabi season. The Agriculture Ministry is in the process of seeking views from the state governments and other departments concerned," a senior Agriculture Ministry official told PTI. After taking views, a final proposal will be moved for the Cabinet's approval, the official added. Wheat is the main crop grown in the rabi (winter) season. Wheat sowing begins in October and the harvesting starts from April onwards. MSP is the rate at which government buys the grain from farmers. The government procures wheat during April-June. For the 2013-14 rabi season, the previous government had raised the support price of wheat marginally by Rs. 50 per quintal to Rs. 1,400 per quintal even as then Agriculture Ministry Sharad Pawar had pitched for Rs. 100 per quintal hike. For the 2012-13 season, CACP had recommended freezing of wheat MSP at Rs. 1,285 a quintal in the wake of huge wheat stocks with the government. However, the decision had to be reviewed due to strong opposition and the government later fixed the wheat MSP at Rs. 1,350 a quintal. Wheat is normally sown from November and the crop is harvested from April onwards. The country had harvested a record 95.91 million tonnes of wheat crop last year.

Business Standard

Soybean down 2% on global cues

Soyabean prices fell by Rs 65 to Rs 3,355 per quintal in futures trading today amid a weak trend overseas. At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, soybean for delivery in October drifted by Rs 65, or 1.90%, to Rs 3,355 per quintal, in an open interest of 65,610 lots. In a similar fashion, November contracts shed Rs 19, or 0.59%, to Rs 3,217 per quintal with an open interest of 80,590 lots.

Chana sheds 0.90% on increased supply

Chana prices were down 0.90 per cent to Rs 2,870 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators trimmed positions amidst increased supplies from producing regions in spot markets. At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, chana for delivery in September traded lower by Rs 26, or 0.90 per cent, to Rs 2,870 per quintal with an open interest of 1,39,050 lots. Similarly, the commodity for delivery in October lost Rs 22, or 0.74 per cent, to Rs 2,958 per quintal in 73,230 lots. Market analysts attributed the fall in chana futures to increased supplies from producing regions in the physical market against weak demand from dal mills.

Cardamom down 1.15% on profit-booking

Cardamom prices fell 1.15 per cent to Rs 974.20 per kg in futures trading today after speculators locked-in gains at prevailing higher levels amid subdued demand in the spot market. Besides, adequate stocks in the physical market following increased arrivals from producing belts put pressure on cardamom prices. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in September plunged by Rs 11.30, or 1.15 per cent, to Rs 974.20 per kg in a business turnover of 761 lots. The October contract traded lower by Rs 8.10, or 0.84 per cent, to Rs 953 per kg in 129 lots. Market analysts attributed the fall in cardamom futures to profit-booking by speculators at existing levels amid sluggish demand in the spot market.

Sugar sheds 0.36% on adequate supply

Sugar prices drifted by 0.36 per cent to Rs 3,048 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators trimmed positions amid higher supplies in the spot market. However, an ongoing festive season demand from bulk consumers, capped the losses. At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, sugar for delivery in September fell by Rs 11, or 0.36 per cent, to Rs 3,048 per quintal with an open interest of 14,760 lots. The October contract lost Rs 8, or 0.26 per cent, to Rs 3,060 per quintal in 2,290 lots. Market analysts said adequate supplies from millers mainly put pressure on sugar prices at futures trade here but festive season demand from bulk consumers, restricted the losses.



CACP recommends a moderate hike in wheat MSP for 2015-16

With state-owned agencies such as Food Corporation of India (FCI) having sufficient wheat stocks, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) has recommended a marginal increase of R50 per quintal on minimum support price (MSP) for the next rabi marketing season (2015-16). The agriculture ministry will now consult the state governments of the key wheat growing states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and the food ministry before seeking a Cabinet nod on MSP. Usually, the government agrees to the CACP recommendations. The government had fixed an MSP of R1,400 per quintal for the current year's marketing season and agencies such as FCI and state government owned agencies had purchased 28 million tonne (mt) of wheat from farmers during the 2014-15 marketing season. Sources told FE that the government agencies like FCI at present have 38 mt of wheat stocks at the start of this month which is far excess of the buffer stocks norm; therefore, the CACP has

recommended a moderate increase. The FCI has been conducting weekly auctions to sell 10 mt of excess wheat stocks under Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to bulk buyers by March, 2015. The FCI would commence procurement of wheat for the next season from April 2015 and it continues up to June 2015. In the 2013-14 marketing season, due to huge wheat stocks held with FCI, the CACP had recommended freezing of MSP at the previous year's level of R1,285 per quintal which the UPA government did not accept and revised MSP to R1,350 per quintal. For the 2014-15 rabi marketing season, the UPA government had raised the support price of wheat marginally to R1,400 per quintal notwithstanding the then agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar had suggested R100 per

Weak monsoon forces farmers to sell bulls on Pola eve

Perturbed by scanty rainfall so far this season, farmers from the region were found selling their pair of bulls on the eve of pola. The farmers celebrate the festival by decorating and worshipping their bulls. Pola falls on the day of the pithori amavasya (the new moon day). Every year, lakhs of farmers from across the state throng the weekly markets in the last week of Shravan, a holy month in the Hindu calendar, for purchasing colours, bells and decorative items for their bulls. However, hundreds of farmers had come to sell their pairs of bulls on Sunday in different weekly markets across the region. It is a practice widely considered as a taboo and a sign of ill-fate in the farming society.

Abhasaheb Agde (34), a resident of Harshi Budruk village in Paithan Taluka, who had come to the Pachod weekly market considered to be one of the biggest in the region, told TOI, "Last year, I had purchased a pair of bullocks for Rs 50,000. The pair belonging to the khillari breed is known to be hardworking and requires huge amount of fodder. Since the last few months, I am being forced to purchase fodder worth between Rs 300-400 daily from the market." "I am unable to bear the expenses of these bulls. Hence, I am selling them off," Agde added. However, to the dismay of the farmers, there were not many prospective buyers in the market. Moreover, those showing interest in purchasing the animals were asking the farmers to sell them off at half the market price. Another farmer Abhasaheb More said, "At present, the farmers are not in a condition to purchase bulls. Hence, as suggested by the slaughter house owners and some farmers, the farmers are left with no option but to sell their animals to them. I sustained heavy loss in selling my animal. However, I ensured that the bull was not sold to a butcher." Badrinath Pachode, a 39-year-old farmer from Diyanatpur in the district, said, "Due to deficit

rainfall, things were slipping out of our hands. The task to feed our animals had become a daily struggle for us. I sold my pair of bullocks for Rs 37,000. Six months ago, I had purchased it for Rs 52,000 from the same market." Farmers' activist Jayajirao Suryawanshi said, "The state and central governments have become insensitive towards the farmers. The situation in the region has gone beyond description. On one hand, the BJP leaders are staging huge agitation in Aurangabad demanding declaration of drought in the region. But on the other hand, they are not ready to bring even a single penny from the central government. The farming community is desperately waiting for 'achche din' as promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Farmer Viju Pawar said, "The drought is taking a toll on us. The farmers are under severe depression; they are neither able to sleep nor eat. They have loans to pay and take care of the marriages of their sisters and daughters. Their future hangs in the balance due to scanty rainfall. Today, we are selling bulls. Soon, we will be forced to sell whatever we have, including the farmlands we own. It is high time that the government comes to our rescue or else many farmers will be forced to commit suicide." Coconut market suffers too: Many sectors in the market are being affected badly due to the deteriorating economic condition of the farmers. The latest to witness the sufferings is the coconut market, wherein the traders claimed that they are facing a decline of over 70% in the business. Lakhs devotees purchase coconuts in the month of shraavan as they visit various temples for paying obeisance. The sale too goes up during the period. However, traders said the farmers, who earlier used to purchase at least five coconuts for performing rituals on the occasion of pola, are not buying more than one coconut this season, thereby bringing down the sale drastically.

Single window for fisheries exports

Union minister of state for commerce and industry Nirmala Sitaraman on Saturday mooted a single window system for fisheries exports to provide a boost to the sector in the country. Interacting with various stakeholders of the fishing industry at the Fishing Harbour, she said that all the organisations related to fisheries exports should be brought under one umbrella. Furthermore, she said the ministry would hold a meeting with officials of all the nine states having a coastline to deliberate on preparing a policy for fisheries exports. However, during her visit the minister expressed unhappiness at the lack of sanitation at the Fishing Harbour. Sitaraman said that she would speak to AP chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu on the issue in order to improve conditions at the fishing harbour.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Monsanto sees opportunities in hybrid corn, vegetable seed market

Monsanto, the world's largest seed company, sees great opportunities in the hybrid corn and vegetable seed market of India as it looks to help farmers to increase productivity in sustainable ways. The company also feels that there is a possibility of Bt brinjal, which is grown in Bangladesh, illegally finding its way to West Bengal owing to its higher yield and lower cost of production. Except for Bt cotton, India has banned genetically modified (GM) crops and the government recently halted field trials, including that for brinjal and rice. Subsequently, a controversy broke out when it was revealed that MPs belonging to the ruling NDA were planning to travel to the US on a study tour organised by Monsanto. The BJP has asked its MPs to drop out of the trip, reportedly at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The US company, which also produces non-GM seeds, believes that Indian farmers can double their yields using such conventionally generated varieties. "We see great opportunity in our conventional business of corn. India has on an average 2.5 tonnes per hectare of corn and if you think of the potential India has, we believe there is an opportunity to more than double yields. This will have a gigantic impact for farmers and also the community," said Jesus Madrazo, vice-president corporate engagement for Monsanto. He said the company was also actively working in the vegetable business. "We have been growing our business and there is a huge opportunity, considering that people love vegetables and there is increasing consumption," he said, adding that as value chains develop in the country, farmers will find it remunerative to produce sustainable and better quality vegetables. The company which has a presence in oilseeds such as canola is exploring the pulses seed market. Monsanto has a market share of 3-4% in the Indian cotton seed market, 15-20% in corn and 10-15% in vegetables. Madrazo said that in India there was enough space and market to continue investing in

research and development for the needs of Indian farmers. "In India, we have evolved our company as a solution-based company. Now, we are in a path to integrate all those solutions to really be able to help the farmer-customer produce more with less natural resources and less inputs," he said. With Bangladesh allowing commercial planting of genetically modified (GM) Bt brinjal, Madrazo said that there was a "solid" possibility of illegal entry of the seeds into India. "Agriculture has zero frontiers. We have seen in other parts of the world, when farmers have access in one country to innovation and technology, compared to the neighbouring country we see technology finding its ways. This happened earlier in Brazil, which used to illegally import GM soyabean from Argentina," he said. Madrazo added, "We know that's a possibility. Of course, we will be concerned. Here, we can work together to ensure that farmer is able to get access in the right way." Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco), which developed the Bt brinjal technology, has transferred it to the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). Mahyco, 26% owned by Monsanto, is hoping that the BJP government will expedite the release of Bt brinjal in India.

Kharif sowing picks up further, but rain worries still there

Crop plantings have picked up further over the past week but remain lower than year-earlier levels, with monsoon rain deficits alarming wide in the northern bread-basket states. Average rainfall in this monsoon season that started in June was 19% below what is considered nor.