

More farm ponds in delta will shore up water resources

To help increase the per capita water availability in the Cauvery delta and fulfil the long- and short-term needs of agriculturalists, experts suggest digging of farm ponds to effectively harness rainwater as a cost-effective option. The delta's requirement is now pegged at a minimum of 320 tmcft a year. The existing lakes in the Grand Anicut (GA) command area could harness five tmcft, while four tmcft each could be generated through recycling of domestic waste water and desalination to feed coastal areas. Summer ploughing could ensure soil moisture retention to the tune of 20 tmcft. In this backdrop, experts say digging of farm ponds could help to tap at least 55 tmcft of rainwater that wets the delta in a year, even as the new farm ponds can recharge the groundwater table to the extent of another 20 tmcft. All these measures could yield 108 tmcft of water. And if you take into account the receipt of Tamil Nadu's rightful share of Cauvery water from Karnataka amounting to 192 tmcft, the region could get 300 tmcft a year. "This is enough to touch 93 per cent of the world water resources norm for a healthy life put at 1,700 cubic metre per capita annual requirement", argues P.M. Natarajan, a renowned geologist and expert in groundwater conservation. As per the norm, the per capita annual water requirement for a healthy life, at least 1,000 cubic metres is essential. But the present annual per capita availability in the delta is just 135 cubic metres, he points out. To bridge the gap, it is essential to dig thousands of farm ponds to tap rainwater and recharge the groundwater table, he told *The Hindu*. It is observed from the data available for the past 50 years that the normal annual rainfall for the Cauvery delta is 1,188 mm or 60 tmcft.

Prudent techniques

Through prudent water management techniques such as rainwater harvesting and

groundwater recharge movement, pursued vigorously by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, it would be possible to generate 108 tmcft, he pointed out. Even with that, the per capita supply and demand gap will be 1,117 cubic metres. But if the State's legitimate share of 192 tmcft of Cauvery water sanctioned by the Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal, which relates to 1,029 cubic metres per person a year, is to be accounted for, it is easily possible to supply 1,612 cubic metres of water per capita. That figure could be nearer to the international benchmark of 1,700 cubic metres, said Dr. Natarajan.

Pisciculture

Though the cost of digging farm ponds could be huge, pisciculture by beneficiary-farmers could generate great returns, increasing the per capita income of farmers as desired by the Chief Minister. In fact, Ms. Jayalalithaa appointed a high-level panel for pursuing the farm pond option in the drought-affected delta districts during 2012-13. Through the February 2013 order, the government ordered formation of 15,000 ponds in eight districts. But that is far short of the requirement in the core regions. More funds and concerted efforts could be a boon for the delta farmers, he felt.

Over 30,000 hectares in Salem brought under horticulture crops

An area of 31,557 hectares has been brought under the horticulture crops in the district so far during the current year against the target of 58,500 hectares. The State Horticulture Department has initiated effective steps to achieve the target by this December. The vegetable crop including tomato, brinjal, chilly, tapioca and lady's finger gets a lion's share with the department planning to cover 30,000 hectares. Vegetables have so far been raised on over 8,800 hectares and the farmers are involved in the work of administering manure and other crop protection works. The department has proposed to raise fruits in 9,800 hectares and

more than 8,400 hectares have been covered. The district has already exceeded the target in raising plantation. A total area of 9,531 hectares has already been covered exceeding the target by over 30 hectares. As far as the flower crop is concerned, an area of 1,173 hectares has been covered and the target is 3,200 hectares. Official sources are confident that the target will be achieved by December. In the production front, 3.80 lakh metric tonnes of horticulture produce has been achieved against the target of 13.439 lakh metric tonnes. The department is expecting to achieve the target by March 2015. The Horticulture Department is involved in the work of distributing seeds and fruit saplings under the National Horticulture Mission. The target under this scheme is 265 hectares and the department is having a stock of 40,000 saplings. The work of distribution of fruit saplings is already in progress. The National Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture is under implementation in the district. The work of identification of beneficiaries under the various components of this mission such as precision farming, augmenting the production of vegetables using hi-tech methods, rainfed area development programme, National Mission on Minor Irrigation, National Mission on Medicinal Plants, and National Horticulture Mission is in progress, according to the sources.

Periyar dam level touches 125 feet

In the wake of good inflow, water level in Periyar dam touched the 125-foot mark around Monday noon. The level has been steadily rising in Vaigai dam as well owing to restricted discharge to meet drinking water needs of Madurai residents. The level in Periyar dam stood at 125 feet even as the inflow slumped to 1,417 cusecs from the 2,101 cusecs it received on Saturday. But Public Works Department (PWD) officials restricted the discharge to 500 cusecs as farmers are utilising the heavy rain in the past week to irrigate the paddy crop in over 14,000 acres. The water level stood at 51.4 feet in Vaigai dam. The inflow was 535 cusecs and the discharge 60 cusecs.

2,640 tonnes of fertilizer ready for samba cultivation

Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) has moved 2,640 tonnes of fertilizer for samba cultivation. A consignment of 2,640 tonnes of basal fertilizer has been sourced from its unit in Paradeep, Orissa. The consignment would help farmers in Tiruchi, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Thanjavur, Karur, and Pudukottai districts, said D. Subramanian, Chief Area Manager, IFFCO, Tiruchi region. The consignment included 1,800 tonnes of IFFCOPhos (20:20:0:13) and 840 tonnes of DAP. Steps have been taken to avoid scarcity of fertilizer as an estimated 12 lakh acres would be brought under samba cultivation simultaneously across the central region, he said. Mr. Subramanian said that for the first time, IFFCO has started marketing zinc sulphate to cater to the demands of farmers. Supply of water-soluble fertilizers has brought down exploitation of farmers by private traders. Urea phosphate, NPK 18:18:18, and sulphate of potash were some of the water-soluble fertilizers currently available. The price per kg ranged between Rs. 60 and 70, and those in need of fertilizers could contact the authorities by dialling: 9444990737. Arrangements were also on to commence second phase of supply of 1,350 tonnes of DAP and 1,350 tonnes of 20:20:0:13 complex he said to Tiruchi and other neighbouring districts except Tiruvarur. IFFCO would supply 2,650 tonnes of DAP to Tiruvarur by the middle of September.

“Declare Ramnad as drought-hit”

Members of Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association staged a demonstration here on Monday, demanding to declare 2013-14 as drought year in the district and opposing the Modified National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (MNAIS). Led by Association state general secretary P. Shanmugam, the farmers opposed the rise in premium for crop insurance and reduction of compensation under the MNAIS. The farmers urged the State government to prevail upon the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP)-led government at the Centre and the Agricultural Insurance Company of

India to provide relief to the farmers under the scheme. Talking to reporters, Mr. Shanmugam said that owing to severe drought in the year 2013-14, farmers had lost the entire paddy, chilli and other crops cultivated in about three lakh acres and demanded compensation of Rs. 15,000 per acre for paddy and Rs.30,000 per acre for chilli. The government should waive farm loans for affected farmers. As farmers and farm workers were migrating to neighbouring districts for employment, the government should prevail upon the Centre to increase the number of employment days from 100 to 150 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, he said.

Dairy farming classes

The Dairy Training Centre at Naduvattam, near Beypore, will conduct a training programme in dairy farming for farmers from Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode and Malappuram districts from August 30 to September 4. Those interested may report at the centre at 10 a.m. on the first day of the programme with documents to prove their identity. Details can be had from the centre on phone 0495-2414579.

Report on breach of pokkali field bund sought

The Department of Agriculture has sought a report on the incident in which earthmoving equipment was used to breach the bunds of a section of pokkali fields collective in Ezhupunna Panchayat's Ward 15. The Agricultural Officer concerned is reported to have confirmed allegations by local people that the bunds were breached, resulting in the inundation of the fields by salt water. The bunds of the pokkali fields were breached without either the permission of those who had leased the field for cultivation or the Agricultural Office. A report has been sought by the Principle Agricultural Officer in Alappuzha. Bunds protecting about 15 acres of pokkali fields were breached in the incident. The area was taken on lease by a group of people for cultivation of pokkali rice before the monsoon set in. The

earth moving equipment was apparently taken to a neighbouring field for strengthening its bunds for shrimp farming. Pokkali Samrakshana Samithi, a group working to revive pokkali cultivation in the districts of Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts, has sought action against those who breached the bunds.

Wild animals devour Onam crops

Panchayat officials inspecting the crop loss at the Anchal Government Farm on Sunday. Damage of vegetable crops by wild animals at the Anchal Government Farm in the district is creating hurdles to the declared programme of the District Panchayat to distribute 16,000 kits of 10 different organically grown vegetables to households during the Onam festival. District panchayat president S. Jayamohan, who on Sunday inspected the crops raided by wild animals, said crops in other portions of the farm were growing well and the programme would be carried out utilising the vegetables harvested from those areas. Over eight acres of the crops in the farms were completely devastated by the depredation. These comprised pumpkins, cucumber, and snake gourds. Farms officials told Mr. Jayamohan that large groups of wild boar, peacocks, porcupines, and sambar deer were constantly raiding the crops. While peacocks raided the farm during the day time, the depredation during the night was caused by other animals. Four acres of pumpkin, three acres of cucumber, and almost two acres of snake gourds had been eaten away. The crops planted simultaneously in some other parts of the farm, which were safe, had started to yield. The peacocks not only ate the tender shoots but also pecked and destroyed the tender vegetables too.

Erratic power plays havoc with coir units

The government's unkept promise of nine-hour power supply to medium and small-scale industries under the Eastern Power Distribution Company Limited (EPDCL) is proving detrimental to several industries in East Godavari including the coir industry. The acute shortage of power has hit industries, including those

run by self-help groups (SHGs), who depend on motor warts to make ropes, which have heavy demand in the export market. There are as many as 430 coir industrial units in East Godavari, and SHGs are handling more than 3,000 motorised warts in Ambajipeta, Mamidikuduru, Lakkavaram, Pasarlapulilanka, Doddavaram, Ramarajulanka and Isukapudi villages in Konaseema.

Market demand

According to Dunna Ramalakshmi of Lakshmi SHG, the demand for coconut ropes in the international market has increased in recent times, and at present the price has reached Rs. 21 to Rs. 28 per kg, and they were producing 40 kg per day till February this year. However, the erratic power supply has crippled the coir industry. “Now, we are producing not more than 15 kg a day, and the exports have come down drastically,” said Matta Satyavathi of Mamidikuduru.

Scale of production

On the other hand, big industries in Konaseema are regularly producing six tonnes per day, while medium-scale industries are churning out three to four tonnes. “Generally, we produce coir from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., but the power cut is implemented between 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily. While permanent labourers sit idle, contract labourers work from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Once in three days, electricity officials announce emergency load relief from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., apart from the regular power cut. It is getting difficult to run the business,” S. Prabhakar, who owns a major coir industry near Lakkavaram. However, the promise of reviving Coir Board in Konaseema is still elusive as successive MPs have failed to keep their promise.

'Prepare action plan for paddy procurement at MSP'

Commissioner of Civil Supplies C. Parthasarathy has asked officials to prepare an advance action plan for procurement of paddy at Minimum Support Price (MSP) in the wake of the Centre's decision to reduce levy from 75 per cent to 25 per cent. In a video conference with district officers on Monday, Mr. Parthasarathy told them to plan for more procurement centres so that farmers are ensured MSP for paddy. The procurement season will commence from October 1 and by that time officials should position adequate number of gunny bags, he said, adding that payment to farmers should be made through cheques as directed by the Centre. Asking them to assess the infrastructure to be provided by the Marketing Department, the Commissioner also suggested that they draw required personnel from the Agriculture Department to do a quality check of the paddy purchased in procurement centres. Further, they were told to extend online payment facility practised in Medak and Nizamabad districts to other districts, to launch a publicity campaign about MSP and fair average quality specifications. The district officers should collect details of the estimated paddy production from the Agriculture Department, quantity of paddy to be purchased by millers, to impart training to the personnel engaged in purchase operations, to position sufficient equipment in the procurement centres, to appoint transport contractors and to mill levy at 25 per cent of raw rice to be collected both in decentralised procurement and by the Civil Supplies Corporation, the Commissioner said. The FCI should receive raw rice in non-decentralised procurement districts and boiled rice in all districts. The paddy MSP fixed for Kharif Marketing Season 2014-15 was Rs. 1,360 per quintal for the common variety and Rs. 1,400 per quintal for grade-A variety.

Monsoon covering up the 'deficit'

Rounding into the final lap of the four-month season, this year's southwest monsoon is racing neck-and-neck with the long-period average rainfall for Kerala. The State has received an area-weighted rainfall of 1,720.3 mm, against a long-period average of 1,739.9 mm for the period June 1 to August 25. The rainfall deficit as of August 25 (if the word 'deficit' can be used to describe the position) is less than one per cent.

State receives 1,720.3 mm against average of 1739.9 mm

Major fillip to tuna exports from Vizag

Tuna exports from Visakhapatnam will get a major fillip with the introduction of airlifting facility to Singapore shortly. Marine Product Export Development Authority Chairman Leena Nair told *The Hindu* on Saturday that Visakhapatnam was poised to find a prominent place in tuna exports to Japan and the United States. She said once tuna consignments reach Singapore by Silk Air, it would be convenient for them to reach international markets. MPEDA is training the mechanised boat and trawler operators which diversified into tuna long-lining on safe and hygienic handling. Tuna, a highly migratory species, is most sought-after when it is flown live as landing centres like Vizag do not have processing and value addition facilities. She indicated that MPEDA would help in a big way in setting up required facilities in Visakhapatnam to make it a major tuna export hub. MPEDA gives subsidy for tuna long-lining. With shrimp-centric deep-sea fishing causing dwindling number of the 'prized catch,' the Centre launched several initiatives to popularise diversification into tuna fishing. About 200 mechanised boats and 50 trawlers are now into tuna fishing from here. "We want chilling, processing and other facilities to be developed in the city with good air connectivity," said Y.G.K Murti, president of Association of Indian Fishery Industry. He said proper encouragement to tuna catching would help double

seafood export turnover from \$5 billion to \$10 billion by 2020. For want of air-lifting, tuna captured by local fishermen and others are being bought by middlemen from Kochi and Chennai at a lower price. “They give us around Rs.100 to Rs.200 per kg depending on the size of tuna fish. Once it is air-lifted, we can get somewhere around Rs.500 per kg,” an exporter said.

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.

Water level at Mettur

The water level in the Mettur Dam stood at 109.08 feet on Monday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 9,680 cusecs and the discharge, 21,000 cusecs.



Jagan Slams Govt for Meagre Allocations for Crop Loan Waiver

Citing various figures and statistics, leader of the opposition YS Jaganmohan Reddy has tried to discredit the government over meagre allocations for farm loan waiver and unemployment dole and also expressed apprehension that like in the past chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu may go back on his poll promises. Initiating the discussion on the AP budget for 2014-15 on Monday, Jagan described the budget as disappointing and misleading. "Crores of farmers,

DWCRA members and unemployed youth have been looking forward for the budget, expecting the government to make sizeable allocations for implementation of promises like farm loan and DWCRA loan waiver, unemployment dole among others. However, only meagre allocations were made for the purpose,” he said. Pointing out at the budget estimates and revised budget estimates were one and the same, Jagan said all the government did was to do a ‘cut and paste’ job. Jagan wanted to know why the ruling party, which was aware of what the financial position of the residuary state would be, had made plethora of promises. “However, now it is trying to find excuses of getting out of the promises made. During elections, Naidu had assured to waive all the loans and promised a job or unemployment allowance to every household,” Jagan said. He wondered what made the government change the cutoff date for loan waiver from March 31, 2014 to December 31, 2013. “Many had taken loans, assuming the government would waive their loans during that time,” he said. He wondered how the government expects to implement the loan waiver scheme with meagre allocations. “It had allocated Rs 599 crore for interest free loans, while the required amount is Rs 2,550 crore. In case of pensions, allocations were far less than the required amount,” he said and demanded the government to make public the PRC report and implement the recommendations. Pointing out that only Rs 4,500 crore was allocated for the ongoing irrigation projects, he asked how does the government plan to bring 15 lakh more acres under irrigation. YSR Regime Far Better

The government is only trying to divert the attention of the people from its failures to keep the promises made by making allegations against previous regimes, the opposition leader alleged. “There are different parameters by which the success of any regime is calculated,” Jagan said and gave 96 marks to YSR regime and only 57 marks to Naidu’s regime citing GSDP and other parameters.

Kochi's First Fish Mall Gets Government Nod

Gone are the days you had to stand stink and mush to purchase fish from your nearby fish market. For, Kochi is all set to get its first fish mall in the state. “First of the three fish malls mooted by the state government will come up in the city,” said Fisheries Minister K Babu. The fish mall will be a facility with modern amenities where seafood and value-added products will be available. The state government has granted administrative sanction for the project and has also allotted `3.11 crore for the project, the minister said. The proposed fish mall, with have centralised air conditioning facility, will also have other facilities such as kids playing area, lockers, snackbars etc. Fresh fish, dried fish and other value added products will be available at the stalls at the mall. The construction of the mall will be carried out by Coastal Development Corporation. The construction is expected to be completed by August 31, 2015, the Minister said. Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode are the two other locations identified for fish mall. Meanwhile, the All-Kerala Fishing Boat Operators Association office-bearers suggested that the government should have held meeting with stake holders in fishing sector before finalising such a project. The boat owners welcome and support the project. Since government has not consulted with us, we have no idea about catch procurement policy. The Government has to make its stand clear on procuring catch from fishermen in other state. A modern facility like a fish mall will definitely be benefiting for consumers and also those associated to various job. A modern facility for retail of sea food is a long pending demand of various fishermen organisations,” said Boat Owners’ Association general secretary Joseph Xavier Kalappurakkal.

Coonoor tea prices at 1-year low

Prices at the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association which crashed to the year's lowest level of Rs. 63 a kg last week continued to remain at that level this week at Sale No: 34. Even after reducing the prices, teas worth Rs. 2.85 crore remained unsold. Vigneshwar Estate and Deepika Supreme topped the CTC market at Rs. 189 a kg each, followed by Homedale Estate at Rs.188, Hittakkal Estate and Navil Kal Estate at Rs.187 each, Shanthi Supreme at Rs.185. In all, 71 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg.

Orthodox teas

Among orthodox teas, Chamraj got Rs. 251 followed by Kodanad at Rs. 222, Kairbetta at Rs.221, Havukal at Rs.211. In all, 34 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg. Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs. 40-45 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs.100-140 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged Rs. 40-49 for plain dusts and Rs.120-185 for brighter liquoring dusts. On the export front, Pakistan bought selectively in a wide range of Rs. 50-71 a kg. Better liquoring CTC leaf and dust eased Rs. 4-5 a kg, better mediums Rs.3-4 and plainers Rs.2-3.

Latex skids further on weak buying

Spot rubber prices were steady on Monday. Most counters continued to remain unchanged amidst low volumes despite a weak closing in the rubber futures on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. The trend was partially mixed as latex declined further on extremely low demand. Sheet rubber was quoted flat at Rs. 130 a kg by traders and the Rubber Board. The grade closed unchanged at Rs. 127

a kg. The September futures weakened to Rs. 128.90 (129.11), October to Rs.127.50 (128.05) on the NMCE. RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to Rs. 110.83 (109.94) at Bangkok. The August futures expired at ₹190 (Rs. 110.76) while the September futures improved to ₹192 (Rs. 111.92) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 130 (130); RSS-5: 126 (126); Ungraded: 118 (118); ISNR 20: 111.50 (111.50) and Latex 60%: 91 (92).

Onion farmers shed tears as input costs soar

Farmers growing onions in Asia's largest onion market Lasalgaon, Nashik, want consumers to pay Rs. 50 for a kg as the cost of onion cultivation, excluding labour, has gone up three times in the last eight years. The price of onion seeds alone has more than doubled to Rs. 3,200 a kg during this *kharif* season, as compared to Rs.1,200 last year, while *rabi* seeds have shot up by three times at Rs. 5,000 a kg (Rs. 1,600 a kg). Similarly, the price of all inputs including fertiliser, weedicide, insecticide, fungicide and plant growth regulator have seen a steady rise. Nanasahab Patil, Chairman, Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC), Lasalgaon, and Director, Nafed, said if onion prices touch Rs. 50 a kg at the retail level, farmers would get to realise Rs. 25 for their produce. While the cost of production has gone up 93 per cent to Rs.1.85 lakh a hectare in 2012-13 from Rs.95,959 a hectare in 2008-09, the yield per hectare has moved up marginally to 112 quintal from 100 quintal, he said. "The Government reacts sharply whenever onion prices go up. This time around, they brought it under the Essential Commodities Act. They fail to understand that farmers are facing high inflation in several other commodities that are used for farming activities, just like other consumers," he added. The Essential Commodities Act prescribes that the Government announce a minimum support price (MSP) to protect farmers' interest, before including any commodity under the Act.

Freight rates

The Government also gets the power to procure any commodity under the Act, at a price lower than the market rate. The Government also has to announce a concession on freight rates for commodities under the Act. However, for onions, railway freight has shot up by 18-22 per cent, as the Railways reclassified it to LR3 category from LR4. In its rush to bring down onion prices, the Government has neither announced an MSP, nor clarified whether farmers would be exempted from the storage limit enforced under the Act.

Prospect of shortage

Since onion is not grown between March and September, there would be a huge shortage if it is not allowed to be stored. Storage of onion for a longer period results in 30 per cent weight loss as the essence tends to evaporate, said Patil.

According to data collated by APMC, farmers have sold 46 per cent of their produce at less than the cost of production in 2012-13, while 33 per cent was sold below 50 per cent profit. Another 21 per cent was sold at over 50 per cent profit. In 2011-12, farmers sold 66 per cent of their produce below the cost of production, data showed.

Traders buy onion from Egypt to bring down prices

In a bid to bring down onion prices, traders have imported 15 containers of onion from Egypt. Of the total imports, eight containers were received at Lasalgaon and seven were offloaded in Mumbai. The landed cost of onion at Lasalgaon works out to Rs. 25 a kg which is higher than Rs. 15-20 a kg quoted in India. Nansaheb Patil, Chairman, Agriculture Produce Market Committee, Lasalgaon, and Director, Nafed, said as there is no scarcity of onion in India, this decision of giving permission for traders to import is impractical and has been done without

considering various factors such as price and quality. “The quality of imported onions is inferior and needs to be dried by fans to sustain for some time. Moreover, consumers may not like it as it tastes very different from the Indian onions which are known for their pungency,” he said. The Government claims that this import will help stabilise retail onion prices.

Abandoned quarries turn fish breeding ponds in Kerala

Kerala’s abandoned granite quarries seem to be opening up new investment opportunities for the owners, who are facing threat from environmental agencies and anti-pollution forums. A unique cage fish culture demonstrated by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Ernakulam is turning into a money-spinner for several quarry owners confused about how they could effectively utilise the abandoned quarries. The Kendra has successfully demonstrated cage fish cultures in 50 cents of the abandoned quarries owned by Shaji Varghese, a farmer at nearby Kothamangalam. This has yielded results with the average production of high local demand fishes like pearl spot and tilapia going up to Rs. 100-150 kg per cage. PA Vikas, Subject Matter Specialist (Fisheries) of KVK told *BusinessLine* that the operational cost for one cage was Rs. 10,000 including seed and feed. Today, Varghese is earning a gross income of Rs. 24,300 from one cage. Earlier, he could hardly earn Rs. 5,000 per year from this quarry through traditional carp farming, Vikas said, adding that one cent of granite quarry can accommodate seven such cages. According to him, small floating cages were fabricated and erected in the farmer’s quarry. After eight months fish of harvestable size were produced and the average survival rate was 90 per cent. These types of cages can be used for at least five years.

Exapansion plans

Shinoj Subramannian, Programme Coordinator, said that KVK plans to replicate this model in five more locations in the district this year. However, the need of the hour is to create awareness among granite quarry owners on its profitability. There are about 800 large and small quarries in the district and majority of them are abandoned. These granite quarries are reservoirs of fresh water. Even the State government's initiative to utilise these quarries as source of potable water also failed to start off. Given the situation, he said a viable model of controlled fish farming is the only practical approach. As the area is far away from the coastline, there is scarcity of fresh fish in the foothills of the Western Ghats. Thus, granite quarries can be converted into a potential location for cage fish culture.

Rains seen tracing back their footprint over parts of North-West

The low-pressure area over east-central Arabian Sea has weakened, signalling an end to the wet spell over peninsula from last weekend. In the process, it has cleared the way for a successor brewing in the west-central Bay of Bengal. Associated rain belt is seen progressing west-northwest from Thursday across central peninsula towards Gujarat.

Fresh 'low'

Along the way, the new 'low' may weaken over west Maharashtra dumping heavy rain over Marathwada, Madhya Maharashtra, Konkan, Goa, Mumbai and west Madhya Pradesh towards the weekend. By Monday, September 1, the low-pressure is projected to be active and sitting over north-west Maharashtra, Mumbai and adjoining west Madhya Pradesh. The US National Centres of Environmental Prediction saw its intensified form stepping out into north-east Arabian Sea and ramping up further into a likely depression. It could bring heavy to very heavy

rainfall along Konkan-Goa, Mumbai and adjoining west Maharashtra, and south Gujarat during the weekend and early next.

Assured spell

In this manner, a wave of rain is assured for central and adjoining central India, northern parts of the West Coast, Gujarat, west Madhya Pradesh and parts of east Rajasthan. At the end of this run, available indications suggest the west-central Bay may get into act the once again, rustling up another rain-bearing system there. A cyclone circulation-tracker based in the US sees a low-pressure forming here and moving into east-central India before cutting a way towards Madhya Pradesh. The weakened 'low' is forecast to spin towards Gujarat and south-west Rajasthan. Successive 'lows' would keep the advancing anti-cyclonic circulation (associated with monsoon withdrawal) at bay over Rajasthan.

Last month

During this phase into early September, the last full month of monsoonal rain, the peninsula and the North-East are forecast to witness no major rain activity. Elsewhere in the North-West, a western disturbance is waiting its turn to enter the country to bring passing showers over the hill regions. It is also possible that the wave may briefly interact with the rain wave over Konkan-Goa and set up a wet corridor across east Rajasthan and south-west Uttar Pradesh. It may also drop some rain over east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar before exiting the country towards the east-northeast.

Business Standard

India imports 425 tonnes of onion from Egypt

India has imported onion from Egypt at a price higher than that prevailing in major mandis India has imported about 425 tonnes (15 container-loads) of onion from

Egypt at a price substantially higher than that prevailing in major mandis, including that in Lasalgaon. Of the 15 container-loads, eight (between 28-29 tonnes each) were transported to the Lasalgaon mandi, while the rest containers were supplied to the markets here. Nanasaheb Patil, chairman of the Lasalgaon Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee, said, "The cost of the imported onions works out to Rs 25 a kg in Lasalgaon, against the prevailing price of Rs 15-18 a kg from local sources. Also, the quality the imported onion is poorer than that of Indian origin." Trade sources believe, the government's objective would be to keep local prices under control.

India's jeera exports up 15% during April-July

India's jeera (cumin) exports has crossed 50,000 tonnes in the first four months of 2014-15, a rise of 15 per cent from the corresponding period of the previous year, industry sources said. While, country's total jeera exports in 2013-14 (Apr-Mar) rose by 42 per cent to 121,500 tonnes from 85,602 tonnes in 2012-13. Industry sources said export of Jeera from April to July this year would exceed 51,000 tonnes as against 44,000 tonnes in same period of 2013. "Other jeera producing countries like Turkey, Syria and Iran have short crop. Moreover, geo-political tension in these countries have diverted demand to India over the last two years and consequently, we have witnessed good export demand," said Girish Brahmhatt, chairman, Indian Spice and Foodstuff Exporters Association (ISFEA). Demand for jeera has increased from across the world. There was good demand from West Asian countries before Ramzan. Also, there has been good demand from western countries which have ignored to buy jeera from Syria and Iran owing to geo-political tension. "India is providing superior quality jeera than other producing countries at lower price which has attracted the international market. Right now, export demand is not much but it is expected to increase from next month," said Jitendra Adani, a leading trader and exporter from Rajkot. Despite strong export demand from other countries, price of jeera has more

or less remained stable because of high production. Traders and exporters expected 357,500 tonnes jeera production in 2013-14. However, it was around 302,500 tonnes. Over the last few months, jeera prices have traded between Rs 1,800 and Rs 2,400 per 20 kg in Unjha market. Presently, jeera price is ruling between Rs 1,755 and Rs 2,200 per 20 kg.



Fertiliser ministry to recommend ban on pesticides hazardous to nature, biodiversity

Favouring the use of pesticides which are friendly to nature, fertiliser minister Ananth Kumar on Monday said his ministry will recommend banning those pesticides which are found to be hazardous to biodiversity. "There is need for holistic green revolution in the country and our motto should be less chemicals, more crops," he said. While addressing the annual Agrochem Conference organised by Ficci, the minister said: "The biggest challenge today is whether our pesticides and insecticides are complementary to mother nature." Expressing his concerns about biodiversity, the minister wondered "where bees and sparrows are these days." "So we will study and if it is found that there are pesticides and insecticides which are a threat to our nature and biodiversity, we will recommend banning them to the agriculture ministry," Kumar said. The minister added that if some pesticides have been banned in other countries like the US, they could be banned in India as well. Calling for increasing the use of bio-pesticides, Kumar said these have advantages over conventional pesticides. They are usually inherently less toxic than conventional pesticides, they generally affect only the target pests and closely related organisms, in contrast to broad spectrum, conventional pesticides that may affect organisms as different as birds, insects, and mammals, he added. The registration of pesticides, their standards and residue levels, is governed by the Insecticides Act of 1968, which requires major changes

to address the issues affecting this segment, he added. "Green lifestyle is the best lifestyle," the minister said. "The Pesticides Management Bill 2008 has been introduced in Parliament to replace the Insecticides Act, and the government will take all possible action to pass the same expeditiously so as to accelerate the growth and development of this sector," Kumar said. In India, presently about 250 insecticides stand registered on regular basis for use in the country. There are more than 60 technical grade pesticides being manufactured indigenously by 125 producers and more than 500 pesticide formulators spread over the country.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government pitches for biotech crops to achieve 2nd green revolution

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh today pitched for biotech crops especially in eastern states for achieving second green revolution in the country. Opening a new agricultural biotechnology institute in the state will pave way for preparing trained human resources, he said after laying the foundation stone of Indian Institute of Agricultural Bio-Technology at Garh Khatanga near Ranchi. Stating that there is a need to bring second Green Revolution particularly in eastern states, Singh said: "As such agricultural biotechnology will play a significant role in increasing quality production in these states." He said the central government has taken a decision to open an agricultural biotechnology institute in Jharkhand keeping in view the importance of agricultural biotechnology, an official statement said. Highlighting the benefits of biotechnology, Singh said crops can be made climate resilient and drop in production can be addressed with use of biotech crops. In the backdrop of limited natural resources and growing population, there is an urgent need to change the traditional methods of agriculture, he added. The mission of the institute will be to strengthen ongoing research work, fundamental research in the field of biotechnology, as also building capacity for human resources. The institute will play an important role in

strengthening employment security and food security for tribal population and farmers in the state. The government proposes to confer the deemed university status to this institute, he added. The government has allowed commercial cultivation of Bt cotton, while moratorium has been imposed on Bt brinjal.