

State seeks higher levy on rubber import

Kerala has urged the Union government to impose a higher tariff on import of rubber and products and announce a special fund in 2015-'16 Union Budget to revive the spices sector and promote export of traditional agricultural products.

The State's demands were communicated to the Centre by Finance Minister K.M. Mani at a pre-budget consultation convened by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Friday. Although Mr. Mani could not attend the meeting, his speech was distributed at the meeting by the State's representative Rabindra Kumar Agarwal, secretary, finance (expenditure).

Mr. Mani pointed out that the sharp fall in rubber price had affected the livelihood of small and marginal rubber growers who constituted a majority of farmers in the State.

Rubber price Besides pegging the import duty on rubber at 40 per cent, the Union government should also consider including the rubber sector under the ambit of the new scheme of 'Make in India' programme, Mr. Mani said.

On the introduction of the Constitution Amendment Bill in Parliament for the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) from April 1, 2016, Mr. Mani said while it marked the beginning of a new co-operative partnership between the Centre and States for the augmentation of their resources, such a partnership would not survive if the dominant player viz., the Centre, did not take into account the legitimate concerns of the other partners — the States — and accommodate them in the scheme of things.

The GST Council representing the Centre and States should act as a platform for States to negotiate as equal partners to ensure the success of the new tax policy, he added. Mr. Mani pointed out that the State's concerns about the new tax regime with regard to the issues of compensation, negative list, rate, etc. had already been communicated to the Centre.

The Finance Minister should ensure that there was deliberation with every State before decisions on future changes under GST regime are taken. The review now proposed by Mr. Jaitley on the GST framework once in every three years should be comprehensive and should be based on the views of the State governments, he said.

The world of agribusiness management

There have been persistent efforts since Independence for quantitative as well as qualitative development in the field of agriculture. The National Agriculture Policy announced in 2000 is a watershed in the growth and development of agriculture in our country.

Its objectives cover

actualising the vast untapped growth potential of agriculture

strengthening rural infrastructure

promoting value addition

accelerating the growth of agro business

creating employment in rural areas

securing a fair standard of living for the farmers and agricultural workers

discouraging migration to urban areas, and

facing the challenges arising out of liberalisation and globalisation

We should encourage 'technically sound, economically viable, environmentally non-degrading, and socially acceptable use of country's natural resources and genetic endowment to promote sustainable development of agriculture.'

This demands continuous research. Our country has very good infrastructure for agricultural research. There are nearly 150 research institutions, including agricultural universities, under the control of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Why Agribusiness Management?

Agriculture is not just a medium for providing livelihood to agricultural workers. It is an industry and a business. It should meet the essential needs of our people and generate income for the country. Reforms in agriculture which engages a majority of our population would naturally influence economic and business activities in the country. As a part of development, we have to transform farmers into 'agripreneurs,' who merge agriculture and entrepreneurship.

The foundation of rural development is agribusiness. There is a serious challenge in transforming livelihood into profitable business ventures. Those engaged in extension services have to face the challenge. These services involve refinement and application of technology, including the use of fertilizers, soil-testing and other farm services. Our agricultural development should focus on enhancing the potential for export as well. Our farmers and agricultural workers have to be enlightened on these significant aspects.

Agribusiness institutes have the sacred duty of training competent professional managers endowed with necessary knowledge and skills as well as qualities of leadership and commitment. They have to merge their agricultural domain knowledge and management strategies. There would be complementary professionals trained in forest/plantation/rural/co-operative management.

Essential components

Agribusiness is made up of diverse components. It touches a wide range of areas such as grains, pulses, tubers, spices, farms, organic farming, plantations, orchards, arboriculture, floriculture, gardening, pisciculture, apiculture, sericulture, livestock/poultry/pig farming, fodder, dairying, soil/water conservation, irrigation, watershed development, integrated nutrient management, optimal use of fertilizers, plant preservation, insecticides, integrated pest management, locust control, plant disease control, farm machinery, hybrid seeds, seed production, seed testing and quality control, value addition, agricultural products of global standards, agricultural marketing, rural banking, co-operatives, testing/quality control/standardisation of agricultural products, venture capital, subsidies, packaging of farm products, extension activities, corporate farming, food processing, food parks, web-enabled agricultural information, export norms, and WTO.

Training facilities

College of Co-operation, Banking, and Management, Kerala Agricultural University (Vellanikkara, Thrissur – 680656, www.kaumba.in), a constituent college of Kerala Agricultural University, offers a two-year (four-semester) full-

time residential MBA programme in Agribusiness Management. There are 40 seats.

The programme, which commenced in 2006, has a history of fine placement for all successful candidates.

Professional graduates from agricultural universities with at least an OGPA of 7.5 / 10.0 can apply for admission. Any university graduate with minimum 60 per cent marks (55 per cent for SC/ST candidates) from SSLC is also eligible.

Selection to the programme is based on the Management Aptitude Test held by the university, qualifying degree, group discussion, and interview. Tuition fee for the course is Rs. 1 lakh. There will be admission/examination/hostel/miscellaneous fees. However, the fee rates are low compared to those in other business schools. Admission notification would appear by April.

Other institutions

The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad (www.manage.gov.in). This is the premier institution in the field in India

The Institute of Agri Business Management, Rajasthan Agricultural University, Bikaner. (www.iabmbikaner.org)

The Ch. Charan Singh National Institute of Agricultural Marketing, Jaipur (www.ccsniam.gov.in)

The National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Hyderabad (www.naarm.ernet.in)

The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (www.iimahd.ernet.in)

The Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow (www.iiml.ac.in)

The Faculty of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University

Aligarh Muslim University (www.amu.ac.in)

The Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research, Mumbai
(www.welingkar.org)

The Garware Institute of Career Education and Development, University of
Mumbai (www.mu.ac.in/garware)

The College of Agribusiness Management, Pantnagar (www.gbpuat.ac.in)

The College of Agriculture, Hyderabad (www.angrau.ac.in)

The Symbiosis Institute of International Business, Pune (www.siib.ac.in)

The Dr. Y.S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Solan
(www.yspuniversity.ac.in)

Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur (www.jnkvv.nic.in)

Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Satna (www.ruraluniversitychitrakoot.org)

The College of Basic Sciences & Humanities, Punjab Agricultural University,
Ludhiana (www.pau.edu)

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore (www.tnau.ac.in)

The Regional Institute of Co-operative Management, Chandigarh
(www.ricmchandigarh.org)

The Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, Pune
(www.vamnicom.gov.in)

The Udaibhansinhji Regional Institute of Cooperative Management,
Gandhinagar (www.urimanager.org)

'Coconut farmers yet to get drought relief'

Vivasayeegal Sangam (a farmers' association) has written to Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam complaining that the drought relief he had promised was yet to reach coconut farmers.

In a release, the association said the farmers were yet to get the promised Rs. 41 crore.

Likewise, it also waited for good quality farm implements.

Sometime ago, it had complained with evidence to the Agriculture Director that the implements supplied were of poor quality and priced at above the market average.

Committees

The officer had then suggested formation of district-level procurement committees to bring about transparency.

But to date, the district administrations in Salem, Erode, Tirupur and Coimbatore had not done so.

In the GAIL gas pipeline case, the officials had relied on "faulty" data the company had given to submit their report to the Tamil Nadu Government, which wanted to know the trees, water bodies, buildings in the proposed pipeline path.

Govt. stand

This had diluted the pro-farmers stand the Government had taken, the association claimed.

The Chief Minister should look into the issue and ensure that farmers' interests were not affected, the letter said.

'Soil fertility has improved in Punjab'

Contrary to opinion articulated through various quarters, empirical evidence and various studies have shown that the agronomic practices since the Green Revolution, especially dependence on the wheat-paddy cycle, had only improved the soil fertility in Punjab, where cropping intensity has reached 190 per cent. A reduction in fertilizer consumption notwithstanding, soil properties, presence of micro-nutrients and yields of crops have seen major improvement.

While, noted economist, H.S. Shergill, has collated scattered evidence, the finding on improved fertility has been made in research conducted by two scientists D.K. Benbi and J.S. Brar at the Department of Soils in the Punjab Agricultural University. They analysed more than three lakh plough level soil samples taken from various parts of Punjab over 25 years since 1980.

Though for some reasons the study by the two scientists was rejected by experts and the State government as it was not considered in the "interests of Punjab's farm economy," their findings were published by an international journal, *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*.

The paper is titled "A 25-year record for carbon sequestration and soil properties in intensive agriculture."

Drive to expand red gram cultivation gets a push



The district administration has intensified the drive to expand the area under red gram cultivation and also sensitise the farmers in this regard for increasing productivity.

To achieve the objective, the farmers have been asked to give up traditional cultivation practices and adopt modern technique to gain substantial yield. The farmers in the region were familiar with the practice of direct sowing of red gram, even though the yield was low.

According to the Collector S. Suresh Kumar this conventional practise yielded just 500—600 kg of red gram per hectare. Instead, if they raise nursery and go for replanting the 36-day-old saplings they could reap rich harvest, as the yield would go up by about three times to 1,300—1,400 kg per ha.

The Collector told reporters during his recent field visit that under the National Agriculture Development Mission it was proposed to set up pilot farms for raising red gram on 550ha for the current financial year 2014-2015 in the district.

Already, 525ha had been brought under the scheme. In Annagramam block alone 45ha out of the proposed 50ha had been covered.

The Collector further said that coordinated measures had been taken to promote agriculture, horticulture and fish culture, besides improving the lot of the farmers.

As part of this endeavour the farmers were encouraged to take to chrysanthemum cultivation that would fetch good dividends.

To increase the yield they were also provided with drip irrigation system with a subsidy component.

The farmers were also given a grant of Rs. 1.50 lakh for putting up green houses for raising vegetables and other horticulture crops.

The Collector also said that the farmers had also evinced keen interest in putting up farm ponds for breeding fish to supplement their income.

For instance, at Kandanalayam in Annagramam block Kadhivel, a farmer, had recently formed a farm pond to breed fish varieties such as rogu, katla, kendai and prawns. He had harvested the fish twice, so far and got 500 kg of fish each time.

The Collector also noted that to provide shelter to the farmers and economically weaker sections of the society permanent houses were being built under three programmes: Chief Minister's Green House programme, the Indira Awas Yojana of the Centre, and also under the aegis of the District Rural Development Agency.

In the Annagramam block alone 357 houses were being built and out of which those hit by the Cyclone Thane would get 255 houses.

At Poongunam village in Panruti block as many as 560 saplings had been planted at a cost of Rs. 66,000 to raise avenue trees, the Collector added.

Soil fertility has improved in Punjab: study

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highlighted that from 1980 to 2005, while the organic matter had increased by 38 per cent, phosphorous content went up from 19.9 to 29.2 kg per hectare

and potassium remained steady between 108 to 123 mg per kg, and soil salinity came down by at least 0.8 pH points from 8.5.

While studies have established that soil organic carbon (SOC) went down considerably in intensively cropped temperate as well as tropical regions of the world, the post-Green Revolution agronomic practices have resulted in SOC increasing from 2.9 to 4.0 mg per kg of soil in Punjab. The ploughing in of farm residue and flooding of fields during paddy cultivation, ameliorated soil salinity as well as increased availability of nitrogen, phosphorous, zinc, iron and manganese. Data indicated that the crops could uptake only 30 per cent of the phosphorous from the fertilizer applied.

Other studies have indicated that the practice of burning paddy straw, which creates a major environment issue every harvest, actually benefited the soil as the residual ash contained 10 per cent potassium and one per cent phosphorous. Heavy application of phosphate fertilizers has also resulted in the build of the mineral. Use of tubewell water for irrigation has helped maintain potassium levels.

An analysis, of various crops cultivated between 1980 and 1999, by Prof. Karam Singh from PAU's Department of Economics has found that yield of wheat in the wheat-paddy rotation remained the highest. It rose from 29.97 to 44.87 quintals per hectare. In a subsequent study, Prof. Shergill established that the yields of wheat and rice, were increasing even after 40 years of introduction of high yielding variety (HYV) seeds. However, the rate of increase in yields during the post-1990 era, has declined.

Prof. Shergill said data during the triennium beginning 1992-93 indicated that fertilizer used to produce a quintal of rice had reduced from 3.76 to 2.98 kg,

while for wheat the same went down 5.38 to 5.33 kg. Collating other studies, he also argued that the fall in ground water table, which is attributed to the wheat-paddy cycle had also solved the water logging problems in many parts of Punjab.

A.P. getting raw deal in fixing MSP

Andhra Pradesh is getting a raw deal in fixing of minimum support price (MSP) for different crops. YSRC Farmers' Wing state president M.V.S. Nagireddy said here on Sunday said that Andhra Pradesh, where the cost of agricultural labour was high, was the biggest loser because of the Central government's cumulative average formula for fixing of MSP. While the cost per acre was Rs. 3,500 for Punjab and Haryana the cost in Andhra Pradesh was between Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 8,000.

This system was favourable to states where the cost of production was low.

While agriculture was a State subject, the Centre was calling all the shots and fixing MSP with total disregard for the Swaminathan Commission recommendations. The cost of production was low in Punjab and Haryana because of mechanisation, he said.

He said farmers in Andhra Pradesh were going through the worst crisis ever because of poor rains and the State government's failure to fulfil its promise.

While Prakasam district had 54 per cent deficit in rainfall, Anantapur and Kadapa had 51 per cent deficit, Guntur and Nellore 48 per cent and East Godavari 46 per cent deficit. Krishna and West Godavari registered 43 per cent deficit.

This led to a severe reduction in the sowing of water-intensive crops. Cotton was sown in 160.47 per cent and maize in 121.8 per cent.

Farmers of Kurnool went for cotton in an additional 1,86,016 hectares and in Anantapur cotton was sowed in an additional 52,868 hectares because of the deficit in rainfall, he said.

Loss to farmers in terms of incentives from the Central government and bank interest on loans, until their loans were waived off in a phased manner, was Rs. 8,400 crore, Mr. Nagireddy said.

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In the pre-green revolution era, 20 percent of Punjab soil was sandy, but extensive use of tractors, levelling of fields through scientific means and other practices has transformed it into loamy surfaces.

Farm loan waivers

The RBI Governor's anguish that debt waivers constrain credit flow to the farmer is understandable, and quite rightly so ("[Farm loan waivers hit credit flow: Rajan](#)," Dec.28). Be it the UPA government in 2008 or Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in 2014, agricultural debt waiver and relief schemes have always been used as means to win elections while ignoring the practical problems and economic impact they hold. Studies by the Public Accounts Committee, the CAG and various other agencies have revealed that in many cases, deserving farmers have been overlooked, which carries fraudulent connotations. This defeats the very purpose of the waivers, and results in huge losses to the exchequer. As a banker, it has been my experience that such schemes act as a disincentive even to those farmers who used to pay their instalments without fail. They

have now stopped, saying “chunav aane do, dekhenge” (let elections come, we’ll see). All those political parties indulging in such financial misadventures at the cost of the exchequer should heed the advice of the RBI.

B. Harish,

Mangaluru

It is a fact that the waiver of agricultural loans and the grant of indiscriminate subsidies to farmers have not benefited them but in fact caused them untold misery and resulted in an agrarian crisis. This is clear from the farmer suicides in Telangana despite a waiver of such loans and the availability of various state subsidies. More than money, farmers need assistance in the form of assured water supply, uninterrupted power, improved seeds, modern farming techniques, remunerative prices for the produce and a boost to their self-confidence. Political parties should refrain from implementing various wild schemes without measuring their deleterious consequences on the economy.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,

Ramayampet, Telangana

From 1989, the rate of credit flow to farmers has declined. More than 50 per cent of agricultural credit goes to urban areas in Maharashtra, which is transferred to the business sector. How do we regulate this credit flow? Further, there are questions about the impact of loan waivers and the issue of farmer suicides. There needs to be a comprehensive study of the issue, followed by urgent reforms.

Online beneficiary tracking system introduced

To ensure complete transparency in implementation of the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) in the district, the Department of Horticulture has introduced e-registration of applications from aspiring beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries identified under the NHM this fiscal are being registered online at www.hortnet.gov.in, created exclusively for the NHM. “A total of 465 of the 1,233 beneficiaries identified in the State under the NHM during 2014-2015 have so far been registered online in the district and given IDs. This is the highest number for a district in the State,” said S. Raja Mohamed, Deputy Director of Horticulture, Tirunelveli.

‘Hortnet’ was an innovative project designed to accomplish e-governance in the National Horticulture Mission to ensure total transparency at all stages such as filing of application online, authentication, processing and online payment of subsidy to the beneficiary’s bank account.

“The objectives include creation of a centralised database of farmers getting subsidies under the NHM and allied sector schemes, online workflow-based system in accordance with established guidelines and policies and ICT initiation. With the available web-services, the registrations get processed immediately. Transparent field verification and authentication, using mobile, GIS and GPRS, would be done to restrict bogus entries.”

Marigold loses fragrance due to heavy arrivals



Steep fall in the price of marigold flowers has put a large number of farmers of Omalur and Edappadi areas in deep trouble.

The disappointed farmers, unable to digest the steep fall in price, dumped the flowers on the Salem - Bangalore Highway on Thursday. A large number of farmers have raised marigold, jasmine, and rose in thousands of acres in Poosaripatti, Kanjanayakkanpatti, Karuvalli, Mookanur, Theevattipatti in Omalur block. Due to good crop in Dindigul and Rayakottai areas apart from Omalur block, there has been a heavy arrival in Poosaripatti near Omalur, a major flower market in the entire western region. This led to steep fall in the price of market. It was priced at Rs. 10 per kg at the Poosaripatti market on Thursday. This was despite the Sabarimala, Margazhi and New Year festival seasons.

The traders procure the flowers in this market and transport the same to Bengaluru, Chennai, Tirupathi etc. The reluctance on the part of the traders to pay reasonable price to the marigold at the Thursday market disappointed the farmers. A section of them expressed their ire by dumping the flower stock on the Salem - Bangalore national highway. A kg of marigold, which was sold at Rs. 100 last season, is fetching a paltry sum of Rs. 10 this year, they complain.

“We have raised the crop spending Rs. one lakh per acre. At the present price rate, the farmers will not get a return of even Rs. 20,000 per acre. The steep fall is a big shock and we do not know how to make this heavy loss,” lamented a cross section of the farmers. The State Government should take effective initiative for protecting the interest of the farmers, they say.

The government should come forward to commission cold storage facility so that the farmers could deposit the flowers in the lean seasons and market the same when they get good price, says Abimannan, a progressive farmers of Konganapuram.

Towards total organic farming

As part of an initiative to promote total organic farming among 1,000 families living in six wards in Venganoor panchayat, more than 800 families who have switched over to zero-poison farming met at Muttakkad near here on Sunday. This was the eighth such farmers’ meet, a press note issued here said.

The meet gave the finishing touches to a plan to enable more families to switch to organic farming in a year’s time. The organic farmers’ group, set up under the organic farming popularisation programme of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi, is being promoted with assistance from Venganoor grama panchayat, the Krishi Bhavan, the State Horticulture Mission and NABARD. Prizes were distributed to the winners of the organic farming contests.

Sugarcane growers come down heavily on CM over unsettled dues

The Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers’ Association has come down heavily on Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for not convening a meeting of cane growers and owners of sugar factories to get farmers’ dues settled.

The association alleged that the Chief Minister was either buckled under pressure from different political leaders or was disinclined to take necessary steps to help farmers.

Kuruburu Shanthkumar, president of the association, told *The Hindu* here on Sunday that Rs. 2,100 crore was due to sugarcane growers from about 62 sugar factories in the State. The government had assured the farmers of getting their bills settled within six months, but has failed to get the farmers their arrears.

Mr. Shanthkumar said the High Court had given a direction in November this year to the State government to direct the sugar factories to settle farmers' bills immediately.

The government had sent circulars to all factories to pay arrears within 14 days after the supply of sugarcane. But the sugar factories have not cared to abide by the government's direction, he said.

The association set January 5 as a deadline to the government to get the bills settled, failing which it warned of staging an indefinite hunger strike in front of the Chief Minister's residence.

'Nationalise sugar factories in State'

The Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers' Association has demanded that the State government nationalise all sugar factories in the State as they were "reluctant to abide by the government and the High Court orders."

Kuruburu Shanthkumar, president of the association, told *The Hindu* that there were over 62 sugar factories in the State. Of them, 28 factories were run by political leaders. Though the State government had directed the sugar

factories to settle dues of farmers along with 15 per cent interest, the factories had not done so.

He suggested that the government nationalise all sugar factories and run them.

He urged the government to issue an ordinance and take over all sugar factories forthwith.

Paddy grown on 1.02 lakh hectares

A prominent-paddy growing area, Mysuru cultivates the crop on over 1.02 lakh hectares of land.

The district has eight procurement centres — seven in seven taluks and one in Bannuru village. The process of paddy procurement began on December 22 at all centres and the government fixed an MSP of Rs. 1,360 a quintal and Rs. 1,400 a quintal for 'A' grade quality. According to K. Rameshwarappa, Senior Deputy Director of Food and Civil Supplies Department, many farmers have registered along with samples of their crop to sell it at the centres.

He said farmers may start selling crops from next week. He said the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation will make payments to farmers for their crops within 15 days of purchase.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

World Bank okays \$75 m for project to help AP farmers

The World Bank has approved a \$75-million (about Rs. 475 crore) loan for the Andhra Pradesh Rural Inclusive Growth Project to enhance agricultural incomes of small and marginal farmers.

The project, approved recently, seeks to ensure increased access to services related to health, nutrition, sanitation and social entitlements. It will target small and marginal farmers in the 150 most backward mandals of Andhra Pradesh covering 5,000 villages.

The project aims to invest in developing a network of social enterprises for food, nutrition, sanitation and other social enterprises which operate at community and district level and support the State Government in its efforts at creating an enabling policy framework.

“Over the years women-led community institutions in Andhra Pradesh have made significant impact in helping communities gain higher access to credit, education and assets, and in greater empowerment. However, despite these achievements, inclusion remains a challenge,” Onno Ruhl, World Bank Country Director in India, said.

The project will seek to link small and marginal farmers to urban markets and make them competitive. It will support to increase the incomes of 250,000 small and marginal farmers by enhancing productivity and improving their access to markets.

This will seek to exploit growth opportunities for high-value commodities such as red gram, milk, poultry, small ruminants, fisheries, turmeric, cashew and coffee.

Advantage India from rich fruit pickings in Europe, US



Mumbai, December 28:

In a country where transportation can be notoriously tough to execute, importer and marketer of fresh fruits IG International has decided to take the bull by the horns to ensure a smooth logistics network.

With new plantings in Europe, the company is looking forward to supplementing the fruit supplies that it ships throughout the country and the rest of the world.

The company has made huge investments in controlled atmosphere and cold storage infrastructure as well as reefer trucks.

Record harvest

countries and handle nearly 30 different varieties of fruits,” said Tarun Arora, Director, IG International, adding, “Other than imports, we are also the largest exporters of grapes and potatoes to Russia and Europe.”

Noting that most foreign markets were flooded with a record crop of fruits, Arora added: “There is a huge economic opportunity next year. With an increase in fruit production especially from the US, the record crop could bring down prices of imported fruit in India.”

The company's fleet of over 50 refrigerated trucks has turned out to be a big advantage.

Arora told *BusinessLine* that the company has wholesale outlets, distribution centres and cold rooms in 22 cities, and around 50 reefer vehicles that handle a large volume of imported fresh fruit every year.

IG International has 12 cold storages with a capacity of over 25,000 tonnes and has set up a large cold storage facility in Chennai at 5,000 tonnes , and in Delhi at 10,000 tonnes and in other cities. It has drawn up plans to further invest in infrastructural facilities to grow its business.

Imported fruits

Other than apples, pears, cherries and plums, the imported fruit market in the country is awash with exotic fruits such as Dragon Fruit and Rambutan with truckloads – a daily sight at the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) markets.

India does not allow import of mangoes, bananas and pineapples, to support indigenous production, said Arora, adding that apples, grapes, kiwi, plums and peaches were, however, for the taking.

Even as imported fruits tickle the taste buds of Indian consumers, Arora said, “Given the high quantity of imported apples coming into the country, it has raised the bar for Indian apples.”

Explaining further, he added that while imported apples tend to retail at around Rs. 120-150 a kg in the APMC market, domestically grown apples have also jacked up their price from the Rs. 60-80 to Rs. 100-120.

Organic farming

IG International is a family owned firm, headed by Chairman GC Arora.

With an annual turnover of around Rs. 250 crore, the company imports close to 1,500 containers of fruits annually from major global companies.

Arora said that importers are being asked to downplay the use of pesticides.

Unseasonal rain damages cash crops in Maharashtra

MUMBAI, DECEMBER 28:

The unseasonal rains and hailstorms in northern Maharashtra during the last few weeks have wreaked havoc with the cash crops.

In Nashik, the largest onion producing district of the country, about 20 per cent of rabi crop has been damaged. Over the last three years, climate change has ravaged the district.

Unseasonal rains, hailstorms and exceedingly cold winter have taken a major toll on cash crops such as onions and grapes thus, impacting prices across the country.

On an average, about 90,000 hectares of rabi crop of onion get planted in the district between October and November, which will be ready for harvest by April and May.

However, the impact of crop damage will not be reflected in the prices in the market immediately, the official said.

Administrative procedure

Umakant Dangat, Agriculture Commissioner of Maharashtra, told *BusinessLine* that the survey work for assessing crop damage is still under way but initial estimates suggest that it has impacted over 15,000 hectares of farm land. Only after *panchnamas*, the real picture will emerge, he said.

A *panchnama* is an administrative procedure, where accounts of five witnesses are taken on record as evidence. The evidence is used while claiming compensation for crop damage. It is also used as a tool for collecting data.

A senior officer with the Revenue Department of the Maharashtra government said that the crop damage could be much higher, as the State administrative machinery is taking time in recording the evidence.

Farmers, who have been hit by crop failure last year, will suffer further, the official said.

Onion prices down

Board member of National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India, Nanasaheb Patil, said currently, the arrival of kharif crop in market places around Nashik has been huge.

In the last seven days, the average prices of onions have fallen by about ₹600 quintal to ₹1,200.

The market will remain bearish, until the rabi crop comes up for harvesting, he said.

Biting cold, thick fog in North may start to lift from midweek

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC 28:

Better clarity has emerged with respect to the weather events lining up to mark the end of the year as well as ringing in the new.

It will take a deep western disturbance from across the Pakistan border and a brewing storm in the South to clear the dense to very dense fog in the North and bring some respite from the biting cold.

LIKELY DEPRESSION

The deep western disturbance will dip low into the southern peninsula and scoop up the storm (a likely depression) in the southwest Bay of Bengal.

On Sunday, India Met Department has acknowledged the presence of a well-marked low-pressure area some 360 km east-northeast of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

It is seen prowling the waters for two more days before it ensures needed supply of moisture to intensify as a depression along the adjoining Tamil Nadu coast.

In doing so, it would dock itself into a 'marginal' environment for further intensification, according to model forecasts.

DENSE FOG, CHILL

The limiting factors are proximity to land (affects moisture availability) and moderate to strong vertical wind shear (change in wind direction and speed with height).

Meanwhile, stagnant air over the plains over northwest India over the past few days has perpetrated dense to very dense fog and a cold snap.

Absence of western disturbances and accompanying wind flows allowed an area of high-pressure area to settle over large tracts of the plains with its trademark biting cold.

This brought down mercury to below December-time minimum at many places and the presence of thick fog has not allowed the sun to reach the ground and warm it up.

The logjam would be broken only with the arrival of the deep western disturbance on Tuesday/Wednesday backed up from the South by a brewing depression.

WIND-DRIVEN

Both these systems are wind-driven and are expected to play a major role in clearing the air over the north by way of precipitation in the plains and heavy rain/snowfall over the hills of the region.

The western disturbance will pull the depression along the east coast through the Bay of Bengal. This will help replace the dense fog in eastern and northeast be replaced with heavy rain.

Ahead of this, Sri Lanka could witness flooding rains as the depression leaves it to the north and brings the moderate to heavy rain to prevail along the Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha coasts by turns.

The Met has issued warnings for fishermen along the Tamil Nadu coast against high winds. They have been advised to exercise caution while venturing out.

According to Met experts, Bay of Bengal has had a history of hosting cyclonic circulations (even cyclones) during December. Normal circulatory features do not support such an eventuality in the Arabian Sea.

Debt waiver schemes have constrained credit flow to farmers: Rajan

Putting a question mark on the effectiveness of government's farm debt waiver programmes, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan today said such schemes have constrained flow of credit to farmers.

"In some states on certain occasions we have had debt waivers. How effective these debt waivers have been? In fact the studies that we have typically show that they have been ineffective. In fact they have constrained the credit flow post waiver to the farmers," he said at the annual conference of Indian economic association.

On farmers' suicide, he said there was need to study this important and sensitive issue.

"One question is how else we should deal with over indebtedness in the farm sector. Also worth examining very important issue is of farmer suicide. How much they are caused by indebtedness especially to the formal (banking) system, how much formal system alleviates indebtedness....," the governor said.

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments have declared loan waivers for the farmers hit by cyclone Phailin last year.

While the Telangana government has given the mandated 25 per cent of the written off loan amount to the banks, Andhra Pradesh has not done it so far.

Banks have over ₹1.3 lakh crore exposure to the farm sector in these two states.

In 2008, the then UPA government at Centre had come out with Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme (ADWDRS) 2008 under which 3.69 crore small and marginal farmers and 60 lakh other farmers were given debt relief to the extent of ₹52,516 crore.

Government auditor CAG had found in several cases that ineligible farmers were given benefit while deserving were left out, pointing to large-scale possibility of fraud.

Subsidies for farm sector

Talking about subsidies for farm sector, Rajan said that it will be useful to see whether these subsidies have actually helped agriculture or not.

“...The positive aspect is that you are giving a benefit, a cheap credit to agriculture. The concern, however, is whether this credit is being put to right use or is it leading to over indebtedness or distortionary investment.

“We, for example, have crop loan that we have subsidised.

“But we don’t subsidise longer term loans. Does that change the nature of what kind of activities are subsidised in agriculture? So that’s one issue...,” he added.

Parched prospects stare at Telangana farmers

Farmers in Telangana, yet to overcome problems faced in the kharif season, are in for yet another disappointment during the rabi season.

Severe water scarcity and an imminent power shortage in the summer could impact their fortunes.

The North-East monsoon has played truant with a deviation of 60 per cent from the season average of 129 mm. Last year, the figure was 240 mm.

Telangana receives 14 per cent of annual rainfall from the North-East monsoon.

If the deficiency in the south-west monsoon is taken into consideration, the region has registered 35 per cent lower than normal rainfall of 906 mm.

“But for the two low-pressure events in October and November, the situation would have been even worse,” a State Government official said.

Not a single district in the state has registered normal rainfall, indicating the severity of the problem.

Anticipating the power and water scarcity, the State Government had already advised farmers not to go for water-intensive crops such as paddy this season.

“We have been asking the farmers to go for irrigated dry crops such as jowar, maize, bengal gram, green gram and sunflower instead of paddy. Obviously, you need more water for paddy. You can irrigate 3-8 acres of irrigated dry crops with the water you spend for one acre of paddy,” the official said.

But most farmers seem to be going ahead with paddy cultivation, going by the latest sowing data. Against the as-on-date acreage of 48,000 hectares, farmers have covered 35,000 hectares or 73 per cent of the normal area.

Telangana cultivates paddy on 6.50 lakh hectares, covering 50 per cent of the State's rabi area of 13 lakh hectares. Maize has been sown on 88,000 hectares against the normal acreage of 1 lakh hectares and bengal gram on 69,000 hectares (1.08 lakh hectares).



Weaver ants make crop pests see red

PANAJI: A couple of red ants crawling up one's body is sure to cause jitters, but a colony of them on a cashew tree can actually help reduce damage to the invaluable crop.

Findings indicate that red ants or weaver ants (*Oecophylla smaragdina*)—known for their painful bites and formic acid sprays—are a potential biological control agent against a wide range of pests found in several fruit and cash crops.

The cashew crop, in particular, is susceptible to quite a few pests such as the stem and root borer, tea mosquito bug, apple and nut borer, thrips, leaf miner, and the leaf and mealy bug. Of these, the tea mosquito causes the most damage.

Recent experiments conducted by scientists of the Indian council of agricultural research (ICAR) at Old Goa have shown that red ants colonized on cashew trees can actually help control the tea mosquito bug.

"This is a harmless way of treating the pest. It is also easy for farmers to manage," N P Singh, director of the ICAR research complex, Old Goa, said. Singh and another scientist, R Maruthadurai, reported their findings at a national conference on innovation in traditional practices for cultivation of fruit, vegetable and plantation crops that was held in Old Goa recently.

The scientists used 75 predatory ant colonies from other trees for their experiment. Initially, the ant nests were not directly put up on the control trees.

"Food material such as dried fish and sugary water were provided to help the colonies establish themselves. Tree branches were connected by fine nylon thread for easy movement of ants," the report stated.

After about 30% of the foliage had been colonized by red ants, five trees were selected at random for observations. Five other trees that bore no red ants were also monitored during the flushing, flowering and fruiting phases of the crop from November to February.

"The results revealed that the damage score of 1 (on a 0-4 scale) was recorded in trees colonized by red ants, whereas a maximum damage score of four was recorded in trees without red ants. The tea mosquito bug adult and the nymph population were significantly lower in plants colonized by red ants. A larger number of productive shoots was also observed in trees that housed the predatory ants than those that had none," the study stated.

After kharif, rabi crop also takes a beating

NASHIK: Only 63% of rabi crop has been sown in the district so far and officials at the agriculture department estimate that sowing will increase by only 5% till January.

Last year, the division had completed 88% sowing during rabi season. But officials believe that it may not even reach 70% this year. Sowing activity has been affected for the second time this year.

The average sowing area is estimated to be 12.29 lakh hectares, while the actual sowing has been done over 7.51 lakh hectares.

An official at the agriculture department said that due to delayed rains the kharif sowing was affected by 20% and the produce was also less due to lack of return monsoon. "The failure of the return monsoon, and the hailstorm and unseasonal rain of November and December consequently affected the sowing of rabi crop," he added. The rain and hailstorms around December 15 resulted in the damage of about 40,000 hectares of kharif and rabi crop.

So far Nashik has recorded 56% of sowing, Dhule, 62%, Nandurbar 59%, Jalgaon 70% and Ahmednagar 63%.

The official said only a marginal rise in sowing was seen compared to last week.

Sowing of wheat has increased from 42.60% to 46% in the last one week, while sowing of gram increase from 70% to 73%.

"The sowing of Jowar, maize and other crops have seen very less increase. Sowing of Jowar has only increased from 38.89% to 39%, while that of maize has increased from 180% to 183%," he added.

Speaking to TOI, he further said that sowing of jowar would be stopped, while wheat is the only crop that can be sown for the next 10 days. Rabi sowing will be called off then, he added.

About maize, the official said many varieties of the crop were introduced. "Maize can also be used as fodder for cattle. Due to its dual benefits, the crop has been chosen by majority of farmers. This could also be observed for Kharif season," he added.

Chief Minister promises Rs 40,000 crore package for farmers

NASHIK: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said that the government would give Rs 40,000 crore package for sustainable development of agriculture and the major steps involved would be micro-irrigation and drought alleviation plans.

Speaking at the inauguration of development of Loknete Nanasaheb Patil Sports Complex and addressing BJP party workers at Pawan Nagar, the Chief Minister said, "Instead of limiting the government role to provide relief measures to farmers after they being hit by calamity, we are planning for sustainable development of agriculture for which basic infrastructure development and all-inclusive insurance plans have to be carried out. While the government will focus on development the insurance plan will look after

farmers'

losses."

The chief minister also spoke about the decentralisation of power to the revenue offices to expedite the works for the people. "We are going to come up with the 'Service Guarantee Act' in the next session and this will be aimed providing services to the people is promised time. This will further be assisted with the decentralisation of power to the revenue officials so that the people can get their works done at the revenue headquarters," Fadnavis said.

Claiming that the government had sanctioned 25 town plans till now that took more than ten years for the earlier governments, the chief minister also pointed out that the government had designed 56 type-plans of houses and if the people applied for the sanctioning of the houses adhering to the plans the permissions would be delivered in less than seven days.

The CM also claimed that the government had already taken measures depicting the speed and acumen and some other measures to be taken in the near future would also bring in transparency.

MNS

corporator

joins

BJP

The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) Corporator of Prabhag 53 B, Satish Sonawane on Friday joined the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) during a programme held at CIDCO. Satish Sonawane, the first time corporator from MNS, joined the party in the presence Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

RBI governor questions effectiveness of farm debt waiver schemes

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"In some states on certain occasions we have had debt waivers. How effective these debt waivers have been? In fact the studies that we have typically show that they have been ineffective. In fact they have constrained the credit flow post waiver to the farmers," he said at the annual conference of Indian economic association.

On farmers suicide, he said there was need to study this important and sensitive issue. "One question is how else we should deal with over indebtedness in the farm sector.

Also worth examining very important issue is of farmer suicide. How much they are caused by indebtedness especially to the formal (banking) system, how much formal system alleviates indebtedness," the governor said.

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Talking about subsidies for farm sector, Rajan said that it will be useful to see whether these subsidies have actually helped agriculture or not.

Traders have their way, recovery of commission from farmers to continue



Buckling under pressure from traders, the Devendra Fadnavis government in Maharashtra Monday stayed its decision to abolish the practice of collection of commission (aadat) from farmers for sale of agricultural produce.

Cooperation and Marketing Minister Chandrakant Patil announced the stay during proceedings of the winter session of the Assembly in Nagpur.

On December 20, Director, Marketing, Dr Subhash Mane had issued directives asking all agriculture produce market committees (APMCs) in the state to stop recovering this commission from farmers.

Aadat is pocketed by commission agents who act as middlemen between farmers and traders. Mane's order had ruled that the commission instead be collected from traders or end users. As per the prevalent practice, a farmer has to pay 3-6 per cent in commission to these agents.

Sources said the government's original orders aimed to present a more "farmer friendly" face. But it backtracked after APMC traders and commission agents threatened to close down markets. In some APMCs, the traders even carried out the threat.

The Supreme Court too has ruled against collection of commission from farmers. The state's first tried to do away with it in 1996 during the Shiv Sena-BJP regime. Pressure from traders had forced the government to withdraw the move even then.

Similar attempts were also made during the 15-year Congress-NCP rule. Former agriculture minister Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil had pushed aggressively for the reform. The politically influential traders and commission agents however managed to block the initiative each time.

Justifying the stay, Patil said the practice could not be abolished till a proper alternative to it was established.

The village that defied drought



On Sunday, the Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti claimed that 12 farmers from western Vidarbha — all from the cotton producing belt — had committed suicide in the past 72 hours due to crop losses. But among the parched villages of drought-affected west Vidarbha, Balkhed village stands out as an exception, thanks to seeds of a revolution sown three years ago by an agriculture officer.

Anil Bonde, the then sub-divisional agriculture officer (SDAO) of Risod tehsil in Washim district, now SDAO of Khamgaon in Buldana district, worked day and

night with villagers to implement the Rainfed Area Development Programme (RADP), sponsored by the Centre to raise a seed manufacturing, packing and grading unit which has brought participating villagers nearly Rs 3 crore in three years. This money helped villagers overcome economic crises that hit almost all villages in the region.



The unit operated by the villagers has spawned not only an economic revolution, but also a system that transgresses caste and political divisions. The Shree Balnath Shetkari Krishi Vidnyan Mandal, which runs the seeds business, has representatives from across castes and religions, with affiliations to different political parties.

When Bonde suggested the idea to villages under his wing, Balkhed responded favourably in 2011. “We liked the idea and called a Gram Sabha meeting, where it was decided to set aside 200 acres as seed-growing plots,” says Vilas Gaikwad, vice-president of the group. Gaikwad also offered his building to set up the unit free of cost.

The project was registered with the Seeds Certification Authority of the state government. “We grew 1,300 quintals of foundation seeds of gram in 2011-12. For processing it, we needed to go to a private unit 30 km away. So, we thought, why not have own unit?” Gaikwad says.

The villagers approached Padgilwars, a company manufacturing processing units. “They offered it to the village for Rs 50,000 less,” says Bonde.

“So, the 13 members of the committee contributed Rs 40,000 each to purchase our own unit,” says Santosh Awtade, president of the group.

The state government offered Rs 2 lakh in subsidy and the unit was ready. The training followed and in the first year, the village produced 830 quintals of processed gram seed, which it sold to farmers for Rs 6,500 per quintal, Rs 600 less than the market price. “It sold like hot cakes,” says Gaikwad.

The villagers also received a special Central government grant of Rs 2,200 per quintal. The effort saw the 100 participating farmers grow richer by Rs 70 lakh together.

Next year, they also produced soybean seeds, followed by wheat last year. The earnings have multiplied to over Rs 1 crore per annum now.

weather

INDIAN CITIES

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Rainy

Monday, Dec 29

Max Min

26° | 23°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 94

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:29

Sunset: 05:51

Barometer: 1011

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Tuesday, Dec 30

Max Min

27° | 22°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday
Dec 31



28° | 21°

Cloudy

Thursday
Jan 1



26° | 26°

Partly Cloudy

Friday
Jan 2



27° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

Saturday
Jan 3



26° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

Sunday
Jan 4



27° | 25°

Partly Cloudy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Rain: 0 Sunrise: 07:12

Humidity: 93 Sunset: 05:33

Wind: normal Barometer: 1020



Business Standard

Rabi acreage around 5% less than last year as sowing nears end



As [sowing](#) of rabi crops enters its last leg, the overall area covered, as of Friday, was five per cent less than last year at 53.02 million hectares. This means the total this year might be 1-1.5 million hectares less than in 2013.

This could have a negative impact on overall gross domestic product growth in 2014-15, unless per hectare yields show a significant improvement in coming weeks.

[Farm growth](#) had slipped to 3.2 per cent in the second quarter of FY15 against five per cent in the year-ago period. In the April-June quarter, it was 3.5 per cent.

In a recent note, CARE Ratings said lower [rabi acreage](#) might translate into lower production and pressure on prices, as rabi accounts for almost half the country's total agriculture production in a year.

Already, kharif foodgrains output is estimated to be less than last year, due to a below-normal southwest monsoon. According to the government's first advance estimate, foodgrain production in 2014-15 is expected to be 120.27 million tonnes, nine million tonnes less than last year.

Production of rice is expected to be 88 million tonnes against 91.69 million tonnes last year, while that of coarse cereals is expected to be 27.05 million tonnes against 31.25 million tonnes last year. Wheat, the biggest foodgrain grown during the rabi season, has been planted in 27.96 million hectares against 28.69 million hectares during the same period last year. The normal area under wheat during the whole year is 29.71 million hectares. The data showed that among other crops, pulses have been planted in around 12.41 million hectares, against 13.47 million hectares during the same period last year.

Oilseeds have been sown on 7.40 million hectares, down from 7.90 million hectares during the same period last year.

A big drawdown has been the post-monsoon (October-December) rains in the country. According to India Meteorological Department data, from October to December 24, the southwest monsoon was 31 per cent below normal.

The saving grace has been the level in 84 major reservoirs across the country, water in which was estimated at 97.41 billion cubic metres as on December 11. This was 63 per cent of their total storage capacity and 84 per cent of last year's storage.

Union Agriculture Minister Emphasises Public Private Partnership to Promote Fisheries Sector

Union Agriculture Minister, Shri Radha [Mohan Singh](#) stressed upon the need for encouraging public private partnership to promote fisheries and aquaculture in the country.

Addressing a Seminar on Fisheries organized by Central Institute of Fisheries Education, (Mumbai) at Muzaffarpur (Bihar) today, he said a great awareness has been created in fisheries sector, however, there is a need for adopting scientific attitude in this regard. He called upon the farmers to implement new techniques suggested by the scientists so that the fish production may touch

newer

heights.

Making a mention of ornamental fish, he highlighted the huge potential of increasing its production in view of its increasing demand in domestic and foreign markets. India's contribution in world market is merely 1% despite prevalence of more than 325 breeds of ornamental fish in the country, he added. Shri Singh said that fisheries can be made a source of self-employment by imparting training to women in this sector. The country's total fish production stands at nearly 10 million tonnes and it is second largest after China, he added.

Shri Singh said that per capita availability of fish, which is presently 9.2 kg, needs to be increased. He stressed upon giving more attention to inland aquaculture, which has a great role to play in fish production.

Shri Radha Mohan Singh called upon the participants to realize the vision of blue revolution of our Prime Minister by increasing fish production through adoption of new techniques and technologies.

Area Coverage under Rabi Crops

As per Rabi Crops data released by Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, total area coverage as on today under Rabi crops moves to 530.22 lakh hectares while last year's sowing area was at 557.85 lakh hectare. Wheat's sowing area is at 279.6 lakh hectares as compared to last year's 286.90 lakh hectares. The area under sowing of total Coarse cereals is at 50.12 lakh hectares as compared to last year's 54.99 lakh hectares. The area under sowing of Gram is at 77.81 lakh hectares this year

while the last year's figure was 90.66 lakh hectares. Area coverage under Total Pulses is at 124.16 lakh hectares while the last year's sowing area coverage was 134.72 lakh hectares. Similarly sowing area under total oilseeds is at 74.06 lakh hectares as compared to 79.03 lakh hectares last year.