

The budget's ecological bankruptcy

The NDA's first budget has thrown a few sops in the direction of the environment and the millions dependent on it. But much like its predecessors, in painting the big picture it remains embarrassingly devoid of innovative ideas on how to move India towards ecological sustainability and justice

“While 2015 will be a landmark year for sustainable development and climate change policy, 2014 is the last chance for all stakeholders to introspect to be able to wisely choose the world they want post 2015.” These are significant words, contained as they are in the government of India's Economic Survey 2013-14. The reference is to the framing of a new set of sustainable development goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that all countries agreed to in 2000 (due to end in 2015), and to a possible new climate agreement to be framed in 2015. The Economic Survey was released a day before Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented the first annual budget of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). So, does the rest of the survey and the budget reflect such introspection? Are the new power-holders in New Delhi any wiser about protecting the interests of the next generation while meeting the needs of the present? Or indeed about how several hundred million people of the present generation, who are directly dependant on nature and natural resources, can have more secure livelihoods?

Lower carbon emissions economy

Let us first look at the good news. The survey contains (for the third year running) an independent chapter on ‘Sustainable Development and Climate Change’, which contains a few more pearls of wisdom like the one quoted earlier. It recounts in detail several goals set by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government (without mentioning it of course), especially as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). Of significance is the goal to reduce “emissions intensity of GDP” quite substantially, meaning moving towards a lower carbon emissions economy.

“ *The budget speech is deafeningly silent on sustainable development, forests, wildlife, biodiversity, ecology.* ”

The budget too has a few provisions to gladden the hearts of “sustainable development” and “green economy” advocates, such as cleaner energy technologies, a big fund for cleaning the Ganga, a boost to watershed development and provisions for water purification in areas badly affected by toxic wastes. Solar energy gets Rs.1,000 crore,

including for agriculture pump sets and water pumping stations. A doubling of the Clean Energy Cess (from Rs.50 per tonne to Rs.100 per tonne of coal) is aimed at financing “clean environment” initiatives.

No solutions

Unfortunately, as in the case of previous budgets and economic surveys, the few concessions given to securing our environmental future are overwhelmingly submerged by what is missing and, worse, what is contradictory. The survey’s chapter on ‘Sustainable Development and Climate Change’ appears to exist in isolation of the other chapters; indeed, if the government was serious about “sustainable development,” sustainability would run like a thread through all the sectoral chapters. A few examples will suffice to show that it does not. The survey’s chapter on industry acknowledges that it is a cause of “natural resource depletion (fossil fuel, minerals, timber), water, air, coastal and marine, and land contamination, health hazards, degradation of natural ecosystems, and loss of biodiversity.” Yet, neither in this chapter nor anywhere else is there an indication of how this is to be tackled. The chapter on agriculture and food has no mention of the enormous health implications of the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, nor does the ‘Sustainable Development and Climate Change’ chapter say anything about the need to reduce emissions from fertilizer use. Indeed, the Union budget makes an increased allocation for the fertilizer subsidy, ignoring the repeated advice from both within and outside government to begin moving towards organic, ecological fertilization measures (it does have a token provision of Rs.100 crore for organic farming in northeast India, peanuts when compared to the Rs.70,000 crore plus subsidy for chemical fertilizers). Nowhere in the survey are the issues of dryland farming or the importance of reviving millets for the health of soils and people mentioned.

Sustainability

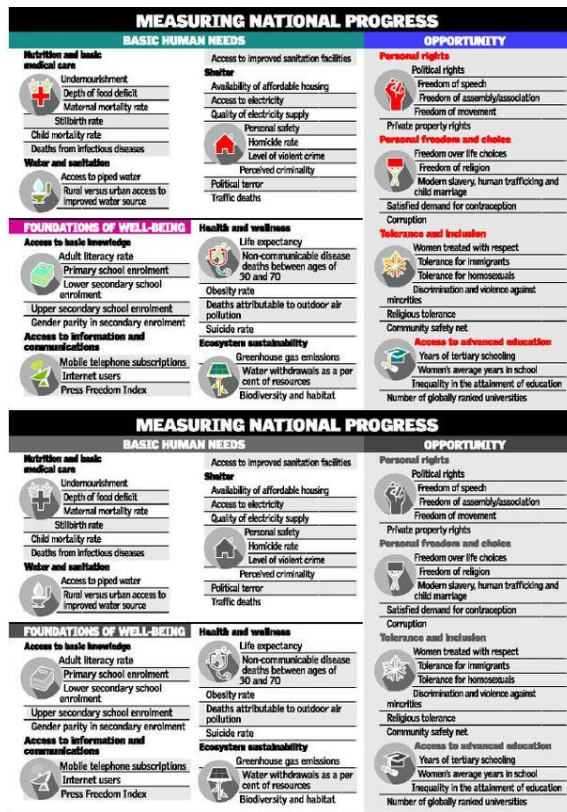
A lot more could be said about the ecological bankruptcy of the Economic Survey; for instance, how can anyone gauge whether we are moving any closer to sustainability in the complete absence of any indicators to measure this? But let us move now towards the budget Mr. Jaitley presented on July 10. Astonishingly, his 43-page budget speech is deafeningly silent on sustainable development, forests, wildlife, biodiversity, ecology. It is as if a quarter of the country that contains forests and grasslands and wetlands and other ecosystems, and the 500 million people directly dependent on these, simply do not exist for the purposes of deciding where the country’s money is to be allocated. Tribal welfare does get a substantial allocation, but there is no indication whether it will be allocated to continuing the intricate nature-culture relationship of such peoples; thus far it has not, and the NDA is unlikely to be any different. And what appears to be good news on the solar energy front pales into insignificance when one realises that the allocation is only 0.6 per cent of the total energy budget, with the lion’s share still going to dirty sources like coal and big hydro and nuclear. The “Key Features of Budget 2014-2015”

document has no section on the environment. Mr. Jaitley's speech mentions the environment only in respect of coal, clean energy cess and mining. The promise of sustainability in the mining sector has been made for many years, but no government has taken serious measures to implement it. We need to see whether the NDA does any better. It will be surprising given the other measures it is already taking or proposing, such as faster environmental clearances and even self-monitoring by companies which have shown scant regard for even mandatory provisions.

Riverlinking

The budget lays great stress on industrial corridors. If Gujarat's model is anything to go by, this will mean massive amounts of forcible or induced land acquisition and pollution. This is a recipe for conflicts and social disruption. Early July has seen massive farmer protests in Raigad district of Maharashtra, against the proposed acquisition of 67,500 acres for a part of the Mumbai-Delhi Industrial Corridor. The budget also initiates the River Linking project (Rs.100 crore for Detailed Project Reports), which has been under discussion for many years. Mr. Jaitley's speech lamented that India was "not uniformly blessed with perennial rivers." Both the UPA and the NDA are ignoring expert opinion that warns of the enormous ecological disruption and social displacement that such a massive engineering project would cause; equally important, they are turning a blind eye to the hundreds of initiatives that have shown how water security can be achieved through decentralised solutions even in the driest of regions. I have said earlier that Mr. Jaitley's omission of crucial ecological terms was astonishing. Perhaps it is not. The fact that almost uniformly, corporate India welcomed the budget is an indication that the NDA is as gung-ho about a neo-liberal agenda as the UPA was ... if not even more. In such an agenda, the focus is on growth through making it easier for industry and commerce, with the assumption that a larger economic pie will help the poor rise above the poverty line. The fact that despite a blistering pace of growth through much of the 1990s and 2000s, the employment situation worsened (latest figures show nearly 15 per cent unemployment), and 70 per cent of Indians remained deprived of one or more basic needs, appears lost on the proponents of such an agenda. And the fact that such growth actually trashes the ecological pie on which all of us depend for our very lives, appears to be of little consequence. Not even the World Bank's 2013 study showing that environmental damage annually knocks off 5.7 per cent of GDP growth, seems to have made a dent in such thinking. The NDA's first budget has thrown a few sops in the direction of the environment and the millions dependent on it. But much like its predecessors, in painting the big picture it remains embarrassingly devoid of innovative ideas on how to move India towards ecological sustainability and justice.

A new index to measure social progress



Is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) an adequate measure of a country's development across many dimensions? This has been debated vigorously in recent years. The discontent with GDP stems from the fact that it focusses exclusively on economic growth. Even there, it does not capture the level of inequity which can exist in a society despite overall economic growth. The inequity can in fact even be exacerbated by it. More importantly, it pays no attention to the social and environmental measures of development which are as important as economic development. Indeed, the United Nations has identified three pillars on which the post- 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must rest: economic, social and environmental.

Alternatemeasures

Several alternative measures have been proposed to capture the social dimension of development, combined with or independent of economic indices. Bhutan has embraced and espoused the concept of Gross National Happiness. A World Happiness Report is now periodically published from the Columbia University which compares self-reported levels of happiness of people from different countries. A composite Wellness Index was proposed by noted economists Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi in response to a request from the then President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, for a measure of development that looks beyond GDP. A Global Multidimensional Poverty Index was developed at Oxford to gauge inequity within and across societies.

“ *We may continue to measure GDP, but we must also measure social progress lest we end up as a soulless society characterised by gaping equality* **”**

However, none of these has really caught on because economists, industrialists and politicians alike are conditioned to place a high premium on economic development as the measure of progress and do not like to see the clarity of a single measure like GDP cluttered by a host of other indicators they view as imprecise or even irrelevant. So, an index of social progress is needed which does not try to displace GDP (not yet anyway) but has additive value. Such an index can be used to remind political leaders that their bifocal vision must accommodate both economic and social progress as being important for a country, recognising, of course, that these two tracks are closely interlinked and sometimes inseparable. Such an index of social progress has recently been created by a group of academics and institutions constituting the Social Progress Imperative (www.socialprogressimperative.org). This index has three major domains: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing and Opportunity. Each of these has several clusters of specific indicators (as shown in the table). The environmental dimension is partly incorporated into the Social Progress Index (SPI) as a cluster of indicators related to ecosystem sustainability. While there can be debates on which other indicators could have been included in any of the clusters, the SPI does provide a list of key areas which need to be tracked and acted upon to ensure a higher level of social progress. The index is still evolving, with validation studies being conducted on data from different countries. The authors have extended an open invitation to groups from anywhere in the world to use their data sets for validation and suggest refinements. The designers of this index draw our attention to three overarching findings of their study so far: social progress is distinct from economic development, though correlated with it; some aspects of social progress are more closely related to the level of economic development than others; countries have relative strengths and weaknesses in social progress, both across the major dimensions and across components within the dimensions. Of the three domains, Basic Human Needs is best correlated with per capita GDP, Foundations of Wellbeing being intermediate and Opportunity the least so. However, in each domain there is variability in the degree of correlation between the individual components and per capita GDP. As the developers of SPI affirm, the index offers a new tool to explore the complex two-way relationship between economic and social progress. At the same time, it provides a metric for comparison of countries, and States within a country.

Inter-country comparisons

In inter-country comparisons, the top three countries were New Zealand, Switzerland and Iceland. Not surprisingly, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark feature in the top 10. India scored lower than the other four from the BRICS group because of lags

in areas such as water, sanitation and access to higher education. In specific indicators, there is variability across these countries. For example, China lags in personal rights and Brazil in personal safety. Costa Rica has an SPI close to that of far richer countries like Spain and Italy. Costa Rica's outstanding health status and access to education may be related to investment priorities (it has no defence budget) and social harmony. For the present, India need not concern itself with comparisons with other countries or even debate on how accurately the individual components of the index measure social progress. It would help if the SPI indicators serve as a checklist to monitor our progress over time in each of these important areas of human welfare. Even as the country commits itself to move on the fast track of economic growth, it must be mindful of the need to invest in improving the social indicators as well. We may continue to measure GDP if that is still considered the talisman of economic progress by the worlds of politics and finance, but we must also simultaneously measure social progress lest we end up as a soulless society characterised by gaping inequality and glaring social backwardness despite gaining wealth. Let GDP and SPI be the inseparable Gemini twins that herald our ascent to higher levels of balanced development.

Rain brings cheer to farmers



Farm labourers transplanting vegetable seedlings at Islamnagar in Ichoda mandal, in Adilabad district on Sunday.-PHOTO: S. HARPAL SINGH

The overnight rainfall has brought back smiles on the faces of farmers in Adilabad who now have hope of salvaging something this season. The quantum of rainfall however, is not sufficient for intensive farm operations or replenishing drinking water sources in the district. The smiles hide a great amount of circumspection among the farmers as to the occurrence of rainfall further into the season. "I do not know if there is rainfall ahead in the season but I have taken up transplantation of tomato based on the news of a cyclone causing rains in these parts," revealed farmer Jadhav Gajanand of Islamnagar in Ichoda mandal. After a gap of about 45 days, clouds have covered the entire district. There was good rainfall at many places.

Agri fair

Agri Intex 2014, the agriculture technology fair, will be on from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Monday at CODISSIA Trade Fair Complex in Coimbatore.

Efforts on to make Kallanai an agricultural heritage site



The Grand Anicut or Kallanai will soon be a part of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) if efforts by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) pay off.

TNAU Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy told *The Hindu* on Sunday that following suggestions from eminent agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan, the institution had taken up the task and if the efforts fructified, it would be the 11th such heritage site in the country. Mr. Ramasamy said that to understand the significance of the anicut, a comparison with the Godavari river system would be appropriate. Though the latter's water resources were five times that of the Cauvery, it was Thanjavur that was called the Granary of the South. It was because the Cauvery waters were well managed in the Delta and the anicut was on top of that. It was only after Sir Arthur Cotton built a dam across the Godavari in 1891, on the lines of the Grand Anicut, that the Godavari Delta gained prominence. The uniqueness of the plough used in the Cauvery Delta region, the System of Rice Intensification technique, the thalady cultivation and the mangroves grown under the Delta eco made the place unique warranting it heritage status, he said. The 329 metre-long, 18.3 metre-wide and 5.49 metre-tall anicut was constructed on inter-locking technology without cementing material. Chola King Karikalan constructed the anicut to divert the Cauvery water to the Delta for irrigation. Mr. Ramasamy said the institution had submitted the draft proposal to the GIAHS secretariat, which had asked for a few more

details. The university would document the same and submit the revised draft. As and when the GIAHS accorded the status, it would be the third such site in Tamil Nadu. And the recognition, according to the GIAHS website, would pave way for support for protective government policies and incentives for conservation of biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

Planting of fodder crops begins in reserve forest areas

Solar Water Pumping - Solar pumps for every application from the global market

The Forest Department has commenced planting fodder crops inside the Reserve Forest areas of Coimbatore district, which is part of the department's initiatives to prevent human-animal conflict. The wild animals enter human habitations in search of either food or water. By making fodder available inside the forests, the Department was trying to prevent elephants from venturing into human habitations, District Forest Officer (DFO) M. Senthil Kumar told *The Hindu* here on Sunday. The Department had already constructed solar-powered bore wells inside the forests to create water troughs. The crops being planted under 'Raising Fodder Plantation' project include bamboos, banyan, peepal and gmelina. Planting on 75 acres for the current year began recently at Booluvampatti Range. Planting would commence shortly in the remaining five ranges shortly. The Department had already planted fodder crops on 225 acres in the district in the past three years, he said. The crops were provided water through diesel-powered generators drawing water either from nearby rivers such as the Bhavani River in Karamadai Range or bore wells. Drip-irrigation was adopted for watering these crops. The plantations were surrounded by elephant-proof trenches. Mr. Senthil Kumar said that the fodder crops were planted in areas that were cleared recently of a weed called 'lantana,' an invasive alien species which spread quickly and prevented the growth of other plants that are consumed by wildlife. As it was thick, thorny and grew to four to five feet, it also obstructed elephant movement. The fodder plantations would also prevent the lantana from growing back.

Relief to coconut growers on the lines of Kerala model?

Is the State government awaiting the Union's aid to provide compensation to distressed coconut growers from the State on the lines of the Kerala model? Minister for Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Shamanur Shivashankarappa told reporters here on Sunday that compensation of Rs. 44,000 had been fixed for loss of coconut crop in one hectare (ha) of land. When asked whether the State had plans of providing relief to each coconut tree damaged due to disease or drought as was being done in Kerala, the Minister sought a reply from senior officials of his department who were present here in connection with a meeting convened by Mr. Shivashankarappa to review the progress made by the district in horticulture. One of the officials disclosed that a proposal had been sent to the Union Ministry of Agriculture during the previous government's tenure at the Centre seeking Rs. 320 crore to compensate the loss incurred by the State's coconut growers. But, so far there has been no reply from the Ministry, the official said. However,

the Minister said the compensation, as fixed by the State, will continue. On the delay in opening the flower market built under National Horticulture Mission at the APMC market here, an official from the department said the market was ready for occupancy and stalls had been allotted but the traders, who were at present running their wholesale flower business at the Devaraja Market, were reluctant to relocate. The stalls were built with an aim to develop commercial floriculture in the Mysore region.

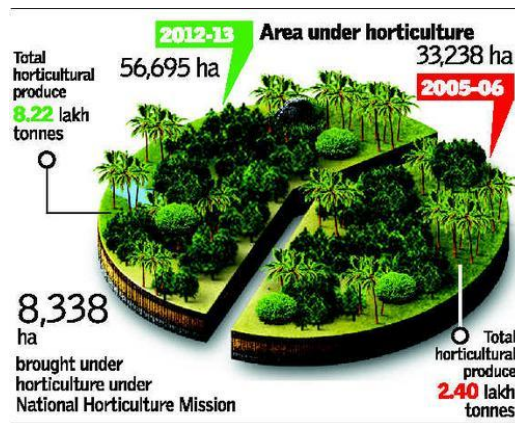
Minister offers 'bagina' to Kabini amidst farmers' protest

Amidst protests from farmers outside the Kabini dam for stopping them from offering worship to the dam, Minister in-charge of Mysore district V. Srinivas Prasad on Sunday offered 'bagina' to the dam, a tradition practised for many years, whenever the dam brims to the full reservoir level (FRL). A large posse of police personnel had been deployed at the dam site as a precautionary measure with farmers firm on offering 'bagina' to the dam before the Minister. The Minister, accompanied by officials and the police officers, went to the dam and offered 'bagina' to the brimful dam at around 2.30 pm and left the place. The protesting farmers, led by Kurubur Shanthkumar, who have been staging protests at the dam site for the last three days under the banner of Kabini Raitha Hitarakshana Samiti, criticising the government for preventing them from offering 'bagina', lambasted the government for ignoring their protests. Although farmers have been offering 'bagina' to the dam for several years, the government, through the police, had stopped farmers from keeping the tradition alive, the farmers charged. The protesting farmers raised slogans against the government, the Minister in-charge of Mysore district and the district administration. While protestors had covered their eyes with black cloth, a couple of them had wrapped themselves in black cloth and held items used for 'bagina'. In a statement here, Mr. Shanthkumar said that the Minister did not meet the protesting farmers and left the place after offering the 'bagina'. "The government has insulted the farmers by stopping them from continuing with their custom. This is anti-farmer and anti-people stance of the government," he alleged. Chikkamadu, H.D. Kote MLA, who was present, met the farmers and heard their grievances. Farmer leaders Attahalli Devaraj and others were present. The samiti members, led by Mr. Shanthkumar, had proposed to offer bagina on July 18, but the police had stopped them from going near the dam. This led to a tense situation at the dam site, with farmers staying put to offer the puja. They were arrested and released later.

Significant strides in horticulture cultivation



Minister for Horticulture Shamanur Shivashankarappa releasing a brochure on the schemes being implemented by the Horticulture Department in Mysore on Sunday.—
PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM



23,457 hectares have come under horticulture in nine years in Mysore district

Mysore district has achieved significant growth in expanding the area under horticulture under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM). About 23,457 hectares has come under horticulture in the last nine years. Disclosing this to reporters here on Sunday, Minister for Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Shamanur Shivashankarappa said the area under horticulture in 2005–06 was 33,238 hectares (ha) and expanded to 56,695 ha in 2012–13. He said the total horticultural produce in 2005–06 was 2.40 lakh tonnes and increased to 8.22 lakh tonnes in 2012–13. “When compared to other districts, Mysore district has made good progress in expanding horticulture,” the Minister added. Mr. Shivashankarappa said about 8,338 ha was brought under horticulture under NHM. The crops include fruits in 4,911 ha, spices in 1,571 ha and floriculture in 1,876 ha. The Minister said 16 per cent of farm land in the district was covered by horticulture crops. The major crops grown include coconut, mango, plantain, sapota, vegetables, flowers, areca, palm, ginger and turmeric.

Higher Allocation

Mr. Shivashankarappa said Rs. 1,123 crore had been allocated to horticulture for 2014–15. A sum of Rs. 44 crore had been released during the first quarter of this year (until June 30, 2014) and 25 per cent progress had been achieved. The allocation to the department this year was more than the previous year. Last year, Rs. 802 crore had been allocated to the sector. Notably, 99 percent growth was achieved spending Rs. 662 crore out of Rs. 704.92 crore released during the year. Replying to reporters' queries, Mr. Shivashankarappa said horticulture was undergoing rapid expansion as returns from the crops were lucrative. There has been an increase in the cultivation of crops like pomegranate, grapes and chiku (sapota). Some crops assure returns up to Rs. 10 lakh a year, he said. Another reason for farmers switching over to horticulture crops is the subsidy, the Minister added. Mr. Shivashankarappa said 333 farmers had received compensation of Rs. 20.8 lakh for the damage caused their coconut trees from drought. Earlier, the Minister visited the department office at Curzon Park here and reviewed the progress made by the department in the district. Deputy Director of Horticulture H.M. Nagaraj was present.

'Govt. ready with drought contingency plans'



Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao on Sunday said the State government was getting ready with contingency plans to tackle a possible drought situation in view of deficit rainfall in most parts of Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to reporters here on Sunday, Mr. Pulla Rao said the government was keen on encouraging drip irrigation in a large way in view of the drought situation.

No shortage of seed

The Agriculture Minister said the government has sanctioned Rs.340 crore in the first phase to encourage drip irrigation and offer subsidies. Earlier, the Minister said there were no shortage of seed and fertilizers for the kharif. On the farm loan waiver, the Minister reiterated that the State government was committed in implementing the farm loan waiver at any cost. Mr. Pulla Rao said that the government was awaiting a formal decision of Reserve Bank of India.

State asked to set up horticulture varsity in Karimnagar

Former MP Ponnampaluri Prabhakar has urged the State government to take all measures to establish the proposed Horticulture University in Karimnagar district for the benefit of farming community. Talking to newsmen here on Sunday, he said that the Karimnagar district was suitable for starting the horticulture university as the farmers in the district were already growing vegetables and it tops in the mango production. He also said that there was abundant land for the setting up of university in Kathalapur or Anthargaon in the district. He said that the TRS MPs and legislators should strive for it. Town party president Kanna Krishna, corporator Gandhe Madhavi and others were also present.

Demand for horticulture varsity at Aswaraopet

Even as the State government initiated the process for finalisation of the site for the Horticultural University in Telangana, organisations representing farmers and agricultural labourers have stepped up their demand for establishment of the university at Aswaraopet, the district's horticultural hub. It may be noted that the Centre had allotted a Horticultural University to the State. The demand for setting up the university in Khammam district stems from the fact that Aswaraopet and its neighbouring mandals in the district have carved a niche for itself as a hub of horticulture crops including oil palm, coconut, cashew nut, banana, mango and guava. Oil palm is grown in over 13,000 hectares in the district, predominantly in Aswaraopet and its neighbouring Dammapeta mandal. The district has another unique distinction – of being the only district in Telangana State to cultivate oil palm on a large scale. Aswaraopet has several prized possessions including a Horticulture Research Station (affiliated to Dr YSR Horticultural University), Oil Palm processing unit, Coconut Seed Garden among other facilities. The Aswaraopet-based Horticulture Research Station earned wide reputation for its research on a wide spectrum of subjects including cultivation aspects of passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*), a native of fruit of Brazil, at the station. Aswaraopet is the ideal choice for setting up the horticulture university by virtue of its fertile lands, infrastructure and irrigation facilities, says Nunna Nageswara Rao, district general secretary of the Telangana Rythu Sangham. "The site should be selected solely based on the horticultural potential without giving any scope for political considerations," he suggests. Aswaraopet deserves horticultural university due to the inherent potential and proven track record of the mandal to promote horticulture, emphasises K. Rangaiyah, State general secretary, AIKMS.

Cost-effective ways to check pests in cotton crop

A senior scientist at the District Agricultural Advisory and Transfer of Technology Centre (DAATTC) situated at Regional Agricultural Research Station in Warangal, has come up with a cost-effective method to control pesticides in cotton crop. Centre coordinator R. Uma Reddy devised a method which is cost-effective and will not harm the environment much. "The farmers have to mix one part of monocrotophos in four parts

of water. A small stick with brush like structure at one end has to be dipped in it and applied on the green portion of cotton seedlings stem at 20, 40 and 60 days intervals after the sowing,” he said, explaining that in this way pests would not attack the cotton crop. “The pests have been attacking the crop from seedling to final harvesting stage. Instead of spraying huge quantities of pesticides, in the new method the pesticide was applied directly to the stem of the plant,” Mr. Uma Reddy said.

“One part of monocrotophos should be mixed in four parts of water and a small brush should be dipped in it and applied on the green portion of cotton seedlings stem at 20, 40 and 60 days intervals after the sowing”

‘Vegetable prices lower than last year’



The government attributes the reduction in prices to increased procurement and sale through retail. Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

Tomatoes are available at half of July 2013 rates and onions 9.5 per cent lower: the Food and Civil Supplies Department highlighted these figures as the impact of its increased procurement and sale through retail to control food price inflation. In a statement on Sunday, Food and Supplies Commissioner S.S. Yadav said the arrival of tomato in July, which amounts to 6,892 metric tonnes, is 45 per cent higher than what arrived here at the same time last year. He added, “Around 51,431 metric tonnes of onion has arrived in Delhi till July, which is 375 metric tonnes more than the arrival in the corresponding period of last year.” This had led to a fall in wholesale prices by 5 per cent in the previous week. This feat has been achieved using a four-pronged strategy of availability, enforcement, awareness and de-control. Government offices and vans have turned retail outlets and 250 hoarders have been prosecuted.

Alert system

A text message alert system has also been introduced to disseminate price information. Also, fruit and vegetable sales have been regulated through control of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees with the department itself monitoring prices of 22 essential food commodities.

Research on for trees that can grow in polluted areas

The Forest Department is undertaking research to identify various types of tree species that can grow in areas that have been polluted. These species can be used in afforestation initiatives in places such as Tirupur where industrial pollution is high. S. Balaji, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Research and Education), told *The Hindu* here that this research would be of immense benefit to industries.

TNPCB fiat

The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) mandated the industries to take up afforestation initiatives under the 'polluter pays' principle to mitigate the effect of pollution caused by them on the environment. This process of using plants and trees to combat pollution was known as 'phyto-remediation.' While the primary research was under way at the State Forest Research Institute (SFRI) in Kolapakkam, Chennai, the department had 54 research stations located across all the seven climatic zones of Tamil Nadu. This enabled the department to come up with tree species that were particularly suited to those locations. One of the major research projects was bio-control agents that could replace pesticides. For example, jatropha plants had certain properties that repelled pests. These could be planted along the boundaries of farms, he said. The department had carried out research in Salem to identify the sandalwood species that gave the best output. The department had six modern bio-nurseries that together produced nearly 400 tonnes of bio-fertilizer annually. Mr. Balaji said that bamboo had the potential to replace the steel in reinforcing roofs and shelters. The NHAI was now constructing modern bus shelters made out of glass and steel. Bamboos could be used to replace the steel in these shelters.

Planting of fodder crops begins in reserve forest areas

The Forest Department has commenced planting fodder crops inside the Reserve Forest areas of Coimbatore district, which is part of the department's initiatives to prevent human-animal conflict. The wild animals enter human habitations in search of either food or water. By making fodder available inside the forests, the Department was trying to prevent elephants from venturing into human habitations, District Forest Officer (DFO) M. Senthil Kumar told *The Hindu* here on Sunday. The Department had already constructed solar-powered bore wells inside the forests to create water troughs. The crops being planted under 'Raising Fodder Plantation' project include bamboos, banyan, peepal and gmelina. Planting on 75 acres for the current year began recently at Booluvampatti

Range. Planting would commence shortly in the remaining five ranges shortly. The Department had already planted fodder crops on 225 acres in the district in the past three years, he said. The crops were provided water through diesel-powered generators drawing water either from nearby rivers such as the Bhavani River in Karamadai Range or bore wells. Drip-irrigation was adopted for watering these crops. The plantations were surrounded by elephant-proof trenches. Mr. Senthil Kumar said that the fodder crops were planted in areas that were cleared recently of a weed called 'lantana,' an invasive alien species which spread quickly and prevented the growth of other plants that are consumed by wildlife. As it was thick, thorny and grew to four to five feet, it also obstructed elephant movement. The fodder plantations would also prevent the lantana from growing back.



Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Monday, Jul 21

Max Min
36° | 29°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 56

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:51

Sunset: 06:38

Barometer: 1006

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Tuesday, Jul 22

Max Min
37° | 28°

Extended Forecast for a week

Wednesday
Jul 23



39° | 29°

Cloudy

Thursday
Jul 24



39° | 28°

Cloudy

Friday
Jul 25



38° | 27°

Cloudy

Saturday
Jul 26



38° | 27°

Partly Cloudy

Sunday
Jul 27



38° | 27°

Partly Cloudy

Airport Weather

Chennai

Chennai

Rain: 0

Humidity: 79

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:51

Sunset: 06:38

Barometer: 1005



THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Agri Dept to Give Biogas Plants to Schools

In a bid to promote organic farming and create awareness on waste disposal among students, the Agriculture Department has decided to distribute portable bio-gas plants in schools, free of cost. The project, worth `62 lakh, is expected to benefit around 300 schools in the district. “We have identified 300 schools. They were selected after holding a discussion with the Education Department,” said Pushpakumari, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Ernakulam. The schools selected under the initiative will be able to use the bio-gas produced by them for cooking, and the organic waste as manure for agriculture. The Department is planning to provide ‘1 metre cube’ bio-gas plants to the schools. “We decided to distribute similar bio-gas plants to all schools. It has been observed that a lot of food waste is being dumped on the premises of schools after the noon meals. We hope that the project would help in creating awareness among students, as well as the public, on the need for proper waste-disposal and production of organic fertilisers,” Pushpakumari said. The distribution agency for the bio-gas plants is KAICO.

Promoting poison-free CURRY LEAVES



With the successful launch of ‘Oru veetil oru curryveppila’ (a curry leaf plant for every house) programme, Koyilandy municipality in Kozhikode is proving what a municipality can do to develop a healthy lifestyle in society. To promote organic farming among the residents it was in last June that the municipality distributed as many as 25,000 curry leaf plants to the residents with the help of Kudumbashree workers. “We Keralites add curry leaves in curry not just to get the flavour, but to make it a healthy dish,” says K K Santha, chairperson of Koyilandy municipality. “Earlier, the slightly bitter but aromatic curry leaf plants used to be present in every household in the state, but now like other vegetables, people buy it from the market. When we came to know that curry leaves are the most poisoned ones available in the market, without a second thought we chose it for the programme.” “Within three months, the natives of Koyilandy will be self-reliant in curry leaves cultivation. An amount of `3 lakh was set aside for the purchase of curry plants from Mathottam in Kozhikode.” “Sixty to 70 per cent of women in the municipality are part of the Kudumbashree Mission. Hence, it is easy for us to monitor its growth,” says

Public Works Standing Committee chairman T K Rajesh. “Though the project was launched as part of the World Environment Day observance, we are not ready to confine it to a week-long or month-long programme. In the coming years also, more plants will be given to the natives,” he says. Last year the municipality had distributed neem plants among the residents. “Most of the people seldom spend fruitful time in their farms. Through phase-by-phase programme, we hope an affinity towards nature can be created among the people,” says ward councillor Sudheesh. The municipality also plans to take its production to a commercial level. “At that time also we will not make any compromise on its organic mode of cultivation,” he says. Apart from households, people from all sectors of society, including lawyers and doctors, were given plants to grow on their office premises. To ensure creative participation of toddlers in the conservation of environment, Indian Laburnum (golden shower tree-Kanikkonna) saplings were provided this year.

Goat Lives' Can be Seen in Kerala Too: Zacharia



Nowadays ‘goat lives’ are seen across Kerala also, said writer Paul Zacharia. He was addressing the gathering after releasing two books, ‘Al Arabian novel factory’ and ‘Mullapoo niramulla pakalukal’ by Benyamin, at Chandrasekharan Nair Stadium premises here as part of DC Book Fair on Sunday. “In Benyamin’s novel named ‘Aadujeevitham’ (Goat days) he spoke about the abused migrant worker Najeeb. But nowadays such migrant workers are present around us in Kerala. The workers from Bihar and West Bengal are more active in the state and we can witness ‘goat lives’ here, among them,” said Zacharia. He added that Benyamin was the first Malayalam writer to popularise the literature which deals with the life of non-resident Malayalis living in Gulf countries. “The narrative style he uses in his works is very different. He portrays the life of the people in that society in the point of view of a Malayali,” he said. He added that the symbolism in Benyamin’s works is the element that attracts the readers to his novels. “In our state the number of unemployed people is very high, while around 30 lakhs of migrant workers are in the state,” Zacharia said. “There are complaints that the reading habit does not exist among Malayalis. But that is wrong. There are still people who buy books and read them, even though the number of critics is diminishing. The writers in our language should be thankful to our society - we are the only people who love writers. The situation is exactly the opposite if we go to any other state,” he said.

Benyamin said that he had gone through a difficult situation during the writing of 'Aadujeevitham'. "It was a difficult time, as I was writing about the lives in the country that gave me a job to survive. But I was sure that it would be against morality if I hide the truth," he said. Writers George Onakkoor, Radhika C Nair and District Library Council president V K Madhu were also present.

Delayed Monsoon Jacks up Prices of Vegetables

It is a wellknown fact that whenever any commodity is in short supply, its price is jacked up by the sellers. The same is true of vegetables being sold in the district now. However, the reason for the price hike in this case is not just a drop in the production of vegetables due to the delayed monsoon but also the exploitation of the situation by middlemen. With the result, the prices of almost all the vegetables have soared - in some cases, they have more than doubled and gone beyond the reach of the common man. Sample these: The price of beans at the Rytu Bazar here which was Rs 30 till last week has gone up to Rs 70 this week. Similarly, green chillies which were being sold at Rs 30 kg earlier now cost Rs 80 a kg. The cost of tomatoes has doubled to Rs 60 a kg now from the earlier Rs 30 a kg and that of brinjals to Rs 30 a kg from Rs 15. The vegetables come here from the surrounding mandals in the district as well as from Maharashtra. While the inflow has somewhat reduced, the middlemen are making a killing by exploiting the situation and manipulating the prices, allege the farmers. They also blame the apathy of the officials of the agriculture, horticulture and marketing departments for the prevailing situation.

Rs 50 Cr Released for Agri Varsity Coming Up at Lam

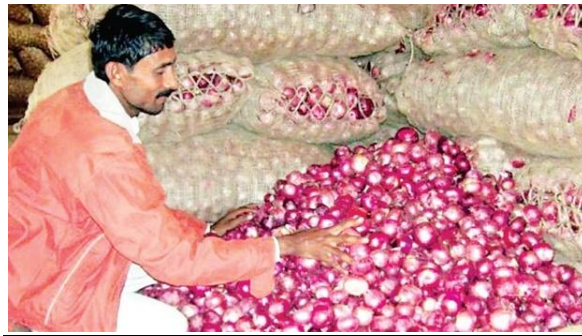
Minister for agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao said here Sunday that an agriculture university will be set up at Lam village in the district and the government will initially release Rs 50 crore for the purpose. He also said that the state government is preparing to take alternative steps for kharif cultivation as all the districts are witnessing deficit in rainfall. Addressing a press conference, Pulla Rao said that the state government had urged the Centre to set up a regional fisheries development board affiliated to the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), Hyderabad, in Andhra Pradesh. "We have urged the Centre to release at least Rs 500 cr to adopt drip irrigation system in the rain-deficit districts. It has agreed to release Rs 340 crore but the grant will be released only after the state is accorded special category status," he added. Speaking on the government's preparedness for the kharif season, the minister said that adequate quantity of seeds and fertilisers were kept available for the farmers and added that the government was going to conduct awareness campaign on the usage of modern techniques in agriculture. He also said that the Centre had sanctioned four 'Krishi Vignan Kendrams' to help farmers in adopt latest technology. He also said that the state government was trying to focus on soil tests and provide nutrients for the enrichment of the soil which may cost Rs 300 to Rs 400 crore. The agriculture minister alleged that YSRC president YS Jaganmohan Reddy had failed as the Opposition leader and added that the latter had no

right to criticise chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu with regard to implementation of the loan waiver or any other scheme. “We are making efforts to fulfil all our poll promises, but we do not have any ‘Akshaya Patra’ or ‘Mantra Dandam’ to solve all the issues at one go.” he added.

Cotton Barrage Water Released into Sea

As many as 1.39 lakh cubic metres of water was released into the Bay of Bengal from Sir Arthur Cotton Barrage at Dowleswaram Sunday. All the 175 gates at Dowleswaram, Bobbarlanka, Madduru and Vijjeswaram arms of the barrage were lifted to release the water. Currently, the water level at the barrage is 11 feet.

Onion, Potato Go out of Market



Retailers in the district have almost stopped selling onion and potato after Collector Guha Poonam Tapas Kumar fixed their profit margin. They said they used to procure onion at ₹22 per kg and sell at ₹30. Similarly, potato was sold at ₹20 to ₹22 per kg against the buying price of ₹14.40 from the wholesale market. Objecting to the Collector’s decision, they stopped selling the vegetables instead incurring losses. Md Talha, a local retailer, said, “Since about 25 per cent of onion and potato go waste, there is no point in selling the perishable products at the rate fixed by the Collector.” Suresh Jalan, a potato wholesaler, said, “We have sufficient stock of potato but the retailers are not buying it in weekly market. We hope the issue would be resolved soon.” Civil Supply Officer (CSO) BL Das said since the retailers are not selling onion and potato in the daily market, the stocks have been supplied to grocery stores. The problem would be resolved in a few days, he added. On Thursday, wholesalers and retailers were directed by the Collector to keep the profit margin of not more than ₹3 for onion and ₹4 for potato per kg and also ensure that the customers are not harassed for the price. The CSO and his staff were also told to conduct surprise check on wholesalers and retailers for strict implementation of the order.

Farmers Protest As Minister Offers Bagina

District in-charge Minister V Srinivasa Prasad offered bagina to the brimming Kabini reservoir at Beechanahalli in H D Kote taluk here on Sunday, amid protests by farmers who were wearing black bands over their eyes. They were protesting the recent arrests of

farmers trying to offer bagina to Kabini. The minister was accompanied by HD Kote MLA Chikkamadu (JD-S) and officials of the Irrigation Department. Speaking on the occasion, Srinivasa Prasad said though the rains were below normal in the catchment areas in Wayanad and Kodagu in June, it picked up pace in July and helped the dam reach its full capacity. The minister said there is a proposal before the government to construct a bridge connecting Bidarahalli and N Begur as the two villages remain cut off when more than 20,000 cusecs is released from the Kabini reservoir. "I will bring this matter to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's notice after discussing it with Irrigation Department officials...and announce the project in the next Budget," he said. On Sunday too the residents of the two villages were cut off from the rest of the district due to water being released from the reservoir. On farmers staging protest for not allowing them to offer bagina, Prasad said offering bagina to reservoirs is a government programme and it has to be done by the chief minister. "But he could not make it this year due to his busy schedule and hence he asked me to offer bagina. Therefore, farmers are not allowed on the premises of the dam. But they could have joined hands with the government in offering bagina," he said. However, farmers led by Kurubur Shanthakumar strongly criticised the government. "We were the first to start the tradition of offering bagina in 2004 following which the government took over," he said.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

'Agri sector plays major role in rural job generation'

Agriculture can play a major role in generating adequate rural employment, according to Thulasi Maddineni, Chief Executive Officer of Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat. Speaking at the 33rd Foundation Day ceremony of Nabard at the Bankers' Institute of Rural Development (BIRD) in Mangalore, she said agriculture needs to be made an attractive proposition for the youth. Only through agriculture can adequate rural employment be generated and productivity in agriculture could be improved. Stating that appropriate orientation and training will attract the youth to this sector, she said India cannot be developed without rural development. While the mere presence of infrastructure will not guarantee development, the absence of infrastructure will definitely lead to underdevelopment, she said. Highlighting the achievements of Nabard since its inception, R Venkataswamy, Joint Director of BIRD, Mangalore, gave a detailed account of the credit/refinance support provided, the development initiatives taken and the supervisory role played by the organisation. He also highlighted the contribution of the BIRD at Mangalore for the last 29 years and the performance of the institute during 2013-14.

'Budget has set the tone for economic reforms'



The Union Budget has set the tone for economic reforms by announcing measures such as moving from government to governance, simplifying of tax regime, giving boost to agriculture sector, allowing FDI in select sectors, according to B Yerram Raju, consultant economist. Addressing a workshop on “Overview of Budget, focus on SMEs and Opportunities” at G Pulla Reddy Engineering College, organised by *Business Line* here, he termed the Budget as “progressive, futuristic and dynamic”. The present Finance Minister had inherited an economy which was in shambles, Raju said adding the earlier UPA Government indulged in jugglery of figures by inflating the receipts from public sector units and postponing expenditure. On external factors, Raju said the global economic recession was still continuing and India cannot be insulated from it completely. A GDP growth rate of 5.4-5.9 per cent was anticipated while four per cent growth in agriculture was considered crucial. On allocation of 3.3 per cent budget for education he said, it should go up to six per cent if tangible results are to be expected or demographic dividend of the country was to be harnessed. He advised the engineering students to improve financial literacy. B Rajender, expert in securities, speaking on the stock market, said the students should also have knowledge of companies, their financials and stock market. He said stock market had given the highest returns even in the volatile conditions. One could benefit by investing early, investing regularly and investing for a longer time. Placement Officer Veerabhadra Reddy, Principal Srinivasa Reddy, Director Jayarami Reddy, Assistant Regional Manager SDT Rao and others were present on the occasion.

Will August be able to sustain current trend in monsoon rainfall?

All-India rainfall is down to 32 per cent as of last evening as a low-pressure area takes shape anew in the northwest Bay of Bengal. The preparatory upper cyclonic circulation is already in place; a resident circulation over land (weakened erstwhile ‘low’) over Uttar Pradesh is still generating considerable rain over the region.

AUGUST SIGNALS

Monsoon watchers are scouring the sky to gain an early outlook into August even as all available indications that the rest of July will turn productive for central India and parts of northwest. August can make or mar the current turnaround phase in the monsoon depending on how it can keep the Bay of Bengal sufficiently 'excited' to generate further rain-producing weather systems. At least one positive signal, though admittedly early in the day, is available from a Taiwan-based forecaster which sees the Bay of Bengal erupting yet again during the first week of August. Experts say it would be premature just yet to make any concrete assessment of the prediction that suggests formation of the next 'low' between July 31 and August 4.

HEAVY RAIN

Meanwhile, areas benefiting from the circulation over Uttar Pradesh are Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha across northwest and east India. The 'live' offshore trough from Gujarat to Karnataka brought moderate to heavy rain to Konkan, Goa, coastal Karnataka and Kerala. The 'low' expected to take shape next in the Bay is forecast to bring a punishing spell of rain across east, central and west India. Initial forecasts indicate that a heavy rain system would lie straggled with one limb fixed bang over Mumbai and the other over Chhattisgarh by Tuesday.

OUT INTO SEA?

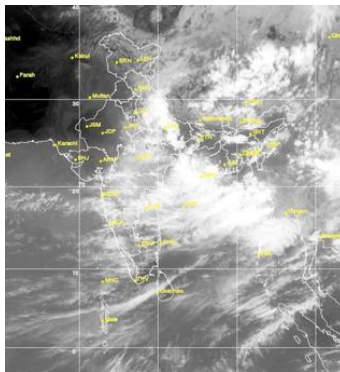
The system will move at a slow pace to the west with the Chhattisgarh limb curling in and literally rolling over in a whole across Madhya Pradesh towards the Mumbai limb. The combined system would leave a trail of flooding rain across this part of central India and also over north peninsular India even while dumping heavy rain over Mumbai and adjoining south Gujarat. The system is forecast to move further west into west Gujarat and then into northwest Gujarat, bringing moderate to heavy rain along the way. A US military outlook suggested that this system will withdraw into the northeast Arabian Sea, pick up some intensity, and move west towards the Oman coast. This is something that needs to be watched since it could also mean that monsoon moisture could once again be drained out of India.

BKS resists Centre's nod to GM crops field trials

Various organisations, including RSS—affiliated Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), have opposed Centre's decision approving field trials of certain varieties of Genetically Modified—crops and sought stalling of the move. Apart from the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, organisations like Organic Farmers' Association and Gujarat Khedut Samaj have requested all the state governments, including Gujarat, to withhold their nod to

conducting field trials, saying they are “against the interest of farmers“.The Environment Ministry on Friday gave its approval for field trials of certain varieties of GM crops, including rice, brinjal, chickpea, mustard and cotton, with the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee clearing 15 such proposals.In a joint statement issued today, BKS president Maganbhai Patel, Organic Farmers Association of India chief Praful Sajliya and others have termed the decision as a “bonanza to the Indian and multi—national agri business companies.”“BJP had promised in its poll manifesto that it will consult farmers before taking any decision on this issue. Despite this, the GEAC has taken this decision which is undemocratic,” the statement said.The organisations alleged that Centre has ignored guidelines and views of the Supreme Court—appointed Technical Experts Committee and those of a Parliamentary Committee on agriculture while approving the decision.“This decision is taken in haste and is nontransparent. It is approved despite serious concerns being expressed by various quarters,” it said.“We request the BJP—led NDA government to stall this undemocratic move, which is effected by bypassing Parliament and is aimed at aiding profiteering by big agri businesses,” the statement said.

New-born ‘low’ in the Bay likely to intensify a round



As expected, the northern part of Bay of Bengal has generated a low-pressure area this afternoon, an India Meteorological Department update confirmed.The ‘low’ lies straggled over north Bay, adjoining Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha.This is an offspring of typhoon Rammasun that coasted into China and Vietnam the other day. Unlike its predecessor, it is forecast to intensify a round over the next day or two.This would trigger a wave of heavy to very heavy rainfall over central India, north peninsular India, west India and the west coast.

AREAS IMPACTED

Areas likely to be impacted are Odisha; Gangetic West Bengal; Chhattisgarh; east Madhya Pradesh followed by west Madhya Pradesh; east Rajasthan; Gujarat; Konkan-Mumbai; and coastal Karnataka.North coastal Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Marathwada and Madhya Maharashtra may also stand to make varying gains as the ‘low’ traverses to the west.Meanwhile, an upper air circulation from an erstwhile ‘low’ over east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would sustain a wet session over the rest of Uttar Pradesh and

Uttarkhand. But south peninsular India, including parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Rayalaseema, are likely to witness only passing showers.

Business Standard

Cotton import likely to double this year



Cotton import in India is likely to double this year, due to the higher prices in the domestic market than abroad. The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) estimates the cotton import at 1.5 million bales (a bale is 170 kg) in the current cotton year (October 2013-September 2014), as compared to 0.7 million bales the previous year. "Cotton is selling in India at four-five per cent premiums, said D K Nair, secretary-general of CITI. "The sea transport cost from Africa to southern ports is drastically lower than surface transport cost from the central and western Indian states." Indian mills have signed contracts with African suppliers for all types of cotton imports. The benchmark Shankar-6 variety is trading at Rs 11,642 a quintal, in comparison with the landed cost in southern ports at Rs 11,000 a quintal. Prices in both domestic and international markets declined two to three per cent in the past week. The trend is likely to continue, due to lower demand from China. That country is a perennial importer from India but it is not buying the quantity of both cotton and yarn as in earlier years. Cotton demand from the domestic market has also fallen in recent months, due to a slump in consumption from yarn producers. Prices are likely to remain subdued. Reflecting the trend, cotton on the InterContinental Exchange is quoted lower for delivery in November and December, compared to near-month contracts. Despite the slowing in exports in recent weeks, Texprocil, the apex export promotion body, reported yarn exports at 293.6 million kg in the first quarter of the current financial year (2014-15), compared to 279.3 million kg in the same period last year. Texprocil has urged Cotton Corporation of India to buy from the market when prices here are cheaper than abroad and offload when these breach international prices. It would, they say, benefit farmers and mills.

Agri outlook: Limited downside for soybean, mustard

The year 2013-14 has been a challenging one for soybean crushers and exporters owing to price disparity and rising seed prices in the domestic markets. Heavy rains during the growth of the seed last year not only affected production but also quality of seeds which kept soybean prices in the domestic market higher. Despite a higher acreage which raised optimism about a record production, the same was drawn down to about 9.2 million tonnes in 2013-14 versus 10.8 million tonnes in 2012-13. Crushers have paid fancy premiums - as high as Rs 300 per quintal- for quality seeds. The higher prices at a time of good harvests from South America affected the Indian exports drastically over the last quarter. Exports have plummeted in June to a mere 2,637 tonnes versus 213,564 tonnes in June, 2013 and 8,226 tonnes in May this year. India lost its share in the Vietnam and Indonesian markets owing to the price disparity. Among those nations that import, Iraq remained the biggest buyer of soya meal from India. However, this year too, the start of the sowing season has remained unpredictable owing to the erratic monsoon. According to the latest update by the Solvent Oilseed Processors Association (SOPA), soybean sowing completed as on July 10 stood at a mere 786,000 hectares compared to 8.35 million hectares during the same time last year, down 75.64 per cent. With the recent rains in the growing belts, the sowing numbers are expected to improve. However, with the huge lag in sowing, monsoon activities and what the farmers decide to sow will play a pivotal role in governing the price trend for the coming year. Considering the tight supplies in the domestic market and a possible reduced production, soybean prices for the November contract on the NCDEX near Rs 3,350-3,300 a quintal will become a value buy. Mustard seed prices haven't seen wild swings but have traded in a tight range over the year. The dynamics of the prices is largely dependent on the relative oil prices. Over the years, Indian imports of vegetable oil have risen significantly compared to the previous year keeping a lid on the domestic oil prices. The total imports of vegetable oil during the period November 2013-June 2014 stands at 7,082,220 tonnes, up 15 per cent year-on-year. What is notable is the increase in share of soft oils among the total imports. The share of soft oils, i.e. soybean, Sunflower and rapeseed increased to 29 per cent in 2013-14 from 17 per cent during the same tenure in 2012-13. This change is attributed to the falling prices of palm oil, which encouraged importers to prefer soft oils over palm. Increased availability of vegetable oils has kept mustard prices subdued. Rainfall in north-western India will also play a pivotal role for mustard seed. Rajasthan, the largest mustard-producing state, is dependent on irrigation. We believe there is a limited downside in mustard prices as we enter the festive season and output from the kharif oilseeds remains a concern.

Dairies focus on value-added products for future growth

Value-added dairy products (VADP) are driving the way for dairy players. Through the years, the share of these products in the overall revenue of these companies has risen significantly. To boost growth, most companies plan to focus on this segment and add new products to their portfolio. Maharashtra-based Parag Milk Foods said VADPs accounted for about 80 per cent of its turnover (Rs 1,500-1,600 crore), against 40 per cent about three years ago (when its turnover was about Rs 900 crore). Devendra Shah, chairman and managing director, said the company had maintained its focus on these products through the past few years. “Investors are interested in this category, as this is high-growth and gives better returns,” he said.

IDFC and Motilal Oswal have invested in Parag Milk Foods.

A recent report by CARE Ratings said, “Through the past decade, significant transformation took place in the Indian demographic space, which led to heightened consumer interest in VADPs. This shift in the dynamics of the sector proved beneficial for manufacturers, as margins in the case of VADPs are more than double the margins in the liquid milk segment.” While margins in the liquid milk space stood at four-five per cent, those for VADPs ranged from 12 per cent to 18 per cent, the report said. According to estimates, the share of VADPs in the milk and milk derivatives segment is growing at about 25 per cent every year, and it is expected this pace would be maintained till 2019-20. R G Chandramogan, managing director of South-based private dairy company Hatsun Agro, said VADPs were at a nascent stage in India. “The main growth drivers in this segment are curd, ghee and ice creams. As the market matures, the segment will start giving both volumes and margins.” Most dairy companies have already invested in building capacities for value-added products. Recently, Parag invested about Rs 110 crore in its Pune plant; now, it has a combined processing capacity of about 2,000,000 litres a day (Pune and Andhra Pradesh plant). A year ago, Hatsun, too, invested in building capacities for VADP; the company now processes about 300,000 litres of VADP a day. CARE Ratings says, “Product innovations are likely to accelerate India’s dairy market, which is anticipated to improve margins by attaining greater scale, higher capacity use and an increasing contribution from new milk variants.” Dairy companies are planning to add products in the VADP portfolio. Karnataka Milk Federation plans to enter the cookies and biscuits segment. A senior company official said, “The thrust will definitely be on value-added products, but there is a social obligation to supply liquid milk, and we will continue to do that.” Shah agrees. “While there is growing demand for liquid milk, the demand for value-added products is also increasing commensurately. We have increased our procurement by 20 per cent to take care of the demand.”

Mettur Dam level at 53.06 feet

The water level in the Mettur Dam today stood at 53.06 feet as against the maximum level of 120 feet. The inflow into the reservoir, meanwhile, was 19,829 cusecs while the outflow of about 800 cusecs, the PWD officials said. The storage was 19.793 tmc against the capacity of 93.4 tmc. The officials said Karnataka was releasing around 27,000 cusecs tot-ally into Cauvery from Kab-ini and Krishnaraja Sagar dams following copious inflows.

DECCAN Chronicle

Loan irregularity concerns Andhra Pradesh



A recent letter from State Level Bankers Committee (SLBC) convenor, C. Doraswamy, to the state government proves that farmers took loans in the name of agriculture and used it for other purposes. Mr Doraswamy, in his letter had stated that the farmers were not repaying the loans they had taken for purposes other than agriculture activities. The officials also noticed some irregularities in the farm loans. In a bank in Prakasam district, 80 per cent of agriculture loans were found to be bogus. And in Kurnool district, a single family had taken Rs 4 crore from one bank in the name of agriculture. A member of the P. Kotaiah Committee said that after Mr Chandrababu Naidu's announcement on waiver of farm loans, farmers had taken loans unrestrainedly though the agricultural activities were over. The government feels that there will be many bogus accounts in the name of agriculture. To weed out the bogus farm loans, the government has decided to link the farm loans with Aadhaar cards. Acting on the government's request, the leading bank in the state, Andhra Bank, has sent circulars to all its branches to collect Aadhaar card details.

Many techies leaning towards organic farming

The last few years have witnessed several techies and professionals turning to agriculture. As there is a good demand for organically-grown fruits, vegetables and greens owing to the greater level of awareness, they take up the organic route. Minimizing middlemen, driving the agri-produce directly to homes and tapping export options are their success mantra. This is particularly with IT professionals who have put up decent years of experience and earned handsomely who invest in organic farming lands. Weekend agriculture is the buzz word among such professionals. "Many people from IIT, IIMs and IT fields have become successful agriculturists in organic farming in recent years. They work in the fields during the weekends. They are my inspiration. After two years of research in the scope of agriculture I quit from the job and plunged into agriculture," said Venkatesan M R, worked as an assistant manager from a reputed corporate company. Venkatesan, based in Madurai, has become an agriculture consultant joining his friend at Mahavin, a farm consultant company. R Jaganathan, of Nallakeerai, is one of my inspirations to venture into organic farming, said Keerthirajan Palaniappan. "There have been many IT professionals like me venturing into organic farming. They invest their earnings and getting returns even as they continue their profession," he said. The demand for organically-grown produce is very high. The toughest part for an educated person is production not marketing. Patience is very essential as it would take time to get reap the benefits, he said. R Harishankar, a mechanical engineer and a native of Rajapalayam, was initially working in a spinning mill. His interest towards organic agriculture made him to take up agriculture as a full-time profession. After farming in a leased land for few years he moved on to set up an organic fertilizer factory to cater to the needs of the people. As many new entrants are endeavouring into agriculture farm consultants are coming up in Madurai. Already there have been quite a few. They would help in setting up farms, choosing right crops and means and ways to market the produce. They are also helping them to get government subsidies for farm equipment, drip irrigation and so on, said Venkatesan.

GEAC clears import of GM soyabean oil



India's biotech regulator Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has given green signal for the import of Genetically Modified (GM) soybean oil. "Three applications for import of GM Soybean oil were permitted as highly processed food like oil do not contain detectable DNA or Proteins. The same was confirmed by Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) Mysore after testing of the oil samples," GEAC said, adding that more than 70 countries are importing GM soybean and canola oil. The statutory body, which held its 121st meeting on Friday, also permitted confined field trials of 13 GM crops, including rice, brinjal, chickpea, mustard and cotton, out of the 15 cases it considered. GEAC Chairman Hem Pande said "field trials for certain varieties of GM crops including rice, brinjal, chickpea, mustard and cotton had been cleared". However, the field trials, or small scale experiments, on these crops were subject to No Objection Certificate (NOC) from state governments. During the GEAC meeting, three cases of pharmaceuticals were also considered of which two were deferred and one case pertaining to revalidation of the GEAC nod was permitted. Officials said GEAC had "virtually" not met for almost two years from April 2012 to March 2014 due to which decision on 79 applications for field trials remained pending. These 79 cases, recommended by Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) under the Department of Biotechnology, included 37 cases of revalidation and 42 new cases involving confined (regulated) field trials related to cotton, rice, castor, maize, wheat, groundnut, sugarcane, chickpea, mustard, sorghum and brinjal. The GEAC on Friday also decided to constitute a sub-committee to review the toxicology data generated by the applicants of GM brinjal developed by BejoSheetal P Limited and GM mustard developed by Delhi University South Campus in view of concerns raised by some of the

members. An official said all GM crops field trials are subject to stringent norms which are as per the international standards. India has so far only allowed commercial growth of BT cotton with the issue of GM crops having been a highly controversial one for the country. Sources said that the moratorium continues for BT brinjal and the only commercial release at present is cotton, which is grown on around 11 million hectares in the country. The decision on commercialisation of BT brinjal is yet to be taken by the government, the sources said.