

With better rains, kharif sowing picks up

GARGI PARSAI

Kharif sowing has picked up following an improvement in the progress of the southwest monsoon last week. The average water level in major reservoirs in the country is also better than last week though still lower than last year in all regions except in the eastern region. At 533.18 lakh hectares, the total kharif coverage is still lower by 26.87 per cent compared to the corresponding period last year. By this time 729.13 lakh hectares had been sown in 2013-14. The IMD on Friday said the cumulative rainfall this season has been 25 per cent below the Long Period Average than in the corresponding period last year. The worst affected is the northwest region which has a 36 per cent shortfall than average.

Applications for TNAU courses

Applications for three courses of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University's Directorate of Open and Distance Learning is available till August 18, says a release. The Directorate is offering two-year post-graduate programmes in Sugarcane Technology (M.Sc.), Environmental Management (M.Sc.) and Business Administration (MBA), starting this academic year, the release adds.

Details

Details of the courses are available at www.tnau.ac.in.

Release water to irrigate LBP Canal's zone-II ayacut area: farmers

Tumeric cultivators want auctioning to be held at common spot



Farmers made a fervent plea for release of water for cultivation in zone-11 of LBP ayacut during the grievances redress meeting in Erode on Friday.— PHOTO: M.GOVARTHAN

A forceful plea was made by farmers for release of water for cultivation in the zone-II ayacut area of Lower Bhavani Project (LBP) Canal during the farmers' grievances redress meeting on Friday chaired by District Collector V.K. Shanmugam. The district administration and the Public Works Department must take steps to release water from August 1 into the canal by factoring in the encouraging inflow and comfortable storage position in the Bhavani Sagar Dam, said C. Nallasamy, president of Lower Bhavani Farmers' Welfare Association. There was in excess of 8.5 tmc storage in the Dam, and there was a combined storage of 18.3 tmc in the Dams in The Nilgiris. The farmers expressed their displeasure with what they called the 'failure' of the insurance scheme. They wondered how insurance benefit could be denied to them when the premium was being collected promptly. Officials explained that it was a policy matter to be decided by the State Government. Tumeric cultivators wanted auctioning to be conducted at a common spot to prevent the role of middlemen. The present system of conducting the auction for procurement at four locations was causing them a loss due to a syndicate formed by the middlemen, the farmers complained. The Integrated Commercial Complex coming up near Perundurai would resolve their grievance, the officials of Horticulture Department told them. The farmers wanted the district administration to prevail upon banks to desist from confiscating tractors and other farm equipment for non-repayment of loan, in view of the drought conditions. They wanted the existing loan to be written off and requested for fresh loans without pre-conditions. The speakers suggested that a mechanism be evolved to provide them with inputs for cultivation of next crop at subsidised cost as in the delta districts. The district administration's attention was sought to sort out the imbroglio between the Forest Department and the Public Works Department over Varattupallam Dam during the meeting. PWD officials admitted that they faced difficulties in carrying out maintenance of the Dam that would benefit farmers in Anthiyur region. Sugarcane cultivators criticised the district administration for not enforcing the order of the Commissioner of Sugar for supplying cane to cooperative sugar mills in the event of the private mills in the district failing or refusing to pay Rs. 2,650 per tonne recommended by the State Government.

Farmers upset with modified crop insurance scheme

'The sum assured means yield per acre is three bags of paddy'

The controversial Modified National Agricultural Insurance scheme in place of the old National Agriculture Insurance Scheme evoked high-level of dissent at the monthly farmers' grievance meeting here at the Collectorate on Friday. The scheme implemented on pilot basis in 50 districts of the country, has been largely rejected by several State governments while Tamil Nadu government had given its consent for implementation. The scheme envisions Rs. 2,250 as sum assured per acre for a scale of finance of Rs. 19,500 an acre and the farmer's estimated revenue of Rs. 25,000 an acre. Flagging the issue, Kaveri Danapalan, general secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers' Protection Association, demanded to know the logic of the State government in opting for a scheme that had no optimal value for farmers. "When the coverage should ideally entail coverage of revenue loss, the scheme has scaled down even the sum assured coverage under the old NAIS." Under the earlier National Agricultural Insurance Scheme, the sum assured was Rs. 8,692 an acre for a cent per cent loss. The new MNAIS had drastically brought down the assured claim in the event of a total loss to Rs. 2,250 an acre, destroying the farmer, Mr. Danapalan said. "The sum assured would mean the production per acre is about three bags of paddy while the same agricultural department says per acre yield is 4 tonnes." Urging the Collector to suspend the collection of premium amount against cooperative loans, Mr. Danapalan said farmers should not be forced to pay the premium for a loan.

Plea rejected

However, this was rejected by the Joint Registrar, Kumbakonam Cooperatives, who said a precondition for loan would be deduction of insurance premium. Acknowledging widespread opposition to MNAIS, Collector Mr. Munusamy said it would be conveyed to the government.

Vellapalam project

The other contentious issue was the shelving of the Vellapalam reservoir project proposed by the Chief Minister under Rule 110 in the Assembly last session. The project, proposed in the last Assembly session at a cost of Rs. 640 crore, was received with much fanfare in tail-end areas of the delta, for its potential to store the runoff water into the sea. Mr. Danapalan said a meeting of farmers with the Public Works Department's project officer and deputy secretary in Chennai revealed that the project had been unilaterally

shelved on the premise that the Vellapallam reservoir scheme would only store saline water. “On what basis did the PWD come to such a conclusion, without a discussion with the farmers’ representatives, or holding a field study? It was a scheme announced by the Chief Minister and the department has audaciously decided to close the file,” alleged Mr. Danapalan. Seeing reason in the argument, Mr. Munusamy said he would write to the department secretary once again to highlight the importance of the project for tail-end areas.

Why waste surplus water, ask farmers



The surplus water released every year from Mettur Dam should be diverted to lakes, and ponds in the nearby areas instead of allowing it to go into the sea, said members of Cauvery Surplus Water Action Committee. Committee president G. Sakthivel said that this would help farmers carry out farming activities without delays. At a time when agriculture activities could not be carried out because of water scarcity, water was being let into sea every year. In 2005, 70.76 tmc ft of surplus water was released into sea. In 2006, it was 42.85 tmc ft; 2007, over 100 tmc ft; 2008, 75.15 tmc ft; 2009, 65.42 tmc ft; and in 2013, over 130 tmc ft of surplus water was released into sea. The water could have been diverted to lakes and ponds at Nangavalli, Edappadi, Tharamangalam, Mecheri, Omalur, and Konganapuram. It would have helped improve the ground water level. R. Thambaiyah, committee coordinator, said that the State Government had asked the Public Works Department to submit a report on diverting surplus water. Minister for Highways and Minor Ports Edappadi K. Palaniswami said that there was no project to benefit farmers in Salem district as the government was planning to use the surplus water through alternative route. Later, they submitted a petition to District Collector K. Maharabushanam at the Collectorate. Over 500 villagers were present.

Release water from Mettur Dam: farmers

S.P. SARAVANAN

Farmers in Salem, and Namakkal districts on Friday called for early release of water from Stanley Reservoir in Mettur for irrigation, instead of waiting for the water to rise to the full reservoir level. K. Sundaram, general secretary of Tamil Nadu Farmers’ Association,

told *The Hindu* that the dam could be opened in the first week of August. Public Works Department officials said that water level at the Stanley Reservoir stood at 67.41 ft on Friday. The inflow increased from 28,961 cusecs to 32,756 cusecs while the storage level was 30.517 million cubic feet (tmc ft), as against the total capacity of 93.470 tmc ft.

Biligundlu

At Biligundlu in Dharmapuri, the inflow in the Cauvery was more than 38,000 cusecs on Friday evening, sources said. Farmers at Pannavadi, Sethukuli, Ariyur, and Neruppur, have begun harvesting their crops as these were getting submerged because of rise in water level. Farmers said that if the level reached 120 feet, 63 square miles of water spread area would be submerged, including the 30 square miles where they had cultivated various crops.

Farmers demand early release of water from Mettur



Collector N. Subbaiyan speaking to farmers at the farmers grievance day meeting in Thanjavur on Friday.— Photo: M. Moorthy

Farmers demanded the government to release water from Mettur dam at the earliest in the wake of steady inflow into the dam, to facilitate irrigation activity in the delta region. Speaking at the monthly farmers' grievances day meeting held here on Friday, they said that early discharge of water from Mettur alone will ensure samba cultivation. Initiating the discussion, S. Ramanathan, a farmer from Peramalakudi said water from Mettur should be released with immediate effect. A.K.R. Ravichandar, president of Cauvery Delta Farmers Association, said that water from Mettur for irrigation before August 10 would facilitate the samba cultivation. Mr. Ramanathan suggested that the crushing season at Arignar Anna Sugar Mill should commence by October first week. Sundara Vimalanathan, of Swamimalai, urged the district administration, to direct the private sugar mills, to clear sugarcane arrears payment to the farmers. N. Subbaiyan, Collector, presided over the meeting, in which P. Chandrasekaran,

District Revenue Officer, said that about 25,150 hectare had been brought under kuruvai cultivation, including 17,353 hectare under SRI technique. A section of the farmers staged a walk out from the meeting, protesting against the new system for obtaining computerised entry form for participating in the meeting and presenting the petitions.

Increased inflow into Periyar dam brings cheer to farmers

PWD officials say they have stepped up the discharge



Good news: Agricultural workers engaged in paddy transplantation in Cumbum valley in Theni district.— PHOTO: G. KARTHIKEYAN.

Continuous rainfall and an increase in the inflow of water into Periyar dam have renewed the hopes of farmers in Cumbum valley, where agricultural activities are going on in full swing. Even though the Public Works Department (PWD) had released water in June, farmers were initially hesitant to begin agricultural activities since the level in the dam remained at 112 feet. The abrupt stoppage of water released during the last paddy season due to poor storage too made them hesitant, since standing crops on 10,000 acres had completely withered due to monsoon failure. The rising storage in the dam has, however, instilled confidence in farmers who were reluctant to even raise nurseries. While farmers in the areas near the tail-end of Periyar dam begun to raise nurseries, transplantation work commenced in many parts of Cumbum valley like Gudalur. “Raising of storage level in Periyar dam to 142 feet has renewed our hope. If the rains arrive on time and are adequate, we will not find any difficulty in protecting the crop till harvest,” said farmers in the valley. On June 12, water was released for irrigating 14,707 hectares of land — 11,807 hectares in Uthamapalayam, 2,412 hectares in Theni and 488 hectares in Bodi — under the registered ayacut. PWD officials said they had stepped up the discharge to 955 cusecs so that the water would reach the tail-end areas quickly and improve the storage in Vaigai dam. Water flow was also reported to be steady in the main channel and in other supply channels. Officials from the district administration said they had kept sufficient stock of fertilisers ready for distribution to the farmers.

Banana growers seek early compensation

'Farmers incurred a huge loss because of gale and drought since 2012'



Farmers distributing sweets to Collector Jayashree Muralidharan and other officials at grievance day meeting in Tiruchi on Friday.— PHOTO: G. GNANAVELMURUGAN

Banana growers who spoke at the monthly grievances day meeting here on Friday urged the district administration to take steps to disburse compensation to the crop lost during the drought and gale in the past seasons. They wanted adequate compensation for the loss incurred by coconut cultivators in the district. A. Nagarajan, a progressive farmer of Puliur, said although farmers had incurred a huge loss because of drought and gale in the past three seasons since 2012, compensation had not been announced by the State government. C. Masilamani, district president of Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, said the delay in the announcement of compensation made the affected farmers lose their hope of any succour from the State government. Mr. Nagarajan and P. Viswanathan, state president of Tamizhaga Eri Matrum Aatrupasana Vivasayigal Sangam, protested the Centre's directive to the State government to suspend the incentive for paddy growers. They said the State government's incentive of Rs. 70 and Rs. 50 for fine variety and common variety of paddy was planned to be withdrawn which, they said, was anti-farmer attitude. When a few farmers underlined the need for suspension of distraint proceedings against those who had not repaid their dues, Jayashree Muralidharan, District Collector, who presided over the meeting, replied that she had impressed upon the bank officials to desist from such action. However, the Collector advised farmers capable of repaying their dues to be prompt in repaying their dues. She clarified that the re-scheduling of farm loans should not be misunderstood as a means for waiver of loans. P. Ayyakannu, State vice-president of Bharatiya Kisan Sangam, wanted stern action against the monkey and wild pig menace causing extensive damage to the crops. The Collector assured him of taking action in the matter. R. Raja Chidambaram, state secretary of the Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, said the modified crop insurance scheme did not benefit farmers much. The jurisdiction of the insurance benefits had been revised from the tiny village-

level unit to a larger firka-based unit. This pushed up the premium rate for farmers with less benefits.

‘Don’t tamper with Jayadhar cotton’

SHARATH S. SRIVATSA

Jayadhar cotton, for which the University of Agricultural Sciences-Dharwad received permission for transgenic trials last Friday, is a popular variety in the rain-fed areas of north Karnataka. It is a rabi crop predominantly grown in Dharwad, Gadag and Haveri districts, and parts of Bellary and Koppal. Unlike other varieties, it is a mixed crop grown with chillies and onion, among other crops. The drought resistant Jayadhar was an improved variety released in the 50s. It saw further improvement when EDHC-11 and RAHS-4 varieties were released by the UAS-D later. Though other local varieties have been improved upon, Jayadhar remains popular among farmers. “Farmers hardly use pesticides on this crop. Any changes in the crop will also have its effect on the weaving/khadi community in the vicinity,” said Krishnaprasad, convenor of Desi Cotton Growers’ Association. All the improvements in Jayadhar were to stabilise its characteristics and not cross-breeding, he pointed out. “It has all the qualities to get the geographical indications (GI) tag. It should be preserved as the local variety and without causing gene contamination. Currently, indigenous varieties cover only 3 per cent of the total cultivated area,” said Mr. Krishnaprasad, fearing that the trials and introduction to the market could damage other indigenous varieties. “Since Jayadhar is a local variety of Karnataka, the State government should deny a no objection certificate. Further, it should oppose permission given by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee to conduct trials in other states (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra),” he added.

Irregularities alleged in implementation of livestock scheme

Officials say list of beneficiaries was accepted as it was submitted by panchayat authorities

The absence of an efficient mechanism to oversee the implementation of projects is widely considered the bane of the Kuttanad Package. Alleged irregularities that have crept into the system of identifying beneficiaries for the ‘Gosuraksha’ cattle insurance scheme only validated the popular view. The issue came up for discussions at the meeting of the District Development Committee on Friday after it was raised by Chandra Prakashan, a representative of Kodikkunil Suresh, Mavelikkara MP. He claimed that the list of beneficiaries selected from the Kainakary grama panchayat for the scheme included multiple persons hailing from same families. According to him, the list had been

finalised by the panchayat members without holding an open discussion at the grama sabha. The practice paved way for corruption as well as denial of benefits for many eligible livestock farmers. In an apparent admission of their helplessness, the officials of the Animal Husbandry Department, which is implementing the scheme, said the list had been accepted as it was submitted by the panchayat. Taking a serious view of the lapse, District Collector N. Padmakumar ordered those concerned to accept the list only after proper verification. The delay on the part of National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) authorities in repairing damaged portions of the National Highway 47 stretch, passing through the district, also came under criticism. Several agitations were recently organised by local residents in protest against the alleged apathy. Four persons have died and 35 injured in various accidents that took place along the route within a month. Many have claimed that most of such incidents were the result of dilapidated roads. Jose Thomas, a representative of Home Minister and Haripad MLA, Ramesh Chennithala, said the situation was pitiable on the stretch between Haripad and Karuvatta. According to him, the tarring was completed only four months ago. He demanded the immediate repair of the road, failing which a massive agitation would be organised. The Collector was unsatisfied with the response of the NHAI officials regarding the issue. He, however, said that appropriate decision would be taken after receiving a detailed report from the NHAI. Among other issues that came up for discussion was the shortage of staff at the Kerala Scheduled Tribe Development Department hindering the implementation of welfare schemes. There was currently only one Tribal Extension Officer in the district.

Celebrating the king of fruits

SARATH BABU GEORGE



Mango connoisseurs in Alappuzha have much to cheer about. The mango festival that is under way at Sreemoolam Town Hall in Ambalappuzha has been attracting a steady flow of visitors. The festival is being organised by the Malabar Mango Growers' Society with the technical support of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kannur. Some of the mango varieties offered at the event includes Kuttiaattoor, Palakkadan, Muvandan, Kilichundan,

Banganapali, Alphonso, Sindhuram, Neelam, Malgoval and Apple Rumani. Saplings of various types have also been put on offer at the exhibition-cum-sale. Organising committee chairman Abey Francis said the society had been conducting similar festivals across the State. This is the first such programme that is being conducted by the society in Alappuzha. Seeking to maximise their gains in the approaching festive season, the sale also offers a large variety of handloom products sourced from other States including Rajasthan, Orissa and Jammu and Kashmir. Pickles prepared by Kudumbasree units are also being sold as part of the programme. The festival, which was formally launched by G. Sudhakaran, MLA, on Wednesday, will continue until the Onam season.

Wayanad warms up to strawberry

E.M. MANOJ



The State Horticulture Mission is preparing to tap the potential of Wayanad, a hill district, in strawberry cultivation, a new crop to the farm community. The mission is planning to expand strawberry cultivation to 100 hectares this fiscal, 50 hectares each in Wayanad and Idukki, under the Mission 676 project of the government. The crop has been successfully cultivated at Munnar, Vattavada, and Kanthallur in Idukki and farmers are getting better income from it. Though a few progressive farmers in Wayanad are cultivating strawberry, this is the first time the department is trying to tap the commercial potential of the crop, Alex C. Mathew, Deputy Director of the State Horticulture Mission told *The Hindu*. "Climate in the district is suitable for its cultivation and the department has received good response from the farmers. As many as 150 farmers attended a recent training programme of the department on strawberry cultivation," Mr. Mathew said.

Harvest in two months

For farmers, the major attraction is that the crop can be harvested within two months of planting. The harvest can continue up to six months. As many as 24,000 seedlings can be planted on an acre under the open cultivation method. The cost of production will come around Rs.5 lakh an acre, including the cost of seedlings, manure, fertigation, and polythene sheet for mulching, he said. The mission will provide a subsidy of Rs.1.6 lakh a hectare for the cultivation, including Rs.50,000 for seedlings, Rs.18,000 for purchasing polythene sheets, and Rs.36,000 for fertigation, Mr. Mathew said. A yield of 12 tonnes of fruit is expected from an acre each season. Marketing will not be a major issue as the produce has good demand in the district itself, he said.

Two varieties

He said HortiCorp's procurement and processing facility for the fruit at Munnar could purchase the produce. "We have been cultivating two strawberry varieties successfully for the past four years," P. Rajendran, Associate Director of Research, Regional Agriculture Research Station, Ambalavayal, said adding that the station had produced strawberry crush and syrup and marketed them profitably. Under a pilot project, strawberry was successfully planted at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Ambalavayal last year.

Irrigation water released for 2.06 lakh acres

Minister for Women and Child Welfare Peethala Sujatha on Friday released water from the Tadipudi Lift Scheme on the Godavari River, which will cater to the irrigation needs of 2.06 lakh acres of farm land in 14 upland mandals. Superintending Engineer, Irrigation Circle, Venkataramana, said power supply had been ensured through dedicated lines to keep the scheme functional uninterruptedly. Endowments Minister P. Manikyala Rao said there would be no need for water supply by the Tadipudi scheme, once the Polavaram project was completed.

Crop loans: RBI seeks more details

The wait for RBI's clearance for rescheduling of crop loans seems to be getting longer. After the A.P. government sent details of crop loans sought by the RBI about 10 days ago, the apex bank sought from the State level Bankers Committee the break-up of mandal and crop-wise loans disbursed to farmers. The SLBC in turn directed the bank branches to furnish details but the banks explained that only branch-wise loan

disbursement details were available with them. In the light of these developments, Chief Minister N.Chandrababu Naidu may be writing to the RBI with a request to relax its stand on rescheduling of crop loans without insisting mandal-wise crop loan details.



Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Saturday, Jul 26

Max Min

39° | 28°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 70

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 05:52

Sunset: 06:38

Barometer: 1005

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Sunday, Jul 27

Max Min

36° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Monday
Jul 28



38° | 28°

Partly
Cloudy

Tuesday
Jul 29



38° | 28°

Partly
Cloudy

Wednesday
Jul 30



39° | 28°

Partly
Cloudy

Thursday
Jul 31



39° | 28°

Partly
Cloudy

Friday
Aug 1



39° | 28°

Partly
Cloudy

Airport Weather

Delhi

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:38

Humidity: 67

Sunset: 07:16

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1005



Tamil Android App Brings Info to Farmers' Fingertips

by M Niyas Ahmed

Dharmapuri: A free Android application in Tamil, which provides information about government subsidies, market trends, weather patterns and tips on growing various crops, has the potential to revolutionise the agriculture sector in Tamil Nadu.

'Vivasayam in Tamil', developed by VisualMedia Mobile Apps based in Krishnagiri district, is the brainchild of Selva Murai (29), a journalist-turned-technopreneur from Mathur in Krishnagiri. A computer science graduate armed with an MBA, he hails from an agriculture family.

"I started my career as a reporter for Tamil vernacular dailies. Eight years of reporting experience gave me new insights into the plight of farmers. I always wanted to do something for them. While our farmers make use of traditional farming techniques, they are still unaware of modern farming technologies,

Screen shot of Vivasayam page in Google Play Store; (r) Selva Murai showing the application in his tablet | SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

government subsidies they can avail and the best market for their produce. The app, developed by the five-member team at VisualMedia Mobile Apps, will bridge that gap," he told *Express*.

He chose to develop the app in Tamil to reach the farmers who are comfortable only in their mother tongue, he said.

"While personnel computers are not that popular in interior villages, smart

phones have become ubiquitous. Also farmers find it tough to navigate the application interface in computers compared to the touch sensitive screens of Android phones," he observed.

The app can be downloaded from Google Play Store at <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.Aapp.vivasayamintamil>.

Hosted a few weeks ago,

it has received an enthusiastic response from farmers even from Malaysia and Singapore, Selva Murai claimed.

The app would especially benefit the youngsters who have abandoned their IT jobs for farming, an assistant quality controller in Agricultural Department, N Madhubalan said. "The app has tips on cultivating vegetables, paddy, millets and even flowers.

Eight years of reporting experience gave me new insights into the plight of farmers. I always wanted to do something for them

— SELVA MURALI
Technopreneur

Phase-II TNAU Counselling on Monday

Express News Service

Coimbatore: The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) will conduct the second phase of its counselling on Monday for waitlisted candidates.

This is to fill the seats which have fallen vacant after the first phase of counselling.

There are now 127 vacant seats in TNAU's constituent colleges and 37 in affiliated colleges.

The university has called over 300 students for the second phase counselling,

which will be held at the TNAU's Anna Auditorium from 9:30 am on Monday.

Details can be found on the university website www.tnau.ac.in/admission.html.

The first phase of counselling was held between June 30 and July 11.

Of the 4,483 candidates

called for the first phase of counselling, 2,740 turned up.

While 1,534 students were admitted to various undergraduate courses, 1,206 were waitlisted.

The university had given time till July 15 to confirm the admissions by submitting relevant certificates.

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University offers 13 undergraduate science and technology programmes in its constituent and affiliated colleges for which online applications were invited from May 12 to June 7.

Around 47,000 candidates had applied for about 1,820 seats to be filled under single-window counselling. After scrutiny, 27,737 candidates were shortlisted.

The first semester for the newly admitted students will begin on July 30.

The university has called over 300 students for the second phase counselling, which will be held at the TNAU's Anna Auditorium from 9:30 am on Monday

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Sugar industry wants Government to rationalise cane pricing

The Government should rationalise sugarcane pricing policy and also encourage better use of by-products by the sugar factories by formulating suitable policies. This is important since the industry is passing through a grave crisis, according to representatives of the industry and sugar technologists. They were speaking at the two-day annual convention of the South Indian Sugarcane and Sugar Technologists' Association which began here on Friday. Association President RV Vatnal said: "Sugarcane price is increasing exponentially, and making the operation of many mills economically unsustainable. There is an urgent need to take a relook at the sugarcane pricing policy and make it more realistic. The policies of the Government are pushing many sugar mills into sickness. Many mills are facing acute cane scarcity and there are several other problems plaguing the industry including high power tariff and they should be addressed in right earnest by the Government, the industry and farmers." He said that sugarcane farming should be made remunerative for the farmer, but at the same time the operation of the mills should also be made sustainable. Therefore, all efforts should be made to cut the cost of cane cultivation, increase yields and the sucrose content of the cane at the farm

level and also to improve the efficiency of the mills and for better use of the by-products at the mill level. The Government's policies should be carefully tailored to meet both ends. Andhra Sugars Joint Managing Director M Narendranath said mechanisation in sugarcane cultivation at the present juncture was inevitable as there was labour scarcity at the farm level. "It is possible to introduce mechanisation at the farm level, even though our holdings are small. At the Andhra Sugars, we have found that Australian experience is particularly useful in the regard. There will be some cane loss if we introduce harvesters, but the loss should be compensated by the factories. The gains far outweigh the losses," he said. KCP Sugars Chairman Vinod R Sethi said the challenges facing the sector were many but they were by no means insurmountable, and "efforts should be made to introduce indigenised mechanical solutions at the farm level." The Government should frame a suitable policy framework to promote innovation and better use of by-products. Jagadeesh Gudaganti, the CMD of Siddapur Distilleries Limited, Karnataka, said rationalisation of cane pricing policy could no longer be postponed and "as suggested by the Rangarajan committee a revenue-sharing formula should be adopted as in many sugar producing countries in the world. The cane price should be pegged at 70 per cent of actual revenue realisation by sale of sugar, molasses, 25 per cent of bagasse and press mud or 75 per cent revenue realised by sale of sugar alone." He said Maharashtra and Karnataka were following the system, as suggested by the Rangarajan committee, and others should follow suit. Vice-chancellor of Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University A Padma Raju said the mills and the Government should take care of the sugarcane farmer first, as "sugarcane cultivation is not very profitable in the present circumstances. In the Indian situation, mechanisation is easier said than done. It is not impossible, and it can be done in spite of our small holdings. But a group approach and meticulous village level planning are required for mechanising cane cultivation."

Weak cues drag spot rubber

Spot rubber closed almost steady on Friday. Sentiments continued to remain neutral amidst low volumes but RSS 4 lost further following another weak closing on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. Hence the trend was partially mixed. Sheet rubber declined to Rs. 138 (Rs. 139) a kg, according to traders and the Rubber Board. The grade was quoted weak at Rs. 135 (Rs. 136) by dealers. August futures weakened to Rs. 137 (Rs. 138.74), September to Rs. 134.50 (Rs. 136.38), October to Rs. 133.98 (Rs. 135.72) and November to Rs. 134.88 (Rs. 135.96) on the NMCE. RSS 3 (spot) dropped to Rs. 119.33 (Rs. 120.28) at Bangkok. August futures closed at ₹193.9 (Rs. 114.34) on

the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg): RSS-4: 138 (139); RSS-5: 133 (133); Ungraded: 127 (127); ISNR 20: 120 (120) and Latex 60%: 105 (105).

Monsoon to be active in North till early August

The Climate Prediction Centre of the US is of the view that moderate to active monsoon conditions would continue over the North-West into the first week of August. These will be underwritten by helpful circulations forming in the Bay of Bengal. On Friday, India Met Department has identified an upper level circulation doing the rounds over north Bay of Bengal.

More churn

A couple of international models suggested this has settled down to being a weak low-pressure area, which will now spearhead the monsoon from East into North-West. It is expected to drop moderate to heavy rainfall over parts of east and north India, especially Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh until July 30. Parts of Gujarat and the West Coast at large are also expected to gain. Entire central parts, peninsular India and the South may remain largely dry. The US National Centres for Environmental Prediction is of the view that the Bay may not be finished just yet. A follow-up 'low' is there for the asking, and might show up over the Odisha coast by July 31.

Rainfall scale-up

The new 'low' is predicted would sustain the rainfall over North India at least until August 6; here again, central and peninsular north and south may have to sit out. The Met Department has forecast increase in rainfall activity over east and adjoining central India and the western Himalayan region from July 28. It will be subdued over south interior peninsula. The West Coast would continue to witness varying moderate to heavy rain; the real gains this time round are forecast to accrue for south-west Uttar Pradesh and east Rajasthan.

Deficit down

Meanwhile, rainfall deficit for the country as a whole has contracted rapidly to 25 per cent. The Met said on Friday that the erstwhile monsoon depression had weakened into 'low' over south-west Rajasthan and adjoining Pakistan and had merged into the larger monsoon trough.

Business Standard

Tea Board looking to amend Tea Act 1953



The Tea Board of India is looking to amend the Tea Act 1953, a move primarily triggered by recent closing down of some tea gardens, specially in West Bengal. The Tea Board is also set to meet the state government in the next fifteen days to come up with a solution to reopen the closed tea gardens, Tea Board of India Chairman, Siddharth, said. “We are planning to meet the state government in another fortnight or so. One of the major problems with reopening closed gardens is change of lease and that is why we are also considering to look into amend the Tea Act,” he said here on Friday. However, no particular timeline for the same was given by the Tea Board chairman. India has about eight closed tea gardens and five of them are in Bengal, mostly in the Dooars region, according to Siddharth. Recently, a couple of deaths by allegedly starvation had been reported in the tea gardens of Bengal. Siddharth, however, is of the view that the deaths did not occur owing to malnutrition or starving. “We have reports from the local administration and that report clearly shows that the deaths are not by starving or malnutrition. We have a meeting with the state government to look into the problems and the Centre too is trying to see and come up with some solution to cure the problem,” he added. On the overall production front, he said, “We are confident of achieving 1200 million kgs this year despite a dip in the initial two-three months,” India had produced 1200 million kg of tea during last year.

Vietnam pepper exports crossed 110,000 tones



Vietnam, world's largest producer and exporter of black and white pepper, has exported 111,395 tones of pepper, including 100,820 tones of black pepper and 10,575 tones of white pepper during January – June period of the current year. Compared to the same period of 2013, exports rose 35.16% in volume, Black pepper exports increased 42.19% where as white pepper dropped roughly 10%. Whereas India could hardly managed to export only 9,500 tones of pepper during the period. Much higher prices offered by India had caused the serious fall in the export of pepper. According to Vietnam Pepper Association (VPA) export turnover marked a strong growth over the same period , increased 47.5% equivalent to US \$257 million. The total value of exports reached \$797 million in which black pepper contributed \$694 million and white pepper \$103million. This hike was mainly due to the sharp increase in the global price of the commodity for the last one year. The average export price of black pepper during the period was US \$6,885 per tone and white pepper reached 9716 per tone, with a corresponding increase of \$707/tone for black pepper and for white pepper the increase was \$851/tone over the same period of last year. The biggest advantage of Vietnam is their huge production and the highest productivity across the world. Thanks to these key factors, the county could offer the lowest prices across the world. The Indian prices were higher by US \$3,000/tone than the Vietnam's quotes which literally drove India out of the international market of the spice, said a top Kochi based exporter. Even Indian manufacturers of value added products depend mainly on imported pepper. North Indian markets also sell imported pepper as it is cheaper compared to the local grades. During this year Vietnam is reported to have a total production of around 150,000 tones while India's production confine to less than 35,000 tones. Some growers projects a much lower production than this; at around 25,000 tones only. The leverage of large scale production and productivity help Vietnam growers to offer world's lowest price tags. U.S. market continues to be the largest importer of pepper from Vietnam with 22,632 tones during January – June period of the current year. However, Singapore emerged as a strongest importer of Vietnam pepper in recent times , the volume of imports of Singapore in the first 6 months reached

12,618 tons , up 6,524 tons from last year. While most markets like India , Saudi Arabia , Pakistan, Netherlands , Spain have seen an increase in their imports , except Germany. German market recorded a drop in imports from Vietnam . In the first 6 months Germany imported only 3525 tons, according to the data of Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture. India imported 7431 tones of Vietnam pepper during this period and Pakistan had bought 4511 tones. Vietnam's pepper exports could fetch a record US\$1 billion this year, with around 140,000 tonnes of the spice to be exported, according to the Vietnam Pepper Association (VPA). The International Pepper Community (IPC) forecast that global supply to fall by 45,000 tonnes this year to 320,000 tonnes and demand to remain high, keeping prices high. With 50% global market share, Vietnam has been able to dominate the market. Vietnamese pepper products are exported to 90 countries and territories, the association said, with the EU and Asian countries being the largest export destinations.

Pricegallops

Meanwhie global prices breached the level of US \$10,000/tonne, while domestic farm gate pepper prices are moving in the 12500 levels. With Malaysia and Indonesia experiencing supply crunch and India turning out to be a net importer, sky is the limit with regard to pricing of pepper, said a leading exporter.

Cardamom up 0.2% on rising demand



Cardamom prices remained higher for the second day and gained 0.17% to Rs 902.30 per kg in futures trading today as speculators enlarged positions amid a firm trend at spot market. Tight stocks position on restricted arrivals from producing regions in the physical market also supported the uptrend. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in September gained Rs 1.50, or 0.17%, to Rs 902.30 per kg in a business turnover of 18 lots. Likewise, the spice for delivery in August added 60 paise, or 0.06%, to Rs 935.60 per kg in 87 lots. Market analysts said speculators enlarged positions on

rising demand in the spot market which kept cardamom prices higher for the second day at futures trade.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

Tomato prices skyrocket to Rs 80 per kg in some cities



Tomato prices have soared up to Rs 80 per kg in some parts of the country after a substantial drop in supply from key producing states. The average price of tomato, monitored by the Consumer Affairs Department, in 59 cities, however, stood at Rs 60 per kg. The vegetable is selling at Rs 80 per kg in Gurgaon and Port Blair. Tomato is available at Rs 75 per kg in Patna and Indore, while it is selling at Rs 70 per kg in Kolkata and Rs 65 per kg in Guwahati. The other major cities which have witnessed a rise in tomato prices are Delhi, Karnal, Raipur, Panaji, Ahmedabad, Ranchi, Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar. The key kitchen ingredient is available at Rs 60 per kg in these cities.

Meanwhile, prices of tomato at Mother Dairy's Safal outlets are stable and it has not increased prices from last two days. Tomatoes are available at Rs 55 per kg at its outlets in the national capital region. Tomato Merchants Association President at Azadpur Mandi Darshanlal Arora attributed the rise in prices to substantial drop in supplies from the northern part and high prices in other supplying regions in anticipation of drought.

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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Sowing of crops up 54% on monsoon revival



The monsoon's revival has increased sowing of crops by 54% in the past week to 53.32 million hectare, but planting is still much lower than last year. Expected heavy rains in many parts of the country could boost the sowing of cotton, paddy and soybean. Heavy showers drenched some of the driest regions of the country, including Gujarat, where Friday's rainfall was 513% above average; Madhya Maharashtra 392%, West Madhya Pradesh 209%; and Saurashtra and Kutch 90% and Vidarbha 43%. Total rainfall in the country on Friday was 10% above average and the seasonal deficit remained at previous day's level of 24%. According to agriculture ministry data, sowing has been done on 53.32 million hectare, against 72.91 million hectare in the corresponding period of the previous year. Total normal area under kharif planting is 105.75 million hectare. Rainfall this week has helped rice planting expand to 16.57 million hectare, but it is still lower than 18.99 million hectare a year ago. Officials said sowing was continuing in many parts of the country and was likely to pick up significantly in the days ahead. Planting of paddy was relatively slow in UP, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, MP, Andhra, Assam, Haryana and West Bengal, the agriculture ministry said. The India Meteorological Department has forecast increase in rainfall in many parts of the country, except in the southern regions, where it will be subdued. During the same period, scattered rainfall over plains of northwest India is expected. Planting of pulses (pigeon pea, urad bean and moong bean) at 4.40 million hectares, is much lower than last year's 7.30 million, but with the weather office forecasting good rainfall, the acreage is poised to increase. "Pulses sowing will continue till the first week of August and a clear picture will emerge by the second week," said Pradeep Ghorpade, CEO, India Pulses and Grain Association. Oilseed planting also improved from previous week's 3.81 million hectare to 10.78, compared with 15.31 million last year. Soybean, which is one of the key oilseed crops has been planted over 7.7 million hectares till Friday compared with 11 million hectares in the previous year. Rajesh Agrawal, spokesperson, Soyabean Processors Association said sowing can take place till July 30. "I am confident that we will cover up by then," he said. Cotton sowing is down to 7.61 million hectares from 10.50 million a year ago, but the situation can improve rapidly. "There is good progress of planting over last week and we should be able to cover 11.5 million hectare, similar to previous year," said Dhiren Sheth, president of the Cotton Association of India. Area under coarse cereals — jowar, bajra and maize — had also dropped 64.74% to 8.45 million hectare from 14.9 million hectare a year ago.