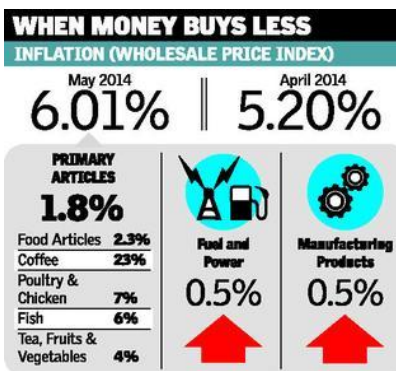


NEW DELHI,

States told to crack down on hoarders

PUJA MEHRA

Curbs on export of onions, potatoes to combat inflation



The Government on Tuesday announced steps to check rising food prices, restricting export of onions and potatoes, and asking States to crack down on hoarders. A day after official data showed inflation running at a five-month high, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley held an emergency meeting with Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh and top officials, including Nripendra Misra, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Of the 22 commodities being actively monitored by the government, four to five have shown a spike in prices, Mr. Jaitley said. "The government won't allow anyone to exploit apprehensions of a weak monsoon. States are being advised to crack down on hoarders." Among the export curbs, the government imposed a Minimum Export Price of \$ 300 per tonne on onions. *(Additional reporting by Gargi Parsai)*

NEW DELHI,

States given drought warning

GARGI PARSAI

The Centre has issued an advisory to the States to be prepared with strategies for mitigation of a possible drought during the kharif season of 2014. The biggest worry is that a deficient monsoon will spur hoarding and push up inflation. Prices of pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables can rise. Drought-mitigation plans have been prepared for States likely to be worse

hit. The worst-affected are likely to be the north-west and central India regions — parts of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Kerala. Already an advisory has been sent out from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to the States to set aside 10 per cent of their funds for mitigating drought.

BANGALORE,

Forest clearances for projects to go online

Anil Swarup



Starting July 1, all forest clearances for industry and infrastructure projects will go online, to be followed by online environmental approvals from September 1, Anil Swarup, Additional Secretary, Union Cabinet Secretariat, said here on Tuesday. Inaugurating the Karnataka Government's e-portal to track public and private sector projects above Rs. 100 crore that have got delayed, Mr. Swarup, who heads the Project Monitoring Group (PMG) of the Cabinet Committee on Investment under the Prime Minister, said various Ministries were being gradually brought into a transparent, digitised system of fast-tracking large projects of over Rs. 1,000 crore. About Karnataka's new ePMS (electronic Project Management System), he said this was planned to be the first State-level portal but five States had already adopted it. He urged industries, "If you have a problem go to the portal and upload the issue. We are there to look into it." Chief Secretary Kaushik Mukherjee launched the portal at an event hosted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry. "We now have a tool to measure our own efficiency," he said. Mr. Swarup said, "We are now digitising the entire process [of project clearances.] We are making one Ministry after the other to understand the process. From July 1, forest clearances will be moved on the web. On September 1, environment clearances will go live on the web. The Ministry of Mines has agreed and so has the Ministry of Coal." All States must soon follow the pattern which enables industry to track project in real time and in an open

way, Mr. Swarup said, describing it as a “huge, revolutionary exercise.” At the Central level, where the PMG handles projects exceeding investments of Rs. 1,000 crore, he said, “Till date, issues related to about 150 project proposals worth investments of Rs. 5.5 lakh crore have been resolved.”

NEW DELHI,

Drought-mitigation plans ready

GARGI PARSAI

With the India Meteorological Department predicting that the southwest monsoon can be 93 per cent below normal, drought-mitigation plans have been prepared for States likely to be worse hit. The worst-affected regions are likely to be north-west and central India — parts of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and Kerala. The Union Agriculture Ministry plans to get the Cabinet’s approval to provide seed and diesel subsidies to the affected States. Already an advisory has been sent out from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna to the States to set aside 10 per cent of their funds for mitigating drought. Normally, a State is declared drought-affected when it states so in a memorandum to the Union government. The contingency plan prepared by the Centre has advised States to go in for short-duration pulses and suitable legumes for late sowing. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka farmers have been advised to go in for late-sown varieties of groundnut. For eastern and central Uttar Pradesh growers, the advice is to go in for rapeseed and mustard varieties that can be grown late in the kharif season. Late-sown pearl millet and small millet has been suggested for Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Bihar. Farmers have been advised to go in for traditional sowing methods to preserve moisture in the soil and to keep their livestock cool. It is expected that while irrigated Punjab, Haryana and parts of western Uttar Pradesh may tide over the situation and the Northeast may get a normal monsoon, the central parts of the country and Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan may be the worst hit. ***States advised to set aside funds for mitigating the situation***

GULBARGA,

TDC to take survey of all tandas in forests

Putta Mahadevaiah, member of the Tanda Development Corporation, said that the corporation would take up a comprehensive survey of all the tandas and those unsurveyed ones inside the forests and submit a report to the government on the conversion of them into revenue villages within two months. Mahadevaiah said as per the present norms tandas with at least 50 houses having a minimum population of 250 members and 100 acres of land should be declared as revenue village. The Union government had issued comprehensive guidelines to all the States for the implementation of the Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (recognition of Forest Rights) Act for protecting the land rights of those residing in the forest and tilling the land. Mr. Mahadevaiah said that based on these guidelines the corporation would undertake the survey in all the tandas and unsurveyed forest dwellings and submit a report to the government. He said that during the conversion of the tandas into revenue villages the land required for community use such as schools, hospitals and other basic amenities would be included. State unit President of the All India Banjara Seva Samiti (AIBSS) Rama Nayak said that, even after the 20 years of constituting the Tanda Development Corporation, government had failed to facilitate families dwelling in hamlets with the basic amenities.

SRIKAKULAM,

Dry spell worries farmers



Farmers carrying seed from the DCMS office in Srikakulam on Tuesday.— photo: K. Srinivasa Rao
Farmers are a worried lot in Srikakulam district with the delay in arrival of South-West monsoon and poor supply of seeds and fertilizers by the government agencies concerned. Normally, agricultural activity takes place in about 2.2 lakh hectares in all the three divisions -- Palakonda, Tekkali and Srikakulam. But this year, the production is likely to be affected with

delayed monsoon and non-availability of seeds. The total requirement of seed is about 1.6 lakh quintals but the supply is said to be only 26,000 quintals so far. "Even in June second week there is not even a drizzle though the monsoon is supposed to set. More over, we could not get sufficient quantity of seed at subsidised price," said J. Joga Rao, a farmer of Narasannapeta. The farmers also fear that they won't get financial assistance during kharif as the bankers would not extend new loans with the confusion over loan waiver. Many villagers were already in deep trouble with floods and Phailin cyclone which caused unprecedented damage in Tekkali and Srikakulam mandals. "We have lots of hopes on the kharif season. But with no sign of rain and financial aid from bankers things look bleak," said R. Laxamana Rao, a villager of Gara mandal.

BHUBANESWAR

Western Odisha farmers lose out to middlemen

Lack of storage facilities and farmers' cooperatives has led to this situation

Even as onion price has started to shoot up, farmers in western Odisha -- especially in Bolangir, Kalahandi and Nuapada districts -- are rueing for missing out a chance for reaping profits. Majority of farmers in the region have either sold their stocks to middlemen or disposed of produces in open market at a price very low by any market standard. The price of onion at farmers' level had varied between Rs. 3 and Rs 9 per kg. The reason for this situation is absence of storage facilities and farmers' cooperatives. Moreover, farmers have no access to bigger market from where they could get fair price of their produces. The prevailing poverty level in the region is also adding to the woes. As soon as their crop is ready for harvest, farmers sell it either in the open market or to middlemen at whatever price offered to them. Odisha produced 432,052 metric tonnes of onion in 2013-14. Bolangir alone had production of 123,006 mt accounting for more than 28 per cent of State's production. Similarly, Kalahandi and Nuapada districts had produced 31,888 mt and 11,414 mt respectively. While the highest onion productivity was found to be 14.74 mt per hactre in Bolangir, the productivity in Kalahandi and Khariar is 13.32 mt and 13.46 mt per hactre respectively. Only Angul district with 13.55 mt per hectare of productivity matches with these three western Odisha districts. "I had taken up onion cultivation in two acres of land. Although the production was below my expectations after being affected by three days of unseasonal rain during May, my profit margin could have been more in view of rapidly rising onion price in the market. But we hardly have any storage facility to preserve our produce," Ram Narayan Singh, a farmer in Khariar block of Nuapada district,

said.He said unless farmers' cooperative is not developed with government back-up in the region, farmers would continue to fall victim to distress sale.The region, known as Odisha's Nasik, could keep volatile price of onion in check if basic infrastructure facilities and services are provided to farmers.

MYSORE,

Spend more time in fields than offices, agriculture officials told

Krishna Byre Gowda reviews functioning of the department



Taking stock:Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda addressing a review meeting at the zilla panchayat hall in Mysore on Tuesday.— PHOTO: Anurag BasavarajMinister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda reviewed the functioning of the Agriculture Department here on Tuesday.The review meeting was attended by the officials and staff of the department from Mysore, Kodagu and Chamarajanagar.Mr. Gowda urged the officials to strive for transfer of technology from laboratory to farms to enhance crop output.He noted that the officials and staff of the department had confined themselves to routine administrative issues, including distribution of fertilizers and seeds, but the more important component of “extension work” and demonstration of technology to farmers had taken a back seat.Calling for modification in strategy and approach, the Minister said the change should be visible from this sowing season. Officials with agricultural science background should spend more time on the fields than in offices, he said. The officials were directed to take precautionary measures to ensure that crops were not affected by diseases. Mr. Gowda said a constant interaction with farmers at the field-level will curb the outbreak of diseases in initial stages itself.Reviewing the sugarcane production practice, the Minister took exception to the low yield in the region.He noted that in the Mysore and Chamarajanagar belt, the output hovered around 40 to 45 tonnes an acre as against the nearly 80 to 90 tonnes an acre in parts of Bagalkot and Belgaum.The agricultural scientists present at the meeting attributed the low yield in the region to unregulated use of

water and improper spacing of crops, among others. Mr. Gowda directed the officials to identify a demonstration plot and conduct a workshop for farmers so that they imbibe the best practices in agricultural production. Director of Agriculture Dharmarajan said the government would constitute a body on the lines of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices to ensure that there was scientific fixation of procurement price of agricultural produce to benefit the farmers. This will come into vogue in due course and is important as crop pattern is determined by crop price, he said.

Tobacco cultivation

Joint Director of Agriculture Mahanteshappa said the department was taking steps to reduce tobacco cultivation in the district, so as to phase it out gradually. The area under tobacco cultivation had come down by 5,000 acres in H.D. Kote and a similar effort would be made in other taluks, he said. MLAs Vasu and H.P. Manjunath and Deputy Commissioner Palaiah were present.

HYDERABAD,

Vegetable prices shoot up



VEGETABLE PRICES		
Vegetable	New Price	Old Price
Green Beans	Rs.100	Rs.40
Cluster Beans	Rs.40	Rs.20
Ridge Gourd	Rs.40	Rs.20
Cucumber	Rs.40	Rs.15
Carrot	Rs.40	Rs.20
Onion	Rs.25	Rs.10/15

(Price per kg)

Onion prices may once again bring tears to our eyes as prices of the vegetables, among others, have almost doubled in the last few days. Vegetable vendors in the city said there may be a further increase soon as there has been a shortage of onions in the market for a fortnight. While onions now cost Rs.25 per kg from just Rs.10 a kg two weeks ago, the green beans have shot up from Rs.40 to Rs.100 a kg compared to weeks ago! Cluster beans, ridge gourd, tomato, cabbage, cucumber, carrot, and potatoes have also become costly, creating a bigger hole in the

pockets of citizens. Vegetable vendors at Monda Market in Secunderabad said that the price rise may stop once monsoon begins. A wholesale onion trader at Monda Market, on condition of anonymity, said that the ongoing strike by onion traders in Nashik, Maharashtra, also may contribute to the hike of onion prices. Gajanand, vice-president, Monda Market Retailers' Association, explained that more than 60 per cent of the vegetable stock comes from Andhra Pradesh, and that lesser stock has been arriving from the last two weeks. "The production of vegetables in Telangana is less. Since monsoons have not begun, the extreme heat has resulted in low productivity," Gajanand said, and added that once rainy season sets in the State, the situation will improve.

NEW DELHI,

'Onion shortage due to hoarding, mismanagement'

GARGI PARSAI & PUJA MEHRA



The Union Agriculture Ministry has asked States to take stringent action against hoarders as prices of onions, potatoes and tomatoes continue to rise. "Production of onions, potatoes and tomatoes is higher this year than last year. A shortfall in supply is either due to hoarding or mismanagement by onion-producing States," Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh told *The Hindu*. A sluggish south-west monsoon and rising inflation on account of food and fuel prices have alarmed the government. Onion prices have shot up to about Rs. 35 from Rs. 15 a kg a fortnight ago. The prices of potatoes and tomatoes have also spiralled. The spike in inflation came even before the effects of the projected deficient rains and possible Iraq-related hike in global oil prices began to kick in. "The rise in prices of food articles can also be attributed to withholding of stocks on account of apprehension of a weak monsoon," Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had posted on Facebook late on Monday. "The State Government(s) should take effective steps to ensure that speculative hoarding is discouraged." Over the weekend, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi warned that “bitter medicine” was needed to put India’s economy back on track, without giving details. There is an urgency in the government circles to tackle the situation as elections are round the corner in Maharashtra, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand and possibly Delhi. Last year, just before the Assembly elections in Delhi, onion prices shot up to Rs. 100 per kg taking down the Congress government. Mr. Radha Mohan Singh attended a meeting convened by Mr. Jaitley to review measures for containing inflation. Earlier, the Prime Minister’s Office also convened a meeting with departments concerned on “measures taken to tackle food inflation.” Onion prices have also started rising as supplies have been hit due to a strike by loaders in Nasik in Maharashtra. Union Agriculture Secretary Ashish Bahuguna on Tuesday spoke to his counterpart in Maharashtra requesting him to prevent hoarding and resolve the dispute between strikers and the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee. Onion production this year is 192.98 lakh tonnes as against 168.13 lakh tonnes in 2012-13. Potato output is 46.6 lakh tonnes compared to 45.3 lakh tonnes while tomato production is 191.03 lakh tonnes this year against 182.27 lakh tonnes. Last year, 13.58 lakh tonnes of onion were exported as against 18.22 lakh tonnes the previous year. Mr. Singh said onion prices shot up by 29 per cent in Mumbai and 13 per cent in Delhi within a week due to shortage in mandi arrivals. “However, the steps taken by the government will bring down the prices,” he said.

COIMBATORE,

Cotton conference in August

The Indian Cotton Federation will organise a national-level conference on “Indian Cotton Scenario in the Current Context 2014-2015” here on August 12 and 13. According to a press release from the organisers, though cotton production and yield have improved in the last two years, there are challenges such as logistics, taxation, contamination, and arbitration facilities. Apart from discussions on these issues, the two-day programme will have sessions for farmers, ginners, traders, brokers and textile mills. About 3,000 delegates are expected to participate.

DHARMAPURI,

Move to create awareness on rain water harvesting in villages

A propaganda van to create awareness on establishing rain water harvesting structure in all the buildings was flagged off by the District Collector K. Vivekanandan here at the Collectorate campus on Tuesday. Mr. Vivekanandan said that the van would take a tour in all the eight panchayat unions in the district. The district administration is keen to establish this facility in all the Government buildings before the end of June 30 this year. The Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Sewerage Board (TWAD Board) would conduct cultural and awareness programmes in all the panchayat unions. It has been decided to familiarise about these facilities among the people by placing the models in the public places. Public can obtain technical knowledge from the TWAD Board officials on 04342 260028. Mr. Vivekanandan appealed the public to understand the benefits of these structures and establish the facility in their residences and buildings. N. Chandrasekaran, Superintending Engineer, TWAD Board, T. Sridhar, Project Director, DRDA, K. Sabanayagam, Executive Engineer among others were present on the occasion.

SALEM,

Water level

Mettur Dam

The flow of water into Stanley Reservoir in Mettur stood at 534 cusecs on Tuesday morning. The outflow was at 801 cusecs. The water level stood at 44.20 feet as against its full reservoir level of 120 feet while the storage was 14.354 tmc ft.

FELICITATED

Toppers in Standard X, and Plus-Two board examinations were felicitated at a function held here recently organised by Arya Vysya Munnetra Peravai. Former Mayor Rekha Priyadarshini, and Peravai president R. Aravindan felicitated the students.

PENSION ADALAT

The Department of Posts, Salem East Division, will conduct a divisional level pension adalat at the office on June 20 at 10 a.m.

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Sunny

Wednesday, Jun 18

Max Min

38° | 29°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:42

Humidity: 59

Sunset: 06:36

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1004

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Thursday, Jun 19

Max Min

40° | 30°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday Jun 20	Saturday Jun 21	Sunday Jun 22	Monday Jun 23	Tuesday Jun 24
39° 30°	38° 30°	39° 29°	39° 29°	38° 29°
Cloudy	Cloudy	Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy

Airport Weather

Chennai

Chennai

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:42

Humidity: 59

Sunset: 06:36

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1004



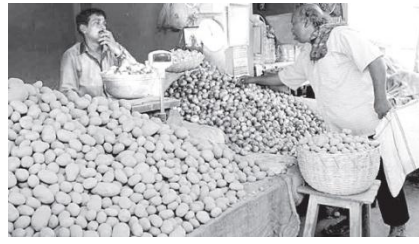
Farmers Worried as Dry Spell Threatens Malnad



CHIKMAGALUR: Chikmagalur district and the Malnad region have been experiencing a dry spell for the last 15 days. Farmers and officials of the Agriculture and Horticulture Departments, who expected the monsoon to begin by June 2, are waiting anxiously as the rains have been interrupted by Typhoon Nanauk. The monsoon had weakened over Kerala and there was a 28 pc deficit in rainfall. No rain is expected in the next two days, according to the Met office. In Haveri too, farmers who have already begun sowing are in distress as the rains are delayed. In Malnad, encouraged by the showers before the onset of monsoon, some farmers sowed potato and ginger tubers. The crop is now withering due to the dry spell. Some farmers who bought seeds and fertilisers with loans will face losses if the dry spell continues. Major commercial crops in Malnad like coffee, pepper and cardamom too will wither if rains fail. The quality of the coffee crop will be hit if manure is not added but farmers cannot add the manure unless it rains. There is also the possibility of pepper losing its stiffness and the crop being ruined. As against the demand for 25,830 tonnes of different kinds of fertilisers for the district, 19,990 tonnes have been supplied, said Agriculture Department officials. The officials said there is a demand for 12,700 tonnes of DAP, 28,400 tonnes of complex, 25,200 tonnes of urea and 860 tonnes of SSP. As of now, a DAP stock of 2,175 tonnes lies at the KSCMF Chikmagalur godown, 538 tonnes in Kadur and 415 tonnes with private agencies. Similarly, NPK stock of 2,356 tonnes in Chikmagalur, 296 tonnes in Kadur and 1,450 tonnes are available with private agencies. The Agriculture Department also clarified that 54 tonnes of MOP in Chikmagalur, 396 tonnes in Kadur and 1,050 tonnes in private stock were available. Urea stocks weighing around 40 tonnes are available in Chikmagalur, 199 tonnes in Kadur and 550 tonnes with private dealers. The Horticulture Department has invited applications from potato growers for awarding a special package subsidy of Rs 5,000 per hectare. An amount of Rs 1.40 crore was sanctioned as subsidy to potato growers in the district. Potato growers have suffered losses in

more than 2,800 hectares. The growers were asked to submit the current pahani, photocopies of their bank accounts, medicine purchase bills along with tin number and crop certificate to senior horticulture officers in respective taluks.

Summer Shock: Onion, Potato Prices Rise



SAMBALPUR: The sudden rise in prices of onion and potato in the last fortnight has come as an additional torture for the people in the summer. While the price of onion has soared from `12 to `20 per kg, potato is sold at `18 per kg. Although unseasonal rain in the onion growing districts of Kalahandi and Nuapada from May 25 to 27 is attributed to the price rise, the fact remains that onion from these two districts does not determine the price of the onion in the State. According to reports, onion was cultivated in over 846 hectares (ha) in Nuapada district and production of 11,387 tonne of crop was expected. While farmers claim that crop in over 300 ha was damaged due to the rain, Deputy Director (Horticulture) Bhagban Das has a different take. He said crop in only 29.5 acre has been lost. Apart from the rain, hoarding is seen as another cause of the sudden price rise. Vegetable wholesaler Gopal Gupta said rain had badly hit the crop in onion producing areas of Maharashtra two months back. In order to dispose of the crop before it perished, the farmers had sold the stock at a loss thereby bringing down the price. But with new crop harvested, they have jacked up the price to make up for the loss, Gupta said. He said the prices may further rise and will only be stabilised after fresh harvest. Meanwhile, prices of vegetables have also skyrocketed with ladies finger being sold at `35 per kg, pointed gourd at `40 per kg, brinjal at `10 per kg, green chilly at `50 per kg and spring beans at `40 per kg.

Tiruvarur Dist Gets ₹9.7 Cr Under CM's Kuruvai Package

Express News Service

Tiruvarur: The State government has allocated ₹9.68 crore for Tiruvarur district to implement the kuruvai package as announced by the Chief Minister recently.

The district administration expected 17,000 hectares would be brought under kuruvai cultivation with the canal irrigation whenever the water was released in Cauvery. Another 19,000 hectares would be brought for cultivation through irrigation wells, according to an official release issued by M Mathivanan, District collector.

Under the kuruvai package ₹1.06 crore has been allocated to raise community nurseries for paddy in 170

The administration expected 17,000 ha to be under kuruvai cultivation with canal irrigation whenever Cauvery water was released

hectares with which 17,000 hectares could be planted when Cauvery water reaches the district. Already 2,201

hectares have been covered with kuruvai paddy in the district.

The Government has also allocated ₹1 crore for distributing 50 transplanting machines to farmers groups in the district. Similarly ₹4.20 crore will be spent for distributing PVC pipes to 2,100 farmers. Zinc sulphate at a cost of ₹1.23 crore would be distributed to farmers to cover 14,000 hectare. There are allocations for distributing micro nutrients and gypsum to the farmers.

Three-phase power supply for 12 hours would be provided to the farmers who will take up kuruvai.

Stocking of other inputs under the kuruvai package are underway, the collector added.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

Cotton federation to hold all-India meet in August

Coimbatore,

Indian Cotton Federation (ICF) is organising its second All India Cotton Conference in Coimbatore during August 12 -13. The theme of the conference would be 'Indian Cotton Scenario in the Current Context 2014-15,' said ICF President J Thulasidharan. Stating that the second edition would be a follow-up of the Federation's maiden event held on September 1, 2012, he said such conferences provide the platform to discuss the challenges faced by the sector and seek opinions from all sections of the trade. "The earlier event focused on the challenges facing the cotton industry. The discussions were useful, but we realised that due to

time constraint, the problems confronting the industry could not be discussed at length. Hence, we have proposed to conduct it over two days this year,” Thulasidharan said. He said that since cotton prices would be the deciding factor for smooth working of the textile industry with sustenance of margins in domestic and export sales, discussions in the forthcoming event would centre around policy initiatives of the government, agencies. The resolutions adopted will be forwarded to the Union and State Governments for consideration. ICF is expecting at least 300 delegates from India and abroad to participate in this event.

Onion, potato turn costlier despite higher arrivals, production



A woman sorting onions at the wholesale vegetable market in New Delhi on Tuesday. S Subramaniam

Ahmedabad,

With prices of potato and onion soaring across markets in the country, market insiders are blaming speculators for the surge. “Even though there was some damage due to pre-monsoon showers during February-April this year, there is no shortage of onion in the market. It is more of a psychological factor that has caused a buzz about price rise,” RP Gupta, director, National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) told *BusinessLine*. In the past fortnight, prices of these two vegetables have jumped by up to 55 per cent in different markets of the country. At Lasalgaon, Asia’s largest onion market, the modal price or rate at which most trade took place ruled at Rs. 1,250 a quintal on Monday, up 22 per cent from Rs. 1,025 on June 2.

Labour issues No trading has taken place in Lasalgaon from Monday in view of a controversy over labours who weigh the onions seeking a higher wage. “The strike will not hamper supplies as we have other centres such as Aurangabad, Solapur and Pune from where supplies can be got,” said Gupta. (Cogencis reported that onion auctions in the 14 market yards of Nashik will resume from Wednesday after agitating traders and labourers reached a deal with the State

Government.)A sharper hike was witnessed in Ahmedabad APMC (Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee) yard, where onion touched Rs. 1,400 on Monday, up 55 per cent since June 2.Potato prices, too, have increased by 16 and 18 per cent respectively in Delhi and Mumbai markets to Rs. 1,720 a quintal and Rs. 1,850 during the fortnight.Concerns over crop damage and flash strike by workers at Nashik are hampering onion supplies, adding fuel to the price rise. Onion production in 2013-14 season ending this month is 19.2 million tonnes, up 14 per cent from last season's 16.8 million tonnes.Potato production was up at 46.39 million tonnes (45.34 million tonnes). Estimates show that about 3-3.5 million tonnes of onions are held up either with farmers or traders in anticipation of higher prices like last year.A year-on-year comparison of NHRDF data showed an increase in arrivals in June compared with the same month last year. At Lasalgaon, arrivals were 1,550 tonnes on Monday against 1,290 tonnes a year ago. In the Ahmedabad market, arrivals stood at 974.7 tonnes against 552 tonnes on the same day a year ago.

Monsoon concerns

“There are concerns over monsoon affecting vegetable crops such as onion and potato. Once onion sowing begins for *kharif*, we will see prices stabilising. Potato prices may see upward trend for a few weeks more as the futures market is firm,” said a potato trader in Ahmedabad's Chimanbhai Patel APMC.Potato arrivals too are higher compared with last year. In Mumbai, potato arrivals increased from 1,240 tonnes on June 17 last year to 1,528 quintals on Monday. But prices have increased by over 60 per cent year-on-year from Rs. 1,150 to Rs. 1,850 a quintal.

Fresh monsoon surge may sustain up to June 27

VINSON KURIAN

A fresh monsoon surge seems to have been initiated along the West Coast from Tuesday marked by moderate to heavy rain, high winds and rough seas.The Bay of Bengal too is expected to come to life over the next two days with the Met Department forecasting a fresh surge along the East Coast as well.

Fresh spell

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts sees the fresh spell being able to sustain in varying degrees of intensity at least until June 27. Thereafter, the flows from the Arabian Sea are predicted to weaken gradually. This is likely to coincide with the West Pacific getting into action mode. Global models have indicated that the West Pacific would likely witness an active typhoon (cyclone) season, something that weather watchers here wary of. A good number of the typhoons thus forming are predicted to go take in an east-northeast track (farther and away from the Indian subcontinent).

Not ideal

This is a condition that is not expected to go down well with the prospects for monsoon over India since the away-going typhoons will rob it of precious moisture to sustain the rain. Meanwhile, the ground being prepared for the enhanced typhoon season in the West Pacific received further credibility with an Australian Bureau of Meteorology outlook. The Bureau said that the West Pacific has been getting warmer than what presumed El Nino conditions in the tropical Pacific would suggest. In typical El Nino conditions, it is the East of the Pacific that gets warmer. Chances of an El Nino turning out this season are still considered at an elevated 70 per cent.

Alert sounded

Meanwhile on Tuesday, the country's West Coast was put on alert with warnings of rough seas, high winds and heavy rainfall in clear signs of a revival of monsoon. Over Kerala, heavy rain warning is valid for isolated places in the State for the next three days. Fishermen have been advised to exercise caution during next 24 hours since strong winds from a westerly direction with speed occasionally reaching 45- to 55 km/hr is likely along and off Kerala and over Lakshadweep islands. In a warning issued for Goa and Maharashtra, the local Met centre said that winds will be south-westerly speeding to 45- and 55 km/hr in gusts/squall. The Chennai Regional Met Centre has put the entire Karnataka coast with forecasts of strong onshore winds from a westerly direction with speeds occasionally reaching 45-55 km/hr along and off Karnataka coast. On the east coast, warning is valid for Chennai and Puducherry where south-westerly to westerly offshore reaching speeds of 45-55 km/hr are likely along and off the respective coasts.

Agriculture Ministry to review fisheries schemes

The Government will review all existing schemes in the fisheries sector, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh told a delegation of fishermen from different States who met him here on Tuesday. Singh said his Ministry would ensure that these schemes addressed the concerns and requirements of fishermen and directed the officials concerned to discuss issues that were brought to his notice. Among other things, the fishermen sought revival of diesel subsidy and steps to bring relief to fishermen who were jailed by neighbouring countries.

Bans

The fishermen also raised the issue of ban on fishing, with many of them saying they were not able to avail of the benefits of the schemes during the ban period. Coastal representatives sought control over 'destructive' fishing methods and gear and called upon the Ministry to consider using solar technology for fishing boats, an Agriculture Ministry release said. The fishermen representatives also presented a copy of the National Policy on Fishing and Fishermen Party to the Minister. In India, there are about three crore fishermen in 13 coastal States and Union Territories, of which about two crore are solely dependent on fishing for their livelihood. Some representative bodies, such as the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF), have for long been demanding a separate Ministry for Fisheries and Fishermen Welfare.

Loan problems

In a pre-poll memorandum to all political parties, NFF had demanded that fisheries be considered part of the Agriculture Ministry, as fishermen do not get any facility or concessions like farmers, such as loans and grants through cooperative and nationalised banks. "We are not allowed to get loans by pledging jewellery to repair fishing boats, nets or to buy fishing equipment," the NFF had said.

Spot rubber steady on low activity

Spot rubber closed almost steady on Tuesday. Market activities were in an extremely low as an improvement in the global trendsetters failed to trigger a positive trend in the commodity. Meanwhile, RSS 5 lost marginally amidst scattered transactions and the trend was partially mixed. Sheet rubber finished unchanged at Rs. 145 a kg, according to traders and the

Rubber Board. The grade was quoted flat at Rs. 142 by dealers. July futures dropped to Rs. 143.70 (Rs. 144.11), August to Rs. 142.70 (Rs. 143.02), September to Rs. 140.94 (Rs. 141.06) and October to Rs. 139.98 (Rs. 140.07) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange RSS 3 (spot) improved to Rs. 125.95 (Rs. 124.53) at Bangkok. June futures closed at ¥195.8 (Rs. 115.45) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange Spot rubber rates (Rs. /kg) were: RSS-4: 145 (145); RSS-5: 140.50 (141); Ungraded: 136 (136); ISNR 20: 132 (132) and Latex 60%: 123 (123).

How Govt can tackle the onion crisis



Marie C Fields/shutterstock

Onion prices have become an important issue since 1998 when India tested its nuclear weapons. Prices of onion have become a subject of regular conversation in every household in India. This article will discuss onion prices, given the onset of monsoon season and the Government's worry to tackle food inflation. It might be prudent to introduce a few ideas to help the onion market from a policy standpoint. According to data published by the Ministry of Agriculture, over 16 million tonnes of onion are produced annually with a yield of around 15 tonnes/hectare. India is one of the largest producers of onion in the world, along with the US and China. Conversely, per hectare yield of onions in India is among the lowest in the world. Global average yield is around 19 tonnes, and yields in countries such as Korea and the are over 50 tonnes/hectare. There are a few points that I would like to highlight for consideration. First, I do not see the demand for onions going down in the long run. Thus, the long run trend for demand will be upward. In addition, the long run demand of onion will be inelastic relative to any short run price change. Second, yield adjustments in India are sticky,

which means that it is quite unlikely to improve in the short term to bring about any structural change in the supply curve. Third, there is little hope from an inventory stand point where one could argue that a large rabi (winter) crop could be stored to offset the kharif (summer) production fluctuations due to the vagaries of the monsoon. While the points above sound pessimistic, the solution is more realistic, and I am quite optimistic that a proper interventionist policy by the Government can result in ameliorating the ongoing onion challenges in India. So, what needs to be done? The government needs to act real-time and intervene pro-actively. One such intervention would be to create a central data server where onion prices from every micro market in India are reported. This isn't as difficult as one might guess, but I would leave it to entrepreneurial minds to find a solution. This information gathering exercise is important so that we can see why certain markets are priced at a premium over others. If there are any arbitrage opportunities between micro markets, they can then be taken advantage of by traders resulting in a price benefit to consumers. Once all this information is digested in real time, the government would know exactly in which markets it needs to intervene. Another intervention the government can enact is bringing the producers and consumers closer by creating an artificial strangle. I am using the options parlance here, and what I mean is that the government writes a call to the consumer and writes a put to the producer. This means that the government is short on the price volatility, which it can hedge with a global reinsurer. This methodology will help producers and consumers in the case of a monsoon failure. Financial institutions are quite capable of delivering this solution to the Government. Using data to create a real time solution design is paramount in this age; and it should be doable. It is imperative that policies are designed to act lest today's troubles become yet another case study in the annals of onion tears. The writer is based in London and is the founder and Managing Director of OpalCrest (www.opalcrest.com).

Business Standard

Farmers in Himachal go for power tillers

The rising cost and shortage of labour have compelled [farmers](#) in the hills of [Himachal](#) Pradesh to go for [power tillers](#) for their work in fields and orchards. Due to the steep terrain of the terraced farms, use of [tractors](#) is not possible but there is space for bringing in smaller power tillers for both empty fields and tree covered apple and stone fruit orchards. In the last couple of years, cheap power tillers have entered the market and farmers have been buying them in plenty. The

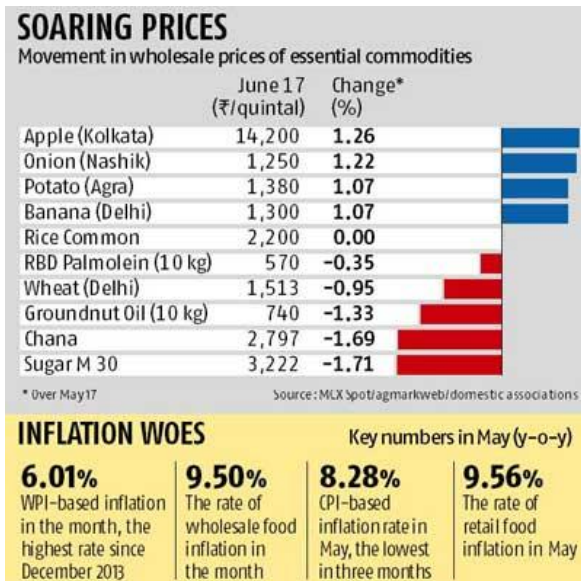
cost of a power tiller varies between Rs 80,000 to Rs 120,000. Also the government offers a flat subsidy of Rs 60,000 on a machine costing Rs 120,000, say the state horticulture department officials. A power tiller can do multi-purpose farm jobs like digging, mowing and cutting in little space as compared to a tractor which needs flat fields. Petrol-run power tillers are most popular in the vegetable belt in the mid hills known for producing off-season vegetables which finds its way across northern India. Here farmers own individual machines or hire the services of a joint tiller in the area. Apple and stone fruit orchardists are also acquiring tillers as using tractors with trees is not possible as they come in the way. But the biggest relief power tillers have brought to farmers is less dependancy on labour which is not only scarce but becoming more expensive every year.

Govt initiates steps to cool food prices



The [Narendra Modi](#)-led central [government](#) on Tuesday swung into action to rein in increasing prices of essential [commodities](#). While it imposed minimum export price ([MEP](#)) of \$300 a tonne on [onions](#), it assured a similar step for [potatoes](#) to bring down exports of the commodity and augment domestic supplies. The Centre advised states to freely allow movement of fruit and vegetables by delisting those from Agricultural Produce Market Committee ([APMC](#)) Act. The delisting process will start on Wednesday from Delhi, which is currently under the Central rule. The government also announced that a line of credit will be offered for states to directly import pulses and edible oils to meet shortages. Besides, an additional five million tonnes of rice will be released in the open market through states. In Delhi, the government will also procure onions for sale through the public distribution system and at Mother Dairy outlets. The Centre advised states to crack down on hoarders, amid apprehensions stocks of food items were being withheld in anticipation of a sub-normal [monsoon](#). After holding a high-level meeting with ministers and bureaucrats concerned, Finance Minister [Arun Jaitley](#) told reporters these steps were being taken to stem further increase in prices. He announced Delhi Lt Governor Najeeb

Jung would be advised that "tomorrow itself this delisting order (from APMC Act) with regard to Delhi for all fruit and vegetables be issued". This means farmers would have the option of going to either APMC or the market. Experts said an ordinance will have to be promulgated to amend the Delhi APMC Act. Meanwhile, Food Minister [Ram Vilas Paswan](#) said rice would be sold in the open market at above-poverty-line rates of Rs 8.30 a kg. Ashok Gulati, chair professor for agriculture at ICRIER, said: "Delisting of fruit and vegetables from APMC in Delhi has been due for at least 10 years. Offloading of five million tonnes of rice in the open market will help cool prices." There would be two kinds of effects of these measures. First, there will be an announcement effect, which itself will help tame [food prices](#); and second, there will be an impact on prices of actual delivery, he said. Of the 22 commodities monitored by the government, only four or five had seen a spike in prices, Jaitley said. Of those, onions and potatoes were two items that had witnessed a sharp price surge. While the government had imposed an MEP on onion, after a gap of three months, the commerce ministry would announce a floor export price for potatoes, Jaitley added.



"Export of all varieties of onions...will be subject to an MEP of \$300 a tonne," a Directorate General of Foreign Trade notification said on Tuesday.

Wholesale prices of potatoes have risen over 30 per cent in three months to May. The rate of price rise in May, though, slightly fell to 31.44 per cent from 31.56 per cent the previous month. It had stood at 31.38 per cent in March. MEP, below which a product can't be exported, is mostly resorted to when there is a significant price rise in the domestic market. A surge in prices of essential food items pushed the wholesale price index-

based [inflation](#) to a five-month high of 6.01 per cent in May. Jaitley had on Monday said a rise in inflation of food articles could have been because of withholding of stocks. He had advised states to take a tough stance against hoarders. Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh on Tuesday said onion and potato production this year was higher than last year, so there was no cause for worry. "But, it is for state governments to stop hoarding and blackmarketing." However, in terms of wholesale inflation rate, onion prices saw a year-on-year decline of 2.83 per cent in May, though the rate of fall in price was 9.76 per cent the previous month. There has, though,

been a spike in the wholesale price of onions in June at various centres; this will be reflected in retail prices in days ahead. For instance, between May 29 and June 17, the wholesale price of the commodity rose by Rs 600 a quintal to Rs 1,800 in Mumbai. This translates into an increase of Rs 6 a kg. In Delhi, price pressures were a bit low - by Rs 50 a quintal to Rs 1,188. This implies a rise of 50 paise a kg, according to data released by the consumer affairs department. Tuesday's high-level meeting, besides Jaitley Radha Mohan Singh and Paswan, was attended by Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and government officials like Nripendra Misra, principal secretary to the prime minister.

Paswan said the government gave export incentives on sugar for two more months - June and July - as stocks were adequate. Earlier in the day, Misra held a meeting of bureaucrats on food inflation at the Prime Minister's office. After the meeting, Consumer Affairs secretary Keshav Desiraju said the country exports 1.5 million tonnes of onions a year. "The MEP is expected to have some impact on increasing domestic supply and checking price rise." The secretaries from agriculture and commerce ministries were also present at the meeting. The issue of food inflation is also likely to be discussed at a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

Vietnam pepper exports up 40% in Jan-Apr



[Vietnam](#) saw a more than 40 per cent jump in pepper [exports](#) during the January-April period this year. The Southeast Asian country's export volumes were up 40.2 per cent at 75, 514 tonne, in value terms it saw a net gain of US\$164.3 million. Exports include 68,500 tonnes of [black pepper](#) and 7,014 tonnes of white pepper. Its dollar value reached US\$ 519.2 million, including US\$ 451.8 million for black pepper and 67.4 million for white pepper, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. The average export price of black pepper during the period was \$ 6,596 per tonne, white pepper \$ 9,606 per tonne. The biggest advantage of Vietnam is their huge production and the highest productivity across the world. To these key factors, the country could offer the lowest prices across the world. Higher prices of Indian pepper during the period caused

a serious drop in the Indian exports. Local manufacturers of value-added products depend mainly on imported pepper. North Indian markets also sell imported pepper as it is cheaper compared with the local grades. During the year 2013-14, Vietnam was reported to have a production of around 150,000 tonne while India's production was confined to less than 35,000 tonne. However, some growers project a much lower than this; at around 25,000 tonne. The US market continues to be the largest importer of pepper from Vietnam with 14,580 tonne, up by 3,700 tonne over the same period last year. However, Singapore emerged as the strongest in the recent times. The volume of imports of Singapore in first four months touched 10,141 tonne, up 6,524 tonne from the last year. While most markets like India, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Netherlands, Spain have seen an increase in exports, except Germany. German market continued to decrease imports from Vietnam. In the first 4 months Germany imported only 2223 tonne, down by 3,361 tonne over the same period last year, according to the data of Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture. 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) has forecast global supply to fall by 45,000 tonne this year to 320,000 tonne and demand to remain high, keeping prices high.

Govt may face challenge over cost in sugarcane floor price



As the National Democratic Alliance government gets down to fulfil its poll promises, it might find it difficult to provide a [floor support price](#) of 50 per cent over the cost of production, at least in [sugarcane](#). Officials said state governments in their estimates of production cost for sugarcane for the 2015-16 season (October to September) have quoted a rate on which 50 per cent addition would mean over Rs 400 a quintal of the [Fair and Remunerative Price \(FRP\)](#), the equivalent of minimum support price in sugarcane). They said for the 2015-16 sugar season, Uttar Pradesh has reportedly estimated the cost of production at Rs 281 a quintal, while Haryana pegged it at Rs 327. If 50 per cent is added on to the cost of production, then FRP

should be around Rs 420 a quintal."Guaranteeing an FRP of over Rs 400 for 2015-16 is almost next to impossible as sugar prices in retail markets would be close to Rs 100 a kg," said an official, who participated in the meeting.The issue of cost of production of sugarcane was discussed in a meeting on Monday between the [Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices \(CACP\)](#) and all stakeholders of the sugar industry for fixing the FRP for 2015-16 sugar season. The stakeholders also decided to expedite the ethanol-blending programme.FRP is the benchmark rate set by the Centre, while state governments are free to fix their own State Advised Price or SAP which is followed by the companies while making payment to farmers. For the 2014-15 season, CACP has already announced an FRP of Rs 220 a quintal, only 4.76 per cent more than the previous year.

Cardamom down over 1% on weak demand



[Cardamom](#) extended losses for the second day and prices fell further by 1.15% at Rs 909 per kg in futures trading today as speculators reduced their holdings on account of sluggish demand in the spot market.Adequate stocks position in the physical market on higher supplies from producing regions further fuelled the downtrend.At the [Multi Commodity Exchange](#), cardamom for delivery in July fell further by Rs 10.60, or 1.15%, to Rs 909 per kg in business turnover of 299 lots.In a similar fashion, the spice for delivery in August contract traded lower by Rs 5.60, or 0.72%, to Rs 888.50 per kg in 18 lots.Analysts said besides sluggish demand in the spot market, adequate stocks on increased arrivals from producing regions mainly kept pressure on cardamom prices to trade lower in futures trade.

Chana down 0.3% on profit-booking



[Chana](#) prices declined by 0.30% to Rs 2,960 per quintal in futures trade today on emergence of profit-booking by speculators at prevailing levels amidst subdued demand in the spot market. At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, chana for delivery in July traded lower by Rs 9, or 0.30%, to Rs 2,960 per quintal with an open interest of 1,72,210 lots. Similarly, the commodity for delivery in July shed Rs 5, or 0.18%, to Rs 2,815 per quintal in 38,630 lots. Analysts said besides profit-booking by speculators at prevailing levels, sluggish demand in the spot markets against adequate stocks position mainly influenced chana prices in futures trade.

Mustardseed up 0.5% on spot demand



[Mustardseed](#) prices improved by Rs 20, or 0.55%, to Rs 3,633 per quintal in future trading today following fresh positions created by speculators amidst rising demand in spot market. At the [National Commodity and derivatives Exchange](#), mustardseed for delivery in far-month September contracts rose Rs 20, or 0.55%, to Rs 3,633 per quintal, in an open interest of 2,700 lots. On the similar lines, mustardseed for delivery in current month contracts inched up by Rs 17, or 0.49%, to Rs 3,485 per quintal, with an open interest of 7,810 lots. Marketmen said the rise in mustardseed in futures trade was mostly supported by a firming trend at spot markets on increased demand against restricted supplies.

Sugar mills get Rs 4,000-cr loan boost

Banks have so far disbursed over Rs 4,000 crore interest-free loans of the total Rs 6,600 crore approved by the government to cash-starved sugar mills for clearing dues to cane farmers. In December, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) had approved Rs 6,600 crore interest-free loans to the sugar industry exclusively for clearing sugarcane arrears. It decided to give loans via banks equivalent to the excise duty paid by the mills in the past three years. "As on June 3, banks have disbursed Rs 4,072 crore interest-free loans to sugar mills," a senior food ministry official told PTI. Of which, Rs 1,412 crore and 1,461 crore have been disbursed to mills located in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, the country's top-two sugar producing states, he said. Banks have been given June-end as deadline for sanctioning the entire loan amount. The total interest burden, estimated at Rs 2,750 crore over the next five years, is being borne by the government. Mills have to repay the loans in five years and can avail of a moratorium on repayment for the first two years. The Rs 80,000-crore sugar industry has been facing a cash crunch due to higher cost of production and lower selling prices in the wake of surplus output over the past few years. Currently, sugarcane arrears stand at about Rs 11,000 crore across the country, with the maximum of Rs 7,200 crore in Uttar Pradesh. Amid concerns over rising cane arrears, the food ministry is also examining providing additional interest-free loans of Rs 4,400 crore to sugar mills to clear dues to cane farmers. It is also looking at hiking sugar import duty from 15 per cent to 40 per cent to curb cheap imports and increase ethanol blending in petrol to 10 per cent as an effort to improve the liquidity of mills.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

AP, Telangana firm on going ahead with farm loan waiver

Despite the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) giving it the thumbs down, the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments are determined to go ahead with their election promise of waiving off loans taken by farmers. In a communique to the chief secretaries of the two states, RBI executive director Deepali Pant Joshi had told them that such gestures will damage not only the banking system and the economy, but also choke credit flow into the respective states. "The RBI does not support the farm loan waiver scheme as it would hurt the financial health of the banks while destroying the repayment system," the letter said. While the state governments are mandated to comply with the Fiscal Discipline and Budget Management (FRBM) norms, the RBI

said such loan waiver schemes would weaken fiscal discipline and cautioned that waiving of such loans would demoralize borrowers who are prompt in repayment while encouraging defaulters. States should not embark on such a scheme that would favour the loan defaulters, the RBI said and strongly advised against the proposed waiver scheme. But on Tuesday, both AP chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his Telangana counterpart K Chandrasekhara Reddy appeared determined to go ahead with the loan waiver scheme. Naidu held a meeting with his officials and decided to write to the RBI explaining the circumstances that led to his poll promise and the need for financial help to Andhra Pradesh. "Our government has taken the decision with all responsibility. We are optimistic that a decision on loan waiver will be made by June 30 after taking all issues into consideration," said agriculture minister P Pulla Rao. The minister said Naidu would convene a meeting with bank officials on Wednesday following which he would write the letter to the RBI. He would also go to Delhi on June 25 and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and convince them about the loan waiver scheme, Pulla Rao said. Meanwhile, despite the disapproval of the RBI, the Telangana government on Tuesday calculated that the farm loan waiver for the crop year April 2013 to March 2014 would amount to Rs 16,013 crore. As per information furnished by the banks, about 36,51,316 borrowers availed various farm loans on 37,41,841 accounts between the stated period. After a review by the finance and agriculture departments, it was determined that out of the total borrowing of Rs 17,993.78 crore, the eligible farmers would get a waiver up to Rs 16,013.49 crore. However, the final figure may slightly vary as the data could need cross verification, sources said. There are about 14,52,867 farmers who had farm loans up to one lakh. They borrowed Rs 5,617.23 crore and the entire amount could be waived as per the assurance given by chief minister Chandrasekhara Reddy. Sources in the Telangana government said the letter from the RBI notwithstanding, they are determined to fulfill the promise the TRS had made in its election manifesto.

Onion auctions in Nashik to resume from tomorrow



Onion traders in Maharashtra's Nashik district have 'stayed' their strike and onion auctions will resume tomorrow after a gap of two days. Differences over how much wages should be paid to porters led to a strike yesterday and today. The two-day strike by onion traders over differences with mathadi workers (head-load porters) on the levy issue has been stayed this evening till July 10, following a meeting of state marketing federation officials, traders and mathadi workers at Nashik District Central Co-op Bank here, Nitin Jain, a trader present at the meeting, said. A committee has been formed to review the levy (mathadi workers' wages) issue and it will submit its report to the state government by July 10, he said. The meeting was held by District Sub-Registrar Sunil Bansode, where representatives of traders, officer bearers of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees, mathadi workers and state marketing federation were present. Both traders and mathadi workers have agreed to hold onion auctions till July 10, but have warned of resuming the agitation from July 11 if the issue is not resolved. Meanwhile, prices of onion were not affected due to the strike in Nashik district today, as auctions continued at Navi Mumbai APMC and elsewhere, said Jain. However, over 30 wholesale markets in Nashik district remained closed for the second day due to agitation by mathadi workers, who are demanding a hike in their remuneration ('levy') from traders. All 15 APMCs in Nashik district remained closed for two days. Traders are opposed to the increase in levy rates paid to workers from existing 34 per cent to 44 per cent.

El Nino may impact oilseeds production this year



Imports of vegetable oil and oilseeds are likely to surge if El Nino effect develops this year as forecast. El Nino, or warming of Pacific Ocean, led to deficient rainfall during the monsoon season and impacted production of oilseeds on all three occasions when it struck over the past decade. El Nino adversely affects rainfall and leads to drier conditions in India, South East Asia and eastern Australia, while it causes wetter conditions in South America and southern USA. Production of four major rainfed oilseeds - groundnut, soybean, sesame and castor - is susceptible to El Nino since even minor variation in rainfall impacts arability of these crops. With production likely to be impacted, oilmeal exports may also get affected this year. "If rainfall this year is lower than 90 per cent of long-range forecast, these crops are likely to be affected adversely. However, distribution and regular spells have a greater bearing on oilseed crops than the absolute quantum of rainfall. The demand-supply mismatch during peak season could also bring in unwanted volatility in prices of these oilseeds across major markets," said Raju Choksi, vice-president (agri-commodities), Anil Nutrients Ltd BSE -4.78 %. Choksi added that in case a major El Nino develops, oilseed production in India and palm oil production in Malaysia and Indonesia would take a hit. However, wetter conditions in South America and the USA may prove beneficial to the soybean crops in these regions. As per data available from the Indian Meteorological Department, India faced severe drought in 2004 and 2009, when monsoon was below normal by 13 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Production of oilseeds went down in both these years, as did oilmeal exports, while vegetable oil imports surged.

Genetically-modified brinjal may be the latest Bangla illegal immigrant

Despite India's moratorium on the release of genetically-modified (GM) Bt brinjal, there is a possibility of gene contamination of Indian brinjals from Bangladesh due to illegal entry of Bt

brinjal seeds through the porous border between the two countries. Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco), which developed the Bt brinjal technology, has transferred it to the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). Mahyco, whose 26 per cent stake is owned by US life sciences company Monsanto BSE 0.78 % , is hoping that the new Union government will expedite the release of Bt brinjal in India. CD Mayee, former co-chairman of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee, said: "In the absence of a permission to use them in India, there is a threat of illegal entry of Bt brinjal seeds into India via Bengal, Orissa and Bihar." Eggplant is a popular vegetable in West Bengal, which has banned field trials of genetically modified crops. West Bengal's science and technology department, state biotechnology council and the agriculture department are against GM crop field testing. Tushar Chakraborty head of Gene Regulation Lab, Indian Institute of Chemical Biology in Kolkata, said: "The draft biotechnology policy of West Bengal specifies this position. But, so far, we have not seen any concrete action in the border areas to stop this menace or threat." According to the scientists, if cultivated on large scale, one season will be enough for gene contamination to take place and will be too complex to control. Brinjal and its numerous wild and cultivated varieties and related species may be contaminated. "It will be like the case of GM canola (rapeseed), which is silently being withdrawn due to mass contamination in US and Canada to its wild relatives . South and north Bengal, Assam and Tripura will be at risk," said Chakraborty.

Weak rains may cut coffee output: Report

A below-normal monsoon is likely to pull down further the country's coffee output, which has been ravaged by the white stem borer pest attack. An initial estimate by growers puts the arabica production at 65,000 tonne in the coming season. The growers had calculated the previous year's arabica production in the range of 80,000 tonne to 90,000 tonne against the Coffee Board's post-monsoon estimate of 1,02,000 tonne "If the monsoon is weak, production may be hit further," said D Govindappa Jayaram, chairman of Karnataka Planter's Association. The white stem--borer menace was earlier confined to the coffee grown in the plains. But this time, the pest has been crimping the output in higher elevations as well, which does not augur well for the coffee production in the country. "Blossom rains during March were not uniformly distributed and were patchy, which resulted in long gaps of dry weather with high temperature. This was conducive for white stem-borer attacks," pointed out Coffee Board chairman Jawaid Akthar According to him, the crop in the coming season will depend on the distribution of rainfall. The board is adopting temporary measures to deal with the problem. But to find a lasting solution, it is jointly doing a research with the Indian Council for Agricultural Research.

India produces the robusta variety in bulk but globally arabica is grown widely and this determines the price. Arabica futures prices on ICE New York fell to just over \$1 per pound in November 2013 with a good crop predicted in Brazil, the largest producer. But a drought during January and February led the Latin American nation to scale down the forecast to below 50 million bags (each bag of 60 kg). As a result, prices flared up and went above \$2 per pound. But showers in the last few weeks have eased the impact of the dry spell and international prices have fallen again. Arabica futures for September delivery stood at \$1.76 per pound on Monday. The Brazilian authorities have lowered their 2014-15 estimate of the Brazilian crop to 44.57 million bags though they argue that recent rains have to some extent compensated for the earlier damage.

Government plans 'soil health cards' for all farmers



Seeking to spur agricultural growth, the Centre will soon launch a comprehensive plan to provide 'Soil Health Card' to all farmers across the country. The card will carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients/fertilizers required for farms, making it possible for farmers to improve productivity by wisely using inputs. A computerized system will be developed, allowing local agriculture science centres to keep details of 'soil test' results. Soil samples will be collected even from small farms in remote villages. The system will, eventually, allow farmers to download the 'Soil Health Card' using 'unique number' allotted to each soil sample. This way, any change in ownership of the particular farm land will not create any problem in getting such cards or getting it updated. Though a few states including Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Haryana had successfully distributed such cards a couple of years ago, most states did not make it operational beyond villages around various agricultural universities. The Centre's fresh

move will make it universal. "Providing 'Soil Health Card' to all farmers across the country is our priority. We are working out the details, studying best practices being followed by different states," agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh said. He told TOI that the move will help farmers in identifying "health of the soil" which will go a long way in improving productivity through judicious use of fertilizers and water. Since collecting 'soil samples' and uploading/updating the test results will be a mammoth exercise, the Centre may write to states urging them to take help of students of agriculture universities in doing this. Officials here do not rule out the possibility of linking the final degree of agriculture students with their work in fields like helping 'Krishi Vigyan Kendra' officials in sample collection and its periodic update. All soil samples will be tested in various soil testing labs across the country. Thereafter, experts will analyze the strengths and weaknesses (micro-nutrients deficiency) of the soil and suggest measures to deal with it. The result and suggestion will be displayed in the cards. Singh said, "Distributing 'Soil Health Card' to all farmers and providing irrigation facility to all villages under the 'Pradhan Mantri Gramin Krishi Yojna' across the country will be two major components of our agricultural policy."