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THE HINDU

'Hidden hunger' affects two billion



More than 2 billion people are malnourished because they do not receive enough nutrition from the food they eat, even though access to food has improved substantially over the past two decades.

Widespread consumption of poor-quality food leads to “hidden hunger”, which ravages economies and worsens poverty, according to the 2014 global hunger index (GHI), released on Monday by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide.

“In the long term, people cannot break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition without being granted the basic right to nutritious food,” the Welthungerhilfe president, Barbel Dieckmann, said. This year’s GHI, which examines 120 low-income countries, says about 805 million people are “chronically undernourished” because they do not receive enough food.

The study shows, however, that 26 countries in the developing world have reduced the number of hungry people by 50% or more since 1990, contributing to a global 39% fall in the number of people without access to food.

Burundi and Eritrea are the countries of most concern, with an “extremely alarming” prevalence of hunger, and the number of hungry people in 14 other countries was described as “alarming”.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs), which will follow the millennium development goals after they expire next year, must incorporate “a universal goal to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms and clear mechanisms to ensure accountability”, the report says. The latest draft of the SDGs contains a goal to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

— © Guardian Newspapers Limited, 2014

What is GHI?

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a statistical measure formulated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to determine the extent of hunger across the world. Updated annually, the GHI lists the successes and failures in efforts taken to reduce hunger across the world.

Three main factors

GHI is calculated by taking into account three important indicators – Undernourishment, child underweight, child mortality rate.

Ranking

GHI bases its ranking on a scale from 0 to 100. Zero indicates no hunger and 100 indicates the opposite scenario.

What it means to be a farmer



Day in and day out All 365 days, a farmer needs to work in his/her field to provide us our daily food. Photo: AFP

In this age of laptops, mobiles and iPads, you can browse the Internet, send e-mails, listen to music or even watch a film... all from the comfort of your chair.

But just think of someone who toils all day, and can't get his work done by connecting to the Net? Any guesses? Industrial workers for one; and the other being a farmer who grows the food we eat. If someone were to catalogue who's the most important person in terms of our life on this planet, it has to be the farmer.

If we fall sick we go to a doctor, if we have any doubts in class, we go to the class teacher ... and when it comes to food? No, not your nearest supermarket!! It may be technically correct to say we shop there, but the food we buy started off somewhere on land tilled by a farmer.

A farmer's life is a life of hard work and unrelenting toil. Think how hard it must be: no Saturdays or Sundays, no Christmas or Diwali holidays, no vacation breaks. All 365 days, he needs to work in his field to provide us our daily food.

He needs to be in the field from early morning till night and sometimes even through night to see his crops don't get damaged or stolen.

Schedule for crop

Just like your school schedule with its opening, exam dates and vacation season, the farmer has also a schedule for his crops.

Once the rainy season is over, the farmer gets busy readying his fields for sowing seeds. Then for a nearly 4-5 months he needs to water the seeds, protect them from getting infested by insects or diseases. Once the crops have grown to their optimum size, it's time for the harvest.

The crops are removed from the field and thrashed on the ground to remove the wheat, paddy or millet grains (nowadays machines do this job) and then cleaned and packed in gunny bags and sold to a purchaser. They are then dehusked, polished, sorted, packed and despatched... for you to finally pick it off a store shelf.

But the job of a farmer is not all drudgery... it's multifaceted. Like some of you who get prizes during for more than one subject, the farmer is multi-talented.

He grows the crop so he is a farmer; he knows whether it will rain or not by just looking at the sky, so he is a weatherman; he keeps animals like cows and goats and takes care of them when they fall sick, so he is a veterinarian; he works hard so is a worker... the job is certainly not boring, for he's wearing so many hats and doing so many things.

Next time you eat your idli/vada, think of the 3-4 months the farmer spent tending and growing his rice and pulses. The oil in which it's fried comes from mustard, gingelly or groundnut and for growing those, a farmer would have spent easily another 3 months.

For a country to prosper and grow, its farmers should be happy and prosperous. You can judge the health of a country by the way its farmers are treated.

Becoming a farmer when you grow up is something to be proud of. Our country has several thousands of doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers and office executives. What we need now are more farmers.

(M.J. Prabu is The Hindu's Agriculture correspondent. He writes the popular Farmer's Notebook. Write to the author at prabu.mj@thehindu.co.in)

Brainstorming session

On October 25, a brainstorming session on how to go about creating and sustaining interest among school and college students in agriculture will be held in Chennai. The top brass of The Hindu and the Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural research along with Vice Chancellors and Directors and young farmers will attend.

If you are interested in taking part, mail a question on agriculture/farming through your school to school@thehindu.co.in and if your question is selected, you will be invited to attend the session.

U.S. wins WTO case against

In a setback, India on Tuesday lost a case filed by the U.S. in the WTO against restrictions it imposed on poultry imports from America.

Giving its ruling, the World Trade Organisation's dispute panel said restrictions imposed by India on imports of poultry from America were "inconsistent" with international norms.

In March 2012, the U.S. dragged India to the WTO against India's ban on imports of certain American farm products, including poultry meat and eggs. India had banned imports of various agricultural products from the U.S. in 2007, as a precautionary measure to prevent outbreaks of avian influenza in the country.

"India's Avian Influenza (AI) measures are inconsistent with [several articles]...of the SPS [sanitary and phyto-sanitary) Agreement because they are not based on the relevant international standard," the ruling said. — PTI

Restoring fertility of tsunami-ravaged lands



Agriculture land affected by tsunami in Pillaiyarkuppam, Puducherry. (Right) Remedial measures undertaken by the authorities to restore the fertility of the land.— Photos: T. Singaravelou

The scars of the tsunami of December 26, 2004 are still evident on the agricultural lands of the region.

It is against this backdrop that authorities are engaged in broad-based efforts to restore the touch of fertility to the once bountiful fields.

During the tsunami, water ingress was recorded up to 1-3 km inland from the coast in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry which have a coastal length of 1025 km.

The average height of tsunami was 7-10 m. The total number of villages affected was 376 and 33 in Tamil Nadu and Pudhucherry respectively.

Saline water incursion was around 1 km into the southern coastal areas of Puducherry and this rendered the soil with high levels of salinity and the land uncultivable. The deluge damaged rain water harvesting ponds which were the main source of irrigation of casuarinas plantation in areas such as Narambai, Pillaiyarkuppam, Manapet.

It turned them saline and unfit for irrigation. Rare wildlife fauna and flora such as rabbit, fox, many reptiles and herbs are no longer present there. In the once fertile coastal villages paddy and manila crop were grown through pond irrigation.

The ponds dotted across the coastal area which gave clean water to farmers were totally damaged after the tsunami. Sharing his experience, K. Devaraj, farmer of Pillaiyarkuppam, said, "After the tsunami, we were unable to grow any crop. Our ponds either became saline or damaged."

Several villagers even attempted to sell their land to real estate agents at rock bottom prices .

G. Pattabiraman said, “Our livelihood was at stake. Whatever we sow would wilt immediately because of soil salinity. Now we hope to recommence our farming activities, thanks to the initiatives of government.”

The authorities have begun to sink a deep bore well near Manapet village. It will supply water for irrigation for nearly 50 acres of land. Tsunami affected farmers had represented to the Government of Puducherry to construct a community bore well.

N. Ramesh, Environmental engineer of Department of Science, Technology and Environment said, “After tsunami struck here several farmers remained clueless on recommencing their occupation. Now we are taking steps for community farming through pipeline water supply from the bore-wells.”

The Agriculture Department has been taking several initiatives to revive agriculture in the coastal area.

A. Ramamurthy, Director, Agriculture said, “We have been continuously taking initiatives to reclaim the land and restore agriculture activities.'By bringing in a community bore-well irrigation, we will be able to supply water to over 50 acres of land.

We undertook measures such as removal of silt settled on the soil, leaching the excess salinity and green manuring so that land becomes cultivable.”

New facility to assess fish safety, quality

The Tamil Nadu Fisheries University (TNFU) will establish a niche area of excellence in fish safety and quality assurance through the Department of Fish Quality Assurance and Management, Fisheries College and Research Institute (FCRI) here with a fund of Rs.3.05 crore from Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR).

According to a statement from Baskaran Manimaran, Vice-Chancellor, TNFU, the new facility would help to recognise, investigate and resolve issues through innovative approaches by acting as National Referral Laboratory in terms of capacity building through generation of technically qualified manpower.

The main mandate of the centre is to train faculty or scientists of research institutes, food quality inspectors and quality control technologists on various aspects of fish quality, safety and authenticity.

The main research objectives include molecular assessment of microbial risks, evaluation of chemical residues associated with frozen farmed shrimps and cephalopods, establishment of reliable non-destructive physical methods for rapid assessment of freshness and development of genetic markers for authentication of exportable fishes.

This centre would serve as a nodal agency to formulate standards for microbial pathogens and chemical hazards for fishery products and guide the government in taking policy decisions.

It would also collect baseline information on various risks associated with fish in Tamil Nadu in order to help the State government in taking decisions on closure of specific fishing sites and implement strict regulations.

It would cater to the needs of the seafood processing industry in Tamil Nadu in getting the products certified for export.

The state-of-the-art facility would attract collaborative research programmes at international level. Facilities would be extended to farmers in getting their farmed shrimps tested for chemical residual problems.

Seafood exporters would be provided with timely certification of the produce for risk, residues and authentication so as to boost exports and create awareness of quality, safety and authenticity among domestic consumers for improving per capita fish consumption.

‘Farmers will get 24x7 power if they install meters’

D.K. Shivakumar, Minister for Energy, has announced that the State government is ready to supply 24x7 power for farmers at subsidised rates, provided they agreed to install meters.

Charges

Speaking at a function organised in Kanakagiri, in which the Chief Minister set in motion a slew of development works for the district on Tuesday, Mr. Shivakumar said though the cost per unit of power was around Rs. 4.31 the government had decided to charge only Rs. 1.50 per unit and exhorted the farmers to come forward to install meters.

“Let the revolution start from Kanakagiri in Koppal district,” he said.

New policy

Mr. Shivakumar also said that the government had come out with a new power policy with thrust on encouraging farmers owing dryland to take up generation of non-conventional energy. “During agricultural seasons, he can make use of the power generated by him to lift water from borewells and during the lean season, he could sell the power to the government,” he said.

Commitment

H.K. Patil, Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, while lauding the Chief Minister for his concern towards the welfare of the people in general and that of farmers in particular, said that the government was committed to overall development of the State.

Take up generation of non-conventional energy, Shivakumar tells farmers

Students reap an ‘ideal’ harvest



Green fingers:National Service Scheme volunteers of Edaneer Swamiji Higher Secondary School at Kasaragod harvesting the paddy they cultivated using organic methods.

Students of Edaneer Swamiji Higher Secondary School near here have reaped a rich paddy harvest for the second year in succession.

A 'koythulsavam' (harvest festival) with the active participation of around 100 National Service Scheme (NSS) members was held on the paddy field on Monday.

The students took up the farm initiative to create awareness on the need to promote paddy cultivation on barren lands and to preserve paddy fields. They also wanted to highlight the rich farm tradition of the State.

The school's endeavour was to make the students feel the problems faced by paddy farmers, who had enjoyed a unique status in society till they abandoned paddy cultivation and started growing coconut and areca nut.

The students had spent dedicated hours right from preparing the field, sowing paddy, clearing weeds, and harvesting. They cultivated high-yielding 'Uma' and 'Aiswarya' varieties on over an acre of leased land adjoining the school following organic farming methods, I.K. Vasudevan, NSS programme officer of the school said.

T. Vanaja, senior faculty at the College of Agriculture, Padanakkad, near Neeleshwaram and local farmers provided guidance in their endeavour.

For the poor

The school is planning to use the yield for conducting 'annadanam' for the poor and will distribute it to the needy in adopted villages. The paddy will also be used at an upcoming NSS camp, he said. The harvest festival was inaugurated by N.A. Nellikkunnu, MLA, on Monday.

Chandy to discuss rubber crisis with Centre

Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said here on Tuesday that the crisis faced by rubber planters in Kerala and the implementation of the Idukki and Kuttanad packages would be taken up for discussion with Union Minister for Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh during his visit to New Delhi later this week.

Presiding over a meeting of the Agriculture Development Committee, he said the Commerce Ministry had already been apprised of the problems caused by the fall in price of natural rubber. Pointing out that the crisis was engendered by the global downturn in rubber price, he said a comprehensive package for the revival of the rubber sector would be presented to the Centre.

Mr. Chandy said the government would take steps to implement the recommendations of the agriculture policy formulated by a committee headed by former MLA K. Krishnankutty. Noting that the licensed production of neera had turned out to be beneficial for coconut farmers, he said the government was working on a programme to attain self-sufficiency in vegetables and milk.

Hailing the trend among young entrepreneurs to take to agriculture, he called for steps to promote hi-tech farming and organic farming in Kerala. Mr. Chandy said moves were afoot to ensure that farmers received timely payment for the paddy procured by the Civil Supplies Department.

The government, he said, had rolled out a project for Kerala to attain self-sufficiency in milk within one year. “While the northern parts of the State had already achieved this objective, the central and southern regions were still dependent on milk imported from other States, though production had gone up,” Mr. Chandy said. Efforts were on to promote vegetable cultivation in schools, fallow land and at the homestead level, he said.

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan said the first vending machine for neera would be installed on the Secretariat premises here on November 1. He announced that a workshop for NRIs was being organised in Doha this month to attract investments to the agriculture sector in the State.

Fisheries Minister K. Babu; Dominic Presentation, MLA; Planning Board vice chairman K.M. Chandrasekhar were among those present.

Project to help vegetable cultivation regain lost ground

The Agriculture Department is on a mission to remove eucalyptus grandis trees in Vattavada, Kanthallur and Marayur villages. The trees spread widely in the area are affecting vegetable cultivation and have led to the depletion of groundwater levels.

Check dams

Work on construction of four check dams is also on.

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan is monitoring the progress of the project in the affected villages. Mr. Mohanan told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that the areas where vegetable and fruit were once cultivated would be reclaimed within a set timeframe.

He said the removal of the trees and the construction of the dams were going on in a phased manner and various agencies such as the Horticulture Mission, Forest and Irrigation Departments had joined hands for the project.

Farmers had first grown eucalyptus grandis on the upstream barren areas.

It later spread to vast areas, resulting in considerable drop in vegetable production. It is estimated that nearly one-third of vegetable farmlands in Vattavada and Kanthallur were affected by grandis cultivation.

Groundwater depletion

A major after-effect was the depletion of groundwater levels and more cultivable areas turning barren.

A farmer in Vattavada said they were happy to return to vegetable cultivation as more people were doing away with grandis cultivation.

The State Horticulture Mission (SHM) is implementing the project and nearly 60 hectares of land has been shifted to vegetable cultivation in Kanthallur and Vattavada, the main vegetable cultivating villages.

Abhilash Mohanan, SHM field assistant at Kanthallur, said farmers were paid Rs. 50,000 for removing grandis in a hectare of land.

The amount was cleared without hurdles, resulting in prompt response from the farmers.

He said vegetable cultivation in about 20 hectares of reclaimed land in Kanthallur was nearing harvest. M.J. Ajithraj, field assistant at Vattavada, said grandis in 28 hectares of land was cut down.

Agriculture Department to remove eucalyptus grandis trees in three villages

Trees have spread widely, adversely affecting vegetable cultivation

Agriculture experts discuss farming, financial literacy

NABARD, All India Radio hold seminar for farmers



K.S. Rangappa, Vice-Chancellor of University of Mysore, releasing a booklet at a seminar in Mysore on Tuesday.— photo: m.a. sriram

Agriculture experts, scholars, farmers, bankers and students attended a seminar on Agriculture and Financial Literacy held here on Tuesday as part of 'Marali Baa Mannige' (Return to soil), a programme on financial and agricultural literacy designed by All

India Radio (AIR), Mysore, and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

University of Mysore Vice-Chancellor K.S. Rangappa inaugurated the seminar at the auditorium of B.N. Bahadur Institute of Management Sciences here. Akashwani Deputy Director Anand V. Patil, N. Usharani and Y.S. Sidde Gowda from the University of Mysore were present at the inaugural function.

In the sessions held in the afternoon, retired IFS officer and environmentalist A.N. Yellappa Reddy, senior journalist Nagesh Hegde, Sripadre, editor of *Adike Patrike*, Bindumadhava Vadavi from NABARD, Mandya, and Mohan Alva, chairman, Alva's Educational Institutions, Moodbidri, spoke.

Topics pertaining to farming, government policies, farm education, financial literacy and agriculture development, sustainable agriculture and the role of media in agriculture were discussed.

Earlier, inaugurating the seminar, Prof. Rangappa said steps must be taken on priority to boost the agricultural sector since many farmers had left agriculture for various reasons.

Stating that the number of persons taking up agriculture as a profession was on the decline, the Vice-Chancellor said efforts must be made to attract the youth to farming.

'Marali Baa Mannige' programme was designed to spread the message that rural areas offer abundant economic opportunities for the youth in agriculture and other rural sectors, and that financial institutions have resources to support entrepreneurial spirit of youth in rural areas for rural economic activities.

The radio programme highlighted schemes of the Union and State governments aimed at promoting agriculture and other rural sectors, and also talked about technologies developed by agricultural universities and research stations to make farming a profitable venture.

The programme was launched to create opportunities for pursuing farming as a livelihood activity by youth, besides involving influential leaders and religious heads in bringing “pride back to farming”.

CCI will bail out cotton farmers, says CMD

Cotton Corporation of India will step in and rescue farmers reeling under low prices, Chairman and Managing Director B.K. Misra said here on Tuesday.

Cotton prices have nosedived this year as China, the biggest importer of cotton, has reduced its imports by almost 50 per cent. Of the 117 lakh bales India exports to other countries, China alone consumes 55-60 lakh bales per year. But left with buffer stocks piled up to meet its domestic demand, China has drastically cut its imports from India.

“CCI will step in and bail out farmers. We have opened 22 procurement centres in AP and 59 in Telangana and will begin procurement soon. To boost our exports, CCI is looking to tap business opportunities in Bangladesh, Vietnam etc,” Mr. Mishra told reporters at a meeting with traders here at the CCI, regional office, here.

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) offered to cotton is Rs.4,050 per quintal. Domestic prices have plummeted to Rs.35,000 per candy forcing the intervention of the CCI.

Even as concerns over price fluctuation remain, India is poised to take over China as leading producer of cotton in the world. India is expected to produce 320 million bales during 2014-2015. Domestic consumption of cotton was also expected to pick up as more number of spinning mills would be coming up, the CMD said.

Explaining about the corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities of CCI, Mr. Mishra said that CCI had taken the initiative to construct 15 check dams at seven villages in drought hit Vidharba region in Maharashtra. The CCI has been adapting villages and encouraging farmers to follow good agricultural practices.

The CCI had also tied up with the Central Institute of Cotton Research, Nagpur, to introduce High Density Production Seeds (HDPS), he added.

CCI Marketing Director M. Chokkalingam, director Pradeep Agarwal, general manager S.K Chaturvedi and manager R. Jeya Kumar were also present.

Training in organic certification

Kerala Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran addressing a training programme on 'Organic certification and internal control system management' that began in Thrissur on Tuesday.

A five-day training programme on "Organic certification and internal control system management" began at the Kerala Agricultural University here on Tuesday.

Inaugurating the programme, organised by the KAU's Directorate of Extension and the Centre for Organic Farming, University Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said that local bodies should take steps to promote organic farming.

"The market is full of products that are claimed to have been organically developed. Many of the claims could be false. Farmers should be made aware of public sector facilities to get organic certification.

They should follow the recommended procedures in crop management, production, harvesting, post-harvest processing, value addition, packaging and marketing," he said. Presiding over the function, P.V. Balachandran, the newly-appointed Registrar, said that most farmers did not know the scientific practices for organic crop management.

"Indiscriminate use of chemicals in crop production and management has affected soil health," he said. Those present on the occasion included S. Estelitta, Head, Communication Centre; Binu P. Bony, Course Director; Chandra Prabha and Kshitij Kumar, Scientific Officers with the Regional Centre for Organic Farming, Bangalore.

Farm policy seeks blanket ban on paddy field conversion

The State agriculture policy slated to come up before the Cabinet for approval seeks a blanket ban on conversion of paddy fields.

The policy recommendations circulated at the meeting of the Agriculture Development Committee here on Tuesday, include steps to prevent the reclamation of paddy fields, enhance the acreage and improve the productivity.

It calls for immediate steps to increase the acreage from 2,18,000 hectares to 3,00,000 hectares and improve the productivity of paddy from 2.3 tonnes per hectare to four tonnes per hectare over the next five years. It also proposes that the paddy land ownership limit eligible for various government benefits be enhanced from two to five hectares.

Heritage asset

Highlighting the need to protect paddy fields as the State's heritage asset, the policy proposes that the ownership be restricted to farmers. It moots ecological incentives to farmers for preserving paddy fields and wetlands and the integration of farming with fisheries to double the income of ryots.

The document stresses the need to adopt water budgeting on a watershed basis, protect farm ponds and popularise micro-irrigation technology, rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharge methods. It seeks to enhance the production of bio-manure and develop regional soil nutrient plans to improve crop production potential.

The policy proposes a loan relief fund to provide financial assistance to debt-ridden farmers and bring them above the repayment threshold level.

Setting up of agricultural labour banks in all panchayats and a production incentive for farm labourers who have worked for a minimum of 100 days have also been mooted. The document recommends Amul model outlets and agricultural retail markets for procurement and distribution of farm produce.

Hoping for better returns



THE HINDUA woman picking cotton in a field near Talamadugu in Adilabad district.-PHOTO: S. HARPAL SINGH

After a rather prolonged bout of vicissitudes in their fortunes, cotton farmers in Adilabad are waiting anxiously for trading to open this season. They hope to nullify their losses incurred earlier in the season if their produce gets good price in the market which is expected to open around Deepawali festival.

The cotton market trends elsewhere in Telangana or in the country however, do not seem to be favourable to the farmers. The price may not be above the minimum support price (MSP) of Rs. 4,050 per quintal as was witnessed at Bhainsa, the second largest market in the district after Adilabad.

The MSP will not be remunerative considering the increased investment by way of loss of seed twice at the beginning of the season and the expenditure incurred owing to the delay in waiver of loans in addition to the decreased yield due to the weather prevailing in the monsoon.

“The price has to be above Rs. 6,000 per quintal for farmers to get something remunerative out of their kharif operations,” opines senior farmer leader and Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) State secretary B. Goverdhan Reddy.

The Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) is likely to be the major player in the market this season through its MSP operations. Nevertheless, its policy of purchase of cotton in open market being quite stringent farmers harbour no great hopes.

“If the CCI insists on the moisture content to be just 8 per cent for it to purchase the produce, it will go against the interests of the farmers,” says Palsi Kishan, a cotton farmer in Talamadugu where harvesting of the crop is underway.

The CCI deducts Rs. 40 per percentage point of moisture with the maximum limit for moisture content being 12. Application of this rule has always been detrimental to the cause of farmers as the first pickings of cotton exhibit a moisture content of over 15 per cent.

“Rejection of cotton with higher moisture content by the CCI will force farmers to go in for distress sale. They have to sell their produce to private traders at much less the MSP,” Mr. Reddy points out.

Centre asks tea-producing states to ensure minimum wages

The issue of minimum wages for the north Indian tea industry took centre-stage at a four-hour meeting taken by Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with various stakeholders in the tea industry. The minister felt that more needs to be done by the industry and the State government.

“A large part of the meeting was devoted to the issue of minimum wages,” a source who was present at the meeting told *The Hindu* , adding that the minister wanted to know whether tea wages were being paid as per the law of the land.

Ms Sitharaman was here on Saturday to hold a similar meeting with stakeholders in the jute industry. Her meeting with the tea industry is seen by political pundits as an attempt by the Bharatiya Janata Party to woo the workers in these industries. There seems to be a strong political agenda at work.

While 40 lakh farmers and 3.5 lakh workers are engaged with the jute industry, the tea industry provides employment to over 14 lakh people.

The minister was keen to know whether the North Indian tea industry is compliant with regard to payment of minimum wages as legislated. The north Indian tea industry mainly consists of Assam (which accounts for half of India’s tea output) and West Bengal, which has a 25 per cent share in India’s tea crop which averages at around 1000 million kgs.

Ms Sitharaman was keen to have the response of the West Bengal representative, although no one was present at the meeting. She was told that the Assam government notifies the minimum wages which is arrived at on the basis of bi-partite negotiations. Payments in kind under the Plantation Labour Act are also taken into consideration.

In case of West Bengal, the discussions are tripartite and long-drawn. The minister was of the view that clubbing of benefits with the wages gives a distorted view and should be avoided.

Mangoes no longer a sweet affair

Dry weather forcing farmers to cut down withered trees

WITHERING HEIGHTS



Farmers cutting down mango trees in Kolar district on Tuesday.

Mango is being grown on 48,824 acres in Kolar	Five taluks in the district declared drought-hit	Fall in groundwater level, scanty rainfall, are main reasons for drop in yield
Trees yield good harvest on an average of 30 to 50 years if nurtured properly		

It is very difficult to revive mango trees once they start withering, and that is why farmers resort to felling them.

V. NACHEGOWDA, Dean, College of Horticulture, Kolar

Mango yield in the State is likely to witness a drop as cultivators are felling trees that are withering owing to scanty rain and humidity.

All the five taluks in Kolar district have been declared drought-hit and mangoes are among the major crops affected by the situation that has been prevailing for six years.

One of the prominent horticulture crop, Mango is cultivated on 48,824 hectares in the district. Srinivasapur is the largest mango-growing region in the State gaining the sobriquet 'Mango Barn of Karnataka'. The district's average annual mango production is around five lakh tonnes.

However, the crop which provided livelihood to thousands as well generated jobs for at least three months in a year, is no longer a sweet affair.

Mango cultivation has become sour for farmers as the trees are withering. A study by a technical committee identified that mango crop on about 4,500 hectares of land was damaged. Among them, trees on about 390 hectares had been felled by the farmers for use as firewood and in brick kilns. The loss is huge in Srinivasapur taluk, estimated at around 3,550 hectares so far. The figures are likely to go up when the study is over.

Deputy Director of the Horticulture Department M.R. Chandrashekhar told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that the study will be completed in a week. The exact picture will be known only once it's completed, he said.

A report will be submitted to the government shortly, Mr. Chandrashekhar said. Mango trees yield good harvest on an average of 30 to 50 years if nurtured properly, says V. Nachegowda, Dean, College of Horticulture, Kolar. However, lack of groundwater as well as humidity in atmosphere has an adverse affect on the trees in the region, he explained.

“It is difficult to revive the trees once they start withering and that is why the farmers resort to cutting them down,” Mr. Nachegowda said.

P.R. Suryanarayan, leader of the Mango Growers' Welfare Association, demanded the government come to the rescue of mango cultivators.

DECCAN Chronicle

Hike cotton MSP, says YSRC



Mr Srinivasa Reddy demanded that cotton be procured by Cotton Corporation of India (CCI)

Khammam: YSR Congress Telangana state president and MP P. Srinivasa Reddy on Tuesday said that cotton growers in the state were left in the lurch due to the drastic fall in cotton prices. Addressing a bike rally on Tuesday organised to welcome him to the district after taking over the charge as party state president, Mr Srinivasa Reddy demanded that cotton be procured by Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) and the minimum support price be hiked to Rs 5,500 per quintal from the Rs4080 at present.

“The situation is bleak. Farmers are being exploited by middlemen who pay them just Rs3,000 per quintal,” he said. Mr Srinivasa Reddy said that cotton is the most important crop in Telangana region and is grown in an extent of 17 lakh acres, next only to Gujarat and the government should ensure a fair deal to the farmers to usher in the promised Golden Telangana.

PowerlessTelangana farmers hit hard by dry spell



Farmers who depend on borewells are the worst hit, since they are getting power for only two to three hours a day, even as officials claim that the power supply is for four hours

Khammam: Farmers of Khammam district are reeling this kharif season on two counts — the dry spell and inadequate supply of power to the farm sector. Crops like paddy, maize, cotton and chilli are drying up due to lack of water.

Farmers who depend on borewells are the worst hit, since they are getting power for only two to three hours a day, even as officials claim that the power supply is for four hours.

Farmers in as many as 15 mandals have been relying on borewells as there is no major water source. Agitation by farmers in front of Transco stations are a daily sight, especially in Julurpad, Karepalli, Kamepalli, Bonakal, Tallada, Enkoor, Paloncha and Mulakalapally, and Chandrogonda mandals.

Paddy in Painampalli, Arempula, Timmakkapet, Bachodu, Patharlapadu and Subledu under Tirumalayapalem mandal which depend on borewells, is getting dried up.

P. Narender, a farmers' leader from Tirumalayapalem mandal, said that farmers had sown paddy in 5,000 acres in the mandal depending on the borewells to water the crop.

"The crop is drying up due to the fact that farmers cannot even switch on their borewells," he said, pointing out that farmers who started kharif cultivation a month late are losing hopes of any good yield.

A Transco official said that Cyclone Hudhud has added to the woes since power being supplied from the Simhadri power plant has been stopped. The situation would continue for at least a fortnight, he said. P. Rama Rao, an agricultural official, said that yield will not be an encouraging one in the district this year.

He said that the insufficient power supply is hitting the crops in the extent of over 32,000 acres in 15 mandals.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Natural rubber faces the heat as crude oil drops

Synthetic rubber prices set to drop, gain market share

Chennai, October 14: With Brent crude oil prices plunging to a four-year low at \$88 a barrel, natural rubber prices, too, are set to come under pressure. This is more so because as crude prices drop, the rates of synthetic rubber will also drop.

"Already, supply exceeds in the global rubber market. Thailand and China had a lot of unreported stocks. These are coming to the markets, putting pressure on prices.

On top of this, the fall in crude oil prices spells bad news for rubber growers,” said CP Krishnan, Whole Time Director, Geojit Comtrade Ltd. On Tuesday, Brent crude oil futures slipped to \$87.76 a barrel for delivery in November. US crude ruled at \$84.75.

Rubber prices, however, improved in Asian market as China came up with better trade data and on talks of producers in South-East Asia planning supply curbs. Rubber contracts for delivery in March were quoted at Rs. 105.63 a kg on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

In the domestic spot market, RSS 4 (ribbed smoked sheet) grade ended flat at Rs. 122.50 a kg, though futures improved on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

Impact on price

“Natural rubber prices move in tandem with crude oil prices. But we see something positive in South-East Asian producers such as Thailand and Malaysia saying they won’t sell lower than current prices. This is a positive development in the last few months,” said N Dharmaraj, Vice-President of United Planters’ Association of Southern India.

“The fall in crude oil prices is a major problem. It will make synthetic rubber cheaper.

As a result, natural rubber prices will drop and growers will lose interest in nursing their plantations and tapping rubber,” said N Radhakrishnan of Cochin Rubber Merchants Association.

“Prices of synthetic rubber will have an influence on domestic rubber prices. As such, natural rubber prices are dropping on quality issues,” said Rajiv Buddhraja, Director-General, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers’ Association, a body for tyre manufacturing firms in the country.

Synthetic rubber

Data show the share of synthetic rubber in total consumption increased in the first quarter this year to 58.9 per cent against 57.6 per cent last year. They also show a 15,000-tonnes supply surplus in synthetic rubber against 81,000-tonnes deficit in natural rubber.

Global natural rubber production increased to 2.72 million tonnes (mt) in the first quarter this year against 2.69 mt in the same period a year ago. Its consumption increased to 2.81 mt against 2.67 mt. On the other hand, synthetic rubber output increased to 4.04 mt against 3.87 mt during the period and consumption was up at 4.03 mt against 3.83 mt.

In India, natural rubber production during the period increased to 1.67 lakh tonnes against 1.50 lakh tonnes, while synthetic rubber output was up at 37,29 tonnes against 26,682 tonnes. On the price front, RSS-3, used mainly by the tyre manufacturers, dropped to \$2,118 a tonne in the second quarter this year against \$2,251 in the first quarter and \$2,795 last year.

Synthetic rubber prices increased to \$2,735 a tonne in the second quarter from \$2,568 in the first quarter but were lower than last year's \$2,740.

"As availability of natural rubber is high, buyers in the global market may not go for it. Rubber is in a bearish mode. The only bright spot is the recovery in the US economy," said Geojit's Krishnan.

Supply woes

"At current prices in the domestic market, growers are getting only Rs. 107-108 a kg. Production has been dropping over the last 3-4 years," said Radhakrishnan. "Lower prices means production can be affected in the coming years too. Natural rubber prices will have to increase to Rs. 150 a kg if the situation has to improve," he said.

Currently, the domestic market is facing shortage of supplies, say Radhakrishnan and Buddhraja.

“If someone asks for 100 tonnes of rubber now, you can’t get it,” Radhakrishnan said.

“The domestic market is facing a peculiar situation. Availability is nil,” said Buddhraja, adding that this being a peak production season tyre companies are facing problems. “Any problems relating to the domestic market can support prices here. The Government could step in to help,” said Krishnan.

Gujarat groundnut production to drop 44%: survey

SEA crop survey reveals 26% decline in sowing and 25% drop in yield

Ahmedabad, October 14: Groundnut production in Gujarat, country’s largest producer, is likely to fall by 44 per cent to 14.3 lakh tonnes this year against 25.9 lakh tonnes last year.

After a three-day crop survey conducted in groundnut growing regions recently, the Solvent Extractors’ Association of India (SEA) said that while kharif groundnut sowing in Gujarat— which produces over 50 per cent of the country’s groundnut — has dropped by about 26 per cent, the yield is also likely to drop by 25 per cent compared with last year.

“Delayed and irregular monsoon has adversely affected groundnut crop in the region. Already, sowing area has declined as farmers preferred cotton over groundnut for better prices,” BV Mehta, Executive Director, SEA, told *BusinessLine* from Rajkot.

Groundnut acreage in the State has declined from 16.6 lakh hectares last year to 12.2 lakh hectares this year. According to an estimate, around 3.5 lakh hectare of groundnut area has shifted to cotton.

According to SEA estimates, groundnut yield has also taken a beating due to bad weather conditions. The yield may decline to 1,170 kg per hectare against 1,560 kg per hectare witnessed last year.

Last year, groundnut prices had fallen below the minimum support price (MSP) levels of Rs. 4,000 per quintal. “Farmers made losses as prices had dropped to around Rs. 3200-3300 per quintal and government’s procurement machinery also did not help,” said Mehta. However, sharp decline in production in Gujarat may not have an immediate impact on groundnut prices as international trends support the prices at present levels. The Gujarat groundnut crop survey was conducted by SEA under the guidance from sector experts including Govindbhai Patel and Vinubhai Patel. The national data on groundnut production estimates will be released on November 9 after completion of surveys in other regions.

As demand for hybrid variety rises, turmeric gains

Erode, October 14:

HYBRID TURMERIC GAINS ON DEMAND

Turmeric prices in Erode markets increased on Tuesday on demand for the hybrid variety. “Traders have received some upcountry demand for turmeric, especially for the hybrid variety. On Tuesday, about 1,800 bags of hybrid turmeric arrived and all the bags were sold,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at Rs. 3,799-6,599 a quintal, the root variety Rs. 3,796-5,930. Salem Hybrid: The finger variety fetched Rs. 5,687-7,699, the root variety Rs. 5,299-6,111. Of the 1,203 bags that arrived, 410 were sold. Our Correspondent

Coffee Board to assess Hudhud damage to AP,

Estimating losses due to excess rains in Karnataka

Bangalore, October 14:

The Coffee Board will assess the damage caused by cyclone Hudhud to plantations in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, Chairman Jawaid Akhtar has said.

The Board is currently assisting the Karnataka Government in estimating the losses caused by incessant rainfall to plantations in the key growing districts of Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Hassan.

“Araku Valley in Vishakapatnam district of Andhra and Koraput in Odisha are the new areas where we will take up the assessment of losses to plantations,” Akhtar said.

These non-traditional coffee growing regions in Andhra and Odisha came under the influence of cyclone Hudhud that wreaked havoc and caused damages in the eastern coastal districts of these States.

Coffee is grown on close to 43,000 hectares in Andhra and about 3,000 hectares in Odisha. These two States account for over 12 per cent of the country’s coffee area.

However, in terms of output, these regions totally accounted for about two per cent of the 3 lakh tonnes of coffee produced in the country.

Akhtar said the crop loss survey is jointly being taken with the local district authorities in Coorg, Chikmagalur and Hassan.

Heavy and excess rainfall during August had induced berry droppings besides triggering diseases such as leaf rot and stalk rot.

According to growers, the traditional high rainfall areas of Bhagmandala and Madikeri in Kodagu, Mudigere in Chikmagalur and Sakleshpur in Hassan have witnessed a higher than normal berry droppings this year, a trend that may influence the crop size this year.

Karnataka accounts for over two-thirds of the around three lakh tonnes of coffee produced in the country.

The Board, in its post-blossom estimates, has projected a record crop of 3.44 lakh tonnes (lt) for the new season starting October, a 13 per cent increase over last year.

Total output of Arabicas is pegged at 1.05 lt, while Robusta is forecast at 2.34 lt.

In Karnataka, the robusta output for next season is pegged at 1.67 lt, higher than last year's 1.32 lt. The output of arabicas is forecast at 80,700 tonnes. The Board is expected to take up the post-monsoon crop survey sometime late October-early November.

South-West monsoon withdraws in Hudhud's wake

Thiruvananthapuram, October 14:

Withdrawal of the South-West monsoon has resumed on Tuesday with the road block posed by intervening cyclone Hudhud getting blown away in phases.

The withdrawal line has pushed down along the western flanks into the peninsula while rains triggered by the Hudhud remnant, a depression over east Uttar Pradesh, have slowed the process in east India. An India Met Department update said that the South-West Monsoon has exited more parts of west Madhya Pradesh, most of Madhya Maharashtra and Konkan and central Arabian Sea.

Easterly winds

Its outlook suggested that easterly winds may start filling peninsular India as early as from Wednesday to replace in entirety the erstwhile south-westerly monsoon regime over the landmass.

From here, onset of the North-East Monsoon over peninsular India would be a logical conclusion. The Met would wait for rains to break out along the east coast and part of peninsular India before taking the call.

'Low' likely

Genesis of a likely low-pressure area south-east of Sri Lanka would be the trigger for pulling in the easterlies faster into the island nation as also over south India from around Friday. The Navy Global Environmental (Navgem) model of the Fleet Numerical Meteorology and Oceanography Centre of the US Navy is also in agreement with this outlook.

The 'low' is forecast to move north-northwest, rebound off Sri Lanka, and head towards the Tamil Nadu coast near Chennai, says the Global Forecast System of the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction.

Rain forecast

The US Navgem model sees the system rolling into south-east Arabian Sea, moving away from India's south-west coast and gaining intensity to likely storm strength. During the week ending October 19, moderate to heavy rain may lash south Kerala and adjoining Tamil Nadu while it will be normal to moderate over rest of Kerala and coastal and south interior Karnataka.

During this period, the Hudhud remnant would continue to drop rain over the Andhra Pradesh and Odisha coasts before signing off with a spurt of rain over the Himalayan foothills of east-Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The week starting October 20 would see Sri Lanka being washed over by another rain-fed system and break-away rain bands lashing adjoining south Kerala and Tamil Nadu, an outlook by the US Climate Prediction Centre suggested.