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THE HINDU

Agriculture critical to economy: Sumitra



“Agriculture was the most economic activity for any country and national governments must be sensitised to the fact that key agricultural issues were critical for food security, reduction of poverty, improving nutrition and empowerment of women and youth,” Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan said while inaugurating the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association workshop in Chandigarh on the ‘Role of Parliamentary Agriculture Committees’.

The Speaker emphasised the point that the trend of industrialisation, rapid urbanisation and related growing demand for housing and infrastructure were causing a demographic shift from rural to urban areas necessitating changes in infrastructure with regard to movement of workers and goods with important consequences for society and the farm sector.

“However, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture is clear that any new modern technology should be adopted only after examining its suitability to societal and local needs, its viability in different climatic conditions and that it conforms to the laws, regulations and policies of the government,” she said.

Pointing out that the Indian government had taken several measures for sustainable development of the agriculture sector, Ms. Mahajan noted that New Delhi has taken a consistent position in WTO on issues pertaining to livelihood, food security and rural development which were of vital importance to the interests of poor farmers.

“This apart, India’s Foreign Direct Investment policy in the farm sector aims at attracting public and private investments necessary to bring technology, knowledge and services to farmers,” she added.

CPA President Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary, chairpersons and members of committees from Asian, South East Asian and India Regions of the CPA, Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal and agricultural experts participated in the opening session, a press release from the Lok Sabha secretariat said.

TNAU’s SMS initiative to help farmers

Data the weather station collects...	From which zones the data comes and who manages it
☞ Rainfall level	☞ North Eastern Zone - Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai
☞ Wind velocity	☞ North Western Zone - TANUVAS college, Namakkal
☞ Maximum temperature	☞ Western Zone - Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
☞ Minimum temperature	☞ Cauvery Delta Zone - Tamil Nadu Rice Research Institute, Aduthurai
☞ Relative humidity	☞ High Rainfall Zone - Horticulture Research Station, Pechiparai
☞ Leaf wetness	☞ Southern Zone - TNAU Research Station, Kovilpatti
☞ Soil temperature	☞ Hill Zone - Hill Research Station, Ooty
☞ Solar radiation	



An automatic weather station set up by the TNAU.

It also transmits advisory to agriculturists based on the crop

Passing on information through short message service is now an in-thing. Capitalising on the technology, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) has come out with an idea to send weather and related information to farmers through SMS to help them plan farm activities better.

The TNAU's Agro Climatic Research Centre and six other institutions act as nodal agencies for the seven agro-climatic zones in the State and disseminate messages to around seven lakh registered farmers, says S. Panneerselvam, Professor and Head.

The institutions collect data from the automatic weather stations set up by the TNAU in 224 of the 385 blocks in the State, and transmit them through Global System for Mobile Communications technology to the server at the university, where experts read, analyse and send out predictions to farmers and to the public. The data generated by stations every hour is available for people in the university's website tawn.tnau.ac.in

Along with the information, the TNAU also sends out agriculture advisory based on the crop the farmers cultivate.

Mr. Panneerselvam says that the Agro Climatic Research Centre has moved on to the next stage. Once the farmers give crop detail and date of sowing, the centre will study the growth cycle of the crop and pass on the information to farmers.

The TNAU Vice-Chancellor, K. Ramasamy, says the purpose is to give accurate weather information and suggestions to farmer so that they can do the right work at the right time.

K. Marappan of Nagaranai in Sathyamangalam says that such information is useful but he wants the SMS in Tamil.

Govt. hikes MSP of Rabi crops

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for several Rabi crops.

These include wheat, barley, gram, Masur lentil, rapeseed or mustard and safflower. The prices are for the 2014-2015 season which will be marketed in next fiscal.

The MSP of wheat has been hiked from Rs. 1,400 to Rs. 1,450, barley from Rs. 1,100 to Rs. 1,150, gram from Rs. 3,100 to Rs. 3,175, Masur from Rs. 2,950 to Rs. 3,075, rapeseed from Rs. 3,050 to Rs. 3,100 and safflower from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 3,050.

The prices have been decided by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.

Bunds strengthened to stop influx of seawater

Paddy fields in several taluks partly submerged or water-logged



Collector T.Munusamy inspecting the inundated paddy fields at Koonduranveli village in Nagapattinam district on Wednesday.— Photo: DIPR

District Collector T.Munusamy has ordered officials to take steps to strengthen the bunds of Adaiparru to prevent sea water from seeping into the paddy fields at Gunduranveli and Thalaigaiyru Irandam Sethi villages. Paddy fields in the coastal villages in Thalaigaiyru union have been inundated due to the influx of seawater.

Mr.Munusamy, who inspected rain damage on Wednesday, directed the Public Works Department and Fisheries Department officials to maintain vigil in the villages to ensure the safety of residents. The Collector also directed the officials to immediately dismantle the nets erected at the estuaries of the Harichandra River and Karapidagai canal. He also directed the officials to clear water hyacinth and vegetation on water bodies that hinder the flow of rain water across the district.

Advisory

The district administration has suggested a series of steps to protect the standing samba crop in areas which experienced widespread rain in the past few weeks.

The district has registered a heavy rainfall in the last three weeks. The rainfall, which was 364.14 mm over the normal realisation for the month and the paddy fields in Vedaranyam, Thalaigaiyru, Mayiladuthurai, Kuttalam, Sirkali, Kollidam, and Sembanarkovil taluks had been either partly submerged or remained water-logged, said T. Munusamy, District Collector.

In a release here on Thursday, he said the crop was prone to certain diseases or pest attack such as case worm, leaf roller, blast or leaf blight.

Listing the details of the steps taken to check any loss to the standing nurseries of samba, the Collector said that application of sand mixed with kerosene and monocrotophos would go a long way in controlling the case worm. To control leaf roller, the Collector suggested application of profenophos.

For controlling blast, carbendizim or tricyclozole should be sprayed. To check leaf blight, he has suggested the spraying of streptomycin sulphate and copper oxychloride.

In case of any doubt, he has appealed to farmers to contact the nearest agriculture office for taking up remedial measure.

The district accounted for 37,400 hectares of paddy — 13,191 hectares under direct sowing strategy, 15,721 hectares under 'samba' area, and 8,488 hectares under 'thaladi' cultivation. He has appealed to farmers to drain the stagnant storm water from the fields.

Over 4,000 ha in Kolli Hills to benefit from watershed programme

The project to be implemented at a cost of Rs. 4.81 crore



Development work: Collector V. Dakshinamoorthy inspecting the implementation of integrated watershed management programme at Kolli Hills in Namakkal. -Photo: Special Arrangement

To harvest rainwater and utilise it to irrigate 4,010 hectares of agriculture land in Kolli Hills, the integrated watershed management programme is being implemented at a total cost of Rs. 4.81 crore.

Implemented by the District Watershed Development Agency, under the Agricultural Marketing Department, the Project X envisages construction of check dam and farm pond, deepening water bodies, agro forestry, providing drinking water, horticulture plantation besides crop demonstration and capacity building training programmes for farmers in four panchayats - Devanur Nadu, Selur Nadu, Thinnanur Nadu and Valappur Nadu.

Under the project, spread over a period of six years from 2013-14 to 2017-18, 27 water tanks were already constructed for villagers, while construction of five tanks was in progress. "It is to restore the ecological balance by harnessing rainwater and developing degraded natural resources", said R. Subramanian, Executive Officer, District Watershed Development Agency.

He said that the special programme was implemented with 90 per cent financial assistance from the Central government and 10 per cent from the State government.

Villagers in the four panchayats have to decide the type of work and adopt resolution and send it to the officials for implementation. The Department of Land Resources, Government of India, earlier implemented the drought prone areas programme (DPAP), the desert development programme (DDP) and the integrated wasteland development programme (IWDP). All these programmes were modified and integrated as IWMP from 2009-10. Collector V. Dakshinamoorthy recently inspected the project works.

Rice plants affected by disease

Foot rot disease showing up in 35-day old rice plants at a farm in Pallapalayam village, an interior pocket in Perundurai taluk, has dealt a severe financial blow to the cultivator Shanmugam.

Fifteen out of the 17 acres in which he is cultivating paddy is under a lease-agreement, and Mr. Shanmugam says he has spent Rs. 3.5 lakh so far on the crop so far.

He is now apprehensive about the productivity, which is likely to go down by less than percent of the usual output of about 50 bags an acre. In the leased land, he has to pay 12 bags of paddy an acre in kind, or the equivalent in money, irrespective of the productivity, at the time of harvest.

Mr. Shanmugam had purchased the seeds from a private seller for Rs. 30 a kg, the rate at which the Agriculture Department also sells the seed. He had no hesitation in choosing the selling firm based at Ammapet in the district as it was a government-certified one. Also, there was no problem with the seeds he had purchased from the same firm last year.

The farmer was taken aback after he saw the rice plants grow abnormally and drying up in quick succession. The dried up straw was so smelly and was unfit even for consumption by cattle, Mr. Shanmugam rued, seeking adequate compensation for the loss of production.

After he expressed apprehensions over the quality of seeds during the Farmers' Grievance Redressal meeting on Wednesday, District Collector S. Prabakharan who chaired the session deployed a team led by M. Selvaraj, Joint Director of Agriculture, to study the cause.

The team that also comprised Duraisamy, Professor and Head of TNAU's Regional Research Station at Bhavani Sagar; Deputy Director of Seed Inspection G. Annadurai; and Assistant Director of Seed Certification S. Chinnasamy, surmised that the peculiar seed-borne disease had occurred since it was not treated with benomyl.

Legal action can be taken against the seller only if the germination falls below 80 per cent level. In this case, there was no problem with germination.

The cultivator has been told that the next course of action could be decided upon after ultimate determination of crop productivity, official sources said.

CRISAT meet aims to boost FPO movement

Farmer producer organisations (FPOs) from six States of India are benefiting from an agribusiness initiative of the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), that will enable them to operate as businesses and make their farm operations sustainable and profitable.

At a recent FPO summit, smallholder producers gathered to explore agribusiness opportunities in the areas of technology penetration, productivity improvement, access to inputs and services, and increasing incomes for a sustainable agriculture-based livelihood.

Organised by ICRISAT's Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) programme, the one-day summit was attended by over 100 smallholder producers from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, a statement from the institute said on Wednesday.

At the summit, the participants were provided extensive knowledge and information, as well as networking support in setting up and promoting FPOs.

"The FPO approach is intervention-owned, managed and executed by smallholder farmers themselves. We need to scale up and increase the number of FPOs through agribusiness incubators so that we can bring in more stakeholders in making agriculture more sustainable and profitable," said ICRISAT director-general William Dar.

"In India, 35 per cent farmers do not have access to organised credit. With significant movement of rural labour from farm to non-farm activities, labour scarcity has emerged as one of the biggest constraints. Mechanisation of agriculture is the only solution to improve farming," said Andhra Bank CMD C.V.R. Rajendran.

Agribusiness summit attended by over 100 small farmers from six States; ryots provided inputs on technology, productivity and networking

Demonstration held in support of farmers

Congress leaders staged a demonstration at Enumamula Agricultural Market drawing the attention of the government to problems facing the farmers here on Tuesday. They were demanding Rs. 4,050 per quintal for cotton. The party workers led by Congress Kisan cell State president M. Kodanda Reddy interacted with the farmers at the market.

False propaganda

Former Minister Baswaraju Saraiah, former chief whip G. Venkataramana Reddy, former legislators S. Rajaiah and K. Sridhar, DCCB president J. Raghava Reddy, district Congress president N. Rajender Reddy, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) secretary Hari Ramadevi and senior leader Errabelli Varadarajeshwar Rao took part in the protest.

Speaking to newsmen, the leaders alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and his Cabinet colleague T. Harish Rao have been making false propaganda in support price to cotton farmers.

“The government is releasing pamphlets claiming that it is offering Rs. 4,050 MSP to cotton but the reality is different as none of the farmers are getting the price. They are only given Rs. 3,600 to Rs. 3,700 per quintal,” they complained.

Insurance facility

During the Congress regime the cotton farmers were given an MSP of Rs. 5,000 per quintal and also provided insurance facility, the leaders claimed. They demanded that the State government enhance the support price to Rs. 5,000 per quintal and procure the produce through Cotton Corporation of India (CCI).

The party city wing president T Vidyasagar, leaders Ghanta Narender Reddy, Rajarapu Pratap, Manda Vinod Kumar, Sambari Samma Rao, Surender Reddy and others have also taken part in the agitation.

Congress leaders seek minimum support price of Rs. 4,050 for quintal of cotton

Work to tone up paddy collective at Thottara to begin soon

Work on the first phase to improve the conditions in Ernakulam district's largest rice producing farm collective Thottara Punja is expected to begin early next month.

Though the project, aimed cutting the cost of agricultural production, were officially inaugurated in July this year, works are yet to begin largely because of the rainy season, said the Chairman of Kerala Land Development Corporation Benny Kakkad on Monday.

He said that the tendering process had been completed and there would be no delay in starting the work with the weather conditions improving.

Water logging in the fields was one of the key reasons holding up the works, said Mr Kakkad.

Thottara Punja extends over the Amballoor and Edakkattuvayal panchayats in Ernakulam district and Velloor in Kottayam district. The farm collective is spread over a total of about 1,500 acres.

The first phase of the work, which has been allotted more than Rs.15 crore, will mostly be confined to about 800 acres of the farm collective in Amballoor panchayat.

The Kerala Land Development Corporation is executing the work with funds received from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Building of bunds, walls, ramps for farm equipment to enter the farm fields and mechanical shutters are among the new improvements to be made for the farm collective.

President of the Amballoor panchayat K.F. Kuriakose said that rice cultivation would be possible this season in more than 60 per cent of the fields.

Agri-aqua expo to showcase sustainable models

The immense potential of organic aquaculture will be unveiled before stakeholders at the sixth edition of the India International Food and Agri Expo (IIFAE-2014) beginning at the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies on Thursday.

Organised jointly by the Foundation for Organic Agriculture and Rural Development and KUFOS, the five-day event will include an agro-machinery expo, India organic fair, processed food expo and animal husbandry expo. It will also have workshops on organic aqua-culture, organic spices, organic coconut-based farming systems, farm mechanisation, quality assurance, value addition and market linkage.

Elaborating on the objectives of IIFAE, KUFOS Vice Chancellor B. Madhusoodana Kurup pointed out that organic aquaculture and its vast potential will have a special emphasis at this year's expo. The expo will conclude on November 3.

Engagements for Thursday

Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies; Foundation for Organic Agriculture and Rural Development: Public Works Minister V.K. Ebrahim Kunju to inaugurate sixth edition of India International Food and Agri-Aqua Expo, K.V. Thomas, MP, to preside, Vice Chancellor of KUFOS B. Madhusoodana Kurup to deliver keynote address, Panangad, 2.30 p.m.

'Kera Neera' to be launched on November 1

Neera, a sweet non-alcoholic drink tapped from coconut palms, being brought out by the State Coconut Development Corporation under the brand name, 'Kera Neera,' will be launched in the market on November 1.

A venture of State Coconut Development Board and Kerala Agriculture University (KAU), 'Kera Neera,' will be made available in the market across the State through automatic vending machines. The first of these machines, to be installed in the Secretariat, will be inaugurated by the Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, on November 1, the Agriculture Minister, K. P. Mohanan, said here on Wednesday.

Fertilizer stock adequate

Based on cultivated area (total hectares), the fertilizer requirement had been worked out and supplies from different companies were arriving, said Collector L. Subramanian.

Inspecting a couple of godowns in Sellur on Wednesday, he said the fertilizer stock in the district was comfortable.

In October, TANFED and other agencies sent 5,300 tonnes of urea and 3,846 tonnes had been sold to farmers through primary cooperatives and other outlets till October 27.

As on date, the district had 1,996 tonnes of urea in stock, 2,475 tonnes of DAP, 434 tonnes of potash, 424 tonnes of complex (10 26 26), 1,184 tonnes of complex (20 20 013) respectively, Dr. Subramanian said and added that special teams had been formed to keep a check on selling prices of fertilizer.

The Agriculture department would keep a tab on all dealers selling fertilizers. Farmers could lodge complaints if they did not find price of fertilizers displayed at the outlets.

Similarly, information on adulteration or smuggling to other districts would be seriously viewed. Action would be initiated as per Essential Commodities Act, he also said.

A committee of officials would periodically review farmers' requirement of fertilizers and ensure supplies were in place.

As a precaution, the district had a buffer of 600 tonnes of urea, he said. Farmers should inform the authorities of any malpractice or attempts to hoard or create artificial demand by any dealer, he said.

There are 86 private godowns in the district, which have been authorised to stock fertilizers and despatch supplies.

A committee of officials will periodically review farmers' requirement of fertilizers and ensure supplies

Yellow leaf disease in arecanut may get a cure in two years

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) is hopeful of finding a way to tackle yellow leaf disease (YLD) in arecanut plantations two years from now, CPCRI director P. Chowdappa has said.

In an informal chat with *The Hindu* here on the sidelines of a meeting on Wednesday, Mr. Chowdappa said that the institute, with its headquarters in Kasaragod in Kerala, submitted a Rs. 7-crore proposal to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, a few days ago to take forward the study to find a solution to the disease.

An arecanut palm affected by the disease becomes weak and its productivity gradually declines. The disease was seen in the State in Sullia taluk in Dakshina Kannada and Koppa and Sringeri taluks of Chikmagalur. The disease has forced some farmers in Sullia taluk to shift to oil palm cultivation.

He said that the institute was adopting three different approaches to reach the goal. “We are approaching from three directions. One of them may work; or by combining all three, I think we can have a solution,” the director said. Explaining that the first approach was to develop growth-promoting micro-organisms, he said that certain bacteria and enzymes that enhance plant growth would be isolated from the soil and from the plant and a formulation prepared. When applied to roots, such formulations would help boost growth and crop yield.

The second approach was to identify disease-resistant plants in disease-affected areas, and to opt for the multiplication of such plants through tissue culture. Such plants have been identified in Sullia, Koppa and Sringeri.

The third approach would be to develop micro-nutrient formulation to reduce the disease intensity. “We have to take up field trials. We are hopeful that in two years we may find ways to tackle the disease,” Mr. Chowdappa said.

The director participated in a stakeholders’ meeting on “enhancing productivity and value addition in arecanut plantations” organised by the institute at its regional station at Vitla.

Rain cheers farmers

Some parts of Tuticorin district received rain on Wednesday.

The northeast monsoon has cheered farmers who depend on rain to raise their crops. N.K. Dhakshinamoorthy Joint Director of Agriculture, Tuticorin, said the normal area under paddy in the district was 17,500 hectares. Nursery preparation was under way for transplanting work. Millets had been raised on 66,000 hectares (normal area 80, 000 ha), pulses on 75,000 ha (67,700 ha) and oilseeds on 3,600 ha (4,100 ha). Cotton cultivation was expected to increase in the coming days. So far, 6,000 ha had been covered. But the average cultivation of cotton was 3,600 ha.

D. Jawahar, Professor and Head, Agricultural Research Station, Kovilpatti, said sowing of sorghum, pearl millet, minor millets and pulses continued till October third week. The farmers would sow sunflower, sesame, Bengal gram, coriander and medicinal senna in November,.

With a record 35 mm, Kazhugumalai recorded the highest amount of rainfall. Kovilpatti received 1mm, Surangudi 5 mm, Kadalkudi 8 mm and Tuticorin.30 mm.

Call for studies on use of solar energy for desalination

Researchers, especially young scholars, should identify the right technology for desalinating seawater by using solar energy stored in the upper strata of the ocean, A.E. Muthunayagam, formerly chairman, Board of Governors, IIT-Madras and formerly secretary, Department of Ocean Development, said.

Delivering the 22nd convocation address at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University here on Wednesday, Dr. Muthunayagam said the seawater, which could not meet domestic, industrial and agricultural needs owing to the four per cent dissolved salt content, was the largest solar energy collector.

The researchers should identify a cost-effective technology to use this energy to desalinate seawater without any external energy supply.

“I believe that the integration of both low pressure distillation process for desalination and ocean thermal energy conversion process for energy generation can provide an effective answer to this ambitious question,” Dr. Muthunayagam said.

Successful development of an integrated ocean energy-cum-desalination system could be an economical, reliable and environment-friendly procedure to make available huge quantities of water from the ocean to meet the needs of the society without any external sources of energy supply, he said.

Stressing the need for providing quality education that met international benchmarks, Dr. Muthunayagam said Indian universities should aim at becoming one of the top educational institutions in the world with global standards of research, teaching and learning through periodical update of curricula, introduction of choice-based credit system, examination reforms etc., so that the country, which was on the threshold of becoming one of the poles of a new multi-polar world, could produce a new generation of graduates in different disciplines to create a knowledge society.

“At the same time, basic knowledge, innovative application, adopting and disseminating the best practices for wider applications, and social organisation for programme implementation are very much essential to make the country a technology source or a global research and development platform,” he said.

Vice-Chancellor A.K. Kumaraguru, in his introductory remarks, noted that the university was working closely with IBM Corporation, Bangalore for setting up a cloud computing facility in the Computer Science and Engineering Department and had taken steps to set up Software Technology Park in collaboration with Software Technology Parks of India.

He informed that the MSU, which had installed 10-KW solar photovoltaic power generator, was planning to establish a 150-KW solar power generator system and construct a convention centre in connection with the university's silver jubilee celebrations.

A total of 893 candidates — 767 Ph.D.-holders and 126 rank-holders, including 335 men and 558 women — received their degrees in person from Minister for Higher Education P. Palaniappan. Moreover, 39,739 persons will receive their degrees in absentia to take the total number of persons to be awarded their degrees during this convocation to 40,632.

Techniques to bail out rain-hit paddy crops

The Agriculture Department has asked farmers to adopt a few techniques to protect the rain-affected paddy crops in Vellore district to avoid loss.

With the Northeast monsoon setting in, the State has received widespread rain. As a result, paddy crops are submerged in a few places and water stagnation reported in some fields.

As the rains have temporarily stopped, the department has asked the farmers to adopt certain measures. They have been told to immediately create a channel to drain the water and provide aeration for the roots. If recently cultivated saplings are damaged, the remaining seedlings could be planted.

If the crops are fully damaged, the farmers can take up cultivation of short-term paddy varieties through seedlings or direct sowing. There is a possibility of nutritional loss in crops submerged in water for which spraying of fertilizers is necessary.

The farmers have also been asked to take up appropriate measures to protect the crops from pest attack, including leaf roller pest, paddy blast and bacterial leaf spot disease, according to a release.

Banana growers float firm to improve revenue

To improve revenue and prevent post-harvest losses



Tamil Nadu ranks first in banana production with the total area coverage being around 2.5 lakh acres. Picture shows banana plantation at a village near Tiruchi. — Photo: A. Muralitharan

A group of 1,000 banana farmers across the State have joined hands and floated a company with objectives of improving revenue, preventing post harvest losses and identifying organised markets to dispatch their produce at a competitive price.

Christened Tamil Nadu Banana Producer Company Limited, the incorporated firm will have its central office in Tiruchi, a leading district in banana production.

Encompassing 40 banana grower societies, the company has been started in tune with Government of India guidelines with Rs. 1,000 provided as contribution by every member as equity share. The State government would provide Rs. 45.8 lakh as aid in three years for organisational strength and business plan development.

The company, expected to be commissioned next month, would be a platform for the banana grower societies to integrate, identify the customers' requirement and percolate them to member banana growers.

It would enable banana growers to interact and know the latest cultivation and marketing practices.

The company would sensitise member growers to the post-harvest procedures, grading, sorting and packing.

The immediate plan is to reduce post-harvest losses by setting up pack houses in banana growing districts including Tiruchi, Tuticorin and Theni, said its secretary G. Ajeethan, an agriculturist based at Mohanur in Namakkal district.

Tamil Nadu ranks first in banana production with the total area coverage being around 2.5 lakh acres. Tiruchi, Tuticorin, Theni, Cuddalore, Erode and Nagercoil are the major banana growing districts housing many banana clusters.

Traditional varieties such as 'poovan,' 'karpoora valli,' 'neipoovan,' 'rasthali,' red banana, 'matti' and 'cavendish' are raised in Tamil Nadu which has surpassed Maharashtra in average yield and productivity to reach the top slot. Banana varieties raised in the State were yet to penetrate north Indian markets in the absence of logistic support.

The whole objective of forming the company is to try to tap huge upcountry markets by perfecting logistics and seeking help from intervening agencies such as Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium and Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, said Mr. Ajeethan, also general secretary of the Tamil Nadu Banana Growers Federation.

Preliminary negotiations were held with authorities of the Kisan Mandi at New Delhi to showcase and market the produce in north Indian markets, he said.

- *It is expected to be commissioned next month*
- *There is also a plan to reduce post-harvest losses*

Crop loans: Govt. confesses to giving poor priority to ryots

At times when farmers are eagerly waiting for announcement from the State government to waive crop loan, the officials and political leaders on Wednesday confessed their poor commitment towards achieving target of sanctioning crop loans in Kharif season-2014. A total of barely Rs. 1,206 crore crop loans have been sanctioned to the farmers in the ongoing Kharif season as against targeted Rs. 3659 crores, which was arguably lowest priority given by the banks towards the agriculture sector.

The leaders including Irrigation minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao and Excise and B.C. Welfare minister Kollu Ravindra maintained silence over the issue of crop loan targets fixed to the banks during the first general body meeting of the Krishna District Zilla Parishad, held here. The meet began with a range of protest from the YSRC party ZPTCs and MPTCs who alleged that they received no communication or agent report from the ZP authorities regarding the issues scheduled to be discussed at the meet.

Responding to a query on process of obtaining licence for sand reach quarry, Mr. Umamaheswara Rao offered his clarification that a three member committee headed by the Collector would help the Self Help Groups to get licence as per the existing guidelines. "The public is allowed to recommend the newly explored sand reaches along the river bed of Krishna to the three member committee", the minister added. MLC B. Nageswara Rao presented a wide range of problems unaddressed by the department of education and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan officials. "Nearly 93 elementary schools which are badly in dilapidate state as per the SSA authorities are still crying for attention for renovation", he said. Krishna District Collector M. Raghunandan Rao and ZP Chairperson G. Anuradha coordinated the meet.

A.P. agricultural GDP much above national GDP

The Gross State Domestic Product of Andhra Pradesh (GSDP) in agricultural sector is above the GDP in the sector. While the GSDP in agriculture is 17.43 per cent, the GDP in the sector is 3.80 per cent.

This came to light at a review meeting conducted by Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu along with Special Secretary (Planning), Director (Planning) and Director of Economics and Statistics. The GSDPs in Industry and service sectors of the state are lower than that of the country. While the GSDP in industrial sector is 3.96 per cent, the Gross State Domestic Product is 4.24 per cent.

Similarly, the GSDP in service sector was 6.46 per cent, the Gross State Domestic Product is 6.80 per cent. The Minister urged officials to focus on the development of services and industry sector as their development will also stabilise the agricultural sector.

Finance Minister urge officials to focus on development of services and industrial sectors

Auction at Thuraiyur market sweetens the deal for cotton, onion farmers

The weekly auction of cotton and onion introduced at the Regulated Market at Thuraiyur been largely been welcomed by farmers.

Closed bid auction was done for cotton for 17 weeks on every Wednesday from February 5 to May 28 at the market. During this period, cotton farmers from Thuraiyur, Uppiliapuram, Thottiyam, and Musiri blocks brought 1,214 quintals of cotton for auction. In the auctions, farmers got a maximum price of Rs. 53 a kg, minimum of Rs. 47 a kg and on an average Rs. 49 a kg. Total of 4,163 bags of cotton were auctioned at a cost of Rs. 57.85 lakh. As many as 805 farmers benefitted out of the auction. Fifteen traders took part in the auction.

Auctions for onions were held for 14 weeks from July 16 to October 15. Onion farmers of Thuraiyur, Uppiliapuram, Thottiyam, Thathaiyengarpet, and Musiri blocks brought 58.57 tonnes of onions cultivated by them for auction. They got a maximum price of Rs. 23.50 a kg, minimum price of Rs. 11 a kg and average price of Rs. 17.25 a kg. Total of 413 bags of onions were auctioned at a cost of Rs. 7.36 lakh. Two hundred and twenty five farmers and 17 traders benefitted out of this. All the farmers who auctioned their onions and cotton were paid money immediately by the traders at the market.

“About Rs. 65 lakh worth of cotton and onions were auctioned by the Regulated Market in 14 weeks,” said M. Ravi, Secretary, Tiruchi Marketing Committee, and R. Chandrasekar, Deputy Director, Agribusiness. The auctions were arranged following the demand made by farmers in the monthly grievances day meeting to Collector Jayashree Muralidharan for providing marketing facility for their produce.

“In the Regulated markets, commission is not taken from farmers. From traders, no fee is collected. The markets provide direct purchasing facility to farmers from traders. Closed bidding is yet another advantage for farmers,” said Mr. Ravi.

Nine regulated markets are functioning under the control of Tiruchi Marketing Committee. They are functioning in Tiruchi, Manapparai, Thuraiyur, Mannachanallur, Lalgudi, Thottiyam, Thuvrankurichi, Thathaiyengarpet, and Kattuputhur. In Tiruchi district, cotton and onion are cultivated on 12,000 hectares of land and on 3,500 hectares of land respectively in non-delta areas such as Thathaiyengarpet, Thuraiyur, Uppiliapuram, Thottiyam, and Manachanallur.

Farmers who benefitted out of the auction said they were happy.

A. Inbasekaran, a cotton farmer of Okkarai village, said he auctioned 84 quintals of cotton at Thuraiyur regulated market for Rs. 5,23,000. P. Seetharaman, another cotton farmer of the same village, said he could store cotton in advance in the regulated market for auction.

“If the price is not good, we store the cotton for a week in the market and sell it when the price is good,” said Mr. Seetharaman. Cotton farmers demanded Individual Farmers Crop Insurance. Saravanan, onion farmer of Mahadevi Pudur in Thathaiyengarpet union, said he got the money for the onions sold by him in the regulated market immediately from traders.

T. Srinivasan, another onion farmer from Renganathapuram, said that commission was not collected in the regulated market from farmers.

Creature comfort



What are the commonly found insects during the monsoon? Naturalist Poochi Venkat leads us to them on an early morning walk at the Theosophical Society

“Ah, look at that one! And that. There’s another behind the leaf.” Naturalist *Poochi* Venkat bends into an innocuous bush we would otherwise overlook. But on an insect walk with him at the Theosophical Society early one morning, we realise that the tiniest blade of grass can be home to fascinating creatures. We set out to explore the world of insects a few days after the rains — for that’s when a lot of species are out to breed and start a new life.

“Look for something unusual; something that doesn’t look green,” he advises. “Leaves that are folded up are a dead giveaway for insects,” he adds as he peers into one. True enough, we see a praying mantis under it. “It’s a brilliant subject to photograph,” he says. “It’s not skittish.” All the world’s home for insects. We spot a pair of moths mating, unaware of our inquisitive eyes — “they are regenerating because it has rained,” observes Venkat. Soon, every speck of dust seems to move — a crab spider that “looks like a crab and moves sideways”, black and red millipedes on endless journeys, spotted cockroaches mating by the roadside, red ants referred to as ‘idli ants’ because of the idli-like formations on the skin that result from their bite, tiny lynx spiders with venom potent

enough to kill spiders much bigger than them, dazzling jewel flies, water striders travelling at lightning speed, a garden lizard sunning itself...we get to see insects we share our world with, in a new light and learn their interesting behaviours.

Venkat tells us of spiders that mimic ants so they can eat ants themselves and to not be preyed upon by other insects — “ants are not tasteful” he explains. “It’s a classic case of wolf in sheep’s clothing,” he smiles. It’s unbelievable how an ant’s mind works. He shows us one that constantly pokes at a small hopper in front of him. A closer look reveals a small drop of liquid on his leg. “The ant is teasing the hopper,” points out Venkat. “It exudes a sweet sticky liquid when irritated that the ant is fond of. The hopper is treated like a cow.” The ant “somehow seems to know” the hopper’s secret.

It’s easy to get lost amidst the tiny legs and fluttering wings. An hour later, the eye is constantly gazing into the green for a sign of movement. Venkat explains that most of the insects we spot can also be found in our gardens. While some insects come out after a spell of rains, a whole new world reveals itself in dry weather. But they are all beautiful, nevertheless. This is what Venkat wants to do — show us how beautiful insects are through his photos. He believes that conservation will happen as a result. “Insects are the base of the eco-system,” he says. Without them, other living organisms cannot exist.

Venkat developed a love for them by accident. In the early Nineties when a scientist gave him some slides to process, he noticed many of them consisted of insects. “I realised I had seen many of them in my garden,” he says. He shot a few photos of insects himself and there was no looking back. His best teachers, he says, were farmers. “They taught me the art of spotting and identifying insects,” he says. “They would point faraway and say ‘*paarunga sir, thumbi*’.” There would be one at the exact spot.

Insects are the base of the eco-system. Without them, other living organisms cannot exist

Call for calibrated export of cotton

P. Gopi, a Tirupur-based apparel exporter and a member of Cotton Advisory Board under the Government of India, has made a representation to the Centre calling for a calibrated export of cotton during the current cotton season (October 2014 to September 2015).

“Export of cotton produced within the country, if at all want to be allowed, should be permitted only after calibrating the crop situation and the local demand of the apparel manufacturers once in every three months. This calibration methodology, instead of a blanket permission for exports throughout the season, will help avoid hoarding of cotton by middlemen and the cotton prices could be maintained at consistent levels,” Mr. Gopi told *The Hindu* .

Any major fluctuation in the cotton prices could affect the apparel industry in clusters like Tirupur, which is presently on a path of economic recovery with export orders flowing in, he pointed out.

Mr. Gopi was of the opinion that the Union Government should protect the farmers’ interest in tandem with ensuring controlled exports.

“Government should allocate funds to allow Cotton Corporation of India to procure the cotton directly from the farmers at attractive prices all through the cotton season,” he said.

Farmers seek regulation of poultry price

Poultry farmers from all over the State staged a protest here on Tuesday against the terms on which poultry companies work with farmers.

However, farmers did not reach any agreement with the association of poultry companies with regard to their problems. Representatives of farmers wanted to approach the government to draw up norms to regulate the poultry industry after companies

under the Karnataka Poultry Breeders Association, led by Venkateshwara Hatcheries Ltd., declined to fix a minimum price for chicken sold by the farmers.

The companies told them not to approach the government and said they were willing to talk with farmers and come to an agreement. However, two meetings remained inconclusive.

‘Enhance kole roga-resistance in arecanut’

Can “kole roga” (fruit rot disease) resistance in arecanut palms treated with chemical solution be prolonged from 45 days to 90 days?

This question from Konkodi Padmanabha, president, Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative Ltd. (CAMPCO), to farm scientists at a meeting here on Wednesday appeared to summarise the concerns of the growers.

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), with its headquarters at Kasaragod, Kerala, had organised the meeting at its regional station here to help “enhance productivity and value addition in arecanut plantations”.

Mr. Padmanabha said that “kole roga” was a common disease in arecanut palms during monsoon. Farmers found it difficult to spray the copper sulphate-cum-lime mixture solution on arecanut bunches to control the disease. Now, the solution sprayed helped arecanut withstand the onslaught of the disease up to 45 days.

Hence, farmers would have to spray the solution at least twice or at times, even thrice.

If the CPCRI scientists, through research, could enhance the disease-withstanding capacity up to 90 days or more, it would help many farmers.

Monsoon brings copious rain

A vigorous Northeast monsoon is bringing copious rain across the State, filling up dams on the Western Ghats. According to the India Meteorological Department, the rain, beginning October 1, has been 43 per cent excess than normal rainfall. Almost all districts, except a few in the delta and north, have received excess rainfall. Only Tiruvannamalai district registered deficient rainfall this month. Meanwhile, the government has decided to assess the crop damage once the flood water recedes in the delta districts where, according to official estimates, 53,000 acres of farmland have been inundated.

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Today's Weather



Partly Cloudy

Rain: 0

Humidity: 66

Wind: normal

Tomorrow's Forecast

Thursday, Oct 30

Max 31° | Min 25°
Sunny

Sunrise: 06:01

Sunset: 05:43

Barometer: 1008

Friday, Oct 31

Max 32° | Min 26°

Extended Forecast for a week

Saturday
Nov 1



31° | 25°
Cloudy

Sunday
Nov 2



31° | 26°
Cloudy

Monday
Nov 3



31° | 25°
Partly Cloudy

Tuesday
Nov 4



32° | 25°
Partly Cloudy

Wednesday
Nov 5



32° | 25°
Sunny

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Don't go for paddy in rabi, Telangana Govt tells farmers

Hyderabad, October 29: The Telangana Government has asked the farmers to go for crops that require less water. Farmers were asked to shun paddy this season, keeping in view the unfavourable weather conditions. State Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivasa Reddy and Principal Secretary Poonam Malakondaiah held a review meeting on Tuesday with officials to take stock of the kharif crops and to discuss the rabi plan.

The meeting also discussed the losses caused by the untimely rains last week and measures to be taken to help farmers sell cotton. The unexpected rains in the State damaged crops and the produce in several mandals. The State is also in short supply of power, forcing it to enforce day-long power cuts in villages. Availability of power during the rabi could be even more difficult. The Government has asked the farmers to go for dry land crops that require less water and, in turn, demand less power. "Farmers are advised to plan their crops in such a manner that they would go for harvesting by March 15 when temperatures begin to rise," an official of the Department of Agriculture said.

Paddy is grown in 6.50 lakh hectares in Telangana out of the total cropped area of 13 lakh hectares in Telangana. The rest of the area is shared by maize (1.52 lakh ha), bengal gram (1 lakh ha), ground nut (1.7 lakh ha). The exact rabi production figures are not immediately available as this is going to be the first season after the State is created. In the combined State, paddy was grown in an average 15 lakh ha and produced about 55 lakh ha.

Unfavourable weather conditions and scarcity of power have rendered paddy cultivation unviable.

Volume rises at Coonoor tea sale

Coonoor, October 29: A volume of 21.68 lakh kg has been catalogued for Sale No: 44 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auction to be held on Thursday and Friday.

This is 4.16 lakh kg more than the offer of last week.

Of this, a volume of 14.31 lakh kg belongs to the leaf grades and 7.37 lakh kg belongs to the dust grades.

As much as 20.32 lakh kg belongs to CTC variety and only 1.36 lakh kg to the orthodox variety.

In the leaf counter, only 64,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 13.67 lakh kg, CTC.

Among the dusts, only 72,000 kg belongs to orthodox while 6.65 lakh kg, CTC.

With substantial volumes remaining unsold in previous auctions, as much as 3.46 lakh kg of such teas are being re-offered this week.

In the leaf auction last week, among corporate buyers, Hindustan Unilever Ltd bought good medium varieties. Duncans Tea Ltd was selective on the broken.

Godfrey Philips India Ltd was selective on medium broken. In the dust auction, HUL, operated on good medium smaller grades. Duncans was selective on the good medium bolder dusts. Godfrey Philips showed some interest on medium smaller grades. Indcoserve expressed interest for good medium smaller grades.

There was less demand for brighter liquoring teas from upcountry buyers. Overall, internal buyers were less active. Exporter enquiry was weak and confined to plainer grades.

Cotton, groundnut crops in Gujarat face trouble from Cyclone Nilofar fallout

Unseasonal rain likely to affect quality, productivity

Ahmedabad, October 29: Though cyclone Nilofar is slated to weaken before its landfall near Naliya in Kutch, cotton and groundnut farmers in the coastal regions of Gujarat could be in for a spell of trouble.

Heavy rainfall triggered by the cyclonic storm could damage *kharif* crops. However, the Gujarat administration and farmer bodies have stepped up their preparations to avert the impending danger to the maximum possible extent.

However, the standing crop of cotton and groundnut in parts of Saurashtra, Kutch and North Gujarat could be adversely hit by the unseasonal rains.

India Meteorological Department has predicted heavy to moderate rains along the coastal districts of Gujarat, including Kutch, Porbandar, Jamnagar and Devbhumi Dwarka till November 1.

“Even if the velocity of the wind is lower, rains will damage the bolls in cotton as water could seep inside it. This will affect the quality and productivity,” said NM Sharma, Managing Director, Gujcot.

Harvests at risk

However, the first plucking has almost been completed in most regions, but for the long-duration plants, subsequent plucking may be affected.

“We have advised farmers not to make fresh harvest for the next two-three days. Also, whatever has been harvested should be kept in safe and dry places,” said Mukesh Parmar, District Agriculture Officer, Kutch.

Gujarat has over 30 lakh hectares of area under cotton cultivation, while groundnut sowing has been done on about 12.25 lakh hectares.

For government officials, groundnut is a worry too.

“Cyclonic rains will damage groundnut lying in the fields. Most of the crop is ready as farmers had begun harvesting about a fortnight ago; however, about 40 per cent crop is still to be harvested,” said a State Agriculture Department official in Rajkot.

The Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) in the regions have also advised farmers not to bring farm produces for trading for the next two days.

“We have decided to keep market yard closed for fresh arrivals on November 1,” said Mahesh Vadodaria, Secretary, Gondal APMC, one of the largest APMCs in the State.

The current situation is akin to the one witnessed in 2010 when unseasonal rains affected cotton and groundnut crops, especially in the Saurashtra region.

For agri business page (brief)

Kochi, October 29:

GREEN CERTIFICATE FOR HML ESTATES

Harrisons Malayalam Ltd (HML) tea estates in Kerala, along with five factories belonging to the company, has been certified for Sustainable Agricultural Network/Rain forest Alliance (SAN/RA) by the IMO controls, Bangalore. The SAN/RA certification system is jointly owned by the Sustainable Agriculture Network and Rainforest Alliance. This initiative to certify all estates on sustainable practices is part of the management commitment to preserve the Western Ghats, HML President C Vinayaraghavan said adding that the company embarked on a journey to make its estates as plastic-free zones. Our Bureau

Govt hikes minimum support price of wheat by Rs. 50/quintal

Rise in prices		(In ₹/quintal)
Commodity	2013-14	2014-15
Wheat	1,400	1,450
Barley	1,100	1,150
Gram	3,100	3,175
Masur (Lentil)	2,950	3,075
Rapeseed/Mustard	3,050	3,100
Safflower	3,000	3,050

New Delhi, October 29:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for Rabi crops, including wheat, for the current season ending June.

For marketing in the 2015-16 season, the MSP for wheat and barley has been hiked by Rs. 50 to Rs. 1,450 and Rs. 1,150 a quintal, respectively. The maximum hike of Rs. 125 is for masur dal (lentil) at Rs. 3,075.

“The prices are based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices... and will help in higher production through assured remunerative prices to the farmers,” an official release said.

The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation, National Cooperative Consumers’ Federation, Central Warehousing Corporation and Small Farmers Agri Business Consortium will be the nodal agencies for procurement of oilseeds and pulses, and losses if any, incurred by the nodal agencies in such operations would be fully reimbursed, the release said.