

Farmers in Bargur hills expect bountiful harvest

It is after a gap of three years that tribal farmers on Bargur hills are able to think of remunerative returns from their agricultural crop, thanks to a spell of heavy rains last week. Farmers believe they would be able to make a reasonable margin from ragi and tapioca cultivation this time around. Having taken loans for two consecutive years and suffered losses, the farmers say that but for the rains, they would have well sunk into debt trap. Nevertheless, agriculture does not appear promising in the long run. Farming being entirely dependent on rainfall on the hills, many have left the vocation over the years and gone to work in the textile units in Tirupur and tea estates in Valparai and Ooty. In fact, the going is not smooth even for existing farmers, who are dependent on middlemen for selling their produce. The middlemen procure ragi and tapioca for less than half the price, according to Chinnasamy, a retired teacher who has been raising the crops on the hills.

Desperation

Out of desperation, farmers take loans from money-lenders in Anthiyur on high interest, and do not delay disposal of their produce. The concept of forming a cooperative society and operating vehicles for transport of their produce to the plains has not been explored as yet, admits Mr. Chinnasamy. Ideally, ragi must be procured for Rs. 10 per measure ('padi') and tapioca for Rs. 1,000 per quintal for agriculture to survive on the hills, said Mr. Chinnasamy, adding that the agro-climatic conditions does not suit cultivation of any other crop. Inquiries indicate that middlemen always adopt the strategy of bringing down the procurement price drastically within a few days of start of the harvest season, by blaming the price-crash on 'low starch'. Until the alleged nexus between middlemen and sago mills remains, the socio-economic condition of the farmers on the hills is bound to stagnate, or, in fact, keep deteriorating,

sources said.

Micronutrient deficiency: farmers urged to use foliar spraying

Occurrence of micronutrient deficiencies is a major problem in tapioca growing soils. Hence, to overcome these deficiencies, foliar spraying of 1 per cent ferrous sulphate, 0.5 per cent zinc sulphate, 1 per cent magnesium sulphate along with 0.1 per cent urea is recommended. Professors at the Tapioca and Castor Research Station in Yethapur said that tapioca was cultivated as a major crop in Salem, Namakkal, Dharmapuri, Erode and Villupuram districts. Soil types that exist in the cassava growing areas are calcareous where the decrease in the availability of micronutrients leads to occurrence of widespread deficiencies. The deficiency symptoms of micronutrients are same as iron deficiency symptoms where uniform chlorosis of upper leaves and petioles, which become white under severe conditions, reduced plant growth and young leaves are small but not deformed. In case of zinc deficiency symptoms, interveinal yellow or white spotting of young leaves, which become very narrow and chlorotic at the growing point under severe conditions, can be found. For details, call 04282-293526.

Supplementary irrigation to help farmers face dry spells

Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute, Kumulur, has developed a water harvesting and supplementary irrigation technology to help farmers cope with climate changes in Tiruchi district. The results of the three-year-long study has proved that effective harvesting of runoff water through constructing farm ponds and recycling it for supplemental irrigation through micro-irrigation during critical stages of crops would facilitate the farmers to

get higher productivity and profitability in dry lands. As per the study, a well-designed farm pond of capacity 1,800 cubic meters was dug up. It had harvested approximately 6,000 cubic meter of rainwater during northeast monsoon season with an average rainfall of 348 mm in three fillings. The harvested rainwater was then effectively used for supplemental irrigation using sprinklers and drip irrigation for crops with duration of 70-120 days. K.Ramasamy, Dean, AEC&RE, said the project, carried out under the National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) had proved that crops could get higher yield. G.Kathiresan, Professor and Head, Department of Agricultural Sciences, said that maize, cotton, pulses and others were successfully grown with higher yields up to 30 per cent. S.Somasundaram, Co-Principal Investigator, and S.Vallal Kannan, farm manager, said that higher yields in dry land were due to supplemental irrigation of 60-80 mm of harvested water through micro-irrigation. Mr. Ramasamy advised the farmers to dig up farm ponds on their lands to store not only rainwater but also the water from canal seepage, field drains and others to supplement the irrigation when the canal supplies dry up. Project carried out under NICRA had proved that crops could get higher yield

Farmers demand equitable distribution of water

The farmers, raising crops on 96,000 acres of land that fall under the command areas of Parambikulam Main Canal (PMC), were of the view that the authorities should follow equitable distribution method when the water would be released from Thirumoorthy dam on September 7. The demand for equitable distribution of water along the entire expanse in the command areas of Parambikulam Main Canal, frequent water theft from irrigation systems and issues pertaining to groundwater pollution were raised by the farmers in the grievances meeting organised by the district administration here on Wednesday. "Last year, the water was released for spells of seven days in the areas lying in 'head reach' of PMC irrigation system while the farmers in the 'middle reach' and 'tail end' areas got water in spells of only five days, which

is not a justifiable decision,” said A. Swamiappan, a progressive farmer and retired Superintending Engineer of Agriculture Engineering Department. P. Rathinasamy, a coconut and amla farmer in the command area of PMC, complained of widespread water theft using pumps and illegal pipelines along the 70 km stretch from Thirumoorthy Dam to Kallapalayam. “Unless the theft is controlled this time, farmers in the tail end will end up suffering,” he said. On the demand for distributing seeds to farmers for the entire areas they bring under agriculture crops, the Joint Director of Agriculture P. Santhanakrishnan clarified to the agrarian community that the seed distribution could be done only based on ‘Seed Replacement Ratio’ calculations. Farmers from Karaipudur, Kunnangalpalayam and Goundenpalayam areas jointly represented that the untreated effluents coming from many dyeing units in the area had been polluting the groundwater and hence, the water could not be used for irrigation.

Prices of pulses show signs of decline

Prices of pulses have come down in the last four days in Vellore. -Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy. The cost of pulses is showing signs of decline in the last few days. Tamil Nadu receives majority of its supply from Maharashtra followed by Karnataka. Good rains in these parts have improved the supply. This could come as a relief for consumers in Vellore as traders hope for a further dip. C. Janarthanam, secretary of Vellore Navathaaniya Mandi Vyabarigal Sangam, said that compared to July, prices of toor dal, Bengal gram and urad dal had increased by 10 to 15 per cent during August. The escalation was due to lack of rains in Maharashtra and Karnataka. But good rains in these

places in the last 10 days have helped to bring down the prices by 3-5 per cent. It could dip further this week, he added. The rates of dry red chillies, will continue to be the same. Chances that the price of dry red chillies (round variety) from Ramanathapuram will decline are minimal due to lack of rain, he said.

Red chillies

The dry red chillies come in two varieties – those stored in air conditioned godowns and non air-conditioned ones. “Red chillies are stored in A/C godowns to maintain its red colour,” he said. Accordingly, the round dry red chillies (non A/C) cost Rs. 110 a kg, with good quality ones costing Rs. 135 to Rs. 150. Those coming from A/C godowns cost Rs. 160. Similarly, dry red chillies (long variety) from Guntur in AP cost Rs. 80 (non A/C) and Rs. 80 to Rs. 86 (A/C). Tamarind (local variety) costs Rs. 60, while that supplied from Tumkur in Karnataka cost Rs. 85 to Rs. 90. Garlic costs Rs. 45 to Rs. 80, he said.

Government to hear farmers during peak samba season

With the agricultural activity gaining momentum for raising samba crop, the district administration has chalked out a programme for redressing the grievances of farmers. A special grievances meeting will be held on second Thursdays at the Revenue Divisional Officer's offices in Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, and Pattukottai from September till the end of samba and thaladi seasons. Officials from the revenue, public works department, Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation and Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation would participate in the meeting to redress the grievances, said N. Subbaiyan, District Collector. In a release here on Sunday, he said the district administration had advised the Public Works Department to ensure proper storage of water in tanks to meet the irrigational needs of farmers during the season. The special meeting was aimed at ensuring speedy redress of grievances of 'samba' and 'thaladi' farmers. He has appealed to farmers to participate in the meetings which will commence at 11 a.m. This apart, a preliminary meeting

for ascertaining farmers' grievances, would be held at the above three revenue sub-divisional offices on Thursday, the release added. Special grievances meet to be held on Second Thursday every month.

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Fertilizer release sought

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Suresh C. Angadi, MP, has urged the Union government to immediately release the promised quota of fertilizers to the district so that the standing crops were not affected. In a release issued here on Sunday, he said around 63,600 MT of urea was promised to the district for the current year, of which, 51,435 MT had been supplied so far. He said he had placed a request with the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers H.N. Ananth Kumar on the topic.

'Steps taken to increase forest area'

In order to increase forest areas in the State, the government has decided to encourage farmers to grow sandal plants on agriculture land, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Shivangouda has said. He was speaking after inaugurating a sandal plantation programme organised by the District Forest Department in Ballalsamudra village in Hosadurga taluk here on Saturday. He added that as per records the forest area in the state should have been 33 per cent, but the present area is only 22 per cent. So one step of the State government to help increase the forest area in the State is to encourage the farmers to grow sandal and other such plants on their agricultural land. Since sandalwood commands a high price in the market, the farmers who grow these saplings would get considerable profit after 20 years. The farmers can grow these saplings along with other agriculture and horticulture crops like pomegranate, coconut and other crops on their agricultural land. "The farmers in the region can get more benefits from growing these saplings as the growth would be very good in such climate and the oil content would also be considerably high in plants grown here", he added. The farmers who are interested in growing these saplings under government scheme should approach the district forest department officials along with their land records and two passport size photographs to register the names. The saplings would be provided to farmers depending on the necessary requirement, he said. Hosadurga MLA B G Govindappa stated that the State government has

already provided an opportunity to for to grow sandalwood on their agriculture land under the Karnataka Forests (Amendment) Act of 2001. The farmers would get 90 per cent of the benefit of the plants after certain period and state government would get only 10 per cent of the profit towards maintenance of the plants, he said.

Onion farmers warned over downy mildew

Because of considerable change in the climatic conditions across the district, farmers have been instructed to take precautionary measures to protect their onion crop, one of the major crops in the district, from diseases by sprinkling chemicals, Deputy Director for Horticulture Department K.R. Devraj has said. Due to incessant rainfall over the last few days, the crop in some parts of the district was affected by the downy mildew disease, which spreads fast in clod climatic conditions, he said. "Farmers should take all precautionary measures to control it," he said. There are also reports that onion in some parts of the district was suffering from blast disease, commonly called 'benki roga'. Officers of the Horticulture Department at all taluk levels have been instructed to guide farmers in controlling the spread of the disease and protect the crop.

Relief assured

The Kolhapur district administration has assured agitating farmers on Saturday that the crop loss due to the pollution will be assessed for compensation. Earlier, farmers had laid siege to the office of the pollution control board at Akivate in Kolhapur district for inaction to control the pollution caused by industrial units in the area.

Farmers in Mysore, Chamarajanagar shifting away from cane cultivation

Uncertainty in getting suitable price for sugarcane and the unending crisis have resulted in some farmers in districts such as Mysore and Chamarajanagar shifting to substitute crops for better and instantaneous returns. "It is true that some growers have quit sugarcane cultivation and shifted to fruit and vegetable

cultivation, which was giving them faster returns. The uncertainty in sugarcane price and delayed payment by sugar factories have disillusioned some growers. They are now earning more from alternative crops,” said Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers’ Association president Kurbur Shanthakumar. Mr. Shanthakumar, who is in the forefront of agitations across the State seeking better price for sugarcane, told *The Hindu* that there were 62 sugar factories in the State, including the two newly-opened ones in Chamarajanagar and Bijapur districts, and their combined crushing capacity was around 4.7 crore tonnes a year. However, 3.6 crore tonnes of sugarcane was being supplied to the factories. Though there was a shortfall in supply, the area under sugarcane cultivation had not gone up, perhaps because of the uncertainty over price. “Farmers are fed up over unending uncertainties and not in a mood to continue cultivation under these circumstances. Some of them have shifted to cultivating plantain, papaya, oil palm, watermelon, onion and so on,” the farmer leader said. “The returns are immediate, unlike sugarcane.” Mr. Shanthakumar said the State was in need of 10 lakh quintals of ragi but managed to get only one lakh quintals owing to the decline in production. “I attribute this to the lack of a price mechanism. If suitable price is not assured, farmers will gradually shift to crops that give them better returns without the government or anybody’s interventions,” he said. Sugarcane is cultivated in about eight to nine lakh acres in the State and about 20,000 acres in Mysore district.

Milk farmers to open counter at Perinthalmanna

A collective of milk farmers in Perinthalmanna municipality will open a sales counter for milk and allied products at Perinthalmanna on Monday. Municipal chairperson Nishi Anil Raj will inaugurate the counter at Kodathippadi on Pattambi Road. K.P. Padmakumar, District Development Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), will be the chief guest. The counter will be managed by the Thanima Milk Club. It will function adjacent to the Kudumbasree sales centre. It will sell hot milk, packed milk, curd, butter milk and ghee. Municipal vice-chairman M. Mohammed Saleem

said a counter exclusively for milk products of Thanima Milk Club would help farmers get better prices for their products. The milk stall will also get the support of the Menma Nature Fresh Milk, a venture by the Mannarmala Farmers Club. All value-added milk products of Menma will also be available at the stall. The farmers' sale counter promoted by the municipality offers products of Kudumbasree units, besides vegetables, fertilizers and seeds. It also has a farmer information centre.

Punjab farmers in Georgia at a loose end

The issue of Punjabi farmers owning farmland in Georgia being denied visas by the Georgian government has become a cause for concern in Punjab where scores of farmers in recent years have bought agricultural land at cheap rates. Raising the issue, Sukhpal Khaira, a former Congress MLA, said that farmers, lured by unscrupulous agents and false advertisements, had lost investment worth crores of rupees. Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal has also expressed concern and said it was a matter for the Central government to pursue with the Georgian government and that he would urge the Centre to look into the problem. In a statement issued here, Mr. Khaira said Punjabi farmers had spent their life's savings to invest in Georgia. But without assigning any legitimate reason, the Georgia government had been denying them visa. Their large-scale exodus underlined the critical situation of the State's agrarian economy, he added.

Water level in Mettur

Water level in the Mettur Dam stood at 104.57 feet on Sunday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 4,712 cusecs and the discharge 17,003 cusecs.

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Doing the Needful for Farmers

Shortage of seeds, high prices set by dealers and middle men, lack of enough quantity of seeds, and lack of money – are all factors that contribute to lack of seeds, which means lack of crop for thousands of farmers across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In an attempt to better this situation, Rythu Bandhu magazine, Hyderabad-based Telugu magazine that works for the empowerment of farmers, in association with Nest Foundation, a year old organisation with the same philosophy is conducting the first seed packet challenge contest. This, especially for benefit of poor and small farmers. “The crop season is over and we this is a process to ready farmers for the next crop season, and ensure that they have enough for the next season,” says Vamshi Mohan who is a co-ordinator from the Rythu Bazaar magazine. Focussing on assisting small and marginal farmers, they have opened a contest for all people and organisations associated with the agriculture and allied fields, including seed manufacturers. “We begin with collecting promises from these seed manufacturers where they tell us what quantity of seeds they will be able to provide,” explains Vamshi which provides them with an opportunity to put forth the quality of their brand. Apart from this, companies will also supply organisers with seed packets and the technical literature that helps in enabling the best practices for growing that particular crop. “The seeds and the brands will be registered, after they have been checked and ensured that they are clean and pesticide free,” informs Vamshi, adding that the state agricultural department has informally agreed to help them with the safety checks. “There will be local agricultural officers taking care of this,” he assures. Once the seeds are collected, beneficiary farmers are provided with the option of repaying the foundation with more or less or equal amount of seeds according

to the yield. “This is however voluntary,” points out Vamshi. And the seeds that are collected will be used to expand this activity further. The seeds will be distributed to potential farmers free of cost. “In addition, they will be given advice and training on proper crop management to ensure best crop yields and earn good income. Technical assistance will also be arranged,” informs Vamshi. These are part of the regular activities that Rythubandhu and Nest foundation deliver among farming communities. “We also emphasize a lot on organic farming,” adds Vamshi. They have held awareness programmes among farmers to address issues like safety on the field, farmer suicides, and also the invention and usage of new technology and farming techniques. The contest is open and will be on till the next cropping season begins. The seed packet distribution campaign will take place with the help of farmer cooperatives and farmer welfare committees apart from NGOs working for farmers and the government agencies. This is to ensure the widest distribution of seed packets to the poorest farmers. The contest is an opportunity for seed manufacturing companies to enlarge their brand name, along with providing relief to suffering farmers.

Farmers Up in Arms as Kuttanad Package Set to Go up in Smoke

The state government’s lackadaisical attitude is set to push the ambitious ₹1,840-crore Kuttanad package in troubled waters. Shattering the dreams of thousands of farmers of the Kuttanad belt, the Central Government is planning to stop funding the six-year-old project designed by agricultural scientist M S Swaminathan, it is reliably learnt. Farmers outfits are planning strong protest measures against the move of the Modi government. CPM-based Kerala Karshaka Sangam has decided to observe 72-hour satyagraha from September 22 to 24 at Kumarakom, Mankombu and Tiruvalla. District president of the body G Venugopal, points fingers to the inability of the state government that has led the Centre to take a tough stand on the issue. “The state government failed to implement the project in time. Nearly 20 percent of the work has been carried out under the project in six years, so the state is responsible for the

failure of the project, he said. The Kuttanad package was approved on July 24, 2008. Six years on, only 20 percent of the projects were completed. A major work, the construction of the third phase of the Thanneermukkom bund was launched last month with `250 crore. The construction of outer bunds in paddy polders are incomplete and the bunds were constructed unscientifically, the farmers said. With no full-time project implementation officer to co-ordinate works of various departments, construction works were getting delayed. The state government also did not appoint any technical expert to supervise the works, they said. Officers with vested interests prioritise the construction of outer bunds to protect their interests, farmers alleged. Kayal lands and some of the paddy polders were vulnerable to natural calamities and the possibility of bund collapse is high. But the officers did not take interest to construct bunds in these paddy polders. The absence of strong outer bunds had been creating loss of crores of rupees to paddy cultivation in Kuttanad every year. This year, the Agricultural Department estimated a loss of over `25 crore due to the breach of bund. The M S Swaminathan report asked the government to implement the strengthening of Thottapally spillway, improve natural drainage in the Kuttanad and other major recommendations by the Commission. Most of the recommendations of Kuttanad package remains in paper, farmers alleged.

Agri Machinery on Hire to Beat Labour Shortage

Farmers thinking of giving up agriculture due to the severe labour shortage in many parts of the state will soon get a helping hand from the state government. As many as 186 Agriculture Seva Kendras (service centres) will be set up across the state to provide farm equipment and machinery to farmers on rent. "We have drawn up plans to open 186 Agriculture Seva Kendras where small and medium farmers can get farm equipment like tractors, sowing and harvesting equipment, and irrigation motors at a very low cost for rent. The rates will be at least 30-40 per cent less when compared with private agencies," Agriculture Minister Krishna Byregowda told Express. Of the 186 proposed centres to be set up by the end of September, about 13 have already been

established. The programme is being implemented in association with NGOs, and is expected to help ease the labour shortage by mechanising farming. The first string of these Kendras is being set up in association with the Shree Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Foundation. Each Kendra will come up at a cost of about `75 lakh. While the state government's share will be `50 lakh, the NGOs will contribute `25 lakh to every Kendra. The state government will stop funding these centres after two years, after which the NGOs are expected to run them on a self-sustaining financial model, the minister added. In all, about 48 types of farm equipment will be made available. The Kendras will have representatives from the farming community in its managing board and they will have a say in fixing the rents, choosing the equipment required and other issues, he said. "We have plans to set up these kendras in every hobli if the first phase proves to be a success," the minister said.

Saga' Balm for Farmers as Vegetables Remain Pricey

With skyrocketing prices making vegetables out of bounds for the common man, 'Saga' (edible leaves) has come to rule the kitchens in rural homes of Western Odisha. Compared to the expensive vegetables, Saga is cheap, tasty and contains a whole lot of nutrients. With spiralling prices pinching the pockets, the platter of the rural delicacy has assumed significance for one and all irrespective of social status and family income. Hoping to take advantage of the manifold benefits of Saga, villagers of Chandmunda and adjoining Mirgamunda of Gunderpur gram panchayat in Maneswar block have taken to cultivation of the edible leaves instead of vegetables. Almost all farmers of the two villages have taken up Saga farming which has become a lucrative option in the current situation. Unlike many vegetables, almost all varieties of Saga plants grow round the year. In Chandmunda, all 150 families are into Saga cultivation in land measuring from 10 decimals to two acres. From 'palak' to 'methi' and 'kosala' to coriander, farmers are not shying away from cultivating all varieties of leafy vegetables and are even prospering in the process. A villager, Bhima Nagria (30), said he is raising Saga plants in over 1.5 acre of

land and is happy with the returns. Giving the details, Nagria said he spends about `5,000 in seeds, `600 for fertilizer and `3000 for organic manure per acre of land. He harvests the leaves five times a year at an interval of 45 days and earns `8,000 to `10,000 per acre each time. Besides better returns, the villagers are satisfied with Saga cultivation as it involves less labour and investment compared to vegetables, Nagria added. Similarly, in Mirgamunda village, 50 households of the 150 odd families have taken up Saga cultivation. Interestingly, 40 households, who are into the cultivation of edible leaves, are landless and have taken land on lease to grow the crop. Hrusikesh Chattar (40) of Mirgamunda, who has taken one acre of land on lease, confided that he manages to earn about `50,000 from cultivation of Saga. Elaborating on the benefits of the vegetables, he said though farmers grow paddy and vegetables, it is for their personal consumption. At a time when heavy use of pesticide in farmland is giving rise to the incidence of cancer in the country, the Saga, which is cultivated more with organic fertiliser than chemicals, can prove to be the right diet for a healthy life.



Cardamom will retain its flavour

Cardamom prices have risen sharply this year due to a pick-up in export and domestic demand. The cardamom futures contract traded on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) has surged about 64.6 per cent from its low of 571 per kg in December 2013 to 940. It peaked to 1,129.9 in May. Cardamom prices in India fell for more than a year since August 2012 before bottoming out in December 2013. Excess supply and fall in export demand dragged down prices. Data from Spices Board India shows that cardamom exports fell by 36 per cent in 2012-13. This saw the MCX cardamom futures contract tumble

nearly 63 per cent from its high of 1,508 in July 2012 to a low of 560 in July 2013. However, exports picked up thereafter, increasing by 13 per cent during April-December 2013 from a year ago. This arrested the price fall and cardamom futures consolidated sideways in a broad range of 550 and 900 during this period.

Tight supplies

Cardamom supply in the domestic market might remain tight until September, when there is a second round of plucking. In the first round, between May and July, the delay in monsoon affected harvest. There is no threat for domestic prices until October, when Guatemala, the world's largest cardamom producer, announces its current year production estimates. With several provinces in Guatemala facing drought conditions, traders are keeping fingers crossed. Depending on whether the data is strong or weak, domestic cardamom prices could sway accordingly. So, domestic prices may remain high for longer. Demand from exporters and domestic mandi traders is strong and supplies are tight.

Technical outlook

The medium-term outlook for the MCX-cardamom futures contract is bullish. After a sharp fall from the 2012 high of 1,508, the contract had consolidated in a broad 560-900 band for a prolonged period from May 2013 to February 2014. This suggests the formation of a strong base. Technically, this would be a strong base as the consolidation has happened around an important long-term trend line support level at 600. Key medium-term support for the contract is at ₹ 800. There is no hurdle to the bullish outlook as long as the contract trades above this level. Some resistance is seen at 1,050. A strong break above this can take the contract to 1,300. Traders with a medium-term perspective can go long in the contract now. Stop-loss can be kept at 750 for the target of 1,200.

The outlook for the MCX-cardamom futures contract will turn bearish only on a strong decline below 800. The ensuing target on such a fall will be 600.

Short-term view

The contract has been consolidating in a sideways range of 910 and 1,030 since the last week of July. A breakout on either side of this will decide the next leg of move for the contract. This sideways consolidation is just happening above the 200-week moving average, currently at 913. Also, the 38.2 per cent Fibonacci retracement support level is poised nearby at 916. These two supports could make it difficult for the contract to break the 910-1,030 range on the downside. This implies a high probability for the contract to breach 1,030. The short-term target on such a break will be 1,150. The first sign of a bearish outlook would emerge if the contract records a decisive close below its 200-week moving average-level. In such a scenario, the short-term outlook could turn negative for the target of 850 — the 50 per cent Fibonacci retracement support level.

Heavy rain bands seen extending to Rajasthan, Punjab and hill States

The early-September surge in monsoon is now seen walloping rain-scarce Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi during the rest of this week. In fact, transiting western disturbances will interact with the vigorous monsoon current just south of it to pour down heavily over Punjab during the week.

Lone blot

Punjab has been the lone Met subdivision to stay consistently under the 'rain-scanty' (deficit ranging from 60 to 99 per cent) up till now. Marathwada in Maharashtra had been giving it company for quite some time but has lately been upgraded to 'rain-deficient' (deficit of 20 to 59 per cent). This has come about as rain-driving low-pressure areas from the Bay of Bengal transited over

this Met subdivision region in succession in recent times. South interior Karnataka has turned in 'rain surplus' category (surplus of 20 per cent or more), the lone subdivision to be classified so as per latest statistics.

Rain deficit

The rain deficit for the country as a whole stays at 17 per cent, with east Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, east Madhya Pradesh, and parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh wallowing in the 'rain deficient' category. Meanwhile, west India and parts of northwest India stayed in the reckoning for a productive run by the resurgent monsoon current during the rest of the week. Western and northern Rajasthan will join adjoining west and north Gujarat as a prevailing well-marked 'low' over Vidarbha and east Madhya Pradesh spins in slowly towards these regions. The 'low' may even stop briefly over contiguous west Madhya Pradesh, east Gujarat and Mumbai-Konkan and power up the torrents locally during the next few days.

Interactive rain

It will also interact with an incoming western disturbance and extend its area of influence to Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi. In fact, the interaction may have already been triggered with monsoon easterlies as a western disturbance called in over Jammu and Kashmir yesterday. It will be active for another day in the region. A successor disturbance is waiting its turn over Afghanistan to enter the northwest border whose interaction with the monsoon would be the most productive for the region. Meanwhile, a fresh low-pressure area seen developing in the Bay of Bengal is seen as scaling up intensity to a likely depression during its stay over the waters. It may not be allowed to enter coast until the incumbent over land gets done with its job as also the interaction with western disturbances, which will take at least as far as the week-end.

Rain outlook

An India Met Department outlook has put out the following rainfall alert for disparate regions for next three days. Rest of the day today, September 1: Heavy to very heavy rain with extremely heavy falls for east Gujarat; Saurashtra; Konkan-Goa; east Rajasthan; and Madhya Maharashtra. Heavy rain for Himachal Pradesh; Uttarakhand; west and east Madhya Pradesh; Vidarbha; Chhattisgarh; Telangana; coastal and north interior Karnataka; Kerala. Tomorrow, September 2, Tuesday: Heavy to very heavy rainfall with isolated extreme falls over east Gujarat; Saurashtra; Kutch; Konkan-Goa; west Madhya Pradesh; and east Rajasthan. Heavy rainfall for Himachal Pradesh; Uttarakhand; east Madhya Pradesh; Madhya Maharashtra; and Kerala.

Strike by potato traders in Bengal called off

The three-day strike called by potato traders in West Bengal from Monday to protest a condition set by the government for a partial relaxation of the export ban was withdrawn on Sunday. "We requested the potato traders to withdraw the strike and they have done so," state Agriculture Marketing Minister Arup Roy told PTI here. Earlier, Trinamool Congress General Secretary Mukul Roy had urged potato traders not to go ahead with the strike since Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would be away in North Bengal from September 1 and should talk to the administration. Both the Agriculture Minister and the TMC leader said the government was considerate and after meeting the state's requirement, it had no objection to transport of potatoes to other states. Last Monday, the state government had told potato traders that they would be allowed to export 700 tonne daily to other states, provided they supplied 300 tonne of the tubers to the West Bengal government at a price of Rs. 12 per kilo to be sold to fair price shops. The Pragatishil Aloo Byabsayee Samiti, the largest organisation of potato traders in the state, had called the strike. Santanu Manna, the president of the Samiti, had earlier questioned how this was possible when they bought the Jyoti variety of potato from farmers at Rs. 13 a

kilo, which included cold storage and transport charges, before being sent to wholesale markets. The price at that stage then became Rs. 16 a kilo, he had said. The state government had earlier banned supply of potatoes to other states in view of the three-day strike called by the potato traders from tomorrow.

Centre tweaks norms to expedite issue of soil health cards

Aiming to issue soil health cards to all farmers in next three years, the Centre has come out with uniform norms to expedite the process of testing soil nutrients in irrigated and rainfed areas. As per official data, only 5.69 crore soil health cards have been issued to farmers till last fiscal. Highlighting the importance of soil testing to achieve higher farm production, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has written to the state governments seeking their views on new norms at the earliest. For irrigated areas, the Centre has proposed testing of NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorous, and Potash) nutrients in the soil based on landholding, while micro nutrients in a sample grid of 10 hectares, as per the draft norms. For rainfed areas, both NPK and micro nutrients are proposed to be tested in a sample grip of 10 hectares. That apart, the Centre has proposed norms for setting up of soil testing labs for every 50,000 acres of irrigated land and 1.5 lakh acres of rainfed land. The state governments have been suggested to make use of funds under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for setting up of new labs and issue of soil health cards. This has been done as funds under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) would not be sufficient to create the required number of labs. Currently, financial assistance for creation of new soil testing laboratories and strengthening of existing soil testing laboratories is being provided under NMSA.

Chennai to host wheat seminar

Chennai will host an international wheat and wheat products seminar during September 2-3. The meet, being held at a crucial time when the world is facing a glut in grains production, will focus on new technologies and marketing opportunities. Renowned agricultural scientist MS Swaminathan will inaugurate the seminar and the Indian Council for Agricultural Research Director-General S Iyyappan will be the guest of honour. Global wheat trade from an Indian perspective, latest trends and developments in mills and baking, and sustainability of food and nutrition security will also be discussed. An exhibition will also be held.

Punjab Agricultural University signs MoU with CPRI

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) on Friday said it has inked a MoU with Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI), Shimla for the production of breeder seed of notified potato varieties. University Vice Chancellor B S Dhillon said this pact will strengthen the collaboration with CPRI, and their benefits will percolate to the end users more easily at affordable prices. "This agreement will go a long way in producing sufficient quantities of the breeder seed of the popular potato varieties for production of foundation and certified seeds," he said. He further added that due to agro-climatic conditions and local cost structure, there is a great potential to enhance potato production in the state and it can also help in crop diversification programme. Bir Pal Singh, Director, CPRI, said the production of breeder seed by PAU will definitely help the farmers in the adoption of the varieties and will go a long way in making this crop profitable. "The need of the hour is to develop dedicated team of scientists and technicians to handle the seed crop," he said. "CPRI will provide virus free index tubers and training to the PAU scientists for raising seed crop and this will be further multiplied by PAU, and Department of Horticulture, Punjab to produce foundation and certified seeds," said PAU Director Research S S Gosal.

West Bengal, top producer of cut flowers in India: Study

West Bengal has been the highest producer of cut flowers, of over 250 crore pieces, in the domestic market and recorded the highest compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 597 per cent during five-year period of 2007-08 and 2011-12, ASSOCHAM noted in a study. This has happened despite shrinkage in area under floriculture in the State. West Bengal was also at the top in terms of share of flower production (about 34 per cent) in the country's total output value of 740 crore pieces in 2011-12, the industry body said. West Bengal ranked eighth in terms of production of loose flowers. The State produces about 64,000 tonne loose flowers clocking a CAGR of over seven per cent during the aforesaid period. The country's loose flower production is growing at a CAGR of over 17 per cent as India produces over 16.5 lakh tonne annually. The area under flower production in the State, however, shrunk from about 27,000 hectares in 2007-08 to about 24,000 hectares in 2011-12 thereby registering fall at a CAGR of over three per cent, a study prepared by the ASSOCHAM Economic Research Bureau (AERB) found. Share of West Bengal in the area under flower production across India also plummeted by seven per cent during the period -- from about 16.5 per cent share in 2007-08 it came down to 9.4 per cent in 2011-12, the study said. ASSOCHAM said that about two lakh people were estimated to be involved in cut flower production in the State, blessed with diverse agro-climatic conditions. Dedicated cold storage facilities for flowers near to the main production centres would give a boost to exports of flowers from West Bengal. It also suggested that promotion of biotechnology especially tissue culture and genetic engineering, would further help the State in realising its potential in floriculture industry, the ASSOCHAM study said.

Business Standard

Potato crisis resurfaces as WB halts transportation

This is one problem which refuses to go. With the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in West Bengal putting fresh restrictions on shipment of potato from that state, the availability of tuber in the Odisha market has plummeted yet again. This time, the authorities in the neighboring state have halted road transportation of potato to Odisha via the Laxmannath check gate from yesterday.. The supply disruption has already influenced the vegetable rates in the retail market. At key markets of Bhubaneswar, the tuber variety is sold at Rs 28-30 per kilogram, up from Rs 24-26 a kg last week. However, at wholesale markets, the rates are hovering around Rs 18-22 a kg. Meanwhile, the Potato Traders Federation of West Bengal has given a call for a three-day strike beginning September 1 to protest their state government's decision of not to allow export of potato to other states including Odisha. An office bearer of the Federation said, the West Bengal government's decision of not to allow sale of potato outside West Bengal has resulted in heavy losses for the potato traders and hence, the resolution to hold the protest dharna. Odisha buys potato mostly from West Bengal and onion from Maharashtra. The rates of both the vegetable have gone up across the country due to supply problems. Uttar Pradesh is the top producer of the tuber variety in the country and Bihar is placed third behind West Bengal. Odisha largely imports more than 80 per cent of its annual 900,000 tonne potato requirement from West Bengal. The potato supply has been affected over the past few weeks, when the West Bengal government banned selling of the vegetable to traders outside the state in order to maintain the local price equilibrium. Though the ban has been lifted officially, restrictions by the West Bengal government are still imposed time and again on potato transportation.

Soyameal exports down 82% in April-July 2014

Poor monsoon, coupled with soaring domestic prices, has taken a toll on soyameal exports in the current financial year. However, a spell of rains persistent since last two days in soya-growing areas has brought fresh hopes for the farmers. On one hand some soyameal exporters are apprehensive of further decline in exports; Indore-based Soyabean Processors Association of India (Sopa) has said crop condition was not that bad. "It would be premature to predict about soyameal exports and crop yield for coming season as a fresh spell of rains have raised hopes among farmers and the industry. At present, the crop is in good condition. The exports are likely to decline but it would stay near 3 million tonne," Rajesh Agrawal, Sopa spokesperson said. According to Sopa in the current year, soyameal exports during April-July 2014 stood at 93,000 tonnes against 518,000 tonnes in the corresponding period last year, showing a decline of 82 per cent. As per data released by Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEAI) total export of oilmeals during April-July 2014 stood at 721,577 tonnes compared to 1,038,819 tonnes last year, down by 31 per cent. In July 2014 export of oilmeals stood at 115,094 tonnes as against 182,133 tonnes in July 2013 a decline of 37 per cent. "Export of soybean meal greatly reduced in last three months due to high cost of soybean in local market which lead to total disparity for soybean meal in international market," SEAI had said. "Lack of rains since last fortnight is putting the soybean crop which is in the flowering stage under stress. Rainfall in the coming week and one spell in mid-September would be crucial for this year's crop," said Raju Choksi, Vice-President (Agri Commodities), Anil Nutrients Ltd. in a statement. Raju is a soyameal exporter based in Ahmedabad. A recent spell of rain has given a fresh lease of life to the crop which is currently in flowering stage.

Kerala seeks elephants' help to grow rubber

Punyalan Agarbatties, a Malayalam movie released last year, showed the struggle of a young entrepreneur to get his project off the ground -- making incense sticks from elephant dung. The story struck a chord since the state has around 600 domesticated pachyderms and waste disposal is a problem. But thanks to the Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII), those who own several elephants like the Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple, may not have to struggle to get rid of the daily heaps. RRII has discovered that elephant dung can be effectively used as a potting medium for raising rubber root trainer plants. The containers help in the uniform growth of roots, thus aiding growth into a healthy tree. The method has become popular among rubber growers in the country. Coir pith, currently used as a potting medium, requires lengthy pre-treatment to remove the phenolic content before it can be used. "Elephant dung mixed with an equal quantity of soil can be used as an alternative to coir pith, which has become costly," said James Jacob, director of RRII. Kerala, which accounts for 90% of the natural rubber produced in India, adds 5,000 hectares of new plants every year and nearly 12 lakh root trainer plants are required annually. It is estimated that the dung of about a tenth of the number of elephants in the state can be accounted for by the root trainers. The Sri Krishna temple has 59 domesticated elephants. They are used in festival parades at Guruvayur and other temples. The temple spends lakhs of rupees to dispose the dung (about 2 tonne is generated a day), which can make for an elephantine problem. "We will apprise the managing committee which will take a decision on the possibility of selling dung to the prospective rubber growers," said P Krishnankutty, deputy administrator of Guruvayur Devaswom, who was present at a function organised by the Rubber Board for the distribution of plants raised through the method.

Scheme announced to revolutionise Makhana farming in Bihar

Adhering to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise during his election rallies to give a boost to 'makhana' (fox nut) cultivation and marketing in Bihar, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh today announced a scheme to revolutionise its farming. "Our scientists at Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have developed a new seed of makhana called 'Suvarna Vaidehi'. The special thing about it is that instead of being cultivated in just ponds and lakes, it can be used in the fields just like we cultivate paddy. The farmers can now integrate Makhana to their crop cycle," Singh told reporters.



Centre to miss October deadline on Food Security Act implementation

The government is likely to extend time given to states for a complete rollout of the food security law as majority of the states, including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Gujarat, are yet to prepare beneficiary lists and have the logistical arrangements to implement the scheme. Last month, the government had given three months — till the start of October — to implement the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, which envisages providing highly subsidised foodgrains to two-thirds of the country's population. Official sources told FE that majority of states were yet to digitise the data regarding the beneficiary lists, foodgrain godowns and fair price shops. The complete rollout would take several more months. Eleven states and union territories — Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi and Chandigarh have so far implemented the Act — some of them fully and others partially. However, many of the larger states, including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with a substantial poor population, have yet to take the plunge. Even the Gujarat government, which expressed reservations about the food security law, has sought a one-year extension for implementing the

legislation. Tamil Nadu, which provides free rice to the poorest sections by reinforcing the Centre's Antyodaya Anna Yojana with additional state support, feels the NFSA is redundant in its case. "We want whole supply chain management of foodgrain under NFSA to be digitized and many states have been rather slow in their work," a food ministry official said.

He said that the Centre couldn't force states to implement the food security law in a stipulated time. Besides sources said the NDA government had been focusing on reducing the pilferage of foodgrain under the present Targetted Public Distribution System (TPDS) to be reduced before the rollout of the food security law. Food ministry officials acknowledge that about 30% of foodgrain meant under TPDS are either siphoned off or does not reach the intended beneficiaries because of lack of transparency in identifying Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. Ashok Gulati, chair professor (agriculture) at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, said, "As regards NFSA, the problem is that most of the states have yet to identify the beneficiaries based on the social census. Also, the PDS leakages run at around 40%. So there should not be any hurry to implement NFSA. We need to fix the system before