

## **Farm ponds fetch rich benefits**

While most farmlands in T. Kallupatti in the district remain arid, one farmer is a happy man. M. Karuthan of Vannivelanpatti near T. Kallupatti has two farm ponds in his one-acre land, where he is growing fish, and he has already started reaping the benefits. "I had let 1,500 African catfish into one pond 90 days back and have already caught and sold around 100 of them, each weighing a kilogram, for Rs.10,000. I am expecting better returns when I harvest and sell more fish in a few days," Mr. Karuthan said. Though the region has not received substantial and continuous rainfall in the last three years, the ponds in his field are full. "The soil here is clayey which ensures that water does not drain away. If it rains for a couple of hours, the pond immediately fills up and I occasionally pump water from a nearby channel into the pond with a motor," he said. K. Suruli Bommu, Assistant Director of Agriculture at Kallupatti, said while Mr. Karuthan initially had only one farm pond, its benefits prompted him to get another pond dug in his farm recently. "While the department has set a target for 175 farm ponds to be dug in this area, work is currently under way on 60 ponds," he noted. Mr. Karuthan said water collected in the pond had helped irrigate crops. "I have guava, orange, amla and sapotta trees which have given a good yield this year since water was available from the pond," he said. "While fish provide a substantial income to the farmers, water stored in ponds also helps them irrigate crops," said Jaisingh Gnanadurai, Joint Director of Agriculture. He said farmers could either approach the village panchayats or the Agriculture Department officials of the area with a proposal for digging farm ponds. "Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, workers will be allotted to dig farm ponds in the fields. This way, the farmers don't have to spend anything," he said. In Madurai district, there were 130 farm ponds, and 560 ponds were now being dug. "Hardly 10 farmers have, however, stored water and are harvesting fish. More awareness is needed in this regard and we are trying to achieve a target of 2,520 farm ponds in the district," Mr. Gnanadurai said.

### **Periyar dam level reaches 130-foot mark**

Water level reached 130 feet in Periyar dam here on Tuesday, cheering farmers in Cumbum valley and alerting Public Works Department officials to gear up their future course of action. Representatives of various farmers' associations in Cumbum and Uthamapalayam exchanged greetings with the association members this evening. Farmers were jubilant over the comfortable storage in Periyar dam. At the same time, the PWD officials were waiting for quick response from the government in this connection. Already, supervisory committee advised the sub-committee to closely monitor the dam and record water readings if the storage level touched the 130-foot mark. The sub-committee too decided to monitor the dam closely in its first meeting. The PWD officials hold two opinions. The government will either increase the discharge tomorrow morning to keep the storage level below 130 feet or wait for the level to touch 136 feet because the SC had granted permission to store water up to 142 feet, according to sources. Inflow into the dam was 3,500 cusecs and the discharge was only 500 cusecs. If the government chose to restrict the level, PWD officials will increase the release tomorrow morning.

### **Potato to hit Rs.25-27 price band in November, December**

The Agro Market Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMIBPC) of the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri Business has indicated that the price of good quality potato would rule between Rs.25 to 27 a kg between November and December. In a price advisory for root vegetables such as potato, beetroot, and carrot (grown in both hills and plains) sown in September to October in major growing districts, the back office of the AMIBPC in the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies (CARDS), Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, provides the price forecast to help farmers take proper pre-sowing decision. In Tamil Nadu, potato is grown in the hilly regions of Nilgiris, Dindigul, Krishnagiri, and Erode districts. Nilgiris potato is sent to Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchi, Salem, and Vellore and also to other States. Potato was cultivated in 5,350 acres in Tamil Nadu in 2013 with the production being 1, 15,630 tonnes. The price advisory has been issued based on the analysis of price at Nilgiris Cooperative Marketing Society and survey among traders. Beetroot is expected to fetch a price of Rs.20-25 a kg during November and December, the advisory said. Currently a bag of beetroot containing 75 kg is auctioned in the price range of Rs.1, 800-2,600 at the vegetables commission mandi at

Mettupalayam, Tiruppur, Theni, the Nilgiris, Dindigul, Coimbatore, Krishnagiri and Erode, which are the major beetroot growing districts in the State. Carrot, which is currently sold at Rs.2,250-Rs.3,000 a bag of 75 kg at the Mettupalayam vegetable mandi, is expected to command a price of Rs.25 to Rs.30 a kg during November and December, the harvest period. The Nilgiris, Dindigul, and Krishnagiri are major carrot growing districts in the State.

### **Farmers' company to come up in Tirupur**

For the first time in Tirupur, a set of farmers are going to come together to form a 'producers' company' for capacity building and market interventions, thanks to an initiative mooted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development. "The first of the 'producers' company' is going to be floated with 10 farmers very shortly and the size of the membership will be expanded. subsequently as per the norms. The body will be registered under the Company's Act," NABARD's Assistant General Manager V.S.Sriram told *The Hindu*. The forum will be dealing with a wide gamut of business activities related to primary produce/product such as sorting, grading, processing, packaging, value-addition and marketing, apart from collectively procuring high yielding farm inputs. "Due to fragmentation and disorganisation prevailing, it is not economically viable for the farmers on many occasions to purchase good quality seeds or fertilizers and adopt latest technologies. Besides, they are not able to realise good value from their marketable surplus by selling their produces individually," NABARD officials said. In this scenario, the constitution of the producers' companies would act as a catalyst for increasing profit margins apart from getting timely access to adequate finance and provide linkages to markets, sources added. An interesting aspect of the constitution of the company, cited by the NABARD officials, is that certain portions of the profit would be shared among the farm producers with the balance going to the share capital or reserves, all working for sustainable benefit of the member farmers. Once the producers' company was floated, its member farmers will be eligible for credit guarantee and also equity capital from the Small Farmers' Agri Business Consortium, a society promoted by Union Ministry of Agriculture. In addition to this, the NABARD would also be providing credit/grant support for setting up market infrastructure facilities and for capacity building, the NABARD sources said.

## **Sweet tidings for coconut growers**

‘Neera’, the sweet sap tapped from the coconut spathe, is back in the news as the Coconut Development Board (CDB) of the Agriculture Ministry is now projecting this as a ‘health drink’, the production of which can boost the fortunes of the country’s coconut growers. Zeroing in on Bangalore to create public awareness about the economic as well as health importance of neera on the occasion of World Coconut Day on September 2, the CDB described the sap as the “future of the country’s coconut sector”. According to CDB’s Chief Coconut Development Officer Sugatha Ghose, the experience of coconut farmers in Kerala, which is the only State that has allowed tapping of neera, has shown that it is possible to earn a minimum of Rs. 15,000 from a tree per year through neera production compared with coconut sales which can fetch only about Rs. 1,200.

### **‘Economic security’**

“Neera can change the very concept of coconut cultivation in India by providing economic security to growers as it has the potential to increase their income 10-fold,” he observed. But the more than a century-old Excise rules will have to be amended to allow farmers to tap neera. The main contention of the Excise Department has been that neera will automatically turn into toddy if left untreated for some time and then the Excise rules will come into play. Incidentally, Karnataka has banned all forms of arrack. CDB Chairman T.K. Jose pointed out that the board, along with other research institutes, had developed technology for neera production and processing that would ensure a shelf life of nearly one year without letting the neera ferment. Pointing out that such technologies would help in marketing neera and its byproducts in a packaged format to ensure hygiene, he said coconut-growing States should decide to allow neera tapping.

### **‘Green collar’ job**

According to an estimate by the board, it is possible to create 24 to 28 lakh “green collar” jobs — decent paying jobs in the farm sector -- in the country through neera production, he said. Responding positively to this, Principal Secretary, Horticulture Department, Rajiv Chawla said he would try his best to expedite the process of evolving Karnataka’s neera policy. Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizer Ananth Kumar, who inaugurated the World Coconut Day celebrations, urged Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh to convene a round table of agriculture and horticulture Ministers of all States to discuss amending Excise rules to allow tapping and marketing of neera as a health drink.

### **Crop loss: Davangere officials told to submit report by Friday**

Deputy Commissioner S.T. Anjan Kumar has asked officials to submit reports on crop loss and damage to public properties caused by heavy rain, by Friday to ensure that compensation is provided to those affected. Speaking at a meeting of district-level officers here on Tuesday, he said taluk-level officers should be instructed to visit affected areas. "Officials should not submit reports based on the opinion of people and farmers. Instead, they should visit the fields. Those who fail to submit accurate reports will face action," Mr. Kumar added. The reports from taluks should reach the district administration by Friday along with photographs to prove the extent of damages and other documents to confirm the ownership of land. All the reports would be sent to the State government for approval of compensation amount as early as possible, he said. Officials of the departments of Agriculture Horticulture department should ensure that crop insurance was provided to farmers who had paid premiums and completed other official procedures. The officials should also create awareness among farmers and the people on the methods to be followed to get compensation, Mr. Kumar said. Irked by the lukewarm attitude of Agriculture Department officials in initiating action against a private company which supplied low quality maize seeds, the Deputy Commissioner instructed that criminal cases should be filed against the company and it should be blacklisted. "Action will be initiated against officials if they failed to initiate action against the company," he said.

### **Heavy rain**

Davangere taluk received 134 mm rainfall in August against the normal of 74.2 mm, Harihar 160 mm (68.2 mm), Honnali 165 mm (64.2 mm), Chennagiri 211 mm (101.9 mm), Harapanhalli 141 mm (93.8 mm) and Jagalur 195 mm (64.4 mm). Eight houses were partially damaged in Harihar taluk and four in Chennagiri taluk and the loss has been estimated around Rs 1.2 lakh.

### **Compensate farmers for crop loss, demands KPRS**

Karnataka Pranta Raita Sangha on Tuesday demanded that the State government release compensation of Rs 10,000 per acre to those farmers who lost their crop in the recent rain and floods. Members of the KPRS, led by the president of the district unit Gouramma Patil and secretary Sharanabasappa Mamshetty, staged a protest demonstration here on Tuesday. They said that the government should conduct a detailed survey of the total loss suffered by the farmers and compensate

adequately. They said that the families who had lost their houses should be adequately compensated and new houses should be constructed for them. Those who lost cattle should also be compensated properly.

### **Black pepper growers face mixed prospects**

The prospects appear mixed for pepper growers in Udupi district. Though the price of black pepper has almost doubled in a year, some farmers expect a lower yield due to uneven rain this year, while the plantations of some others are recovering from the wilt disease. Black pepper is grown as an inter-crop in arecanut, coconut and cashew plantations in the district. According to Guruprasad, Assistant Horticulture Officer, the land under black pepper cultivation had gone up from 267 hectares (ha) of land in 2008-09 to 383 ha in 2013-14 in the district. The total production of black pepper in the district is 148 metric tonnes. The yield per acre of black pepper is 0.39 tonnes per hectare. As pepper is a climbing vine, the farmers grow them under the arecanut, coconut and other trees. Satyanarayana Udupa, a farmer in Hunsemakki village, has grown pepper vines on 600 arecanut, coconut and mango trees, in his field. Last year, he had got 80 kilograms of black pepper. "This year, I am getting at least 160 kg of black pepper. It is boom time as the prices of black pepper have almost doubled in a year. Last year, it was Rs. 400 to Rs. 450 per kg, this year it is Rs. 750 to Rs. 800 per kg," he said. But the yield of some farmers got affected due to late and uneven rainfall in the district this year. Ramakrishna Sharma, a farmer, cultivates black pepper in six acres of land at Bantakal. "Last year I got 10 quintals of black pepper, but due to uneven rain this year, I might get about four quintals," he said. According to the agricultural scientists at the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station (ZAHRS) in Brahmavar, the production of black pepper was affected by quick and slow wilt diseases last year. "Last year, nearly 50 per cent of black pepper plantations in the district were affected due to wilt, but this year it has come down by half. The decline in production is also one of the reasons for the rates going up," said B. Dhananjaya, Associate Professor, ZAHRS. B.V. Poojary, who grows black pepper on 400 coconut and 100 arecanut trees in his field, said that he had lost nearly 90 per cent of pepper to wilt disease three years back. "But by giving proper medication to the pepper plants, I managed to get 100 kg of black pepper last year. This year, I am expecting more production," he said.

### **Fish farming gets a shot in the arm**

The State Government allotted an amount of Rs. 4,033.85 lakh for various schemes in the fisheries sector, Fisheries Minister K. Babu said. The schemes were approved at a high level meeting held at Thiruvananthapuram. A brackish water fish farming project will be implemented at Pallimattamthottil at Tripunithura in Ernakulam district, for which a sum of Rs. 89 lakh has been approved, the Minister said. Inland fish production will be augmented with aquaculture development, said a communication.

### **A feast with organic vegetables**

Organically grown vegetables for Onam promised by the Kollam district panchayat will reach six distribution centres across the district on Wednesday. District panchayat president S. Jayamohan said here on Tuesday that each kit will contain ten vegetables and a cluster of njaalipoovan variety banana. The vegetables are bitter gourds, long beans, okras (Venda), eggplants (Vazhuthana), chillies, ash gourds (Kumbalanga), cucumbers, ivy gourds (Kovakka), snake gourds, and pumpkins. Though the vegetables and the banana in each kit is worth Rs. 220 as per current Kollam vegetable open market rates, the kits will be sold at Rs. 100 each, Mr. Jayamohan said. Along with each kit, four banana leaves will also be given as Onam gift. The kits will be sold through the five farms of the district panchayat at Anchal, Kadakkal, Kuryottumala, Kottarakara and Karungapally. In addition, the kits will also be sold through a counter at the district panchayat headquarters here. Mr. Jayamohan said that about 10,000 kits will be sold in this manner. The vegetables for the purpose were mainly grown at the Anchal and Kadakkal farms. Harvesting of the vegetables was completed on Tuesday morning and by evening these were weighed and filled in kits. Each kit will contain 4 kg of vegetables. Mr. Jayamohan said that the panchayat had planned to distribute 16,000 such kits for Onam. But a portion of the crops for the purpose were lost to depredation by wild animals. Moreover, an unexpected heavy rain hampered the growth of the crops. Because of the heavy rain and overcast skies, the long bean crops failed to flower even after 40 days. These have started flowering only two days ago. Many of the other vegetable crops too did not flower at the expected time.

## **Flower trade wilts in hartal heat in city**

A large number of flower traders, who thought of minting something extra money through the seasonal trade, were virtually trapped in various nooks and corners of the city on Tuesday, when the Sangh Parivar affiliated organisations and the Bharatiya Janata Party declared a hartal. As the hartal declaration came very late on Monday evening, a majority of them had received their bulk order from other States and had no way to quit the deal.

### **No permission**

Traders who received the stock to transport to interior areas too landed in trouble, as no vehicles were permitted to move in the city. "It was quite a miserable day as the buyers were minimal and we were forced to sell the flowers at a cheap rate. Though some of us had ordered additional stock to trade in other parts of the district, everything proved vain," said C. Pratheesh, a trader from the Palayam market. He shared that flower traders from all parts of the district suffered a huge loss following the hartal. Though hartal supporters did not turn hostile towards the flower traders, it did not help them much on Tuesday. "There was a little hope as there were private vehicles carrying out service in the district in the early hours of Tuesday, but, that too ended as BJP activists started blocking vehicles in various locations," rued a flower seller from West Hill.

### **Price rise**

Some of the bulk dealers complained that they would not be able to recover the "huge loss" even after four days' continuous trade. "As we would not be able to store the purchased flowers for another day, we would be compelled to increase the price of the fresh stock to recover from the loss," they said.

## **Procurement of rubber begins**

The Kerala State Cooperative Rubber Marketing Federation (Rubbermark) has started procuring rubber directly from farmers and also through marketing societies, producing societies, and the purchase branches of the federation. An official press note said here on Tuesday that the federation was paying Rs.2 more a kg than the Kottayam rate fixed by the Rubber Board. Details can be had from 0484-2205790 and 9447815219. — Special Correspondent



## **Industrial corridor expected to revive cotton industry**

The proposal of the Telangana government to develop an industrial corridor along the NH-44 between Hyderabad and Nagpur in Maharashtra has infused hope of resuscitation of the cotton industry in Adilabad. Cotton processing has reached a saturation point in this district and any further development warrants moving towards the establishment of spinning and textile mills, which can be done easily through industrial corridors, say local industrialists.

### **Cumulative turnover**

There are 134 cotton ginning, pressing and cottonseed oil mills in Adilabad district, of which 52 are concentrated in Bhainsa town, which is about 45 km away from the NH-44 and 31 in Adilabad town, which lies adjacent to the four-lane highway. The cumulative turnover of the cotton processing industry in the district is estimated to be over Rs. 5,000 crore though last season it was much lower, owing to several factors. Adilabad also has scope for development of the ferro-alloy industry given the huge deposits of manganese along the river Penganga. Much of the mining activity is concentrated along the NH-44 at present in Jainad and Adilabad mandals. The fast growing area under vegetable cultivation, which is by and large concentrated in the mandals of Ichoda, Gudihatnoor and Indervelli along the highway, also provides scope for development of the food processing industry. A dedicated high-speed freight, as envisaged in the Hyderabad-Nagpur Industrial Corridor (HNIC) will certainly boost industrial growth but will not be enough to attract investment in the given sectors. "We need restructuring of taxes in Telangana for that," says Telangana Cotton Association honorary president Gade Vinod, himself an industrialist, even as he welcomes the proposal.

### **Conducive environment**

"For example, market cess is levied on cottonseed only in Telangana besides Value Added Tax (VAT) on cottonseed and soyabean de-oiled cake. These taxes should be levied on a par with Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh to provide a proper atmosphere for industrialists," he added. Adilabad shares much of its border with the Vidarbha region in Maharashtra, also a cotton and soyabean rich area, and there is a strong trade bond between the two regions. Much of the cotton produce in Vidarbha was sold in markets in this district until about two years back when an unfavourable business atmosphere resulted in a reverse trend.

### **YSRC slams State on meagre funding to agriculture sector**

The Opposition YSR Congress legislators succeeded in exposing the government to some extent on the hollowness in the budgetary allocations to agriculture sector, including the provision for loan waiver scheme, even as the debate on demands for grants was reduced to a slanging match between the two in Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Tuesday. Y. Visveswar Reddy, V. Subba Rao and D. Raja of YSRC sought to know how the government planned to meet the tall order of the agriculture sector to make it a profitable profession as promised by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, when only about Rs. 3,500 crore would be available after setting aside the provision for loan waiver, power subsidy and NREGS linking out of over Rs. 13,000 crore provided to it. Mr. Reddy said the government had allocated Rs. 6,700 crore for planned expenditure and another Rs. 6,373 crore for non-plan spending. However, Rs. 5,000 crore was meant for loan waiver, Rs. 3,188 crore for power subsidy and Rs. 1,386 crore for NREGS linking out of the total provision. Keeping aside the allocation to the three major aspects, the remaining amount would be only 3 per cent of the total budget estimates. Demanding the government to announce the date from which the loan waiver would come into effect and the farmers would become debt-free, Mr. Subba Rao alleged that the ruling party was talking about all sorts of conditions and limits after promising cap-free loan waiver during the run-up to elections. He said TDP did not speak about Rs. 1.5 lakh limit, one farmer per family condition and others before polls. As usual, the treasury benches including Ministers P. Pulla Rao and P. Sujatha and Chief Whip K. Srinivasulu intervened in the speeches of YSRC members repeatedly. In their defence of the government, A. Rajendra Prasad, P. Srinivasa Reddy, N. Rama Naidu and S.V.S.N. Varma of TDP explained how farmers were relieved on spending sleepless nights with power supply to farming being made in day time now. They also detailed several government initiatives to give a push to agriculture.

### **Naidu seeks action plan to make State drought-proof**

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has asked irrigation officials to expedite completion of 54 ongoing irrigation projects and prepare an action plan to make the State drought-proof.

## **Advisory panel**

Reviewing the progress of various projects, the Chief Minister announced that a State irrigation Advisory Committee would be set up to study water scarcity in mandals located near basins Krishna, Godavari, Penna, Vamsadhara and Nagavali rivers and formulate a plan to provide water to these mandals.

## **Centre, State ignoring farmers' problems: Telangana Rythu Sangham**

Activists of the CPI affiliated Telangana Rythu Sangham staged a day-long fast here on Tuesday to press for immediate redressal of the problems plaguing the farmers in the State. Addressing the protesters, the CPI district secretary B Hemantha Rao has charged the BJP-led government at the Centre and the TRS government in the State with pursuing pro-corporate policies posing serious threat to the interests of farmers and agricultural labourers. He alleged that the State government has failed to provide electricity, seeds, fertilizers and other inputs to the farmers on time. Hemantha Rao demanded that the TRS government should implement waiver of crop loans without imposing any conditions and fulfil all the electoral promises without any delay. The other speakers sought provision of Rs 3,000 monthly pension to the farmers of 60 years and above, implementation of Dr Swaminathan Committee's recommendations to promote sustainable agriculture and improve the living standards of farmers.

## **Floating sensor buoy saves aqua farmers from 'drowning'**

L. Subba Rao is a resident of Bapatla in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. His aquaculture farms are located about 40 km from his village. One night in April 2010, the dissolved oxygen level in his farm could not be monitored and a change in the levels affected the farm adversely—leading to the death of all the fish in the pond. This resulted in a loss of Rs. 9 lakh. This incident forced Raavi Sreeram, an electrical and electronics engineer, a close relative of Subba Rao, to find a solution to the problem being faced by many aqua farmers. He worked hard to find a solution using technology to make it easier for aquaculture farmers to monitor their farms. He built a prototype in May 2012 and used it first at his uncle's farm. "The solution I developed allows farmers to measure the water quality with respect to levels of dissolved oxygen and the PH level," Sreeram, who established Eruvaka Technologies, told *The Hindu*. The device, Floating Sensor Buoy, is placed in the pond and has sensors measuring the various parameters required for maintaining a healthy environment for fish. Floating Sensor Buoy comes with

cloud and mobile solution technology, which analyses water and biological conditions in shrimp ponds and alerts farmers immediately on their mobile phones. Every five minutes, farmers get a message on their cell phone on a real-time basis. Mr. Sreeram approached the Agri-Business Incubation Program of International Crops Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), which incubated his innovation by mentoring, field testing, and facilitating financial assistance to kick-start his venture. "Aquaculture has great potential in agribusinesses in India and this innovative device by Eruvaka can enhance the productivity and convenience of the shrimp and fish farmers," says S.M. Karuppanchetty, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Agri Business. The Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) Program of the Agribusiness and Innovation Platform (AIP) of ICRISAT builds start-ups and creates a conducive environment for new businesses to grow. "Each start-up invested and accelerated by ABI-ICRISAT is guided, organised and connected to the start-up ecosystem for substantial growth. The key factor in the success of ABI-ICRISATs work is its pioneering incubator model. The model encompasses customised services and networking through its 30 co-business incubators in India and Africa," says Kiran Sharma, CEO, AIP. The product is currently being used by aqua farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.

### **Hooda declares Haryana drought-affected**

Declaring the entire state of Haryana as drought-affected for Kharif 2014, the Haryana government has sought Central assistance of Rs 4,829 crore to compensate farmers. Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said a special *girdawri* has been ordered to assess the loss cause due to continued dry spell. He said in case of more than 50 per cent damage to paddy and cotton crops, a compensation of Rs 4,000 per acre will be given. It will be Rs 3,500 per acre for other crops. The Central government norms for the same are Rs 1,800 and Rs 3,600 he said, adding that his government has submitted a memorandum to the Central government for a special package. Mr. Hooda disclosed that according to the data collected from the India Meteorological Department from June 1st to August 31, there was more than 65 per cent rainfall deficit in the State as compared to the normal average. Eighteen out of 21 States have received less than 50 per cent rainfall. He further said that out of the special package demanded, Rs 1191 crore is for the State power utilities who have been meeting the irrigation needs of farmers by supplying eight hour power, sourced at high rates for agricultural tube-wells. Criticising the Central

government's scheme of diesel subsidy announced on August 4, Mr. Hooda said it suffers from serious issues of implementation and farmers will not be able to get the required relief in the drought-affected State. Quoting inputs from the agriculture department, Mr Hooda said kharif crops require 10 protective irrigations to sustain the paddy crop from July 15 to September 30 with cost of each irrigation calculated at Rs 514 per acre.

### **Water level at Mettur**

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 103.09 feet on Tuesday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 6,488 cusecs and the discharge 16,995 cusecs.



### **Forest Dept Field Officers Authorised to Fix Relief for Livestock, Crop Loss**

The State government has authorised the Forest Department's Field Officers with financial powers to fix the compensation amount regarding the crop loss, loss of human and domesticated animal lives, permanent disability and injuries, loss of property due to attack from wild animals in order dated August 13. It has come into effect from this financial year. In case of death of a cow, ox or buffalo due to man-animal conflict, a maximum compensation of ₹10,000 has been announced to the owner of the animals as against the previous minimum ₹2,500 and a maximum ₹3,000 compensation. A compensation of ₹5,000 will be paid to the affected farmers in case of death of a sheep or goat. The government will grant a maximum of ₹1 lakh to the affected farmer if the crop in his plantation is destroyed by wild animals as against the previous maximum of ₹50,000. From 2009-10 to 2013-14, a total of 123,191 crop loss cases have been reported in the State and a compensation of ₹32.77 crore has have been disbursed to the affected farmers and 4,073 cattle have become victims in the last five years and a compensation of ₹1,29,95, 943 has been paid to their owners. However, the revised rates of compensation will be bound by the terms and conditions laid down in the government orders of April 30, 2011 and August 3, 2011 during their sanctions. Under Secretary to Forest and Environment Department S P Patil has mentioned that expenditure for the current proposals will have to be borne under head of account 2406-02-110-0-01- 015 of the financial year 2014-15. Meanwhile,

Bhadra Tiger Reserve Director S Venkateshan told Express that 111 cases of property and crop loss have been reported around the Bhadra Sanctuary in the last three years. However, no human lives were lost. The compensation for the loss of a human life due to wild animal attack has been put at `5 lakh.

### **Farmlands in Vizag Dist Growing Infertile**

The agriculture lands in Visakhapatnam district are increasingly turning infertile due to phenomenal decrease in mineral components in the soil over the past few years. Scientists blame increasing usage of chemical fertilisers and deficit rainfall for the alarming situation and suggest that the government take up immediate measures to conserve the fertile lands in the district. The three main elements in the soil that help a plant's growth are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, which are being consistently indexed in the 'low' category of nutrients in the soil for the past one decade in the district. The Soil Testing Laboratory wing in Visakhapatnam district, in its studies, established that all three compounds are limited to the 1.66 category, which falls in the 'low' grade of the nutrient index. The studies also revealed that other important elements like zinc, manganese, copper, iron and sulphur are also listed in the 'low' category, indicating how the soil strength has drastically weakened in the district. "Due to the low compound levels, the yield has decreased considerably. We have already briefed the chief minister about the issue during his recent visit. The situation in all 34 rural mandals is the same, except for the fact that it is little better in the 11 agency areas, if not entirely great," said G Sunitha, assistant director of Soil Testing Laboratory (STL). She blamed the indiscriminate utilisation of fertilisers and other chemicals, insufficient rains and ecological imbalances for the plummeting soil fertility levels. The STL analyses about 8,000 samples every year and lists the strengths of the soil under the parameters low, medium and high. From time to time, the STL informs the government about the major and micro nutrients in the low category and suggests the officials and farmers to decide the crop variety, and required quantities of nutrients including fertilisers, based on the soil conditions, for a good yield. However, despite these efforts, the farmers are still incurring huge losses as the yield is not proportionate to the expenditure, notwithstanding the expansive usage of fertilisers. According to the statistics available at the agriculture department, a healthy production of paddy is 30 bags per acre (with each bag containing 75 kg of the grain). But during the past two Kharif seasons, a majority of the farmers are able to produce only 20-25 bags, even during favourable conditions. In the event of a cyclone or drought, the yield could fall further to 14

to 18 bags. Stressing the high need to take up measures to strengthen the soil, agricultural scientists have recently requested chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu to take up special measures to help the farming activity in the district. They have also informed the chief minister of how some farmers in several mandals have been forced to abandon farming altogether due to infertile lands and go in search of alternative jobs. Responding to the growing threat, the Ministry of Agriculture has acknowledged the issue and assured the scientists of taking further action.

### **Water Level Increases in Dam**

The volume of water in Idukki dam increased to 63.91 per cent of its total capacity increasing it to a level of 2,370 feet against its full level of 2,403 feet on Tuesday morning. The water level in the dam is about 25 feet less compared to last year. On the September 2, 2013, the water level was 2,395.94 feet. Water level in Mullaperiyar Dam was 129.4 feet against its permissible level of 142 feet. The Idukki dam had a volume of 933.55 million cubic metre (MCM) against its full volume of 1460 MCM. Rainfall received in the catchment area of the dam is 25.60 mm. The inflow in the dam was equal to generating 39.09 million units of power. The power generated was 2.805 million units in the past 24 hours. Total rains received in the district since the beginning of the monsoon is 2,782 mm as against the previous year's record of 3,217 mm.

### **State Targets 5 lakh Tonne from Koraput by Next Year**

Reeling under potato crisis for nearly a month due to embargo on supply of the vegetable by the West Bengal Government, Odisha Government on Monday set a target to produce five lakh tonnes of potato in Koraput district by 2015. To accomplish the target, a project proposal prepared by PACT (Partners for Agri Communities and Tribal) was discussed at a high-level meeting held here under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Gokul Chandra Pati and attended by Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Sanjeev Chopra along with a team of experts. The project has been designed to expand potato farming to 50,000 acres involving 8,000 farmers of 200 villages in 10 blocks of Koraput district. The project envisages fetching an annual income of two lakh per acre to the farmer through year-round assisted farming. The project will be monitored through a comprehensive accountable and transparent process built on a world class Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platform. "The ICT platform will include all processes 'from seed to buyer' with on-demand reporting system.

The cost of the project has been estimated at `106 crore and will be implemented in PPCP (Public Private and Community Partnership) mode,” said Horticulture Director Sanjeev Chadha.

### **Tomatoes Cheap, Potatoes Remain Hot**

With supplies increasing during Vinayaka Chaturthi festival, prices of tomatoes have fallen dramatically. Tomato prices that had shot up to Rs 85 per kilogram a few months back have fallen to as low as Rs 15 this week, vendors at Koyambedu vegetable market said on Tuesday. Housewives, who spared tomatoes from their sambhar and chutney over the past few months, are buying the red vegetable in bulk as if they wanted to compensate for those “expensive” days. The price reduction in Koyambedu had an effect in the retail market too. “Some people were selling tomatoes on a mini-van in my colony for Rs 20 per kg. They were even announcing the price on a megaphone. I bought two kilograms and stocked them up in the refrigerator,” a resident of Korattur said. Though the tomatoes brought relief to housewives, prices of potatoes continued to be hot, forcing people to have more onions in their platter. While Ooty potatoes are available for Rs 42, the Karnataka ones cost Rs 35 and Agra potatoes cost Rs 32. “It depends on the produce we get, if we have more potato vehicles coming, prices will go down,” said R Bhaskar, a merchant. Onion prices continued to be stable with Nasik variety costing Rs 30 per kg and Andhra variety Rs 24. Merchants also said the price of lemon has increased from Rs 60 per kg to Rs 150 per kg. The price of white beans has gone down from Rs 40 per kg to Rs 30 per kg while red beans cost Rs 50 per kg, reflecting continuing volatility in the price of some vegetables.

## **Business Standard**

### **Deepak Fertilisers set to increase open offer bid for MCF takeover**

Pune-based Deepak Fertilisers, which has been trying for over a year to gain management control of Mangalore Chemicals & Fertilisers, a company promoted by Vijay Mallya's UB Group, is now planning to come up with a revised open offer price for the fertiliser company's shares. Deepak's decision to go full throttle in its takeover bid comes a day after United Bank of India (UBI) declared UB Group company Kingfisher Airlines and Mallya (pictured) wilful defaulters for non-payment of Rs 400 crore of dues, casting a shadow on Zuari chief Saroj Poddar's plan to jointly own a controlling stake in MCF with Mallya. After the Pune-based company earlier offered Rs 63 a share, Mallya and Poddar had jointly launched a counter open offer at Rs 68.55 a share. Now, having been declared a



wilful defaulter, Mallya might not be allowed to keep a board seat at any company. According to sources, unless he secures a stay on the UBI decision, his agreement with Poddar with regard to MCF might have to be reworked. Two people with direct knowledge of the matter told Business Standard that Deepak Fertilisers was planning to increase its open offer price. "We will go full steam. We are thinking on the lines of revising our open offer, as it would make sense for stakeholders to tender their shares to us only if the price we offer is higher than what has been offered by the other two suitors," said a person close to the development who did not wish to be named. "The offer made by Deepak Fertilisers earlier was priced too low. The discussions are at the senior management level and stage seems set for a revised offer," said another person close to the development. Analysts, too, share these views. They say a revised open offer at this point could give Deepak a lead in the takeover battle. "The Poddar-Mallya counter offer was priced substantially higher than Deepak's open offer. But now, a wilful-defaulter tag on Mallya presents an opportunity to Deepak Fertilisers to come up with a revised price," said a sector analyst with Sharekhan. The price of MCF shares has been hovering around Rs 70 apiece for some time. That is higher than the prices offered in both the proposed open offers. On Tuesday, the MCF scrip fell 0.66 per cent from its previous close on BSE to end at Rs 68.05. Mallya, through UB Group, owns 21.98 per cent in MCF, while Poddar holds a 16.43 per cent stake through Zuari. As of the April-June quarter of this financial year, Deepak owned a 25.3 per cent stake in MCF and had proposed an open offer for an additional 26 per cent stake. Poddar and Mallya had jointly made an open offer for a similar stake. While Sebi had last month approved both these open offer proposals, Deepak Fertilisers had received the Competition Commission of India's approval as well.

**BATTLE FOR MCF Apr 2013:** Zuari chief Saroj Poddar initially buys close to a 10% stake in MCF with the intent of gaining control of the company

Poddar makes it clear he is in talks to jointly run the company with MCF Chairman Vijay Mallya

**July 2013:** Sailesh Mehta-led Deepak Fertilisers makes surprise entry by buying a 24% stake in MCF

Poddar increases his stake to 16.4% through open-market purchase of shares

**April 2014:** Deepak further increases its stake to 25.3 %, triggering an open offer

**May 2014:** Poddar joins hands with Mallya to launch a counter offer

The Poddar-Mallya open offer is made at Rs 68.55 a share, compared with Deepak's Rs 63 a share

### **Rubber imports set to soar**

Natural rubber import is set to be more attractive for consuming countries, with rubber-producing countries gearing to offer more concessions to push the commodity. Thailand, the world's largest exporter of rubber, recently decided to release 200,000 tonnes of its stockpile. Vietnam's finance ministry is considering slashing the rubber export tax down to zero from the current one per cent. All this means more availability of the commodity at world markets, leading to a drop in prices. This will, in turn, result in more imports to consuming countries such as India. On Monday, the price of benchmark grade RSS-4 quoted Rs 127 a kg, while Bangkok price in rupee terms was Rs 107. "In November 2013, Vietnam decreased the export tax for centrifugal rubber and synthetic rubber from three per cent to one per cent. Now it plans to further reduce it to zero levels. The price advantage will definitely favour more import to India this year," said Rajiv Budhraj, director-general of Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA). Budhraj told Business Standard it is not the price alone that would determine the quantum of imports, but local availability and quality, too, are major issues. However, this year, price along with higher availability in overseas markets would play a major factor. Experts are of the view that the total imports by India would cross 400,000 tonnes in the current financial year. During FY14, India had imported 325,190 tonnes against 217,364 tonnes in the previous year. Notably, if India's imports cross 400,000 tonnes, that would constitute 50 per cent of the country's total production. According to the latest data of the Rubber Board, during the April-July 2014 period, 133,789 tonnes of natural rubber were brought into India. This is for the first time that rubber import has crossed 100,000 tonnes in just four months' time. During the first five months of this financial year, Vietnam exported 239,000 tonnes of rubber worth \$472 million. Compared to the same period last year, export volume shrank 20.5 per cent, while revenue was 39.3 per cent lower. The country's total revenue this year is expected to be 25-30 per cent lower than in last year.

### **Chana down 0.4% on increased supply**

Chana remained weak for the second day and prices fell further by 0.42% to Rs 2,865 per quintal in futures trading today as speculators offloaded their positions amidst increased supplies from producing regions in the spot markets. At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, chana prices for delivery in

October were down by Rs 12, or 0.42%, to Rs 2,865 per quintal with an open interest of 1,12,190 lots. Similarly, the commodity for delivery in September shed Rs 6, or 0.21%, to Rs 2,806 per quintal in 84,290 lots. Analysts said offloading of positions by speculators, triggered by increased supplies from producing regions in the physical market against sluggish demand from dal mills, kept pressure on chana prices at futures trade.

#### **Refined soya oil up 1% on strong demand**

Refined soya oil prices rose further by 1.02% to Rs 561.95 per 10 kg in futures trading today as speculators enlarged positions amid strong demand in the spot market in view of festive season. At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, refined soya oil for delivery in October gained Rs 5.70, or 1.02%, to Rs 561.95 per 10 kg with an open interest of 1,17,630 lots. Likewise, the oil for delivery in September went up by Rs 4.20, or 0.70%, to Rs 607.10 per 10 kg in 37,235 lots. Analysts said besides strong spot market demand, less arrivals from producing regions, mainly supported the upside in refined soya oil prices at futures trade.

#### **Palm oil up 0.8% on spot demand**

Extending gains for the second day, crude palm oil futures advanced by 0.88% to Rs 445.30 per 10 kg in futures market today as speculators enlarged positions. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude palm oil for delivery in September moved up by Rs 3.90, or 0.88%, to Rs 445.30 per 10 kg in a business turnover of 236 lots. Likewise, the oil for delivery in October traded higher by Rs 3.70, or 0.87%, to Rs 430.30 per 10 kg in 111 lots. Analysts said apart from firming trend at spot market on strong demand, restricted arrivals from producing regions influenced crude palm oil prices at futures trade.

#### **Cardamom up 0.4% on rising demand**

Amidst rising domestic and export demand, cardamom rose further by 0.38% to Rs 918 per kg in futures trade today as speculators engaged in enlarging positions. Besides, restricted arrivals in the spot markets from producing belts further fuelled the uptrend. At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in October went up by Rs 3.50, or 0.38%, to Rs 918 per kg in a business turnover of 45 lots. Similarly, the spice for delivery in September gained Rs 1.60, or 0.17%, to Rs 934.70 per kg in 56 lots. Market analysts said besides rising domestic as well as export demand, limited arrivals from producing regions mainly kept cardamom prices higher at futures trade.

### **Cardamom slips as supply outstrips demand**

The cardamom market slipped last week as supply outstripped demand at auctions in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Supply has picked up as harvesting has begun in all the estates. However, export buying has surged and arrested a sharp fall in prices. Exporters bought 100 tonnes of the spice last week. Upcountry buyers were not buying aggressively anticipating that prices would decline further when supply picks up in the coming weeks. The individual auction average has slipped to between Rs. 770 and Rs.840 a kg. Good bold green bulk was being sold at around Rs. 800 a kg. However, 8mm bold which has been in short supply was sold at Rs. 900-950 a kg, market sources in Kumily told *BusinessLine*. The first round of picking is almost over and the second round is to begin next week, they said. According to growers, prices should stabilise somewhere between Rs. 750 and Rs.800 a kg as the cost of production has gone up substantially. They said that cost for harvesting and drying one kg of cardamom would come to Rs. 500, while the production cost for one kg is estimated at Rs. 150. Therefore, anything below Rs. 750 is not going to be remunerative, they said. At the Kerala Cardamom Processing and Marketing Company auction on Sunday, arrivals increased to 76 tonnes from 65 tonnes the previous Sunday. The entire quantity was sold out. The maximum price was at Rs. 1,083 a kg and the minimum at Rs.457 a kg. The auction average fell by Rs. 75 a kg to Rs.777, PC Punnoose, General Manager, KCPMC told *BusinessLine*. During the current season of the crop from August 1, production stood at 1,191 tonnes against 1,867 tonnes last year. Sales were at 1,162 tonnes against 1,846 tonnes. The weighted average price as on August 31 stood at Rs. 817.38 a kg as against Rs.617.56 a kg as on the same date last year. Prices of all graded varieties dropped last week and they in Rs. \kg at the weekend were: AGEB 925-935; AGB790 -800; AGS 660 - 670; and AGS -1: 640 - 650.

## **Wheat to face pressure from excess supply, other crops**

Wheat prices are likely to remain under pressure from competing crops this year and supply glut, industry experts told the International Wheat Seminar here on Tuesday. "Wheat prices are likely to trade between \$5.75 (\$211/tonne) and \$5.50 (\$202) in the near term and could even drop to \$5 (\$183) over the next six months," said Rajiv Yadav, Vice-President, Grains and Oilseeds, Noble Natural Resources. Prices would be bearish next year too, he said during a session on Global Wheat Trade – an Indian Perspective. On the Chicago Board of Trade, wheat maturing for delivery in December ruled unchanged at \$5.635 a bushel (\$207.16 a tonne) on Tuesday. The International Grains Council, in its latest report, has projected a record 713.1 million tonnes (mt) of wheat this year, while the US Department of Agriculture has pegged it at 716.1 mt. The carryover wheat stocks, according to IGC, will be 195 mt (193 mt: USDA). GK Sood, former chairman of Noble Resources and Trading India Private Ltd, said a higher corn production for the fourth successive year will put pressure on wheat. He drew a parallel to falling crude oil prices, which he said, would make production of ethanol from corn unattractive. US crude oil, a benchmark for global agricultural market, has dropped to multi-months low of \$95.05 a barrel with inventories rising to a record high. "Though prices are ruling far lower, people will have to watch out for volatility," said Somnath Chatterjee, Division Manager Procurement, ITC Ltd. Had the rupee not gained in the last 12 months, wheat exports could have been in trouble, he said. Some two mt of wheat have been exported this year, while the rupee has recovered to levels of around 60.50 to the dollar from over 64. Though wheat prices tended to rise last week, it would be a short-lived phenomenon, he said. Nobel Natural Resources' Yadav said that rains damaging crop in Europe last week have proved to be a double whammy for agricultural commodities. "Nearly 12 mt of wheat were damaged enough to be downgraded to animal feed," he said. Ample stocks are available in the country too and if the Monsoon recovers, next year's crop could also turn out to be at this year's level of 95.6 mt. "This year, wheat prices will rule stable and there is no gain in building inventories. Exports, too, are unlikely to pick up since our wheat will cost \$280-290 f.o.b.," Yadav said, adding that prices in the market were lower than the offers from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) through the Open Market Sale Scheme. "Exports are unlikely until the new crop arrives (in April)," said Sood, adding that imports have turned attractive now with global prices turning bearish. Dwelling on flour millers' perspective, Ajay Goyal, Managing Director, Shivaji Roller Flour Mills, said the Government should indicate a cap for the price rise. "If the maximum level is breached, it should start offloading the FCI stocks," he said.

## **Coonoor tea prices continue to rule at year's lowest level**

For the third consecutive week, average prices at Sale No: 35 of the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association ruled at the year's lowest level of Rs. 63 a kg. Even after reducing the prices, teas worth as much as Rs. 3.68 crore (35 per cent of the offer) remained unsold. Deepika Supreme topped the CTC market at Rs. 190 a kg. Vigneshwar Estate got Rs. 185, Navil Kal Estate Rs.181, Homedale Estate, Hittakkal Estate and Shanthi Supreme got Rs.180 each. In all, 66 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg. Among orthodox teas, Kairbetta got Rs. 225, Havukal Rs.222, Kodanad Rs.220, Corsley Rs.216 and Chamraj got Rs. 210. In all, 27 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg. Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs. 45-47 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs.100-150 for brighter liquoring sorts. They ranged Rs. 45-49 for plain dusts and Rs.120-185 for brighter liquoring dusts. On the export front, Pakistan bought selectively in a wide range of Rs. 48-111 a kg and CIS at Rs.43-60. Better liquoring CTC leaf eased by Rs. 4-5 a kg, better mediums by Rs.3-4 and plainers suffered withdrawals even after shedding Rs. 4. Better liquoring CTC dusts eased by Rs. 3-5 a kg, better mediums by Rs.2-3 and plainers suffered withdrawal despite losing up to Rs. 3.

## **Storage infrastructure key to food security**

The Government should consider viability gap funding to encourage private sector investments in modern grain storage infrastructure, according to S Sivakumar, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC – Agri Business Division. The country's wheat production is estimated at close to 100 million tonnes (mt) from about 30 million hectares under cultivation. There is potential to increase this by about 20 per cent with the available technologies. But post-harvest losses are a huge concern with an estimated 5 mt being lost in storage and transportation. Addressing the 7<sup>th</sup> international seminar on wheat and wheat products, he said that the Government support is required to garner private sector investments and public private partnership in grain storage infrastructure. Biometric systems can be introduced to supply grains to beneficiaries under the public distribution system to prevent leakage and pilferage, he said. Technology rather than subsidy can be the key to food security, he felt. MS Swaminathan, Chairman, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, said a national grid of grain storages is needed fast. India needs over 60-70 mt of foodgrains to meet the needs of food security programme. Wheat production has increased to nearly a 100 mt from about 6 mt at the time of

Independence. Monsoon and markets decide the fate of farmers in India. Improving yields, developing crop varieties that are pest- and disease-resistant and modern infrastructure can benefit farmers. Genetic tools are key to getting high yielding crops but adequate safety regulations are needed to instil confidence in the public, he said. Varun Berry, Managing Director, Britannia Industries Ltd, said changing lifestyles are driving demand for value-added wheat products that are convenient and ready-to-eat. New categories of baked products, frozen dough for delivering fresh-off-the-oven products to shoppers are in demand. This means the quality of raw material, wheat from the farms, has to be good and specific varieties that cater to specialised applications are needed.

### **Karnataka to promote neera tapping**

*Neera*, the sweet sap tapped from coconut tree, could be the much-needed elixir for thousands of beleaguered growers who have been battered by pest attacks and droughts in recent years. After the recent success in Kerala, where the State Government amended the 100-year old excise laws and came out with a policy to promote *neera* production through farmers' associations, the Coconut Development Board wants other major growing States such as Karnataka to emulate it. *Neera* is considered a health drink on account of its high nutritive and medicinal value. "Neera could do to India what crude oil has done to Saudi Arabia," said TK Jose, Chairman, CDB, commenting on the economic potential. Freshly tapped *neera*, if not stored under controlled temperature or consumed within a couple of hours, turns into toddy with about four per cent alcohol on account of fermentation. And the sale of toddy comes within the ambit of the State excise laws. Early this year Kerala came out with a policy to encourage production of *neera* through coconut producers' society. Farmers – organised into societies and federations – are being issued licences to tap *neera* from about a tenth of coconut trees in their plantations. Jose said coconut growers the world over, except India, were doing well despite fall in prices of coconut oil or copra as the income earned from *neera* has helped them to bear the impact of lower oil prices. However, in India, *neera* tapping is not allowed, except in Kerala, Maharashtra and Goa. Hoping that the laws would be amended, CDB has come up with technologies in collaboration with the Central Food Technology Research Institute and Central Plantation Crops Research Institute to extend the shelf-life of freshly tapped *neera* and produce value-added products. Recent developments in Kerala have caught the fancy of growers in neighbouring States, mainly Karnataka which

accounts for 26 per cent of the country's output. Vishwanath Anakatte, a coconut grower from Tumkur, believes that the Karnataka Government should allow tapping of *neera*. Farmers in the State have suffered in the recent years on account of mite attack on the trees and successive droughts – that has reduced the yields by about 40 per cent, said Anakatte, who is a member of the coconut growers association. A coconut grower can earn an additional income of up to Rs. 3,000 per tree, if allowed to tap *neera*.

### **Draft policy**

Though Karnataka came up with a draft *neera* policy way back in 2007, the State has developed cold feet in implementing the same over concerns of misuse. In fact, the State budget last year talked promoting *neera* as an energy drink, but there has been no action from the Government. “We will try to take up the issue with the State Government,” said Rajeev Chawla, Principal Secretary, Horticulture. Addressing the World Coconut Day, Ananth Kumar, Minister of Chemicals and Fertilisers told growers that he would impress upon the Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh to convene a round table of all stakeholders to formulate an action plan on promotion of *neera* and amend the excise rules.

### **Reforming agriculture: time for the next green revolution?**

While the first green revolution managed to make the nation self sufficient the next round of reforms certainly needs to address the problems faced by today's farmers. According to statistics available on Indian Council of Agricultural Research, India reaped a record foodgrain production of 259.32 million tonnes (mt) in 2011-12. However, the output fell to 257.13 mt in 2012-13 on account of deficient rainfall in several States. Questions are still linger on the quality of produce and impoverished conditions of farmers. On the face of it, the Government has initiated actions to bridge these gaps in the agricultural system. For instance, the Budget has sought to increase its focus on yield, food quality and self sufficiency to protect the interest of farmers. The salient features are: Bhoomi Heen Kisan, Soil Health Card, New Urea Policy, Irrigation, National Adaptation Fund, Promoting Organic Farming, Farm Price Stabilisation Fund and promoting agri-entrepreneurs. However, if the inclusive participation of all stakeholders is not taken into account, efforts will fail. The other problem is that the farmers community regularly suffers from developments relating to weather. One way to



safeguard against these is through 'Protected Cultivation' which will collaborate the efforts of farmers as well the Government on a common ground. In India, only one per cent of total floriculture is equipped with protected cultivation techniques, whereas agriculturally advanced countries such as Netherlands, Italy, Spain, France and others have 55-70 per cent area covered under protected cultivation. Protected cultivation solutions involve custom-made poly houses, shade nets, insect nets, bird protection nets, anti-hail nets, mulch mats and similar products which will certainly augment the quality and productivity of the crops, resulting in higher profits to the farmers at subsidised rates. Protected Cultivation increases yield by up to 8 to 10 times, saves water up to 50 per cent, compared to open field flood irrigation, reduction in cost of fertilisers, labour etc. Undulating terrains, saline, water logged, sandy and hilly lands can also be brought under productive cultivation. A poly house in an acre would approximately costs anywhere between Rs. 25 and 30 lakh. This would last for at least 15 years. The yield per acre in the first year would be in the range of Rs. 75-80 lakhs. There is a component of 30 per cent subsidy available from the Government. Small farmers may not be able to pool in such huge investment. Hence, banks and other financial institutions should chip in to support farmers. In India, where nearly every year north regions such as Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir faces hailstorms resulting in almost 12-15 per cent high-value crops being severely damaged and putting farmers in a helpless situation. Though the Government takes adequate step to compensate for adversity, the right approach would be to plan and protect farms well in advance using anti-hail nets. To make it affordable, banks should give loans to poor farmers. Similarly, usage of anti-bird nets must be encouraged, especially for isolation crops. Also, one-third of the geographical area is drought-prone since it is dependent on the monsoon, which can be erratic. In comparison to the past, where monsoon was spread across 3-4 months, now almost 60 per cent rainfall happens in a week or two and even after a good monsoon, adequate water is not available due to of lack of proper management and storage. Therefore, it becomes important to make provision for storing rain water by building pond in the agricultural fields. One of the most effective ways of water management is through pond/canal lining. These ponds would be built in a variety of soil types which exhibit a wide range of seepage characteristics. Because of seepage, the water level of the reservoir depletes rapidly. Seepage losses not only mean loss of useful water but also lead to other problems such as breach in the embankment, water-logging and increased salinity in the adjacent areas. To conclude, all the proposed reforms along with protected cultivation solutions when implemented

will result in convenience to the farmers, better output and subsequently reduce the migration of the rural population to the cities. This will answer the perpetual question of whether agriculture can bring the Indian economy out of the trough. The author is COO, Garware Wall Ropes Ltd. Views are personal.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Onion prices may rise next month**

The new central government may have managed to keep onion prices in check during its first 100 days in office, but it may have to brace for a spike in prices of the politically-sensitive commodity ahead of the series of upcoming assembly elections and pray that it does not rain at the time of harvesting the new crop.

Although supply of the new crop has already started in Karnataka, the new kharif crop from Maharashtra is expected only by October-end or the beginning of November. "If it rains at the time of harvesting of the new crop, then the supply situation can turn critical," said a Nashik-based onion exporter, who did not wish to be identified. Traders and experts say onion stocks will start running out from the end of this month, leading to an increase in prices of the commodity from next month. "Prices can increase after October 15," said Changdev Holkar, director of National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation or Nafed. However, he added: "There is ample onion in other countries like Pakistan that can be imported to meet the shortage in domestic market." Stocks in Rajasthan, which has been feeding onions to Delhi, are likely to last for just 15 to 20 days.

### **Haryana declares drought, demands relief from Centre**

Haryana became the first state in the country to officially declare drought as it sought Rs 4,829.25 crore from the Centre to compensate farmers and power utility companies. Rainfall shortage in the state on Tuesday was 64%. In 18 of its 21 districts it was below 50%. Haryana had last declared drought in 2002 when rainfall deficit was 51%. "In case of more than 50% damage to crops of paddy and cotton, a compensation of Rs 4,000 per acre would be given. In case of damage to other crops, it would be Rs 3,500 per acre," chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda told reporters. Officials will submit a detailed report on the situation in a month, he

added. Agricultural drought is defined as a period of four consecutive weeks of meteorological drought with a rainfall deficiency of more than 50% of the long-term average. The weekly rainfall is 5 mm or less from mid-May to mid-October, a period when 80% of total kharif crop is planted. A state government declares drought if the total area sown by the end of the July-August period is less than 50% of the total cultivable land. Other monitoring tools applied for drought declaration are normal difference in vegetation index and moisture content in the soil. The Centre gives 50% of the claim amount made by the state for compensation of farmers loss and increase in input cost. According to officials, the Uttar Pradesh government too is likely to seek aid from the Centre for a drought-like situation. In Telangana and Maharashtra, where rains have picked up over the past few days, officials are keeping a watch. Meanwhile, widespread rainfall over the last few days has narrowed the seasonal monsoon deficit in the country to 16%. Haryana's additional chief secretary, finance, and commissioner revenue, Yudhvir Singh Malik, said, "We have sent a memorandum to the Centre to get assistance. There has been no availability of water for irrigation through Bhakra and Jamuna canal, leading to difficult situation for farmers." According to Malik, Haryana has sought a special package of Rs 4,829.25 crore, including Rs 1,191.79 crore for state power utility companies, Rs 1,703 crore for yield loss of standing crop and Rs 1,047.71 crore to waive crop loans. Officials said farmers have incurred huge expenditure in pumping water through tube wells as irrigation canals have dried. About 60% of Haryana's farms are irrigated by canals. Agriculture ministry officials said they would wait for the report before taking action. In Punjab, where 90% of farms get water from canals, seasonal rainfall deficit was 64%. It was 59% in western Uttar Pradesh, 36% in both Telangana and Marathwada. In August, the Punjab government had asked the Centre for Rs 2,350 crore as drought relief but had not declared drought in state. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh is studying the acreage and likely yield loss across districts. "Forty-one districts out of 75 have received less than 50% rainfall. In the next 1-2 days, we will get the report on acreage loss and any damage to standing crop," said Jai Prakash Sagar, special secretary, revenue, Uttar Pradesh. The state's natural calamity relief commission will make an announcement in the next one or two days, he said. As per officials, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Noida, Bulandshahar, Hapur and Rampur are the worst affected districts in West Uttar Pradesh. "In Telangana, where 95% of farms are rain irrigated, maize and cotton crops could see a likely drop in yield. Janardhan Reddy, agriculture commissioner, Telangana, said all 10 districts in the state have received below normal rainfall. The reports of loss of

maize crop and stunted growth of cotton from all the districts in the state. We are watching the situation and will announce drought if things worsen," he said.

### **Agriculture Ministry to issue 14 crore soil health cards in three years**

The Agriculture Ministry will issue 14 crore soil health cards to farmers in three years that will provide crop-wise recommendations of nutrients to help improve farm productivity. Sharing the number of steps taken by the government in the first 100 days, the Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh in a statement said: "These cards will be issued to 3 crore farmers during current year and 5.5 crore cards each during next two years. Also 100 mobile soil testing laboratories will be made available during the current year." A soil health card carries crop-wise recommendations of nutrients and fertilisers required for farms, so that accordingly farmers can use inputs and raise the productivity. Singh said the government has taken all possible steps to meet the challenge of a drought and have announced a subsidy of 50 per cent in diesel, seeds, where 50 per cent rainfall deficit has been reported. "An additional allocation of Rs 700 crore under Mission of Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) during current year for availability of fodder has been made," he said. In addition, waiver of duty on import of de-oiled soya extract, groundnut oil cake, sunflower oil cake, canola oil meal, mustard oil cake, rice bran and palm kernel cake to increase availability of feed ingredients will also be given, Singh added. During the course of its first 100 days, the government has launched Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to promote the use of organic farming and reduce dependence on chemical inputs, the minister said. Mentioning about the initiatives in horticulture sector, Singh said that after the launch of saffron park recently at Pampore in Jammu and Kashmir, the facility for processing packaging and e-auction of saffron will be also provided. "Under a new initiative named 'Chaman' the horticulture crops would be mapped through remote sensing (satellites)," the minister added. For increasing production of fruits and vegetables, the government has also approved 'centre of excellence' under Indo Dutch Cooperation, in Jalandhar in Punjab, Baramati in Maharashtra and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Two new high yielding crop varieties developed by Haryana agricultural university Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University (CCSHAU), Hisar, today said it has developed two new high yielding and disease resistant varieties of wheat and barley for cultivation in different states of the country. CCSHAU Vice-Chancellor K S Khokhar said here today the Central Varietal Identification Committee headed by Dr S K Datta, Deputy Director General (Crop Sciences), Indian Council of Agriculture Research

(ICAR), in the All India Wheat and Barley Research Workers Meet held at Jawahar Lal Nehru Krishi Vishva Vidiyalaya, Jabalpur, recently, had identified variety's wheat variety WH 1142 for release in North Western Plain Zone for timely sown restricted irrigation conditions.

## DECCAN Chronicle

### **India talking to WTO members on food subsidy issue: Commerce Secretary**

India is talking to "good number" of countries to garner support on its stand on the food security issue at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) with a view to carry forward the talks for freer trade. The WTO has resumed work at Geneva from September 1 after a month long vacation. "We will start from where we have left. The bottom line is already made clear. We are willing to talk but achieve the same objectives in whatever manner," Commerce Secretary Rajeev Kher told reporters here. He said that it was now upto the WTO Director General Roberto Azevedo to convene meetings in the form of either calling heads of delegation or in smaller groups. "We are talking to few countries...a good number of countries," Kher said when asked whether India is engaging with other WTO members to garner support on its tough stand, which led to failure of talks in Geneva. At its last meeting at Geneva on July 31, the 160-member WTO failed to agree on a global customs pact popularly called as the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). India had decided not to ratify WTO's TFA, which is dear to the developed world, without any concrete movement in finding a permanent solution to its public food stock-holding issue for food security purposes. New Delhi has asked WTO to amend the norms for calculating agriculture subsidies so that the country could continue to procure foodgrains from farmers at minimum support price and sell them to poor at cheaper rates without violating the norms. The current WTO norms limit the value of food subsidies at 10 per cent of the total value of foodgrain production. However, the quantum of subsidy is computed after taking into consideration prices that prevailed two decades ago. India is asking for a change in the base year (1986-88) for calculating food subsidy as it would capture the impact of inflation and currency movements over the years. There are apprehensions that once India completely implements its food security programme, it could breach the 10 per cent cap. Breach of the cap may lead to imposition of hefty penalties, if a member country drags India to the WTO.

