

Crop loan waiver: government mulls giving cash, coupons

The State government is planning to immediately provide cash of Rs.50,000 and coupon that can be cashed in six months or one year for the remaining amount to each eligible beneficiary of the crop loan waiver scheme.

Once the banks complete the process of identifying genuine beneficiaries and provide the government with the final list, a thorough scrutiny and final validation would be taken up, official sources said. In case, the bankers hand over the list by September 25 or 26 as promised by them, the government would try to finish the entire process by October 10 and all the details would be put online.

In the run-up to the elections, the Telugu Desam had promised to waive loans of farmers up to Rs. 1.5 lakh and those of DWACRA women self-help groups up to Rs.1 lakh.

While refusing to hazard a guess on the extent of fake or bogus crop loans taken by borrowers, the sources said there were different types of irregularities. For instance, there have been cases of multiple borrowings on the same land from two or three banks.

More trees felled in Mangar forest

More than half-a-dozen trees, mostly Vilayati Keekar (*Prosopis juliflora*), were illegally cut in the Mangar Bani area off Gurgaon-Faridabad highway here on Sunday. The area is notified under Section 4 and 5 of the Punjab Land Preservation Act.

The illegal cutting came to light in the morning when some villagers spotted men carrying branches and trunks of trees in a vehicle. "It raised suspicion and when we went inside the forest to check we found several trees cut. There were a couple of persons inside the forest who ran away on seeing us," said Sunil, one of the villagers.

The matter was reported to the Faridabad Division of the forest department and officials visited the area around noon.

An infrastructure firm that owns land in the forest was also accused of felling over 50 trees last month.

On March 30 a group of bird watchers, including a Delhi High Court lawyer and his friend, were seriously injured when they were attacked allegedly by a local priest and his goons in the area. It was seen as an attempt to keep away environmentalists and activists from the forest.

One of the last few stretches of virgin forests in the National Capital Region, the Mangar Bani has been treasured by and cared for centuries by the residents of three villages -- Mangar, Bandhwari and Baliawas.

Over the past few years, the villagers were forced to sell their share of land and a draft development plan for Mangar was passed in 2011 allowing real estate activities. But the Ministry of Environment & Forests intervened directing the Haryana Government to identify Mangar Bani and other such areas as forests and to keep the development plan in abeyance. A group of villagers even sent a petition to the Haryana Government in 2012 -

seeking to protect over 320 acre of Mangar Bani and its surrounding area. But little seems to have been done by the Haryana Government.

A bitter harvest for Kashmir's apple growers

Hundreds of apples, some rotten, some yet to ripen, lie scattered in stagnant floodwaters as a man rows across his orchard on a shikara. He is trying to pluck the handful of apples that are still hanging from the higher branches, untouched by the waters.

The floods hit Chakganistan-Mustafabad villages in north Kashmir's Sumbal area after the Jhelum had already wreaked havoc in Srinagar. For the 250 families that live here, the question was not how to survive but how to save their paddy fields and orchards which were ready for harvest.

Now, with their houses inundated, their paddy fields looking like vast lakes and their orchards still six feet under water, they are clueless where to begin from.

“Only our lives have been spared. The floods destroyed everything else,” said Fareed Ahmad Dar, a villager. “And we don't know whether to cry for our broken houses or our lost crops or for our destroyed orchards.”

The Shalteng-Hajin-Sumbal belt is among the highest producers of paddy, wheat and pulses in Kashmir Valley and the floods have destroyed almost all the crops. In Chakganistan-Mustafabad villages, around 9,000 kanals (1,115 acres) of paddy and wheat fields and more than 500 kanals (62 acres) of orchards are flooded.

“We would have been in the fields right now, harvesting our crop. This is usually the happiest time in these villages, but today we are

all crying,” Mr. Dar told *The Hindu* .

His extended family owns eight acres of paddy fields and half-an-acre of orchard land. While the paddy is lost for this year, the orchards, after being under water for a week, could be diseased and useless for future too.

Shakeel Qalander, a member of the Kashmir Centre for Social and Development Studies, said the losses caused by the floods in Jammu and Kashmir are over Rs. 60,000 crore.

The villagers here complain that no one from the government came to tell them about the dos and don'ts after the floods. “They did not even give us chlorine tablets. We have been drinking whatever water we get, knowing fully well that it could kill us. We have no electricity, the wood is all wet. How are we supposed to boil water?” asks Abdul Ahad Malik, a panch in Chakganistan village. “We are living in stench and our babies are sick. No doctor has come to us yet. The government has just left us to die in this submerged village.”

The villagers feel they are being discriminated against by the government, which is giving all its attention to Srinagar.

Wildlife corridors: Karnataka to partner with firms

The Forest Department will soon ink an agreement with private companies to acquire wildlife corridors around tiger reserves.

A tripartite agreement between private companies, tiger reserve directors and the Chief Wildlife Warden is likely to be signed in November, to create a formal framework for agricultural or revenue land to be bought by companies, transferred to the Forest Department, and notified as forest land, Additional CEO of the Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board Vijay Mohan Raj told *The Hindu*.

PCCF (Wildlife) Vinay Luthra said that nine “chicken necks” identified around three of the State’s Tiger Reserves — BRT Wildlife Sanctuary, Nagarahole and Bandipur national parks — had been proposed for companies to consider buying under their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds. “We need to restore some of these connecting corridors to wilderness to enable tiger gene flow, and elephant migration,” he said.

So far, four companies — McAfee, Hewlett-Packard, British Telecom and Sidwin (an engineering company) — have shown interest in channelling their CSR funds towards various activities in tiger reserves, Mr. Raj said. Tiger reserves already had a financial mechanism under their respective Tiger Conservation Foundation to accept funds “in cash or kind,” he said, and added that the new tripartite agreement will chart out the companies’ long-term responsibilities rather than a one-off contribution.

While companies have already offered to fund other initiatives of the Forest Department, land acquisition is the “biggest challenge” for the department, requiring several thousand crores, said Mr. Luthra.

Expert suggests silt-free barrages

A U.N. consultant and engineer has come up with a cost-effective plan for Ganga rejuvenation by building 25 silt-free barrages within the river system to dilute the waste and to maintain a continuous flow of fresh water.

T. Hanumantha Rao, former Engineer-in-Chief of the A.P. Irrigation department and U.N. consultant to 22 countries told *The Hindu* that his ‘Ganga rejuvenation plan,’ involved construction of barrages from Haridwar to Farakka, one below the other in such a manner that the stored water of the lower barrage touches the upstream one.

This would render the entire river a long reservoir limited to storing flood water within the flood zone of the river without submerging any village. A perennial flow of 'bathing quality' water is thus ensured through a self-purification process that takes care of waste water flowing into the river either directly or from dysfunctional sewage treatment plants, which has been the biggest challenge so far. His project is expected to be presented to Prime Minister Narendra Modi shortly.

The Central Pollution Control Board had estimated that 4800 million litres per day of waste flowed into the Ganga in 2013. This works out to 1,964 cubic feet per second (cusecs) requiring a fresh water discharge of about 19,640 cusecs for its dilution by 10 times. This is required essentially during the dry period of four months as flood flows take care of the dilution in the remaining eight months.

Mr. Rao's plan prefers building these barrages on the main river itself as it is virtually impossible to construct storage reservoirs elsewhere on the Gangetic plains or in the ecologically fragile Himalayan hilly regions. A design innovation proposed in the barrages is that the bottom of the radial gate starts from the river bed apron level and is kept open to allow free normal flows and to wash down the silt. The water stored upstream in each barrage is released downstream to provide enough water for dilution of waste inflows.

There will be no siltation upstream of barrage as each vent will function as scouring sluice.

Besides purifying the Ganga basin, the project has advantages such as big ship navigation, hydro power generation, large-scale fishing for Hilsa and other species, assured environmental flows and conservation of mangrove of the wetlands, he says.

A radio to save lives in Rudraprayag.

After over a decade of efforts, a community radio focussed on disaster management was launched on Sunday in the Mandakini Valley, which was ravaged by the floods in Uttarakhand in 2013.

Listeners can tune into *Mandakini ki Awaz* from 200 villages in the district and remote areas of the Chamoli and Pauri districts. The studio of the first community radio service in Rudraprayag district will be based at Sena Gadsari.

The station, in collaboration with the Bangalore-based People's Power Collective, will broadcast programmes in the local Garhwali dialect, which has been categorised as "unsafe" in the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of UNESCO.

The Collective, which works to bring community radio to rural and isolated communities in the country, joined hands with Mandakini Ki Awaz Kalyan Sewa Samiti, a local body, in 2010. In September 2013, the two started training local people to manage the radio station.

"The workforce of the community radio is the residents of 80 villages in the district," Saritha Thomas, founder of the Collective, says.

A community radio became a pressing need in the region after the floods destroyed all means of communication — roads, cellphone towers and so on. "Community radio has a big role to play in grassroots-level disaster preparedness, risk reduction, relief and rescue operations, rehabilitation and the responsible reconstruction of an affected region and its people," Ms. Thomas said.

The community radio, she says, will address locally relevant issues such as education, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, women's and public health, livelihoods, migration and community well-being

as well as enable the community to celebrate and preserve their language, traditions, folk music and culture.

It is the seventh community radio in the State.

Double working days under MGNREGS: Aidwa

With prices of essential commodities skyrocketing, affecting farmers and labours, the All India Democratic Women's Association (Aidwa) has urged the Centre to increase the number of working days from 100 to 200 and fix the minimum wage at Rs. 300 a day under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The three-day 14th State Conference of the Aidwa began here on Saturday with the participation of its national president Malini Bhattacharya and State leaders.

One of the main resolutions adopted was the effective implementation of the scheme across the country. The resolution said that only because of the pressure exerted by the Left parties, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) at the Centre implemented the scheme in 2006. It was aimed at guaranteeing 100 days work so as to improve their standard of living and also prevent migration. But the budgetary allocation for the scheme was significantly reduced every year and in many cases the funds were not utilised fully, the resolution said.

About 22.11 per cent and 32.82 per cent of funds for 2011-12 and 2012-13 respectively were not utilised, the resolution said adding that though Rs. 167 was notified as daily wage for workers in Tamil Nadu, workers were paid an average of Rs. 80 a day and jobs provided only for 40 to 50 days a year.

The conference wanted basic amenities such as medical, drinking water, childcare and roof shelter made available at work site, as 90 per cent of workers were women. The conference wanted additional allocation of funds besides effective implementation of the scheme across the country.

Amaravathi water release



Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Sunday directed that water from the Amaravathi dam in Coimbatore district be released from September 22 for irrigation of 47,117 acres in Tiruppur and Karur.

The decision followed request from farmers of the area, an official release said.

Single-handed effort to clean Kuruchi Tank

An environmental activist has embarked on an attempt to clean the Kuruchi Tank all by himself.

K.S. Arumugasamy says that for the past couple of months, he has been spending five to six hours every day removing the hyacinth from the Kuruchi Tank.

The objective of his effort, he says, is not only to clean up the tank, but also to create awareness among the people about the need to conserve such tanks.

“The Kuruchi Tank was constructed in the 9th century and has a rich history behind it. However, the tank has shrunk in size in recent years due to many factors,” he said.

He is working towards creating awareness against encroachment of water bodies and dumping of plastic, construction debris and other solid waste into tanks.

Conservation measures would ensure that the tank was preserved for future generations, he adds.

He has already undertaken similar attempts a few years ago.

Scheme to boost capital goods sector

The scheme for enhancement of competitiveness of capital goods sector, which was approved recently by the Cabinet Committee for Economic Affairs, will give a boost to the sector, Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises P. Radhakrishnan said here on Friday.

Inaugurating Confederation of Indian Industry’s three-day industrial maintenance expo and conference, he said the estimated outlay for the scheme was Rs. 930.96 crore. While the budgetary support from the government for the scheme would be Rs. 581.22 crore, the balance Rs. 349.74 crore would be contributed by the stakeholder industries.

He said the Ministry was taking an active role in events such as the industrial maintenance expo. Industrial maintenance was of importance to industries here.

An industrial organisation that prioritised maintenance would be able to avoid losses. Loss of production time and quality because

of poor maintenance would have an impact on the competitiveness of the industries.

The Union Government was supporting growth of MSMEs by providing provided logistics infrastructure, power, and access to credit and technology, he said.

T.T. Ashok, former chairman of CII-Southern Region, said the State and Central Governments were focusing on manufacturing. While the share of the manufacturing sector in the GDP was about 15 per cent now, it was expected to go up to 25 per cent in the next eight years.

There were new developments, applications, and challenges too. There was a need to focus on micro, small and medium-scale enterprises, he said.

A. Shivkumar, co-chairman of IMX 2014, said industries need to go in for pro-active maintenance.

Ravi Sam, chairman of CII-Tamil Nadu, said manufacturing was growing in smaller cities in the country and Tamil Nadu was emerging as a major manufacturing hub.

Water released for irrigation from Lower Anicut, Veeranam Tank

On the direction of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa two Ministers M.C. Sampath (Commercial Taxes) and K.A. Jayapal (Fisheries) released water from the Lower Anicut and the Veeranam Tank for irrigation on Sunday.

Prior to the opening of the sluices, the Ministers attended a puja performed at the Lower Anicut. Later, they reached the Veeranam Tank to let out the water for the ayacut areas. Those who accompanied them included Cuddalore District Collector S. Suresh Kumar, his Thanjavur counterpart N. Subbaian, MPs A.

Arunmozhithevan (Cuddalore), M. Chandrakasi (Chidambaram) and R.K. Bharathimohan (Maiyiladuthurai), MLAs M. Rengasamy (Thanjavur), Selvi Ramajayam (Bhuvanagiri) and N. Murugumaran (Kattumannarkoil).

The water release would help the farmers to raise paddy on a total area of 1,31,903 acres in the districts of Cuddalore, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam. To start with, 1,200 cusecs of water would be discharged from the Lower Anicut as follows: Vadavar — 700 cusecs, North Rajan Canal — 200 cusecs and South Rajan Canal — 300 cusecs.

From the Veeranam Tank a total quantum of 85 cusecs — at the rate of 10 cusecs through the Radha Canal and 75 cusecs through the Veernam new sluice — would be released. Later, as per the requirements the quantum of release would be stepped up.

The Lower Anicut water would directly benefit 47,997 acres in Cuddalore district and 39,050 acres in Thanjavur and Nagapattinam districts. The Vadavar (part of the Veeranam system) would benefit 44,856 acres.

The Ministers appealed to the farmers to use water judiciously and get optimum crop yield.

Belated action

Meanwhile, the vice-president of the Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association V. Kannan has said that the belated water release would pose problems to the ayacutdars in raising paddy crops.

He told *The Hindu* that owing to certain reasons opening of the Mettur Dam was postponed from the customary date of June 12 to August 10. Therefore, the ayacutdars of the Lower Anicut and the Veernam tank had resorted to direct sowing in about 75,000 acres.

But for want of rain the survival prospects of the paddy seedlings in the directly sown areas were bleak. In the remaining ayacut area

of about 56,900 acres fresh nursery ought to be raised and subsequently transplantation would have to be done.

The saplings would be ready for transplantation by October 25, the time when normally the north-east monsoon sets in. In such an eventuality the paddy saplings would get inundated and rot.

Therefore, going by the present experience at least in future the Public Works Department should keep ready an exigency plan well in advance, Mr. Kannan added.

Cost-saving in machine transplantation of paddy crop demonstrated

The Agricultural Department has demonstrated substantial cost-saving in machine transplantation of paddy samba crop at Singiripalayam village in Thookanaickenpalayam block in the district, much to the relief of the cultivators facing shortage of farm labourers who have migrated to Tirupur and other places and transformed into industrial work force.

Since manpower shortage in agricultural operations right from nursery preparation to post-harvest operations is being increasingly felt, farmers are being encouraged to opt for mechanised transplantation under the National Agriculture Development Programme.

According to Joint Director of Agriculture M. Selvaraj, who initiated the machine planting demo at Singiripalayam village, 10 kg of seed would suffice for planting one acre of main field.

Under the conventional method of transplantation, 25 kg seeds are required.

The nursery for machine transplantation is prepared in plastic trays within 15 days. After a week of watering the trays, one kg of powdered diammonium phosphate is applied to the nursery trays

for better growth of the seedlings.

Machine transplantation of seeds that would cost Rs. 3,500 per acre could be completed within two hours, and it was compatible to SRI (System of Rice Intensification) mode of cultivation.

Row spacing is maintained at 25 cm, and harvest of more than 3,500 kg could be achieved per acre. The savings in cost of cultivation will be from Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000,

Mr. Selvaraj said, adding that it has been established through the demonstration plot that rodent damage was low, and pest and disease incidence could be brought down with good nitrogen management practices.

P. Chidambaram, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Thookanaickanpalayam, said farmers in the block have evinced interest in broad-basing machine transplantation method in their fields. Machine transplanting will be taken up massively in the coming season, he said.

Ero Intec 2014 showcases array of business opportunities

Ero Intec 2014, the second edition of industrial and consumer products fair being organised jointly by the Erode District Small Scale Industries, Association and the National Small Industries Corporation since Friday, showcases an array of business opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs through orientation programmes.

The four-day fair at the Parimalam Mahal ends on Monday.

Indian Bank and Small Industries Development Bank of India were sponsors and co-sponsors respectively. The Tamil Nadu Industrial Investment Corporation provided information on the loan schemes for new entrepreneurs at competitive interest rates.

Among the products include a 70-cc bike that runs on 80 percent

petrol and 20 percent water, a motorcycle operated with mechanical shaft, and a host of devices that would benefit agricultural operations.

The other sponsors are Technopac and EID Parry (India) Ltd. Sakthi Masala, Podaran, and Milka Wonder Cake constitute the other co-sponsors.

The student involvement has witnessed a rise, Chairman of Ero-Intec 2014, R. Subramanian said.

“We intend to extend employer job-matching service by creating a database of the names of candidates and their profiles that would be provided to Employment Exchange, Mr. Subramanian said.

Sunflower fields, the cynosure of all eyes

Sunflower, one of the major sources of edible vegetable oils, may not be a preferred crop among farmers of Karur and Tiruchi districts as paddy and banana crops continue to attract them thanks to availability of irrigated water supply. However, a few farmers in the fringe areas of Karur and Tiruchi districts have made a new beginning by cultivating the crop – of course in a small way.

The crop has been raised on a few hundred acres in Kalingankadu, Thongamalai, and Ayyarmalai. The crop, which was raised about 70 days ago, has almost come to the stage of harvesting. Some farmers have harvested the crop a few weeks ago.

Though farmers did not intend to make them as demonstration plots, the striking colours of sunflowers attract passersby and neighbouring farmers. Many of them invariably stop a while at the sunflower field. Some of them enquire with the farmers, who had raised the crop.

“After trying a number of various vegetable crops, I have raised the

sunflower on three acres of my land on a pilot basis. I may or may not earn profit. But, I am happy that I have passed inputs about the method of cultivation to many farmers in the region,” says V.Sangapillai of Kalingankadu. A.Sadayandi, another farmer, said that the results were encouraging.

Pension ordered to farmer

The Madras High Court Bench here has criticised the revenue officials in Thanjavur district for having withdrawn the monthly pension granted to an agriculturalist, under the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Workers Social Protection and Welfare Scheme, after his son secured a government job.

Observing that not all sons took care of their parents, Justice T.S. Sivagnanam quashed an order passed by the Special Tahsildar, Social Security Scheme, Tiruvaiyaru in Thanjavur district, on May 23, 2013, stopping the disbursement of monthly pension to the writ petitioner, T. Sampantham.

The judge directed the Collector and the Tahsildar to resume payment of pension to the petitioner under the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Workers Social Protection and Welfare Scheme, 2006

Delta farmers hail Chief Minister

Farmers are jubilant over the Chief Minister Jayalalithaa’s decision to dump the new National Crop Insurance Programme.

As the programme would affect farmers, they are reluctant to get loans due to high premium and the low insurance coverage. However the Chief Minister’s announcement has come as a boon to farmers as they could avail crop loan from banks without any hesitation.

Subramanian, district secretary, All India Kisan Sabha, said that ever since the new programme was introduced, farmers were shocked and felt that it would be an additional burden. Representatives of all farmers' associations had opposed the new programme in the last agriculture grievance day meeting also.

Dhanabal from the Cauvery farmers' protection centre and Gopi Ganesan from the Cauvery Delta (east) Farmers Munnetra Sangam thanked the Chief Minister for reverting to the old National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NIAS) this year for paddy and other crops.

NEEDS and innovation make him successful entrepreneur

Innovation and conversion of ideas into action transform even an employee into a successful entrepreneur.

As a proof of this, G. Thanigaivel Murugan of Bodi, former coordinator for '108' ambulance service, has become a young entrepreneur and his product is a simple one, but one wonders why nobody could think of it before.

He set up a plastic and polyester printing unit and markets the products – printed rolls and pouches – tapping the ever-growing needs of food-processing industry with the help of the Department of Industries. A sum of Rs.65 lakh was given to him for capital investment under New Entrepreneurship-cum-Enterprise Development Scheme (NEEDS).

Theni district is one of the biggest trading and manufacturing centres of spices, masala items, snacks, agricultural and food items. Moreover, a majority of the food-processing and food item manufacturing units are small and cottage industries. Attractive and multi-coloured packing materials are their prime tool to market their products and attract customers.

Earlier, they had to go to Sivakasi or Hyderabad to buy printed

pouches for packing food items, because Theni district had no such industries. With no time to visit Sivakasi or Hyderabad to place orders, many industries depended on middlemen for printing their packing materials. Distance and time made their packaging costs high. "I see a vast business potential in this area," says Thanigaivel Murugan, who has completed B. Pharm and MBA. "Now, they get packaging materials at affordable costs locally," adds.

Of the Rs.1-crore investment, loan component was Rs.65 lakh and the rest was his contribution. His contacts as coordinator in Theni, Madurai, Dindigul, Pudukotti, Sivaganga and Virudhunagar helped him expand his business activities.

Now, he prints pouches for spices, chocolates, dhal, flour, masala powder, milk, snacks and cashew. His business activities spread up to Kerala, a highly potential market. Gravure printing cannot be done in Kerala owing to the cool climate. Rapid drying is necessary for this printing, he adds.

Briefing on NEEDS, Collector K.S. Palanisamy said the main aim of NEEDS was to help prospective unemployed graduates become employers. "We offer funds and impart administrative training to them. Beneficiaries can avail themselves of loan from Rs.5 lakh to Rs.1 crore under NEEDS, with 25 per cent investment subsidy and three per cent interest subvention," he said.

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 90.91 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 4,555 cusecs and the discharge, 21,001 cusecs.

Five-day powerloom products mela launched

A buyer-seller meet-cum-powerloom products mela was organised by Powerloom Development and Export Promotion Council (PDEXCIL), under the aegis of the Ministry of Textiles, here on Sunday.

Inaugurating the programme, P.S.S.K. Raja Sankaralingam, president, All India Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Tuticorin, said manufacturers of powerloom products had now got the opportunity to market their produce directly to consumers at the five-day mela.

With a good collection of readymade garments for men and women and home furnishings available in various stalls, he said, this programme heralded the beginning of Deepavali festival. After having a look at the stalls, he said the export quality products were made available at reasonable prices.

V.T. Karunanidhi, vice-chairman, PDEXCIL, Southern Region, said the tradesmen in the textile industry could avail themselves of the benefits of Technology Upgradation Fund (TUF) Scheme through which the government was offering 30 per cent subsidy to boost the trade.

The TUF Scheme would be functional until 2017 and hence he appealed to the stakeholders to utilise this scheme. To overcome labour shortage in the textile-oriented industries, training programmes were offered on computer designing to cut clothes under Skill Development Scheme.

About 800 to 1,000 persons were trained in Erode through PDEXCIL and they were employed. The PDEXCIL would organise a similar buyer-seller meet at Ahmedabad and Frankfurt in October to attract foreign buyers, he added.

G. Kumaravel, Assistant Director, Regional Office of Textile Commissioner, Coimbatore, said there was a high demand for export of powerloom products, but the manufactures had been concentrating on domestic market. Under Capital Subsidy Scheme, any entrepreneur could take up this venture, he said.

Twenty five stalls selling saris, silk saris, readymade churidars, churidar material, churidar tops, cotton shirts made from Tirupur, Erode and Salem, bed sheets, made-ups and other furnishing textiles were put up.

K. Marappan, Member, PDEXCIL, Mumbai, S. Sivaraju, Regional Office (in-charge), PDEXCIL, Erode, and P. Vinayagamurthy, president, Tuticorin Central Traders Association, also spoke.

UPASI expresses concern over crisis in plantation commodities

President, United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI), Vijayan Rajes, has expressed concerns over the crisis in two major plantation commodities, tea and natural rubber. Tea continues to realise lower prices in South India averaging Rs.87 per kg compared to Rs.103 per kg last year and even on the production

front there is no solace because of the unfavourable weather conditions.

The dropping prices are more worrisome in light of the escalating cost of production. At present, the average cost of production for the corporate sector in South India is approximately Rs.105 per kg.

India has already lost its prominence in the export market and now it occupies the fourth position after Kenya, China and Sri Lanka. Mr. Rajes said that UPASI under the aegis of UPASI Commodities Exchange Limited (UCEL) will be launching the regular e-auction on 1st December 2014. It will address most of the concerns the industry vis a vis the current e-auction system.

Farmers told to shift to protected cultivation practices for better yield

S. Ayyappan, Director-General of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has underlined the need to promote protected cultivation practices.

Changes in climatic condition had affected the agricultural yields and quality of crops. It was essential to motivate farmers to take up protected cultivation practices like greenhouse farming, shade-net, mulching and drip irrigation to mitigate loss that they (farmers) might incur owing to climatic changes, he said after inaugurating the Foundation Day programme of the University of Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences, Shimoga here on Sunday.

Mr. Ayyappan regretted that wrong notions were prevailing in a section of society towards agricultural sciences. Agricultural science was a serious academic discipline that played an important role in shaping the destiny of the nation. The role played by agricultural scientists in helping the nation achieve self-reliance in food production should be highlighted. At present, meritorious youths prefer to join medical and engineering courses. It was necessary to sensitise youths on the employment opportunities that were available for those who studied agricultural sciences and attract them towards this stream, he said.

Mr. Ayyappan called upon the youngsters to become agriculture entrepreneurs. Agriculture graduates should take to cultivation of mushroom, pisciculture, seed processing, food processing and soil testing.

The low returns from agriculture owing to fluctuating prices of the produces and inconsistent weather has forced many rural youths to migrate towards urban centres in search of jobs. By adopting the scientific cultivation and post-harvest practices, the profit margins can be enhanced.

It is necessary to sensitise the young farmers in this regard, he said. Mr. Ayyappan released the new logo of the university and launched its website on the occasion. C. Vasudevappa, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences, Shimoga; D.P. Biradar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture Sciences, Dharwad; D.P. Kumar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agriculture Sciences, Bangalore, were present.

ICAR to set up research centre in Chitradurga

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) will establish a research centre in Chitradurga district to study on the scope of remote sensing technology in agriculture, said its Director-General S. Ayyappan.

The Union government has directed the ICAR to work on interface between remote sensing technology and agricultural sciences. The ICAR has decided to establish a research centre that will take up the study in this regard in Chitradurga.

The University of Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences, Shimoga, and the Department of Atomic Energy would be roped in for the project, he told presspersons here on Sunday.

The proposed centre would become functional in one year. It was possible to get precise information on soil quality, climatic conditions and impact of climatic changes on agricultural yields through remote sensing technology.

Rs. 347-crore vented dams project in Udupi, Dakshina Kannada approved

Vinay Kumar Sorake, Urban Development Minister, has said that the State government had given in-principle approval to a Rs. 347-crore project to construct vented dams in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts.

He was speaking after inaugurating various developmental works and distributing facilities to beneficiaries at Hejmady in Udupi district.

Mr. Sorake said the project to construct vented dams had been submitted to the Karnataka Neeravari Nigama. This project would help in improving the underwater table, and would solve both drinking water and irrigation needs.

Around 13 rivers were flowing through Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts, but they were not being utilised to their full potential. The water from Kumaradhara River would be provided for the Yettinahole project, he said.

Efforts would be made to have a separate office of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) in the coastal region to deal with problems related to CRZ in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts. The States of Kerala and Goa enjoyed certain relaxations in the norms of CRZ.

The State government had sent a proposal to the Union government to extend these relaxations to Karnataka also. This would also help in tourism development. A committee of the Union government had already collected opinions on this issue. Already 500 beneficiaries had been provided with sites in the district. By the end of this year, another 1,000 beneficiaries would be provided with sites.

A project to construct a fisheries harbour at Hejmady village in Udupi district, at an estimated cost of Rs. 122 crore, had been sent to the Union government for its approval. A project had been prepared to construct a modern playground at Hejmady at an estimated cost of Rs. 1.3 crore.

Ration cards of nearly 4,000 beneficiaries in Kaup Assembly constituency were yet to be linked with their Aadhaar cards. The lists of such persons had been sent to the gram panchayats to solve any problems in either of the cards by October 7.

Pension Adalats and Revenue Adalats were being held in different parts of the district to solve the problems of pensioners and those having problems with regard to title deeds. A district-level Pension and Revenue Adalat would be held at Thekkatte soon, Mr. Sorake said.

‘Modify research programmes to address farmers’ problems’

The research programmes in agriculture sector should benefit farmers, Kerala Agricultural University vice chancellor P. Rajendran said.

Addressing a review meeting on the All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP), Kerala, he said appropriate modifications could be incorporated in the research programmes to address the problems of Kerala farmers without compromising on national perspectives.

He also stressed the need for flexibility for programmes to make midcourse correction, if required. Addressing the meeting T.R. Gopalakrishnan, director of research, KAU, said the Indian Council of Agricultural Research was supporting the University in terms of manpower and finance for implementing research projects.

A total of 32 AICRPs financially supported by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research is under implementation in 38 centres spread across the State. There are separate crop-based AICRPs for research on rice, vegetable, fruits, spices, medicinal and aromatic plants, sesamum, sugarcane, cashew, floriculture plants, palms and forage crops.

Explaining about farm research programmes in the state, Mr. Gopalakrishnan said eight AICRP were working on issues to address crop management aspects. Seven AICRPs are working on crop protection.

The various crop-based and system based All India Coordinated Research Projects has helped to generate a number of high

yielding and pest and disease resistant culture varieties in crops like rice, vegetables, banana, pepper and, pulses, said Mr. Gopalakrishanan.

“A number of pest and disease problems in the State also could be addressed through research in the coordinated research projects at the Kerala Agricultural University. Quite a good number of varieties like Ambili and Sooraj (pumpkin), Surya and Swetha (brinjal), Priya and Preethi (bitter gourd) and a number of crop production and crop protection technologies from KAU were released/ recommended at national level through co-ordinated research,” he added.

Good response to farm programme

The month-long programme organised by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Kannur (KVK) at Panniyur here for dissemination of farming technologies has drawn a positive response from the farming community in the region, according to the organisers.

KVK programme co-ordinator P. Jayaraj said that the KVK organised ‘Chingam’, a programme to coincide with the Malayalam month known as the farmers’ month, with the objective of equipping the extension functionaries, farmers and agricultural workers to utilise proper technologies suitable for different agro-ecological units in the district as also of converging the opportunities and facilities from other sources. The programme that concluded the other day was organised in association with All India Radio (AIR), Kannur. He said that 1,400 farmers had attended the month-long programme which included a series of technological sessions, training sessions, visits, workshops, participatory mode of technology transfer, diagnostic visits and seminars, among others. The events were arranged to benefit the farming community, he said in a press release.

While the farmers who had participated in the programme are the immediate beneficiaries of the initiative, the AIR here would broadcast the proceedings of the various sessions of the

programme to ensure that the benefits reached a wider audience. The sessions would be broadcast from October 1 to 31, Dr. Jayaraj said.

The KVK also launched the Kisan Mobile Advisory Services (KMAS). On the first day of its launching, 220 farmers had registered for the service facility, he said. The service was inaugurated by AIR Kannur Assistant Director K. Balachandran.

Among those who visited KVK during the programme included Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) Vice-Chancellor P Rajendran, P.V. Balachandran of the KAU Director of Extension and C.V. Sairam, Principal Scientist, Indian Council of Agricultural Research's Zonal Project Directorate, Bangalore.

Experts in various agricultural fields had handled various technical sessions. A training on family farming concepts and potential for the State was also arranged for the participants.

Report on deep sea fishing draws flak

The report of an expert committee constituted for the 'Comprehensive Review of Deep Sea Fishing Policy and Guidelines' has stirred a hornet's nest in littoral States.

The report recommends that 1,178 deep sea fishing vessels (DSFV) be considered for deployment in the India Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) based on the resource potential of tuna and other commercial species such as squids. Critics of the report fear that the recommendation, if implemented, will open the Indian waters to exploitation by foreign vessels at the cost of the Indian fishing industry.

The traditional and the mechanised fishing sectors have demanded rejection of the report and warned that attempts to implement it will be strongly resisted. It will also lead to depletion of marine wealth in the Indian waters, they allege

The report underlines that “sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Indian EEZ should be the primary condition for any utilisation plan. Restoration of resources is not only costly but often impossible.” Underexplored It specifically refers to the underexploited rich yellow fin and skipjack tuna resources.

A fisheries scientist who did not want to be quoted endorses the committee’s finding that India is still a small player in the global tuna market. Except Lakshadweep, there is hardly any organised tuna fishery in India. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands offer some of the best tuna fishing grounds in the Indian EEZ. “But tuna resources from these waters have largely remained unexploited. Since the oceanic tunas are migratory, the tuna that could have been caught by the Indian fleet in the Andaman and Nicobar waters mostly get harvested in the EEZs of neighbouring countries or in the high seas by the fleet of distant-water fishing nations,” says the report.

On an average, during 2008-12, India had caught 39,000 tonnes of yellow fin and skipjack tuna from its waters against a potential of 1,79,000 tonnes. In other words, India is presently harvesting about 1/5th of the potential and the balance can be optimally harvested using a judicious mix of technology, infrastructure and human resource development, the report says.

B. Meenakumari, Deputy Director General (Fisheries) attached to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, who headed the expert committee, told *The Hindu* that the report was posted on the website for comments. The government would look into the comments and decide. “Comments from the chair of the committee or members are not desirable, as they are not authorised to speak on behalf of the government.”

FREE TRAINING IN DUCK FARMING: A free training in duck farming will be held at the Animal Husbandry training centre near ITI in Malampuzha on September 24 and 25. Interested people shall register in advance and report at the centre by 10 a.m. on September 24, a press release said. — Staff Reporter.

Cultivating passion for a fruit

Even though there are immense possibilities for cultivation of passion fruit in Kerala, farmers here seems to have not yet found its real potential.

In an effort to popularise the cultivation of the fruit, a private company in Kozhikode has come out with a plan, which offers a buy-back scheme of fruits for interested farmers after distributing them hybrid variety of the fruit saplings.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday P.K. Gireesh, chairman of the newly registered company based in Kozhikode, which is planning to produce value-added products from the fruit besides promoting the farming here, said his firm had already approached the Agricultural Department with the idea to which the Agriculture Minister had responded “very positively”.

As per the scheme, the firm would provide adequate number of the fruit saplings to registered farmers, from whom it would buy back the fruits once they were ready for the market price.

“For each 10 kg of fruits, the price of a sapling will be reimbursed,” said Mr. Gireesh, who maintained that the company would need at least 1,000 kg of fruit daily to start the production unit.

Though the fruit was in high demand world over, no one was farming it on a commercial basis in Kerala due to lack of awareness.

“This is despite our climate being most suitable for it,” he said. Farming passion fruit “even in five cents of land” would fetch Rs.20,000 on an average annually for a farmer, said Mr. Gireesh, who said the farming only required minimum labour and low maintenance. “Farming passion fruit is two times profitable in comparison to plantain cultivation, considering its labour,” he said.

Claimed to be of “high medicinal value,” the pulp of the fruit according to Mr. Gireesh was used for a host of value-added

products world wide. “Considering its immensely increasing demand, even the State government has now started farming the fruit at Nellyampathy in Palakkad district,” he said.

The firm, according to Mr. Gireesh, would buy back only the fruits from those farmers, who had purchased saplings from them as a measure to maintain the quality of the fruits.

“We have already sold over 20,000 saplings,” said Mr. Gireesh. , For details, contact Ph: 9388931193.

Paddy farmers go for distress sale

With yet another harvesting season round the corner, paddy cultivators here are a worried lot. Despite the increasing price of rice in the open market, the minimum support price for farmers looks too low and not in conformity with the labour, seed, and fertilizer costs.

Even Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, who was in the district on Friday, agreed that the farmers were getting low prices despite the huge demand for Palakkadan Matta rice. “The Central government is offering a support price of Rs.13.50 a kg. The State is disbursing the amount along with its contribution of Rs.5.50 a kg. The government is aware of the grievances of farmers. But increasing the support price requires the nod of the Finance, Agriculture, and Civil Supplies Departments and the government has already started consultations in this regard,” Mr. Chandy said while interacting with farmers at Kozhinjambara.

September 24

But there are no indications that the government will act before September 24, when the Supplyco starts paddy procurement in the district.

As the process courted controversy during the last season because of the differences between Supoplyco and the Palakkad District Cooperative Bank over disbursing dues to farmers, the

State agency has reached an understanding this year with Canara Bank to disburse the payments within seven days from the date of procurement.

As the procurement by the State government has already delayed by more than two weeks, farmers in Vadakkanchery and Pattambi have started selling their produce to private rice mills at Rs.12 a kg. “We started harvesting two weeks ago. In the absence of storage facilities, we are selling the paddy to private players at throwaway prices,” said M. Shanmugham, a farmer in Vadakkanchery.

Farmers’ organisations are demanding at least Rs.25 a kg as support price. About 32,000 farmers have registered with Supplyco this time.

Labour shortage has also started affecting the morale of farmers. Harvesting machines from neighbouring States are yet to reach. Instead of making use of the machines, many farmers are engaging migrant workers from Bengal to harvest their produce.

Cotton traders seek uninterrupted power

Cotton traders in Adilabad on Sunday demanded uninterrupted power supply for the processing industry during the trading season ahead.

The traders also wanted repairs or relaying of roads around the Adilabad market yard to facilitate smooth transport operations.

At a meeting as preparatory for the trading season, Adilabad Cotton Association honorary president Gade Vinod Kumar made the plea for a conducive atmosphere for traders as they were reeling under tremendous losses.

Forest Minister Jogu Ramanna promised measures which would be helpful to farmers and traders.

Moisture content

A request for relaxation of the practice on moisture content however, did not elicit a favourable response from the administration. Collector M. Jagan Mohan made it clear that price of cotton will depend upon the moisture content which should ideally be between 8 and 12 per cent.

Purchase centres

The Assistant Director, Marketing, T. Srinivas informed that 19 cotton purchase centres will be opened in the district.

He said the minimum support price for cotton was fixed at Rs. 4,050 per quintal.

There was promise of improvement of facilities for farmers at purchase centres. Adilabad MP G. Nagesh, Nirmal MLA A. Indrakaran Reddy and Boath MLA Rathod Bapu Rap were also present.

'Go for solar, wind energy units'

Adilabad Collector M. Jagan Mohan on Sunday invited industrialists to venture into solar and wind energy production as the atmosphere in the district is conducive for it. He said industrialists can also venture into processing of cotton and soyabean and promised all help from the administration. The Collector was addressing a meeting of enthusiastic industrialists with a view to promote industrialisation in the district.

24 water bodies identified as suitable for fish culture

Aimed at encouraging fish culture in rural areas of Delhi, the Delhi Government's Development Department has identified two dozen water bodies in the North-West district which are suitable for fish culture. Officials said the initiative will also help in preventing these gram sabha lands from encroachment.

“The fisheries unit is encouraging fish culture in water bodies and village ponds of Delhi to overcome the problem of encroachment of such water bodies situated on gram sabha land,” an official said. Delhi Land Reforms Act, 1954, mandates the gram panchayat to develop activities such as poultry farming and fishery on the gram sabha land.

The fisheries unit of the Development Department has 15 nursery ponds covering a total water area of about two acres, where in the unit produces/procures fish seed, rear them to fry and fingerling size and stock in public and private waters.

The fisheries unit of Delhi Government has produced 18.25 lakh fish seeds and 680 MT fish so far during the current financial year, officials said.

Farmers demand ‘seed sovereignty’

The government should ensure ‘seed sovereignty’ for farmers, demanded peasant leaders from different parts of the country here on Sunday.

“Seed sovereignty is not a baseless ideological position, but a pragmatic approach. It is an integral part of food security and sovereignty of a community or a nation. Seed being handed over to multinational corporations, many of them notorious for their monopolistic tendencies and operations, is disastrous for the livelihood of millions,” said Saroj, a leader of Paschim Odisha Krushak Sangathan.

About 400 farmers from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Jharkhand and Karnataka under the banner of Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA) and Desi Bihana Surakhya Manch, Odisha assembled here to chalk out a strategy to put up united front for securing preservation of traditional seed varieties in the country.

“Government should encourage, and invest in farmer-level seed

production of locally suitable, diverse seeds. Community seed banks should be set up with schematic government investment,” he said.

Farmers demanded that governments should assess and distribute promising traditional seed varieties through the department’s regular programmes while agricultural research and extension programme should focus on farmer-led participatory varietal selection and breeding programmes.

“Seed breeding should be in organic conditions so that seed does not become a package that brings in other unwanted inputs like chemicals. Private (commercial seed) sector should work in a statutory regime that allows the government to regulate not just the quality but price at which seed is sold, in addition to laying down a strict accountability regime that includes penalties, compensation and remediation where required,” they demanded.

A radio to save lives in disaster-prone Rudraprayag

After over a decade of efforts, a community radio focussed on disaster management was launched on Sunday in the Mandakini Valley, which was ravaged by the floods in Uttarakhand in 2013.

Listener can tune into *Mandakini ki Awaz* from 200 villages in the district and remote areas of the Chamoli and Pauri districts. The studio of the first community radio service in Rudraprayag district will be based at Sena Gadsari. The station, in collaboration with the Bangalore-based People’s Power Collective, will broadcast programmes in the local Garhwali dialect, which has been categorised as “unsafe” in the Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of UNESCO.

The Collective, which works to bring community radio to rural and isolated communities in the country, joined hands with Mandakini Ki Awaz Kalyan Sewa Samiti, a local body, in 2010. In September

2013, the two started training local people to manage the radio station.

“The workforce of the community radio is the residents of 80 villages in the district ... ,” Saritha Thomas, founder of the Collective, says.

A community radio became a pressing need in the region after the floods destroyed all means of communication — roads, cellphone towers and so on. “Community radio has a big role to play in grassroots-level disaster preparedness, risk reduction, relief and rescue operations, rehabilitation and the responsible reconstruction of an affected region and its people,” Ms. Thomas said.

The community radio, she says, will address locally relevant issues such as education, nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, women’s and public health, livelihoods, migration and community well-being as well as enable the community to celebrate and preserve their language, traditions, folk music and culture. It is the seventh community radio in the State.

The bean-to-bar route

The programme, says Anbuchelvan, managing director, Chocko Choza, was meant nudge consumers, cocoa farmers and chocolatiers towards pure, healthy chocolate. During the three-day programme, they visited cocoa farms in Thodupuzha (Kerala) and Aliyar and interacted with farmers on how they can improve their crop. Over 100 cocoa farmers, 10 chocolatiers and a few end-users benefited.

Arun Viswanathan S K of Ganache calls it an amazing educative initiative. “We now have an idea of pure chocolate. More important, chocolatiers got a chance to interact with each other. We have plans to form a network to educate the public about good chocolates.”

The world over, many farmers have learnt to make small batches of chocolate from beans harvested from their farm. Helping them are innovative bean-to-bar processing machines. Andal Balu and her husband Balu M. Balasubramanian make and market such machines in the U.S. and 50 other countries under the brand name of CocoaTown. The couple started off marketing ELGI Ultra grinders in the U.S. before they decided to do this. “Some years ago, when chocolate became health food, we branched into this. Balu loves tinkering with machines. We came up with a machine, got feedback...it’s been a good journey.”

The couple plans to enter the Indian market soon. “People want to make their own chocolate, but they need good cocoa beans. For that, we need to support farmers. And, before selling people machines, we need to get them into the habit of making chocolate and perfecting their recipe. I don’t want someone to buy a machine and then discover they don’t want to make chocolate, after all. For, the idea is based on ethics. To help people make something using honest-to-goodness ingredients in small batches,” she says.

Chocolatier María Fernanda Di Giacobbe from Venezuela gave a demo on making bon bons. “We had a bunch of interesting people who were very keen on making chocolate at home,” she says. Back home in Venezuela, Maria has seen the bean to bar industry grow from 30 women in one community making chocolate from plantation beans to over 600 women. “We want to show women here that they can set aside some beans for themselves and make great tasting chocolate.”

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

CM Removes Crop Insurance Thorn

CHENNAI: When Chief Minister J Jayalithaa announced on Saturday that the old National Agriculture Insurance scheme (NAIS) will be valid for Samba, she took a major thorn out of the delta farmers' flesh.

For, the Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS) introduced by the erstwhile UPA government a few years ago was seen as hostile by the farmers because of its high premium and low cover. In fact, though the government specified an agriculture loan disbursement target of `1,826 crore for 2014-2015 Samba crop, only a small section had availed of it so far since they were wary of the MNAIS. Now, the Chief Minister's announcement has lifted that burden.

Farmers comfortable with NAIS because of its low premium claim that the MNAIS, instead of providing security, acted as a burden. They said they were uncertain on taking the crop loan since they would be forced to pay about 50 per cent of the loan amount as premium under MNAIS.

Speaking to Express, Cauvery Dhanapalan, general secretary of the Cauvery Farmers Welfare Association said, "Under MNAIS, the maximum cover per acre is `6,000. In other words, after I spend about `20,000 for paddy cultivation per acre, I will get just `6,000 in case of crop failure. So, insurance companies will reap the benefits while farmers will bear the burden."

Under the NAIS scheme, for receiving claims of `6,000 per acre, small and medium scale farmers had to pay two per cent of their claim amount as premium. That worked out to `120 per acre. Large scale farmers paid 2.5 per cent premium, which amounted to about

₹150 for ₹6,000 insurance cover. But under the MNAIS, farmers say that they had to pay ₹1,725 (28.74 per cent of the cover amount) as premium for insurance of ₹6,000 per acre. “If a farmer avails ₹1 lakh as agriculture loan, he would have to shell out as much as ₹52,000 as premium under MNAIS. Worried over the hefty premium, farmers were unwilling to avail of bank loans for Samba,” Dhanapalan claims. District Collector T Munusamy concurs.

Happily, all that has now changed since the old scheme is back in force.

Seeds of Hope

CHENNAI: A late surge in the Southwest monsoon changed the outlook from drought to surplus, filled the Cauvery basin, persuaded farmers in the delta region to go for Samba paddy planting and raised hopes for a good crop this season. This the first time in two years that farmers find better storage level in Mettur dam and can keep their fingers crossed for a bumper Samba harvest. Their fingers are crossed because of the vagaries of the forthcoming Northeast monsoon, since the current storage in the Mettur dam may not be enough to last the season. However, according to all available indications, the Northeast monsoon too will be normal.

In all, Samba is likely to be cultivated in around 4.3 lakh hectares in three Cauvery delta districts. A sizeable number of farmers have opted for ‘direct sowing’ as it requires lesser water than the traditional way of growing nursery and transplanting them.

At present, the storage level at Mettur dam is 90.91 ft as against its full capacity of 120 ft. While the inflow on Sunday was 4,555 cusecs, the outflow was maintained at 21,001 cusecs. The State agriculture department is upbeat and has set an ambitious target of 92 lakh metric tonnes of paddy yield this year – 17 lakh MT more than last year. The target last year was 75 lakh MT.

The department is also educating farmers on various methods to

improve yield, such as adopting the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and efficient water management. SRI is a different process for cultivating rice with less water as compared to the traditional water-intensive method.

To persuade people to switch over to modern farming, the agricultural department last year launched a scheme of appointing 'farmer friends', each of whom are tasked with interacting with two specific revenue villages. Those selected as farmer friends are 'progressive farmers', who have been successful in applying modern techniques in cultivation.

According to official sources, the scheme was a big success since farmer friends were able to share their experience with fellow agriculturists easily. The scheme will continue and there are around 8,500 farmer friends at present in Tamil Nadu.

While the agriculture department is proactive, grassroots level farmers still have various unresolved issues. According to farmers associations, the primary problem they face is the inability to avail crop loans. Besides, insufficient desilting of waterways and channels result in water released from Mettur dam failing to reach most of the tail-end areas of the delta.

K Balakrishnan, MLA representing Chidambaram Assembly constituency and president of Tamil Nadu farmers Association (CPM), says since many farmers could not repay loans availed during the previous year due to drought, the cooperative societies were denying them fresh loans. Funds allocated for desilting the waterways too were insufficient, he argues.

S Ranganathan, general secretary of the Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association, concurs. He says in many places there were sand dunes along the field channels obstructing the waterways. "As of now, a drought-like situation prevails in many tail-end areas and farmers are pinning their hopes on the Northeast monsoon," he claims.

Durai Manickam, general secretary, Tamil Nadu Farmers Association, points out that a large section of farmers have not

been able to avail of crop loans due to the stiff conditionalities that need to be fulfilled for doing so.

Arupathi Kalyanam, general secretary of the Federation of Farmers Associations of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts, says poor water management by the authorities affects farmers in a big way.

If grievance day meetings are arranged at the revenue division level, farmers in and around three or four taluks could participate in them and ventilate their problems, he suggests.

Organic Manure for Samba Gaining Ground

CHENNAI: Well-heeled health conscious consumers, worried by the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides during cultivation, are gradually switching over to organic products. Since they fetch a good price, a section of farmers have taken up Samba cultivation with high organic manure content. While such fertilizers have a high organic ratio as compared to chemical fertilizers, there are some farmers who use only organic fertilizers.

Speaking to Express, Rajendiran, an organic farmer of Nagai district says, "Most of us have become conscious about the ill-effects of excessive use of chemicals in farming. Considering the health of consumers and in a bid to inflate the nutrient level of soil, farmers are now turning to organic manure."

Earlier, farmers used chemical fertilizers such as di-ammonium phosphate and potash. Now, they include organic compost and cattle manure along with chemical fertilizers for cultivation.

Ingredients of the organic fertilisers include sour buttermilk, Panchagavya concoction made of cow-derived products - dung, urine, milk, ghee and curd - and Amutha Karaisal (mixture of cow dung, cow urine and jaggery). Organic and chemical fertilizers are together used in the ratio of 20:80.

Another section of farmers uses organic manure alone. Their total

acreage has reportedly gone up by as much as 50 per cent across the delta districts.

Panneerselvam, Joint Director of Agriculture, agrees that organic farming has of late been gaining momentum among farmers here because of rising consumer awareness.

There is no subsidy for organic farming as of now though, he adds.

According to officials, of the target of 1.08 lakh hectares set for paddy cultivation under Samba and Thalady across eight taluks of Nagapattinam district, 28,200 hectares have already undergone paddy cultivation in about six blocks in Vennar division of the district under direct sowing method till the first week of September. With copious water being continuously discharged from the Mettur dam, officials are optimistic for a bumper Samba crop.

Along with organic farming, farmers are also turning to direct sowing, with officials expecting as many as 58,000 hectares of paddy cultivation under this methodology. This requires substantially less quantum of water than the transplantation method.

Pepper Rehabilitation Project to be Launched in Kannur Dist

KANNUR : Krishi Vigyan Kendra(KVK), Panniyur, here will start a participatory pepper rehabilitation project in the district in four panchayats next week and would launch a new initiative to encourage farmers to start mini nurseries in their homesteads to find a solution to the scarcity of pepper seedlings.

Dr P Jayaraj, programme coordinator of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, said that the project would be launched next week in Naduvil, Kurumathoor, Chengalayi and Sreekandapuram panchayats.

The participatory rehabilitation of pepper aims at increasing the pepper production and ensuring technology dissemination with an active participation of farmers' committees.

“One of the major problems we face in pepper rehabilitation is the shortage of planting material. There is a demand for 20 lakh to 25 lakh planting material every year.

But only less than 10 lakh seedlings are produced by public sector research centres and private nurseries altogether.

To effectively address this problem, the project envisages starting mini nurseries in every farmer’s place,” Dr Jayaraj said.

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra will provide technical and scientific assistance for farmers to start mini-nurseries, so that they can meet their needs and ensure quality of plants.

In another development, the KVK and All India Radio have joined hands to take the lessons of the month-long programmes and technical sessions held in connection with the farmers’ month to benefit all farmers in the district.

All the technical sessions have been recorded and would be aired in the coming days.

The programme was aimed at providing the extension functionaries, farmers and agricultural labourers’ training and awareness about the technologies suited to different agro-ecological units and also to converge the opportunities and facilities from other sources.

A series of technological sessions including training, exposure visits, workshops, participatory model technology transfer, diagnostic visits and seminars were arranged to benefit the farming community, said Dr Jayaraj.

About 1,400 farmers attended the month-long programme. Dr P Rajendran, Vice Chancellor, Kerala Agriculture University (KAU), Dr P V Balachandran, Directorate Of Extension, Dr C V Sairam, Principal Scientist, Zonal Project Directorate, Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), Bangalore, and other experts from Indian Council for Agriculture Research, KAU, Department of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries departments also

attended various technical sessions.

All these sessions would be aired to benefit the entire farming community of the district through Kissan Vani programme on AIR from October 1 to 13.

The concluding seminar and Kissan Mobile Advisory Services (KMAS) were inaugurated by Balachandran, Assistant Director, AIR, Kannur on Saturday.

'Foreign Investment in Cold Storage Units Will Help Farmers'

BAGALKOT:Foreign investment in setting up cold storage units in the district will be a great help for horticulture farmers, said District Industrial Centre joint director M L Halalli.

Addressing the valedictory of the two-day UGC sponsored national seminar on 'Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Retail Marketing in India' on Sunday, he said there is an urgent need of establishing cold storage units to protect agriculture produce.

He favoured FDI in this sector to be allowed in a phased manner and said it would help both the farming community and the customers. He opined that the sector would have access to adequate capital and sophisticated technology by allowing FDI.

'Good Days Ahead for Consumers'

Earlier, speaking on 'development of Indian economy- a perspective', M R Sollapur from Siddhaganga Institute of Technology- Tumkur said good days are ahead for consumers with the introduction of FDI in retail sector. Basaveshwara Institute of Management Studies Director R G Allagi presided.

As many as 13 teacher delegates presented papers on different aspects of FDI. Associate professor in Rani Channamma University (Belgaum) S O Halasagi, who chaired the session, said necessary precautionary steps have to be taken before welcoming FDI into Indian economy as there is a need to safeguard the

interest of the people of the country.

Indian economy cannot be compared with that of Germany, Japan and other countries as it is a developing nation, he said.

“Why some big Indian retailers are incurring losses is an interesting and key topic to study at this juncture,” he opined.

J V Chavan and M M Hiremath were present. The two-day seminar was organised by Basaveshwara Commerce College.

Principal L S Patil presided over the valedictory. Organising secretary S B Gavimath welcomed. Rapporteur S N Nargund presented a report on the proceedings of the seminar.

CPCRI - A Crop Research Centre Par Excellence

KASARGOD: Farmer-couple Kunhiraman Bhasi and Vimala of Periya, a village in Kasargod, have never heard of Edward Victor Nelliath or P K Ramachandran Nair. But, their small land holding of 40 cents is testimony to the pioneering research done by the two scientists at Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasargod, in the 1970s. The couple converted their land, a plot with laterite soil, into a multi-storey green haven of coconut trees, black pepper and pineapple.

The once-sustenance farmers say their yield has increased and so is their income from the land. Today what the Bhasis are doing is taken for granted because of the years of research done by Nelliath and Nair. Nelliath studied the different stages of growth of coconut trees, the sunlight the trees would pass to the ground, and based on that found the suitable lowerstorey crops that could be cultivated along with coconut trees. Nair left the institute in 1976 and is with the University of Florida. Today, he is a world leader in agroforestry.

In 2016, the research institute in Kasargod will turn 100, and scientists at the institute say most of their methods and machines have percolated to the people.

Origin

The institute was set up as a Coconut Research Station in 1916 by the government of Madras. The Indian Central Coconut Committee took over the station in 1948. CPCRI in today's form was established in 1970 under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). It has regional stations at Kayamkulam (Kerala), Vittal (Karnataka) and Minicoy (Lakshadweep Islands) and research centres at Kahikuchi (Assam), Mohitnagar (West Bengal) and Kidu (Karnataka). The institute conducts research on coconut, arecanut and cocoa, a plant introduced in Indian by CPCRI, says K Muralidharan, Head, Division of Social Sciences.

Computers & Crops

But, CPCRI was not only about crop research. It had its share of computer research, too, as one of the first institutes to introduce the machine in Kasargod. After a Facit calculator and a DCM microcomputer, in 1982 an office table-sized PC arrived from ECI. "It's memory was 36 MB," recalls Muralidharan, who had then just joined the institute as a trainee scientist. Seeing the machine lying idle, K V Ahmed Bavappa, the founding director of the institute, called technical officer C H Amarnath and asked him to computerise the payroll in three months. "I was left with no choice. I learnt COBOL language, and then wrote the program for the payroll system," says Amarnath, who retired as chief technical officer.

Future

The task is cut out for CPCRI. Last year, Indian farmers wanted 15 million coconut seedlings, but only 2.3 million were delivered. "To meet the demand, plant tissue culture is the way forward. But now only CPCRI is working on it," says Anitha Karun, head and principal scientist (Horticulture). The UK and France have given up on coconut tissue culture, and recently other labs in India, too, have discontinued their research after multiple failures. "We are almost there. Now, we get four to five clones. We need at least 1,000 to make the technique commercially viable," she says.

CPCRI is also working on unravelling the information in the DNA sequence of coconut to develop drought, temperature and disease-resistant varieties. "In the future we cannot do away with biotechnology tools, including transgenic," says Anitha Karun.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Pulses set for a bull run

The stage is set for the market sentiment on pulses to change. For an extended period of time, farm-gate prices have been ruling at or around the minimum support price. Indeed, chana or gram (desi chick pea), the dominant crop accounting for 50 per cent of the country's total pulses output, ruled even below the MSP for 15 months.

This followed a sustained rise in pulses production since 2011-12 (from 17.1 million tonnes to 18.3 mt in 2012-13 and then on to 19.3 mt in 2013-14), and augmented by continuing duty-free imports.

All this is set to change with the south-west monsoon playing truant.

At 7.6 million hectares, acreage for pulses this year has lagged last year's 8.9 million hectares. Tur/arhar and moong plantings have lagged by 15-20 per cent vis-à-vis last year.

Importantly, erratic rainfall has affected input management and also the agronomic practices of growers. This is expected to hurt the yields which, in any case, are rather low at about 650 kg a hectare.

Rising trend

The kharif 2014 pulses production target is 7 mt, something that is not going to be achieved. In each of the last two years, actual output in the kharif season was 6 mt.

With lagging acreage, suspect input management and possibility of lower yields this year, actual production runs the risk of declining 12-15 per cent.

Worse, signs of the beginning of the withdrawal of south-west monsoon means there may not be sufficient subsoil moisture for the Rabi season which traditionally accounts for two-thirds of the total annual production.

Chana is the dominant rabi pulse crop and its record breaking streak of last three years runs the risk of coming to an end.

From 7.7 mt in 2011-12, chana harvest expanded to 8.8 mt in 2012-13 and then on to 9.9 mt in 2013-14. This consistent rise in production certainly prevented the price rise .

Below-normal monsoon this year is likely to provide the trigger market participants have been waiting for.

From the current levels of about Rs. 3,000 a quintal, chana prices are set to steadily rise in the coming weeks and months with the potential to test Rs. 4,000 a quintal before year-end. In this emerging bullish scenario, a comforting factor is the record production of yellow peas in origins such as Canada.

To fill the shortfall, India is likely to import larger volumes of yellow peas available at more economical prices (less \$450 a tonne). It is well known that yellow pea flour is freely blended with chana flour in our country.

Prices of other pulses — mainly urad and moong — are also set to rise by 10-15 percent. So, pulses are likely to begin to contribute to food inflation.

Tough times ahead for Indian textile sector, say industry experts

Coimbatore, September 21: The Indian textile industry is likely to face challenging times in the coming months with China effecting a change in its cotton policy, rising cost of production and net margins rarely crossing four per cent, say senior industry officials.

Chinese factor

While concerns were expressed about the sustainability of the domestic textile sector, industry sources did not fail to point out that with China – the largest producer, consumer and exporter of cotton – changing its policy on sourcing cotton and yarn, the export of both – the white fibre and yarn to China from India could take a beating this year.

“Uncertainty might prevail till stability comes in Chinese cotton production and consumption pattern. Chinese Cotton Policy brought a sudden downfall in the New York price index and this in turn had a cascading effect on the entire world,” said Matt Earlam of Plexus Cotton.

Cotton exports

Meanwhile, the Vice-President of the Northern India Textile Mills’ Association Sanjay K Jain said that cotton exports, which stood at 11 million bales (1 bale equals 356 kg) in the 2013-14 cotton season, could slide to 6-7 million bales in the 2014-15 season due to poor demand from China.

China is currently carrying high cost cotton inventory. It built huge stockpile after buying the fibre at a reserve price of \$1.34 a pound when prices in the global futures market were ruling at over \$2.

Rising inventory

Saddled with high price stock, the country is now planning to reduce the inventory of cotton, besides cutting down yarn production, said Earlam.

Indian cotton prices also are not competitive, quoting higher than global market, he said