06.08.2015

THE HINDU

Prices of onions to rise further

Prices of onions in the city are likely to dig a bigger hole in your pockets in the coming days. According to traders in the wholesale markets, prices of the edible bulb are bound to increase further as supply from southern India has been delayed.

At present, onions are being sold to consumers for as high as Rs 60 per kilogram. Wholesale prices of good quality onion has soared to Rs 37.5 per kg.

While consumers have already begun to feel the heat, there seems to be no respite coming for them.

"Prices of onions are going to increase further. This is because supply coming from the South has been delayed by about 15 days. The stock from Northern region is also thinning," said Rajendra Sharma, member of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee, Azadpur. In the South, Delhi gets the essential commodity from Belgaum in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Another reason is the skyrocketing prices of onions in Maharasthra, which is the largest producer of the vegetable in India. "A huge chunk of our supply comes from Maharashtra. Wholesale prices of onions have doubled there. At Lasalgaon which is Asia's biggest wholesale market for onions, the prices have hit the roof at Rs 40 per kg," said a trader at Azadpur mandi adding that the rains not only have spoilt tonnes of crops but have also affected transportation of the same.

Meanwhile, the retail market has been pocketing the most. "Good quality onions are available for Rs 60 and medium and bad ones are sold at Rs 50. What can we do, we ourselves are buying them at a high cost," said Mukesh, a vegetable vendor at INA market. Retailers at Bhogal, Laxmi Nagar, Rohini, Janakpuri are selling a kilo of good quality onions at Rs 50, whereas in upscale areas such as Vasant Kunj and Greater Kailash, onions are being sold at an eye-watering Rs 55 to Rs 60 a kilo.

POLITICS OVER ONIONS

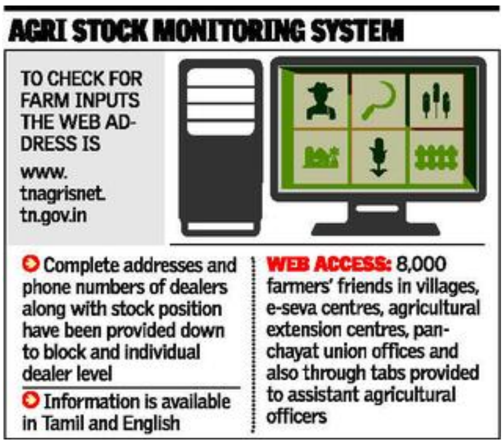
While people continue to shed onion tears over its soaring prices, politics over the issue has already begun. The Aam Aadmi Party government on Thursday attacked NAFED and the Central government for misleading people on onion prices and not including Delhi for supplying the edible bulb.

The BJP, on the other hand, accused the AAP government for ignoring NAFED's advice of procuring onions earlier.

"It is shocking that the NAFED, which had asked the Delhi Government in its letter dated 24 July, 2015 to make an advance payment in case it wanted to buy onions procured by NAFED at Nasik, is now misleading the public by allowing the political nominees to give confusing statements and mislead the public of Delhi," the Delhi government said. It further questioned NAFED whether it is ready to sell good quality onions to any state at a rate different from any other central government mandated procurement agency.

Now, an app to help farmers source seed

This agriculture dept. offering will also help them find out fertilizer availability



As farmers in the delta districts eagerly await the opening of the Mettur dam, they are also thinking of other things they need – seeds and fertilizers. To ensure that farmers get their inputs on time, the agriculture department has recently introduced a system whereby they can check availability online.

Using smart phones, it has linked 9,600 fertilizer dealers, 4,500 primary cooperative agriculture credit societies and 8,300 private seed dealers with an android app. These dealers and societies have been asked to update their stock position using the app, Agri Stock Monitoring System, which is updated on the websitewww.tnagrisnet.tn.gov.inthat farmers can check.

The dealers have to update availability of urea, super phosphate, potassium, SSP and complex fertilizers. “This will help prevent hoarding. We are also making arrangements for supply of enough seeds and fertilizers so that farmers can start sowing when the water from the dam reaches them,” an official said.

Around 11.12 lakh acres are expected to come under paddy cultivation this samba season in the delta districts.

Annually, farmers in the State use about 20 lakh metric tonnes of fertilizers.

Kottakuppam farmer S. Sankaranarayanan, who has been using the website, said it is quite useful. “Even if I am unable to check online, the Vanur block agricultural officer sends details by text message. We get regular updates about various schemes and subsidy for implements, seeds and fertilizers. The Kisan call centre is also helpful,” he said.

According to M. Seran, president, Confederation of Farmers Associations, some farmers have already sown seeds with the available water and are now waiting to irrigate the crops. “They will need fertilizers almost immediately. We hope the State government will ensure proper supply of seeds and fertilizers, which are of prime concern for us,” he said.

Elsewhere in the State too, samba cultivation will commence almost at the same time and farmers are preparing to sow paddy seeds. A.N.K. Jayamohan, president, Eri Neer Pasanam, Chinnambedu in Tiruvallur district, said that last year, during August- September there was a huge demand for urea and the cooperative society had only one third of what was required. “We had to go to several shops before we got the required fertilizer,” he said.

Department to step up efforts to persuade farmers to insure coconut palms

Coconut farmers in the district have traditionally been reluctant to insure their crops.

In order to buck the trend the Department of Agriculture is all set to launch a massive sensitisation drive at the block level explaining the advantages of the insurance coverage to the farmers and bring them into the insurance fold.

According to agriculture department sources, only around 20 farmers opted for the risk management cover under Coconut Palm Insurance Scheme (CPIS) coverage, a product mooted by Coconut Development Board, in 2014-15.

Joint Director of Agriculture R. Kanagasabai told *The Hindu* , "This year, we are aiming to bring at least 16,000 coconut growers under the CPIS before the end of the current fiscal and then go on to increase the coverage base gradually." The agriculture officers at the block level will meet the farmers to explain the benefits of the CPIS coverage. Individual farmers growing at least five healthy nut bearing palms trees between four and 60 years old could enrol The scheme would cover the perils leading to death, loss of palms or palm becoming unproductive due to storm, cyclone, heavy rain, inundation, pest attacks, accidental fire, lightning, earth quake and severe drought leading to yield loss.

What the farmers say:

While admitting that the insurance coverage was good to offset losses, some coconut farmers, when contacted, said they were reluctant to insure their trees because of huge procedural delays they faced before they could actually get the insured amount. They said that if these delays were addressed and reduced, more farmers would step forward to enrol into the scheme.

The response of the insurance authorities to this was that even though there may be a delay in a few cases, the insurance claims could provide big relief to the farmers.

Sensitisation drive planned at the block level explaining the advantages of insurance coverage

Few ready to get licence to carry vegetables to Kerala

Even as the deadline for transporting vegetables with vehicle licence to Kerala ended on Tuesday night, vegetable traders and vehicle operators in Dindigul district have not evinced much interest in getting a licence.

The food safety officials have set up a temporary office at the wholesale vegetable market in Oddanchatram with computer, Internet and printer facilities to issue licence on the spot. "Net facility is a must as farmers and traders have to apply for licence only online. We go to Oddanchatram market in the morning and return in the evening. But the response from them is very poor. Out of 26 applications from transporters, licence was issued to 18 so far and the rest would get their licence on Thursday," said an official.

To maintain vegetable flow, Kerala too was flexible in handling transporters and vegetable traders. It only insisted that identity of suppliers and buyers should be recorded in some form.

To satisfy Kerala officials at check-posts, traders in Oddanchatram and buyers in Kerala produced a set of photo copies of their Aadhaar cards, registration certificate and ration card on demand.

These documents will help Kerala maintain a record of traders and buyers and quantum of vegetables, said Thangavel, a trader in Oddanchatram market.

"But we cannot continue with this arrangement for long. We have to get licence," he added.

But many traders have started diverting their supply to Karnataka and Chennai markets for hassle-free business.

Meanwhile, the Department of Food Safety has been taking steps to test vegetables on the spot with the help of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. At present, vegetable samples are sent either to the laboratory in Coimbatore or Madurai for testing. The TNAU has planned to buy a sophisticated equipment to test residue levels in vegetables.

"All pesticide shops have been strictly instructed not to sell 23 types of banned pesticides, especially those banned in Kerala.

Farmers have also been advised to stop spraying pesticides at least 10 days before harvesting to maintain low pesticide level in vegetables," said T. Sam Elango, Designated Officer for Food Safety.

Kerala had given time till August 4 for vegetable and fruit transporters and traders to get licence from Food Safety Department as it was concerned about the residual levels of pesticides in the produce transported from Tamil Nadu.

Go in for value addition to farm products, Collector tells farmers

Kharif pre-season awareness camp held

The administration will back all efforts of farmers to have a bountiful samba and thalady paddy crop in this district. Timely water release as ordered by the State Government will help the farmers in achieving their targets, Collector M. Mathivanan told farmers at the kharif pre-season awareness camp held by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Nidamangalam on Wednesday.

Mr. Mathivanan exhorted the farmers to go in for value addition to the farm products by treating agriculture as an industry to make the venture more profitable and maximize the income from the field. By doing so, the farmers could reap the benefits in a better and easy fashion.

Pointing out adopting recent scientific technologies and practices would pave the way for more profitability, he called upon them to go in for farm mechanization in a big way to ease their burden. For that, such pre-season awareness camps would help by showcasing technologies and advancements.

Integrated farming practices would add revenue generation and be of great help to the farmers. Poultry and sheep rearing along with agriculture would be a good option for the district farmers, the Collector said. The district administration would support all the initiatives by the farmers and the State Government was all for making agriculture a profitable venture by positively responding to the demands of the farmers in their needy time, he said. The Collector released a farm workbook and guidance sheet. Joint Director of Agriculture K. Mayilvahanan, Tamil Nadu Rice Research Centre, Aduthurai, Director V. Ravi, Dean of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Development and Research Institute, K. Samy Ayyan, KVK Programme Coordinator R. Bhaskaran, participated.

Plan to procure 9,250 tonnes of fertilizer

The Department of Cooperation plans to procure 9,250 tonnes of fertilizer, including urea for meeting the requirements of farmers during the “samba” season, which is set to begin a few days from now, in Tiruchi district.

The consignment is expected to be imported through the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (TANFED). The fertilizer will reach Tiruchi within a week.

K.C. Ravichandran, Joint Registrar of Cooperatives, told *The Hindu* that a demand note had been sent the government for allotting 2,500 tonnes of urea, 3,000 tonnes of DAP, 2,000 tonnes of complex, and 1,750 tonnes of potash for the district to meet the fertilizer demand during the fag end of "kuruvai" and beginning of samba seasons. It would be sent to the 146 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), depending upon the requirements in their respective areas.

The fertilizer would reach the PACS well before the launch of nursery preparations for samba crop. While PACS would meet about 40 per cent of fertilizer requirements of farmers, private traders would supply the remaining demand.

Stating that there would be no shortage of fertilizer in the current season, Mr. Ravichandran said the Cooperative Department had stocked 500 tonnes of DAP, 1,913 tonnes of urea, 1,235 tonnes of potash, and 662 tonnes of complex fertilizers in the Primary Agricultural Credit Societies. It addition to this, the TANFED had 600 tonnes of buffer stock.

Raise drought-tolerant groundnut varieties, farmers told

They have also been asked to go for low water-required crops

Collector T.N. Hariharan (right) looks at exhibits at the agri expo at Gandhigram in Dindigul on Wednesday.— PHOTO: G. KARTHIKEYAN

Raising drought-tolerant varieties of groundnut and improved varieties of low water-required crops like ‘samai’ and ragi will help farmers earn better profit at low investments during this kharif season.

This suggestion was made at a Pre-kharif Awareness Programme held at Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Gandhigram Rural Institute here on Wednesday.

Inaugurating the programme, Collector T.N. Hariharan said that value addition to agricultural produce would enhance the income of the farmers. They should adopt modern agricultural practices to cut down expenditure, he noted.

In his address, KVK Coordinator A. Udaya Kumar said that Dindigul received insufficient rain during the ‘Aadi’ season in the last one decade, which affected crop production. Moisture stress and lack of awareness of the latest technologies for enhanced productivity, especially drought-mitigating techniques, were the prime factors influencing the productivity.

Bund planting of drought-tolerant trees would also be very helpful, he pointed out.

In his special address, GRI Vice-Chancellor S. Natarajan said that growing preference among the people to traditional food to maintain their health was a good sign as it would increase demand for small grains and millets and ultimately help the farmers in rain-fed areas get better price for their produce.

The main objective of the programme was to disseminate apt technologies for enhancing productivity and profitability of the farmers during the kharif season and also technologies for rearing animals in the season, he added.

Market committee urges traders to get licence

The Salem Market Committee has urged the traders involved in the marketing of agricultural produce to take steps for getting proper licence of the Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board (TNSAMB).

Salem and Namakkal districts have been declared as ‘notified areas’ by the Board for the marketing of agricultural produce such as paddy, cholam, ground nut, red gram, ellu, castor, chilly, tamarind, cotton, dhal, turmeric, coconut, jaggery, cumbu (pearl millet), raghi (finger millet) etc.

The traders involved in the marketing of these agricultural produce in these two districts have to possess proper licence under the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Act 1987.

As per this Act, the traders should not market the above farm produce without licence in these two districts, an official press release of Salem Market Committee, issued here said.

The traders whose business turnover is over Rs. 5 lakh per year, should remit Rs. 300 for three years for getting the licence. As per the Act, the traders should submit the procurement / marketing report before 10th of every month in the respective market committees. The traders should positively display the price list of the available stock

The medium time traders with an annual turn over between Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. 5 lakh, should pay a fee of Rs. 75 per year for getting the licence. These traders should also submit the procurement / marketing report before 10th of every month.

The small time traders with an annual turnover of less than Rs. 2 lakh should remit Rs. 25 per year for getting licence.

The traders should undertake business of farm produce only after getting the mandatory licence.

The trading of farm produce without proper licence, procurement and marketing details, stocking the goods in the unregistered godowns is an offence as per Sections 8 (1) of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Act 1987 and Sections 27 (1) (2) and (3) of the Rules 1991, the release said.

The press release called upon the farm produce traders to take steps for getting the licence of the TNSAMB and also submit the monthly reports before 10th of every month.

KVK to promote jackfruit

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Thelliyoor will launch two value-added jackfruit products under brand names ‘Eudora12’ and ‘Pollux7’ on Monday.

Modern processing unit and incubation centre to be opened at Thelliyoor

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) attached to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at Thelliyoor, near Thiruvalla, has set up a modern jackfruit processing unit and incubation centre to promote value-added products.

The Rs.52.55-lakh modern centre has been set up with the help of the State Agriculture Department, according to C.P. Robert, KVK district coordinator. The processing unit has facilities for grading jackfruits, processing, and preparing various value-added products, drying yard, waste treatment mechanism, and exhibition of various products.

Dr. Robert said the KVK had conducted a detailed survey of places in the district where jackfruit is available in plenty, besides giving organic certification to peasants growing jack trees in their courtyards and farms. The incubation centre would provide expert guidance and training for exploring the market potential of various value-added jackfruit products in the country and abroad.

The centre would organise advanced training on jackfruit production technology with special emphasis to processing and value addition.

The training would cover topics like processing and preservation technologies, preparation of traditional and commercial food products, their packaging and labelling, processed products and quality standards, credit availability and preparation of bankable projects and sustainable marketing strategies, he said.

Buyer-seller interface

The KVK is planning a buyer-seller interface at Thelliyoor. The technology developed under the project would be made available to entrepreneurs, Dr. Robert said.

Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan would inaugurate the centre on Monday forenoon. Issac Mar Peelexinos Episcopa would preside over the function. Raju Abraham, MLA, would be the guest of honour and Shree Padre, editor of the Kannada agricultural magazine, *Adike Patrika* , would deliver the keynote address.

Plantation Corporation Kerala Limited chairman Varghese George would launch two value-added jackfruit products under brand names 'Eudora12' and 'Pollux7' on the occasion. The dehydrated raw tender jack, raw jack, and jack seed that come under 'Eudora12' will have a shelf life of 9 to 12 months while 'Pollux7' consisting of dehydrated ripe bulbs and jackfruit preserve will have a shelf life of five to seven months, according to Shana Harshan, subject matter specialist at KVK.

'Follow mechanisation, integrated farming'

P. Ramachandra Bhat, a progressive farmer, speaking at the Baduku Besaya-Raitha Santwana Yatre programme at Havanje village in Udupi district on Wednesday.

Progressive farmer P. Ramachandra Bhat on Wednesday urged farmers in the district to take up mechanisation and follow integrated farming system.

He was speaking at an interaction programme with farmers as part of the inauguration of 'Baduku Besaya–Raitha Santwana Yatre' organised by the

Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Cooperation and Information and Malpe-Kodavoor Rotary Club at Havanje village in Udupi district.

Mr. Bhat said that there had been a massive change in the agricultural sector in the district in the last 30 years. Farmers should realise that they could not depend on government relief alone.

Farmers could not do agriculture merely on the calculations of profit and loss. “Agriculture should be our life, and working for it should be our mission,” he said.

Farmers should also take up complementary occupations including dairy farming. “If farmers mechanise their farm operations and follow integrated farm techniques, they will be able to face challenges,” he said.

If farmers get a stable market and good price for their produce, they could lead a comfortable life. It would also then be possible to attract youth to agriculture, Mr. Bhat said.

K.V. Dhananjaya, agricultural expert from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Brahmavar, cleared doubts of farmers regarding soil testing, water testing, use of fertilizers, and other agricultural issues.

Sanjeev Nayak, officer from Horticultural Department, said that farmers should give importance to proper utilisation of space in their fields. Production of quality crops would only add to the income of farmers, he said.

Manu, counsellor, interacted with the farmers and tried to instil confidence in them. Vasanti Shedti, president of Havanje Gram Panchayat; Anthony Maria Immanuel, Joint Director of Agriculture; and Praveen Nayak, Deputy Registrar of Cooperatives, were present.

Cotton cultivators face spectre of crop failure

Farmers say cotton plants will have stunted growth due to inadequate water and the yield may drop.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

Prolonged dry spell, lack of irrigation plague farmers

There are growing fears that the crisis plaguing sugarcane cultivators and sericulture farmers will come to haunt cotton cultivators due to a prolonged dry spell in the region and the lack irrigation facilities.

H.D. Kote taluk is one of the prime cotton growing areas and most of the farmers have switched to commercial crops like Bt.Cotton. Though there are four dams in the taluks — the Kabini, the Hebbala, Taraka and the Nugu — there are no irrigation canals and the reservoirs serve the fields in the downstream areas but not H.D.Kote.

As a result, agriculture in H.D. Kote is mainly under rain-fed conditions but the taluk received very little rain and the cotton farmers are in dire straits. As per the rainfall data for the July 1 to 30 available with the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre, H.D. Kote taluk received 49.6 mm of rainfall against a normal of 201.4 mm.

Vivek Cariappa, a farmer based in Sargur in H.D. Kote, said that cotton was drying up due to scanty rain across the district. Against a normal of 121 mm of rain, Mysuru received only 38.7 mm.

What has added to the farmers' distress is the lack of power in rural areas as a result of which they are unable to operate borewells, said Mr. Cariappa. "Power is being supplied only for two hours a day," he said.

Though the Agriculture Department has claimed that the intermittent rain during July had provided enough moisture for crops to sustain, farmers say crops, especially cotton, will have a stunted growth due to inadequate water and the yield may drop.

The prices have come down below the minimum selling price despite low output, according to Mr. Cariappa, adding that cotton cultivators fear that the situation would deteriorate as there was very slow off-take of cotton in the international market.

In the meantime, the government has been urged to be pro-active and get buyers from Tamil Nadu, a major producer of cotton fabrics, to stabilise the cotton prices and ensure that it does not crash further.

The farmers in the region have alleged that the APMC yard was dominated by intermediaries who do not allow direct interface between the buyers and the farmers and this should be rectified.

After July no-show, farmers hope for better rain ahead

Crops could wither in Mysuru if there is no rainfall in another seven days.

Lack of rain during July might result in crop failure or lower yield in Mysuru district.

Though the district received over and above normal rainfall in the last seven months cumulatively, failure of rain during July could have an adverse affect on crops such as cotton, maize, jawar, ragi and tobacco.

Joint Director of Agriculture M. Mahanteshappa said that if there is no rain in another seven days, crop could get withered. He noted that black soil and black cotton soil have water retention capacity and moisture stress could be sustained in those areas.

Red soil and red sandy soil do not have water retention capacity and crop on that soil may get withered if there is no rain.

Mr. Mahanteshappa told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday that that only 39.1 mm rain occurred in July this year as against the normal rain of 123.8 mm. Last year the district had received 113.9 mm rainfall during July.

He noted that Mysuru had received 28.9 mm during March as against the normal rain fall of 12.9 mm. Similarly the district received 81.4 mm as against the normal rainfall of 61.9 mm during April and during May the district received 170.1 mm as against the normal rainfall of 125.3.

Cotton is grown in over 49,000 hectares in the district including 29,000 hectares in H.D. Kote, 16,000 hectares in Nanjangud taluk. Maize is grown in over 32,600 hectares in the district including 11,500 in Hunsuru, 12,000 hectares in Piriyapatna. Ragi is grown in 6,000 hectares while jowar is grown in over 3,000 hectares in the district. Tobacco is grown in over 71,500 hectares including 30,000 hectares in Hunsuru and 29,700 hectares in Piriyapatna.

Mr. Mahanteshappa said that pulses such as green gram, black gram, cowpea, Avare (field beans) and red gram are grown in over 93,780 hectares and pulses crops are in the harvest stage and hence there is no danger to this crop.

International meet on 'zero hunger' opens tomorrow

A three-day international conference on achieving "zero hunger" would deliberate on the challenges to improve small holder income and productivity will begin here on Friday.

The conference on "Science, Technology and Public Policy for achieving the Zero Hunger challenge,' organised by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in collaboration with ICRISAT, Harvest Plus and BISA will bring together farmers, scientists, experts and policy makers to evolve strategies for harnessing science, technology and public policies towards ending hunger.

"There is a growing commitment of the international community towards small and marginal farmers," Ajay Parida, excutive director, MSSRF said on Wednesday. The conference would help also suggest collective action towards ending malnutrition and will deliberate on challenges in addressing different types of hunger such as calorie hunger and protein hunger.

Global Tiger Day observed

The Global Tiger Day was observed by the students of Government Middle School governed by the Adi Dravidar Welfare Department at Udayadi on Wednesday.

An awareness rally to save tiger was taken by the students who wore the mask of tiger and dressed like to tiger.

The rally was flagged off by Boothapandi Forest Ranger R. Nagarajan.

S.S. Davidson of Tribal Foundation, who organised the rally, said that that the presence of the tiger denoted the well-balanced ecological status of the forests, which is healthy. The animal is symbolic of the good climate, prevalence of all other animals.

The Global Tiger Day is held to give worldwide attention to the preservation of tigers, he said. It is also to promote the protection and expansion of the wild tigers' habitats and to gain support through awareness for tiger conservation.

Poultry training programme

The State Poultry Breeding and Training Centre at Hesaraghatta is organising a poultry training programme from August 17. Those interested can call 080-28466093 — Staff Reporter

Ensure proper supply of seeds and fertilizers, officials told

They are expecting good rainfall in the next few days: TP president

Taluk panchayat president Prathiba on Wednesday instructed the taluk-level officials to ensure proper supply of seeds and fertilizers as the farmers are expecting good rainfall in the next few weeks.

Speaking at the monthly Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) review meeting here, Ms. Prathiba said, the climatic conditions were suitable for sowing groundnut and therefore, the farmers had already purchased 18,000 quintals of groundnut seeds in the taluk. The demand for seeds may further increase, if the rain occurred in the next few days, she said.

As the government had introduced several schemes to ensure all facilities for children in government schools, the officials concerned should make sure that the facilities reached every child. Even after providing better facilities, the number of students in government schools was decreasing, she said.

In response to her statement, the officials of the Education Department informed that the major reason for decrease in the number of students in government schools was opening of more private schools in the taluk.

As a result of this, there was acute shortage of teachers in government schools as they were getting attracted by higher salaries and facilities offered by private institutions, the officials said.

Ms. Prathiba instructed the officials of the Food and Civil Supplies Department to issue below the poverty line ration cards to eligible applicants in the taluk at the earliest.

HC to find solution to complaints related to crop insurance

The Madras High Court Bench here has decided to find a solution to frequent complaints of several farmers not being able to receive insurance cover amount under the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) floated by Agricultural Insurance Company (AIC) formed at the behest of the Union Finance Ministry in 2002-03.

During the hearing of one such case on Wednesday, a Division Bench of Justices R. Sudhakar and V.M. Velumani directed D. Srinivasaraghavan, counsel for AIC, to provide by Tuesday a list of cases pending in the court against the company besides producing details of the insurance scheme and the reasons for rejecting the claims made by farmers.

Earlier, petitioner's counsel S. Pugazhendhi claimed that the cooperative societies, which extend agricultural loan to famers, deduct the insurance premium amount by default before disbursing the loan amount. Yet, the farmers, who suffer crop loss due to vagaries of nature, are denied the insured amount by citing one reason or the other, he alleged.

Assisting the court, advocate S.M. Ananthamurugan, pointed out that AIC was incorporated by the Centre as an exclusive corporation for agriculture insurance. As per the NAIS, farmers who grow notified crops such as paddy, maize, cotton, sugarcane, banana, chilly, ginger, potato, onion, tapioca, turmeric, horsegram and blackgram were eligible to get insured.

The scheme covers on a compulsory basis, all the farmers who grow the notified crops and avail agricultural loans from financial institutions. Even those who do not obtain such loans could get covered by paying the necessary premium on a voluntary basis. On payment of premium, comprehensive risk insurance would be provided to cover losses due to unpreventable risks.

NAIS covered losses suffered by the insured farmers due to natural fire and lightning, storm, hailstorm, cyclone, typhoon, tempest, hurricane, tornado, floods, inundation, landslide, drought, dry spells, infestation of pests and afflicting of diseases. “However, the stark reality, remains that the insurance amount does not reach the farmers properly,” the lawyer told the court.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Sugarcane area down in state, Solapur worst hit

With mills running into cane arrears, drought and uncertainty hovering over the sugar sector, farmers are now not too keen on sugarcane cultivation.

The double whammy of scanty rainfall and non-payment of cane dues has brought in a massive change by leading to a slight decrease in the areas preserved for sugarcane cultivation in 20 of the 35 districts in the state. Solapur district, with 32 sugar mills, is the most hit, where the area under sugarcane cultivation has come down by 22,367 hectares. The total reduction of such crop areas in the state is 63,457 hectares. For the last 10 years, there was a growing impetus in preserve the areas under sugarcane cultivation due to strong political patronage of the sugar lobby, assured income from the mills and increasing number of mills. Substantial resources were being diverted to the cultivation of sugarcane as it is a water-intensive crop. This had even caused an imbalance in water distribution in the state. But with the mills running into cane arrears, drought and uncertainty hovering over the sugar sector in general, farmers are now not too keen on sugarcane cultivation. Deepak Bhosale, Pandharpur head of the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS), said, “The total cane arrears in the district is around Rs 400 crores and there have been no rainfall for a long time. In view of the uncertainty that looms large over the sugar sector, many have decided not to go for sugarcane cultivation this year,” he said. Figures show that almost 70 per cent of water resources in the state had been diverted for sugarcane cultivating areas, although it occupies just 9.4 per cent of the total crop area. In water-stressed regions like Solapur, Marathwada, the increase in area for sugarcane cultivation has resulted in severe depletion of the groundwater level, causing acute water crises during summer. The projected area, for 2015 and 2016, as per the figures released by the sugar commissioner’s office, is 98,6353 hectares and the expected cane yield would be 887.72 lakh tonnes. For the season 2014-15 the area under cane stood at 10.53 lakh hectares and the yield was 930.42 lakh tonnes.

Nutrient self-sufficiency: Better make in Iran than in India

The proposed revival of closed urea plants in the eastern region makes little economic sense.

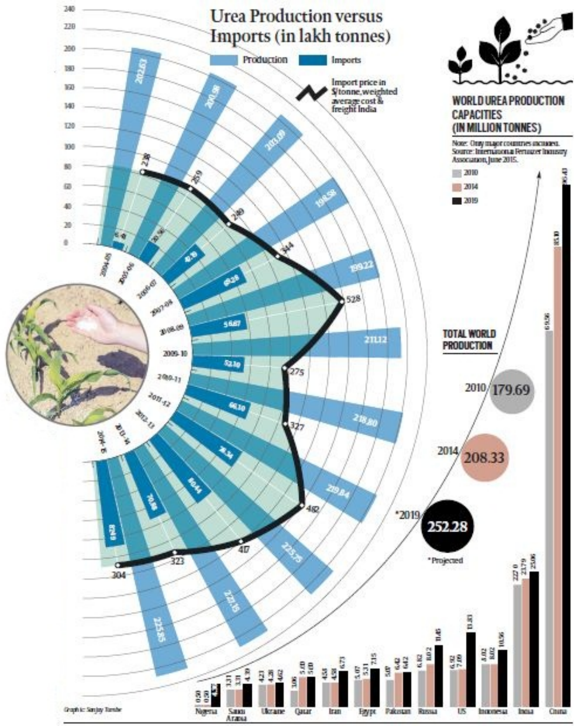
On March 31, the Union Cabinet approved the revival of HFC’s Barauni unit in Bihar and that of FCIL’s at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, both non-operational since 2004.

The current government has embarked on a plan to ‘revive’ closed urea plants in eastern India belonging to Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation (HFC) and Fertiliser Corporation of India Ltd (FCIL).

On March 31, the Union Cabinet approved the revival of HFC's Barauni unit in Bihar and that of FCIL's at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, both non-operational since 2004. This was followed by a similar approval, on May 21, for restarting the Sindri (Jharkhand) plant of FCIL that last produced urea in 2002.

In all three cases, the proposal is to invite bids to set up practically new plants of around 1.3 million tonnes (mt) capacity, each costing Rs 5,000-6,000 crore, at these locations. The government's hopes of attracting bidders comes even as its estimated Rs 30,000 crore of fertiliser subsidy dues to the industry has left existing investors jittery. Tata Chemicals, for one, is reportedly mulling selling its the fertiliser business, while Kumar Mangalam Birla has clearly stated that "there is no economic rationale for further investment" in the sector.

Still, on the face of it, the proposed revival plans may appear to make sense for two reasons. First, as Prime Minister [Narendra Modi] has pointed out, India needs a "second" Green Revolution from eastern India. This region currently has just two operational urea plants at Namrup in Assam, producing some 0.35 mt annually. "Farmers here require urea, which is why our government has decided to reopen the closed factories through fresh investment of arabon-kharabon rupiah (thousands of crores)," Modi said at a foundation stone-lying event in Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) on June 28. We're likely to hear more of this in the coming days in the run up to the Bihar Assembly elections.



Second, India's urea imports have surged almost 14-fold to 8.75 mt in the last decade, whereas domestic output has stagnated at below 23 mt. To that extent, there is a case to augment indigenous production. And why not in states where the demand for fertilisers would really come from? On July 25, the very day he launched the NDA's poll campaign, Modi inaugurated the first-phase construction of a 922-km gas pipeline from Jagdishpur to Haldia that would also supply to the proposed Gorakhpur, Barauni and Sindri urea plants through separate spur/feeder lines. But it raises a fundamental question: How viable are these planned urea capacities going to be? The main issue is gas. The existing urea plants consume roughly 42.5 million metric standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of gas, of which 26-27 mmscmd comes from domestic fields and the balance 16-17 mmscmd through imported liquefied natural gas (LNG). The new plants would require additional imported LNG at twice the cost of domestically sourced gas. Even at a 'pooled' uniform price, the final delivered cost will not be below $10 per million British thermal units (mBtu).

Now, one can expect newly-commissioned units to be highly energy-efficient, requiring say, only 5 giga-calories (Gcal) to produce one tonne of urea, as against 5.5-7 Gcal for most existing plants. But at $10/mBtu — one mBtu equals 0.25 Gcal — the feedstock cost alone would still be $200 per tonne of urea. Adding conversion costs of $50 — towards wages and salaries, chemicals, consumables, repairs and maintenance, selling expenses, etc — takes it further to $250.

On top of this are capital costs. For a project costing Rs 5,500 crore financed through 70:30 debt-equity, the interest component (at 10 per cent) would be $46 per tonne on an annual production of 1.3 mt. Inclusive of depreciation $42 (at 6.33 per cent per annum over 15 years on 95 per cent of asset cost) and $36 return on equity (12 per cent post-tax or 18 per cent pre-tax), the total production cost of urea from a new plant will work out to about $375 per tonne. That compares to $290 for an existing fully-depreciated plant consuming 6 Gcal/tonne.

Is it worth setting up new urea plants producing at such high cost in India using predominantly imported gas at $10/mBtu? What will be the implications for fertiliser subsidy, when the government is already struggling to pay even existing manufacturers? Would any lender be willing to fund these projects under the circumstances?

These questions have relevance, especially in the present scenario where imported urea costs have plunged to $300 per tonne levels (see chart). Why should India 'make' at $375 when it can very well 'buy' at $300? The chances of global prices falling further cannot be ruled out, considering the substantial new capacities coming up worldwide (see chart). With China turning from the world's largest urea importer to the largest exporter and the US, too, set to become self-sufficient, we are probably entering a buyer's market.

But then, it is also true that global prices are volatile. India imported urea at an average landed cost of $482 per tonne in 2011-12 and $528 in 2008-09. A reasonable degree of self-sufficiency is, therefore, worth targeting. However, the way forward to achieve it would be to make not in India for India, but in countries where gas is available relatively cheap. India imports about 1.65 mt of urea annually through the Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) at an average $160 per tonne landed cost. These supplies against a long-term government-backed offtake agreement at pre-determined prices — OMFICO is a 50:25:25 joint venture of Oman Oil Company, Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative and Krishak Bharati Cooperative — have partly insulated the country against extreme volatility in international prices, including in 2008 when they even crossed $800 per tonne.

What we need is an extension of the OMIFCO model to other countries where gas can be sourced at below $5/mBtu. At that delivered rate, the feedstock cost for a new plant will not exceed $100 per tonne of urea, enabling imports at well below $300 levels. These rates can, indeed, come down further through concerted bilateral negotiations.

India is now in talks with Iran for establishing a 1.3 mt urea plant at the Chabahar region through an OMIFCO-like joint venture, involving Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilisers and Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers. The Iranian government has apparently indicated a gas price of $2.9 per mBtu for the project, which isn't difficult to lock into in a depressed global oil market (Oman had, in 2002, contracted to supply gas to OMIFCO at $0.77/mBtu, which was subsequently in 2012 revised upwards to $3/mBtu). In urea, Modi's 'Make in

India’ strategy clearly needs tweaking to mean investing overseas to make for India. There isn’t a better time for stitching these deals than when global commodity prices are ruling low. And that will deliver true nutrient security even for Bihar’s farmers without reopening the shuttered Barauni plant.
- See more at: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/nutrient-self-sufficiency-better-make-in-iran-than-in-india/#sthash.0KmU8yMs.dpuf

THE TIMES OF INDIA
Powered by Indiatimes

Only 7% water in Marathwada dams

With Maharashtra receiving just over half the average rainfall so far, water storage in the state's dams has hit a three-year low. The worst affected is the arid region of Marathwada, where the dam levels are now at just 7% of capacity, down from 16% in 2014 and 33% in 2013.

In fact, 5 out of Marathwada's 11 major dams have hit dead storage level, according to the water resources departme8nt. This means the water cannot be released downstream. In such cases, the dam water is mainly used for drinking, rather than agriculture or industry.

Officials admit Marathwada could face a water crisis, close on the heels of last year's drought.

The situation in Marathwada is quite serious. But we are hoping to avert a water crisis. We have undertaken several steps including initiatives to generate artificial rain," said state water resources minister Girish Mahajan. "The rains have re-started now and we are hoping this spell will compensate for the deficit," he added.

2014 was a drought year for Maharashtra. However, the state had still received a higher share of rainfall by early August in 2014, compared to this year. Maharashtra has received 57% of the normal rainfall so far this year, compared to 6% by early August in 2014. The Beed and Parbhani districts in Marathwada are the most rain deficient this year, having received just 2% of the normal rainfall so far.

The rainfall deficit is reflected in the plummeting water levels in the state's dams. The average water level in the state's dams is 39% of capacity, compared to 51% in 2014 and 6% in 2013.

While Marathwada is the worst off, Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra have also reported dam storage levels which are much lower than 2014. Water levels in the dams in Nagpur division are 36 % of capacity, almost half the figure in 2014. In Amravati division, the water level is down to 32% compared to 46% in 2014. In Western Maharashtra's dams, the water level is 46% compared to 61% in 2014.

The dams which have hit dead storage level in Marathwada include the Poorna Siddheshwar project in Parbhani district, the Majalgaon and Manjara project in Beed district and the lower Terna and Sina Kolegaon projects in Osmanabad.

However, water expert Pradeep Purandare says it is still too early to predict a water crisis.

"Generally, we take stock of the dam levels in September. During the current spell, dams are in the process of filling up. There is still some time to see if the monsoon picks up," he says.

UP posts impressive growth in agri, infra, SSI sectors: plan panel report

With one and half years to go for the next assembly elections, a state planning commission report comparing the change in development parameters of 27 sectors should bring cheers to the state government. Chief minister Akhilesh Yadav has learnt to have expressed satisfaction over the report which says that the state has registered and impressive growth on socio-economic indicators between 2012 and 2015.

Just a few days back, an independent report prepared by public policy experts Rwitwika Bhattacharya and associate Utkarsh Bhardwaj had praised the UP government's efforts in improving ambulance services the field of medical and health by reducing the response time and the size of the fleet being operational.

The planning department report shows that the state has progressed well in education sector if one counts number of schools and student-pupil ration. "Overcoming illiteracy was a major challenge, but the report reveals that the number of higher secondary schools has gone up from 9.58 lakh in 2012 to 10.14 lakh in 2014," explains a special secretary in the CM office. Similarly, the teacher-pupil ratio at different levels of education has also gone up from 50.87 to 51.64.

The report further highlights how the length of the PWD pucca roads per thousand sq km has increased to 814.57 (2012-13) from 759.89 (2010-11). This is despite the fact that PWD minister Shivpal Yadav has not been able to get any response from the Centre for the maintenance of NHAI roads. Irrigation, another department with Shivpal, has also made a mark by increasing the net irrigated areas to net area sown from 81.00 (2010-11) to 84.09 (in 2012-13).

In the power sector, although there is a negative growth in the percentage of domestic consumption - down from to 41.59% to 40.00%, a senior IAS officer says that it also implied that consumption by industrial and agricultural sectors had gone up. "This is a positive sign," he says.

The report has also claimed that the cropping intensity had increased from 154.37% to 166.89% while productivity of rise had gone up from 21.22 to 24.54 quintals per hectares. Similarly, productivity of total foodgrains also increased to 25.98 from 23.91 quintals per hectares.

Small-scale industries too have seen have marked progress and their number per lakh population has increased to 21.56% from 16.53% in 2012. Credit-deposit ratio has gone up to 44.15 from 44.04 and number of scheduled commercial banks per lakh population has increased from 5.70 to 6.75.

Similarly, the report also praises the way per capita credit has increased to Rs 12,573.82 from Rs 9,438.82. "It means that people are having access to institutional loans for investment in the industries, agriculture or for entrepreneurship. In order to provide better facilities to farmers, number of cooperative agricultural marketing centres per lakh population has also increased from 22.06 to 37.03. Similarly, per capita gross value of agricultural produce (2004-05 base year) has increased to Rs 61,269.57 from Rs 50789.62.

agricultural produce (2004-05 base year) has increased to Rs 61,269.57 from Rs 50789.62.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Food Ministry proposes compulsory exports to pare sugar stocks

A Kashmiri labourer prepares to carry a sack containing sugar inside a government warehouse in Srinagar, August 4, 2015. India is likely to bring in rules to make it compulsory for sugar mills to export millions of tonnes of surplus supplies to support local prices, sources said, in a move that could quell growing anger among farmers but add to a glut on global markets.

Direct selling or barter options being explored; push for 6% ethanol blending this year

To help raise domestic sugar prices, various proposals, including compulsory exports by sugar mills up to 4 million tonnes (mt), at the start of the new sugar season on October 1 and a 6 per cent ethanol blending target, have been suggested by the Food Ministry at a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 1.

On the anvil

Export models being considered include government countertrade and direct selling by Indian mills abroad. Countertrade refers to barter i.e., the exchange of goods for trade instead of money.

“There is nothing concrete at the moment, these were proposals discussed with the Prime Minister last Saturday. One was the compulsory exports by mills through either countertrade with other governments from whom we import agri-goods, or by having mills sell directly to foreign traders,” a senior government official told *BusinessLine* on Wednesday. “Another proposal was to increase ethanol blending to 6 per cent this year and to 10 per cent over the next four to five years,” he said, adding that the models were being explored and a final call will be taken with the Prime Minister’s assent soon.

Prices may gain

The rationale for the proposal is that once excess domestic stock is shipped, local prices will improve and help the beleaguered sugar industry realise better returns. It can then be used to clear dues worth about ₹17,300 crore owed by mills to cane farmers as of mid-July. The levying of an additional tax on the sweetener was another proposal to help mop up arrears to farmers primarily in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Average ex-mill prices are currently below ₹20/kg, while cost of production is around ₹31-32, which has affected mills’ paying capacity. The Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has estimated carryover stock at the end of the season at 10.4 mt. “We usually keep about three months’ stock prior to the start of crushing. Our monthly requirement is about 2 mt, which works out to 6 mt requirement for catering to the domestic market for those three months. Hence, 4 mt is what can be exported,” the official explained.

Export sops and WTO

He added that the export incentive of ₹4,000/tonne of raw sugar will not be continued after September 30, due to concerns raised at the World Trade Organisation. Under the scheme, India has sold around 800,000 tonnes this season, against 2.2 mt in 2013-14.

“If the proposal comes through then certainly domestic stocks will fall and the demand-supply scenario will adjust. Prices should then see a rise. However, we are yet to receive any information on the same,” said Abinash Verma, Director-General, ISMA.

Raw cashew imports fall on high prices

Raw Cashew Nut (RCN) imports declined during the first quarter of the current fiscal due to rise in prices in the West African growing countries.

Increased offtake by Vietnam, which has overtaken India in cashew processing and exports, of late, following setting up of more highly mechanised units, coupled with emergence of new processing units in the producing countries such as Tanzania, Ivory Coast, is creating a squeeze in availability of the raw nuts, Chandran Prabha, Vice-Chairman, Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI), told*BusinessLine.*

He said, consequently, the prices of raw nuts have turned firmer and currently ruling at $1,650 a tonne. “The landed cost comes to around ₹110 a kg. Add to this, is the high processing cost here and the withdrawal of incentives for export. Meanwhile, the government has hiked the wages for the workers by over 35 per cent with effect from April 1, last. All these factors have raised the kernel prices,”Chandran claimed.

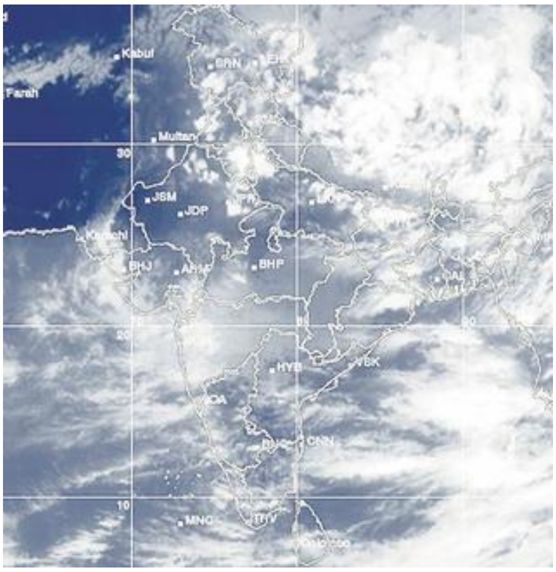
Rise in RCN prices led to a decline in its imports during April-June this year to 3,07,734 tonnes valued at ₹2,472.02 crore at an average unit value of ₹80.33 kg from 3,12,780 tonnes valued at ₹2,042.27 crore at the unit value of ₹65.29 a kg in Q1 last year.

He said 25 per cent of processing factories in Kerala remained fully closed from April 1 while 70 per cent of the remaining is functioning partially. Consequently, the kernel production has dropped significantly which is reflected in the country's Q1 exports that have tumbled 17 per cent from that of the first quarter last fiscal, he pointed out.

Sasi Varma, Executive Director and Secretarty, CEPCI, told *BusinessLine* that "a strong domestic market, where the prices rule much above that in the overseas markets, has made it attractive given the high cost of production".

Total exports during April-June 2015 stood at 22,598 tonnes valued at ₹1,118.77 crore at the average unit value of ₹495.07 a kg.

Active monsoon over MP spills welcome rain into Maharashtra



Tuesday's depression over Madhya Pradesh has given up some steam, weakening twice over into a conventional low-pressure area in the same region.

It also brought some badly needed relief to the rain-deficient Met subdivisions of Vidarbha, Marathawada, and Madhya Maharashtra just to the contiguous south.

Heavy rainfall

Heavy to very heavy rainfall with isolated events of extremely heavy rainfall has been reported from west Madhya Pradesh during the 24 hours ending on Wednesday morning.

Other regions recording heavy to very heavy rainfall included Vidarbha, south interior Karnataka, Madhya Maharashtra and parts of east and north-east India, an India Met Department update said.

The overall rain deficit for the country as a whole is six per cent. North-West retained the lone surplus among the four geographical regions at five per cent.

The deficit was worst in South (21 per cent) but lower by one percentage point from overnight thanks to the rain in parts of east and central Maharashtra.

The deficit in central India is four per cent, while it is nine per cent in east and north-east India. The situation looks manageable in the former given the outlook for another round of rainfall from later this week.

But east and north-east India may slip further into red since the rain-driving low-pressure areas will be active over central and north-west India during this week and into the next.

Fresh spell soon

On Wednesday, India Met has located a fresh cyclonic circulation in the Bay of Bengal where global models see the possibility of another 'low' developing.

But they had pointed to southerly coordinates along the Andhra Pradesh coast for it to materialise. It remains to be seen if the circulation would track to southeast to this location to evolve further.

The US Climate Prediction Centre sees rain from it spreading out over Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and southern parts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during August 11-17.

Kerala bans catch of juvenile fishes for 5 years

In an attempt to check the depletion of marine fishes, the Kerala Government has, for the first time in the country, banned the catch of juveniles of 14 varieties of fish off the State's coast.

Invoking the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1980, the Government has issued a notification prohibiting for five years the catch of the juveniles of 14 fishes that belong to the pelagic, demersal, crustacean and molluscan stocks. These include the popular varieties such as oil sardines and mackerel.

Recommendations

The State, on the recommendations of fisheries scientists and fish workers' organisations, has determined the 'minimum legal sizes' of the fishes that could be caught. For instance, oil sardines smaller than 10 cm and mackerel smaller than 14 cm should not be caught.

The catch of juveniles by mechanised fishing vessels for supply to the fish manure factories located outside Kerala has been highlighted as a major cause for the depletion of resources, especially of certain popular varieties, in Kerala's waters. Along with these juveniles, certain other non-edible varieties which are essential for the sustainable fishing, were also being destroyed.

"This type of unscientific, uncontrolled practice of fishing will lead to heavy destruction of juvenile fishes and will affect the biodiversity of the marine eco-system and the livelihood of traditional fisherfolk," the notification pointed out. Though the ban period is five years, the notification promises that this could be reduced later after an evaluation.

Interestingly, in late July, a meeting of fish workers called by fishing trade unions had decided that they would not catch juveniles and would discourage boats from catching too.

Prevention measure

Charles George, leader of a union of the traditional fishermen, told *BusinessLine* that the ban was an important step in preventing the rapid depletion of fish resources off the Kerala coast. It was also a major strategy in co-management of the marine resources. The trade unions were now willing to cooperate with the government in the sustainable development of resources.

Low prices, taxes stifle AP sugar sector

The sugar sector in Andhra Pradesh seems to be no one's baby.

While farmers say they are not getting remunerative prices, the sugar industry feels it is burdened with low sugar prices and flood of imports from other States.

The Government, however, seems to be reaping good sugar harvest. It is getting a higher price than what the growers are getting for a tonne of cane. As many as 22 functional factories in the State contributed ₹1,700 crore to the State revenues and ₹100 crore to the Central kitty in the form of Excise Duty – or ₹2,500 a tonne of cane crushed by them.

Compare this against ₹2,300-2,400 that the cane growers receive from factories. The industry claims it is they are paying more to the farmers more than the price (of ₹2,270 a quintal) and making a loss of about ₹1,000 a quintal.

"The government must implement the recommendations of Rangarajan Committee which proposed to share revenues on 70:30 ratio between the farmers and factories. Instead, they are announcing a price for farmers but leaving the interests of the industry to the wind," N Nageswara Rao, President of SISMA (AP), told *BusinessLine.*

"After making continuous losses in the last few years, the factories in the State are finding it impossible to fund this loss any longer. While sugarcane prices went up by about 145 per cent (over 2006-07 price), sugar price went up by only 85 per cent," Raghuraj S Bhalerao, Secretary of SISMA-AP, said.

The State has an installed capacity of 84,450 tcd (tonnes crushed a day) in 2014-15, down by 4,300 tcd over last year's 88,750 tcd. Consequently, sugar produced in the State came down to 5.64 lakh tonnes from 6.76 lt.

The sugar industry in Andhra Pradesh sites the examples of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra that announced financial assistance to factories to help them clear dues and export of raw sugar.

He said the State continued VAT (value added tax) imposed by the erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh Government on sale of sugar in 2011.