

13-08-2015

THE HINDU

Coimbatore District exceeds target in credit disbursement



K. Krishnamoorthi, Lead District Manager, told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday that as many as 32 new bank branches have been added in the district between April and June this year, taking the total number of branches to 741. This has expanded the banking services to more people.

In the last financial year (2014-2015), 67 branches were added in the district and this year, in just three months, 32 were added. Further, as against the Government norm of about 60 per cent credit deposit ratio, the district had registered 117 per cent. More bank branches and an increase in disbursement of credit had resulted in the district exceeding the annual credit plan target for the first quarter of this fiscal, he said.

The annual credit plan envisaged total a credit outlay of Rs. 12,150 crore for this year, and in the first quarter alone, Rs. 3,067 crore was disbursed as against the target of Rs. 2,964 crore.

This included Rs. 1,243 crore to the agricultural sector, Rs. 1,320 crore to the micro, small and medium-scale enterprises and Rs. 503 crore to other priority sectors, he explained.

The District Collector Archana Patnaik released the annual credit plan book on Wednesday. The book has details of bank branches, contact numbers of different departments and development schemes in the district. She urged the banks to surpass the annual credit target for this year.

Receiving the first copy of the book, the General Manager of Canara Bank, S. Krishnan said that the plan has the highest allocation of credit to the agricultural sector (42 per cent), followed by MSMEs (41 per cent).

‘More bank branches and an increase in disbursement of credit had resulted in the district exceeding the annual credit plan target’

Hungry for millets

Its cultivation in State has increased substantially in the recent years.

A slew of factors including health consciousness among people, growth in the fodder industry and erratic rainfall affecting paddy and sugarcane cultivation have led to increase in millet production in Tamil Nadu.

“Millet cultivation increased substantially as they are less water intensive and short term crops. You can harvest them in 90 days. Even if there is a crop failure, still you can use the plant as fodder. There is a huge demand and our department is now focussing on increasing the production of millet and pulses,” said a senior official of the Agriculture Department.

Earlier people cultivated millet only in rain-fed areas, bunds and inter-crop. Now the trend is gradually changing.

“Increasing demand and good price are encouraging factors. Millets are costlier than rice and almost all the shops have stocked them. There was a time people looked down upon millet eaters as it was cultivated in backward areas of the State. Health consciousness brought in a change in the attitude of the people,” he said.

Millet production in 2014-15 is 41.580 lakh tonne against 32.734 lakh tonne in 2013-14 and 13.425 lakh tonne in 2012-13. The area of cultivation is also constantly increasing while rice production has already reached the standard figure of 77,000 lakh tonne in the State.

The yield per hectare is also going up. “Unlike in other States, we never paid any attention to seed selection in Tamil Nadu. Now we are encouraging farmers to use certified seeds and it has resulted in higher yield,” the official said, adding that even areas once under paddy and sugarcane cultivation were now covered by millet.

The growth in poultry and dairy production has also contributed to the demand for millet, officials say. Corn, maize and jowar are important ingredients of animal fodder.

Opportunities galore in agriculture sector



G.Sugumar, Dean (in-charge), Fisheries College and Research Institute, addressing at TN AGPRO 2015, in Madurai on Wednesday.

In a bid to discuss the expansion and opportunities available in the Agriculture and food processing sector with farmers and other stakeholders, the Confederation of Indian industry organised ‘TNAGPRO 2015’ here on Wednesday.

Speaking at the meet, B. Soundararajan, Convenor of the CII Tamil Nadu Agriculture and Food processing Panel said that there was a definite thrust needed on the processing and value addition of produce which would bring in immense returns for the farmers.

G. Sugumar, Dean (in-charge) of Fisheries College and Research Institute said that while there were a lot of regulatory measures which governed the export market for fish, more regulation and monitoring of the domestic market was needed which could lead to its growth.

“Since domestic trade is mostly unorganised, early players who make an organised foray into the market are sure to gain returns. In Madurai, ornamental fish cultivation is picking up in particular and needs to be encouraged,” he told the farmers. Mr. Sugumar also added that intensive fish farming and processing could be carried out in areas like Madurai with no coast, which would be viable.

Encouraging farmers to take up rearing livestock, R. Balagopal, a retired professor of Tamil Nadu Veterinary Sciences University urged them to not only focus on milk products, but also to come up with value addition as well as make use of the dung for vermin-compost which could be marketed and sold.

Rs. 300-cr. relief package for ryots

The government on Wednesday announced a relief package of Rs. 300 crore to provide diesel and seed subsidy, among others, in order to save standing kharif crops in the eventuality of drought and deficit rainfall.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved allocation of Rs. 300 crore to provide diesel and seed subsidy, save horticulture crops and improve fodder supply, an official release said.

“Immediate remedial measures are to be initiated to save standing agricultural crops and perennial orchards... measures to be initiated by state governments in the eventuality of drought deficit rainfall situation,” the release said. The government approved Rs. 100 crore for implementing the diesel subsidy scheme for protective irrigation of crops.

Under the scheme, 50 per cent diesel subsidy would be given to farmers to supplement irrigation to protect standing kharif crops in areas where rainfall deficit is more than 50 per cent as on July 15, sources said.

‘Committed to developing new revenue divisions’

Deputy Chief Minister N. Chinna Rajappa has said the government was committed to the development of mandals that were merged with Andhra Pradesh as part of the Polavaram irrigation project.

Speaking after formal inaugural of a new revenue division, Yatapaka, in East Godavari district on Tuesday, Mr. Rajappa said the Chief Minister would give top priority to issues pending redressal in these mandals. With the merger of four mandals from Telangana, the total number of mandals in the district has touched 64.

The Deputy Chief Minister admitted that the newly-formed division faced problems mainly due to adequate staff in the Education, Health, Revenue, Transport, Agriculture, Police and Judicial departments and also due to non-transfer of records of the departments concerned from the Telangana State.

He said immediate steps would be taken to address the problems by holding talks with the Chief Secretaries of both the states if necessary and vacant posts would be merged in these mandals.

He also assured better package to the displaced people due to Polavaram project and said compensation would be given based on the wishes of farmers and affected people.

Bus passes to students

He said the AP State Road Transport Corporation officials had been asked to issue bus passes to students and improve transport facilities by setting up an RTC depot at Chintur.

East Godavari Collector H. Arun Kumar, Revenue Divisional Officer G.V. Satyavathi and ITDA project officer K.V. Chakradhara Babu participated while ZP Chairman Namana Rambabu, MLC Reddy Subrahmunyam, East Godavari SP Ravi Prakash and Rampachodavaram ASP Fakeerappa were present on the occasion.

Minister promises better package to people displaced due to Polavaram project

‘Improve rural economy’

The rural banking sector has played a key role in transforming the rural economy and ushering in a progressive mindset among farmers and women self-help groups in recent years, K. Chandra Reddy, Zonal Manager, Indian Bank (Rayalaseema & Nellore) said here on Wednesday.

Opening the renovated branch of Saphthagiri Grameena Bank (SGB) in Chittoor, Mr. Reddy said the confidence level among agrarian sections in rural banks had gone up, thanks to services like stress-free agriculture loan processing. He added that SGB, sponsored by Indian Bank, had emerged as a vibrant entity with a record number branches and customers. “Soon, we will introduce a system to transfer money from Saphthagiri Grameena Bank to any nationalised or private banks. It [SGB] already holds the potential to compete with the best

commercial banks in the country. We appeal to farmers and women groups to prudentially utilise loans and strengthen the rural economy by avoiding diverting opportunities for luxuries,” he said. SGB Chairman Mr. B. Suri Babu said the Chittoor branch of the bank had done business worth Rs. 140 crore in 2014-15, and that the target in the current year was Rs. 200 crore.

He added that steps would be taken to modernise all the 170 SGB branches in Chittoor and Krishna districts in a phased manner.

Water for kharif remote as Sagar touches dead storage

Nagarjunasagar reservoir touched dead storage as it had not received any flow throughout the South-West monsoon. Due to this the irrigation authorities cannot release water for agriculture purpose to 22 lakh acres except to meet drinking water needs of Hyderabad, Nalgonda district and other places.

Against its Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of 590 feet with capacity of 312 tmcft, the largest masonry dam ever built on the earth had reached 510 feet (132 tmct) here on Wednesday.

As the water level in reservoirs on upstream Krishna is very low, the chances of releasing water from Nagarjunasagar for kharif cultivation are bleak unless the catchment area of the river receives heavy rain during the next fortnight in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Paddy in as many as 22 lakh hectares is being cultivated in Nalgonda, Khammam, Guntur, Krishna and Prakasam districts in both the States.

Almost all the area was brought under cultivation during the last kharif since the irrigation department started releasing water on August 6. Interestingly, the district received average rainfall during the south-west monsoon this year, but last year the it received deficit rainfall during the same period.

However, Srisailem and Nagarjunasagar received heavy inflows upstream from Karnataka and Maharashtra due to incessant rains in August and September last year.

Though it touched dead storage on August 1, it attained FRL by September 15. Farmers cultivated all the 22 lakh acres under Nagarjunasagar as the irrigation department started releasing water from August 6.

Plan to bring 3.25 lakh acres under ‘samba’ cultivation

With water to be discharged for the ‘samba’ cultivation, the district administration has chalked out a comprehensive plan for bringing 3.25 lakh acres under cultivation this season.

The plan aims at equitable distribution of water to all tail-end areas in the Cauvery basin, under turn system, in co-ordination with farmers and officials of Public Works Department, said S. Palanisamy, Collector.

Addressing officials of Agriculture, Public Woks, Cooperation and Agricultural Engineering Departments here on Wednesday, he said that the Agricultural Engineering Department would make arrangements for bringing additional tractors, mechanised transplanters and other implements so as to meet the growing demand for the same. He said scarcity of farm labourers was one of the major problem which would be addressed by Agricultural Engineering Department by ensuring availability of implements from other districts.

He said the Revenue Divisional Officers in Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai would conduct special divisional-level farmers grievances day meeting to ensure equitable distribution of water and speedy availability of seeds, implements and other irrigation-related issues. A preliminary meeting would be convened on August 18.

Benjamin Babu, District Revenue Officer, and K. Mayilvahanan, Joint Director of Agriculture, were present.

PACS to disburse Rs.222-cr. loan

The Cooperative Department has fixed the crop loan target of Rs.222 crore for the current year in Tiruchi district.

It is Rs.20 crore more than the last year’s achievement. Of the target, a sum to the tune of Rs.58.25 crore has been extended to the farmers.

K.C. Ravichandran, Joint Registrar, Cooperatives, told *The Hindu* that crop loan target had been fixed for all 140 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) depending upon the coverage area. While credit required for “kuruvai” season had been extended to the farmers, the disbursement of loans for “samba” season would begin in a day or two. Instructions had been given to the PACS functionaries to ensure smooth disbursement of crop loan to the needy farmers. There should be no room for complaints in extending loan to them.

He said the societies would not charge interest from farmers for crop loan. They would have to repay it within eight months. The recovery of loan disbursed last year was good. So far, 82 percent of the loan had been recovered.

Mr. Ravichandran said inputs for procuring seeds had been collected. It was estimated that it would require 100 tonnes of paddy seeds for selling through the PACS. It would be procured through Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (TANFED). The seeds would be available in a few days from now.

Stating that there would be no shortage of urea this year, he said the Cooperative Department had stocked up 6302 tonnes of fertilizers including 2161 tonnes of urea and 1960 tonnes of complex.

An order had been placed for 8703 tonnes of fertilizers.

It included 3200 tonnes of urea and 2600 tonnes of complex.

It would meet the requirement of farmers till the first week of September.

To promote onion cultivation

In future, onions may cause tears only while cutting, and not while buying, thanks to the decision by the Telangana government to increase their cultivation significantly in the 10 districts of the State.

The Horticulture Department aims to increase the extent of onion cultivation from the present 15,000 hectares to 25,000 hectares, mainly by encouraging the farmers to take up the cultivation even in kharif season, the lean season for onion.

A State-level workshop will be held on August 14 towards educating farmers about cultivation practices, storage methods and the interventions undertaken by the Horticulture Department. The workshop may have attendance from 400 farmers from nine districts, and be addressed by resource persons from National Horticulture Research Development Foundation, and Horticulture and Agriculture University of Telangana State apart from progressive farmers.

“Usually, onion is a rabi crop here. We have studied the cultivation practices at Vaddepalli village of Mahabubnagar, and a few other places in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, where onion is cultivated in the kharif crop season. We will share the knowledge with the farmers,” Commissioner of Horticulture L.Venkatram Reddy informed while addressing a press conference here on Wednesday. This is in line with the government’s aim of doubling the horticulture extent in the State, besides controlling the extreme fluctuations in the onion prices, he said. As of now, the State produces only 2.5 lakh metric tonnes of onions per annum as against the 3.6 lakh metric tonnes demand, leading to scarcity of the commodity during lean season. Citing three reasons, high seed rates, crop damage due to untimely rains, and storage problems as the triggers for the high prices, Mr.Reddy said the department is planning to supply onion seed at 75 per cent subsidy for 14,000 hectares under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana seed distribution programme.

‘Farmers don’t need subsidy, but scientific prices for produce’

Prices of farm equipment under subsidy are inflated: farmers



Deputy Commissioner A.B. Ibrahim during a meeting with farmerleaders in Mangaluru on Wednesday.— Photo: H.S. Manjunath

Farmers do not need any subsidy or sops, but scientific prices for their produce. This was the demand of many farmers in Dakshina Kannada district. The prices of products offered under subsidy to farmers are highly inflated thereby making mockery of the system, they alleged.

Participating in a meeting called by the district administration here on Wednesday, a farmer said that while producers of finished products are capable of fixing the maximum retail price for their products, a farmer is not. “Free them from the clutches of middlemen,” he urged.

Balasubrahmanya from Belthangady asked why the government could not emulate the Karnataka Milk Federation concept to market farm produce too.

He said that the agriculture price commission had been of no use to farmers. While the farmer had been feeding society, society had failed the farmer.

Mr. Balasubrahmanya alleged that government agencies inflate the prices of farm equipment before offering them under subsidy to farmers.

Deputy Commissioner A.B. Ibrahim, chairing the meeting, attempted to change the topic saying that there were more issues to be discussed. But the farmers continued their tirade against the system. Mr. Ibrahim asked how many farmers had been using the facilities at Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees in every taluk.

Of the 55 lakh tonnes of areca nut produced in the district, only 5 lakh tonnes are moved through APMCs, he said.

Rejecting his claim, farmers said that APMCs were filled with middlemen and they did not get fair prices there.

Several district-level officials, including Joint Director of Agriculture Kempe Gowda, were present in the meeting.

Taking serious note of the action from banks — commercial as well as cooperative — to recover loans from farmers, Dakshina Kannada Deputy Commissioner A.B. Ibrahim on Wednesday directed them to desist from such actions.

They should also not issue loan recovery notices or press civil cases before courts, Mr. Ibrahim told the bankers at a meeting to hear grievances of farmers here. The government should take a suitable decision in the matter, he added.

While banks would reschedule loans on request by farmers, none of the banks could take blank cheques or obtain the signatures of farmers on blank papers, Mr. Ibrahim warned.

He was responding to a series of complaints from farmers with regard to continuing loan recovery action from banks despite a direction not to by the government and State-level bankers committee.

PCLD bank at Puttur had forced a farmer to pledge his gold with an NBFC to repay the loan and publicly claimed its success in loan recovery, one farmer alleged.

Externship programme for Tamil Nadu veterinary students

About 75 students of Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS) will undergo an externship programme from the faculty of veterinary sciences, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, from August 13, a press release issued here on Wednesday said.

In addition to sharing of professional knowledge and skills among the participating students, the students' externship programme will enable cultural exchange between Indian and overseas students, the press release said.



Maharashtra govt to form squads to prevent hoarding of onions

With onion prices still fluctuating, the Maharashtra government has decided to form a special team to check hoarding of the produce. Minister for State for Marketing and Agriculture Ram Shinde said the team would conduct raids and take action against hoarders. Prices of onion, which are higher than normal now, have been fluctuating at the Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) over the last more than a week.

The maximum price Wednesday was Rs 3,861 per quintal, up from Rs 3,771 per quintal Tuesday, Rs 3,730 Monday and Rs 37,00 Saturday. Last week too saw the prices fluctuating, with the produce fetching Rs 3,787 per quintal Thursday, down from Rs 3,900 per quintal Wednesday.

On August 4, the highest price was Rs 3,962 per quintal, a significant jump over Monday's Rs 3,600. For a few weeks, the arrival of onions has been erratic too. Senior officials at the Lasalgaon APMC, Asia's biggest onion market, said the sudden price rise and wide fluctuations were not natural to the trade.

They said though there had been a dip in the prices in the wholesale markets, this had not reflected in the retail market. In fact, the gap between wholesale and retail prices is now more than 30 per cent in Pune and other cities.

The officials said this could be a result of the hoarding by traders to artificially spike prices in the retail market. Speaking to The Indian Express, Shinde said a special team would be dispatched to Lasalgaon to study the situation.

"We have instructed officers to take action against hoarders," he said. The present crisis in the onion trade is a result of the large-scale destruction of the crop in the main onion growing states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh due to unseasonal summer rains. Dr R P Gupta, Director, National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation, said some relief might be possible due to the arrival of the late Kharif crops.

He said the gap in monsoon had delayed plantation of the crop in these states. Plantation is near normal in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. "Overall, the harvest is getting delayed due to the vagrancy of the monsoon," he said.

The special tender for import of 10,000 metric tonnes of onions by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) had failed to evoke any response. NAFED has around 5-6,000 metric tonnes of onions stored in its godowns.

Land Development Bank starts its winding down process

The announcement by the State cooperative commissioner Chandrakant Dalvi Monday of a special recovery scheme for the defunct land development bank (LDB) is a fall out of the government's decision to wind up the bank.

Non-functional for the last 17 years, the total liabilities of the bank at this moment are more than Rs 2,000 crores with loans worth Rs 1,100 crores remaining non-recovered. The bank which was operational in 29 districts of the state used to provide long term and medium term loans to agriculturist and farmers.

Loans were provided for laying of pipe lines, purchasing tractors and other works related to agriculture. Other than the Kohlapur branch, which has a board of directors and the Nashik branch which is under an administrator, all other branches of the bank had ceased functioning. At this moment recovery has to be done from over 35,000 farmers whose land is mortgaged to the bank. The bank has 953 employees and has assets including buildings and open plots worth Rs 550 crores. Many of the properties of the bank are in prime locations and would be quite valuable as properties.

The bank had twice failed to repay the apex bank NABARD which had refinanced it. As the government of Maharashtra was the guarantor of the refinancing packages the state government had to pay NABARD Rs 800 crores for the default. The total expense towards salary and maintenance per month comes to be at least Rs 3 crores which the bank is doing at this moment through recovery.

Earlier in 2015 the state government had announced the decision to wind up the bank due to its chronic poor financial health. Dalvi, while addressing a press conference in Pune recently, announced a special loan waiver scheme for the creditors. As per the scheme the government will waive off Rs 900 crores and the rest of the amount will be recovered at the rate of 6 per cent interest. The scheme is valid till March 31,2016 after which the government will take action against the creditors.

While retrenchment of staff has been announced the government has also announced a special scheme of Rs 236 crores for the staff. 'Once the special recovery scheme gets over the formal process of winding up the bank will start,' said Dalvi.

Maharashtra to buy sugarcane from Karnataka for animal fodder

THE Maharashtra government has decided to import sugarcane in bulk from the neighbouring state of Karnataka to overcome the animal fodder shortage in drought-hit Marathwada. The massive loss of crops due to a poor monsoon has led to an acute fodder crisis across eight districts of Marathwada region.

The drinking water crisis is being met with supply through 1,200 tankers. In Osmanabad district, farming is done on a total of 3.5 lakh hectares. This year, however, sowing was done only on 1.9 lakh hectares due to water scarcity and lack of rain. Almost 1.5 lakh hectares failed to yield the desired harvest. As a result, several lakh farmers are affected in the district, which is among the worst hit. The poor crop with stunted growth was not even useful to feed animals.

“The daily requirement of fodder for 7.37 lakh animals in the district is 3,000 metric tonnes. If we calculate a month’s supply, it goes up to 30,000 MT. The long dry spell in the district has created acute shortage of fodder as even the wild grass have dried up,” said Osmanabad District Collector Prashant Narvawre.

The scenario in the districts of Latur, Beed, Parbhani and Jalna is no different. Sugarcane works out to be the most cost-effective fodder for animals during drought.

The government decided to buy cane from Karnataka because it will be economical to get the supply from there due to its geographical proximity. Satish Patil, a farmer in Osmanabad, said, “I have four animals. If I had a good harvest of jowar, I would have easily managed the fodder expenditure for my animals.

Now with the loss of jowar, the expenditure on fodder for four animals is upsetting my daily budget. However, we hope the government will come forward to help farmers who have no other source to sustain their animals.”

After allegations of corruption in the fodder camps during the previous regime, the state government has decided to provide funds directly to district collectors so that the money can reach individual farmers. The money is directly deposited in the farmer’s account.

A senior officer in the Ministry of Agriculture said, “In Marathwada region, we would require 20,000 to 25,000 MT of fodder daily. This means we would need equivalent 20,000

to 25,000 metric tonnes of animal feed that could be components of sugarcane, millets, bajra, wheat, rice or straws, green grass etc.”

Apart from Karnataka, the government is also trying to get sugarcane from the neighbouring districts of Western Maharashtra, which is not drought prone and had surplus sugarcane cultivation. The excess use of sugarcane as feed may not be advisable.

Officials are hence advocating the practice of processing the fodder using other nutrients that are economical and easily available to the farmers.

The drought-hit districts are feeding Azolla fern to the farm animals. Azolla has abundant amount of proteins and vitamins, as well as ferrous, copper and magnesium in better proportion than that found in ordinary fodder. Its use helps to curtail the excess fodder requirement and also enhances the production in milch animals.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

DRDA to dig 101 farm ponds to bolster groundwater levels

MADURAI: Groundwater level in Thadayampatti panchayat of Sedapatti block is set to get a huge boost as the district rural development agency (DRDA) is planning to dig 101 farm ponds over the next four months.

Utilising the large workforce of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at its command, the agency has initiated work on 18 ponds at one go. All the 101 ponds would come up in seven hamlets in the panchayat.

"We are planning to complete as many farm ponds as possible before the northeast monsoon begins. With these ponds, we are going to provide a boost to groundwater table in the region, since every drop of rainwater can be harvested," said DRDA project officer, Rohini Ramdas.

Sedapatti and T Kallupatti, which are primarily agrarian, do not have canal or well irrigation.

Most of the agriculture depends on rainwater. Further, the state of groundwater level at Sedapatti block is highly precarious as the table has fallen below 800 feet.

DRDA, Madurai is planning to dig 1,200 ponds in the district using the MGNREGS workforce. Farmers from scheduled caste/tribe and marginalised communities can apply for the same.

Initially, there was not much awareness among the farmers about these ponds. Hence, block-level meetings were held with panchayat presidents to sensitise them on the matter. During the review meeting, the agency found there was huge demand for ponds in Sedapatti and T Kallupatti blocks.

"Farmers found that these ponds will be of great help to them since there is no other irrigation facility available in the region," Rohini Ramdas said.

Farmers are optimistic that these ponds could save the crops when there is a dire need for water in the arid months. I Sangilithevar from Thadayampatti is jubilant that a pond is coming up in his field. He was doubtful when he procured seeds from the horticulture department but he is confident that he can save the crop using the water from the pond.

Besides, DRDA officials are also taking up a study on the groundwater once all the 101 farm ponds are completed in the panchayat. An initial reading has been recorded at present and the groundwater table will be studied again once the farm ponds are ready.

In Madurai district, 710 ponds were dug up during 2014-15. During 2015-16, 1,290 ponds are aimed to be created. So far, 347 ponds are sanctioned at an estimated cost of Rs 255.32 lakh, according to DRDA statistics.

Soon, scheme to revive agri in khazan lands

Panaji: The agriculture department is shortly rolling out a subsidy scheme with other incentives to revive agriculture in khazan lands, offering farmers 15,000 per hectare to clear weeds and bushes to bring it under cultivation.

Goa has 18,000 hectares of fertile khazan lands, but hardly 4,000ha is being tilled by farmers. Non-cultivation of vast stretches due to costly inputs of labour and influx of saline water in cultivable areas has led to uncontrolled growth of vegetation.

The reported increase in green cover in the state a few years ago is actually the spreading mangrove cover in khazan land, sources said.

"The one-time financial assistance has been envisaged to salvage whatever remains of khazan lands. If the fields remain barren, the mangrove cover will spread and these patches will be declared private forests and will be lost to agriculture," Orlando Rodrigues, director of agriculture department, said.

Clearing the vegetation poses a challenge, as some patches of khazans have been uncultivated even for a couple of decades or more. "Removing the weeds or bushes will be difficult and machinery will have to be used to uproot them," Rodrigues said.

The scheme also extends to clearing hill sides with cashew and other plantations. Growth of invasive and other species of plants has reduced accessibility and affected the crop. But mangrove species and trees which are classified under the forest act will not be touched under the clean-up project.

But some farmers pointed out that mangrove cover forms the main obstruction to farming activity. "Mangrove cover has increased in the fields and without clearing it, farming may not be possible," Eknath Mapari, a farmer from Chorao, said.

The breaches to bunds have also contributed to the neglect of farming in some areas. The central government's allocation of 150 crore for repairs is likely to prove useful in controlling ingress of salinity. "The funds can be utilized in three years for strengthening the bunds," Rodrigues said.

As additional incentives to farmers, the department will disburse the korgutt variety of rice free to farmers. A total of three tonnes of this hardy variety was distributed during the current kharif season.

Further, farmers raising cashew and mango crops will be eligible for financial assistance of 30,000 per hectare for planting saplings of the same crops. "But the assistance to clear weeds will be disbursed only after confirmation that the cleared area is brought under cultivation," Rodrigues said.

Sowing down by 5L hectares over 2014

AHMEDABAD: The delay in rains first in July and now in August has again brought sowing virtually to a halt. As a result, sowing this year has been nearly 5.5 lakh hectares less than in 2014.

Gujarat has so far received 496.46 mm of rain against the average seasonal rainfall of 797 mm. This is only 62% of the total rainfall received during this period.

According to data released by the state agriculture department, sowing has been completed in 66.10 lakh hectares of land against the annual average of 85.53 lakh hectares. Officials said, last year, sowing had taken place in 72.57 lakh hectares. Agriculture department officials said the delay in monsoon in July and virtually no rain in August had brought sowing to a halt.

"Even sowing of cotton was low as compared to last year," said an official. "Last year, cotton had been sown in an area of 29.30 lakh hectare while this year it had been sown only in 26.11 lakh hectares. Usually cotton is sown in 27.26 lakh hectares."

Officials said that sowing in North Gujarat and Kutch region they had received less rain

had been in only 50% of the total agricultural area of 4.76 lakh hectares. It was lowest in North Gujarat.

Good rains end fear of resowing all over state

Nagpur: The monsoon has picked up in all parts of the state except Marathwada, according to a state government report. The overall rainfall received till Tuesday was 446mm against the long period average of 733mm touching the 61% mark.

While rainfall deficiency in Marathwada remains high, Konkan and Vidarbha regions have received good spells in the current month. A statewide report said, of the 355 talukas only 11 got less than 25% rains while 92 recorded up to 50%, 126 talukas got less than 75% and 81 talukas received 76 to 100% rains. At least 45 talukas recorded more than 100% rains this season.

Akola and Amravati districts in Vidarbha are among those that received more than 100% of the season's rainfall. Nagpur district as on Wednesday had only 13% deficiency. According to agriculture department sources, sowing has been completed in 87% of the crop area for kharif season.

Good rains received this month have come as a huge relief to the farmers as well as the state administration. Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters here on Sunday that the looming threat of resowing had dissipated. "Long dry spell in July had raised doubts that resowing would be required on at least 32 lakh hectares. But revived monsoon from July-end put these uncertainties away. The farmers have also grown wise and 10 to 12% who did not do kharif sowing may now take up early rabi crops starting this month-end," an enthused Fadnavis said.

The water storage in reservoirs of major and minor dams put together was around 44% which was less than the average stock for the corresponding period in last five seasons. On this date last year, the storage had reached 60% of the capacities. However, forecast of heavy rains in the next few days has kept alive hopes of reservoirs filling up.

Opposition leaders, including former minister Anil Deshmukh, who were till now demanding relief to farmers for resowing operations are now demanding urgent relief from excess rains that caused damage to crops and washed away lands in some parts in the last two days.

Govt approves additional Rs 300 crore to help farmers in drought situation

NEW DELHI: Apprehending drought amid prediction of low rainfall during remaining days of the Monsoon season, the government on Wednesday approved proposals for initiating a series of farmer friendly interventions to save standing Kharif (summer) crops and sanctioned additional Rs 300 crore for the purpose.

These interventions include implementation of diesel subsidy scheme and raising the ceiling of seed subsidy for farmers in the states facing deficit rainfall.

The other measures, approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), include implementation of drought mitigating interventions on perennial horticulture crops and implementation of 'Additional Fodder Development Programme' for ensuring availability of fodder.

"These measures have been sanctioned with an additional allocation of Rs 300 crore during current financial year. Actual expenditure may vary depending upon the drought situation. These interventions will be applicable in all rainfall deficit areas of the country", said a government statement.

As a result of these interventions, state governments will be able to initiate immediate remedial measures to save standing agricultural crops and perennial orchards in rainfall deficient districts.

Besides, farmers will be able procure seeds for contingent cropping where normal sowing window is no longer available.

"Appropriate measures to ensure availability of fodder and feed for livestock will be possible because of these interventions. These intervention will help in minimising the adverse impact of deficient rainfall on agriculture production", said the statement, released after the CCEA meeting.

Such interventions are needed if different parts of the country face low rainfall during June-September.

South West Monsoon (June to September) contributes about 80% of total rainfall of the country. Timely onset and even spatial distribution of rainfall is crucial for cultivation of

kharif crops that account for about 90% of paddy, 70% of coarse cereals and 70% of oilseed production of the country.

As per IMD Long Range Forecast for rainfall during second half (August & September) released on August 3, the rainfall over the country as a whole during the period is likely to be 84% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of $\pm 8\%$.

The rainfall during August is likely to be $90\% \pm 9\%$ as was forecast in June. The season (June to September) rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be 88% of LPA with a model error of $\pm 4\%$ as was forecast in June -- a situation which is termed as drought.

As per the report of the IMD, there has been deficit rainfall for states of Meghalaya(-33%), Nagaland(-58%), Manipur(-20%), Mizoram (-30%) , Bihar(-31%), Uttar Pradesh(-32%), Haryana(-24%), Punjab(-26%), Goa(-22%), Maharashtra(-26%), Telangana(-22%), Andhra Pradesh(-24%), Karnataka (-23%), and Kerala(-30%) as on August 12.

Weekly farmer's market receives good response

PUNE: The fifth weekly farmers' market started in the city's Bavdhan area received fairly good response from citizens, said officials in the state agriculture marketing board.

The weekly farmers' market initiative has been taken up jointly by the marketing board and farmers' groups to make available fresh vegetables and fruits to city residents at reasonable prices without any role of middlemen. The board officials said that they provide open spaces to the farmers' groups and assist them to bring their produce to the city and sell it directly to citizens. Five such markets have been started in the city so far in last one year, officials said.

Officials said that the fifth market that was started last week in Bavdhan area received enthusiastic response from local residents. Over 40 farmers' group participated in the initiative with their produce. Besides vegetables and fruits, the groups also offered variety of agri products. Farmers are told to bring good quality fresh vegetables at these markets, officials said.

The markets are operating in Katraj, Balewadi, Kothrud and Baner areas once a week in temporary sheds. The board plans to set up similar markets in the city in the next few months in newly developed residential areas in the outskirts of the city.

DECCAN Chronicle

Tangedco evacuates record 4,100 MW of wind power



Chennai: A month after the Madras high court gave a direction against backing down of windmills, Tangedco has evacuated a record 4,144 MW of wind power on Tuesday evening.

According to Tangedco sources, windmills generated 4,144 MW during the lighting peak at 7.20 pm on Tuesday. This is the second highest evacuation of wind power by Tangedco. All time high wind power evacuation was 4,201 MW and 89.5 million units on June 25 last year.

“We are happy over Tangedco evacuating 4,144 MW of wind power. We have congratulated CMD of Tangedco and Energy department secretary for their efforts,” said Prof K. Kasthurirangaian, chairman, Indian Wind Power Association (IWPA.)

He said Tangedco was more willing to evacuate wind power with forecast supplied by them. The windmills on Tuesday supplied 84 million units to the grid, he noted.

A wind power generator said that wind power evacuation had improved a lot in the last few days. “Initially, when the wind season began in June, the wind mills were cut off from the

grid for hours together resulting in huge financial losses. But the situation has improved over the period of time,” the generator said, noting that Tamil Nadu Spinning Mills Association moved the high court and got an interim stay against backing down of wind mills.

Tamil Nadu’s installed wind capacity was 7,400 MW and it constituted about 36 per cent of the total wind capacity in the country. The state received maximum generation from wind mills during peak wind season between May and September.

The second highest all-time high wind power evacuation was done on a day when the generating stations including thermal and gas turbine faced sudden outage to the tune of 2,200 mw. All the three units of 1,500 MW Vallur Thermal Power Plant, which supplied 1077 MW to the state, were taken off the grid following snapping of conveyor system. The central and state generating stations with a combined capacity of 2,038 MW were under annual maintenance. In a way, wind power generation helped bridge the shortfall created by the forced and planned outages of the central and state generation stations.

An official of Vallur plant said the snapping of coal conveyor feeding boilers on August 10 brought to halt generation in all the three units. “After the conveyor system was rectified, Unit I has been brought back to service on Wednesday evening. The other two units will commence generation by tonight or on Thursday,” the official said.



Arabicas set for early harvest on timely rain



Timely and well-distributed rainfall across key coffee growing regions this year could advance the harvest of Arabicas, even as the flare-up of white stem borer (WSB) threatens to shrink the output of this mild, premium variety.

“We may have an early crop this year due to the timely and adequate rainfall, and enough sunshine during the breaks in the monsoon so far. There’s already some ripening reported in certain areas,” said Y Raghuramulu, Director of the Central Coffee Research Institute in Balehonnur, Chikmagalur district.

The pickings could be advanced by a fortnight to a month. Coffee harvest usually runs from November to January for Arabicas, while the robusta pickings are carried out between January and March.

Blossom showers

K Kurian, Chairman of the Karnataka Planters’ Association, the apex body of growers, credits the good pre-monsoon showers for the early harvest this year. Pre-monsoon — or blossom showers as they are called by planters — are the most critical as they help the coffee flower buds to blossom.

Similarly, the backing showers that come with a lag of 18 days after the blossom showers help in fruit development and retention.

“In fact, in one of our estates, a small quantity that had ripened early has already been harvested,” Kurian said.

The early rains have boosted the prospects of coffee this year with the State-run Coffee Board, in its initial estimates, pegging the crop size for the 2015-16 crop year, starting October, at 3.55 lakh tonnes (lt) — a growth of 8.75 per cent over the previous year.

Coffee Board numbers

The Arabica crop size for 2015-16 is pegged at 1.10 lt — up 12.55 per cent over 2014-15’s final estimate of 97,700 tonnes. The Robusta crop size is estimated to expand to 2.45 lt, a growth of 7 per cent over the previous year.

“Most growers are reporting a fairly average to a better crop this year,” Kurian said, while expressing concerns on the flare-up of white stem borers. “In several low elevation areas of Chikmagalur and Kodagu, the incidence of borer flare-up is extremely high. People are removing the infected trees, bearing coffee fruits, in large numbers,” Kurian said.

WSB menace

While the Arabica crop looks relatively better than last year, the high incidence of borer could shrink the output of the superior variety of bean.

“The impact has been colossal as even single plants are being infested with the borer,” said N Bose Mandanna of Subramanya Estate at Suntikoppa, near Madikeri. “Arabicas should be ready for harvest some-time in end October or early November,” he added.

A clearer picture on the impact of the white stem borers on the Arabica crop output is likely to be available by mid-September, Kurian said.

WSB is reported to be responsible for an estimated loss of about half a million plants each year, resulting in a crop loss of about 1,500 tonnes per annum.

Campco plans to enter pepper market

The multi-state cooperative Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd is planning to venture into the business of pepper.

In this regard, Campco will seek approval from the grower-members at its 41st annual general meeting in Mangaluru on August 30.

The cooperative has sought amendments to its bye-laws to procure, process and to sell pepper. Now Campco deals in the procurement, processing and sales of arecanut, cocoa and rubber.

Suresh Bhandary, Managing Director of Campco, told *BusinessLine* that many farmers grow pepper as an intercrop in their arecanut plantations.

Profit, dividend

In several meetings with growers on various occasions, they had sought facilities to market pepper grown in their plantations. Considering this, it was decided to seek the approval from the general body of the cooperative to amend the bye-laws to include pepper in Campco's business, he said.

The financial year 2014-15 saw the cooperative recording a net profit of ₹ 49.57 crore as against ₹ 39.93 crore in 2013-14, registering a growth of 24.14 per cent. The board of directors of Campco has recommended a dividend of 15 per cent to its grower members.

Arecanut contributed a significant share to the revenue of Campco. During 2014-15, Campco purchased 45,497.41 tonnes of arecanut valued at ₹ 1,241.78 crore, and sold 47,346.43 tonnes worth ₹ 1,292.77 crore.

The cooperative procured 5,525.86 tonnes of wet cocoa beans worth ₹ 31.98 crore and 1,457.97 tonnes of dry beans worth ₹ 31.35 crore during the same year.

The total production at Campco's chocolate factory in Puttur stood at 13,575.25 tonnes during 2014-15. Of this, the cooperative produced 10,388.73 tonnes in its own brand.

Campco purchased 1,463.09 tonnes of rubber valued ₹ 17.95 crore and sold 1,500.88 tonnes worth ₹ 18.91 crore during 2014-15.

All about Canola



The name Canola is a contraction of Canada and ola, meaning oil. It was bred from rapeseed at the University of Manitoba, Canada, by Keith Downey and Baldur R Stefansson in the early 1970s.

Buyer resistance saps rubber



Spot rubber lost further on buyer resistance following the sharp declines in domestic futures on the NMCE. RSS 4 weakened to ¢ 118 (¢ 118.50) a kg, according to traders and the Rubber Board. The grade dropped to ¢ 115 (¢ 115.50) as quoted by the dealers. August futures declined to ¢ 113.10 (¢ 116.39), September at ¢ 115.51 (¢ 116.78) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. August futures closed to ¥183.4 (¢ 95.62) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (¢ /kg): RSS-4: 118 (118.50); RSS-5: 113 (114); Ungraded: 102 (103); ISNR 20: 104 (105) and Latex 60%: 84.50 (85.50).

Weak futures keep oils steady

Edible oils market ruled steady despite weak futures amid slack demand.

Considering higher import parity local refineries increased their rates for imported oils by 2-5 but there was no demand support. On the Bombay Commodity Exchange, cotton and rapeseed oil rose by 2 and 5 for 10 kg each. Liberty was quoting palmolein at 462 ex JNPT, super palmolein 505 and soyabean refined oil 570. Ruchi traded palmolein for 463, soyabean refined oil 568, sunflower refined oil 685. Allana's rates: palmolein 462, super palmolein 495, soya refined oil 570 and sunflower oil 680.

In Saurashtra-Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* increased to 1,630 (1,620) and loose (10 kg) at 1,050 (1,030).

BCE spot rates (/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,000 (1,000), soya refined oil 565 (565), sunflower exp. ref. 630 (630), sunflower ref. 680 (680), rapeseed ref. oil 855 (850), rapeseed exp. ref. 825 (820), cottonseed ref. oil 600 (598) and palmolein 458 (458).

Castor increased on fresh demand

Castor seed price was moved up on fresh domestic as well as export demand. Following the spot, it gained on future also on short covering by market participants. According to trader, apart from covering-up of short positions, a firm trend at the spot markets on the back of pickup in demand at prevailing levels, helped castor seed to trade higher at futures trade. At National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange castor August futures was gained 47 to 3,986 per quintal, with an open interest of 16,190 lots. NCDEX September futures was moved up by 44 to 4,048 per 100 kg, with an open interest of 257,130 lots. On Rajkot Commodity Exchange castor September was increased 38 to 4,028 per quintal. RCX spot gained 35 to 3,825 per quintal.

About 20,000-25,000 bags of arrived in Gujarat and price was gained ▪ 10 to ▪ 765-775 per 20 kg. Saurashtra region reported arrival of 500-600 bags and price was quoted ▪ 735-745 per 20 kg. Castor seed oil was traded unchanged at ▪ 785 per 20 kg.

Turmeric dips despite fresh demand

Spot turmeric prices at Erode markets decreased despite traders receiving some fresh upcountry demand.

“The traders in North India have placed new orders and so the local traders procured quality turmeric. The upcountry traders will keep the purchased turmeric in stock and after the improvement of the price will sell the same,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

On Wednesday, 6,400 bags arrived for sale, of which 60 per cent stocks were sold for a reasonable price. The finger turmeric decreased by 100 a quintal in all the markets and the root turmeric by 200. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at 5,241-7,668 a quintal; the root variety 4,909-7,188. Of the arrival of 1,830 bags, 650 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric fetched 6,459-7,637; the root variety 6,459-7,119. Of the 1,435 bags offered, 1,189 were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric ruled at 6,459-7,437 and the root variety 6,869-7,119. Of the arrival of 1,298 bags, 1,059 were sold.



Govt set to unveil farm, health insurance for masses



Close on the heels of its success in launching banking, insurance and pension schemes, the Centre is gearing up to launch two more mass social security schemes to make healthcare affordable and tackle distress in the farm sector across the country.

The government is planning to come out with a universal health scheme and an exclusive all-in-one insurance product for the farming community as part of its ongoing efforts to bring people under the social security net.

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) is likely to announce universal health insurance plan on the Independence Day on Saturday which will ensure insurance cover to all members of a family under a single sum insured. Against the backdrop of rising incidents of farmer suicides in the country, the government's proposal for an exclusive all-in-one insurance product for the farming community is keenly awaited. The product, which will be called Unified Package Insurance Scheme (Bhartiya Krishi Bima Yojana), would combine nine features with mandatory crop insurance. However, farmers have to choose at least four other features to avail subsidy under crop insurance section, according to a draft paper prepared by the finance ministry.

While the draft report is at the discussion stage with all the key stakeholders, the government has proposed better features this time as earlier schemes did not have the desired results. According to the draft, the proposed policy incorporates various products like crop insurance, health cover, personal accident insurance, live stock/cattle insurance, insurance cover for agriculture implements like tractors and pumpsets, student safety insurance and life insurance. The scheme is basically targeted at providing financial protection to farmers, thereby ensuring food security, crop diversification and enhancing growth and competitiveness of agriculture sector besides protecting farmers from financial risks, the draft says.

“At present, the sum insured under a typical crop insurance scheme is the cost of inputs or the loan taken by the farmer. The claim is calculated by applying the shortfall in yield ratio to the sum insured. The government now seems to be thinking in terms of covering farmer’s income loss,” said former IRDA Member KK Srinivasan. A recent study by the private weather forecasting agency, Skymet, and industry body Assocham showed that less than 20 per cent of the total farming population in the country has crop insurance, thereby exposing a vast majority of the farmers to vagaries of weather.

The draft paper on the universal health insurance scheme says there will be two kind of covers — with sum assured of Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh — for which a customer may have to pay a premium of Rs 700 and Rs 1,300 respectively. The policy covers cashless hospitalisation for diseases contracted or injury sustained by the insured persons. Pre-existing diseases will be included after a waiting period of 24 months, the draft paper says.

The health insurance scheme will be available to all families not exceeding five members, including families headed by senior citizens in the country wherein entire family will be covered under a single sum insured. Four state-owned insurers (New India Assurance, United India Insurance, National Insurance Company, Oriental Insurance) and private players like ICICI Lombard, Bajaj Allianz, Iffco-Tokio Marine and HDFC Ergo are in talks with the government to finalise the fine print of the scheme, the draft paper says.

Govt working to provide rain forecast at block level

Research efforts are being initiated by ESSO and IMD to explore possibility of generating sub-district scale agro-meteorological forecast with acceptable level of verification skill in a pilot mode, says Harsh Vardhan, Science and technology minister.

The government departments are working on providing rainfall and weather forecast at the sub-district or block level, science and technology minister Harsh Vardhan said on Wednesday.

“Research efforts are initiated by Earth System Science Organisation (ESSO) and IMD to explore possibility of generating sub-district scale agro-meteorological forecast with acceptable level of verification skill in a pilot mode,” Vardhan said in the Parliament.

At present, the Met department does not provide rainfall and other weather-related forecast at the block level.

However, under the Gramin Krishi Mausam Seva (GKMS), the ESSO and IMD have been providing crop specific advisories to the farmers at the district level twice a week.

The GKMS products are being disseminated through smart messaging service (SMS) and integrated voice response system (IVRS) to 11.46 million farmers.

For the benefit of fisherman community, a satellite-based application titled ‘potential fishing zone advisories’ is being generated and provided on using the satellite data and Geographic Information System (GIS), an official statement said.

On the improvement in the IMD’s weather forecasting system, Vardhan said that operational implementation of improved forecast suite of models after the commissioning of the high performance computing systems have enhanced the weather forecasting capacities.

Meanwhile, IMD recently launched a special service titled ‘Nowcast’, where the farmers living in the 50-km radius of IMD’s 146 weather stations would get SMS alerts on thunderstorm, squall, hailstorm, etc., within minutes after the information is generated by the Met department.

Earlier IMD's weather predictions were uploaded on its website which farmers used to find difficult to access due to lack of internet connectivity in many of these remote locations where the Met department has AgroMet Field Units.

Now, the data generated by IMD's state-of-the-art doppler radars, which have been deployed in 17 locations across the country to track extreme weather phenomenon, would be instantly transmitted to agriculture ministry's mKisan portal.

“After getting alerts from the IMD, the data would be transmitted through an SMS from dedicated portal to the farmers located in the affected areas or locations,” an agriculture ministry official told FE. The official said the farmers would get SMS in their local languages.

Launched in 2013, the IT-enabled advisory service of the agriculture ministry, mKisan portal, is at present offering region-specific and crop-specific information to farmers on their mobile phones, irrespective of the types of handsets.

The agriculture ministry has tied up with leading cellular operators — BSNL, [Bharti Airtel](#), Idea, Tata Docomo and Vodafone — to send decision-critical information to farmers (through SMS) who are deprived of easy access to relevant information relating to weather pattern, agricultural commodities prices, etc. The farmers need to pay a nominal monthly fee for getting host of information on their phones.

As part of agricultural extension initiative, under the government's National e-Governance Plan – Agriculture (NeGP-A), various modes of information dissemination to farmers through internet, touch screen kiosks, agri-clinics, private kiosks, common service centres, Kisan Call Centres, etc., have been provided at the present.

As per the agriculture ministry official, at present there are 38 crore mobile phone connections in rural areas where internet penetration is low.

Business Standard

Extra Rs 300-cr drought package for farmers approved

With a deficit in monsoon rain, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved an aid package to help farmers, which included Rs 100 crore for a 50 per cent subsidy on diesel for irrigation.

It also raised the ceiling on seed subsidy, to partially recompense the farmer for extra spending in re-sowing and purchase. And, an extra Rs 150 crore for horticultural crops and Rs 50 crore under an additional fodder development programme. “These measures have been sanctioned with an additional allocation of Rs 300 crore this financial year, while the actual expenditure might vary, depending on drought,” a senior official said.

He said these interventions would help states initiate remedial measures without delay to save standing crops and perennial orchards in rain-deficit areas.

Sugar

The cabinet also eased the norms for sugar mills to take soft loans, amounting to around Rs 6,000 crore, to help clear sugarcane arrears to growers. Officials said mills that had cleared half their cane dues by June 30 were eligible; this date has been relaxed until August 31. The government has provided a year's payment moratorium on this loan and will bear the interest subvention cost to the extent of Rs 600 crore for the period.

“This will benefit about 150 additional sugar mills which had pro-actively liquidated more than 90 per cent of their cane dues,” an official said.

Extend crop insurance date: Naveen

Worried with uneven and deficient rainfall delaying the agriculture operations, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has urged the Centre for extension of the cut-off date for crop insurance of non-loanee farmers under the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) during kharif, 2015, crop season.

"In order to help the maximum number of farmers to avail the benefits provided under the crop insurance scheme of government, it is requested that the cut-off date for applying for insurance coverage by the non-loanee farmers may be further extended to August 31, 2015 instead of July 31, 2015 under the NIAS during Kharif-2015", Patnaik wrote to Radha Mohan Singh, Union minister for agriculture. He stated that the operations have been delayed because of the uneven and deficient rainfall.

As per the scheme, all farmers availing seasonal agricultural operations (SAO) loans from financial institutions (or loanee farmers) are covered compulsorily while it is optional for non-loanee farmers.

The scheme, currently implemented by Agriculture Insurance Company of India (AICIL), is available to all the farmers, loanee and non-loanee, irrespective of the size of their holding.