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THE HINDU

Maharashtra government extends PDS benefits to APL farmers



Scheme to dig one lakh wells and 50,000 farm ponds planned

The Maharashtra government will flag off ambitious programmes of digging one lakh wells, and 50,000 farm ponds and bringing Above Poverty Line farmers from 14 suicide-affected districts within the ambit of the Food Security Act from Independence Day, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced on Thursday.

The inconsistent monsoon has reduced soil moisture, and to prevent its negative impact, the State government had launched the Jal Yukt Shivar scheme to involve villagers in increasing the water table in their respective village.

To prevent a spurt in farm suicides, the government will extend the benefits of the Food Security Act to Above Poverty Line (APL) farmers too in six drought-prone districts of Marathwada, and six suicide-affected districts in Vidarbha.

The State will provide rice at Rs. 3 per kg, and wheat at Rs. 2 per kg to APL beneficiaries, and this way all ration-card holders in 14 districts will benefit from the scheme. The foodgrain distribution will begin from August 15, the Chief Minister said.

Fresh loans

Mr. Fadnavis also said fresh loans would be given to farmers affected by natural calamity in financial year 2014-15, and their previous loans would be restricted.

Interest would be waived on loans taken by the farmers who have been repaying their yearly instalments in the financial year 2015-16. The State will bear the interest of six per cent for four years from 2019-2020 which amounts to Rs. 1,526 crore, he said.

He said medical aid under the Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandayi Yojana will be provided to farmers in the suicide-affected districts.

‘Need more research on producing biofuel from maize’

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister H.K. Patil has stressed the need for advanced research to explore the potential of producing biofuel from maize.

Inaugurating the International Biofuel Day programme organised by the Karnataka State Biofuel Development Board University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) Dharwad on Wednesday, Mr. Patil said latest research had indicated the possibilities of producing biofuel from maize.

Exploring possibilities

“Scientists should explore these possibilities. The government is ready to support the farmers if they grow maize for biofuel,” he said.

“It was high time that farmers focussed on biofuel production to supplement their income. Scientists will have to join hands to help the farmers explore different avenues in the field of biofuel production. The government will support the board, if it encourages the farmers to grow biofuel crops,” he added.

Mr. Patil also laid foundation stone for a Biofuel Park.

Elephant project: farmers demand Rs. 30 lakh an acre as compensation

Most farmers agree to part with their land, albeit against ‘good relief’

Farmers, who have expressed their willingness to part with their land for the elephant corridor project in the Bisale Reserve Forest in Sakleshpur taluk, have demanded at least Rs. 30 lakh an acre as compensation.

Residents of Arani, Mankanahalli and Boranamane villages, who took part in a meeting called by the district administration at Mayanuru in Sakleshpur taluk on Wednesday, said they would give their land only if they were offered a good compensation.

The Forest Department has proposed to strengthen the elephant habitat by occupying about 2,945 acres of private land that fall in Mysore Elephant Project area, as one of the permanent measures to end the elephant menace. The identified land spreads across eight villages in the taluk.

Owners of about 2,251 acres of land have already given an undertaking in writing to give away their land. The district administration is holding consultation with local people regarding the remaining land. The first meeting was held in the last week at Kaginehara and the second one at Mayanur.

H.N. Gopal Krishna, Additional Deputy Commissioner, said that the administration would take people's opinion and submit it to the State government. About 95 per cent of land owners had already consented to give land, he said and added that the officials would record whatever the public express at the meeting.

By and large, all farmers who spoke at the meeting expressed their willingness to give their land.

Man-animal conflict

They said increasing man-animal conflict, heavy rainfall and loss in agricultural fields had prompted them to give up farming and look for compensation. Basavaraj, a farmer from Mayanur, said lack of basic amenities had made life in villages miserable. "Taking an unhealthy person to a hospital poses a big challenge. We are ready to leave this place," he said.

Satish from Arani village said, those without owning any land should also get compensation. "Land owners will get compensation for their land. What about the workers, who are dependant on the plantations for their livelihood?" he wanted to know.

H.K. Kumaraswamy, Sakleshpur MLA, who was present at the meeting, said the man-animal conflict had increased in the area as the forest officials were releasing the captured leopards in Bisale area.

The district administration should avoid releasing wild animals into the area, he said and appealed to the district administration to provide a better relief package to the farmers.

Crop insurance scheme appears to have failed to rescue farmers in distress



The weather-based crop insurance scheme does not seem to have come to the rescue of farmers, who suffered losses in potato cultivation in Hassan last year. Of the total Rs. 7.03 crore paid as premium to the insurance company, the farmers could claim only Rs. 1.67 crore.

As many as 25 farmers of Hassan have committed suicide since April this year. A majority of them were potato growers, who suffered losses due to late blight disease. Last year, the government insisted that farmers go for weather-based insurance scheme, assuring that it would help them in times of crop loss.

As many as 10,676 growers paid the premium to avail themselves of the benefits of the insurance scheme. As per the data obtained from T. Ramachandraiah, Joint Director of Agriculture Department, the total premium paid by farmers in 2014 was Rs. 3.51 crore. An equal amount was contributed by the government as subsidy.

Altogether, Rs. 7.03 crore was paid as premium to cover 8,228.4 ha of land to the Agriculture Insurance Company of India. The insured amount was Rs. 58.06 crore. As many as 10,698 farmers, in return, got Rs. 1.67 crore in the form of claims. On an average, each farmer got around Rs. 1,500.

“The weather-based insurance scheme does not help the farmer,” commented B.R. Satyanarayana, a farmer and member of Hassan Zilla Panchayat. Under this scheme, a hobli is treated as one unit. “Even if a farmer has lost the crop entirely, his chances of getting the benefit are very less. If a vehicle owner insures his vehicle and meets with an accident or loses his vehicle, he won’t commit suicide. The insurance company will take care of the vehicle. Why not the same standard be followed in the case of agricultural sector?” he asked.

The insurance company made a profit of nearly Rs. 5.3 crore by insuring potato in Hassan district. Farmers paid the premium because the government insisted on it. “One of my friends took crop loan from a commercial bank. The bank was not prepared to sanction the loan till he agreed to insure his crop. The government’s policies help the company earn profit at the cost of poor farmers,” he alleged. However, this year, the State government has not notified insurance for potato in Hassan. Mr. Ramachandraiah said, the government had not announced the scheme for potato. “We have not collected premium this year as there is no insurance cover,” he added.

Saving a crop

Wearing a helmet, a farmer sprays pesticide mixed with water generously on a cotton field in Shankarpally mandal of Ranga Reddy district in Telangana. The district is reeling under a whopping 82 per cent shortfall of rain in August, compared to the normal average, forcing farmers to spend more on spraying water on their farms in July and August.



Natural farm products get boost with new project



'Vithu Muthal Vipani Vare Vishudhi' launched by Earth Care Foundation to ensure maximum price for farmers and toxin-free food for consumers.

The Earth Care Foundation Trust, a non-profitable organisation working for spreading zero-budget farming methods, has launched a project 'Vithu Muthal Vipani Vare Vishudhi' in the district on Tuesday aimed at ensuring a steady market for the produces of registered natural farmers.

Besides, the trust also aims at giving them training, awareness sessions, and farmer interaction programmes from time to time. The trust, which promotes, the Subhash Palekar model of zero-budget natural farming methods, will start marketing outlets for natural farm products at all important junctions of the Thodayadu Bypass starting from Ramanattukara to Koyilandy, said P.V. Krishnankutty, the trust chairman.

“Maximum price for farmer and toxin-free food for consumer is our aim,” he said maintaining that middlemen would be completely done away with.

Speaking at a seminar organised in connection with the launch of the project at the Town Hall here, Dr. N. Shudhodanan, noted agriculturist and former Deputy Director of Animal Husbandry, said it was high time that the farmers across the State took a collective decision to turn to natural farming methods if the State was to escape from the threats of dreaded diseases.

It should frighten anyone as more than 45 per cent of Kerala’s population was suffering from one or the other lifestyle diseases, including diabetes, said Dr. Shudhodanan. Emphasising on the importance of reclaiming the lost practice of rearing indigenous breeds of cows, he said that ensuring purity of food was the only way to guarantee the mental and physical health of the people.

Noted agriculturist and natural farming exponent P.K. Chandrashekhara from Palakkad, who spoke on the benefits of natural farming methods, said the question was not whether to use organic fertilizers or chemical pesticides, but to make sure the natural condition of the soil and the ecosystem.

“The question is how to make possible an ecosystem that will ensure adequate number of micro-organisms for the proper growth of vegetable and fruits in the soil,” he said.

An exhibition-cum-sale of a variety of vegetables, fruits, saplings, seeds, and food products prepared from natural ingredients was also organised as part of the programme.

Farmers, who would like to register with the trust or would like to know more about it may contact members at Ph: 9388110491, 9349999098, 9447847712.

‘India could lead on Climate Change...’

A dialogue on sustainable consumption should get centre stage at the Paris Summit for combating climate change.

The world is gearing up for the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP-21) or the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, to be held later this year, where 195 countries are expected to participate, mostly at the heads of state level. A key player, [Laurence Tubiana](#), the French Ambassador for [Climate Change](#) Negotiations, spoke to Pallava Bagla on India’s role and expectations at the upcoming Paris meeting, explaining that a debate on sustainable

consumption should become the keystone. A globally recognised specialist on climate change and development issues, Ms. Tubiana founded the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations in Paris in 2001.



You were in India for several days for talks. What has been the outcome?

What I learn is that at the domestic level India is very engaged; your Prime Minister has launched an enormous effort to change the energy policy, particularly with his massive programme for renewable energy which comes from his Gujarat experience — which I know. I also see a huge commitment to the future, looking at the development of an India which is clean and allows for much more access to energy to the ones who do not have it.

Clean energy has a link to local pollution and [there is a] connection between clean energy and health. This creates a different option for India's thinking that combating climate change and development can be hand-in-hand.

India is not fighting climate change. We don't even have electricity available to 300 million people, where are we talking about India fighting climate change? India is not a big contributor to the problem of changing climate.

No. But you can show that for a country that is so keen on making its people well off and developed and on this key issue of health, sanitation and energy, you have a very progressive understanding. So that is why I think in these negotiations India can show real leadership. India can show most developing countries the pathway, the direction

and a different way of developing — both as a source of energy and the way to cleaner development.

At the same time, India should also talk about how to promote a life style that is compatible with nature.

“The over consumption of meat is linked to excessive land use and deforestation. We should try going a day without eating meat. ”

India’s per capita emission is low and is in contrast to the West — look at the per capita emissions in the U.S. and France...

Yes, nobody contests that. On the contrary, the consumption of energy in India has to go up, that is for sure . People who don’t have access to electricity need to have that and I think that would be an achievement. At the same time, it is not my idea, but many of my Indian interlocutors also spoke about the need for a sustainable life style. India can show the way that you can be better off with basic needs fulfilled and a sustainable lifestyle. I do think that India can show the way to the West to think back on how they live, which is not sustainable.

So are you saying that the debate should now shift to sustainable consumption?

Yes, I think that on food consumption, for example, the over consumption of meat is linked to too much land use, deforestation, methane emission etc. This is something that must be considered as part of sustainable consumption. We should at least try going a day without eating meat!

So would the Paris convention be willing to tell the U.S. to cut down its consumption or even Europe?

In this process you don’t dictate. You have to make people believe that this is a better way . Nobody will dictate to India about a development model; you have to make the choice. But we can reflect together and have collective discussion on what is really suitable to the international community.

So we will not dictate to the U.S. about its consumption model but we can make the U.S., and even the Europe, see the need for transformation, which is already happening to some extent. We have now in France and in some European countries begun a campaign against all this terrible wastage of food, for example . Sometimes 20 or 30 per cent is wasted. That is totally crazy. That is where you can have leadership from India in the form of political, intellectual and spiritual leadership . People are ready to listen to that message.

What is the expectation from India at the Paris Conference?

One, India is a big power — politically, internationally — so any agreement has to have India on-board and one that supports the development model that India has chosen. And this is clearly a clean development model, on which I see no contradiction between India and others.

On the contrary I see a convergence in trying to draft an agreement that India would be comfortable with. This could be a model agreement for many of the smaller countries to emulate and who face the same problems as India. For example, countries in Africa, which are poor and deprived also face issues related to access to energy. A solution in Paris that is acceptable to India would create a basis for powerful support from these countries as well.

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Returning to roots

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.

Spices board drive against use of chemical pesticides

The Spices Board of India will start a campaign in the Cardamom Hill Reserve (CHR) areas against the use of chemical pesticides in plantations as pesticide residues in the produce and by-products may hit export orders as well as internal market.

A team of scientists and officers will visit 34 cardamom-growing villages to sensitise farmers in adopting better pest control measures in farming. This is to create a steady export and internal market to benefit the farmers as the European Union is firm on the quality of the produce, said a spices board official.

Farmers due to ignorance use red-labelled and banned pesticides without adequate advice and pesticide residue in the produce would be a factor in determining the market in future. The campaigns will be conducted from August 18 to 22 and September 1 to 5.

In the wake of the ban on Maggie noodles, stakeholders in the Indian cardamom sector are concerned over the high use of pesticides in farming. The board has constituted seven teams of scientists and officers for the programme, to be conducted at four to five locations in each village.

Effective pest management without disturbing the ecosystem, reduced environmental pollution, and eliminating direct and indirect health hazards are the objectives of the programme.



Fodder shortage: Farmers to adopt hydroponic method

Maharashtra will provide subsidy to farmers adopting the “hydroponic” model to meet shortage of animal fodder in drought hit areas. There is a shortage of 25,000 metric tonne fodder in Marathwada region and alternative models are being promoted.

A structure made of bamboo for promoting “hydroponics” created by tribals of Gadchiroli in Vidarbha, will also get a boost with the government promoting it. The

finance ministry will set aside Rs 10 crore for subsidy to promote hydroponic fodder, and the state government will provide 50 per cent subsidy.

The remaining 50 per cent will be borne by the farmers or individuals adopting the scheme. The financial requirement will be worked out after getting the response across state, Khadse revealed. The agriculture minister said, “The hydroponic model widely adopted in countries like Netherlands, Australia and United States may prove beneficial to tide over the crisis.” He revealed that Maharashtra has its modified locally made apparatus to germinate seeds.

Tribals in Gadchiroli are trained to make the shelf with bamboo trays. The trays hold water which percolates from top to bottom soaking the cereals which turns into sprout and saplings within 8 to 10 days. Cereals such as maize, wheat, jowar or bajra are kept in the tray and flow of water is controlled, at a suitable temperature. In eight days, sprouts spring to life and grow taller.

It can be a nutritious animal fodder. They can sow other seeds as well. Citing an example, the minister said, “In rural Maharashtra, during monsoons, we have seen households growing wheat that turns from seed to a sapling of upto 10 cms. Although such customs are equated to religious or festivals, they can be adopted as good animal fodder.”

Push irrigation, not dams



One of the drivers of India’s irrigation sector has been the construction of large dams on our rivers, which Jawaharlal Nehru famously described as “the temples of modern India”. While these dams have helped increase India’s irrigated area and provided a semblance of food security, they have also created more problems than they have solved. What is worse, these dams have not really achieved what they had promised.

While the nation and its most deprived people have paid a huge price in terms of displacement and ecological costs, the farmers for whom the water was meant have not benefited as planned.

Perhaps the most telling statement in this regard has recently come from the chief minister of Maharashtra, the state with the highest number of dams in India. Intervening in a debate in the state assembly on July 21, Devendra Fadnavis remarked that Maharashtra has 40 per cent of the country's large dams, "but 82 per cent area of the state is rainfed. Till the time you don't give water to a farmer's fields, you can't save him from suicide. We have moved away from our vision of watershed and conservation. We did not think about hydrology, geology and topography of a region before pushing large dams everywhere. We pushed large dams, not irrigation. But this has to change."

Recent scholarship supports the chief minister's refreshing perspective. It shows that most of the peninsular river basins (the Kaveri, Krishna and Godavari) and the Narmada and Tapi have reached full or partial basin closure, with few possibilities of any further dam construction. In the Ganga plains, the topography is completely flat and storages cannot be located there. The problem further up in the Himalayas is that we confront one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world.

The Himalayas are comparatively young mountains with high rates of erosion. Their upper catchments have little vegetation to bind the soil. Deforestation has aggravated the problem. Rivers descending from the Himalayas, therefore, tend to have high sediment loads. The Geological Survey of India records many cases of power turbines becoming dysfunctional following siltation.

Climate change is making the predictability of river flows extremely uncertain. Diverting rivers will also create large dry regions, with adverse impact on local livelihoods (fisheries and agriculture).

The neo-tectonism of the Brahmaputra valley and its surrounding highlands in the eastern Himalayas means that modifying topography by excavation or creating water

and sediment loads in river impoundments can be dangerous. Recent events in Uttarakhand and Nepal bear tragic testimony to these scientific predictions.

The comprehensive proposal to link Himalayan and peninsular rivers, estimated to cost around Rs 5,60,000 crore in 2001, also presents major problems. It has been overlooked that because of our dependence on the monsoons, the periods when rivers have “surplus” water are generally synchronous across the subcontinent.

Further, given the topography of India and the way links are envisaged, they might totally bypass the core dry highlands of central and western India. Even more worrisome, recent studies indicate that the scheme could deeply compromise the very integrity of the monsoon cycle. The presence of a low salinity layer of water with low density is a reason for the maintenance of high sea-surface temperatures in the Bay of Bengal, creating low-pressure areas and leading to the intensification of monsoon activity. Rainfall over much of the subcontinent is controlled by this layer of low saline water.

If we interlink rivers such that fresh river water does not continue to flow into the sea, this could have serious long-term consequences for climate and rainfall in the subcontinent.

It is this enormously constrained situation that underscores the wisdom of the perspective outlined by Fadnavis. India desperately needs to make a paradigm shift in irrigation, move away from a narrow engineering-construction-centric approach to a multi-disciplinary, participatory water management perspective. We can make huge increases in irrigated area without needing to build more dams simply by the de-bureaucratisation of irrigation, adopting participatory irrigation management through water user associations (WUA), pioneered in some irrigation commands in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. Once farmers themselves feel a sense of ownership over water, the process of operating and managing irrigation systems undergoes a profound transformation.

The WUAs collect irrigation service fees, whose structure is determined in a completely transparent and participatory manner, from their members. Collection of

these fees enables WUAs to undertake proper repair and maintenance of distribution systems and ensure that water reaches the farm gate.

To incentivise states to adopt this approach, the 12th Five Year Plan proposed the setting up of a national irrigation management fund (NIMF), a non-lapsable fund that reimburses state irrigation departments a matching contribution of their irrigation service fee collection on a 1:1 ratio.

To encourage participatory irrigation management, the NIMF would provide a bonus to states, which would enable WUAs to keep 50 per cent of the irrigation service fees collected by them. The 12th Plan believes that participatory irrigation management has failed to take off in many states because, in the current scenario, WUAs have all the obligations but no rights or secure access to irrigation. The aim is to empower these associations. Simultaneously, the human resource profile of irrigation departments is to be broadened by including not just engineers but also social mobilisers, water managers, agronomists and hydrogeologists, so that holistic management of water becomes possible.

Such a paradigm shift in irrigation would enable a decisive move in the direction proposed by Fadnavis. What is truly tragic, however, is that despite the 12th Plan allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for the NIMF, neither the UPA nor the NDA has notified the fund. India is truly fortunate for finally having a minister for water resources who understands the perils of dam-building in the Himalayas and is committed to uninterrupted water flows in the Ganga.

It is to be hoped that she will not lose any time in adopting an approach that could add millions of hectares to irrigated land without building a single new dam — by better managing the water already stored in our existing large dams and ensuring it actually reaches the farmers for whom it is meant.



Food subsidies, interest waivers to help farmers

For the first time, the state government is looking at a holistic approach to tackle the agrarian crisis in 14 suicide-prone districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada and moving away from loan waivers and dole.

On Independence Day, the government will launch schemes specific to these 14 districts (eight in Aurangabad and six in Vidarbha) that have high incidence of farmer suicides. These include subsidised foodgrain under the Food Security Act for all ration card holders and subsidised medical treatment and surgeries under the Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandayi Yojana.

Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday gave directives to the divisional commissioners, collectors and guardian ministers of all districts to ensure decisions taken by the government reach the last mile marginal farmer. The government is looking at an approach that is solely focused water conservation measures by digging over 1 lakh wells and 50,000 farm ponds. “Along with water conservation, we are looking at providing support to farmers’ families by giving food at subsidised rates and free medical services. We have lifted economic criteria for these welfare schemes, making it accessible to all farmers,” said a senior bureaucrat.

Farmers will be able to buy rice at Rs3 a kilo and wheat at Rs2 a kilo under this scheme. These prices were only meant for Below Poverty Line families.

From November 2014 to May this year, 1,286 farmers had committed suicides in these districts. The government has also realised the need to provide mental health facilities at the district government hospitals and clinics. “We will be criticised if we say many of the suicides are not just prompted by debts but because of personal angst and depression. Hence, we are looking at employing a private psychiatrist in every district-level hospital,” the bureaucrat said.

The state had announced rescheduling of loans and interest waiver for farmers.

Those who can pay back their yearly loan instalment to the banks, will get an interest waiver for 2015-16. For the next four years from 2019-2020, the state will pay the 6% interest on their loans to the bank. The government will take on a burden of Rs1,526 crore for this scheme.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Onion prices hit 22-month high at Lasalgaon

The Centre's efforts to keep onion prices under control seem to have failed with the wholesale rate of the kitchen staple hitting a 22-month high at Lasalgaon on Thursday. With the sharp decline in the arrival of the crop in the market, sources said the onion prices would continue to climb in the next few weeks.

The average wholesale onion price at the country's largest wholesale onion market at Laslagon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) touched Rs 3,611 a quintal on Thursday, the highest prices since Rs 3,800 a quintal on November 11, 2013. Market sources told TOI that the prices may touch Rs 4,000 a quintal in a week or two.

The average wholesale onion prices have shot up by almost 140% in the past one-and-a-half months. From the average wholesale onion price of Rs 1,450 a quintal on June 30, the price has climbed to Rs 3,611 a quintal on Thursday at Lasalgaon due to decline in arrivals of onions in the market.

With the summer onion crop damaged due to unseasonal rain and the kharif season delayed with the late monsoon, the onion arrival in the market has dropped to 3,000-4,500 quintal a day compared with the 14,000-15,000 quintal a day till one-and-a-half months back.

"Most of the summer crop was severely affected in February and March due to unseasonal rain and hails. Farmers sold most of their stock in April and May and hence, have very limited stock in their storage. It is difficult to estimate how much stock they have at the moment."

Generally, the summer crop harvested in March and April caters to market needs until the arrival of fresh kharif crop by mid-October. But, this year, the delayed monsoon has also delayed onion plantation in the region. Officials said sowing has been done barely on 2% of the total area under onion cultivation in the district. Kharif onion has been planted only 6,000 hectares of the total 30,000 hectares in the district.

"As a result, the arrival of kharif crop may be delayed by a month or two. It may create onion scarcity during October and November. But the arrival of fresh kharif crop in Andhra Pradesh to some extent and its arrival in Karnataka from next month may give relief to the consumers," sources said.

The average wholesale onion price at Lasalgaon APMC was recorded at Rs 3,611 a quintal on Thursday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 2,100 and Rs 4,012 a quintal, respectively. Around 3,000 quintals of onions were auctioned at Lasalgaon on Thursday.

The average wholesale onion price at another major market at Pimpalgaon was recorded at Rs 3,600 a quintal on Thursday. The minimum and maximum prices were

recorded at Rs 2,500 and Rs 4,251 a quintal, respectively. Around 4,800 quintals of onions were auctioned at Pimpalgaon on Thursday.

In Yeola, the average wholesale onion price was recorded at Rs 3,450 a quintal on Thursday. The minimum and maximum prices were recorded at Rs 1,430 and Rs 4,016 a quintal, respectively. Around 4,300 quintals of onions were auctioned at Yeola on Thursday.

Silk farmers in despair due to unstable prices

A Venkatachalapathy, a sericulture farmer, heaved a sigh of relief on Thursday morning, as he managed to offload 40kg of cocoon at Rs305 per kg, a record price since mid July. His joy was however restrained because of the steep fluctuation in prices. He was unsure whether he would even break even next time around. A farmer for the past 35 years, Venkatachalapathy says that the unstable prices pose a threat to his livelihood.

"Since June, the prices have been fluctuating so abruptly, that it even goes as low as Rs170 per kg. Unless we sell it for a minimum Rs300 per kg, we are unable to feed our families," he said.

Close to 810 sericulture farmers in Coimbatore district find themselves in a similar situation. Cocoon prices in the country fell by more than 60%, once the import duty on raw silk from China was reduced from 15% to 10% by the government. This allows weavers and silk dealers to buy raw silk from China, which is considered to be of superior quality, at almost the same price as that of domestic raw silk. The fall in demand experienced by silk yarn manufacturers is transferred to the sericulture farmers.

In Coimbatore district, where mulberry is cultivated and sericulture is practiced across 1,475 acres, the cost of producing 1 kg of good quality cocoon itself comes up to Rs230 a kg. "Just the inputs like moths, fertilizers for mulberry and insecticides to keep the worms healthy, costs Rs100 a kg," says R Ramakrishnan, president of the Sericulture Farmers Association, Udumalpet. "In addition, we need to pay for labour to ensure the worms are fed twice a day and to help remove the cocoons when they are formed. Total costs work out to Rs230 in the city and Rs210 per kg in rural pockets.

With prices hovering at less than Rs250 per kg from mid-July, sericulture farmers are in despair. "On one hand they say that farmers should increase our production and productivity, on the other hand they kill our profession by encouraging imports from China," says Ramakrishnan. India imports around 4,000 metric tonnes from China every year with the import duty fixed at 15%.

"Though India's requirement is around 26,000 metric tonnes annually, we produce only 23,000 tonnes," says the head of department of sericulture at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, S V Krishnamurthy.

The fluctuating prices at the Coimbatore market has government officials worried too. "Hardly 10% of the sericulture farmers come and sell their cocoons to the government," said assistant director of the sericulture department, S Palani Durai. "Private dealers visiting the weekly market pay more than us. If private players bring down their auction prices, a huge percentage of farmers would hope to sell, and we would need more buyers on such days," he said. Currently a large number of farmers transport and sell their cocoons in open markets like Dharmapuri, Hosur, Kollegal and Salem.

Fully formed and recently removed cocoons can't be left open for more than three days or refrigerated for more than 20 days, because they start rotting.

Regular silk dealers who purchase cocoons on a daily basis from the sericulture department say that the Ramzan and Aadi season also led to fall in prices. "Most silk and yarn wholesalers are Muslims, and they don't work during Ramzan season," said P Venugopal, purchasing head, Avarampalayam Sarvodaya Sangam. "Because Aadi is considered an inauspicious month, weavers get very few orders," he said.

The peak season for cocoons is between December and February and again between June and August. "Post-rains and pleasant weather is when prices peak and the quality is good," said Venugopal. "During the rainy season the cocoon is not strong enough and during summer, the worms die," he added.

Onions continue to rule high

Onion prices did not ease even in current week despite expectations of slide by the traders. Both red and white variety were being sold at Rs50 and Rs 60 a kg respectively in the retail market. The rates were higher by Rs10 or so in some of the pockets of the city.

Traders said average rate at the wholesale market continued to remain at Rs37.5 a kg, with the inferior qualities fetching Rs 35 to Rs 32 per kg.

Illahi Baksh of Saurashtra Trading, a bulk trading firm at the Kalamna, said there were chances of a further spike in the rates in coming weeks. It depends on the supplies from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh that are expected to reach the market during this month. The arrivals have not been enough so far, said another trader.

Meanwhile farmers at Dhule and Nashik are apprehensive about the fresh crop that comes by October-November. "This is the time to sow for the next crop but the dry spell has discouraged many cultivators. There is a likelihood of the fresh supplies in October being hampered due to delayed sowing," said a farmer in Dhule. Most parts of the country depend on supply from this region.

Maharashtra to begin irrigation and food security schemes for farmers on Independence Day

In order to supplement irrigation facilities for farmers, the state government plans to provide 1 lakh wells and 50,000 farm ponds across the state. The programme will be launched on August 15.

The state government has also decided to begin its ration programme for Above Poverty Line farmers on the same day. They will be provided grains at the same rate as those under the Food Security Act. This translates into rice at the rate of Rs 3 per kilo and wheat at the rate of Rs 2 per kilo.

Officials said the steps have been taken in view of the rainfall deficit in the state. This has resulted in the crop being ruined in several areas and the lack of fodder for animals.

Rain mitigates drought in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh

Heavy rains in the last two days in several parts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has wiped out the drought to a considerable extent, bringing cheers to farmers and life to a number of streams and rivulets.

The rainfall deficit in Telangana on Thursday came down to minus 18 per cent from minus 23 a couple of days ago. In AP, the deficit has been reduced to minus 8 from minus 14 per cent. Many places recorded rainfall of over 100 mm. While farmers in many districts intensified agricultural activity to meet the Khariff target, the rains have also stabilised the standing crops - which otherwise faced termination.

However, while rivulets are in spate, the principal rivers - Godavari, Krishna and Penna - continue to be dry as the monsoon is not vigorous in their catchment areas.

The joint capital city of Hyderabad, however, continues to stay relatively dry - receiving 0.2 mm on Thursday. The city registered a staggering minus 51 per cent deficit rainfall so far this season. The only other district in the Telugu states that recorded such a high deficit is Medak.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday that the southwest monsoon has been active over Telangana and Andhra Pradesh under the influence of the low pressure developing over Chhattisgarh-Vidarbha-Madhya Pradesh region. The IMD forecast says moderate to heavy rain or thundershowers will occur in Telangana during the next five days. It has issued a heavy rainfall warning for Friday at isolated places in Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Warangal and Khammam districts.

In Andhra Pradesh the IMD has forecast heavy rainfall in isolated places in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts.

Nizamabad town received the day's highest rainfall of 130 mm, while in AP Visakhapatnam and Narsipatnam received 100 mm of rainfall.

As against the normal rainfall of 461.6 mm between June 1 and August 13, Telangana received 337 mm, which is minus 18 per cent. Andhra Pradesh received 288.2 mm of rainfall as against the normal 315.4 mm, recording minus 8.6 per cent. Hyderabad received only 182.5 mm, while the normal rainfall is 370.4 mm.

Water stock in dams lowest in 5 years

Here's why concern about poor rainfall in the city and the surrounding areas is turning into unease — water in the reservoirs of the four dams that supply drinking water to the city is at the lowest level recorded since 2011.

On Thursday, the collective stock was at 15.07 TMC, just 51% of the total 29 TMC. During the same period in the last four years, storages had crossed the 75% mark. The dams were full in 2013.

This year, rains were consistently weak through July in south India as well as in the subdivisions in such as Marathwada and Madhya Maharashtra. From July 1 till 29, the southern peninsula recorded the highest rainfall deficiency in the country, at 46%.

There have been scanty rains in the catchment areas in July and August. Storages in the reservoirs of Temghar, Varasgaon and Khadakwasla have not even touched the half-way mark even though the monsoon arrived on time. Only Panshet holds 65% stock.

Officials in the irrigation department said long spells of rain in the catchments necessary for accumulation of rain water in the reservoirs were missing in July and in the first two weeks of August. The catchments generally register good spells in July and August. However, this time rainfall has remained scanty. Only heavy spells will swell the water levels, officials said.

Sources in the department say these dams reach their maximum capacities around August 15. In 2011, water stock in the four dams was at 85%, in 2012 it was at 71%, in 2013 all the dams were full while in 2014 storage was at 88%. This year's storage has been less by almost 10 TMC against last year's 25.82 TMC.

The city lifts about 14.5 TMC water annually. The existing stock of 15 TMC would cater only to the city's requirement. Authorities may have plan well to manage the supply for the city and agriculture if the dams fail to fill up.

Among the four dams, Temghar has registered the highest rainfall of about 1,609 mm followed by Varasgaon 1,148 mm, Panshet 1,147 mm and Khadakwasla 382 mm.

Meanwhile, the irrigation department will release water through the Mutha canal to rural parts for the kharif crops till the next week. The department has planned the release of about 2.5 TMC water during the ongoing rotation which will fill up ponds and water sources that supply water to smaller towns like Indapur and Daund.

City-based Sajag Nagrik Manch (SNM) has said that the Pune Municipal Corporation should start releasing 6.5 TMC treated water for agriculture which will bring down the additional burden of sharing of the water in the dams and help the city draw additional water.

Vivek Velankar of the manch said technical hurdles have been cleared in treating and release of used water. The administration should work on priority failing which there would be a crisis in water management, he added.

Girish Bapat calls for meeting

Poor water stock in the dams has prompted guardian minister Girish Bapat to call for a meeting next week to review the water stock in the dams and decide about the supply for the city and agriculture.

Bapat said he has asked the irrigation department to reserve 15 TMC water in the dams for the city's requirement. Additional water flowing into the reservoirs is being released into the Mutha canal for kharif crops, he said.

Officials of the state irrigation department, Pune Municipal Corporation and MLAs will attend the meeting.

Bapat said they were monitoring the dam levels. The government would ensure that the city would get enough water. There are plans to save about two TMC additional water for the city by releasing treated water for agriculture through the baby canal, he added.

Temghar 1.46 TMC 39.43% 1609mm

Varasgaon 6.14 TMC 47.92% 1148 mm

Panshet 7 TMC 65.76% 1147 mm

Khadakwasla 0.47 TMC 23.98% 382 mm

Total 15.08 TMC (51.74%)

Last year 25.82 TMC (88.55%)

The recent hike in prices of rice supplied to exporters by the FCI is under review by the Government. This follows apprehensions that the hike would hit export of nonbasmati rice.

All major exporters of non-basmati rice, including the state-owned State Trading Corporation and MMTC, have already petitioned the FCI and the Government to revoke the hike. Exporters are scheduled to meet the Food Minister, Mr. Ajit Singh, to present their case.

The major point of dispute now is over FCI's decision to make the revised prices applicable even for contracts which have already been entered into. Exporters have already booked orders for about 80 lakh tonnes of rice.

NABARD plans direct financing

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) proposes to undertake direct financing of rural projects, in association with banks. NABARD's activities had been restricted to extending refinance to the lending institutions providing rural credit. NABARD is working on the modalities to begin co-financing rural ventures with other lending institutions, or to participate in banks consortiums for financing larger rural projects. Sources said the bank's main aim will be to provide financial assistance to high-risk ventures.

Rlys net surplus up Rs. 642 cr.

In the best-ever financial performance, the Railways ended fiscal 1994-95 with an 'excess' of Rs. 2,448 crores against the revised estimate of Rs. 1,870 crores. The net surplus after payment of dividend to the General Revenues is Rs. 642 crores higher than that in 1993-94. The improvement in overall performance was on account of higher gross earnings and better realisation from outstanding dues.

Joint efforts required for restoration of degraded lands

Experts and environmentalists have demanded that under government and common people must launch a joint effort for restoration of degraded lands.

"Successful land reclamation or restoration of degraded lands largely depends upon the social and political will along with awareness and motivation of the people, coupled with strict institutional and legal framework," said Dharma Rajan Priyadarsanan, senior fellow and programme leader with Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE).

Ecological restoration is the process of reclaiming habitat and ecosystem functions by

restoring the lands and waters on which plants and animals depend. Restoration is a corrective step that involves eliminating or modifying causes of ecological degradation and re-establishing the natural processes — like natural fires, floods, or predator-prey relationships — that sustain and renew ecosystems over time.

Repairing forests, lakes and other types of nature reserves that have been damaged or depleted can generate wealth, create jobs and become a vital means of alleviating poverty, the United Nations Environment Programme says in a report.

Nature restoration activities include rehabilitating water flows to rivers and lakes, improving soil stability and fertility for agriculture and combating climate change by sequestering and storing carbon from the atmosphere. The report underlines that maintaining and managing intact ecosystems must be the key priority.

However, given that more than 60 per cent of the ecosystems, ranging from marshes and coral reefs to tropical forests and soils, are already degraded, restoration must now be an equal priority. Rehabilitating ecosystems also generates jobs in a world where currently 1.3 billion are unemployed or underemployed, while supporting international goals to substantially reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity, a key theme this year.

"In India, population growth and rapid industrialization concurrent with an ever-increasing quest for better quality of life have resulted in a growing demand for energy and infrastructure, leading to significant impact on the country's environment and ecology.

Resources such as natural forests are particularly exploited through agricultural expansion, timber extraction, mono-culture plantations, rail and road networks, hydroelectric projects, mineral exploration and mining," states a research paper titled 'Needs for policy on landscape restoration in India' written by Ramalingam Ravi and Dharma Rajan Priyadarsanan.

The research paper adds that the anthropogenic pressure on natural landscapes is not limited to India alone. Globally, the world's natural habitats continue to be converted to other land uses at a very high rate. Worldwide, it was estimated that around 16.1mha of natural forests were lost annually during the 1990s. However, there are efforts to repair some of the damages which humans have inflicted on the eco-systems and biodiversity, through ecological restoration.

Rain relief for Koraput farmers

Smiles have returned to farmers' face with rain lashing Koraput district since Tuesday night and easing drought-like conditions.

Paddy and non-paddy crops in agricultural fields had dried up because of scanty rainfall in July and the first week of August.

"The district was staring at the spectre of a possible drought and the rain washed away that fear. For things to improve, it has to rain continuously for the next few days," said deputy director of agriculture, Koraput, Kalidas Biswas.

Against the normal rainfall of 393.06 mm in August, the district had received 78mm till Tuesday, he said.

The agricultural department had targeted to grown paddy on 99.267 hectare in the district this kharif season. But only 62,991 hectare has been covered so far. "Around 25% of the total area covered under paddy has dried up, owing to scanty rainfall in July," said Biswas. The district recorded 122.91 mm rainfall in July against a normal of 375.6.

While Jeypore, Borigumma and Kotpad blocks in the district are being covered under Upper Kolab Irrigation Project, farmers in the remaining 11 blocks depend on monsoon and perennial water sources for irrigating their land.

The agriculture officer said the department had prepared a contingency plan for the farmers to tide over the scarcity.

"We have stocked seeds of short-duration paddy and non-paddy crops like green and black gram and these will be supplied to the farmers," he said.

The rain also helped the forest department to resume its plantation drive. "We can start planting saplings as the soil has become wet and ponds in the forests too are filled up with rainwater," said assistant conservator of forests, Koraput, Laxmi Kanta Udgata.

Kerala govt offers perks to TN farmers to go organic

COIMBATORE: The Kerala government, in a bid to encourage farmers in Tamil Nadu to get into organic farming, is contemplating giving them tax incentive for their produce. If all goes well, a consignment (vehicle) of certified organic vegetables or fruits from Tamil Nadu will be exempted from the 5% cess tax, which is usually levied on them.

This is one of the major recommendations on the new organic policy proposed by the Kerala-based Krishi Vidhyan Kendra. Farmers in Tamil Nadu welcome this move saying this could make them price their products more competitively and would definitely encourage more farmers to try the organic route.

Three months after the Kerala government wrote to the Tamil Nadu government about

the excessive use of pesticides in vegetables and fruits by farmers, they have decided to take matters into their own hands.

"The food safety department and agriculture department understands that 75% of their kitchen vegetables and fruits are bought from Tamil Nadu, so it is impractical to stop it immediately," said a source in Kerala's food safety department. "So they have decided to create incentives for more Tamil Nadu farmers and traders to cultivate and sell organic vegetables to Kerala," he said.

Though the bill to pass all these recommendations has not yet been placed before the assembly, farmers in the state say that Tamil Nadu could definitely take a leaf out of their book. "It is definitely an encouraging move by their government," says organic farmer and manufacturer of organic fertilizers and pesticides, Madhu D Ramakrishnan.

K R Sadasivam of KRS Organic Farms, says the incentives would make organic vegetables more competitive. "Defying their government's obvious leaning towards organic farming, Tamil Nadu traders currently only buy normally grown vegetables and fruits because it is priced lower," he said. "This tax concession might bring the price of our vegetables closer to that of normal vegetables," said farmers who grow tomatoes, onion and grapes, vegetables which are sent to Kerala on a daily basis.

However, organic farmers say they hope that concession is not misused by traders and vendors in Kerala. "They already buy commercial fruits at low prices and resell it in Kerala as organic for a higher rate," said Ramakrishnan. "We don't want the wrong people availing the concession," he said. "The public should be aware of differences between organically and commercially grown produce through simple methods like leaving it outside for a day and monitoring its freshness levels," he added.

Despite such incentives, a sizeable section of commercial farmers remain skeptical of this bringing about a change in the state's agriculture scene. "It is not practical for all farmers to switch to organic farming, because many who have returned to the commercial fold," said the district secretary of Tamil Nadu Farmers Association, A Kandasamy.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Govt approves interest subvention scheme for farmers

Farmers can now enjoy corp loans at just 4% next financial year as the government has approved implementation of interest rate subvention schemes with an extension, the Reserve Bank of India said in a notification on Thursday.



They can obtain such rate if they repay existing loans promptly.

"This also implies that the farmers paying promptly would get short term crop loans @4% per annum during the year 2015-16. This benefit would not accrue to those farmers who repay after one year of availing of such loans," RBI said.

Earlier in the budget proposals, the government had mentioned about of 2% interest subvention scheme for the year 2015-16 for short term crop loans upto Rs 3 lakhs.

Additional interest subvention @3% per annum will be available to the farmers repaying the loan promptly from the date of disbursement of the crop loans up to the actual date of repayment or up to the due date fixed by the bank for repayment of crop loan, whichever is earlier, subject to a maximum period of one year from the date of disbursement, RBI said.

The benefit of interest subvention will be available to small and marginal farmers having Kisan Credit Card for a further period of up to six months post-harvest on the same rate as available to crop loan.

"This 2% interest subvention will be calculated on the crop loan amount from the date of its disbursement/drawal up to the date of actual repayment of the crop loan by the farmer... subject to a maximum period of one year," RBI said in a notification on Thursday.

Delhi government to bring down prices of onions to Rs 30 per kg



The state government has decided to bring down the price of onions from Rs 40 to Rs 30 per kg at 280 fair price shops and on mobile vans selling products in residential locations which don't have outlets nearby. This is being done by introducing a subsidy as part of market intervention to further bring down the prices of onions. Food and supplies minister Asim Ahmed Khan said that by selling directly to people, the government has achieved the "desired purpose of controlling and stabilizing onion prices" in the retail market and also in mandis. " We will continue to strictly monitor the issue and necessary interventions will be undertaken till prices stabilize," he said.

The government claimed that onion prices fell after an announcement was made by them last week that onions would be sold at Rs 40 per kg. The results were visible in open retail markets and it also led to the largest retailer, Safal, lowering the prices.

Officials said that the government's decision to sell onions at Rs 30 procured and stored through Small Farmers Agri Business Consortium (SFAC) at Nasik will lead to a further reduction in prices. Though the cost of procurement, storage, transportation and delivery of onions is higher, the government has decided to bear it as it feels that the "public should not suffer due to fluctuation in prices of essential commodities."

Modern agriculture can boost Chhattisgarh's economy: Minister

Introduction of modern day best practices of agriculture, adapted to Indian needs, has potential to boost Chhattisgarh's economy in a big way, a senior minister from the state has said.



The BJP government is working towards providing latest agricultural equipment's, and increase cold storage facilities in the rural areas so as to jump agricultural productivity in the state, visiting Chhattisgarh Minister for Water Resources and Agriculture Brijmohan Agrawal told PTI here.

Washington DC and Tampa in Florida meeting the overseas Indian-American community from Chhattisgarh and seeking their help in attracting foreign direct investment in his State.

"A number of Indian-Americans have told me that they want to come and invest in Chhattisgarh," he said, adding that the state has huge potential in agricultural exports.

Agrawal said the Chhattisgarh government is providing incentives to farmers who are moving towards growing cash crops or and engaged in floriculture.

"We are providing them special facilities through loan and subsidies. This year we are providing subsidies worth Rs 200 crores to our farmers," he said, adding that this is likely to benefit one lakh farmers.

"Unless we move towards cash crop, we can't improve the economic status of our farmers," Agrawal said.

Having got an opportunity to visit a few agricultural fields and facilities in the US, Agrawal said American farmers have got state of the art technology and equipment for their farming.

"India has a long way to go to achieve this level as is available to farmers in the US," he acknowledged, but stressed that his government is taking necessary steps in that regard.

"A visit to these facilities gives us an idea as to how we can help our farmers. Our farmers also needs to be well equipped," the minister said, adding that efforts are being made to provide subsidies to farmers in the state to buy latest technology and equipment.

Government offers seed, diesel subsidies to farmers hit by patchy monsoon



The government will offer subsidies on seeds and diesel to help farmers facing patchy monsoon rains in some key growing states, a government statement said on Wednesday.

The government, which has earmarked 1 billion Indian rupees (\$15.4 million) for diesel subsidies, will also ensure subsidised seeds are available in case farmers need to plant their crops again, the statement said after a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Monsoon rains irrigate nearly half of India's farm lands. So far, the June-September monsoon rains have been 9 per cent below a long-term average.

Fourteen states, including Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh have received less than satisfactory rains this year.

Subsidies for seeds and diesel and a few other measures to help cushion the blow of poor monsoon would cost 3 billion rupees, said the statement.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Business Line twenty years ago today: FCI's rice price hike under review

Longer summers and erratic rainfall in Tamil Nadu have raised doubts over whether the state is experiencing impacts of climate change. Even if present-day weather uncertainties cannot be conclusively linked to climate change, there are several indications that unpredictable climate will become the norm in the coming years. Is the state prepared to deal with the situation?

The location of the state on the wrong side of the monsoonal curtain makes it more vulnerable to climate change. While the average annual rainfall for Tamil Nadu is 998 millimetres, the comparative figure for Kerala is 3,055mm. The Western Ghats block the monsoonal clouds as they enter the peninsula from the southwest. This also impacts the rivers flowing through the state, with only two riverine systems — Cauvery and Thamirabarani - emerging from the Western Ghats and thereby having water flow throughout the year. The other rivers in the state emerge from the drier hill tracts and have a good flow only when it rains, thereby making the state vulnerable to drought.

According to the Tamil Nadu State Action Plan for Climate Change (TNSAPCC), agriculture in the state is vulnerable. "The projected increase in minimum and maximum temperatures, decrease in number of rainfall days, increase in intensity of rainfall, carbon dioxide, cyclones, and rise in the sea level projected for the future have all implications vis-a-vis enhanced soil erosion, loss in soil nutrient, increase in pests and diseases, loss in productivity due to flooding of extended areas with respect to what is occurring now," says the report.

Tamil Nadu receives rainfall in two spells - first the southwest monsoon from July to September, and the northeast monsoon from October to December. According to the TNSAPCC, the trend in the past decade has shown the southwest monsoon has been decreasing from its share of 48% to 24%, and the northeast monsoon has increased from 34% to 63%. The steadier southwest monsoon is better for agriculture unlike the northeast monsoon, which comes in short bursts of heavy rainfall. This trend could get accentuated with climate change. Thus, though the average annual rainfall over TN may not change over time, its distribution could change.

The TNSAPCC quotes modeling studies for rice production and states that there will be a likely increase in productivity of rice in Tamil Nadu in the near future, i.e., in 2020s with respect to current levels of production.

However, in 2050s the production during the kharif season (southwest monsoon) is likely to reduce by 30% to 35% and in 2080s there might be yield reduction up to 80%. During the northwest monsoon period, i.e., the rabi season, in the 2050s, the rice yields are almost same as that of the current productivity and further increase in temperature during 2080s had negative impact and reduced the yields up to 25% in most of the districts of TN.

The state's water supply situation will worsen and the adverse impact of this will not be felt only on agriculture but on all sectors of the economy. The gap between the demand and supply is expected to be 11% by 2020 and 17% by 2050. Adding to this would be the poor health of the water sources in the state.

For agriculture, this would mean an increased demand for irrigation water in the upper basin, coupled with a reduction in surface water availability in the delta regions. This will be especially so in the Cauvery delta, where the demand for groundwater extraction would increase.

Increased northeast monsoon in the tail end of the Cauvery delta where drainage is already a problem can increase chances of flooding. This, combined with the expected sea level rise can result in increased salinization of coastal farmlands.

With a 1,076km long coastline, Tamil Nadu is vulnerable to sea level rise. The fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC-AR5) predicts the global mean sea level rise by the last two decades of the 21st century (as compared to sea levels in 1986-2005) will likely to be in the range of 26cm-55cm under a low-emissions scenario, and 45cm-82cm for a high-emissions scenario. The TNSAPCC predicts a sea level rise for TN to be between 19cm and 73cm.

The sea level rise would submerge the mangroves as well as increase salinity of the wetlands. Coral bleaching because of increase in sea surface temperatures, which has been observed every summer since 2005, could become a regular phenomenon. The coastal region of the state supports the livelihood of a large population, with economic activities such as fishing, tourism, aquaculture, salt mining and coastal agriculture.

It also supports infrastructure such as power plants, highways, urban centres, ports and fishing harbours. Increased intensity of cyclonic activity and storm surges, combined with the effect of sea level rise can make these populations and infrastructure vulnerable.

The measures listed as part of the state's action plan include the introduction of weather-based insurance scheme for farmers and livelihood diversification. The plan also intends to add awareness about climate change to all community livelihood support programmes. These and others are the areas that the state has included as part of a process in which all states were asked to develop. The Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change endorsed the TNSAPCC on March 31, 2015.

India's approach to dealing with climate change has been high on rhetoric and less on policy planning and implementation. Even though Indian negotiators had been actively participating in the international climate change negotiations since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the national action plan on climate change was released only in June 2008.

The state governments are developing their action plans seven years after that and 23 years after the international community decided to deal with climate change. Though TN's action plan is broad in its sweep, it will turn into action only if the government thinks through the details in discussion with the communities and backs it up with enough funds and administrative support. Only mitigative and adaptive action can help the state vulnerable to climate change.

(The author is regional environment manager with Panos South Asia. Views are personal)

Onion dehydration units now chase domestic consumers



Exports decline as high prices impact competitiveness

Faced with fierce global competition, the onion dehydration units that convert the bulb into dry flakes and powder are now looking at the domestic market to sustain and expand their business.

According to industry estimates, the domestic consumption is pegged at a tenth of 55,000 tonnes produced annually. The domestic consumption is largely driven by institutional buyers such as star hotels and restaurants.

Consumption, potential

“There is a big market in the metro cities and urban pockets. Dehydration industry can grow faster provided awareness and acceptance of such products grows in the domestic market,” said Vitthal Koradiya, President of the Onion Dehydration Association of India.

However, onion powder is yet to find acceptance in the domestic market by the retail consumers. Despite the recent rise in onion prices, the consumers are yet to take a liking for the dried version of their daily *pyazz*.

“It is a matter of daily practice and routine. The taste also differs. Therefore, a very negligible portion of onion consumers would shift to dry onion in the event of a price rise of the raw onion. Otherwise, people continue to spend high on onions,” said Ashok Walunj, Director of onion-potato market of APMC Vashi, Mumbai. The difference is apparent as dried onion flake or powder is mainly produced from the white variety of the bulb, while the traditionally consumed vegetable is the red one. Koradiya stressed upon the need for the government support to push the consumption of dried onion.

Exports market

“We export roughly around 50,000 tonnes of dehydrated onions annually. But there is a potential for sale of upto 40,000 tonnes in the domestic market itself. If the government takes proactive steps to encourage consumption, there will be a sustainable future for this industry,” added Koradiya, who runs a dehydration plant at Mahuva near Bhavnagar.

The uncertainty in rainfall has been affecting the raw onion supplies (mainly white onion). Sharp price fluctuations of raw onion, which is grown mostly in Saurashtra and Nashik region, has put the \$110-million (approximately ₹ 690-700 crore) industry in a tight spot.

A boost in domestic consumption would encourage entrepreneurs to venture into this business, he said. Association data point out about 70 units are operational in and around Mahuva region, while about 20 units are based around Nashik.

Higher export price

“Capacity is not a constraint for us, as we see at least 4-5 new units coming up almost every year. They are investing with a target to cater to the local market. But acceptability continues to be a challenge,” he added.

The price of raw onion doubled this year at ₹ 15-17 a kg against ₹ 8 last year. According to trade estimates, 10 kg of raw onion makes one kg of dehydrated onion, be it flakes or powder.


The doubling of raw material cost has reflected in higher export price, making the Indian product expensive in the overseas market.

“As against the prevailing international price of \$2,200 a tonne, our price is \$2,600. We are facing competition from China, the US and Egypt,” said Koradiya adding that the government has also withdrawn the 3 per cent export subsidy to dehydration units thereby making it tougher for them to compete.

Also, because of the high prices, only 15,000 tonnes have been exported so far in current calendar year against 50,000 tonnes last year.

The business being seasonal mostly during January to June, the industry faces difficulty to keep their units running.

Nafed re-floats tender for imports of 10,000 tonnes of bulb

| Average retail prices | | | | | | (In ₹/kg) |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|---|
| Cities | Current price | 1 week ago | 1 month ago | 6 month ago | 1 year ago | |
| Delhi | 46 | 45 | 36 | 34 | 31 |  |
| Mumbai | 43 | 42 | 25 | 27 | 21 | |
| Kolkata | 45 | 45 | 30 | 25 | 30 | |
| Bengaluru | 44 | 46 | NR | 24 | 32 | |
| Chennai | 35 | 42 | 31 | 22 | 24 | |
| Hyderabad | 40 | 38 | 26 | 24 | 28 | |

*Source: Consumer Affairs Ministry price monitoring cell

Adding to consumers woes, the retail price of onions, up 28 per cent over the last month and nearly 50 per cent over the year in New Delhi, might rise further if the second tender floated by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (Nafed) on Thursday also fails to attract bidders.

First round

The first tender, floated on July 24, for imports of 10,000 tonnes of the bulb from countries, such as Pakistan, Egypt and China, did not receive a single response by August 7, the last date for filing the tender.

Officials, however, are optimistic that the re-floated tender for the same quantity in 500-tonne units will see interest.

“The first round received no bidders, but we expect to have bidders to cover the entire 10,000 tonnes in this round. We are looking mainly toward Pakistan since it’s easier to ship via road,” said Bijender Singh, Vice-Chairman, Nafed.

The Centre had directed the co-operative to import the onions to stabilise domestic prices which have risen as much as 105 per cent in Mumbai to 43/kg from 21 at the same time last year, according to government data. It also directed the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), which had procured 10,000 tonnes of the bulb under the Centre's price stabilisation fund, and is supplying 250 tonnes of onions per day to the Capital region, to import.

Kharif output

A failed tender could see traders holding on to stocks to engineer a shortage and inflate prices.

Kharif output may also be hit with lower sowing in key growing States like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh/Telangana.

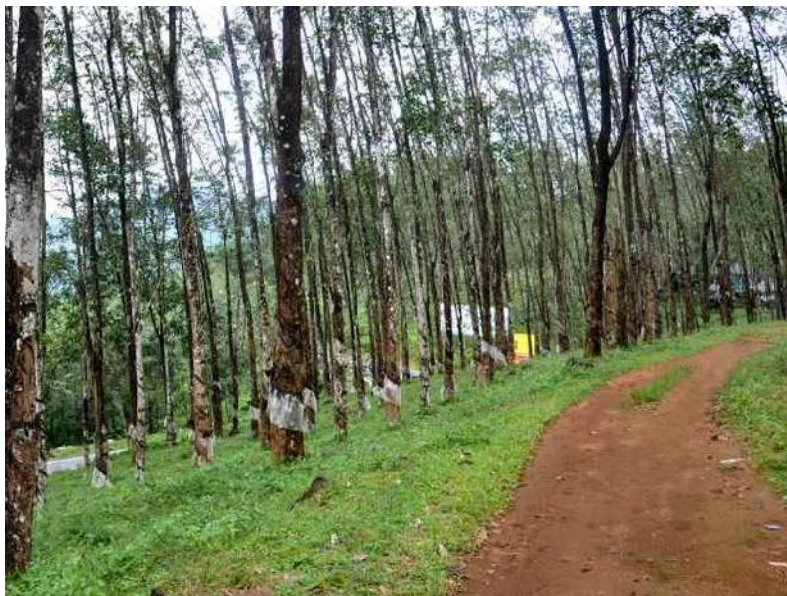
“The monsoon has been a problem across large parts of these States and the drought conditions will impact yields. There is delayed sowing in Maharashtra, while planting is not up to the mark in the other two,” said RP Gupta, Director, National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation, Nashik.

India is estimated to have produced 189 lakh tonnes of the bulb in 2014-15.

Almost 40 per cent of the onion crop is produced in the Kharif season, with 20 per cent accounting for the early Kharif crop which is currently being harvested across South India and servicing markets in the region and eastern India.

Fresh arrivals of late Kharif onions will hit markets by early-October.

Mixed trend in rubber



Spot rubber prices were weak on Thursday. RSS 4 dropped to 117 (118) a kg, according to traders. The grade slipped to 117.50 (118) and 114.50 (115) as reported by the Rubber Board and the dealers. The trend was mixed. August futures improved to 115 (113.11), September to 116.30 (115.22) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to 100.37 (100.14) at Bangkok. August futures closed at ¥185 (96.82) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (/kg): RSS-4: 117 (118), RSS-5: 112 (113), Ungraded: 102 (102), ISNR 20: 104 (104) and Latex 60%: 83 (84.50).

Jeera down on profit booking



Jeera futures settled down on profit booking after prices gained amid fall in supplies from producing belts. Spot price was traded down on slow demand. Traders said that domestic demand was slow and export buying was limited. On the NCDEX, jeera September contract declined 140 to 15,365 a quintal. At Unjha mandi of Gujarat, arrival stood at 3,000-3,500 bags and price was down by 25 to 1,800-3,325 per 20 kg. In Rajkot APMC, arrival was at 400 bags and price declined 20 to 2,300-3,100. Meanwhile, according to expert the quality issues and supply concerns from the production states keep the prices volatile. There are reports that, cumin crop in China damaged due to heavy rains.

Weak buying drags mustard

Sluggish trend continued in mustard oil and seeds on slack buying with mustard oil in Indore mandis on Thursday declined to 785 (down 3 from last week). In Rajasthan mandis, mustard oil traded low at 815 (down 5). In Gujarat, it was steady at 775.



Notwithstanding heavy rains in the State, demand continues to be weak on limited availability of mustard seeds with the crushers. Mustard seeds and raida also ruled stable at 3,700 a quintal each. Plant deliveries also traded lower at 4,475-80 (4,520-25 last week). Arrival of mustard seeds across the country was recorded at 70,000 bags