

20.08.2015

# THE HINDU

## **Mechanised transplantation of nurseries to be promoted**

*Subsidy of Rs. 3,000 per hectare under National Agriculture Devpt. Programme*



Officials are demonstrating the paddy transplantation machine at Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute, Kumulur near Tiruchi on Friday.— Photo: A.Muralitharan

: The Agriculture Department has planned to promote mechanised transplantation of paddy nurseries on about 10,600 hectares during this samba season. Farmers would be extended a back-ended subsidy of Rs.3000 a hectare for carrying out transplantation using transplanters under the National Agriculture Development Programme.

“We expect to promote the use of mechanised transplantation in about 20 per cent of the total area covered under the samba season this year,” an official said.

Paddy nurseries would be transplanted using machines in 800 hectares in Andhanallur taluk. Mat nurseries are being raised in the fields of progressive farmers in villages such as Thiruvalarsolai. The Joint Director of Agriculture R.Chandrasekaran inspected the process of raising the mat nurseries at the village on Monday. Mat nurseries would be raised in the fields of progressive farmers so as to cover 20 per cent of the paddy area in all taluks in the district, officials said.

Farmers interested in availing the subsidy can register their names with the Agricultural Extension Centres or officials of the Agriculture Department in their respective areas. The back-ended subsidy would be credited to bank accounts of farmers concerned.

Paddy is expected to be raised on about 58,900 hectares of land in the district during the samba season this year.

Agriculture Department officials expect paddy to be raised on about 36,400 hectares in the canal irrigated areas of the district and another 22,500 hectares in the non-delta areas.

With a majority of farmers in the district unable to raise the kuruvai crop due to delayed opening of the Mettur reservoir, samba paddy cultivation is expected to be taken up in full swing.

Farming operations are expected to commence towards the end of this month across the district when water for irrigation is released in irrigation canals.

### **About soil health**

The year 2015 has been declared by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization to be the International Year of Soils (“Go in for organic farming: LS panel”, Aug.17).

But how many are aware of this? Healthy soils are the foundation for food, fuel, fibre and even medicine, and are essential to our ecosystems, playing a key role in the carbon cycle, storing and filtering water, and improving resilience to floods and droughts.

Yet, it is unfortunate that we are not paying enough attention to this important “silent ally”, it has said. The overuse of fertilizers and callous use of pesticides across India have resulted in serious ill-effects. A policy to regenerate agriculture and also pay attention to the poor condition of Indian soils needs a strong will. When tiny Cuba can achieve this and won the accolade of being ‘the only sustainable nation based on ecological footprint and human development index’, why can’t India do the same?

### **Sweetgrass keeps mosquitoes at bay**



Researchers have identified compounds in sweetgrass — an aromatic herb native to Europe, Asia and North America — that keep mosquitoes at bay and could add to the arsenal of insect repellents.

Native North Americans have long adorned themselves and their homes with fragrant sweetgrass (*Hierochloa odorata*), a native plant used in traditional medicine, to repel biting insects, and mosquitoes in particular.

Now, researchers have identified the compounds in sweetgrass that keep mosquitoes at bay.

Charles Cantrell with his team at the US Department of Agriculture suspected that the active insect-repelling chemicals must waft off sweetgrass at ambient temperatures and, like essential oils from lavender and other plants, could be extracted using a process known as steam distillation.

To test the mosquitoes' aversion to the oil, the researchers filled small vials with a red-coloured feeding solution that mimicked human blood and covered the vials with a thin membrane.

Then, they coated the membranes with different substances: the sweetgrass oil, alternative sweetgrass extracts obtained without steam distillation and others. Of the sweetgrass extracts, the steam-distilled oil got the fewest mosquito bites. PTI

### **Amaravati project: farmers ready for talks, but not arm-twisting**



K.S. Reddy, a farmer, wants a written assurance on the alternative land.

With two days to go for the Andhra Pradesh Government to unleash the land acquisition law to mop up the remaining land needed for its Amaravati project, riverfront farmers say they are open to being consulted but will not submit to arm-twisting.

The State Government has been making it clear in the past couple of months that it will go in for land acquisition to procure the remaining 2,500 acres that has not been pledged to the Amaravati project under the Land Pooling Scheme.

The Government has already stated it has procured over 30,000 acres in the land pooling exercise in the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) area for a world class capital Amaravati.

The expected land acquisition move irks 69-year-old K.S. Reddy, a riverfront farmer with 20 acres who is worth over Rs. 30 crore. His discontent is not because he is unwilling to share the land for the capital city but because of the way the Government is averse to consulting the stakeholders.

Besides, there is no written assurance on when and where the promised alternative land is going to be given, according to him.

“It’s just a matter of trust. The Government has consulted a couple of families in our villages indoors and we don’t know what transpired. Why don’t they convene public meetings in villages? We are prepared to lose our existence as farmers but all we want is when and where we will have our identity next. We need a written assurance on the promised alternate land,” says Mr Reddy. The biggest fear is that there is no legal sanctity to the word given by Government on the promised alternative land, according to him.

Mr. Reddy is not alone. Others hold similar views in Undavalli and Penumaka, about 15 km from Vijayawada, where over 300 farmers have resisted land pooling. “Instead of consulting with farmers, the Government is clearly indulging in arm-twisting exercise. My land revenue records have been changed. The local tahsildar says it will take about six months to set them right. He even offered an alternative survey number to my land which I’ve been holding for over 50 years,” complains a farmer from Undavalli speaking on condition of anonymity.

### **Crop yield contest for farmers**

A State-level crop yield competition will be conducted for the farmers who have cultivated paddy under the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique and the winner will receive Rs. 5 lakh.

In a statement, Joint Director of Agriculture C. Chandrasekaran said the SRI Crop Yield Competition would be conducted in each district. Based on the competition at the district-level, the State-level winner would be decided.

Entrance fee for participants was Rs. 150. Aspiring farmers could enrol their names with the Assistant Director of Agriculture of their respective blocks by paying the entrance fee. The entrance fees thus paid would not be refunded.

The date of harvest of the field should be intimated to the Assistant Director concerned either in person or by registered post 10 days before the harvest. The field selected for the SRI Crop Yield Competition would be inspected by the Assistant Director concerned. The yield estimate of the field would be assessed by the inspecting officer. If the estimated yield was below 2,500 kg per acre, the field would be rejected.

Mr. Chandrasekaran said the harvest of the field would be conducted in the presence of a four-member team comprising the Joint Director of Agriculture or his representative, Collector or his representative, Commissioner of Agriculture or his representative and an approved progressive farmer.

Harvesting would be done on a minimum of 50 cents land and based on the yield in the plot, the yield in one hectare would be calculated. The farmer getting the highest yield in the State would be selected based on the district-level competition.

### **Paithur, Goodamalai selected**

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) on Tuesday launched its Tribal Development Project in Paithur, and Goodamalai in Gangavalli Block here.

Attur Revenue Divisional Officer S. Jeyachandran launched the project.

The project aims at ensuring sustainable crop productivity through proven agricultural and water management technology, empowering of women, and improving human resources through skill development.

### **NGO**

Nabard has sanctioned Rs. 4.65 crore to Hand in Hand India, a non governmental organisation, to implement the project over the next six years covering 917 families that has landholding, and 91 landless families in Paithur, and Goodamalai. S. Natarajan, General Manager, Nabard, said that the implementation of the project would lead to sustainable development in these areas.

S. Easwaran, Project Director, Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women; A. Bhama Buvaneswari, District Development Manager, Nabard, Salem; Sandeep Mukherjee, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Hand in Hand India; Manavazhagan, Assistant Director – Agriculture; Bhaskar, Horticulture Officer; Karnan, panchayat president, Goodamalai; and Maruthamuthu, chairman, Gangavalli Panchayat Union, spoke.

This is the second Tribal Development Project sanctioned by Nabard in the district. The earlier project was at Pachamalai.

## **Area under rabi cultivation is likely to increase this year**

Area under rabi cultivation is likely to see a record increase this year due to the shifting of the unsown area from the kharif season to rabi cultivation. As against the original target of 4.80 lakh hectares fixed earlier, the area under Rabi cultivation this year is likely to be nearly 8 lakh hectares.

Officials in the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday that the department was redrawing its plans for the rabi season and fixing the targets of different crop.

Preparations were also underway to augment the stocks of the required quantity of seeds of different crops as per the demands of the farming community due to the increased area. All eyes are on the rain, for farmers to take up Rabi sowing in time.

Early rain would help farmers take up the land preparations and the early sowing of rabi crops.

The district has received sporadic rain in few parts of the district giving hopes of a good rabi season. The overall deficit of rain from the beginning of the south West Monsoon from June to August 17 was 48 per cent.

As against the normal average rainfall of 351.3 mm, the district received only 182.4 mm. Afzalpur taluk has been the worst hit with only 92.9 mm of rain as against the normal average rainfall of 278.4 mm during the period.

The shift of the unsown khariff area to the rabi crops this year would be more than 1.75 lakh hectares as per the present expectations of the agriculture department and if here was good rains, the area under the rabi would see further increase. The farmers are likely to go for bengal gram and jowar.

*Farmers wait for rain to take up sowing for rabi season*

## **Pesticide-free Onam market a big draw**



District Collector Kesavendra Kumar buys vegetables from a stall set up at the pesticide-free fruit and vegetable market at Kalpetta in Wayanad district on Wednesday.– Photo: By Special Arrangement

A two-day pesticide-free fruit and vegetable market organised by the ‘Karshakajyothi’, a farmer club sponsored jointly by the NABARD and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, in association with District Kudumbasree Mission here on Wednesday is drawing crowds.

“The market aims to promote pesticide-free vegetables and fruits being produced by the members of the club and supply it to the public at a nominal price by avoiding the intervention of middlemen. It also aims to sensitise the public on the significance of consuming pesticide-free agricultural produces,” says P. Ramakrishnan, training coordinator of the Karshakajyothi club.

The club had trained as many as 6,000 farmers in the district in precision farming, zero budget farming and many trained farmers were following organic cultivation practices, he said.

“We have got a good response from the public, even though we are selling the produces for a higher margin of nearly five per cent,” Sabu, an organic farmer from Mananthavadi says.

“I could sell vegetables worth Rs.10,000 on the first day itself,” Maimoona of Pulikkad, a farmer at Tharuvana, said. As many as 50 organic farmers from different parts of the district are selling their produces in the market. Kudumbasree units have also set up stalls at the market.

### **Delay in providing net meter for solar plant flayed**



Residents demand hassle-free procedures to install rooftop solar plants.

The governments and activists might be pitching hard for people to convert to clean and renewable fuel, but when it comes to switching over to non-conventional energy, there are a lot of issues for which there is no clarity, Chennai residents complain.

Americai Narayanan installed a solar power plant at his office-cum-residence with the hope that the hefty monthly power bills will come down once his plant is 'linked' to the grid through the net meter. But even several weeks after installing the rooftop plant, he is yet to get his net meter.

Now, having linked his solar plant to the grid, he suspects that he has been "feeding" surplus power to the distribution network of Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco).

Mr. Narayanan, a resident of Kalakshetra Avenue, Thiruvanmiyur, complained about the delay in getting a net meter for the solar plant.

He said a plant of 15-kilowatt (kW) capacity had been installed and an application for net metering was submitted to the local authority on February 11.

He also intimated the completion of the project to the local authority.

An assistant engineer visited him on June 1 and said that any solar plant above 10 kW would have to be accompanied by a safety certificate from the Tamil Nadu Electrical Inspectorate.

In a post on his Facebook page, Mr. Narayanan complained that there was a shortage of net meters: "By not providing me reverse meter, the State government is taking the excess power produce free from me without paying for it."

An engineer engaged in installing solar plants said that by linking the solar plant with the grid without a bi-directional meter, Mr. Narayanan might even be billed for the "surplus" power sent to the grid.

Tangedco officials however denied shortage of net meters.

An official pointed out the procedures of getting a safety certificate from the Electrical Inspectorate was mandatory before net meters could be installed, which was not done in Mr. Narayanan's case.

Linking solar power to the grid without getting the safety certificate and installing net meter was a punishable offence, he added.



## Land under paddy cultivation decreases in Udupi district



Although paddy is the main agricultural crop and boiled rice, the staple diet of Udupi district, the land under paddy cultivation has been reducing over the years.

According to the Department of Agriculture, paddy was being cultivated in 69,594 hectares (ha) in Udupi district in 1998-99. It came down to 62,290 ha in 2004-05. It slipped to 57,509 ha in 2009-10. It was cultivated in 49,548 ha in 2014-15. Paddy cultivation had declined by 20,046 ha in the district in the last 17 years.

Scattered and small land holdings, high input costs, labour problem, lack of remunerative prices, absentee landlordism and attack by wild animals are responsible for decline in paddy cultivation in the district.

The farmers in the district are now mostly dependent on farm workers coming from other districts.

Bhujanga Poojary, a farmer in Perdoor village, who used to cultivate paddy in 12.5 acres of land 20 years ago, now cultivates it only in two acres. “Paddy cultivation is difficult as it requires 20 farm workers for transplanting and harvesting work. We have to pay a minimum of Rs. 500 per day per worker. Still, we do not get workers,” he said.

This year, the government has announced a minimum support price (MSP) of Rs. 1,410 per quintal of paddy. “This MSP is simply not enough as the labour cost is too high,” Mr. Poojary said.

The farmers have not taken the crop to paddy procurement centres because of delayed payments. The middlemen go right to the doorsteps of the farmers and collect the paddy, while farmers have to bring it to the centres. “The middlemen pay them on the spot, but the farmers have to wait for a few days to get MSP,” said Anthony Maria Immanuel, Joint Director for Agriculture.

Ramakrishna Sharma, who cultivates paddy in two acres in Bantakal village, said that cost of production per kg of paddy was Rs. 25. “The MSP of Rs. 14 per kg is just not enough. Scattered land holdings increase input costs significantly. The farm workers coming from other districts are not skilled,” he said.

In some places wild animals such as bison, deer, wild boars and peacocks attack paddy fields adding to the woes of the farmers.

### **Farmers stage demonstration**

The Tamil Nadu Vivasaya Sangam affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) staged a demonstration here on Tuesday condemning the Central Government for the reported move to exploit shale gas in Cauvery delta.

Led by the district president Kaliyaperumal and district secretary of the Tamil Nadu Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam district secretary Kumararaja, the protesters gathered near the RDO Office here and raised slogans denouncing the move.

They alleged that the Centre had allowed Oil and Natural Gas Commission to exploit shale gas by digging more than 10,000 feet in the delta by hydraulic fracturing process. All that would harm the ecology and soil condition of the region being exploited rendering farming impossible. Livelihood resources of thousands of farmers and farm labourers would be jeopardized heavily if shale gas exploitation were to be allowed the protesters claimed demanding immediate halt to the works.

### **‘Villagers should assess needs’**

Collector Rondal Rose called upon people to assess the requirement of villages so that proper plan was made and executed.

Participating in Grama Jyothi programme at Mulugu on Wednesday, he said that requirement of the villages should be noted by August 24 and they should be accepted in Grama Sabha. Rs. 3.3 crore would be allotted to the village in the next four years.

“Identify the issues based on priority basis,” he said explaining 7 issues – sanitation, drinking water, management of natural resources, human resource management, health, agriculture, eradication of poverty, infrastructure and social security.

### **Deficient monsoon puts 4 states, 5 crops at highest risk**

As many as four states, which contribute more than one-third of total foodgrains production, and five crops totals to one-fourth of total output are most hurt by deficient rains, a rating agency said on Wednesday.

As per CRISIL’s deficient rainfall impact parameter (DRIP), four states of Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh will be most hurt by deficient rains and these states contribute 34 per cent of total foodgrain production in India.

Crops of jowar, soyabean, tur, maize and cotton are the most hit by deficient monsoon, and of these four food crops, besides cotton, contribute 26 per cent of the total foodgrain and oilseed output.

“If monsoon ends up being deficient overall this fiscal, too, it would mark two failures in a row, which will be harder to deal with,” Crisil Research said in a release.

Meanwhile Crisil maintained its overall GDP growth forecast of 7.4 per cent for fiscal 2016 with agriculture growing at a sub-trend rate of 1.5 per cent on a weak base of last fiscal.

The impact of deficient rainfall is getting increasingly amplified because holistic efforts to reduce structural vulnerabilities are lacking, Crisil Chief Economist Dharmakirti Joshi said.

“We believe investing in Indian agriculture’s future has become economically and politically critical. The government needs to change the templates, and quickly so,” Mr. Joshi added.

The report also pointed that input and output price movements have been quite unfavourable to the farming community.

“The last few years have seen a sharp rise in wages and other input costs, while the increase in output prices was restrained, which reduced cultivation income and hit profit,” it added.

According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), rainfall deficit has widened to 10 per cent and is projected to rise to 12 per cent by the end of monsoon season next month.

### **Green energy sector gets only a small share of NGEF**

The renewable energy sector has got only a fifth of the funds that have been collected through a cess (a form of a carbon tax) levied on coal.

Only a small portion of the National Clean Energy Fund (NGEF) has been made available for renewable energy projects.

“Total amount allocated to MNRE (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy) to date is just 19 per cent of funds collected,” according to a report of Mercom Capital, a global clean energy consulting firm.

A major portion of the funds collected through the cess is not reaching MNRE, and, consequently, clean energy projects. Almost 60 per cent of collected cess funds have not been transferred to NCEF and only 43 per cent of the transferred funds have been allocated to MNRE.

The Central government is expected to have a cumulative amount of Rs.32,206 crore by the end of this fiscal. Out of which, Rs.13,616 crore would be transferred to NCEF. But, the total allocation to MNRE is estimated at Rs.5,983 crore.

Thus, total funds allocated to MNRE to date would be just 19 per cent of funds collected.

Off-taker credibility and payments to developers on time are among the most common and primary risks quoted by banks. With almost \$3 billion sitting in the NCEF funds, the government can use these funds to create a 'reserve backstop fund' against non-payments that will stimulate much needed capital for projects.

"Collecting taxes towards clean energy projects and not using it is detrimental to the industry," it pointed out.

In the last two years, about 55 per cent of the NCEF fund allocation has gone to MNRE while 45 per cent has been allocated to river cleaning and miscellaneous projects.



#### **Food grain: Less production, more procurement**

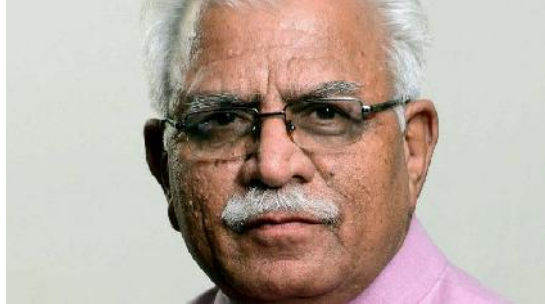
The Agriculture Ministry has reckoned India's foodgrain production to have fallen to 252.68 million tonnes (mt) from the previous year's record 265.04 mt. Output of both rice and wheat are seen to be lower – at 104.80 mt (106.65 mt in 2013-14) and 88.94 mt (95.85), respectively – as per the fourth advance estimates of production released on Monday.

However, despite lower production, government agencies have procured more rice and wheat from farmers this time compared to what they bought from the 2013-14 crop. For the ongoing 2014-15 paddy marketing season (October-September), rice procurement as on date totaled 31.89 mt, which was higher than the 31.86 mt purchased during the whole of 2013-14. The Food Corporation of India and state agencies similarly procured 28.09 mt of wheat from the 2014-15 crop, as against 28.02 mt from the preceding year's production.

Increased state purchases, notwithstanding lower production, are a result of two things. The first is a collapse of private demand, especially for exports on account of falling global grain prices. It has led to farmers offloading more of their produce to government agencies, even with only a marginal Rs 50/quintal hike in minimum support prices (the effective procurement price would be lower, in fact, after factoring in the withdrawal of additional bonuses paid by the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh governments till 2013-14). The second factor has been unseasonal rains and hailstorms in March, causing widespread damage to the standing wheat crop and also poor quality of the harvested grain. That, in turn, also meant fewer private takers for this year's wheat.

All the surplus grain, then, flowed into government godowns, which was also enabled by the Centre's move to relaxing quality specifications for wheat procurement to avoid distress sales by farmers.

**Manohar Lal Khattar, Lt Governor of Maryland to explore tie-ups in biotech, agriculture**



Manohar Lal Khattar

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Lt Governor of Maryland Boyd K Rutherford have agreed to explore the possibilities of cooperation in the fields of biotechnology, life sciences and agriculture, cyber security and engineering. They also decided to find out scope for working with companies engaged in the sector of low-cost housing in Maryland.

The Lt Governor gave this assurance when a delegation, led by the chief minister, met him in Annapolis (Maryland) Tuesday.

Khattar addressed senior associates and the faculty members at Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore on Wednesday. He sought cooperation from its Bloomberg School of Public Health for upgrading the Kalpana Chawla University of Health Sciences, which is being set up at Karnal in Haryana as a Centre of Excellence. He also stressed the need for working out avenues for cooperation and collaboration with Haryana government in the area of health and medical care.

While inviting participation from Johns Hopkins in the construction, maintenance, expert training and research activities of the university, Khattar said the Haryana government wanted to promote super-specialty services in the health sector so that the people could get specialist healthcare services in the state.

The chief minister paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at his statue in Washington DC.

# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

**Government feels onion heat, asks MMTC to import 10,000 tonnes**



The government has asked public sector undertaking MMTC to import 10,000 tonnes of onions to increase availability of the commodity and tame rising prices, which touched Rs 80 a kg in the national capital.

Wholesale onion prices climbed to Rs 50 a kg in Delhi from Rs 15-35 a kg in the first week of August and traders expect prices to continue firming up. The daily arrival of trucks carrying onions from across the country and Afghanistan hasn't eased the current situation.

Prices have increased due to a fall in production on account of unseasonal rains in February-April. Farmers and traders are limiting onion supplies as prices firm up.

In Delhi's retail market, good quality onion was ruling at Rs 80 a kg, while the poor quality, small variety was selling at Rs 50 a kg, traders said.

"Onion is selling from Rs 25-50 a kg. We are daily getting 65-70 trucks carrying 950-1,000 tonnes of onions and expect prices to further firm up by Rs 5-10 a kg," said Rajender Sharma, onion trader and former Azadpur Mandi chairman.

Sharma said onions from Afghanistan were not getting a good response in the domestic market as their size was huge. Onions were being brought in from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

"We all know that even after floating the tender, the shipments will take time and hence prices will remain firm. Since the past five months, we all know that prices will firm and the government should have taken a decision then," said Sharma.

The government asked the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (Nafed) to cancel an onion import tender it had planned to float after earlier attempts failed to attract any bids. Traders didn't respond to the Nafed tender this year and last year as they were not comfortable with the conditions stipulated by Nafed.

"Traders will participate in the MMTC tender if they have taken into consideration demands of traders. If good quality onion from Egypt comes, it will help to control prices," said Danish Shah, a leading importer and exporter of onions from Maharashtra.

Agriculture ministry officials said MMTC's tender would be floated soon and they expected traders from Pakistan, Egypt and China to respond



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Those who ripen fruits with chemicals are terrorists: HC**

Calling fruit traders who use the carcinogen calcium carbide to ripen fruits "worse than terrorists," the Hyderabad High Court on Wednesday ordered a thorough probe into the use of this poison and pulled up the authorities for turning a blind eye.

Six days after the high court had asked the respective governments to conduct immediate raids in fruit shops across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, a division bench comprising Acting Chief Justice Dilip B Bhosale and Justice S V Bhatt appointed senior counsel S Niranjana Reddy as amicus curiae to find out more on the illegal practice and come up with a solution.

"For earning some extra rupees, you are putting scores of lives at risk. Such traders are worse than terrorists, killing generations of people with slow poison," the acting chief justice said.

Calcium carbide is a chemical compound whose two main products -- acetylene, a colourless gas widely used as a fuel and calcium cyanamide, used as fertiliser in agriculture -- are extremely harmful to the human body.

Farmers pluck fruits before they ripen naturally and ship them to the markets where these are treated with calcium carbide -- which acts as a hormone stimulator and thereby hastens the ripening process.

While doctors have said for decades that calcium carbide is a proven carcinogen which contains traces of arsenic and can cause cancer, kidney disorders and other neurological disorders, successive governments have done little to stop the illegal practice. Worse, many traders inject harmful chemicals (sweeteners) in mangoes, papaya and apples to make them taste unnaturally sweet.

On August 14, the court asked authorities in the twin states to immediately raid fruit markets after it took cognizance of a local news report which said most of Hyderabad's fruit markets were selling artificially ripened fruits.

Following raids conducted on three markets, the Telangana special government pleader A Sanjeev Kumar told the high court bench that inspection teams found rampant use of calcium carbide. "The inspecting officials found calcium carbide wrapped in papers and kept in the middle of heaps of fruits in the shops. We seized the carbide, sealed the shops and sent the fruits in such shops to labs," said Kumar. "The reports from the labs stated that these fruits are unsafe for consumption," he added.

When senior counsel P Gangaiah Naidu intervened on behalf of the fruit merchants and tried to defend them, the bench retorted that traders can even sell raw mangoes, leaving the job of ripening to consumers, but could not use calcium carbide. The only way to allow the fruits to ripen is thorough the natural process, it observed.

The bench also asked amicus curiae S Niranjan Reddy to study the issue and inform the court about the impact of carbide on the health of human beings and their nervous system, especially children.

"Till now we were asking children not to eat junk food. We have now reached an unfortunate stage where we have to ask them not to eat fruits also," Justice Bhosale said.

The bench also snubbed AP counsel D Ramesh who told the court that their inspections have found no presence of carbide in Andhra markets. The errant traders have to face penal action apart from suspension of their licenses, the bench said and directed the AP, Telangana as well as the Centre to file affidavits within two weeks detailing inspections carried out and steps taken to prevent the use of carbide in fruits.



## **‘Duplication a challenge for agricultural research’**

Detecting research duplication in India is a major challenge for agencies funding agri-related projects. Many project proposals can be combined with other ongoing projects.

Institutions should take a call on that before forwarding projects for clearance, says S M Viramani, chairman, national expert committee for sponsored and competitive grants, Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR). Dr Viramani was in Kochi to attend the two-day high-level meeting of ICAR scientists to discuss the status of various projects under National Innovation on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA).

He says that only one in 10 climate-related agricultural research projects are sanctioned. "However, most of the projects would ideally fall in the category of 'updates' of existing research and not 'innovations' which is what NICRA stands for. "I have been suggesting to all agencies that projects should be vetted by specialist institutions and cleared before it comes before us. This would help in checking duplication."

Virmani, who was associated with International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) for almost 40 years, says that agriculture research needs to come up with deliverables. "We need products and that too which can be climate resilient. Climate change is a reality."

Commenting on fears by scientists in ICAR institutions on likely stoppage of funding once NICRA gets over next year, he says, "There's no logic in the fears that funding might stop when the NICRA project gets over next year."

Funds will keep coming as all nations are giving it top priority. "The world is beginning to feel the impact of extreme events which is having a bearing on the food systems and health of man, animal and crop," he says.

There are over 200 scientists and associates working in the nearly Rs 600-crore NICRA project which was begun to find solutions to adapt and mitigate in climate-related issues.

"Food is going to be the biggest challenge in the climate change era."

Speaking of his experience as FAO official to China, he says the Chinese expect fisheries to meet 50% of the protein requirement in their country.

"Even Japan is investing in the Chinese marine industry. The entire planning is such that the fish will be caught in China in the morning and will reach Japan by evening. The Chinese have developed the cage culture industry and all the species that Japan wants will now come from China."

## **Water levels low in medium & small dams in Marathwada**

While different 11 major irrigation projects in Marathwada region are left with a cumulative storage of just 9%, the water situation is equally grim in medium and minor projects in the region.

Marathwada has the highest number of medium and small irrigation projects in the state, but a poor rainy season has reduced the water in these reservoirs and the levels are much lower as compared to other such dams in the state.

The 75 medium irrigation projects in the region hold just 8% stock, while the 728 minor projects are left with 5% stock at present.

During the corresponding period last year, these medium projects had 12% stock and the year before that they had 38% stock. The minor irrigation projects has 6% stock last year by mid-August, and 40% in 2014.

P S Tambi, assistant chief engineer at the Godavari Marathwada Irrigation Development Corporation told TOI on Wednesday that there was little chance of the region overcoming rainfall deficit this monsoon.

"The catchment areas of the dams have not received substantial rainfall although almost 80 days of the rainy season are over. The rainfall deficit so far unlikely to be compensated during the remaining 45 or so days of monsoon that are left," he said.

Tambi said the irrigation department would chart out a strategy for water distribution by giving priority to drinking water needs first, followed by agriculture and industry.

It has been more than a week now since the region has received substantial rainfall. As per the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast, Aurangabad and its surrounding areas will get just one or two spells of rain or showers during the next 48 hours.

The absence of rain has led to an increase in temperature. On Wednesday Aurangabad registered a maximum of 33 degree Celsius and a minimum of 24 degree Celsius.

As per IMD records, in the past decade Aurangabad has witnessed a highest maximum temperature of 33.6 degree Celsius in the month of August twice in 2009 (18th and 20th) and in 2014 (20th).

A further dry spell coupled with a rise in mercury levels could possibly break the record of the highest temperature in the month of August in a decade.

### **Centre at work for 4% agri growth, says minister**

Patna: Union agriculture and farmer welfare minister Radha Mohan Singh said on Wednesday the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre is committed to the welfare of farmers, and is working for 4% growth in the agriculture sector.

Singh said PM Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day speech, announced that the thrust of the Union agriculture ministry would be on working for the welfare of farmers and, accordingly, the name of the ministry has been changed to agriculture and farmer welfare ministry.

As such, the thrust of the ministry is also on dissemination of new innovations, including those related to seeds, agri inputs and technology, to the larger community of farmers.

He said the name of Regional Project Directorate has been changed to Agriculture Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI) whose ninth branch has been opened at Patna.

Singh, through remote control, also inaugurated the laying of stone of ATARI building at Patna.

The function was held on the premises of Vidyapati Bhavan.

### **Prime Minister Modi pitches for solar energy as ultimate solution to India's energy problem**



NEW DELHI: Describing solar energy as the ultimate solution to India's energy problem, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday called upon Indian scientists to work towards developing more efficient equipment which could revolutionise the entire sector.

His remarks came during his interaction with 30 eminent scientists from top institutions of India here at a gathering which was meant for discussing scientific solutions to the country's various problems.

The Prime Minister picked up the point of solar energy while discussing the issue of climate change in the context of the upcoming UN climate conference (COP21) in Paris.

Referring to the critical negotiations in coming days in run up to the COP21 in November-December, Modi also asked the scientists to come up with new ideas and concepts so that India can contribute to fight climate change as a global leader.

His emphasis on solar power assumes significance in the context of India's goal to generate 100 GW of electricity from solar energy by 2022. The country is expected to scale up its target quite substantially (almost double) by 2030. India's new goal will be reflected in its 'climate action plan' (Intended Nationally Determined Contribution - INDC) which is to be submitted to the UNFCCC next month.

In the course of his interaction which lasted for over two-and-half hours, several scientists made brief presentations on the progress made by India in different fields of science.

Appreciating the works done by the scientists, the Prime Minister called upon the scientific community to work towards solving the problems faced by India, including in the emerging critical areas of energy and water.

Describing the task of cleaning up the rivers, including the Ganga, as a "scientific project," he said it was a challenge to Indian scientists to come up with innovative solutions to achieve this goal.

In the area of healthcare, the Prime Minister said Indian science must address the unique healthcare needs and challenges that confront India. He mentioned the prevalence of malnutrition, and the disease of sickle-cell anaemia in certain tribal areas, as illustrations.

He also called for overlapping traditional knowledge with modern systems and said India must become self-reliant in medical equipment manufacturing.

Reiterating that while science is universal, technology must be local, the Prime Minister called for innovations in the agriculture sector that would lower wastage of agricultural produce, and eliminate entirely, India's import of agricultural products.

As an illustration, the Prime Minister mentioned that India produces most of the global production of castor seed, and yet other countries import raw castor seeds from India to add huge value, and supply the resulting products globally.

On the administrative front, the Prime Minister said that Indian science seemed to be constrained by a silo-approach, which should be ended through greater coordination, and establishing a multi-disciplinary environment for research.

The vice-chairman of the NITI Aayog, Arvind Panagariya, and principal scientific advisor to government, R Chidambaram, were among those present at the high-level interaction.

### **After cheese and fruits, miffed Russia now destroys flowers from Netherlands**

MOSCOW: In recent years, trade relations between Russia and the Netherlands have at times blossomed and at times wilted. This summer they went up in smoke. A week after Russia began burning and burying European food items like cheese and peaches deemed to have been imported illegally, Russian agricultural inspectors started torching flowers from the Netherlands that they said were insect ridden, in what has become known locally as the flower war.

While similar to the food demolition, which brought widespread outrage as well as satirical videos like the popular 'Death of a Parmesan,' the politics behind the flower war are distinct. The timing of the Russian crackdown on Dutch flowers has closely coincided with important milestones in the Dutch-led investigation into the shooting down last summer of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine, which killed all 298 people on board, most of them from the Netherlands. Russia denies any involvement in the tragedy and has made the unsubstantiated and, Western officials say, far-fetched charge that a Ukrainian fighter jet or missile downed the plane.

On July 27, the Russian agricultural inspection agency, Rosselkhoznadzor, said it had discovered 183 shipments of Dutch flowers infested with insects, including California thrips. That was two days before the Netherlands and three other countries put to a vote in the United Nations Security Council a proposal to form a tribunal to prosecute and punish those responsible for shooting down the plane.

Last Tuesday, after prosecutors from the Netherlands said crash investigators had found parts of what could be a Russian-made surface-to-air missile, Russian inspectors set fire to boxes of roses and chrysanthemums in two Russian towns.

## **Onion prices touch Rs 70 mark, set to go higher**

NAGPUR: Much against the prediction of traders, onion prices are spiking. The white onion, a preferred variety locally, is now being quoted at 70 per kg and even 80 in some of the shops. Standard grade of the red onion is selling at 60 per kg. The poor quality stock is fetching 45 to 50. This is equal to the level reached in summer of 2013 when onions had made headlines.

Two weeks ago, traders were expecting that the prices will recede or at least remain stable. However, all their calculations have failed. Stocks from main production centres like Nashik and Dhule are fast depleting and fresh crop is expected only in October.

This gap is usually bridged by supplies from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. So far, there were hopes that supply from the southern states may help contain prices. But the output has been low even in these states too, which has made the rates spiral.

Jaiprakash Wasani of Pankaj Traders at the Kalamna Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) said bulk traders auctioned onions at 45 to 50 a kg on Tuesday. "The inferior quantities also fetched a price of 25 to 35 a kg. Only 10% of the supplies are of the best quality, but the overall price hike has made even the lower grades dearer," said Wasani.

Cultivation for the October crop in Nashik and Dhule has not reached the optimum levels due to the dry spell. This means there is a likelihood of the arrivals from there being delayed in the next season.

On Tuesday, only five trucks carrying onions reached Kalamna market. Markets in Hyderabad are quoting a price of 45 to 50 a kg for onion, despite its proximity to the production onion growing centres of Andhra and Karnataka. This makes it all the more possible that rates will go up further, added another trader.

"The government plans to bridge the supply gap through exports from China and Egypt, which will also cost 40 a kg, making little difference," said a representative from Afzal Trading Company at Kalamna. The Pakistani onion is being quoted at 38 a kg, but fails to meet the quality parameters, say traders.

Potatoes, which were absorbing the impact of onion prices, too got a bit costlier this week. The prices inched to 10 a kg as against 8 in the wholesale market. The retailers are selling it in the range of 12 to 16.

Ram Bagle, a trader at Gokulpeth market, said he manages to sell onions, both red and white, at 55 a kg as he can offset the loss by selling potatoes, which have a good margin these days. However, not many vendors have the white onions, indicating the shortage.

Among other vegetables, tomato prices have doubled to 40 a kg in last one week. The average rate rules at 40 a kg for any vegetable, said traders. Some veggies like ginger are cheaper by a 20 a kg at 120 and coriander is now 80 a kg as against 150 over a week ago. Among the exotic vegetables mushrooms are up by 10 at 50 a bag of 200 grams due to a supply crunch.

## PRICE CHART

Vegetable-----current-----week ago

Onions -----60-70 ----- 50-60

Potatoes -----12-16 -----12-16

Tomatoes -----40 -----20

Ginger -----120 -----160

Coriander -----150 -----80

(Rates in Rs per kg)

### **Japanese company to help grow soil-less strawberries**

PUNE: A successful experiment, wherein Japanese strawberries were grown in information technology-controlled conditions in Pune district, has prompted Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to scale up the project.

JICA will provide a grant of 50 million yen (approximately, Rs 2.63 crore) to expand the project so that local farmers can carry on cultivation on their own.

" We have had a successful harvest from the Japanese strawberry plants. The next phase is to ensure profitability for local farmers. This year, we are experimenting with growing plants in a three-tier system so that we can triple the harvest. Next year, we hope to introduce the cultivation techniques to local farmers," said Shankar Jadhav, executive director of the NGO Institute of Cultural Affairs, which has partnered with JICA to bring the technology to India.

Jadhav stated that in a half-acre greenhouse, that was set up for the project at Talegaon Dabhade, about 15,000 Japanese strawberry plants have been cultivated. The plants yielded more than 22,000 kg strawberries last season. This August, 45,000 plants will be cultivated, in three different layers since the technology for strawberry cultivation involves growing them on a raised platform instead of the soil.

Hiroki Iwasa, an IT engineer, came up with an idea to apply information technology to soilless culture of strawberries after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed most farms at Yamamoto Cho in Japan. Iwasa is the chief executive officer of General Reconstruction Association (GRA), a company that helps reconstruct tsunami-stricken areas in Japan. GRA helped grow the first strawberry saplings in India at the College of Agriculture, Pune, in 2012 on a test-basis.

Jadhav said the main challenge in cultivating strawberries is temperature control. By means of a special cooling system, the temperature in the greenhouse is never allowed to exceed 30 degrees Celsius. The saplings, planted in August, yield fruits three months later and the harvest season lasts till February. Japanese strawberries are sweeter than the local variety and fetch a much higher price. " We sell them at Rs 500, per kg, so that they are profitable for local farmers. Moreover, we hardly use any pesticides and liquid fertiliser is used moderately," explained Jadhav.

" The set up costs approximately Rs 70 lakh. We are trying to understand if a group of farmers could set up a greenhouse and if the government can provide subsidy to the farmers. We are also in the process of inviting some investors to provide the capital while farmers provide the land," he added.

### **Wind generation goes down due to rain**



**Chennai:** A week after recording the highest wind power generation of this season, the windmills in the state have come to halt almost with them producing mere 7 MW on Wednesday morning due to widespread rains.

On August 11, wind mills recorded this year's highest evening peak load generation of 4144 MW and supplied 84.35 million units to the grid. But on August 18, wind power generation during evening peak load has come down to 127 MW and day's total energy generation stood at mere 3.83 MU.

"Last three days, wind generation has dropped due to rain. Lowest generation of this season was recorded on Monday when the wind mills produced mere 3.238 MU," Indian Wind Power Association chairman Prof K. Kasthurirangaian told DC.

However, he said on Wednesday, the winds have resumed after the rains stopped in the state. "Wind generation will increase and it will last till September end," he said, pointing out that



only last week, on August 11, the windmills contributed 29 per cent of the state's total energy consumption of 288 MU.

S. R. Ramanan, director, Area Cyclone Warning Centre, Regional Meteorological Centre, attributed the drop in wind speed to the upper air circulation over the Lakshadweep and adjoining southeast Arabian sea affecting westerly winds. "The change in wind pattern affected wind power generation. It is quite normal for wind going down on certain days and picking up on certain days," he noted.

Though wind power generation has dropped by 94 per cent over a week's time, it did not affect the state's power supply. "Wind generation has dropped drastically due to rain. However, the wide spread rain has brought down the power demand in the state too," a senior Tangedco official said. The state's daily energy consumption has come down to 268 MU on Tuesday from 298 MU on Friday.

## DECCAN Chronicle

### Chennai: Onion price brings tears to consumers



**Chennai:** As onion prices touched a three-year high of Rs 60 per kilogram in the city market on Wednesday, retailers and market experts opine that a respite in prices is not visible, at least for a month. In July, the price of onions in the city markets was Rs 25 per kilogram.

Onion produce from northern and western parts of Maharashtra, which constitutes 80 percent of the arrival to the Chennai market, has been affected by crop failure due to the late arrival of the monsoon.

In 2013, the price index peaked at Rs 45 per kg and in 2014 it touched Rs 50 per kg in August. In July 2014, 120 trucks arrived at the Koyambedu market, this year this has reduced

to 55 trucks. “There is a considerable drop in the number of buyers for the past ten days due to the rise in prices and we are told that the trend will remain for some more time,” said P.Latha, a retailer at the Koyambedu market. “We have decided to keep off from the big onions for the time being and are only buying the smaller sambar vengayam that is half the price of the bigger Nashik onions,” said a housewife who is a regular buyer at the central market.

On Wednesday, the wholesale price of onion at the Lasalgaon market in Nashik, the country’s largest wholesale onion market was Rs 48 per kilogram, a 30 percent rise from July. Traders

and market analysts attribute the reason to the sudden rise of excess heat, the late arrival of the monsoon, and late sowing, which led to the delay of the crop.

Meanwhile, officials from the Agri-Met department in Pune maintain that the monsoon is set to regain in a month after which production is likely to pick up. “This year, the monsoon arrived late and moreover there was a 50 per cent dip in the rains that led to the dip in production of onions in the west and northern parts of Maharashtra,” said S.V Jadhav, technical officer at Agri-Met, Pune.

## THE HINDU Business Line

### **Weak monsoon to impact five key crops, says Crisil**

Jowar, soyabean, maize, tur, cotton will take a hit; pegs farm sector growth at 1.5%



The deficient monsoon in Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh is set to impact output of key kharif crops including jowar, soyabean, tur, maize and cotton.

The four States contribute 34 per cent of the total foodgrain production, while jowar, soyabean, tur and maize add up 26 per cent of foodgrain and oilseed output, said a Crisil study.

The progress of monsoon and its impact on agriculture has taken a centre stage with the growth in non-farm sector stagnating for various reasons such as low corporate investment in new projects and slowdown in manufacturing activity. If the monsoon ends up being deficient, it would mark the second consecutive year of disappointment in the agriculture sector, the report said.

#### Weather woes

The seasonal deficiency in monsoon rainfall stood at 9 per cent for the June 1-August 19 period.

Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisil, said the frequency of weather-related turbulence is a major concern and is getting increasingly amplified because there are no holistic efforts to soften its impact. “We believe investing in Indian agriculture’s future has become economically and politically critical. The government needs to change the templates,” he said.

#### **Rising input costs**

Adding to farmers’ woes, the agriculture input prices have gone up substantially while that of end produce has dipped eroding realisations.

This apart, labour cost has increased in last few years putting further pressure on the farming sector which is yet to adopt mechanisation in a large scale.

The country may succeed in limiting food inflation like last year, but repeating the feat year-after-year is impossible without structural and holistic improvement in agriculture to address the vulnerabilities, said Crisil.

#### **El Nino forecasts**

Maintaining GDP growth forecast of 7.4 per cent for this fiscal, Crisil said any positive surprise on rainfall over the next 45 days can create some upside to in growth forecast. Crisil expects agriculture growth at 1.5 per cent on a weak base of last fiscal with the Indian Meteorological Department expecting the second half of the monsoon season to be worse than the first half. However, if El Niño distorts the timing and spatial distribution of rainfall, there are downside risks to our forecast.

Last year, a 12 per cent deficit monsoon rainfall coupled with unseasonal rains in March 2015 damaged the rabi crops, thus bringing down the overall food grain production to a three-year low of 251 million tonnes.

#### **GDP growth**

This has translated to a meagre 0.2 per cent growth in agriculture GDP growth in fiscal 2015, causing distress for farmers.

Earlier, global rating agencies Moody's and Fitch lowered GDP growth to 7 per cent and 7.8 per cent due to concern over weak monsoon.

### **Govt mulls increase in floor price for onion exports**



With prices of onion likely to remain stubborn till mid-October when the Kharif crop arrives at markets across India, the Centre is mulling an increase in the minimum export price (MEP) of the bulb.

The inter-ministerial committee on onions, that comprises officials from the ministries and departments of agriculture, consumer affairs and commerce and representatives from farmers' cooperative Nafed, will meet on Thursday to see if there is a case for further increase in the MEP.

MEP is the price below which exports are not allowed.

### **MMTC tender**

The step follows a directive to MMTC Ltd to float a tender to import 10,000 tonnes of onions to increase domestic availability on Wednesday.

A tender floated by the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (Nafed) earlier for the same quantity received no bids.

“Although the country exports not more than 5 per cent of onions that is produced and exports have actually gone down last month because of low international prices, raising the MEP has a signalling effect on domestic prices which are expected to fall,” a government official told *BusinessLine*.

## **Prices soar**

Wholesale prices in Maharashtra, the country's largest producer, touched ₹ 4,500/quintal on Wednesday at Lasalgaon, near two-year high. Onions are retailing on average at ₹ 61/kg in New Delhi, up 103 per cent from a year ago when it was sold at ₹ 30.

“Wholesale prices of onion in Lasalgaon market during August increased by around 159 per cent compared to previous month and around 117 per cent compared to August 18 last year,” said a National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) report released on Tuesday.

The Government had increased the MEP for onions last month to \$425 a tonne for all varieties from \$250 (₹ 16,000), following the increase in wholesale prices to ₹ 16/kg in June from ₹ 12 in May.

While onion prices fell immediately following the increase in MEP, they subsequently rose and have been increasing ever since.

## **Kharif arrivals**

While fresh arrivals of the early-kharif crop have begun hitting markets in southern India according to the report, it is unlikely to help consumers feeling the pinch over the last two months, since it accounts for 5-6 per cent of total kharif production.

“We hope that these take some heat off the prices but are not sure since the early-kharif crop is a small quantity. To some extent it may impact prices in southern markets but it's unlikely to help lower prices elsewhere,” RP Gupta, Director, NHRDF, said.

## **Sowing, acreage**

The NHRDF estimates that sowing is completed across most areas although expects lower coverage in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

“Sowing has been completed across most of the growing regions but there's been no rain in many of these areas. As of now, we cannot provide a precise sowing estimate,” said Gupta.

Area under the crop in 2014-15 is estimated at 11.81 lakh hectares while production is expected to be 18.92 million tonnes.

## **In Kerala, coconut oil loses ground to cheaper alternatives**



Palm oil seems to have emerged as a preferred cooking medium among Kerala consumers, thanks to its low price and large supplies.

Besides this, the consumer preference for other edible oils such as sunflower, rice bran, etc has pushed back coconut oil from the leading position in the domestic market due to its higher prices in the recent period, Thalath Mahmood, Director, Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA) said.

Quoting figures, he said the consumption of palm oil in the State has gone up to three lakh tonnes followed by sunflower, rice bran, while coconut oil is hovering below two lakh tonnes.

According to him, there has been a shift in the consumer pattern because of high prices of coconut oil. Most of the edible oils are available in the market at a price in the range of 50-60 per kg, while coconut oil was sold at a retail price of 125.

Meanwhile, the coconut oil market is in a steady line with festival demand pushing up the prices, touching 11,700 a quintal in Kerala while it was 10,900 in Tamil Nadu. Copra prices also touched 8,000 a quintal in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu, the figure stood at 7,800.

## **Government not for ban on rubber imports, rules out further duty hike**



The Centre has no plans of imposing a ban on import of natural rubber or increase import duties further despite strong demands made by the rubber-growing states of Kerala and Karnataka.

The Commerce Ministry will not recommend any further measures to check imports as the interests of rubber growers had already been taken care of by the import duty hike in May, a government official told *BusinessLine*.

Senior representatives from Kerala recently met officials in the Commerce Ministry while Dakshina Kannada MP Nalin Kumar Kateel gave a representation to Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman demanding a ban.

“Both States say that domestic rubber prices are down because of high imports. This is not the real situation. We have already acted once on their demand by increasing duties. There is no room for further increase,” the official said.

The government had increased import duties on natural rubber to 25 per cent from 20 per cent in May this year. The demand now from rubber growers is that either import should be banned or a higher duty of 40 per cent or more should be imposed.

The Centre’s contention is that the variety of rubber, called block rubber, that is mostly imported into the country is not produced in required quantities domestically. Block rubber is inferior in quality and cheaper than the RSS-4 variety produced in the country and is mostly used by tyre manufacturers who do not need very high quality rubber. “It is not fair to force tyre manufacturers to buy the superior variety of rubber that they don’t need by banning imports of the other variety,” the official said.

Tyre manufacturers had protested against the government’s decision to increase import duties on natural rubber in May claiming that it led to an inverted duty structure where the import duties on the finished product (tyres) was much lower than that on the raw material.

Low international and domestic rubber prices, resulted in rubber production falling to 6,55,000 tonnes, down 15 per cent compared to the previous year. Consumption increased by about 4 per cent to 10,18,185 tonnes, according to government figures.

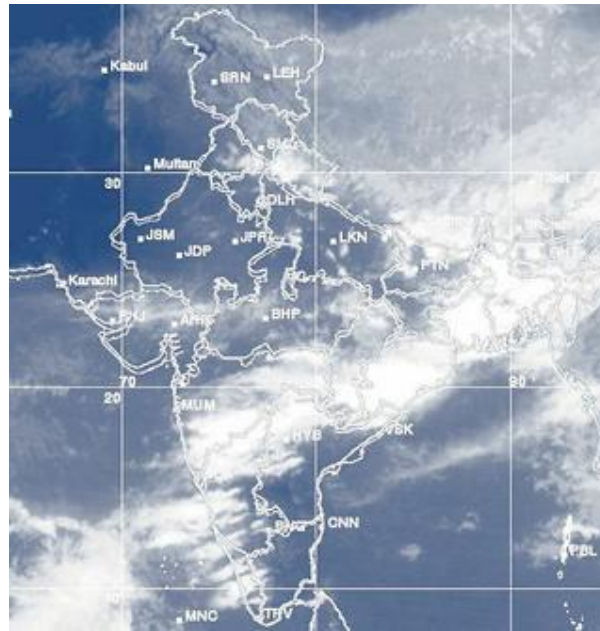
Rubber imports during the year touched a record 414,606 tonnes – up 15 per cent compared to imports in 2013-14.

### **Monsoon ‘ceases to exist’ over peninsula as winds turn over**

The South-West monsoon has been practically dead over the peninsula since the past couple of days with the winds blowing in from the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.

Normally the south-westerly winds fan in from the Arabian Sea.

During the past two days, the winds have been southerlies to south-easterlies originating from the Indian Ocean/Bay of Bengal.



### **Winds turn over**

Now, this is a pattern mostly associated of northeast monsoon. Whatever rain these contra winds triggered was accompanied by lightning and thunder activity, which is atypical of southwest monsoon.

This is the clearest yet indication how the monsoon has turned tail over large parts of South India and is now confined to fringes of East and North-East India and North India. This is attributed to the twin typhoons that have taken centre stage in the northwest Pacific. They have been redirecting the winds around the peninsula into the Bay of Bengal and beyond.

While massing around the peninsular tip, a band from these winds curved in to form a cyclonic circulation, which, in turn, has been guiding them as southerlies to south-easterlies into peninsular India. An India Met Department update said on Wednesday that the circulation has since moved west-northwest around the peninsular tip and traced it to over Lakshadweep and southeast Arabia Sea off Kerala.

### **Thundershowers seen**

The circulation and the churn around will continue to trigger thundershowers often accompanied with lightning along the west coast and parts of the east coast for the next couple of days.



The winds would gradually turn north-westerlies as the circulation weakens and moves away southwest into the Arabian Sea and becomes insignificant.

Meanwhile, the monsoon has been very active to vigorous over North-East India pummelling the all-too-familiar terrain of Cherrapunji with a massive 47 cm of rain during the 24 hours ending in the morning.

# Business Standard

## Modi announced Rs 3,094 crore for agri revival for Bihar



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced an Rs 3,094 crore package for rejuvenation of agriculture in poll-bound Bihar, which is part of his overall package of Rs 125,000 crore for the state.

Funds for the sector will be spent on up gradation of Rajendra Prasad Agriculture University to Central University, creation of a new Research Centre, development of fisheries, farmwater management, storage capacity, farm mechanisation, seed production systems and construction of new godowns for foodgrains.

Of this, work on the first two that is up gradation of Rajendra Agriculture University to Central University and creation of a new Research Centre has already started. Bihar is one of major producer of paddy, fruits and vegetables, but lacks a proper institutional mechanism to procure foodgrains from farmers.

"This is a positive step towards gaining the momentum in the agriculture sector and will provide the necessary boost.

The sector needs funds and thrust towards this is welcome," Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO, Sohan Lal Commodity Management said.

## THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

### **West Bengal aims to maintain crop production despite floods**

West Bengal government is taking all possible steps to minimise the damage during the ongoing kharif season, trying to keep total rice production for this year at the last year's level. West Bengal, India's largest rice-producing state, had produced about 159 lakh tonnes of rice last year. In 2014 kharif season, around 115 lakh tonnes of rice was produced by the state.

Chief Minister [Mamata Banerjee](#) has declared 12 districts in Bengal as flood-hit with heavy rain hitting the state in July and early August. Total area under cultivation damaged by the flood is 12 lakh hectares and over 80% of the damaged farmland is under kharif rice (aus and aman) production.

According to official sources, widespread damage to standing paddy crops occurred in Bardhaman, Murshidabad, East and West Midnapore districts.

"As many as 243 blocks have been affected due to the flood. However, we are taking every measure to ensure that our state does not suffer major paddy crop loss," West Bengal Agriculture Minister Purnendu Bose told The Financial Express. "We have issued advisory to every block, asking the affected farmers to go for replanting their paddy crops in the farmlands wherever flood waters begin to recede."

Bose said sowing time for Kharif paddy could be extended up to first week of September for this year. Sowing process in the state normally continues to mid-August. The minister said the government had earlier set a target that during the ongoing Kharif season 42.8 lakh hectares should be under under kharif rice production.

"The government is distributing seeds and fertilisers to the flood-hit paddy growers for replantation. If the farmers are able to replant the crops in most of the affected farmlands after water recedes, then I think the full production could be achieved," he added.

P K Majumdar, agriculture adviser to West Bengal chief minister, said the government was taking all possible steps to support the farmers to ensure that they did not suffer due to crop loss.

“We are making every effort to keep total rice production for this year at the last year’s level despite the major flood. The government is helping out the farmers wherever the flood waters are receding. And if some agricultural lands remain submerged and replantation could not take place there, the farmers would be encouraged to go for early boro paddy cultivation from November,” Majumdar added.

Usually farmers in Bengal start sowing of boro, primarily an irrigation-based crop, from November. Last year the state had produced 44 lakh tonnes of rice during rabi season. The government said apart from paddy, cultivation of vegetables, flowers, betel leaf (paan) and jute were also affected due to the heavy downpour. Total loss of agricultural production was estimated at around Rs. 1700 crore.

The chief minister put the flood damages in the state at Rs 30,000 crore and demanded Centre’s assistance for the flood-affected districts.

### **Dismal monsoons in Maharashtra to impact cotton, soya**

Dismal monsoons in Maharashtra are likely to impact cotton and soya in Marathwada Vidarbha region, according to top officials of the state’s agriculture department.

After solid start in June, there has been a complete dry spell in July to be followed by few spells of rains in the first fortnight of August. The impact is evident on the state’s farm sector. Although nearly 87% of the sowing operations have been completed across the state so far, officials have now begun thinking on the lines of planning for Rabi since it is too late to even go in for contingency plans to rescue the Kharif season.

The area under Rabi is therefore likely to increase this year by 20%, top officials say. Of the total of 134 lakh hectares, plantation has been completed on 117.23 lakh hectares till date.

According to Vikas Deshmukh, Agriculture Commissioner, although sowing operations have been completed well in time, the complete dry spell in July has resulted in wilting of crops for the want of rains. ” In June there has been 103% average rainfall which has dropped down to just 33% in July. So while the planting has been done the dry spell has affected standing crop and this will in turn affect overall production,” he said. This year cannot be compared to the previous year at all since last year after a lean start, monsoons began late in July and picked up later while the picture has been reverse this year, he said.

The scene in Marathwada region is pretty bad with reports of less than 50% rain, he said. “Seven districts in Maharashtra have been identified as less than 50% rain and the impact will definitely been seen on crops. These include Nashik, Solapur, Kolhapur, Beed, Latur, Osmanabad and Parbhani. Kolhapur traditionally witnesses heavy rainfall and has been able to make up because of its water levels.

Solapur is primarily a Rabi crop region. The impact will be seen on crops in these regions,” Deshmukh said. “Soybean, cotton and jowar have been impacted the most because there has

been a 35-40 day gap after the planting. In the last three days there has been some rainfall in Vidarbha region but this may not be enough for the standing crop and the impact will be seen soon," he said.

Although the department had issued advisories for farmers to go in for bajra, tur and maize because of the the absence of rains, the farmers did not go in for these crops and scientists at several agriculture universities in the state have recommended that sowing cotton and soya after July 31 is not an option at all since this damages the crop quality and results in pest infestation, he pointed out. About 16 districts have been identified with less than 75% rains and another 10 districts have had between 75-100% rainfall.

The Commissionerate has sent out teams to gather data and the first estimates which include the possible damage to the crop will be issued by August 31 and reports will be sent to the Centre, he said. He was willing to give out any damage estimates. Sources from the department say the delayed monsoon has affected nearly 6 lakh hectares.

The Marathwada region has been suffering from deficit rainfall for the last three years. This year's delayed monsoon has completely destroyed crops of soyabean, mung, cotton, and sesame seeds. The farmers are now dependent on rabi crops such as jowar, corn and soyabean. A three-member Central team is touring Maharashtra's rain-deficit areas of Marathwada and a report is expected soon.

This has been among the best seasons for both cotton and soya in the country so far with the total area sown under Soyabean crossing 111.859 lakh hectares this Kharif season, probably the highest in recent years. In Maharashtra however, the crop was sown in 25 lakh hectares down from 28.2 lakh hectares last year. The government has meanwhile set into motion the planning process for Rabi. "Rabi planning is underway done. First is the area that has not been sown during the Kharif season will be converted into Rabi. Seed availability with companies is being checked out. The area that has had planting but seen crop damage will also be converted into Rabi. Around 63 lakh hectares comes under Rabi plantation in the state and this area is likely to increase by around 20%," the Commissioner said.

Major Rabi crops in the state include maize, gram, bajra. In Konkan region, replanting of paddy is still underway. We are hoping for some good rains so that the Rabi crop can be saved. A Rs 25 crore fodder program is being chalked out for farmers.

Meanwhile the government is seriously considering artificial rain to combat the drought like situation in the state with Aurangabad being made the main base for operations. Trial run for cloud seeding was done in Jalna, Beed, Osmanabad and Latur districts of Maharashtra. Maharashtra agriculture minister Eknath Khadse had said that 200 hours of cloud seeding would be done and 100 hours of cloud seeding would be given free of charge by the Khyati Climate Modification Company. He said that experimentation would be conducted for 90 days and C-Band doppler radar would be pressed into service. The minister had said the

government's cloud seeding project worth Rs. 27 crore has yielded positive results in some of the drought-prone areas and it will continue till the end of September 2015.

### **Paddy cultivation to decline in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana due to delayed monsoons**

Paddy cultivation is likely to decline in Andhra Pradesh, one of India's biggest rice producing state and adjoining Telangana, because of delayed monsoons

With prolonged dry spells in both the states and no water in major reservoirs, a major portion of paddy being cultivated in 40 lakh acres in both the states are likely to be affected. The total cropped area in both the states is around 1.2 crore acres and the expected paddy production will be around 60 to 80 lakh tonnes.

Adding to the monsoon deficit woes, is the non-availability of fresh loans to farmers as they have been given default rating by the banks, pushing most of them into a heavy debt trap.

While both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governments announced loan waiver scheme in thier election manifestos, they are yet to repay the debt to banks to clear the dues of crop loans of farmers.

According to Kharif plans this year in Andhra Pradesh, paddy is expected to be cultivated in about four lakh hectares in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam districts. As per the traditional kharif calendar, the sowing has to be completed by June-end and the paddy nurseries are supposed to be ready by July first week. However, as the southwest monsoon rains got delayed, the current kharif works are yet to start in majority mandals.

Most of the mandals in the state have received deficient rainfall, resulting in poor or late sowings. According to Andhra Pradesh agriculture minister P Pulla Rao, atleast 325 mandals in the state registered deficient rainfall this year, while 345 mandals managed to meet the averages. The state has received 244.6 mm of rain as against the average rain of 265.9 mm, showing a deficit of 8%, he said. Majority of the mandals that received deficient rainfall were in Nellore, Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool districts. However, there seems to be some hope for the farmers when there were little showers during last week. The state government is ready with a contingency plan had the situation continued. The official machinery is ready with seeds for alternative crops and other required inputs, the minister said.

According the agriculture department officials, farmers could sow only in 17.53 lakh hectares, which is about 4 lakh hectares less than the area sown last year.

In Telangana, there was a deficit rainfall of minus 21% in this monsoon, which will lead to a massive shortfall in rice production. As against the 33 lakh tonnes of rice that Telangana produces during the kharif season, the output this time is expected to be not more than three lakh tonnes. As against the normal sown area of 41.43 lakh hectares, farmers took up cultivation only in 29.64 lakh hectares.

The state had faced a very harsh summer and deadly heatwave followed by a long dry spell in the first two months of the monsoon season. Incidentally, lack of rains has also depleted groundwater resources. The officials at the Indian Meteorological Centre say that Telangana has received 16% less rainfall than normal this year so far

### **Karnataka sees drastic drop in sowing for pulses, oilseeds**

Despite timely onset of monsoon and better than expected pre-monsoon showers, which augured well for Kharif crops, the sowing in Karnataka was below normal till second week of August. Between June 1 and August 12, the state as a whole has received only 73% of normal rains at 411 mm and has been classified under Deficit category.

Even before monsoon had set in, more than average pre-monsoon showers had cheered farmers, as wet soil and moisture helped them prepare their lands for early sowing operations. However, as monsoon progressed, many taluks have not received adequate rains, thereby affecting agricultural operations.

The state government has declared 98 taluks in 26 districts as drought hit and announced several contingency measures to tackle the situation. As a first step, the government has released Rs 200 crore to supply drinking water and dig borewells in villages.

According to provisional data available with the Department of Agriculture, sowing was completed in 4.46 million hectares, which is 86% of the normal coverage as on August 12, 2015.

However, the state as a whole has achieved only 61% of the total targetted area under kharif this year. The state government has set a sowing target of 7.3 million hectares during the kharif season this year.

The normal coverage during this period is estimated at 5.14 million hectares. Compared to the same period last year, the sowing is 8.6% lower. Last year, the sowing was carried out in 4.88 million hectares during the same period.

As on August 12, sowing was above normal in five districts, normal in 24 districts and below normal in one district. Sowing was above normal in Bangalore Rural, Belagavi, Chikkaballapura, Kolar and Mysuru districts. Bagalkote, Bidar, Chamarajanagara, Chikkamagaluru, Davanagere, Dharwad, Gadag, Gulbarga, Hassan, Haveri, Kodagu, Koppala, Shivamogga, Udupi and Uttara Kannada witnessed between 76% and 100%

sowing. The sowing was above 50% and below 75% in the districts of Bangalore Urban, Ballari, Vijayapura, Chitradurga, Dakshina Kannada, Mandya, Ramanagara, Tumkur and Yadgir. Raichur witnessed less than 50% sowing.

The coverage as percentage of targeted area is highest in case of cash crops followed by cereals, pulses and oilseeds.

Sowing for cereals was done in 1.76 million hectares, which is 51% of the targetted area of 3.45 million hectares. The normal coverage as on August 12 was set at 2.19 million hectares. Compared to the normal area, the achievement was 80% during the period. Sowing under pulses was carried out in 999,000 hectares, which is 68% of the total targetted area of 1.46 million hectares. As against the normal coverage as on date, the sowing was done in 89% of the area.

Under oilseeds, the sowing was done in 673,000 hectares, which is 59% of the target and 79% of the normal coverage as on date. The state has set a target of 1.13 million hectares under the oilseeds this year. The sowing under cash crops was done in 1.02 million hectares, which is 82% of the target. Compared to the normal coverage as on date, the sowing was 106%.

Karnataka grows rice, jowar, ragi, maize, bajra and minor millets under cereals. Tur, horsegram, blackgram, greengram, cowpea and avare are major pulses grown by the state. As many as 16 districts have witnessed 22% shortfall in rains this year. The state government has also given guarantee to state cooperative banks to raise up to Rs 1,550 crore loan from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard).

### **India-Africa conclave to discuss agri cooperation**

Being the biggest producer of foodgrains and horticulture crops, India could help the African continent develop its agri sector. To boost Africa's agricultural production, the Indian industry can help in training and transfer of technology as it imports pulses from the African continent, recommend diplomats from both sides, analysts feel.

When the five-day India-Africa conclave takes place in India from October 26, the two sides along with the industry honchos are expected to deliberate on the need for greater cooperation in agriculture and agro-processing, which would have a positive impact on the food security situation in Africa and India. According to Navtej Sarna, secretary (west) MEA, "Leaders of all 54 States in the region, and nearly 1,000 delegates including heads of government, ministers, government officials, business leaders and others, have been invited for this summit."

While the meeting between the heads of the government and states will take place on October 29, it will be preceded by rounds of interactions between the ministers and the senior officials.

Africa's farm sector is expected to grow to up to \$1 trillion by 2030, although this growth will largely depend on adequate technology infusion. According to officials, Indian companies could help Africa's agriculture sector in several ways such as: farm mechanisation; agro-processing and storage; investments in training and development of human resources for the farm sector, and employment generation; greenfield investments, local vendor development and agriculture exports to neighbours; setting up of agro parks in Africa; and setting up of horticulture industries, floriculture units and contract farming.

Cheap land and labour costs in Africa are attracting a number of Indian firms with interests in the farm sector. A large number of people in East African countries such as Kenya work in the cultivation of tea, coffee, corn, vegetables, sugarcane, wheat and fruits, among other things.

Given the huge landscape and diversities, both the regions have immense potential for growth. The recent OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook (2013-2022) projects that the developing countries are expected to be the leading source of demand for agricultural products.

Among the important initiatives for agriculture in Africa is the support programme for cotton-growing countries.

India has been extending support for the development of cotton sector in the Cotton Four(C-4) countries (i.e. Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali) and also in Nigeria, Uganda and Malawi where India is providing cotton technical assistance, support and cooperation India has already a well-established national research system, seed sector and testing laboratories in place. In this scenario, an enhanced Africa-India STI cooperation can play a significant role in facilitating African countries for building R&D infrastructure, working out necessary Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), sharing successful mutual practices and expertise, and supplying appropriate planting materials. India has already provided better sugarcane germplasm to Ethiopia for higher yields.

With the government acting as a facilitator to the whole process rather than as the main player, it is supporting the conventional new greenfield foreign direct investments, merger and acquisition purchases of existing firms; public-private partnerships; and specific tariff reductions on agricultural goods imported to India through the negotiation of regional bilateral trade and investment treaties and double taxation (avoidance) agreements.

The Indian private sector is the main vehicle through which investments in agriculture are being made in the African continent.

Many business enterprises such as Jain Irrigation, Karuturi Global, Kirloskar Brothers, Ruchi Soya and Renuka Sugars have established presence in several countries in farm and related



sectors. In addition, several new players such as Yes Bank and McLeod Russel are making forays into the agriculture sector in the continent.

Further, while boosting Africa's agriculture production, India too can meet its food needs with imports from the continent, especially pulses, where India faces a huge shortfall. Besides, the Indian industry could also help African governments to establish agriculture vocational training schools in their respective countries.