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THE HINDU

Heavy rain forecast in districts for two more days

Cuddalore to bear the brunt again, Nagapattinam battered

It may rain heavily in some districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on Saturday under the influence of the low pressure area that persists in the same region.

While heavy rain may spare Chennai and its neighbouring districts, places like Villupuram, Karaikal, Puducherry and delta districts are likely to get heavy to very heavy rain on Saturday. Several coastal areas such as Nagapattinam and Cuddalore are already battered by Thursday night's downpour. While Nagapattinam and Cuddalore recorded 9 cm, many other places such as Karaikal, Chidambaram and Marakkanam received over 3 cm.

The low pressure area over southwest Bay of Bengal over Sri Lanka and north Tamil Nadu coast prevails and this will bring rains over the weekend.

On Friday, several weather stations such as Vriddhachalam, Thirukoilur and Kollidam recorded nearly 1 cm of rain. Officials of the Meteorological Department said the State will get widespread rains on Saturday and one or two places in southern Tamil Nadu such as Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari too will get heavy rains.

Tamil Nadu has received 59 cm so far since October 1, much more than this usual share of 44 cm for the season. The seasonal rainfall may scale up more as there are few more weeks for the northeast monsoon to wind up, say officials.

Even while other parts are in deluge, some interior districts like Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga and Dindigul are waiting for more rain.

Heavy rain threatens samba crop



Samba, thalady paddy will get wiped out if the wet spell continues for a fortnight
With thousands of acres under samba and thalady paddy crop remaining inundated following heavy rain, farmers in the delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam are now worried over the prospects of seeing through this cropping season if the wet spell furthered for a fortnight. Farmers fear a certain loss in productivity while officials seek to play down the calamity.

In Thanjavur district, samba has been raised on around 97,500 hectares, while thalady paddy is standing on another 29,000 hectares.

As for samba, while an estimated 3,000 hectares have seen transplanting about 20 days back, a little more than 4,000 hectares have crops that have entered the ear head stage. In more than 90,000 hectares the crop is in the active tillering stage while on another 2,500 hectares the crops are in the flowering stage.

In Tiruvarur district, samba and thalady paddy crop have been raised on over 1.50 lakh hectares and the current rains and the consequent flooding of fields pose a threat to thousands of hectares where the crop is in the flowering stage.

In Nagapattinam district, samba and thalady have been raised on 1.29 hectares. The oldest crop must be about 80 days old and about to enter the flowering stage.

Young crops in around 700 hectares in the Talaignayar, Sembanarkoil and Vedaranyam blocks of the district are also vulnerable.

As per official estimates inundation has occurred only in a meagre 550 hectares in Thanjavur district and 65 hectares had suffered damage. In Tiruvarur district, officials aver inundation has plagued an estimated 10,000 hectares and in Nagapattinam district about 5,000 hectares have been flooded.

However, farmers' organisations in the delta allege that thousands of hectares in Sirkali, Tranquebar, Keezhvelur, Mayiladuthurai and Vedaranyam in Nagapattinam district, Kottur, Tiruthuraipoondi, Mannargudi, Nidamangalam, Kudavasal and Nanilam blocks in Tiruvarur district as also the Budalur-Tiruvaiyaru-Kumbakonam-Tiruvidaimarudur belt and Lower Anicut, Manjalaru regions in Thanjavur district have suffered severe inundation, adding that there was a concerted effort to hush up the extent of damage.

Crops submerged

“Standing samba and thalady paddy crops on thousands of acres across the delta region have been submerged in flooded fields. They are in various stages of growth and the damage to them will depend on the duration of water stagnation. While this fact is well known, officials are feigning ignorance of the inundation figures and fudge details. This is condemnable. Let them report after a proper field survey so that the State Government could get the true picture,” observes V. Jeevakumar, vice-president of the Tamil Nadu Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam.

The Revenue Department must coordinate with the Agriculture Department and the PWD officials to properly assess the damage. Instead of indulging in eye estimates, a proper scientific assessment of the damage must be undertaken after factoring in all aspects.

Farmers will only appreciate if the actual extent of damage, even if it is huge, is reflected in their estimation. Else, a devastation, a la Chennai, will expose the hollowness of their craft, aver farmers belonging to the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam in Nagapattinam district.

In Thanjavur district, samba has been raised on around 97,500 hectares

Bill Gates sceptical of solar, wind power



Says unless clean energy is made cheaper, countries like India will be in an 'impossible' situation.

Lauding India for doubling its funding for research and development of climate change technology, the former Microsoft CEO and co-founder of the world's biggest charitable foundation, Bill Gates, says technological innovation is the only way to fight climate change. "If we are going to make the cost of clean energy as inexpensive as hydrocarbons, or coal energy today, which will need innovations. That will mean you won't have to think about this huge trade-off between 'Should I be clean' or 'Should I electrify'?" he told *The Hindu* in an exclusive interview.

Mr. Gates was in Paris for the COP21 summit, where he launched a multi-billion dollar 20-nation 'Breakthrough Energy Coalition,' and has met Prime Minister Narendra Modi twice this week, both in Paris and in Delhi on Friday.

Backing India's stand on 'climate justice' or the need for the developing world to be financed for cutting emissions, Mr. Gates said that unless clean energy was made cheaper, it put countries like India in an "impossible" situation. "I can't comment on climate justice, I don't know what the definition of that is. I think while the premium cost of clean energy is very high, you force an almost

impossible trade-off between two very important goals. My belief is that if you increase the R&D that will lower the price of energy,” he said.

However, Mr. Gates indicated that solar and wind energy, which forms the bulk of India’s clean energy mix, may not be the most viable sources of electricity in future. In its latest plans, the government has announced it will raise its renewable energy production from the current 38 Gigawatts to 175 Gigawatts by 2022, 100 GWs of which would come from solar energy alone.

But Mr. Gates said the “intermittency” of solar and wind makes it unviable, compared with other sources like nuclear energy and new technologies for storage. “Energy has to be reliable, and when the sun isn’t shining and the wind isn’t blowing, you still need energy. So the whole system designed in terms of storage and transmission gets quite complex. Wind and solar can be a part of your mix, but you can’t do much with them without a storage miracle.”

Mr. Gates words are significant as it runs counter to the solar alliance of countries with hot climates, which Mr. Modi launched at the Paris summit

To the criticism of “philanthro-capitalism” that the Gates foundation funds programmes tied to technologies and companies wherein Mr. Gates has interests, including intellectual property rights, he said he finds the allegations “amusing”. “If you think the way to make money is to come to India and help people get healthcare, that is one strange way to make money,” he said. “The healthcare system in India is under-funded , and we give money away to it, not make money. We give hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to help children get nutrition. We don’t get some benefit back from that.”

Text of the interview

We will start with a question from one of our readers to ask, why Climate Change. The Gates foundation has gone from HIV to vaccines, and now taken up funding Climate Change...

The main focus of my work is on health and that’s the area in which were investing a lot of money, we have expertise, partnerships. We also do work in agriculture, in finances, but the biggest work remains health. If you want to uplift the poor then you have to ensure agriculture is not impacted, and that climate is conducive for farming. But my main focus, as you can see through our funding

remains on malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia. Climate change could interfere with uplifting the poorest so everyone should care a little bit about that too.

This week you have launched the Breakthrough Energy Coalition in Paris, spoken to world leaders about Climate change. How optimistic are you that there will be a sustainable, binding declaration out of COP21?

I'm no expert on what's going on in Paris. My whole life has been about innovation, from my work on personal computing to the IT sector, and even health and agriculture has been helped by people getting together [to innovate] and use that little miracle. In health, like inventing new vaccines, that's innovation. In energy, I feel what's best is strong innovation and that's why I was so excited that 20 countries including India and US and China agreed to double their energy R&D budgets. If we are going to make the cost of clean energy as inexpensive as hydrocarbons, or coal energy today, which will need innovations. That will mean you won't have to think about this huge trade-off between "Should I be clean" or "Should I electrify"?

We do want to speak about your focus on innovation, but you mention this trade-off. That is the basis for India's position at COP21, when it calls for 'climate justice', the idea that the developed world wants the developing world to cut emissions, while it is desperately trying for economic growth. Do you then support the Indian position? Can your coalition be a bridge for this?

I can't comment on climate justice, I don't know what the definition of that is. I think while the premium cost of clean energy is very high, you force an almost impossible trade off between two very important goals. My belief is that if you increase the R&D that will lower the price of energy. A poor person is buying fertilizer, fuel, materials. The price of energy is affecting their life in so many ways, we need to find anything that can bring the cost of that down.

The Breakthrough Energy Coalition (BEC) you have set up says: Technology will help solve our energy issues. What kind of technology and what kind of energy has the best chance in your opinion?

The beauty of the commitment at BEC is that a diverse set of things will be tried. We can try hydrocarbons and hydrocarbon sequestration, there is nuclear fusion and fission. There's wind energy, but that's very high up. Instead of solar energy to make electricity we want to look at making gasoline directly, so we don't have

the storage problem. So I would say we have about 15 different paths, so we should back all of them between the various countries.

But India has made it very clear. They want to increase renewable energy to 175 GW, of which atleast 100 GW will come from solar energy. Is India going down the wrong path then?

Well, wind and solar energy will be a big part of the mix, but the intermittency makes it unviable. Energy has to be reliable, and when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing, you still need energy. If you're running a factory 24 hours a day. So the whole system designed in terms of storage and transmission gets quite complex. You still have other substantial sources of energy that are reliable. So wind and solar can be a part of your mix, but you can't do much with them without a storage miracle.

Many also feel that the push for technology as you have spoken off is the wrong path...that it is in conservation, emission cuts that the world has to push instead of waiting for some elusive miracle, as you term it?

I don't think you can say to somebody who doesn't have lights or a refrigerator that they should cut down on energy usage. We want people to have these services, basically the world will use more energy in the future. Even if the US used 1/3rd of the energy it uses today by some... 'virtuous behaviour'...the increase in energy demand out of Asia will be far greater than a 2/3rds reduction by everyone in the US. So yes, we shouldn't waste energy, but we should also be realistic. When you speak of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to zero, you can't conserve your way there, you have to have new energy innovations in order to make up for it.

I do want to ask about a term your critics use, which is philanthro-capitalism...where they say that whether it is climate change or health, your foundation funding is tied to technologies or companies that you have an interest in...how do you respond to that?

The notion that we do what we do out of self interest is....you know somebody should and see if that's legitimate. We don't benefit in any way from this. If you think the way to make money is to come to India and help people get healthcare (laughs) that is one strange way to make money. I find it amusing someone can say that. The healthcare system in India is under-funded, and we give money away to it, not make money. We give hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to help children get nutrition. We don't get some benefit back from that.

Mark Zuckerberg says you were his hero... and looks like he is following with you his philanthropic announcement 99 per cent of his shares... you haven't always been complimentary about his priorities... what do you think of the announcement?

It's fantastic! Mark is starting at a younger age than I did, he will do things smarter because he won't make the mistakes I did. He is younger than me, but we do partner on many things, his commitment is phenomenal, he is a great person.

NITI Ayog report vindicates our stand: Nitish

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said

on Friday that the NITI Ayog's latest report which projects the State as the fastest growing with 17.6 per cent Gross State Domestic Product growth for 2014-15 has vindicated his stand and exposed the BJP's campaign that the economy was in poor shape.

"I'm happy the NITI Ayog's report has vindicated our stand that Bihar has been constantly making progress with justice. It has also exposed our adversaries who have been alleging that development has come to a halt in Bihar," he said.

He said: "We've been taking steps for the social sector or infrastructure to facilitate business. The rule of law was established... A plan was introduced for developing agriculture. All these steps helped."

Mr. Kumar said his government would sustain the pace of growth and "we'll be able to implement our seven promises for the development of Bihar."

Other leaders of the Grand Alliance have also called it "Bihar's true success story". "It is for BJP leaders, including [Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sushil Kumar Modi and [BJP president] Amit Shah to apologise to the people of Bihar," JD(U) leader Neeraj Kumar said.

Corporation faces shortage of Nilavembu Kudineer

Stock has come down from around 1,000 kg to around 150 kg now



Minister S.P. Velumani distributing Nilavembu Kudineer to residents at a function organised recently.

There is a shortage of the Siddha medicine *Nilavembu Kudineer* that was being distributed by Coimbatore Corporation to help people with tide over fever. The State Government had launched this programme in November.

The Kudineer decoction was being distributed at urban health centres and maternity centres – 36 in all – from 7.30 a.m. to 11 a.m. The civic body has also been administering the medicine to school students and members of the public through various camps.

Because of requests from various quarters for the medicine, there has been a sudden shortfall and sources say the stock has come down from around 1,000 kg a couple of weeks ago to around 150 kg now. The Corporation has not yet received its stock worth Rs 10 Lakh from the State Government's Indian Medical Practitioners Cooperative Society.

The rains in Chennai has delayed the arrival of the medicine. The medicine will be dispensed but in a rationed manner till the stocks are replenished.

A siddha doctor at Coimbatore Corporation says that the medicine has Nilavembu (*Andrographis paniculata*), Sandanam (*Santalum album*), Vettiver (*Coleus vettiveroides*), Vilambicha ver (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), Parpadagam (*Mollugo cerviana*), Peiputal (*Trichosanthes cucumerina*), Korakizhangu (*Cyperus rotandus*), Sukku (*Zingiber officinale*) and milagu (*Piper nigrum*). It has the

potential to treat fever, boost the immune system and address problems related to hormonal imbalance, etc.

Storage improving in PAP reservoirs

As a result of the steady inflow, storage in many of the reservoirs under the Parambikulam – Aliyar Project (PAP) is fast reaching the brim.

Though there are only intermittent showers in the catchments areas of the PAP reservoirs, the inflow continues to be steady though not copious. Storage in Aliyar reservoir stood at 119.30 ft as against the Full Reservoir Level of 120 ft, similarly Amaravathy had a storage of 88.16 ft as against the FRL of 90 ft, Thirumurthy had 47.14 ft of water as against the FRL of 60 ft, Parambikulam had 55.65 of water as against the FRL of 72 ft and Sholayar had 79.43 ft of water as against the FRL of 160 ft.

70% of farm households own less than a hectare

The average agricultural household in India earns just Rs 6400 a month and owns less than 1 hectare of land, new official data shows.

The National Sample Survey Office on Friday released data from its 2013 sample survey of 35,200 households in 4,529 villages across the country. India had over 90 million agricultural households — households which owned, leased or operated land and made at least Rs 3,000 per year from agricultural activities — with over 460 million persons in all, the survey found, making up 58 per cent of all rural households. Uttar Pradesh alone had a fifth of India's agricultural households, while the southern states had the smallest shares. The survey found that OBCs constitute over 45 per cent of all agricultural households.

About 70 per cent of agricultural households owned less than one hectare of land, and just 13 per cent owned more than two hectares. Most Scheduled Caste households had very small land holdings. “These results underline the fact that India is a land of marginal and small agricultural households,” the report said. Farmers in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Kerala were most likely to have very small land holdings, with around 90 per cent of households in these States owning less than one hectare.

On average, agricultural households earn just Rs 6,400 per month from all sources. Over 60 per cent of their income comes from cultivation, 22 per cent from wage employment and the rest from livestock and other sources. While all agricultural households derived part of their income from other sources, households with the smallest landholdings were most dependent on wage employment.

The average agricultural household from Punjab earned over five times its counterpart in Bihar.

Experts stress ‘workable’ means to achieve food target

ble” strategies for local areas is one of the key aspects to reach the food production target for the increasing population of the country by 2030, said experts at the 40th All India Agricultural Universities Vice-Chancellors convention.

The two-day event, hosted by Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU) in Tirupati, laid emphasis on creating with a road map centred on the theme – ‘Prepositioning Agricultural Universities for Target Food Production by 2030’.

The participants, under the aegis of Indian Agricultural Universities Association (IAUA), came up with a set of recommendations also. They said that integrated farming system involving animals and horticulture should be encouraged to replace mono-cropping.

V-Cs’ meet terms climate change a major threat to agriculture and allied sectors

Water in Periyar dam touches 140.5 feet

The water level in the Periyar dam on Friday rose to 140.5 feet with an inflow of 2,083 cusecs as heavy rains lashed the dam site last night. The dam recorded 42 mm of rains till 8 a.m. on Friday. Flood warning will be issued to villages in Kerala and Tamil Nadu situated near the dam once the level touched 141 feet. The discharge was restricted to 511 cusecs only. The PWD had already issued first flood warning on Thursday.

The Kerala State revenue officials had already alerted people residing at villages near the down stream areas of Vallakadavu, Vandi Periyar, Elappara, Manchumala, Upputhara, Anavilasam, Ayyappankovil and nearby areas to move to safer areas.

Inflow to the dam, storage level and other parameters were being monitored on hourly basis as per the direction of the three-member Supreme Court-appointed Supervisory Committee. The sub-committee had also been closely monitoring the situation and was briefing the SC Panel.

Rainfall was almost nil in the Theni district except Veerapandi that recorded six mm rain.

Meanwhile, farmers had intensified preparatory work for the second crop in double cropping areas of Cumbum valley. Raising nurseries was in full swing in many parts of the valley. Farm activities were also in full swing in ayacut areas of 18th channel and PTR channel.

Giji K. Raman from Idukki reports

A senior official of the Revenue Department at Idukki told *The Hindu* on Friday that the district administration had asked the Public Works Department of Tamil Nadu to increase the intake of water. The water from the Mullaperiyar dam was stored at the Vaigai dam in Theni district where the water level is now 65 feet. The maximum level of water in the Vaigai dam was 71 feet.

A total of 2,000 cusec of water could be released through the vents of the underground tunnel of the Mullaperiyar dam and. In emergency situation, in addition to the tunnel, water could also be released through the Erachipalam stream.

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 94.11 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 8,575 cusecs and the discharge, 500 cusecs.

‘Nilavembu kudineer’ given to 3.12 lakh persons in 40 days

The Siddha Medical College here, which is doing an excellent service during this monsoon by distributing to the public ‘nilavembu kudineer,’ the herbal concoction providing great relief to patients suffering from fever and its side-effects, has so far administered the herbal drink to over 3.12 lakh persons in Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts in the past 40 days.

Tirunelveli Siddha Medical College distributes concoction to help build up immunity



The common man had the chance of experiencing the efficacy of ‘nilavembu kudineer’ when the district was struggling to deal with chikungunya outbreak in 2009 and 2010.

When this fever caused excruciating pain, the concoction provided remarkable relief to the affected persons.

Moreover, the siddha practitioners claimed that the herbal drink also strengthened the consumers’ immunity against fever and cold, the common ailments during monsoon.

Having understood its efficacy, the State Government ordered the distribution of the concoction in government hospitals and primary health centres during last monsoon.

Without waiting for any formal order from the government, the Siddha Medical College here started distributing ‘nilavembu kudineer’ to the public before the onset of the monsoon.

After commencing regular distribution of ‘nilavembu kudineer’ in the out-patient section of the Siddha Medical College Hospital, it was then expanded to schools, colleges, public places, passengers, Collectorate etc.

The concoction was given to the visitors of special medical camps organised by various organisations and political parties during this monsoon.

“Since the response was so encouraging, we supplied the concoction for distribution at Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts where we’ve so far reached 3.12 lakh people. The most encouraging aspect of this special programme is that we’ve successfully reached the younger generation, who have started reposing great faith in Siddha formulations,” said Dr. Subash Chandran, faculty member of the Government Siddha Medical College.

Pink bollworm a nightmare for Bt cotton growers



Most of the crop in Raichur district has been destroyed by the pest

handasab, a farmer from Kadagamdoddi village in Raichur taluk, spent Rs. 2 lakh to cultivate Bt cotton on 15 acres that he had taken on lease. Before he could harvest the first round of yield, the entire field was destroyed by pink bollworm.

“I dread visiting my cotton field and seeing this devastation,” he told *The Hindu* on Friday. He is not the only farmer to face this problem.

Veeresh K., from the same village, who cultivated Bt cotton on 18 acres of land said the crop was destroyed by the pink bollworm. He incurred a loss of over Rs. 3.5 lakh.

Lakshman Gowda, another farmer whose Bt cotton on 10 acres was destroyed by the pest, has uprooted the plants and cleared a portion of his field to cultivate other crops.

Disheartening stories of Bt cotton farmers are unfolding across Raichur district, which is one of the major cotton growing districts in the State. The extent of loss is yet to be measured as no survey has been conducted. Cotton is cultivated on nearly 60,000 hectares of lands in the district, most of which is Bt cotton. Farmers started switching to the crop in big numbers in 2007-08 and there has been increase in acreage over the years since then.

Chamarasa Malipatil, State president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, claimed that around 40 per cent to 50 per cent of Bt cotton was destroyed by the pink bollworm this year, not only in Karnataka but also in Telangana.

Bt cotton is genetically engineered with a gene from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) and is toxic to the bollworm, a pest that preys on the cotton plant. There's also the possibility that the plant is being attacked by other insects. A team of agricultural scientists from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur (UAS-R) will be visiting some of the affected fields to study the pest menace.

“The pink bollworm, with its negligible population, was not a threat to cotton crop when the Bt technology was developed. But over a period of time, the worm massively increased its population and is now causing maximum damage to the crop,” said Dr. Jayaprakash Nidagundi, associate professor, Plant Breeding, UAS-R.

A.G. Shreenivas, associate professor, Entomology, UAS-R, pointed out that Bt cotton is vulnerable to climatic variations and attack by sucking pests and insects outside the resistance-claim purview. Farmers control sucking pests, usually found at the backside of leaf, by heavily spraying different pesticides.

“But we cannot control pink bollworm through pesticide spraying as it is inside the cotton boll. The cotton bolls look absolutely normal from outside. But, each boll is infected by the pink bollworm inside. The worm eats cotton seeds and thus prevents the development of cotton staple fibre around it well before the cotton boll opens,” explained Mr. Veeresh. He opened cotton bolls that seemed normal on the outside and showed this reporter the worm in each one of them.

Central team to take stock of drought

A Central team would be visiting the district on Monday to assess the gravity of the drought. The team would collect details pertaining to rainfall, net sowing area and crop loss in the current year.

Relief Commissioner Venkatram Reddy informed the district administration about the visit of a Central team and asked the authorities to make arrangements.

He directed them to prepare reports with details on drought and prevailing conditions, kharif crop, rainfall in the present year, net sown area in the previous year and the current year, and water levels in major irrigation projects and tanks. That apart, details of livestock and fodder availability, and special plans implemented in the last six months need to be provided to the visiting team. The official machinery is busy preparing a report on the drinking water position, besides working on the above mentioned issues.

The team would also enquire with officials on the economic conditions of farmers and farm workers.

The Central team will tour till afternoon and leave for Medak in the evening. The team comprising senior officials from Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Rural Water Supply, Irrigation and Health departments is likely to go around the Kamareddi revenue division.

According to authorities, a photo exhibition on the drought would be organised in one of the places the team visits.

Relief Commissioner Venkatram Reddy has asked the district administration to prepare reports with details on drought and prevailing conditions

No wonder trouble's brewing in tea gardens

The turmoil in Kerala which crippled tea production — a wilting industry, anyway — is a pointer to the lack of labour-inclusive policies. In an industry where nearly 70 per cent of production costs goes towards wages, it has been amply demonstrated how labour unrest can bring plantations to their knees.



The recent uprising in Kerala has dealt a body blow to the 8,500-odd plantations in the country. What unfolded in Kerala was the usual case of vested agendas prevailing over workers' interests, with the usual peace-brokering by the government. Unions have played second fiddle in the recent agitation. Workers' interests were not addressed in any fundamental sense; instead of their colonial-style, feudal relations with the management coming under the scanner so that the sector as a whole benefits, some token wage hikes were agreed to.

There can be no denying that the condition of tea workers calls for improvement in wages, safety, health, working and living standards. An industry with such a huge labour force cannot absolve itself of its commitment to labour.

Labour deserves, in addition to wages and other long-term benefits, a stake in ownership. The master-servant relation, a legacy of the British, has no place in today's context.

Learning from formal sector

Labour deserves a stake through adequate devolution of shares. It deserves at least a 25 per cent stake in ownership to begin with, with stakes going up linked to productivity.

There should be opportunities for vertical mobility of labour, with investment in education. Individual wages are too meagre for savings to be carried forward to subsequent generations. Therefore, life within the plantation needs to be improved for workers to continue there — for their sake and for the next generation. Opportunities to pursue alternative jobs within and outside plantations need to be encouraged.

Plantations should have adequate labour representation on the board of governance and the culture of all-male management should be brought to an end.

With some of the banks reserving 3 per cent of their annual profit to employees, companies coming forward to allot preferential shares at base price, offering 20-30 per cent bonus, 25 per cent dividend, biannual increments, and non-financial allowances, including schooling for children, there is no reason why tea industry workers should not get the same. The industry needs to understand the value of engaging labour in management conversations.

Employee-centric model

With blatant violation of labour standards, it is hard to understand how plantations obtain certification of various kinds and live up to global benchmarks.

Tea requires an employee-run business model not only to serve the larger interests of labourers but also to serve the companies' objective of incrementally increasing productivity.

With Munnar contributing to half the tea produced in Kerala, the tumult among about 13,000 workers in seven major plantations could take the agitation forward across the misty valleys in the country. Workers have not benefited from the buoyancy in tea prices in the last 10 years; therefore, the current lull in the tea market should not come in the way of a wage hike. However, a true change in labour-management relations is called for.

If the current status quo is not shaken, the working class is likely to leave plantations in pursuit of greener pastures.

DECCAN Chronicle

Tamil Nadu floods: We ensure damage minimised, says under-fire state govt

Chennai: Under attack over alleged non-performance in flood relief and rescue operations, Tamil Nadu government on Friday claimed "extra ordinary" efforts have been put in by various departments which ensured that the damage was minimised.

Senior cabinet minister and high officials of the government briefed the media about the rescue and relief efforts involving central and state agencies and said none will be left out in its efforts. Atulya Mishra, Chief Rehabilitation Officer, put the toll from various rain-related incidents since October 1 at 245 and said that it was not "astonishing" as reported.

Electricity Minister Netham R Vishwanathan said the opposition criticism, including those from DMK, were "politically motivated" and done with an eye on assembly elections scheduled next year.

"Opposition parties want to make politics out of this. They are doing vendetta and keeping an eye on elections. There is no iota of truth in the criticisms," he said when asked if the government had failed in the flood relief as alleged by opposition parties.

Housing Minister R Vaithilingam said that relief and rescue efforts were being done on a war footing.

Chief Secretary K Gnaidesikan said various departments of the state government had put in "extra ordinary" efforts to ensure that every affected person was attended to and ensure that nobody was left out in the process.

"In such a crisis, how can we do that (leave out people). We have been working 24 hours with police, revenue, municipal administration and others putting in extra ordinary efforts and every department involved in flood relief has contributed," he said.

He said for instance when the NDRF team arrived it is local authorities who had organised infrastructure and said that every official has been working to help the people.

"When discharge excess water from Chembarampakkam lake was increased manifold, the Chennai Collector and other senior police officials themselves had been on the ground monitoring evacuation activities."



Some relief for flooded Chennai as rain takes a break

A relatively dry spell in Chennai and its neighbourhood brought relief to the flood affected residents and rescue agencies as hopes of water fast receding went up. Mobile phone services, which had taken a severe beating following the heavy downpour on Tuesday, were partially restored even as other services such as ATMs continued to remain shut.

After a day-long dry spell yesterday, some areas in and around the city including Kodambakkam, T Nagar and Tambaram received showers in the night but Friday morning saw some bright skies with people out on the streets.

The break in rains resulted in a sharp fall in the discharge of waters from Chembarapakkam, Pondi and Puzhal lakes leading to reduction in the water levels of the two rivers that criss-cross the city.

Though the water was receding in many parts of the city the misery of citizens showed little let up as power remained suspended in many areas as a precautionary measure, officials said.

Safe drinking water continued to remain a luxury for many.

Milk and newspaper supplies were erratic and many citizens complained that vegetables were still being sold at high rates.

Transport services were also showing signs of picking up.

Limited commercial flight operations have started this morning from the Rajali naval air station in Arakkonam near Chennai.

Train services on the suburban Chennai Arakonnam stretch were partially restored. Southern Railway officials said they were yet to take a call on restoration

of services on the other busy Tambaram-Chennai beach route which covers both business and residential areas.

The Chennai Metro line continued to witness enhanced patronage in the wake of suspension of bus and rail transport.

With a focus on intensifying relief and rescue operations to provide aid to rain-hit people of Chennai and adjoining areas, the NDRF has bolstered its strength by adding ten more teams for the job and has rescued 9,000 people till now.

Director General of the force, O P Singh, said his teams are expected to rescue and reach out to more number of people today as water has receded in some places.

“We have rescued about 9,000 people till now. Ten more teams from Pune and Patna have been mobilised to Tamil Nadu. We expect to have better results today as things have improved and communication is enhanced,” he said.

Five teams arrived early this morning for the task at Chennai, an official NDRF spokesperson said.

The force already has 30 teams, with 40 personnel in each, working in the areas of the Tamil Nadu capital and adjoining Puducherry.

The NDRF has also pressed in about 110 inflatable and other kinds of boats and numerous sets of buoys and life jackets with the rescue and relief teams so that the needy and the marooned get help. The force has also activated helpline number at its control room here— 011-24363260, 09711077372.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa and Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) had yesterday conducted separate aerial surveys of the areas battered by the unprecedented rains that have killed 269 people till now.

After their separate aerial surveys, Jayalalithaa had yesterday met the Prime Minister and urged for an immediate relief of Rs 5,000 crore, to which he responded by announcing Rs 1000 crore more for relief work in Tamil Nadu.

This will be in addition to the Rs 940 crore already announced by the Centre.

A meeting of the Crisis Management Group (CMG) is also scheduled to be held under the Chairmanship of Union Home Secretary Rajiv Mehrishi to review the preparedness of the agencies along with officials of Ministries of Defence, Food, Railways, Agriculture, Health, Department of Telecommunications, and National Disaster Management Authority.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Heavy rain over for now, says Met

CHENNAI: The northern districts of Tamil Nadu, including Chennai, will continue to receive intermittent showers for the next couple of days but there will be no heavy rain. The trough which led to heavy showers on December 2 has moved towards the south and is now at Pamban in Ramanathapuram district. This may bring much-needed asked-for relief to the northern districts.

"The low pressure area on Wednesday moved over to southwest Bay of Bengal and Sri Lanka, off Tamil Nadu coast. Due to this, there will not be heavy rain in the northern districts but once in a while there will be some showers in Chennai and nearby districts," said a senior official of the Met department.

"Chennai, especially the southern areas of city, will receive rainfall but it will be only for a few hours. Rainfall will again start on December 5 night but it will not be for more than 1 hour at a time. Even this will stop on December 7 morning," Skymet weather chief meteorologist Mahesh Palawat told TOI.

State's delta region receives heavy rain

Trichy: Widespread rain lashed across the delta region from midnight on Sunday, flooding paddy fields in Nagapattinam, Perambalur and Thanjavur districts. However, crops have suffered no significant damage. In Thanjavur a dilapidated house collapsed.

While the low pressure formed off the coast of Chennai has weakened, a similar system formed near the Andaman Sea is more likely to bring yet another round of rain across Tamil Nadu, especially the coastal regions, for the next few days.

Excess water is being drained out from the fields. While there is no significant damage to the crops due to the rain, farmers fear invasion of insects due to stagnation of rain water.

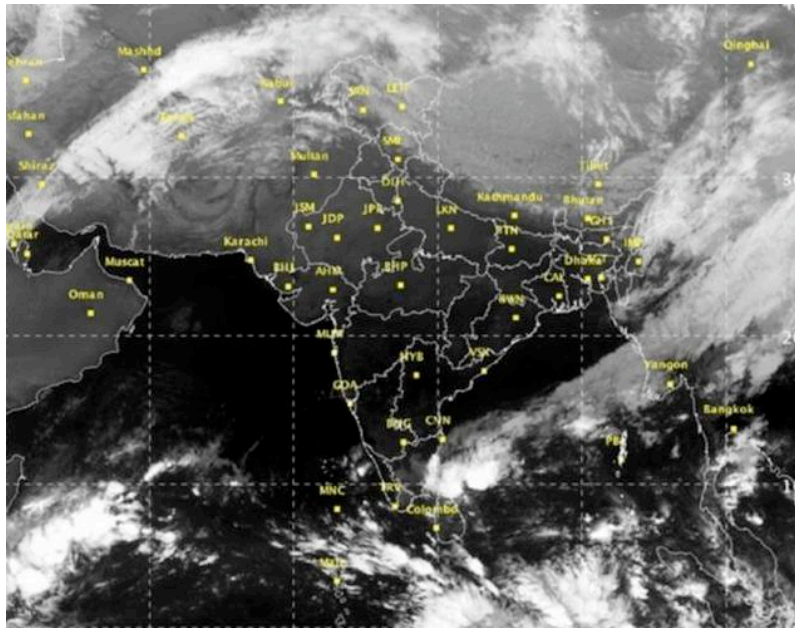
The rain, which started in the evening on Sunday, continued throughout the night in the delta region. Thanjavur receiving 82 mm; Papanasam got 75 mm, followed by Ayyampettai with 63 mm and Neivasal Thenpathi 70 mm

Overnight rain in Perambalur district amounted to 53 mm, while Alathur received 32 mm. Nagapattinam remained dry throughout the day on Monday. There was light rain after 7pm.

There was widespread rain across Trichy city. A total rainfall of 756 mm rain was received in the Trichy region

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Wet spells may revisit Chennai for 10 more days, says US agency



Satellite pictures on Friday evening showed clouds moving towards South-East Tamil Nadu coast and adjoining North Sri Lanka even as rain-hit Chennai recorded fresh showers amounting to 2 cm.

India Met Department had kept Chennai 'under watch' for two days from Friday but most of the excess rain was recorded to its South as winds turned north-easterly from easterly.

The Chennai Met Centre said that the North-East monsoon has been active over Coastal Tamil Nadu during the 24 hours ending Monday morning.

'Low' persists

Rainfall occurred at many places over coastal Tamil Nadu. Isolated rainfall occurred over interior Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and south interior Karnataka.

Chief amounts of rainfall recorded in centimetres are Nagapattinam and Cuddalore-9 each; Pondicherry-8; Cheyyur and Karaikal-7 each; Sethiathope and Sirkali-6 each; and Panruti, Anaikaranchatram, Parangipettai, and Marakkanam-5 each.

The causative low-pressure area persisted over South-West Bay of Bengal and adjoining Sri Lanka off the Tamil Nadu coast.

Rain watch

In an extended forecast, the Met said that rain or thundershowers would continue to lash many places over South Peninsular India and at a few places along the West Coast for another week (until December 11). The US Climate Prediction Centre has maintained a rain watch that covers the entire area from Chennai to the South of Tamil Nadu coast, the peninsular tip (Kanyakumari) and North Sri Lanka during the week ending Wednesday.

It is again Chennai and neighbourhood which have been put on notice for rain watch during the week that follows i.e. from December 10 to 16.

Cyclonic whirl

As for the short-term outlook for four days beginning tomorrow (Saturday), the following is the assessment of the Met Department.

Saturday: Heavy rain at isolated places over Coastal Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Sunday: Heavy rain at isolated places over Coastal Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala.

Monday: Heavy rainfall at isolated places over Kerala, Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Tuesday: Heavy rainfall at isolated places over Lakshadweep.

The movement of the rain belt from South-East Tamil Nadu and adjoining Sri Lanka around the peninsular tip and onward to the Lakshadweep Sea tracks that of the low-pressure area and its embedded cyclonic circulation and the larger trough that hosts the twosome.

In this manner, the rains should dry up over Tamil Nadu but the southward movement of an anti-cyclone from North India is seen squeezing available easterly winds of its moisture over North Tamil Nadu.

This is what should continue to fall as rain over Chennai and its neighbourhood.

Caught between Monsanto and States, cottonseed industry seeks Centre's

With no end in sight to the pricing tussle with Mahyco-Monsanto – the Bt cotton technology provider – the seed industry has approached the Centre to intervene and resolve the knotty issue. Invoking the Patent Act, Competition Act or the Environment Protection Act, the industry asked the government to help fix the price of cottonseed, including the royalty fee (or trait value).

High royalties

The industry feels that only the Centre could bail them out from the ordeal. The State governments of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have been issuing orders at the beginning of the kharif season, fixing the seed price, including the trait value component. This, however, has consistently been opposed by Mahyco-Monsanto which argued that governments could not fix it.

“Due to high royalties fixed by MMBL on its Bt cotton technology, the States intervened by referring the issue to Monopolies and Restrictive Trade practices and invoked the provisions in the Seed (Control) order of 1983 to regulate the cottonseed prices. They promulgated legislations to regulate the Bt cotton seed prices, specifically to bring down high royalty,” Kalyan B Goswami of National Seed Association of India (NSAI), said.

Issues faced

In an appeal to the Union Minister for Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh, the NSAI executive pointed out the issues that dogged the industry. Armed with legislations, the State governments have not raised the MRP of cottonseed despite sharp increase in production costs. “The MRP remained stagnant between 2006 and 2010 and again between 2011 and 2015. In a span of 10 years, the price went up only once,” he said.

The second issue the industry raised was the contracts between the seed firms and MMBL for accessing Bt technology. “The States have never shown interest in recognising the contracts and licences. They haven’t considered the trait values mentioned in the contracts. We have no other go but to obey their orders as they are backed by legislations. The MMBL, however, insist that we obey the contractual obligations,” the industry said.

The association pointed out at a host of petitions in various States by seed firms and MMBL with State governments as an important respondent. These cases were in different stages of hearing. This, the association argues, is impacting the business, leaving it in constant state of uncertainty.

“We have asked MMBL to have a relook at the accounts from 2010 keeping in view the States’ directive on reducing the trait value. It moved the court, asking us to pay the full payment in contravention to the state legislations,” it said.

“This has put us in a fix. On one hand, we are burdened with increased cost of productions, on the other we are faced with uncertainty. The Central government must intervene to resolve the issue,” a seed industry representative said.

Rabi sowing crosses 370 lakh ha, but still lower than last year

(Rabi Acreage in Lakh hectares as on Dec 4)

Widening Gap		
	This Year	Last Year
Wheat	152.56	208.64
Pulses	100.42	106.93
Coarse Cereals	46.71	43.04
Oilseeds	61.84	69.01
Rice	8.7	11.15
Total	370.28	436.77



Source: Ministry of Agriculture

Sowing of Rabi crop continued to be lower than last year, with preliminary reports from the States placing the total area sown at 370.28 lakh hectares (lh), as on December 4, against 438.77 lh in the same period last year. Sowing/transplanting of wheat was done in only 152.56 lh compared with 208.64 lh in the same period last year.

Weather woes

The shortfall in acreages was mainly on account of poor soil moisture levels due to a weak monsoon and delayed harvest of kharif crops such as rice and sugarcane in major producing States such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

While States like Rajasthan have seen an increase in wheat acreage, lower area has been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Haryana.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said on Thursday that both rabi and kharif crops had been affected for the third straight season due to the adverse weather conditions such as drought and floods.

Pulses were sown on 100.42 lh (106.93 lh) last year. Gram or chana, the major rabi season pulses crop, has been sown on 69.25 lh, marginally higher than corresponding last year's 68.92 lh. Acreages of other pulses such as lentil, fieldpea and urad have been lower than last year.

Coarse cereals have been sown marginally higher on 46.71 lh (43.04 lh) with jowar accounting for a significant chunk of it. Jowar has been planted on 34.09 lh compared to 27.78 lh in the corresponding period last year.

Sowing/transplantation of rice stood at 8.70 lh compared with 11.15 lh in the same period last year.

The area sown under oilseeds was lower at 61.89 lh against 69.01 lh last year. Acreages under rapeseed-mustard continued to be lower at 54.17 lh (60.91 lh). The slower pace of sowing has triggered concerns among the edible oil industry. "Poor storage and moisture levels have impacted the plantings. Though sowing will go on for a couple of more, we expect the overall acreages to be lower than last year thereby impacting the output. It is too early to quantify the impact," said BV Mehta, Executive Director, Solvent Extractors Association of India.

More imports feared

Mehta said a lower output would trigger further increase in imports of edible oil. Staring at a higher import prospect, the SEA has urged the government to allow imports of oilseeds, which would not only benefit the extraction industry but also the feed makers.

Oilmeal exports down 41% on low demand

Oilmeal exports dipped 41 per cent in November to 1.12 lakh tonnes (lt) against 1.89 lt in the same period last year.

The sharp fall in exports was attributed to disparity in prices with shipments from India costing more than that of competing countries, said the Solvent Extractors Association of India in a statement on Friday.

In the first eight months of this fiscal, exports were down 38 per cent at 8.95 lt (14.52 lt).

Exports of soyabean meal hit a historical low of 55,889 tonnes in the first eight months of this financial year against 2.50 lt logged in the same period last year. Similarly rapeseed meal exports also reduced to one-third over last year.

Low capacity utilization

The industry is passing through tough time and many plants have either shut down or operating at very low capacity due to shrinking margins. The capacity utilisation of these oil mills are at the lowest level, said BV Mehta, Director, SEA. High soyabean prices and fall in profit margin have led to lower soyabean crushing and fall in edible oil supply and meal export, he said.

Price disparity

Besides disparity in prices, exports to Japan, Iran, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan and Vietnam drastically reduced due to intense competition from China and Argentina.

India also lost Vietnam market for meal as it enhanced soyabean crushing by importing bean from other countries, the association said.

Iran shifted soyabean meal buying from India to other origins after sanctions were lifted. Currently India is outpriced by \$100 a tonne against other origins in Iranian market, the association said.

Japan was a big importer of Indian non-GMO soybean meal. It, however, now started using genetically modified soyabean meal from other countries, SEA added.

South Korea was a major importer of oilmeal from India.

Between April-November, oilmeal exports to South Korea were reported at 5.76 lt (5.68 lt) and it consisted of 2.53 lt of rapeseed meal, 3.22 lt of castor meal and 905 tonnes of soyabean meal.

Govt to pilot direct payments with Maharashtra cotton farmers

For the first time ever, the government plans to try out its Direct Payment Deficiency System for paying minimum support with farmers growing cotton at Hingenghat taluka in Maharashtra.

The new system allows the government to pay farmers only the difference between the market price and minimum support price announced at the start of the season.

How it works?

For instance, if the cotton price falls to ₹3,500 a quintal and the MSP is ₹3,750, the government will pay only ₹250 a quintal. Earlier, the government used to buy the cotton by paying the MSP price of ₹3,750 which used to create artificial short supply in market. The government body also incurs huge cost on interest and storage of cotton procured.

The price determined at the APMC will be considered as the day's market price under the scheme.

Farmer have to submit a copy of APMC receipt as proof for selling below MSP, his land records and estimated yield of his farm as record to avail the benefit under the Direct Payment Deficiency System.

Cost saving

Speaking to media here on Friday, Kavita Gupta, Textile Commissioner, said though the new system would result in some cost saving for the government, it is primarily meant to avoid unintended disruption in supply caused by MSP operations.

Incidentally, she said, all the farm land records in Maharashtra are computerised and yield estimate provided by farmers will ensure that the same cotton is not circulated to avail MSP benefits.

In the last season ended October 2015, the government procured 23.24 lakh bales (of 170 kg) worth ₹3,556 crore under MSP in Maharashtra. In all, the total MSP procurement across the country was at 86 lakh bales.

However, Gupta said, the cotton procurement may be lower this year as the prices are holding firm above the MSP due to lower output estimate and firm demand.

Higher output seen

Despite a deficient monsoon, cotton output in Maharashtra is expected to be higher this season at 80 lakh bales against 78 lakh bales achieved last year due to introduction of high density technology in Vidharba. It helps in improving yield and mechanisation of cotton picking, said Gupta.

The yield in Maharashtra is expected to go up to 355.65 kg/hectare against 316.32 kg last year. The area under cotton cultivation has gone down to 38.24 lakh hectares (41.92 lh) as farmers' realisation was affected due to weak cotton prices last season.

Meanwhile, India will be hosting the annual International Cotton Advisory Committee meeting between December 6 and 11 in Mumbai after a gap of 11 years.



Rabi sowing down 15% at 370 lakh hectare so far

Though the rabi sowing activities have picked up pace in the last couple of weeks, overall acreage under the winter-sown crops has declined by more than 15% from a year ago period, data released by the ministry of agriculture said on Friday. The total area sown under rabi crops is reported at 370 lakh hectare till Friday against 438 lakh hectare reported a year ago.

Last week only 317 lakh hectare was under winter crops.

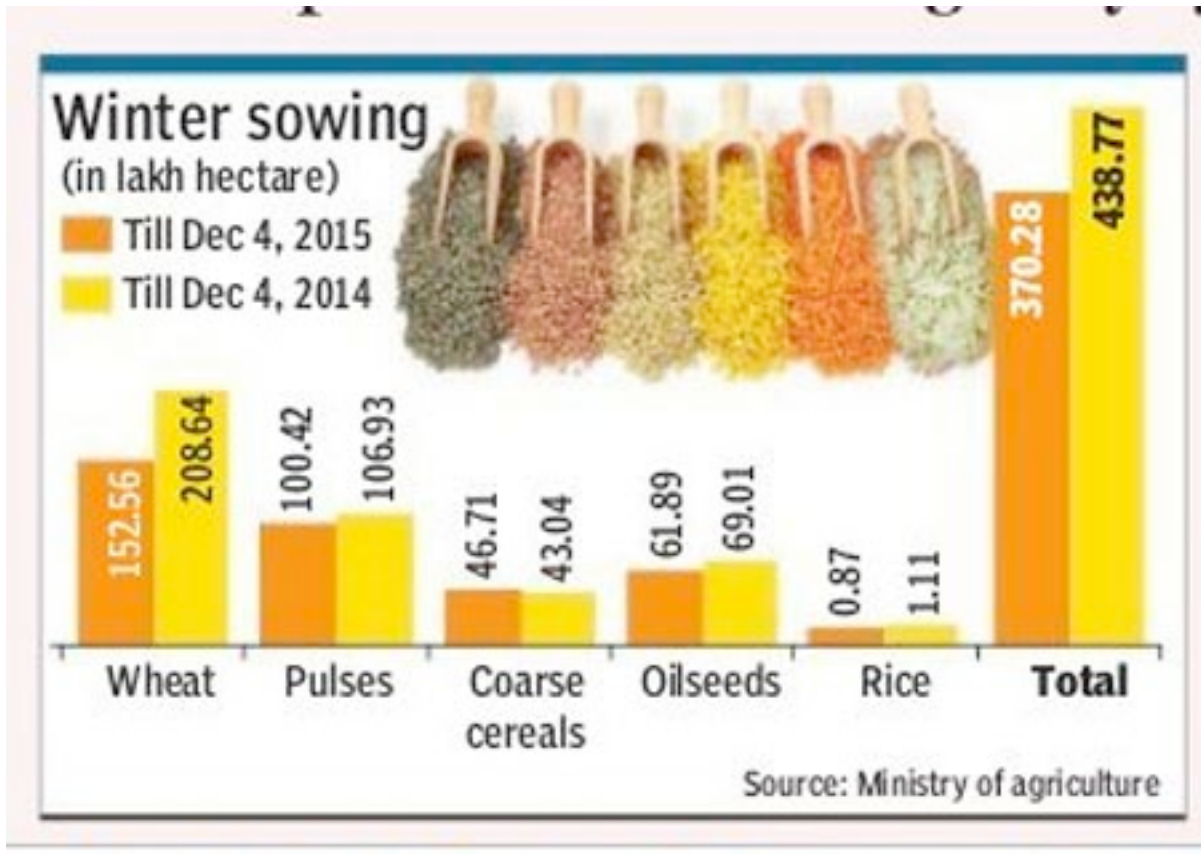
The government is aiming at increasing rabi grain production by 5% to offset an estimated 2% drop in kharif grain output and rabi sowing in the next few weeks would be crucial for the output, an agriculture ministry official said.

However, the area under pulses — which witnessed a sharp price rise forcing the government to undertake a massive anti-hoarding drive — has declined marginally by around 6.08% until Friday from a year before. While coarse cereal sowing has jumped by more than 8.5% compared to last year, the wheat sowing picked up pace this week. However, the wheat sowing is still less by 26% compared to a year ago period.

Most of the key growing states — Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab — have reported lesser areas compared to last year. Agriculture ministry officials say that the rabi sowing would continue till December-end.

Agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh on Thursday had stated that sowing of rabi crops like wheat has been affected due to both drought and floods this year. “Agricultural crops have been affected for the third straight season due to adverse weather conditions in last 18 months,” Singh said. In 2014, kharif (summer) crops were affected due to 12% deficit rains, while rabi (winter) crops like wheat got damaged due to unseasonal rains and hailstorm.

“Due to delay in kharif harvesting because of deficient monsoon, the rabi sowing has been on a slower note,” KV Prabhu, deputy director, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) told FE.



The rabi season accounts for roughly two-thirds of the country's annual pulse production, and any plunge in winter output can worsen price pressure in the protein-rich staple, which witnessed a double-digit rise in the Wholesale Price Index for nine months now.

Prices of tur or arhar — which is grown primarily in the kharif season — hit a record Rs 200 per kg last month before easing to a large extent, as output of the pulse variety had dropped over 12% in 2014-15 from a year earlier.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

North-East monsoon: Water level up in Mullaiperiyar dam, spurs farming



THENI: The water level in the Mullaiperiyar dam has risen to within inches short of its maximum point of 142ft with the heavy North-East monsoon rainfall spurring on agricultural activities in five districts of Tamil Nadu even as it brings normal life to a standstill in the state.

The water level in the dam is now touching a record 140.50ft and farming activity stands to benefit in the five Tamil Nadu districts of Madurai, Theni, Ramanathapuram, Dindigul and Sivaganga.

Theni district collector Venkatachalam told PTI that water had been released from both the Mullaiperiyar and Vaigai dams and other ones, including the Manjalaru, Sothuparai, and Shanmuganathi dams, taking into consideration the conduct of farm activities, which are in full swing.

Water levels in other dams stood as follows: Manjalaru 56.50ft (max 57ft); Sothuparai 126.28ft (max 126.29ft); Shanmuganathi 52.60ft (max 52.55ft). The entire inflow into the dams -- which stood at 149 and 47 cusecs -- at Manjalaru and Sothuparai was being discharged, he said.

In Shanmuganathi, the inflow was 3 cusecs but the discharge was being maintained at 10 cusecs, added Venkatachalam.

The collector, meanwhile, said that the Idukki district administration in neighbouring Kerala had issued a flood warning for the Venkadu, Sappathu and Vandiperiyar villages.

The Mullaiperiyar dam though was quite safe and strong, Venkatachalam said, adding that 25 government officials have been put on alert to deal with any eventuality arising out of the rains.

Farm operations have started in full swing in the southern districts of TN and a bumper crop is expected by February end, officials said against the backdrop of torrential downpours in the state which have led to the loss of more than 200 lives.

The Madurai district administration had estimated the damage caused by the floods to be at Rs 16.5 crore.

According to an official statement, the district rural development agency had sought Rs 9.89 crore, highways Rs 1.41 crore and city corporation Rs 2.16 crore for flood repair works.

A report from Tirunelveli district said that rain-related incidents have claimed 10 lives there. Officials said that compensation has been provided at the rate of Rs 5,000 for 205 fully-damaged houses while Rs 4,100 was awarded for partially-damaged structures.

Agriculture Ministry proposes further 5% hike in import duty of edible oil



NEW DELHI: The Agriculture Ministry has proposed further hike in import duty of edible oils by 5 per cent in a bid to protect the interest of farmers.

In September, the government had raised import duty on crude edible oils to 12.5 per cent from 7.5 per cent, while the duty on refined edible oils was increased to 20 per cent from 15 per cent.

"Farmers have been affected due to rise in import of edible oils. We have proposed the Finance Ministry to consider 5 per cent increase in import duty from the current level," a senior Agriculture Ministry official told PTI.

The Ministry has proposed increase in import duty on crude edible oils to 17.5 per cent and on refined edible oils to 25 per cent from the existing level, the official said.

The Ministry has proposed increase in import duty on crude edible oils to 17.5 per cent and on refined edible oils to 25 per cent from the existing level, the official said.

The proposal has been moved following several demands from state governments, especially Andhra Pradesh, as well as from the industry body Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA).

As per the ministry's data, area sown to oilseeds remained down at 57.08 lakh hectare till last week of the ongoing rabi season that started from October, as against 65.73 lakh hectare in the year-ago period.

SEA has demanded an import duty hike on crude oil to 25 per cent and that of refined oil to 45 per cent to protect the interest of crushers and also local farmers to sustain their interest in oilseed cultivation.

SEA has demanded an import duty hike on crude oil to 25 per cent and that of refined oil to 45 per cent to protect the interest of crushers and also local farmers to sustain their interest in oilseed cultivation.

The country's edible oil imports rose by 24 per cent to 14.42 million tonnes in the 2014-15 oil year that ended in October due to fall in international prices, SEA data said.

About 60 per cent of India's annual edible oil demand of 18-19 million tonnes is met through import, mostly from Malaysia and Indonesia.