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THE HINDU

India to press for equity at climate talks



India's strategy at the Paris Climate Change summit will be to work with emerging economies and press the developed world to concede that responsibility for cutting carbon emissions after 2020 cannot be shared equally by rich and poor nations.

Two major issues that New Delhi will focus on at the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are failed ambitions on transferring low carbon technologies to the developing world, and the lack of support for a plan to fund mitigation and adaptation efforts.

The UN Convention on Climate Change has followed the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), reflected in the Kyoto Protocol and reinforced last year at Lima. Under this, poor countries were not required to cut emissions. India is emphasising this again, informed sources in the Ministry of Environment and Forests said, and demanding that developing nations be allowed greater room in cutting emissions beyond 2020, as they seek to eliminate poverty through fast-paced economic growth.

Low per capita emissions

The Modi government is approaching the CoP with the view that the domestic actions proposed under the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted to the UNFCCC are truly progressive.

National per capita emissions are very low at 1.56 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (about a tenth of some developed nations), and India's share of cumulative global emissions only 3 per cent.

Given the large green cover in the country, these emissions are already accounted for in terms of absorption of greenhouse gases. One independent assessment of the INDC recently described India's offer as exceeding its fair share.

Yet, there is a concerted attempt to bring India under pressure on the eve of the CoP, including by the United States, to paint the country as 'obstructionist'. "This is unfair, uncalled for and deliberate," an official said, pointing out that the UNFCCC had welcomed the INDC submitted by India.

In the run-up to the CoP, India has been engaging 60 countries ranging from the Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries to the developed nations to evolve a consensus.

Two areas of failure in the climate process so far, according to Indian officials, are creation of the \$100-billion annual climate finance fund that had been initiated six years ago in Copenhagen, and transfer of green technologies. "The finance pledge has been diluted at successive Conferences of the Parties, and only a promise of \$10.2 billion has been made at present," said an official. If innovators of green technologies have to be compensated, it could be done using the fund, but there should be no access barrier to any country. Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has been saying that disaster should not be used to generate profits.

Another contested area is that of transparency norms for use of funds. This has been proposed by the industrialised countries in the form of a common framework from 2020, but has also not found favour since it goes against the principle of differentiated capabilities. The overall approach of the rich countries is seen as 'expanding the base of contributors while shrinking the base of recipients'.

India is also taking the lead in demanding the major share of the carbon space (the ceiling of 800 or 900 gigatonnes of carbon emissions that the earth can still absorb to keep a rise in global temperature below the agreed 2 degree Celsius mark), for the developing world. Cutting emissions to stay within this limit requires robust finance and technology transfer mechanisms.

India and other developing countries argue that far from making progress on flow of assistance, advanced nations are trying to include regular overseas development funding under the 100 billion dollar category, in a case of “fudging and double accounting.”

Solar mission

One highlight of the Indian approach to curbing emissions is a major scaling up of renewable energy to 175 GW by 2022, outlined in the INDC. The National Solar Mission alone is to provide 100 GW. However, there is no escape from boosting conventional capacity too, involving some emissions. That is because, if renewables are to provide such a large quantum of power, there have to be other conventional sources, such as thermal, to provide capacities to handle fluctuation in the generation from green sources, an official points out. This is being done in the form of a green corridor that will be deployed during fluctuations.

Overall, India’s effort along with other developing countries such as Brazil, China and South Africa would be to reinforce equity in any climate agreement arrived at in Paris, and for developed countries to enhance action on cutting their carbon emissions in the period before 2020.

Apiculture centre opened at Madurai college



The faculty from the Zoology Department of S. Vellaichamy Nadar College explaining the extraction of honey from one of the beehives in the newly inaugurated Apiculture Research Centre at the college on Monday. Photo: R. Ashok

Bid to inculcate entrepreneurial and research skills among students

In an attempt to inculcate entrepreneurial and research skills among students, an Apiculture Research Centre with an apiary of 100 beehives was

inaugurated at the Nadar Mahajana Sangam S Vellaichamy Nadar College (NMSSVN) in Madurai on Monday.

While a few beehives are often kept in many colleges for use by Zoology students for learning purpose, the college authorities claimed that the centre, named as PRC Anand Apiculture Research Centre, is the first to come up in such a scale in a college in Tamil Nadu.

Revenue for students

K.S. Malar, Head of the Zoology department at the college, said students would participate in beekeeping at the centre and part of the revenue from the sale of honey would be shared with them.

She added that the department would also research on the effect of climatic conditions on production of honey and how different species of plants from which the bees collect nectar affect the chemical composition of honey. “Apart from the apiary here, we are planning to place beehives in forest areas dominated by different species of plants and analyze the honey produced there. We are also planning to explore the possibility of crossbreeding of different subspecies of honey bees,” she said.

The 100 beehives kept in the apiary in the college are designed by S. Josephine, a Madurai-based entrepreneur, with an additional rack attached to the bottom to feed the bees in rainy seasons when they cannot go out of the hive.

“This will help in maintaining the level of honey produced even during rains. I have applied for a patent for this design of beehive,” she said.

According to Ms. Josephine, an average of 1 to 2 kilograms of honey could be got from each beehive for every 20 days to one month and the students can sell it for Rs 400 per kilogram.

M. Pavithra, studying third year in the undergraduate course in Zoology at the college, said, “We have a paper on Apiculture in our curriculum. It would be exciting to get a hands-on experience on the subject through the centre.”

“Gandhi’s philosophy led to regenerative agriculture”



Jostein Hertwig of Sweden, Head, Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society Secretariat, at a conference in Madurai. Photo: G. Moorthy

Says Jostein Hertwig, Head of Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society Secretariat that is involved in rejuvenation of Baltic Sea.

The world cannot afford external inputs for agriculture as natural resources are depleting. Chemical fertilizers and other farm inputs will become too expensive in future and hence there is a need to encourage regenerative agriculture. These are the words of caution from Jostein Hertwig, Head of Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society (BERAS) Secretariat, which is involved in rejuvenation of Baltic Sea.

In an interaction on the sidelines of a conference on ‘Ecological approaches towards diet for a green planet’ here on Friday, Mr. Jostein said that they were on a quest for replicable regenerative agricultural practices and found that India, particularly Tamil Nadu, had “good farmers.”

“Such conferences will help us adopt new ideas and strengthen existing practices here with our experience,” he said.

The concept of ‘diet for a green planet’ has as its criteria organically produced, tasty, attractive and locally produced, seasonal, healthy food, with less meat component. There should also be reduction in food waste. Reduced waste would contribute to a more healthy climate and environment and food

waste should be used as animal fodder and for biogas production. It offers a sustainable lifestyle with consumption of enough and good food without threatening the environment. The basis for the concept of ‘diet for a green planet’ is the farm where ecological regenerative agriculture is practised.

Regenerative agriculture

On the reasons for looking at India for good agricultural practices, Mr. Jostein said, “The concept was inspired by Gandhi’s philosophy.” The BERAS, he said, wanted regenerative agriculture to become a movement and in this context inputs from practitioners of organic farming in Tamil Nadu would be valuable. This was necessary to protect the environment and Europe had enough research done on soil fertility. The focus of such conferences was to network farmers and create awareness of the need to take immediate steps to improve soil fertility.

“Farmers should stop using chemical fertilizers and begin to regenerate soil. There are good examples in the form of model farms in Europe. Certain universal principles can be adapted to local conditions,” he also said.

While appreciating organic farming practices adopted by Tamil Nadu farmers, Mr. Jostein said that its practical side needed strengthening. Government-university linkages would help in this regard. He favoured creation of local models as in Europe to disseminate information and practice of organic farming.

TN seeks Rs. 8,481-crore Central flood relief



The funds required were well beyond the resources available with the State, including the State Disaster Response Fund.

After a speedy assessment of the damage in the State due to the unprecedented November rains, in which four lakh people have been displaced, the Tamil Nadu government on Monday has asked the Centre to sanction Rs. 8,481 crore for carrying out temporary as well as permanent restoration of infrastructure.

In her letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, Ms. Jayalalithaa has asked the Centre to immediately sanction Rs. 2,000 crore to continue rescue and relief operations with the “same vigour”.

She submitted a memorandum containing a detailed assessment of damage and requirement of funds so that the the Centre could expeditiously release the assistance as some weeks were still left in the monsoon during which period more weather systems were expected to develop.

The funds required were well beyond the resources available with the State, including the State Disaster Response Fund. Keeping in view the urgency of restoring many of the infrastructure facilities and services to the flood-affected people and to support the State which was taking up massive scale relief operations, Ms. Jayalalithaa asked the Prime Minister to depute a Central team immediately to make an on-the-spot assessment of damage and to release central financial assistance without any delay.

The November rains were extremely heavy and sustained for several days leaving a trail of damage and destruction. To cite an example, at Neyveli, it rained 437 mm on November 9. Chennai has received the second heaviest monthly rainfall in the past more than 100 years in the first 20 days of November, the Chief Minister pointed out.

As many as 169 lives were lost during this monsoon beginning October 10. More than 4 lakh people were shifted to relief camps and provided food and shelter. Rescue and relief operations were undertaken on a war footing. There was widespread damage to property including dwelling units and crops, she said.

Infrastructure, including roads and bridges, stormwater drainage systems, water supply and sewerage systems and electricity supply systems have been

battered in many areas. “The State had sanctioned Rs. 500-crore initially, but the damage indicates a much higher financial requirement. The extent of damage is still unfolding,” she said.

Centre sanctions Rs. 939 crore

The Central government has sanctioned Rs. 939.63 crore as immediate flood relief to Tamil Nadu. According to an official release here, the memorandum on flood damage and funds required was submitted at the Prime Minister’s Office on Monday morning. Immediately, the Centre released Rs. 939 crore and informed that it would send a team soon to assess the flood damage to provide more grants, the release said.

First flood warning issued as storage in Vaigai dam crosses 66 ft

Administration in five districts asked to alert people residing near riverbanks

Water level crossed 66 feet in Vaigai dam near Andipatti in Theni district on Tuesday.

ANDIPATTI:

Public Works Department officials issued the first flood warning to five southern districts as water level in Vaigai dam crossed 66 feet on Tuesday.

The administration in these districts was alerted to advise people residing near the banks to go to high ridge areas.

Talking to media persons after inspecting the dam, PWD Chief Engineer K. Valliappan said that flood warning was issued to alert villages along the river till Ramanathapuram district.

Already, PWD officials had been camping in the dam and also at sensitive points to monitor water level and flow in the river.

Replying to a query on water release, he said that the PWD was fully prepared to release water for irrigation. Water would be released when

storage reached its desired level and after getting an order from the government.

Level up in dams

Seventeen out of the 32 dams and 2,950 irrigation tanks in nine southern districts were full.

Breaches developed in nine tanks were plugged and bunds strengthened, he added. Later, the CE, along with other PWD officials, visited Periyar dam to assess the situation.

The level in Periyar dam rose to 137 feet. With restricted discharge to meet only drinking water supply, water level in Vaigai dam rose sharply to 66.6 feet.

Already Vaigai, Periyar and Kottakudi rivers are in spate, increasing flow into the dam manifold.

The second warning will be issued when water level in Vaigai dam touches 68.5 feet and the third and final flood warning when the level reaches 69 feet.

Rainfall subsided substantially in many parts of the district.

Administration in five districts asked to alert people residing near riverbanks

Flood warning in Kumbakarai too

Following heavy downpour in the last 48 hours, Manoranjitham dam, the main drinking water source for Kodaikanal town, was full and excess water was released into the Lower Tank here on Tuesday.

The Lower Tank was also expected to surplus in the night. The overflowing water will be drained through Pambar river automatically that would cause a flood in Kumbakarai falls in Periyakulam.

Kodaikanal municipal officials alerted Periyakulam municipal and forest officials about possible flood in Kumbakarai falls on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. They advised them to alert people at the falls site.

However, the forest officials have banned bathing in the falls for the past one week. Now, they will not allow tourists to go near the falls site.

In Palani, residents of wayside villages were alerted as the entire inflow of 370 cusecs into Varadhamanadhi dam was released into Varadhamanadhi river as the dam surplussed on Monday evening.

Storage level in other dams has been increasing substantially. The level was inching towards the total capacity in Palar, Parappalar, Kudiraiyaru and Nanganjiar dams in the district.

However, rainfall has come down sharply in both Dindigul and Theni districts. Except Kodaikanal, Palani and Chatrapatti, there was no rainfall in the district.

‘Nilavembu kudineer’ to be distributed at Aavin parlours

‘Nilavembu kudineer’, an Ayurvedic concoction that has the power to prevent viral fevers, will be distributed at all the 18 Aavin parlours across Kanyakumari district from Wednesday, according to Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan.

Mr. Chavan inaugurated the distribution of ‘nilavembu kudineer’ at the Aavin parlour at the Collectorate on Tuesday in the presence of former Minister N. Thalavai Sundaram, Nagercoil MLA Nanjil A. Murugesan, Chairman of Kanyakumari District Milk Producers’ Cooperative Union S.A. Asokan and RDO S. Madhiyazhagan.

Mr. Chavan said that the concoction would be distributed to the public free of cost as per the orders of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa.

The concoction was distributed to the public at all primary health centres, government hospitals and Amma canteens in the district, he added.

Kanyakumari District Milk Producers’ Cooperative Union General Manager P.S. Sundaralingam was also present.

Tamil Nadu to get more rains today

A trough of low pressure over Southwest Bay of Bengal and adjoining equatorial Indian Ocean near Maldives area is likely to bring rains to several places across the State on Tuesday.

S.R.Ramanan, director, Area Cyclone Warning Centre, said weather models indicate heavy rains in places such as Ramanathapuram, Nilgiris and Tirupur on Tuesday as well. Many places in the State will experience moderate to heavy rainfall up to 12 cm under the influence of the weather system. On Monday evening, few places like Kalavai in Vellore district received a heavy rainfall of 9 cm. The rain gauges in some locations like Virinjipuram near Vellore and Yercaud recorded 2 cm of rainfall and Manaparai received 1 cm of rains. The weather system impacted intense rain spell over Chennai districts with several stations reporting over 8 cm of rainfall within few hours. The same weather pattern is likely to continue over the State and Puducherry till Wednesday. Rainfall may continue over Tamil Nadu till Friday, said officials of the Meteorological Department.

Tamil Nadu has recorded 40 cm of rainfall so far since October 1.

This is 32 per cent in excess than the normal rainfall for the season. The rainfall over Puducherry has touched normal rainfall of 54 cm so far this season.

Chennai on verge of rain record

Rains left the Madras war cemetery flooded on Tuesday.

The weather station in Meenambakkam has already recorded 1144.8 mm this November.

Chennai is on its way to have the wettest November of the century and break an all-time rainfall record.

With Monday's torrential downpour bringing 93 mm of rainfall, Chennai has crossed 1,025 mm of rainfall for the month. According to the Meteorological Department, November 1918 was the wettest month as the city received 1088.4 mm of rainfall then.

The weather station in Meenambakkam has already recorded 1144.8 mm this November. Officials recall that Chennai recorded 970 mm of rainfall in November 1985 and 1077.1 mm in October 2005. The remaining few days of this month will decide whether the city gets to break the century's record. The rains so far have been severe with many rain-related deaths, including the electrocution of a couple in Velachery, death of a youngster in a wall collapse in Pattalam and the fatal fall of a man in a trench dug up in R.A. Puram to drain stagnant rainwater. Schools and colleges in Chennai, Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts will remain closed on Wednesday. As reservoirs continue to get heavy inflows, city waterways are carrying rainwater to their brim. The Adyar River is in a spate as about 6,000 cusecs is being let out from the Chembarambakkam reservoir.

Central team visit

In a bid to provide flood relief assistance, a nine-member Central team will visit flood-affected areas in Tamil Nadu on November 26 to assess the damage.

At present, a new trough lies over southwest Bay of Bengal and the adjoining Sri Lanka coast. With another upper air circulation forming near the weather system, the Meteorological Department expects it to influence the formation of a low pressure area by November 26 or November 27.

Training for forest rangers begins



Forest Minister M.S.M. Anandan (second right) giving away a cheque as compensation in Coimbatore on Monday.— Photo: S. Siva Saravanan

Tamil Nadu Forest Academy conducts course after 27 years

Minister for Forests M.S.M. Anandan on Monday inaugurated the 18-month certificate course for Forest Range Officer trainees at Tamil Nadu Forest Academy, marking the revival of the institute's training programme for officers from other States after a gap of 27 years.

Thirty nine trainees including 6 women from Andaman Nicobar, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have been selected for the training.

According to S. Balaji, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, this training session is to ensure the physical and mental fitness of the forest rangers to help them reach their maximum potential.

Mr. Anandan also gave away cheques paid in as solatium for loss of lives, injuries caused and damage to crops in human – animal conflict situations. As many as 80 persons were given Rs 23.5 lakh as relief. An interactive session with NGOs and farmers was organised at the 4th annual consultative and review meeting of Tamil Nadu Biodiversity and Greening Project Scheme held immediately after the inauguration of the training programme.

Hansraj Varma, Principal Secretary to Tamil Nadu Government Environment and Forest Department, V. K. Melkani, IFS Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Chief Wildlife Warden and Head of Forest Force, Rama Kant Ohja, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, took part.

The last batch from other States that underwent training in the Academy was during 1987-88 and it had 42 trainees from 6 States.

Vigilant farmers save paddy crop

Over a dozen farmers from Kapavaram receive an audio message on their mobile phones from Reliance Foundation warning about heavy rain

Farmers from Kapavaram village near Samalkot in East Godavari district engaged in paddy harvesting works.

Even as the incessant rain that hit East Godavari district for a couple of days and damaged most of the standing paddy crop, residents of Kapavaram

village were among the lucky few who were able to protect most of their yield.

Thanks to a phone call they received a couple of days before the downpour, half of farmers opted for immediate crop cutting by using the machines, while others postponed it and saved their yield from turning discoloured.

Over a dozen farmers from this village received an audio message on their mobile phones that indicated about the possible heavy rain and advised the farmers either to take up the harvesting immediately or postpone it for a week.

“Not just the weather forecast, but we also receive inputs about the use of fertilizer and pesticide, along with the steps to be taken to improve the milk produce,” says Chodiseti Venkata Ramana, a farmer cultivating paddy in six acres including two acres of his own from the verdant village located in Samalkot mandal.

“We have been receiving the bulletins twice or thrice a week for the last four year and benefitting from them a lot,” he explains. It is Reliance Foundation, set up by the Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) that is reaching the farmers on their mobile phones. The foundation has been collecting information from the Indian Meteorological Department, Accu Weather, departments of Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry and disseminating the same to the farmers through its call centres. Farmers can also interact with the experts in call centre on toll-free number 1800-419-8800 and have their doubts cleared on crop related issues.

“As we have received the alert about heavy rain, we have engaged crop cutting machines on a war-footing and completed the harvesting. Had the harvest delayed by a couple of days, we would have lost half the yield,” says Jalligampala Rambabu, a tenant farmer of 10 acres. Of the entire ayacut of 1,050 acres in the tiny village that gets Godavari water from the Pithapuram Branch Canal, about 75 per cent of the harvest had been completed before the commencement of rain.

“Over 50,000 farmers are enrolled in our network from different parts of the district. Besides releasing regular audio bulletins, we also visit the villages along with agriculture scientists and veterinary doctors. Our services are available to farmers from 43 mandals, in which farmers from 25 villages

including Kapavaram are actively working with us,” says Varahalu Cheepulla, project manager.

“We are able to get 35-40 bags per acre. But, we are not able to get good price for our produce. We request the foundation to update us about the paddy prices on a regular basis,” says Aganti Penteeswara Rao, a tenant farmer of 20 acres. In the absence of government-run paddy procurement centre, farmers are selling their produce to the private agents.

Over a dozen farmers from Kapavaram received an audio message on their mobile phones from Reliance Foundation about the possible heavy rain

‘Agricultural Engineering should be under TNAU affiliation’

Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University K. Ramasamy addressing the Agricultural Engineering programme at Bannari Amman Institute of Technology at Sathyamangalam in Erode on Tuesday.

Agricultural Engineering programme offered through engineering colleges must be under affiliation of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, K. Alagusundaram, Deputy Director General - Agricultural Engineering, Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, said on Tuesday.

The practical component in the syllabi for the course offered through engineering colleges under affiliation of Anna University - Chennai and control of AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) stipulation is not effective enough, Dr. Alagusundaram said, explaining the reason for the Thanjavur-based Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology, where he had served as a Director earlier, preferring affiliation of its B. Tech Food Engineering program by TNAU over Anna University. The right mix of theory and practical in TNAU syllabi and the delivery methodology stands the students in good stead in securing good jobs as efficient engineers and technicians, Dr. Alagusundaram said, inaugurating the BE - Agricultural Engineering programme at Bannari Amman Institute of Technology, Sathmayamangalam.

TNAU Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy said there was vast potential for revival of agriculture in Tamil Nadu from where stalwarts had in the past

engineered green revolution for the entire India, raising its food production five-fold. India, he said, will have to produce its own food.

The Vice-Chancellor advocated mechanisation technologies suiting small farms.

There was no dearth of water for irrigation; crisis situations are caused due to inability to store water accruing from continuous rainfall.

Presiding over, S.V. Balasubramaniam, BIT Chairman, said India accounting for 16 per cent of the world population, but with only four per cent of water resources and 2.3 per cent of land has to necessarily depend on mechanisation of agricultural activities for achieving the target to produce 350 million tonnes of food grains by 2030.

Technology

Appropriate technologies are required to eliminate post-harvest loss of food grains valued at Rs. 50,000 crore and fruits and vegetables valued at Rs. 13,000 crore.

BIT Director A.M. Natarajan, Principal D Saravanan and Institute Director M P Vijayakumar also addressed the students.

An exhibition of tractors and other mechanised agricultural equipment was also organised.

No fall in tomato output; price rise due to supply disruption

Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan on Monday said there has been no decline in tomato output and the shooting up of the prices to over Rs 60 a kg is due to disruption in supplies from rain-hit South India.

“There is no fall in production of tomato in the country.

Prices have increased due to transportation problems and rains in the South India,” Paswan said on the sidelines of an event here.

[The price increase in tomato](#) is a seasonal issue and the price situation will normalise as supplies improve, he added.

Tomato prices have risen sharply in the last few days to over Rs 60 per kg in most retail markets. In rain-affected Chennai, they had touched as high as Rs 80 per kg last week.

Cabinet Secretary P.K. Sinha had reviewed the tomato price situation last week and directed the ministries concerned to keep a close watch on the prices.

On pulses prices which are still ruling above Rs 180 per kg, Paswan said the rise is purely due to widening gap in demand and supply of lentils.

The government has taken all measures to rein in prices including imposing stock holding limits and action against hoarders, imports among others, he added.

Paswan said that the production is around 17.5 million tonnes against the demand of 25 million tonnes. The balance is met through imports.

The secretaries of Agriculture, Food, Commerce and Finance are regularly monitoring the prices of pulses, tomato and other essential commodities on a regular basis, he added.

‘Don’t be hasty in sale of discoloured paddy’

Collector H. Arun Kumar on Tuesday advised the paddy farmers not to be hasty while selling the discoloured paddy. Speaking to the reporters after participating in a video conference with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Mr. Arun Kumar said that a technical team from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) would tour the district on Wednesday to conduct a survey on the impact of the sudden rains on the standing kharif crop. He said that the government might respond to the report to be sent by the FCI and, in all likelihood, ease the norms pertaining to paddy procurement.

Tobacco purchases surpass total crop size

Growers get price of Rs. 93.07 a kg despite adverse market conditions

Tobacco growers have realised an average price of Rs 93.07 marketing 190.05 million kg as against the crop size of 172 million kg in the just-concluded auctions, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The auctions in the State were prolonged up to November because of difficult market conditions on account of subdued demand for tobacco and because of production of more of low grade tobacco due to abnormal weather conditions and outbreak of tobacco root parasite “Orabanche”, she said at a review meeting in New Delhi.

She wanted the Tobacco Board officials to enlighten the farmers to stick to the crop size of 120 million kg fixed for the next season.

It may be noted that the trouble for ryots in traditional tobacco growing areas in Prakasam was more pronounced with seven farmers committing suicide in the wake of the trade allegedly reneging on its promise to buy their produce within the price band at a meeting convened by the Union Minister in Vijayawada in July.

The trade had agreed to purchase the bright grade in traditional areas between Rs. 109 to Rs.114 per kg, medium grade between Rs. Rs.97 and Rs.102 per kg and low grade between Rs.62 and Rs.67 so that the ryots could get an average price of Rs.95 to Rs.99, official sources recalled.

In the case of Northern Light Soils, the trade promised to offer Rs.127 per kg for bright grade and Rs. 113 per kg for medium grade and did not show any interest in low grade tobacco in NLS.

While the average price realised in southern black soil auction platforms was only Rs. 83.54 per kg for the 64.47 million kg marketed, the price realisation was a poor 79.46 per kg in southern light soil auction platforms for 57.01 million kg sold, the sources said. As many as 27,950 growers of the 45,923 growers got a compensation price of Rs. 22.40 crore (Rs.16.80 crore from the Centre and Rs.5.60 crore from the State for 11.23 million kg of low grade tobacco marketed by them.

Prospect of more rain worries paddy farmers in delta districts

Large tracts of land inundated since the northeast monsoon set in

Despite a respite from the routine of the past few days of heavy and widespread showers, the delta districts are wet with problems ranging from inundation of paddy fields to flooding of residential areas, disrupting life in

several areas. Fishermen in coastal hamlets have not yet ventured into the sea, preferring to wait and watch for some more time.

The low pressure coupled with the monsoon rains drenched delta districts for over a fortnight now.

Although farmers have been pleading with the State and Union governments to get Karnataka release the Cauvery water for saving the samba paddy, the onset of the northeast monsoon has come as a timely blessing for them. With the crops mostly in the “panickle initiation” stage in the region, the rain has helped the crops immensely with the bonus of preventing pest attacks that take a toll usually at this point of time.

Inundation of standing samba paddy fields on thousands of acres across the districts has caused concern among farmers. Although the situation is not dangerous as of now, farmers fear for any escalation of monsoon in the next fortnight that might just threaten the crops.

Heavy inundation in paddy fields has also led to claims for compensation from farmers’ associations.

“Scarcity of water for timely irrigation followed by sustained downpours over the past month are threatening the standing samba and thalady paddy crops in the delta districts. Tender crops on several thousand of acres have started to wither.

Loss of crop in the previous seasons have pushed farmers to a corner as they are not able to mobilise funds for paying crop insurance premium and the societies are not extending loans. Considering their plight, the State government should come forward to fully bear the crop insurance premium and extend adequate compensation to all the affected farmers,” says All Farmers' Associations Coordination Committee president P.R. Pandian.

Lakes and ponds in the region are getting filled up rapidly and in some cases unattended shutters and control units have given way leading to flood waters entering residential areas and paddy fields. Low lying areas in the town are filling up with flood waters. Farmers and farm workers are engaged in draining the fields of flood waters in many areas.

No significant rainfall was recorded in Thanjavur district during the day although the sky remained cloudy and overcast. But in Nagapattinam and Tiruvarur districts, showers were witnessed in areas such as Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Kollidam, Poompuhar, Vedaranyam, Tiruvarur, Mannargudi, and Kodavasal areas.

Rough seas have forced fishermen from coastal hamlets such as Vedaranyam, Aarukattuthurai, Vanavanmadevi, and Vellapallam as also Poompuhar and Pazhayaru to remain indoors.

Flood waters have marooned houses in more than 25 villages and residential localities in Sirkali, Mayiladuthurai, and Kollidam.

Many residents have been evacuated to the safety of temporary shelters elsewhere.

Relief work

The Special Monitoring Officer Shiv Das Meena along with District Collector S. Palanisamy inspected flood prevention and relief works being undertaken in Nagapattinam district. The administration has readied 65 spots for makeshift relief and kitchen camps with attendant facilities. Two lakh sand bags and 12 cyclone safety shelters were ready to deal with emergent situations, Mr. Palanisamy said.

In Thanjavur, workers of the BJP staged a demonstration demanding immediate relief and rehabilitation on a war footing to the affected farmers and public.

District Youth Wing president Durai Murugan led the demonstration in which the BJP Youth Wing state president Kavin Kamalkumar, BJP state vice-president Karuppu Muruganandam and others participated.

Sugarcane growers plan agitation to ensure implementation of FRP

Sugar mills criticised for giving advertisements saying they could not pay the FRP

The Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers Association has criticised the sugar mills for announcing through newspaper advertisements that they would pay

Rs.1,500 a tonne in north and south Karnataka districts and Rs.1,300 per tonne in Hyderabad Karnataka for sugarcane for the crushing season 2015-16.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, association president Kurubur Shanthkumar said that it was in violation of the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of Rs. 2,300 a tonne at 9.5 per cent recovery, announced by the Centre. He said that the growers would organise protests in sugarcane-growing districts on various days till December 15, the deadline set for the government to ensure that the FRP was implemented by the sugar mills. If the government did not act in favour of growers by December 15, the association would launch a Statewide agitation, Mr. Shanthkumar said.

He said that the FRP announced by the Centre was Rs. 2,300 per tonne at 9.5 per cent recovery and Rs. 230 per tonne for every additional one per cent increase in recovery.

The present recovery in most sugar mills was 11.5 per cent to 12 per cent and more.

At that rate, a grower should get at least Rs. 3,000 per tonne this year, Mr. Shanthkumar said.

The mills in the State had taken Rs. 8,000 crore as interest-free loans to pay dues to the growers.

The Centre had also decided to blend 10 per cent of ethanol with petroleum fuel and offered to buy one litre of ethanol at Rs. 49.50 per litre. There was also a promise to credit an incentive of Rs. 45 per tonne of sugarcane supplied to the mills to the farmers' bank account. The incentive was too less and should be increased to at least Rs.200, he said. He pointed out that due to drought and shortage in power supply, sugarcane yield had been reduced by 30 per cent to 35 per cent.

Also, the crop area had shrunk by at least 5 per cent, Mr. Shanthkumar added.

Sugar mills criticised for giving advertisements saying they could not pay the FRP

NABARD sanctions funds to check migration

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development has decided to give top priority to the backward Srikakulam district to prevent migration of labourers and farmers who have lost hopes with the drought like situation in the last few months.

NABARD decided to allocate Rs.5143.23 crore for the year 2016-17, increasing the outlay up to 14 per cent compared to the current financial year. NABARD Srikakulam District Development Manager MD Vasudevan said more funds would be allocated to the district under the Potential Linked Credit Plan as the district was selected for more activities in agriculture and allied sectors.

“NABARD allocates Rs.2,417 crore for the purpose of crop loan,” he added. The department would spend remaining amount for water resources, farm mechanization, animal husbandry, poultry farm, fisheries sector, rural godowns, food processing and renewable energy.

‘Tomato, peas prices will come down to Rs 35/kg by mid-Dec’

Prices of tomato and peas have eased in the national capital and are likely to come down to Rs 30-35 per kg level by mid-December on arrival of new crops, Mother Dairy said Tuesday.

The rates of peas, which were ruling at Rs 139 per kg last week, have come down to Rs 79 per kg at Mother Dairy’s Safal stores. Similarly, tomato prices have also declined to Rs 48-50 per kg from Rs 60 per kg last week.

“The prices of both peas and tomato have started easing and are expected to come down to Rs 30-35 per kg by mid-December at Azadpur mandi in the national capital as new crop will start entering the market,” Mother Dairy Safal Retail Business Head B Jagdish Rao said.

While prices were high as there was delay in arrival of peas from Punjab, the availability of tomato was also affected after delayed arrival from Karnataka and other southern states due to rains there, he said.

On Monday, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister [Ram Vilas Paswan had said that there is no decline in tomato output](#) and the shooting up of the

prices to over Rs 60 a kg is due to disruption in supplies from rain-hit South India.

Mother Dairy has 380 retail outlets in Delhi-NCR and about 20 stores in Bangalore.

8-foot increase in Papanasam dam level in a day

Manimutharu falls flooding in Tirunelveli district on Tuesday.

The heavy rainfall of 177 mm in the catchment areas of Papanasam dam since Monday evening has triggered 8-foot increase in water level in the prime reservoir of the district.

While rainfall in the plains has almost stopped for the second day on Tuesday, the Western Ghats continued to experience significant rains to bring copious influx of water to Papanasam, Servalar and Manimuthar dams. Water level at Papanasam dam, which stood at 113.35 feet on Monday, rose to 121.30 feet against the full capacity of 143 feet on Tuesday, with an inflow 7,925 cusecs.

The 55.20 mm rainfall in the catchment of Manimuthar dam, the largest one in the district, also increased Monday's water level of 80.50 feet to 83 feet (full capacity 118) on Tuesday after the inflow remained at 2,064 cusecs, so far the highest influx during this northeast monsoon.

After flood subsided, the visitors were allowed to take bath at Five Falls in around 11 a.m. while the ban continued at Main Falls and Old Courtallam Falls as there was no sign of let-up in floods.

Consequently, the Chittar continued to experience flood on Tuesday too. However, most of the irrigation tanks being fed by Chittar escaped from possible breach, thanks to the timely action taken by officials.

Following Gadana, Ramanadhi, Karuppanadhi, Gundar and Nambiyar dams, Adavinainar dam, having the maximum storage level of 132 feet, started overflowing on Monday night, much to the jubilation of farmers as this reservoir near Maekkarai would feed 64 tanks and nourish paddy being cultivated on 7,643 acres.

Rainfall

Rainfall in the district was (in mm): Papanasam dam – 177, Servalar dam – 66, Manimuthar dam – 55.20, Aayikudi – 40.80, Karuppanadhi dam – 35, Ramanadhi dam – 33, Alangulam – 31.40, Kannadiyan Channel – 25, Tenkasi – 27.20, Sankarankovil – 22, Gadana dam – 20, Adavinainar dam – 15, Radhapuram – 14, Ambasamudram and Kalakkad – 8.40, Shencottai – 7.60, Nanguneri – 6, Gundar dam – 5.10, Palayamkottai and Nambiyar dam – 5, Kodumudiyar dam – 5, Cheranmahadevi – 4 and Tirunelveli – 2.

Water level in the dams (Maximum capacity in feet in brackets): Servalar – 143.63 (156); Gadana – 83.65 (85); Ramanadhi – 82.30 (84); Karuppanadhi – 70.75 (72); Gundar – 36.10 (36.10); Adavinainar – 131.75 (132); Vadakku Pachaiyar – 37.20 (67); Kodumudiyar – 46.25 (57) and Nambiyar – 23.20 (25).

Inspection

Flood Monitoring Officer Atul Anand inspected the measures taken to prevent flood in the low-lying areas in Kanyakumari district on Tuesday. He inspected pumping of flood water in Thovalai and Rajakkamangalam panchayat unions.

He also inspected capping of breaches in Navalcaud, Ananthanar canals and stocking of 550 sandbags in Thadikkarankonam panchayat.

Mr. Anand verified chlorine in water in Thovalai and distribution of nilavembu kudineer at Thovalai PHC.

Shot in the arm for herbal farming

Local health traditions could soon be making a comeback in Kerala, thanks to a government initiative to promote the cultivation of medicinal plants for primary health care.

The project, funded by the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), primarily involves training rural communities in conservation, propagation and utilisation of medicinal plants. Named Grameenam, it seeks to establish herbal gardens for the conservation of rare, endangered and threatened species and meet the demands of the herbal drug industry. The gardens are

expected to help reduce the pressure caused by unsustainable extraction of plants from the wild and generate additional income for farmers.

Pilot project

The communities would also be trained in traditional home remedies for common ailments. Peringamala panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district, Ayiroor in Pathanamthitta, Mattathur in Thrissur and Noolpuzha in Wayanad have been selected for the pilot project estimated to cost Rs.1.25 cr.

Grameenam is to be implemented by the State Medicinal Plants Board (SMPB) with the involvement of the department of AYUSH, grama panchayats, Forest Department, Kerala State Biodiversity Board, Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Kerala Forest Research Institute and M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation.

Inaugurating the scheme at a function held here on Tuesday, Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar said Grameenam was designed to make Kerala self-sufficient in the supply of raw materials for the herbal drug industry and overcome lifestyle diseases.

A new project, Grameenam, will train rural communities in establishing medicinal plant gardens

Bananas have few takers

If veggies are becoming pricey, bananas are becoming cheaper day by day. And, there are not many takers for the fruit which had flooded the markets, especially the ‘pachbale’ variety. The two major banana varieties – yelakki and pachbale – had been grown considerably this year in the region as the fruit had fetched handsome prices early this year.

One kilo of ‘pachbale’ is sold at a paltry sum of Rs. 5.50. Yelakki is bought at Rs .20 a kilo in the Hopcoms centres.

The HOPCOMS procurement center here is buying over 6-10 tonnes of both varieties from farmers for its 43 outlets.

90% of disasters weather related: UN report



The five countries hit by the highest number of disasters were the US, China, India, Philippines and Indonesia; Storms were the deadliest.

In the past 20 years, 90 per cent of major disasters around the world were caused by nearly 6,500 recorded floods, storms, heatwaves, droughts and other weather-related events, UN spokesman has said.

A new UN-backed report, titled *The Human Cost of Weather Related Disasters*, found that since 1995, over 600,000 people have died as a result of weather-related disasters with 4.1 billion people injured, left homeless or in need of emergency assistance, Xinhua quoted UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric as saying on Monday.

The five countries hit by the highest number of disasters were the US, China, India, Philippines and Indonesia, said Dujarric.

The report issued by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) notes data gaps, saying that only 35 per cent of records include information about economic losses.

UNISDR estimated that the true figure on disaster losses — including earthquakes and tsunamis — was between \$250 billion and \$300 billion annually.

According to the report, Asia accounts for the “lion’s share of disaster impacts” including 332,000 deaths and 3.7 billion people affected.

The death toll in Asia included 138,000 deaths caused by Cyclone Nargis which struck Myanmar in 2008.

The report also highlights that floods accounted for 47 per cent of all weather-related disasters from 1995-2015, affecting 2.3 billion people and killing 157,000.

Storms were the deadliest weather-related disaster, accounting for 242,000 deaths (40 per cent) of the global weather-related deaths, with 89 percent of these deaths occurring in lower-income countries.

Overall, heatwaves accounted for 148,000 of the 164,000 lives lost due to extreme temperatures, with 92 percent of deaths occurring in high-income countries, said the report.

Finally, drought reportedly affects Africa more than any other continent, with 136 events between 1995 and 2015, including 77 droughts in East Africa alone, the report showed.

Chennai on verge of rain record

Rains left the Madras war cemetery flooded on Tuesday.

The weather station in Meenambakkam has already recorded 1144.8 mm this November.

Chennai is on its way to have the wettest November of the century and break an all-time rainfall record.

With Monday's torrential downpour bringing 93 mm of rainfall, Chennai has crossed 1,025 mm of rainfall for the month. According to the Meteorological Department, November 1918 was the wettest month as the city received 1088.4 mm of rainfall then.

The weather station in Meenambakkam has already recorded 1144.8 mm this November. Officials recall that Chennai recorded 970 mm of rainfall in November 1985 and 1077.1 mm in October 2005. The remaining few days of this month will decide whether the city gets to break the century's record.

The rains so far have been severe with many rain-related deaths, including the electrocution of a couple in Velachery, death of a youngster in a wall collapse in Pattalam and the fatal fall of a man in a trench dug up in R.A. Puram to drain stagnant rainwater. Schools and colleges in Chennai, Tiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts will remain closed on Wednesday. As reservoirs continue to get heavy inflows, city waterways are carrying rainwater to their brim. The Adyar River is in a spate as about 6,000 cusecs is being let out from the Chembarambakkam reservoir.

Central team visit

In a bid to provide flood relief assistance, a nine-member Central team will visit flood-affected areas in Tamil Nadu on November 26 to assess the damage.

At present, a new trough lies over southwest Bay of Bengal and the adjoining Sri Lanka coast. With another upper air circulation forming near the weather system, the Meteorological Department expects it to influence the formation of a low pressure area by November 26 or November 27.



The pulse of the matter

Farmers tend to lose out irrespective of whether crop prices go up or down. Government needs to rectify this.



The general complaint of farmers is that everyone is willing to sell inputs to them but no one cares about the sale of their produce at remunerative prices.

The price of tur/ arhar dal had recently skyrocketed to Rs 200 per kg and the consumer as well as the government were at their wits' end. Not very long ago, high onion prices were making everyone shed copious tears. In both the cases, there was profit maximisation by the middlemen and the sellers. But what were the gains accruing to the farmers? The additional profit, due to the higher prices of pulses and onions, has been cornered by traders with deep pockets. The farmers haven't received much. Contrast this with the potato crop at present.

Because of a bumper production, prices have crashed. A kilogram of potato is fetching just Rs 4-5 in the wholesale market. The potato farmer is suffering despite giving a record harvest. And yet, the consumer continues to buy the potato at Rs 15-20 per kg. Something similar is happening for farmers of Basmati paddy as well. Farmers are agitating over a very low price for a particular paddy variety — Pusa Basmati 1509. Due to weak export demand, Pusa Basmati prices have fallen from Rs 26 per kg last year to Rs 13 per kg this year. It was only when the government started its procurement under the minimum support price (MSP) that the prices recovered marginally to Rs 15 per kg. In short, while farmers are the only ones to suffer when the prices of their agricultural produce go down, they never seem to gain when the prices go up.

The general complaint of farmers is that everyone is willing to sell inputs to them but no one cares about the sale of their produce at remunerative prices. The focus of all scientific and technological interventions since the Green Revolution has been on increasing production. When the production goes up, prices in the markets go down and a farmer's net gain is nullified despite the fact that he may have incurred higher costs due to the application of improved inputs. Even cooperative behemoths like the IFFCO and KRIBHCO are only focused on selling inputs for agriculture. They have not made efforts to ensure that farmers receive remunerative prices for their produce.

The market, on its natural course to maximise profit, tries to extract the most from the farmers. As farmers are generally under debt, they are forced to sell their produce soon after the harvest, when the prices are low. With the passage of time, the prices go up and it is only the traders who gain, not the farmers. And thanks to the multi-tiered marketing structure, prices go up by the time they reach the retail outlets. Hence, the consumers do not benefit from low prices even when there is excess production. Similarly, even in

years of deficit production, when the prices go up due to a shortfall, farmers do not receive higher returns.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the state to safeguard the interest of farmers in order to ensure food and nutrition security for its citizens. Technically, the MSP for up to 25 agricultural crops is declared by the government but, in effect, procurement is conducted only for paddy and wheat.

Over time, this has led to a distortion in the production patterns across the country because the cultivation of rice and wheat is considered to be safer because of an assured market.

The production of pulses, for instance, is a good example of such distortions. For a country like India, where a large number of people are vegetarian, pulses are a key source of protein readily available. Unlike corn and paddy, a hybrid variety of pulses has not been very effective in enhancing the yield. As such, more research is required to increase the productivity of pulses. The supply shortfall in pulses is about 15-20 per cent. This can be bridged either by increasing the productivity or increasing the acreage under pulses. Substitution of arhar dal by matar dal or rajma may also be helpful. However, this requires a behavioural change at the level of farmers that, in turn, requires a sustained campaign. Even the seed availability of pulses has been problematic. As such, there is an urgent need for the government to intervene and augment seed availability. In the northern parts of the country, pulses cultivation also suffers from the extensive damage caused by the blue bulls. They belong to the antelope family, but farmers refrain from killing them because of their Hindi name — “neel gai” — even though governments issue licences to kill them.

A wheat-rice cycle, year after year, is damaging the fertility of the soil as well. The cultivation of pulses rejuvenates the soil by fixing the nitrogen. As there is no policy to maintain buffer stocks of oilseeds and pulses, the government is in no position to release stocks in the markets to stabilise prices when they start to rise. The creation of a reasonable sized buffer stock of pulses, through public procurement, will have the effect of stabilising prices for consumers. Moreover, pulses are largely cultivated in rain-fed areas and, as such, greater public investment in expanding irrigation facilities will further help overall productivity.

Assuring proper returns to farmers is the big question that needs to be addressed. Over 80 per cent of all Indian farmers belong to the category of small and marginal, with over 60 per cent farmers operating on land holdings less than one hectare in size. With rising prices of inputs, cultivation as a profession has become highly unattractive. Farmers still continue to cultivate largely because there is no other choice for them. The situation needs to be rectified. Farming must be made an attractive profession in the interest of the country and its citizens.

To this end, the government must distribute input subsidies directly to farmers by way of income support, since it is a WTO-compliant method. The emphasis on improving production and availability will sound hollow unless we place the farmer at the centre of our thought process.

690 million children at risk from climate change: UNICEF

An additional 160 million kids are growing up in areas suffering severe droughts, mostly in Africa, UNICEF said in the report titled "Unless We Act Now."



Climate Change.

Nearly 690 million of the world's 2.3 billion children live in areas most exposed to climate change, facing higher rates of death, poverty and disease from global warming, the UN children's agency said today. Almost 530 million children live in countries hardest-hit by high floods and tropical storms, mostly in Asia.

An additional 160 million kids are growing up in areas suffering severe droughts, mostly in Africa, UNICEF said in the report titled "Unless We Act Now." "Children will bear the brunt of climate change. They are already bearing a lot of the impact," said Nicholas Rees, a policy specialist at UNICEF and one of the report's authors.

“The sheer number of children exposed to climate risk is alarming,” said the report. US President [Barack Obama](#) and China’s Xi Jinping are joining more than 135 world leaders in Paris next week for an international conference aimed at clinching the first agreement on tackling global warming in 20 years.

The most urgent task is for world governments to agree on curbing greenhouse gas emissions, said Rees, but action is also needed on the national level to deal with the impact. “When impacts occur, children must still be able to go to school and get the health care they need,” he said. A key concern is exposure to diseases that could become deadlier as a result of climate change and rising temperatures, including malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea and malnutrition.

Heatwaves, which have become more frequent, are causing more severe rashes, cramps, exhaustion and dehydration, which is a common cause of hyperthermia and death among infants and young children. The impact of droughts on agriculture is leading to malnutrition and undernutrition, which is responsible for half of worldwide deaths of children under five.

Of the 160 million children who live in areas affected by severe droughts, almost 50 million are in countries where half or more of the population lives on less than four dollars per day. Climate change makes existing inequalities worse, said Rees.

“A poor child and a rich child don’t stand the same chances” when a flood or a drought hits, he said.



[Forest academy holds training for 33 officers](#)

About 33 officers including six women from six states have joined the 18 month training programme at the Tamil Nadu Forest Academy in Coimbatore on Monday. 12 male officers and one female officer from Andaman and Nicobar islands, 10 male officers and three female officers from Kerala, four male officer from Madhya Pradesh, four male officer and one female officer from Tamil Nadu, two female officers and one male

officer from Uttarakhand and one male officer from Karnataka were part of the training.

All of them said while they faced some language troubles while making some purchases, they were excited and were looking forward to the training. Savithri Giri from Uttarakhand said she was away from her family for 18 months. "The main thing I would miss is the food as we are not used to eating much rice," she said. Their classes began on Monday and they would be trained in various aspects of the forests including laws, technology usage, fitness training and other aspects such as conservation, poaching and so on.

M S M Anandan, minister of state for forests, said that this was a proud moment for Tamil Nadu as the last time such training took place was in 1988. "The academy is known for its heritage, discipline and training. Equipped with all facilities, we wish the batch a successful training," he said. He also held a review meeting with forest officers and conservator of forests.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Farm research severely hit: biotech firms

With the frequency of GEAC (Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee) meetings coming down and several States acting slow on giving NOCs (No Objection Certificate) for GM field trials, the ABLE-AG (Association of Biotech Led Enterprises) has said that scientific research in agriculture has been severely hit.

Several firms have either shut down or slowed down research programmes, as uncertainty in getting permissions for field trials of genetically modified crops continues.

‘Neighbours progressing’

“We lost 4-5 years in agricultural research, while countries like Vietnam, China and Bangladesh have progressed,” Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director of Association of Biotech Led Enterprises (ABLE-AG), told *BusinessLine* .

The association had thought the new regime at the Centre would make it easier for the industry in getting approvals.

But protests against GM crops and research in this area got stronger, with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-backed organisations putting pressure on BJP-ruled States to stop giving permissions for GM crop field trials.

The association feels the Centre has been favourable (for trials) but mandatory permissions from States were hard to come by.

“There is a strong disconnect between the Centre and States. Some States are not even equipped to clear proposals. Others try to repeat what the GEAC does. But they don’t have the technical wherewithal to do that,” he said.

Political angle

Ram Kaundinya, Director-General of ABLE-AG, said the States were not able to see the bigger picture.

“Because they are not able to take a technical view, they are taking a political view on the issue,” he said.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, which works under the Union Ministry of Environment, vets the proposals from agricultural biotech firms before giving permissions.

However, the firms will have to take NOCs from respective States to conduct the field trials. Several firms could not start trials even after getting the GEAC go-ahead, as some States tread a cautious path, keeping in view the politically sensitive issue.

Different response

While the Andhra Pradesh Government has approved trials in some crops, the Telangana Government has just formed a committee to vet the proposals. Other States such as Bihar, Kerala, and Jharkhand have taken a hard stance.

“There are certain technologies that could solve the problems of our farmers. For one, drought-tolerant maize and sugar cane could be of great help to them. But the present gridlock does not allow it to happen,” Kaundinya said.

Nixing coconut oil imports brings relief to growers

The Centre's decision to drop its plan to import coconut oil has brought cheers to growers, but not to the market, as rates have witnessed a steady line this week.

However, continuing rains in Tamil Nadu have pushed up copra prices, affecting arrivals from various production centres. Prices now rule at Rs. 6,900 per quintal in Tamil Nadu against Rs. 6,500, while in Kerala it went up to Rs. 6,950 per quintal against Rs. 6,800 quoted last week.

Several companies are purchasing the commodity at higher prices to meet production requirements, said Thalath Mahmood, President of Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA). The coconut oil market is also ruling in a steady line, with prices quoting at Rs. 10,000 per quintal in Kerala, while it was Rs. 9,350 in Tamil Nadu.

The rains have dampened all activities connected with coconut processing; even copra drying. However, prices are likely to decline further in the coming weeks, with good production and low demand, he added.

Meanwhile, the Centre's decision to stop coconut oil imports through the State Trading Corporation (STC) has come as a relief to coconut growers, both in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

A decision to this effect was taken following the concern raised by the Kerala Government as well as from other quarters.

This was conveyed to Mullappally Ramachandran, MP, by Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

In the letter, the Minister pointed out that the DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade) has reviewed the matter and decided to reduce the quantity of coconut oil from 10,000 tonnes to 2,000 tonnes.

It may be recalled that the DGFT had approved its inter-ministerial committee recommendations, seeking authorisation for the import of coconut oil by STC for a leading corporate firm in Mumbai, on high sea sales basis. Accordingly, the STC has imported 2,000 tonnes.

‘Sugar mills doing their best to meet targets but hurdles in States remain’

The sugar industry, while welcoming the Centre’s recent move to pay direct subsidy to farmers on their behalf, said while it was doing its best to meet export and ethanol blending targets, certain “impediments” created by State governments were creating obstacles.

Last week, the Union Cabinet had agreed to pay direct subsidy of Rs. 4.50/quintal (amounting to Rs. 1,147 crore) to farmers on behalf of mills, subject to mills meeting the mandatory 80 per cent export and ethanol blending targets.

In a statement on Tuesday, A Vellayan, President of the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), said the Indian Sugar Exim Corporation had contracted for 1 lakh tonnes of exports in October. “The industry has responded well by contracting for 104 crore litre of ethanol supplies (against 78 crore litres in 2014-15), which will straightaway save the Centre almost Rs. 5,000 crore of foreign exchange,” he said, adding, “We expect to contract for more ethanol supplies in the next couple of months.”

Appeal to Centre

Vellayan said that the “industry is responding in the best possible manner by trying to export sugar, even though exports are unviable and the mills are losing money.”

He urged the Centre to convince State governments to remove certain ‘impediments’, such as “not permitting production of fuel ethanol or delaying excise permissions, or creating impediments on inter-State movements by imposing taxes and duties on such an important fuel”.

This, he said, would not only replace some of the imported petroleum and reduce foreign exchange outgo, but would directly benefit cane farmers in the country. While acknowledging that the Centre was taking steps to rationalise the cane pricing policy, Vellayan added, “We will continue to request acceptance of the recommendations of the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices for a revenue sharing or cane price-sugar price linkage formula, along with the Price Stabilisation Fund, to bridge the gap between FRP (fair and remunerative price) and what the industry can pay.”

The existing FRP is Rs. 230/quintal, the minimum to be paid to farmers, as mandated by the Centre.

For the past few months, sugar mills have been facing a liquidity crunch due to surplus production and subdued prices of the sweetener, leading to accumulation of arrears of over Rs. 7,000 crore payable to cane growers.

India, the world's second largest sugar producer after Brazil, expects surplus output at 26-27 million tonnes for the sixth straight year in 2015-16.

Tamil Nadu's monsoon woes may not be over just yet

Chennai and its neighbourhood, along with Sri Lanka, will yet again bear the brunt of a heavy wet spell being piloted by a low-pressure area, taking shape over the Andaman Sea.

There has been an upper air circulation in the region already, which will descend to lower levels to set up the 'low' by Thursday, the Met Department said in an update.

Peak rain spell

The US Climate Prediction Centre has marked out the week from November 30 (Monday) to December 6, as the most critical period during which the rain fury might touch its peak.

Apart from Chennai, excess rain is being forecast for almost the entire Tamil Nadu and adjoining Kerala, heavier towards the South.

The weather warning issued by India Met Department on Tuesday is as follows:

Friday — Heavy rain at isolated places over Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.
Saturday — Heavy to very heavy rain at isolated places over coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry, and heavy at isolated places over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

As is already known, the 'low' has its origin from a remnant of the prevailing Pacific typhoon In-Fa.

The typhoon has turned tail in the Northwest Pacific, and is now moving away from South Asia.

It would have been a different scenario had it continued to travel towards the West, entered South China Sea that lies next door to the Bay of Bengal.

But here, the East Coast – Tamil Nadu in particular – needs to deal with only a remnant ‘pulse’ of the typhoon. The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts suspects that the ‘low’ may not be able to grow into a full-fledged storm. It sees a low-pressure area or a well-marked ‘low’ at work along the coast.

Rain driver

But that does not take away its capacity to generate intense and sustained rainfall, which was on show last week when the coast came face-to-face with a weather system of the same pedigree.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, the low-pressure area over East-Central Arabian Sea had died out. An offspring trough (not amounting to a ‘low’) persisted, lying extended from South-East Arabian Sea to South Gujarat. In the Bay of Bengal, a counterpart trough was parked off Sri Lanka in South-West Bay of Bengal.

Clouds had since moved out of Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and coastal Andhra Pradesh, in what could be only a brief lull before a wet spell again.

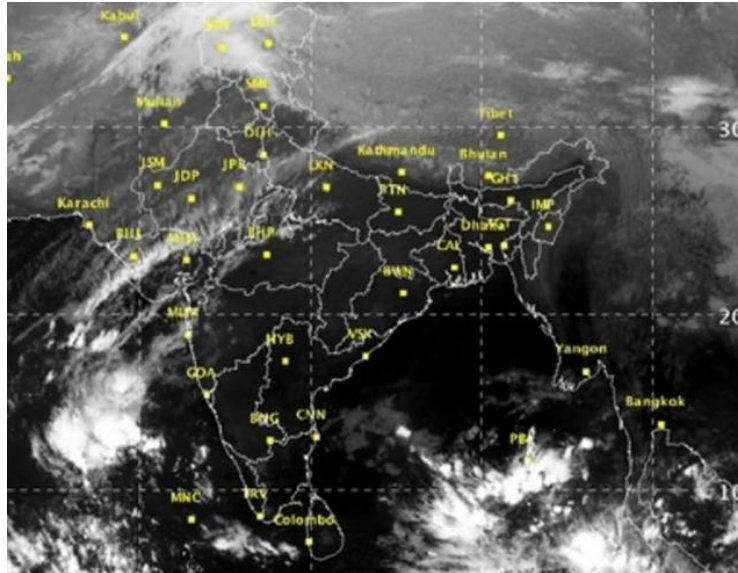
Apart from Chennai, excess rain is being forecast for almost the entire Tamil Nadu and adjoining Kerala, heavier towards the South

Brief lull in Tamil Nadu in the run up to emerging wet spell

Tamil Nadu seems to be enjoying what are mostly clear conditions but satellite pictures show fresh thunderclouds having sailed in well past the half-way mark from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Also, there has been a perceptible increase in the clouding around the islands and the Adaman Sea, where a low-pressure area is expected to materialise by tomorrow (Thursday) as per India Met Department.

There is a preparatory cyclonic circulation hovering in the area, and that explains the clouding, which would grow in density in the run-up to the formation of the 'low'.



By this time, some of the clouds that had left the islands already would reach the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts.

India Met Department expects the coast to receive heavy rain at isolated places over these coasts by Friday, around the time the 'low' has matured in the South Andaman Sea.

The outlook is upgraded to heavy to very rain along Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and heavy over Andaman and Nicobar Islands on Friday.