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‘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.

TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Entrepreneurship Development Institute and Department of Floriculture and Landscaping of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University will organise a 21-day training programme on landscaping and floriculture from December 8 to 31. The programme will be free of cost. Candidates with a minimum education qualification of Plus Two are eligible to apply. Those interested can register with the Professor and Head, Department of Floriculture and Landscaping, TNAU, Coimbatore -641003. The last date for application is December 4.

Eight States seek drought relief from Centre

At least eight States have sought Central assistance for drought relief following deficient southwest monsoon. Seasonal rain this year from June 1 to September 30 was 14 per cent lower than the Long Period Average, according to the India Meteorological Department.

While a Rs. 1,540-crore package has been sanctioned for Karnataka, the Agriculture Ministry has recommended Central assistance of Rs. 1,387 crore for Chhattisgarh, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said during a review meeting with State Agriculture Production Commissioners and Principal Secretaries. The meeting was convened to review the progress of various schemes of the government.

Having received memoranda for relief from Maharashtra for its 21 districts and from Madhya Pradesh for 27 affected districts, Central teams are currently visiting the two States for spot assessment. Uttar Pradesh has declared drought in 50 districts while

Odisha has sought Central funds for 21 affected districts. Central teams will soon be despatched there.

The Minister said Andhra Pradesh had been urged to send its memorandum identifying the districts and regions that had suffered drought from deficient rain. Bihar, Telangana and Jharkhand too were drought-hit and had been advised to submit their petitions for Central assistance.

“Barring Andhra Pradesh, six States have submitted memoranda. We have sanctioned Rs. 1,540-crore assistance to Karnataka,” Mr. Singh said. Drought relief funds are normally sanctioned after Central teams visit the affected States upon receiving memoranda for assistance.

Already last year’s drought in parts of the country has hit pulses production, which has sent the prices of tur and arhar skyrocketing. Prices of onion, tomatoes and peas too are ruling high.

Vigilant farmers save paddy crop

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,” says Aganti Penteswara Rao, a tenant farmer of 20 acres.

Flood warning issued in command area of Amaravathi Dam

Public Works Department has issued a flood warning to the people in the command area of Amaravathi Dam after the water level reached 84.48 feet against the total height of 90 feet at 7 a.m. on Wednesday.

Collector G. Govindaraj said the warning was only to caution the people of the emergency situation that might arise if any of the nine spillway gates were to be opened.

PWD (Water Resources Organisation) officials told *The Hindu* that surplus water would be discharged only if the water level touches 88 feet.

Inflow of water into the reservoir area was at 1,500 cusecs (cubic feet per second) at 7 a.m. on Wednesday.

“Water flow into the reservoir is from the Rivers Thennar, Pambar and Sithar which confluence about four km. on the upstream of Amaravathy Dam”, said PWD officials. Prior to the present alert, the PWD officials had already sent a requisition to the State Government for release of water from the dam for irrigation.

“If that order comes, water can be released even before the level touches 88 feet”, pointed out the officials.

Crops were raised over a command area of 55,000 acres spread over Tirupur and Karur districts.

Relief materials given to flood-hit



Tourism Minister S.P. Shanmuganathan distributing relief materials to the flood-affected people at a relief camp in Tuticorin on Wednesday

Relief materials were given to flood-affected people who have been accommodated in temporary relief camps here on Wednesday.

Tourism Minister S.P. Shanmuganathan, along with Collector M. Ravikumar and Special Monitoring Officer Kumar Jeyanth, visited a camp at Spic Nagar, where 800 people were provided with food items such as bread, bananas and milk.

Clothes and bed sheets were also given to the victims. In a statement issued here on Wednesday, the Collector said that 2,830 victims, who were rescued and evacuated from their inundated houses in various localities, had been provided shelter in eight temporary relief camps.

Besides, 17,400 food parcels were given to those who could not cook food in their houses. Since the district received heavy rain on Monday, 10 villages were affected as water entered several localities. Floodwater was being drained with the aid motor pumps.

Moreover, 50 hp and 100 hp motor pumps had been brought from Virudhunagar, Madurai, Theni and Dindigul districts to expedite the work.

The Collector said that the stagnant water in the affected localities would be drained completely on Thursday.

Effective utilisation of dry lands stressed

Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University's peripheral extension centre — Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Kundrakudi — has organised a workshop on “Strategies to increase the reproductive efficiency in dairy cattle” for the benefit of farmers.

The workshop held at Salaigramam in Ilayankudi block on Tuesday was sponsored by the Tamil Nadu Livestock Development Agency.

Addressing the workshop, Collector S. Malarvizhi stressed the importance of effective utilisation of dry lands for dairy cow production to improve the livelihoods of farmers.

Stating that cross-bred dairy calves were valuable assets in dairy enterprise, she said the by-products of value-added milk served as regular revenue for farming communities.

R. Gurumoorthy, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, mentioned about the nutritional value of tamarind seeds for protein supplementation in dairy cattle feeding.

R. Viswanathan, Regional Joint Director of Animal Husbandry department, said the department's intervention with the co-ordination of farmers, resulted in the increase of cattle population by 10 per cent in the district in the recent years.

S. Sendur Kumaran, Associate Professor and Head, KVK, Kundrakudi, briefed on the role of KVK in helping farmers in technology transfer.

“Newer Technologies in Livestock rearing” authored by V. Kumaravel and “To Know about Soil” by T. Selvaraj, Assistant Professors, KVK, Kundrakudi, were released on the occasion.

Water from Chembarambakkam inundates banks of river

Surplus water from all the four reservoirs is being discharged after eight years

After nearly eight years, surplus water from all four city reservoirs is being released. For the ninth day now, excess water from Chembarambakkam reservoir is being released into Adyar river, which has led to inundation of some areas along its banks. Following heavy overnight rainfall, the reservoir is getting nearly 6,000 cubic feet per second of water from lakes upstream. (One cusec is equal to 28.3 litres).

On Tuesday, nearly 6,000 cusecs was being discharged into Adyar river instigating fears of fresh floods among residents. However, officials of Water Resources Department said the river was now carrying nearly 25,000 cusecs of water from the reservoir and other water bodies in the southern sections of the city.

It travels through Tiruneermalai, Manapakkam, Kolapakkam, Gerugambakkam, Kotturpuram, Saidapet and Adyar before joining the sea. Officials of WRD said the river had a carrying capacity of 50,000 cusecs and the water flow could even go up to 72,000 cusecs near Thiru.vi.ka bridge.

Though its width here goes up to 150 metres, the river is in spate as it swells with heavy inflow. It may be recalled that excess water received from Sriperumbudur area of up to 15,000 cusecs was let into the river a few days ago.

The WRD also diverted surplus from Cholavaram reservoir to Red Hills on Tuesday. Meanwhile, release of water from Red Hills and Poondi reservoirs has also been stepped up.

Of all the reservoirs, Poondi reservoir has registered a maximum release of 19,200 cusecs, which is being let into Kosasthalaiyar river since 6 p.m. on Tuesday.

Similarly, the inflow of 1,850 cusecs, which also includes what is received from Cholavaram lake, gushes out from two shutters. This had to be done to maintain the water level at 19 feet, officials said. Sand bags have been placed in vulnerable low-level areas like Thiruneelakandan Nagar in Puzhal to prevent damage in the locality.

Many areas downstream of Red Hills lake would be affected when the outflow touches 5,000 cusecs. Residents living downstream of reservoirs may have a respite only if inflow and rain recede.

NHAI to construct drains at water-logged points

The NHAI has started marking points on its roads to prevent logging in future. The road from Kundrathur to Sriperumbudur was cut off after excess water from the Chembarambakkam Reservoir was discharged on Tuesday.— Photo: B. Jothi Ramalingam

Following the recent heavy rain in the State, the National Highways Authority of India, which manages over 5,000 km of roads in Tamil Nadu, has started marking water-logged points on its roads to prevent logging in future. We are also looking at places where water overflowed onto the main carriageway. We will ask our concessionaires, who maintain the roads and manage the 40-odd toll plazas, to take necessary constructions including drains across and alongside roads,” said V. Chinna Reddy, Chief General Manager (Technical).

Recently, water from the Porur lake overflowed onto the access-controlled Chennai bypass disrupting traffic on the road. “There are some drainage issues at that point. It will be sorted,” said a source in the NHAI.

Similarly, water had overflowed at a causeway at Narayanapuram on the Chennai – Tirupati highway (NH 205) disrupting traffic. Rakesh Chordia, Purasawalkam resident, who visits Tirupati often said the highway is not motorable in many places. “At Narayanapuram, there is a bridge that is half constructed adjacent to the causeway. Though the NHAI is collecting toll to use the road, several structures including this bridge remain incomplete,” he said. NHAI sources said the structural stability of the causeway had been ascertained by a team of experts, who said it was not weak. “Water is overflowing due to rain. Only recently land acquisition problems were sorted out there. Work to complete the bridge will commence soon,” said a source.

On pot holes, Mr. Chinna Reddy said wet mix macadam had been used as a temporary measure. “Once the rains stop concessionaires everywhere have kept gangs ready and patchwork will be taken up. This time the rains were very heavy leading to water-logging in some places. Our cross drains are usually constructed based on the local channels and nullahs. But in many places, especially near urban settlements, encroachments block the water flow leading to water on the carriageway. The State government should remove encroachments and ensure garbage is not dumped on the sides of our roads,” he said.

Distribution of Nilavembu kashayam begins



TIMELY help:Nilavembu kashayam being distributed at the Government Headquarters Hospital in Erode on Wednesday



Nilavembu kashayam being distributed at Government Mohan Kumaramangalam Medical College Hospital in Salem on Wednesday.

The Siddha wing of the Health Department has provided Nilavembu kashayam for dengue prevention to over 1.85 lakh adults and children in the district so far during this month, for dengue prevention.

The Health Department has been providing the herbal medicine through 50 centres comprising government hospitals and primary health centres throughout the district since the start of the rainy season, official sources said.

People in the city limits are being covered separately by the Corporation administration. The stock of Nilavembu powder is being replenished at regular intervals by Tampcol, a State Government undertaking.

Citizens have been visiting the hospital specifically to consume the concoction and also take it home in the bottles they bring. Since the 'ready to drink' kasayam must be consumed within two to three hours, the concoction is prepared at regular intervals, official sources said.

The public are informed at the hospitals that the concoction must be consumed twice a day for three days. A single dose contains 10 grams of the powder in 30 ml water. The dosage is 5 gm in the same quantity of water for children. The concoction is being prepared using mineral water, hospital sources said.

The public and the visitors start consuming the concoction at the hospital from morning till evening.

The in-patients are given the herbal medicine during the evening hours.

Students in government schools have been covered by the Primary Health Centres. Unlike in the past, private schools have started approaching the Health department for administering the concoction to their students, sources said.

Erode has not witnessed sustained impact of rainfall, and hence, there was no cause for any apprehension of dengue outbreak.

So far, no case has been reported, as per official records.

As part of the State-wide exercise, a special awareness campaign was initiated on Wednesday morning by Revenue Divisional Officer Narmada Devi, in the presence of the Joint Director of Health Mani, District Siddha Medical Officer Ramakrishnan and Assistant Medical Officer Rafiq Ahmed.

Tiruchengode

Nilavembu kashayam was distributed to more than 600 men, women and children on the inaugural day of the five day special camp brought up by the Siddha wing of the Government Hospital here on Wednesday.

The State Health Department had ordered holding special camps for five days in all the Sidha wings functioning in the government hospitals and primary health centres in the State.

The camp at Tiruchengode was inaugurated by Pon Saraswathi, Chairperson of Tiruchengode Municipality, in the presence of Palanisamy, Medical Officer in-charge of the Government Hospital and Chidambara Lakshmi, Siddha doctor.

The camp will continue for four more days.

NABARD sanctions funds to Srikakulam to stop 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.

More rain gauges needed: farmers

With Kolli Hills receiving heavy rain, farmers have demanded that more rain gauges be installed in the hilltop.

During the agricultural grievances redress meeting held at the Collectorate recently, farmers said that there was no gauge to measure the amount of rainfall in the hilltop. They said that if the rainfall levels were known, they would be able to carry out cultivation or plan their activities in the hilltop.

Agricultural Department officials said that a rain gauge has been installed in Kolli Hills.

Steps would be taken for installing more.

Available

Rain gauges were being provided to farmers too under the Agriculture Technology Management Agency scheme in the district.

Norms relaxed to encourage entrepreneurs

With a view to encouraging local entrepreneurs to set up micro enterprises, the Board of the Puducherry Industrial Promotion, Development and Investment Corporation (PIPDIC) has decided to relax the existing norms with regard to debt equity norms and furnishing of lease deed.

According to a press note from T. Karikalan, PIPDIC managing director, henceforth, the micro enterprise projects promoted by local entrepreneurs for loans up to Rs.25 lakh, an unregistered lease deed for the work premises will be accepted by the Corporation instead of registered document that was insisted upon.

The debt equity norms of 2:1 presently followed for the loan amount above Rs.10 lakh is now relaxed to 3:1, for the loan amount up to Rs.25 lakh and the promoter's contribution has been reduced from 33.33 per cent to 25 per cent, the note said.

The Investment Corporation has called upon local entrepreneurs to make use of the opportunity and promote micro enterprise projects in the Union Territory of Puducherry.

Further details are available with PIPDIC.

Potential-linked credit plan released for Dindigul district

The NABARD's Potential-linked Credit Plan of Rs.6,206 crore for priority sector lending in the district for the next fiscal, 15 per cent more than the Annual Credit Plan of the current year, was launched here on Wednesday.

Of the total projected outlay, share of agriculture sector is Rs.4,384.08 crore and other priority sector including micro and medium enterprises, term loan and working capital Rs.790.77 crore, export credit Rs.45 crore, education Rs.44.55 crore and housing Rs.178.68 crore, renewable energy Rs.292.77 crore, other sectors loans to SHG and JLGs Rs.38.15 crore and social infrastructure involving bank credit Rs.88.5 crore. Seventy per cent of the total outlay is for agriculture sector and 13 per cent for MSME sector and the rest for other sectors.

To provide better infrastructure in rural areas, projects, including laying roads, constructing bridges, school buildings, check dams, godowns were being implemented in the district under RIDF scheme to the tune of Rs.149 crore this fiscal. Besides, the NABARD had been promoting 13 farmer producer organisation, said L. Sanjivi, District Development Manager, NABARD.

He stressed the need for increasing credit flow aimed at capital formation both in agriculture and manufacturing sector and advised bankers to meet the credit

requirements of small and marginal farmers. Scope was very immense for lending to horticulture, especially plantation, dairy, poultry, he said.

Plan projected MSMEs, including agro-processing industries, at Rs.147.93 crore and other priority sector areas including retail, small businesses and education loan at Rs. 327.51 crore.

Support promised for grape growers

Efforts will be made to support grape growers in the district, Deputy Commissioner Anurag Tewari said in Bidar on Tuesday.

After a meeting with the officials of the Karnataka State Wine Board, Horticulture and Agriculture Departments, he said the government would provide technical know-how and logistical support to grape growers in collaboration with the Board.

Currently, a small area in Basava Kalyan and Humnabad is under grape cultivation. “We plan to increase it,” he said. He asked the officials to create awareness among farmers about the crop.

He suggested to the officials of the Industries Department to facilitate setting up of a new winery in the district and support the existing units. The government was giving subsidy and other facilities to wine-making units, he pointed out.

“We will try to ensure that all the facilities and benefits available to farmers of other agricultural and horticultural crops reach the grape growers, including easy loans and approvals,” he said.

Wine expert Veeranagouda Patil said wine grapes were hardy and reduced the losses suffered by farmers during extreme climatic conditions.

“It does not demand much water. Farmers can grow grapes on 2.5 acres using the same quantity of water used for cultivating one acre of banana or sugarcane,” he said. Once planted, grapes continue to yield for 20 years. Farmers can expect profits of upto Rs. 1 lakh per acre, he said.

S. Sarvesh, technical officer, said Karnataka was the second biggest grape-growing State in the country after Maharashtra.

However, output per acre in the State was higher than that in the neighbouring State he said.

KAU to organise workshop on plagiarism

Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) is organising a one-day workshop on 'Research Publishing and Plagiarism' for researchers and postgraduate students in University Central Library, Vellanikkara, Thrissur, on December 4, 2015.

Workshop includes hands on sessions also. Those attending the workshop will be permitted to check their theses or papers for duplication within one year by using the databases and software available here.

The fee is Rs. 200 for those from outside the KAU to be remitted in varsity account. Subsidised accommodation will be provided subject to the availability. As seats are limited, interested persons should register in advance with a copy of the consent letter of the institution in which they are doing research or studying, according to a KAU press release.

For registration and more details, contact: The University Librarian, Kerala Agricultural University, KAU Post, Thrissur - 680 656. Phone: 0487 -2438550-60, 9745332878; 9496839409; e-mail:library@kau.in;

Agriculture, Ayurveda are Asha's priority areas

District panchayat president Asha Sanil.

Asha Sanil, the new district panchayat president, has zeroed in on development of agriculture and promotion of Ayurveda as her immediate priority areas.

She has set her sights on making Ernakulam self-sufficient in food. Ms. Sanil told a meet-the-press programme here on Tuesday that making Ernakulam fallow land-free would be one of the major projects of the new governing committee. A retail market for the produce of Kudumbasree will be set up in the district.

Farms under our jurisdiction would be equipped and promoted to undertake cultivation of a diverse range of products from paddy to vegetables, she said.

Ponds and water bodies remaining neglected in the district would be rejuvenated and preserved properly. Water from these bodies would be used in our endeavour to promote farming.

More tractors and tillers would be made available as part of mechanisation of farming. Floating tillers would be tried out in Pokkali farms in the eastern panchayats. Animal husbandry would be promoted to make the district self-sufficient in egg production.

The district panchayat would utilise 300 acres farm under its ownership in Neriamangalam for cultivating medicinal plants as well. Even the area along the newly constructed embankments as part of preservation of ponds would be used for planting medicinal plants.

At present, medicines in the district Ayurveda hospital are being bought from outside. “Our larger plan is to make the entire Ayurveda health care sector in our district self-sufficient in medicines,” Ms. Sanil said.

Continuing the previous governing committee’s focus on developing infrastructure, we would infuse technology in the education sector by developing smart classrooms. While the previous committee concentrated on improving the infrastructure in higher secondary schools, Ms. Sanil said that this time the focus would be on high schools. Promotion of livelihood has been identified as another priority area. This would be done by running self-employment projects like sanitary napkins manufacturing units.

Banana price crashes



Plantains damaged in heavy rain at Peramachipalayam village, near Sankagiri in Salem.

The steep fall in the price of bananas in Thammampatti area is a matter of concern for the farming community.

Different varieties such as ‘rasthali’, ‘poovan’, ‘karpooravalli’, ‘morriss’ are raised in a large area in Gangavalli, Thammampatti, Veeraganur, Sentharapatti, Thedavur and the surrounding villages.

The bananas are plucked every alternate day and sent to cities like Chennai, Bengaluru, where they have good demand. Due to continuous rainfall in Chennai city and other parts of the state for the last many days, the consumption of banana has come down very much.

Moreover, the fear of people getting affected by fever, and cold has also forced the people to stay away from plantain. Due to this, the bananas are not being sent to Chennai city for the last many days. There is no demand for the fruit in the local markets too. The price of 'karpooravalli,' which was selling at Rs. 250 last week, crashed to Rs. 40 on Monday.

The price of 'morris' is now priced at Rs. 100, compared to Rs. 400 last week.

The price of 'rasthali' and 'poovan' too have come down drastically. The plantain farmers and traders of Thammampatti area are waiting for the sky to clear for getting a reasonable price for the fruits.

The plantains in a private farm in Peramachipalayam village near Sankagiri suffered damages in the heavy rain on Sunday.

The standing paddy and turmeric crop in this area is under water.

The hill station of Yercaud received intermittent showers for the last of couple of days.

Symposium on cage aquaculture

Fisheries experts called for sustainable aquaculture practices and focus on environmental safety and consumer health aspects for Asian countries to prosper in the sector.

The experts were speaking at the fifth international symposium on cage aquaculture in Asia, which began here on Wednesday. The conference is being organised by the Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR)-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Kochi, Asian Fisheries Society, Malaysia and the Asian Fisheries Society, Indian Branch.

In his inaugural address, S. Ayyappan, Director General, ICAR, said the tribespeople of Gujarat and Jharkhand had successfully tested the cage culture, which could be emulated by others. Quality seed, feed and skills were required for the improvement of cage aquaculture in India, he said. The Innovation Awards instituted by the Asian Society were presented at the function.

Agri exhibition from December 19

Agrex 2015, a 10-day exhibition of agriculture, floriculture and industry, will be held at the SDV School grounds from December 19.

The exhibition is being organised by Alappuzha Zilla Agri-Horticultural Society, SD College, and the Department of Agriculture, Kerala.

The theme of the exhibition is 'Organic farming for sustainable food products.' The show will also coincide with the culmination of the year long silver jubilee celebrations of the Agri-Horticultural Society. The exhibition aims at strengthening rural-urban linkages so as to develop agro-ecological farming in the district, thereby enabling the urban population to access safe agricultural produces and healthy foods.

It will also help the rural farmers form groups to realise reasonably good prices, according to the organisers. Seminars, entertainment programmes and competitions for students will be held in connection with the exhibition.

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood 90.07 feet on Wednesday against its full level of 120 feet.

The inflow was 7,273 cusecs and the discharge 500 cusecs.

Seminar on soil health

Soil erosion, fertility loss, salinity, acidification, soil carbon decline, and compaction have long been reported and are recognized as global threats.

At present, society as a whole is facing a global soil crisis despite the importance of soil resources to the sustainability of both human and environmental health. The Department of Environmental Science, Periyar University will organise a seminar on Dec. 3.

Papanasam dam level inching towards maximum capacity

The Papanasam dam once again experienced 8-foot increase in its water level on Wednesday, thanks to the 96 mm rainfall in the catchment areas.

As the catchment area of the dam registered a rainfall of 177 mm on Tuesday, the dam enjoyed an increase of 8 feet in the water level. Again, the reservoir had similar increase in the water level on Wednesday after 96 mm rainfall.

In other words, water level in the prime reservoir of the district has increased from 113 feet to 129 feet in the past 48 hours.

Water level in the Manimuthar dam, the largest dam of the district, increased from 83 feet to 88.50 feet on Wednesday following the rainfall of 29 mm in the catchment areas.

As water level in the Servalar dam crossed 150-foot mark against the maximum capacity of 156 feet on Wednesday morning even as the inflow stood at over 7,596 cusecs, over 3,000 cusecs of water was discharged from the reservoir for about three hours.

Consequently, the Tamirabharani swelled again as the quantum of floodwater increased to 18,000 cusecs.

“Even as surplus water is being discharged from Gadana and Ramanadhi dams, the major dams of the district are receiving copious inflow of water and the level in the reservoirs is increasing steadily. Surplus water from Servalar dam is also being released in the river. Hence, the people living close to the Tamirabharani watercourse and low-lying areas should be alert,” Collector M. Karunakaran told reporters after flagging off the mobile medical units at Palayamkottai on Wednesday.

While the catchment areas registered significant rainfall on Wednesday, there no such precipitation in the plains and it was a sunny day across the district.

Rainfall in the district (in mm): Papanasam dam – 96, Manimuthar dam – 29.20, Ambasamudram – 27, Cheranmahadevi – 12, Palayamkottai and Gadana dam – 5, Tirunelveli – 4, Ramanadhi dam – 3, Tenkasi and Nambiyar dam – 2, Shencottai – 1.30 and Sivagiri and Gundar dam – 1.

Water level in the dams (Maximum capacity in feet in brackets): Papanasam – 129 (143); Servalar – 149 (156); Manimuthar – 88.50 (118); Gadana – 83.50 (85); Ramanadhi – 82 (84); Karuppanadhi – 70.86 (72); Gundar – 36.10 (36.10); Adavinainar – 132 (132); Vadakku Pachchaiyar – 39.50 (67); Kodumudiyar – 48 (57) and Nambiyar – 22.96 (25).

College students organise nutritious food exhibition

To create awareness among the younger generation of the serious health hazards being caused by ‘fast food culture’ and the consumption of food being prepared in unhygienic manner, students of St. Ignatius College of Education, Palayamkottai, organised a natural and nutritious food expo on the college premises on Wednesday.

About 160 students of the college, who were divided into five groups, had displayed 269 varieties of natural foods, all prepared with traditional food grains, pulses, fruits etc., in the expo, christened ‘Return to Nature’. Students from various schools and colleges visited the exhibition, where the visitors were explained lucidly about the methods of preparing the food and the benefits of these traditional tasty foods.

Rajya Sabha MP Vijila Sathyananth inaugurated the natural food expo, in which V. Uma Devi, Project Officer, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Tirunelveli and M.A. Ashika Begum, Nodal Officer – Cent Laboratory, Kanyakumari Government Medical College participated.

Temporary shelters for rain-hit coming up

The State government has initiated steps on a war footing to set up temporary shelters for flood-affected families in Periyakaatupalayam and Visur in Cuddalore district. Arrangements have also been made to issue free house site pattas to the affected families under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) scheme.

“The flood-affected families are now staying in relief camps. As many as 48 temporary shelters are being set up at Periyakaatupalayam and 20 shelters at Visur. The shelters would be ready in two days and 68 families would be evacuated from the relief camps and accommodated in the temporary shelters,” Rural Development Secretary Gagandeep Singh Bedi told *The Hindu* .

Each shelter will have a separate kitchen and toilet.

While the flood-affected families in Visur already have patta lands, the administration will issue pattas as per government norms to families in Periyakaatupalayam, Mr. Bedi said.

Crop damage assessment

The assessment of damage to standing crops is expected to be completed shortly. The administration will inform the details of crop damage to the government and compensation will be disbursed as per government norms.

The compensation will be deposited in the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Bank accounts of farmers.

Collector S. Suresh Kumar said that steps had been initiated to distribute free textbooks and certificates to children in the flood-affected areas in the district. Arrangements have also been made for issuing duplicate ration cards, Aadhaar cards, land documents and other certificates to families that had lost the documents in the floods.

A total of 2,838 persons in flood-affected villages had applied with the district administration seeking duplicate copies of various certificates and documents, he said. Meanwhile, volunteers from RAMCO cements limited under the banner of Ramco Social Service League distributed relief materials worth Rs. 20 lakh to flood-affected families in the district.

The group led by Ramalingam, vice-president (manufacturing), and S. Ramaraj, assistant vice-president (administration), distributed relief materials, including bed-sheets, rice and cooking utensils to over 3,000 people in the worst-affected villages of Kurinjipadi, Panruti, Chidambaram and Bhuvanagiri taluks, a release said.



The pulse of the matter

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.

Healthy recipes: Saffron baked yoghurt with orange and ginger salad



You don't always have to turn up your nose at yoghurt. The power food can actually help you lose weight and keep the sniffles at bay. It's also a rich source of power-boosting proteins, metabolism-accelerating probiotics and bone-building calcium. This season, don't shun the yoghurt. Embrace it and enjoy its health benefits. Executive sous chef Gagandeep Singh Sawhney, Shangri-La's – Eros Hotel, New Delhi tells us how to whip up a delicacy.

Serves: 4

Ingredients

200 g hung yoghurt

1 pinch saffron

200 g bakery cream

20 g custard powder

2 g cardamom powder

10 g Splenda sugar free

100 g fresh orange juice

15 g ginger (thinly sliced)

200 g fresh orange segments

50 g winter berries

Method

*Boil cream and add saffron to it. Cover it with a lid and let it rest.

*In a bowl mix yoghurt, custard powder, honey, saffron cream, splenda/sugar free and mix it well.

*Add a pinch of cardamom powder to it.

*Pour the mixture in a heat-proof bowl.

*Now, put the bowl in a water bath tray and bake it at 160 degree Celsius for at least 15 mins.

*Remove from heat and let it cool down at room temperature.

*Place it in a chiller to set for 6 hours.

*In a saucepan boil orange juice with thin slices of ginger in it.

*Reduce the orange-ginger sauce to half and put it in the fridge to cool down.

*Cut wedges of ginger and mix it with the reduced orange-ginger sauce.

*Remove the baked yoghurt from the chiller and pour orange ginger-sauce with orange segments on top.

*Garnish with some winter berries and serve.

The logo for Hindustan Times, featuring the word "hindustan" in a bold, black, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by "times" in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font.

To subsidise or not: All you need to know about food security



Commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that the WTO will have to give a permanent solution to India's food security issue. HT explains.

What has WTO got to do with food security?

The World Trade Organisation was established in 1995 to facilitate trade among members, who now number at 161. The WTO facilitates trade through rounds of negotiations — there have been nine rounds till now, the latest being the Doha Round that began in 2001 — which restrict member countries from imposing trade barriers, such as export or import duties, subsidies etc.

How is globalisation related to trade barriers?

Globalisation is being able to trade goods, services and ideas freely. Under the WTO, countries should not discriminate between trading partners. The WTO wants every member to treat others on most-favoured-nation (MFN) principle — giving these countries the best-possible treatment in terms of trade or the least amount of tariffs. Free trade leads to economic growth as it results in more exchange of products.

So how do tariffs and subsidies act as impediments?

Tariffs such as import duties make exporting to a country costly, thereby discouraging trade. In September, India imposed a 20% import duty on steel to counter cheap

imports from China. According to the WTO, subsidies in the form of stockpiling and financial benefits to firms and consumers such as tax sops “distort international trade”. For example, high minimum support prices for US cotton farmers can affect producers in Africa, who rely mainly on exporting cheap cotton to the US.

How are subsidies categorised?

The WTO divides subsidies into amber, blue and green box subsidies. Amber box are trade-distorting subsidies, blue box are subsidies with restrictions designed to reduce distortion and green box subsidies are non-trade distorting subsidies. Direct cash transfers, coupons and subsidies that do not impact production are not considered trade-distorting subsidies and categorised as green box.

Member countries can challenge such subsidies imposed by trading countries in the WTO dispute settlement procedure. If the WTO feels the subsidy is harming international trade, it can ask the country to withdraw the subsidy. Countries with per capita gross national product of less than \$1,000 are exempt from these conditions, while developing countries are given time to phase out these subsidies, called the “peace clause”. The current peace clause expires on December 31, 2015.

Where does India’s food security programme stand amidst this?

India procures foodgrain from farmers primarily to run its public distribution system (PDS) in accordance with the National Food Security Act and also maintain reserve stocks. The WTO pegs the maximum value of subsidies for the Amber Box at 10% of the total value of a county’s agricultural production. India’s agricultural subsidies fall into this category.

For instance, India procures wheat and rice at `14,500 and `13,800 per tonne respectively, while the external reference price (ERP) (at 1986-1988 prices) for the two crops are `3,540 and `3,520 per tonne. The minimum support prices (MSPs) are over four times the ERP, which means India will have to reduce subsidies to conform to WTO norms.

What is India's stand?

The government has time and again emphasised that it will not compromise the interest of Indian farmers at the WTO. The G33 grouping, which includes India, had proposed changes in the methodology used to calculate subsidies by increasing the allowance to 15% and using current prices instead of the ERP, which is indexed in dollars and does not account for inflation.

Also, developing countries have expressed discomfort with the developed countries being able to get their subsidies categorised as 'green box' and escape legal action. At present, it has been agreed that the "peace clause" will remain in force until a permanent solution to the food stockpiling issue is agreed upon, even if that meant going beyond the 2017 deadline.

What is the way forward?

The Nairobi ministerial from December 15-17 will be key as developing nations are joining hands to lobby for retaining their subsidies. A cutback in subsidies can have disastrous political consequences in India where 57% of the labour force is engaged in agriculture. A permanent solution therefore may involve relaxations of norms by the WTO.

HP to shortlist priorities in agriculture, allied sectors

Already consulting New Zealand for the World Bank-funded Rs 1,000-crore horticulture development project, Himachal Pradesh will now approach the country for a hand in tackling issues concerning agriculture and its allied-sectors.

Chief minister Virbhadra Singh has asked departments concerned to form a committee to shortlist the issues faced by agriculture, horticulture and dairy sectors and prepare a report.

The move came following a meeting between Singh and New Zealand special agricultural trade envoy Mike Petersen in the presence of horticulture minister Vidya

Stokes at Oak Over, the CM's official residence in Shimla on Wednesday. Several state officials were also present during the meeting.

New Zealand is already assisting the Himachal Pradesh Horticulture Produce Marketing Committee (HPMC), the nodal agency in the WB-funded horticulture development project.

Additional chief secretary, horticulture, Tarun Shridhar said the detailed project report for implementing the horticulture development project in association with the New Zealand government was almost ready and the state had already started importing the root-stock.

During the meeting, the chief minister also expressed the desire to partner with New Zealand to take advantage of its expertise in developing various sectors like horticulture, agriculture and dairy.

New Zealand is one of the highest apple-producing countries where per hectare apple production is 57 tonnes. Himachal, which contributes 90% of the total fruit production in the country, is also working on a plan to increase its apple production.

HPMC managing director-cum-project director JC Sharma said bids for the project would be invited from qualified agencies through international bidding process. New Zealand also expressed desire to work on the training part of people involved in the research and horticulture extension, employed in the department and universities.

MoU on the cards

Chief minister Virbhadra Singh said the emphasis of the government would be on diversification of stone fruits and rejuvenation of old apple orchards in which the technical know-how of New Zealand would play an important role. He said the memorandum of understanding (MoU) would be signed with the New Zealand government for implementation of the project early in the next year.

New Zealand willing to partner in education sector

New Zealand special agricultural trade envoy Mike Petersen said New Zealand had good research institutes and help would be extended to the state apple rejuvenation project. Mike also expressed the willingness of the New Zealand government to partner with the state in education sector as well.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Online supermarket BigBasket launches operations in Coimbatore

COIMBATORE: Online supermarket BigBasket launched its operations in Coimbatore on Wednesday.

"We launched our operations in Madurai on Tuesday, and we are launching it in Coimbatore today. The city has close 8.4lakh people on Facebook, which amounts to 24% of the population. So, we see a great potential for online grocery market here," said Meera Iyer, head of marketing, BigBasket.

The company has set up a 22,000sqft storage facility on Thondamathur Road in the city.

"We will be delivering in locations which are within 40km of the storage facility," Iyer told TOI.

Besides procuring items from renowned brands, BigBasket will also tie up with local mills from items like rice, pulses, masalas, idli batter, appallam and other local food items.

As far as fruits and vegetables are concerned, BigBasket has set up a collection centre in Palakode near Dharmapuri where farmers come and sell their produce.

"In case of shortage or additional demands, we will also tie up with local vendors. We will also have exotic and organic vegetables. For working couples, we are also selling cut vegetables," said Meera.

The online supermarket will also sell fresh and frozen meat. "As of now we will have chicken, mutton, fish and pork. We are in talks with companies which can sell fresh meat to us, and once we are through, we may have more items," she said.

"Besides fresh meat, BigBasket will also have processed and frozen meat. We will also sell gourmet stuff," she added.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Remove duties on maize, soya imports: poultry players



With shortage of feed staring at it, the poultry industry has asked the Union Government to remove duties on import of maize and soya to bail out the farmers. Severe drought across the country has resulted in poor flow of maize and soya, the main feed for the industry.

“There will be a shortfall of 4 mt of maize and 2-3 mt of soya. This would mean an additional expenditure of 20-30 per cent than what we spend in a normal season. This would cause the industry heavy losses,” G B Sundararajan, Managing Director of Suguna Foods Pvt Ltd, one of the largest poultry players in the country, told *Business Line*.

Price of maize is ruling at Rs. 1,650 a quintal as against normal price of Rs. 1,300, while soya is selling at Rs.4,000 a quintal as against last year's Rs. 3,000.

Other poultry industry leaders echoed this view at the Poultry India 2015 expo where stakeholders from various parts of India assembled to discuss the challenges the industry is facing.

“The other challenge we face is huge import duties on vitamins, chemicals and amino acids. We don't manufacture them here but are very crucial in the health of the birds. We are paying about 22 per cent duty on these items, making us less competitive internationally. We want the government to either remove the duties or reduce drastically,” a representative of a poultry firm, who doesn't want to be quoted, said.

Centre's response

The industry representatives submitted a memorandum to the Government to consider removal of the duties. The government has said it is actively considering removal of import duties on maize and soya as it did four years ago. “The government removed the duties in 2012 when the country faced a similar drought. We will discuss the poultry industry's appeal. We will take it up with the Union Agriculture Minister,” Sanjay R Bhoosreddy, Joint Secretary, Government of India, said.

FCI offer

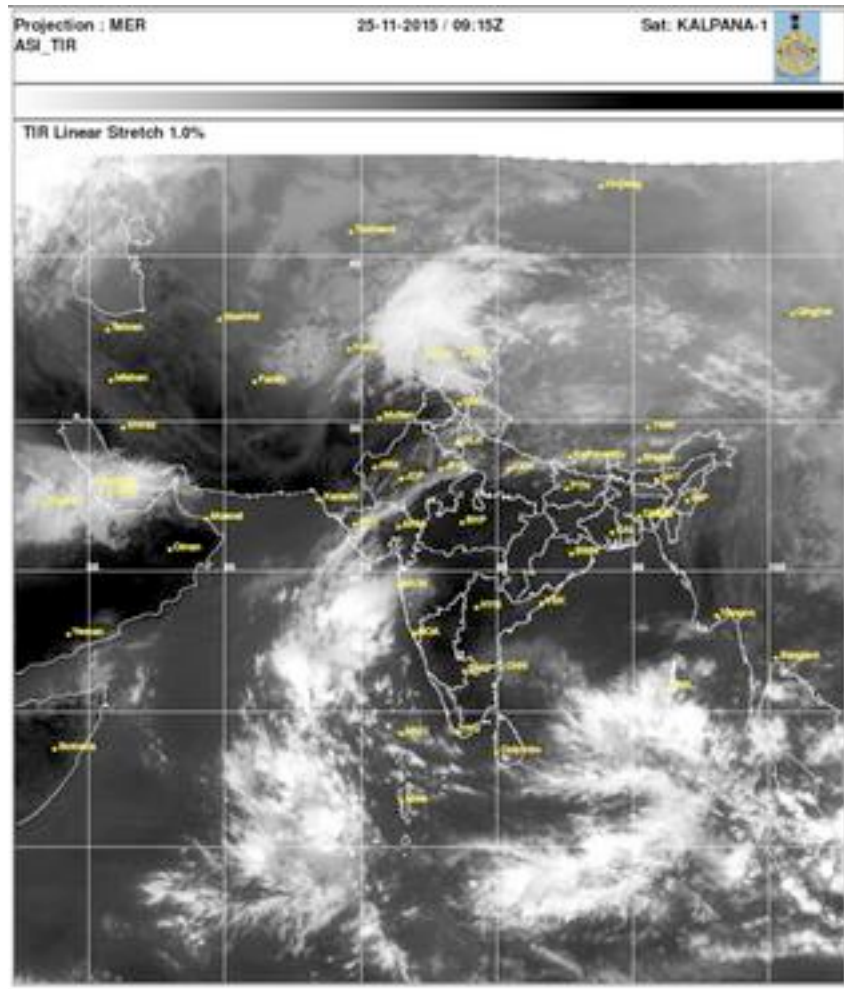
Meanwhile, the Government has asked the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to intimate the poultry industry stakeholders about the sale of damaged grain that's not fit for human consumption. “The FCI will make the availability of such grain online, indicating the quantities in different godowns across the country. The poultry farms can pitch and buy the grains at subsidised rates,” he said. He said the Ministry had released a Poultry Farm Manual, listing out good practices that can be followed by the farms.

Advance clouds reach Chennai, neighbourhood

Advance clouds from a weather system in the making over the South Andaman Sea have travelled hundreds of km to reach Chennai and neighbourhood this morning.

Satellite pictures show clouds hovering closest to Chennai, even as Kancheepuram, Mahabalipuram and Tiruvannamalai braced to receive them during the course of the day.

Even heavier clouds are packed to the rear of the advance clouds, with some of them aimed to hit the eastern coast of Sri Lanka.



A passing shower or two is possible for Chennai and neighbourhood during the course of the day, weather models indicated.

India Met Department forecast says heavy rains will start pelting the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts from tomorrow at the start of a likely sustained session, as clouds grow in size and spread out across the region.

Minister instructs officials to regulate AP tobacco crop size

Tobacco Board officials here have been instructed to take all steps to regulate the crop size in Andhra Pradesh and avoid production of excess crop, which may subsequently lead to problems of marketing, according to a press release issued by the board.

At a review meeting held earlier this week in New Delhi, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman told the officials that Virginia tobacco production in AP should not exceed 120 million kg, the authorised limit. Farmers should be encouraged to go in for alternative crops, if necessary.



In the recently concluded auctions in Andhra Pradesh, 190 million kg of tobacco was sold at an average price of Rs 93.07 per kg against the authorised size of 172 million kg. The percentage of low-grade tobacco was more and the farmers faced marketing problems.

The Centre along with the State Government had to offer Rs 20 per kg assistance to the farmers to dispose off low-grade tobacco. The minister told the officials that such a situation should not crop up again and there should be no excess crop in AP during 2015-16 season.

In the ongoing auctions in Karnataka, so far 19 million kg of tobacco has been sold at an average price of Rs 137.28 per kg, up by Rs 20 per kg. Though prices in the State were good, there were more rejections on the floors. The minister instructed the officials to address the problem. They were also asked to expedite the auction process and finish it by the end of January.

Manoj Dwivedi, in-charge chairman of the Tobacco Board, participated in the review meeting along with senior officials of the board.

Govt likely to import more pulses to check prices



Expecting a further increase in the supply—demand gap of pulses, the government is considering importing more lentils to check prices, which are still ruling as high as Rs. 180 per kg.

So far, MMTC has imported 5,000 tonnes of tur on behalf of the government. The stock has been given to some state governments including Delhi at a subsidized rate for further distribution in the open market.

Pulses prices continue to rule high due to fall in domestic production by 2 million tonnes in the 2014—15 crop year (July—June) due to 14 per cent deficit monsoon. Yesterday, a committee of secretaries from the Finance, Food and Consumer Affairs, Agriculture and Commerce ministries deliberated on availability and prices of pulses and other essential items.

“In the meeting, the committee decided to import more pulses. It also decided to monitor quantities of imported pulses on real time basis,” sources said.

It was decided that both Commerce and Consumer Affairs Secretaries will hold separate meetings with private traders as well as PSUs to chalk out a plan regarding the import of pulses for the coming months, they said.

The import plan for pulses is being kept in place amid concerns that the supply gap may widen significantly if the rabi (winter) crop gets reduced by chance due to any adverse weather conditions.

Till last week of the ongoing 2015—16 rabi season, which started in October, area sown to pulses was 74.06 lakh hectares, slightly lower than 77.42 lakh hectare in the year—ago period, according to the Agriculture Ministry’s data.

The country’s pulses production was 17.20 million tonnes in the 2014—15 crop year, much lower than the requirement of 25 million tonnes. The gap is being met through imports.

Primero Skills completes tea plantation training for 276 unskilled hands

Primero Skills and Training Pvt Ltd, a Delhi-based private skill development outfit, said it has given training to 276 unskilled unemployed in tea plantation work in North Bengal and Assam under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.

“We have a tie-up with Jardine Handerson Ltd for absorption of these trained and certified job seekers in the company’s tea gardens,” said Jayanta Das, Managing Partner/ Director of Primero, said here on Wednesday.

The firm has set up five training centres in Assam and three in West Bengal for tea plantation work alone.

It is also beginning training in tourism/ hospitality, banking and financial services and bamboo plantation in West Bengal, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. It has plans to set up training centres in Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. In each skill set area, the organisation is also trying to create job or entrepreneurial opportunities for the trained.

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 ₹6,900 per quintal in Tamil Nadu against ₹6,500, while in Kerala it went up to ₹6,950 per quintal against ₹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 ₹10,000 per quintal in Kerala, while it was ₹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.

What's holding up India's farm exports?

Inviting mangoes But EU seems hesitant Kamal Narang

India's export of agriculture and processed food products — which accounts for 12-14 per cent of the country's total merchandise exports — had been enjoying strong

growth for the last five fiscals. However, it declined by 9.8 per cent to \$38.6 billion in FY 2015 from \$42.8 billion in FY 2014, with export to the US declining to \$ 2 billion.



Is India being denied market access in the name of health and safety regulations? The latest example is mandatory inspection and audit of imported agricultural products. Are prohibitive import duties and high subsidies — a key feature of first world’s farm policy — constraining India’s farm exports? What are the other factors behind the poor performance of farm exports?

Tariff barriers

Over the last few quarters, export price of basmati rice has declined from \$1,295/tonne to as low as \$1,050/tonne, leading to low realisation from its exports. Export data compiled by Agricultural Products Exports Development Authority shows that export of basmati rice declined in both volume (1.6 per cent) and value terms (7.15 per cent) in FY 2015 mainly because of reduced demand from Iran and the US.

Relative appreciation of the rupee against the dollar *vis-à-vis* Brazilian real has eroded India’s price competitiveness in soyabean, sugar and buffalo meat exports.

Increased shale gas production in the US has led to lower demand for crude oil. Low priced crude in turn has reduced the demand for bio-fuel, especially ethanol, thereby reducing the demand for soya, corn, mustard, sunflower, palm, sugarcane and sugar beet.

China has cut its cotton import quota to 894,000 tonnes, just enough to meet WTO obligations. It is reported to have imported 30 per cent less cotton in the first half of 2015. China also imposes an import duty of 40 per cent, and deprives India access to a large cotton consuming market.

Recent de-stocking and curbs on imports of agricultural commodities in China will keep international prices depressed. That will translate into lower demand for cotton exporters like India.

India's farm exports also face prohibitive import duties in overseas markets. For example, dairy products attract peak import duties of 511 per cent in the EU, 93 per cent in the US, and 692 per cent in Japan. Fruit and vegetables, and oilseeds attract equally high import duties in the EU, Japan and the US, with Japan being the most protective. Though there is a free trade agreement between India and Japan, most farm products have escaped any duty reduction commitments.

India's farm exports also have to compete with highly subsidised farm products supplied by other countries. Although India has been accused of being overly protectionist about agricultural and food products, it is China, Japan and the US which are the top farm subsidisers. According to the OECD, China spent over \$165 billion in direct and indirect farm subsidies, followed by Japan at \$65 billion (50 per cent of its agriculture GDP compared to less than 10 per cent in India) and the US at \$30 billion. Besides, nearly 70 per cent of Chinese subsidies are trade distorting.

India's farm exports also have to face a series of non-tariff barriers in top consuming markets – for example, a ban on import of mangoes by EU that was lifted in January 2015. Other examples of market denials are ban on rice imports by Iran and green pepper by Saudi Arabia. Besides, Vietnam refuses to allow Indian peanuts.

China does not buy non-basmati rice from India but sources the same from Pakistan as well as Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. The proposed US legislation requiring agriculture imports to be mandatorily inspected and audited by USFDA will increase the cost of compliance and hurt India's farm exports.

Domestic factors

Instead of global demand and supply factors, India's farmers are guided by minimum support and procurement prices fixed arbitrarily by government. Keeping domestic prices of farm goods artificially high disincentivises export. Minimum support and

procurement prices also over-incentivise cultivation of cereals vis-à-vis commercial and horticultural crops. This affects India's ability to capture export markets.

Even Bangladesh and Pakistan are now sourcing oil-meals from Latin America rather than India. Like any other merchandise export, India's farm produce suffers from poor customs and port infrastructure, and high logistics cost that cut into the exporters' margins.

Exports of many agriculture commodities, sugar for instance, are regulated by arbitrary quota fixation in India. Such executive actions make India an unreliable supplier. That in turn leads to low net realisation from export. Then, there are quality related issues with instances of pesticides often being found above permissible limits, leading to rejection of export consignments.

The cultivation of genetically modified (GM) crops is quite common in the US and Latin American countries like Brazil. India's hesitation on whether to allow cultivation of GM crops or not affects its ability to capture global market share. China annually imports over 70 million tonnes of GM soybeans, but India can't supply any of it. Strangely, India does allow import of GM soyaoil and cottonseed oil.

The way forward

Given the numerous tariff and non-tariff barriers that its farm exports face in overseas markets, India needs to devise an effective strategy to counter them. India will have to take up the issues of farm subsidies, market denials and high import duties at all bilateral (FTAs), regional (e.g. RCEP) and multilateral (WTO) trade forums if it is serious about pushing its farm exports.

Among internal actions needed are long term measures to tackle the issues of low productivity, over dependency on monsoon, and lack of post harvest infrastructure that lower the net supply of agriculture commodities and leads to knee jerk reactions in the form of export bans. It's time India stopped over- promotion of cereals, and let demand and supply forces guide production and trade decisions.

Imposing export bans deprives farmers of getting the best prices for their produce. India needs to remove quantitative restrictions on exports for improving its image as a supplier. To deal with temporary shortage of specific agriculture commodities, export duties (that are less trade distortive than export quotas) should be used. It's time to consider cultivation of GM crops for capturing a bigger share in global farm trade.

The writer is Vice-President and Head, Agriculture, Food and Retail at Biznomics Consulting

Central team to visit TN to assess flood damage

A high-level Inter-Ministerial Central Team will visit Tamil Nadu for an on-the-spot assessment of the flood-affected areas, according to an official press release.

The team led by TVSN Prasad, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, has been deputed for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation in the wake of the recent floods following heavy rains in Tamil Nadu.

The team will include representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Rural Development, Drinking Water and Power from Delhi, representatives of Ministries of Road Transport and Highways and Health from Chennai and Central Water Commission, Ministry of Water Resources from Bengaluru.

The team has been deputed following a request from the State Government to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the release said.

On Monday, the Centre had instructed release of financial assistance Rs. 939.63 crore to Tamil Nadu to assist in dealing with the floods, the release said.