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THE HINDU

Sowing of palm seed begins in rural areas

The joint initiative of the school education and forest departments to sow palm seeds on tank bunds and embankments of canals has begun.

Schools have huge collection of palm seeds to be sown at the targeted locations after the spells of rain.

The district administration has envisaged involving the Public Works, Agriculture and Rural Development departments as well in the exercise entailing multi-pronged benefits encompassing expanding green cover, strengthening soil, and enabling recharge of aquifer.

Palm trees being drought resistant, the district administration intends to derive their utility particularly during summer months.

All that is required is to ensure that the sprouts are not harvested for consumption, said District Coordinator of Eco Clubs Geetha.

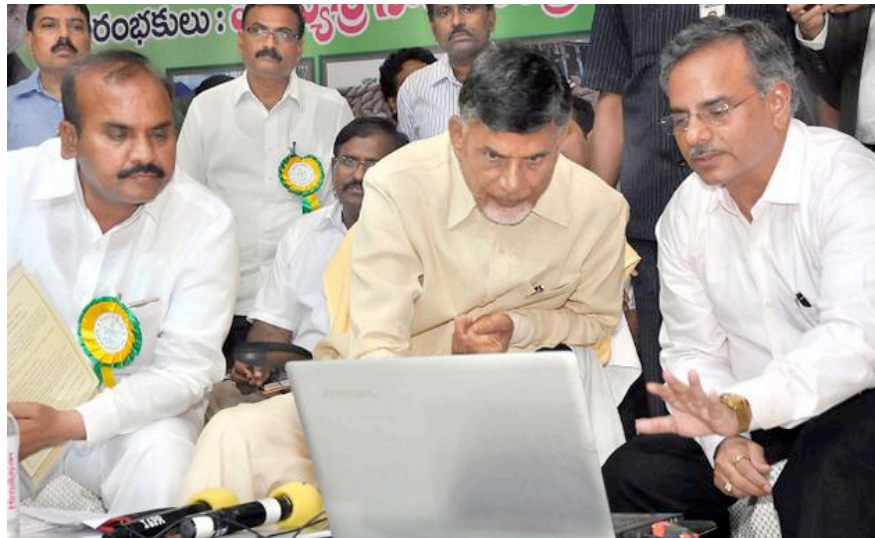
The trees that bear nutritive fruits which are sought after in hot season would be preserved for the future generations through the initiative, Ms. Geetha said

The Highways Department, on its part, has identified locations in the Nasiyanur-Mettukadai stretch and places near Uthukuli for the large-scale sowing of palm seeds. Block Development Officers have already been approached by Assistant Elementary Educational Officers for identification of locations for the purpose.

Academic year

The process of sowing has already begun, and the target will be completed within the next few months, District Forest Officer of Erode Nagarajan said. In all probability, raising of palm trees will be sustained even beyond the academic year, Ms. Geetha added.

Online marketing system for farm produce




The State government as a means to ensure transparent price discovery for farm produce, launched an online marketing system where in licensed traders from across the country would bid for the stocks.

Under first phase, the system was launched in Hindupur, Kalyandurgam, Kurnool, Adoni, Emmiganuru, Kadapa, Guntur, Duggirala, Eluru and Anankapalle market committees. It was formally inaugurated by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu here on Tuesday.

Under the existing manual selling practice, a few traders and commission agents indulge in irregularities. For instance, many costs, including market fee, commission fee and other unauthorised deductions are made, resulting in a dent in the farmers' profits.

Further after the negotiations are completed, most traders and agents delay payments to farmers.

| HOW DOES ONLINE MARKETING SYSTEM HELP FARMERS | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Farmers do not have to enrol on any website  | • They have to take stocks to the market yards | • Authorities will note the stock details | |
| | • Unique lot numbers are issued to each lot of stocks | • Bidding is done on the lot basis | • Farmers would get SMS about the price finalised |
| | • Traders will have to deposit the money in the farmers accounts | • A sale receipt is generated and issued to farmers | |

To address all these issues, the government introduced the online marketing system.

Under the system, a trader or a agent can bid for the stocks online and transfer the money directly into the farmers account directly through online banking.

More importantly, when more traders participate in bidding, then farmers might get good price for their produce. In the present system, traders and agents usually collude and fix low price affecting the farmers’ prospects, Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Marketing Department authorities explained.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister advised farmers to embrace technology and said it would help them in many ways, right from better yield to selling the produce efficiently.

The online market system brings transparency and accountability.

The government has successfully implemented the supply of commodities through E-POS system in fair price shops and likewise technological services would be introduced in all the departments in the coming days, he said.

He appealed to farmers not to take any extreme steps in case of losses and suggested them to do away with conventional farming methods.

Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao said the online marketing system would be introduced in another 40 market committees in the second phase and all the committees would be covered in the third phase.

Wholesale onion prices fall below Rs. 30/kg at Lasalgaon



State-owned MMTC has contracted 2,000 tonnes of imported onion from China and Egypt on behalf of the government to boost availability and check prices.

Wholesale prices of onion fell below Rs. 30 per kg at the Lasalgaon in Maharashtra, Asia's biggest onion market, following curbs on exports and fear of action against hoarding.

According to the data maintained by Nasik-based National Horticultural and Research Foundation (NHRDF), wholesale onion prices today declined to Rs 28.50 per kg at Lasalgaon from the peak Rs 57 per kg in August.

“Prices are expected to come down further in the coming months because of improved supply via imports and fresh arrival of kharif onion crop in

Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka,” NHRDF Director R.P. Gupta told PTI.

The wholesale prices of onion at Lasalgaon are expected to be in the range of Rs. 20-30 per kg in the coming days, he added. State-owned MMTC has contracted 2,000 tonnes of imported onion from China and Egypt on behalf of the government to boost availability and check prices.

According to NHRDF, onion harvesting in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are in full swing, while harvesting in Maharashtra has just begun. The onion supplies are expected improve further as crop in most states is in good condition. “Although production may come down in Maharashtra due to deficit rains, the country’s overall output is expected to be more or less at last year’s level,” Mr. Gupta said.

Onion production stood at 18.73 million tonnes in the 2014-15 crop year (July-June), slightly lower than 19.40 million tonnes in the previous year.

Call to rejuvenate vanilla cultivation

Farmers of the district are ready to rejuvenate vanilla cultivation, which has vanished due to diseases, if they get proper guidance and training to handle the diseases and if they get good and stable prices, said Uttara Kanara MP Anantkumar Hegde participating in a discussion on ‘Rejuvenation of vanilla cultivation’ at TSS hall here recently, according to a release on Tuesday.

If there was a good market for the produce, the farmers would grow vanilla, and price of vanilla beans should be decided at the farmer’s land by companies or buyers, he said. He urged the farmers to grow vanilla on their betta lands.

Progressive farmer Savita Hegde, who inaugurated the seminar, said, “We suffered a great loss in vanilla cultivation earlier, but now there is a new hope.”

Guidance

Scientists from various districts and States who participated in the discussion said there were medicines to completely control diseases. Proper guidance and technological help would be given to the farmers. They should come forward for cultivation of vanilla in order to add subsidiary income, they said.

Participation

Jukka Joseph, Johnson Sebastian, Bhavesh Patel, Anandraj, Choudappa, B.L.Manjunath, G. Selvakumar, Anke Gouda, Ashutosh, Mohammad Firan and many others participated in the programme.

Dharmendrakumar, president of Vanadurgi Samste delivered introductory speech.

N.K. Hegde welcomed the gathering. A large number of vanilla cultivators were present on the occasion.

Centre sanctions Rs. 64 crore for Coastal Tourism Circuit in Nellore

Flamingos at the Pulicat Lake, the second largest brackish water lake in India.

The Centre has sanctioned Rs. 64 crore for implementation of the Coastal Tourism Circuit for Nellore district.

Responding to Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation's (APTDC) proposals worth Rs. 100 crore for the project, the Union Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned Rs. 64 crore for the purpose under its Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

The Swadesh Darshan programme is an integrated development of tourist circuits around specific themes and the Coastal Tourism Circuit for Nellore

is one of the five circuits indentified under this scheme. Others are: Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Krishna Circuit and North-East Circuit.

R. Amarendra Kumar, the Executive Director (Projects), APTDC, said the mega project would pave the way for beautification of the coastline comprising scenic beaches, destinations of heritage and cultural importance.

Nellore region is strategically located as it is well connected to cities like Chennai, Tirupati and Bengaluru. The existing Sri City and the proposed Industrial Smart City under Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor will also help in attracting a large number of visitors to the district.

The proposed tourism circuit in this region envisages linking all the attractive features like the Pulicat Lake (B V Palem, Irakkum and Venadu Islands, Atakanitippa), the Nelapattu Birds sanctuary, the Kandaluru reservoir, Nellore tank bund, the Kothakoduru and Mypadu beaches, Ramatheertham temple and beach, Iskapalli beach, Udayagiri Fort and Krishnapatnam cruise terminal.

The Pulicat Lake is the second largest brackish water lake in India; the flamingos here are nature's gift. The sight of winged beauties at Nelapattu bird sanctuary is a feast to the eyes; The satellite launch pad of India — Sriharikota — has a great significance while the Krishnapatnam Port is India's largest port on the horizon. Besides sumptuous Nellore cuisine, the place offers fascinating green spaces and mesmerising temples.

As monsoon looms, bus routes in disarray

With work on Perambur High Road not complete, water logging is expected to be worse than in 2014. Photo: V. Ganesan

Delay in civic agencies completing their work has disrupted road development

A number of bus routes are not prepared for the northeast monsoon. Inordinate delay in commissioning civic utilities by other agencies has disrupted road development projects along bus routes in the city.

Chennai Corporation had planned to complete the Rs.420-crore project along 194 key roads that carry heavy traffic, ahead of the onset of the monsoon. However, work on 24 stretches has not been completed yet.



Delay in completion of such roads is expected to slow down traffic during the rains. Commuters on roads such as Perambur High Road, Velachery Main Road, West Canal Bank Road, Adyar, Canal Bank Road, Ramapuram Main Road and Indira Nagar Third Avenue have already reported hardship because of the work. Ahmed Sirajuddin, of Jamalia, said “Perambur High Road has been damaged following the work for the past few months. Residents are unable to take vehicles from interior roads to the streets. The carriageway width has reduced. They have to finish road formation before the onset of heavy rain. The proposed platform widening has also not been completed. Pedestrians are unable to walk after a spell of rain”

Chennai Corporation is planning to carry out road cut restoration on such bus routes that had “lengthy road cuts by Metrowater and other agencies” to ease traffic congestion. The re-laying of roads may not be advisable during heavy showers, as it is likely to affect the quality of the pavement.

Work on Kalamankoil Street, Valluvar Kottam High Road, Sterling Road, CSIR Road, Besant Avenue, NSC Bose Road and Deputy Mayor Kabalamurthy Road has also not been completed because of various projects for other civic utilities.

According to Metrowater sources, the roads, where the work is still in progress, will be handed over to the Chennai Corporation by October 15 ahead of the monsoon. The water agency is taking up works to improve water and sewer network across the city.

After a long wait, the Chennai Corporation commenced work on relaying 194 bus routes in May.

The relaying of the roads was originally proposed to be completed before summer, but problems in shifting utilities – power and water supply infrastructure — reportedly affected the progress of work.

The new bus routes will have better facilities for pedestrians, including wide pavements.

World Bank to fund lake restoration project in city

The eco-restoration of Narayanapuram lake includes desilting to a depth of 20 cm

More funds expected from other agencies for similar works

The eco-restoration of Narayanapuram Lake by the Chennai Corporation is close at hand. The civic body will restore 1.81 lakh square metres of the lake — 39,369 sq.m. on the northern side and 1,42,351 sq.m. on the southern side — at an estimated cost of Rs. 17.33 crore.

Tracing the series of events that led to this funding, the State Government inked a loan agreement with the World Bank for the lake's restoration and the Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust handed over a detailed project report (DPR) to Corporation.

The move is expected to be a precursor to the restoration of at least 15 other lakes within Corporation limits. The makeover of these lakes will kick off when more funding agencies clear these proposals.

De-silting up to 20cm

The eco-restoration of Narayanapuram lake includes desilting to a depth of 20 centimetres, which will be taken up to remove contaminated silt caused by dumping of waste and illegal letting-out of sewage by tanker operators.

After the development of walkways and renovation of the bund, the lake is likely to attract a large numbers of walkers from residential areas around the waterbody.

Narayanapuram Lake will be the first eco-restoration project by the Chennai Corporation with funding from the World Bank.

Following demand by residents, the Chennai Corporation has already taken measures to improve public health in localities near the lake. Corporation officials from the Perungudi Zone have cleared encroachments in the lake.

The Water Resources Department will also restore lakes in various parts of Chennai Metropolitan Area.

Trouble in the Corporation zoo

The civic body's hunt for a new location continues

The Coimbatore Corporation Zoo has 497 animals on a 4.35-acre plot in Gandhipuram. The animals include 17 species of birds, seven species of mammals and six species of reptiles.

The Corporation has been maintaining the animals for over 15 years now and nothing much has changed in it. The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) asked the Corporation to improve the zoo's condition and preferably move it to a new, spacious location to comfortably house the animals. But the Corporation is yet to do so. As a consequence, the Authority has not renewed the Zoo's licence and the Corporation is running the zoo without it.

In 2003, CZA asked the Corporation to send four of its solitary animals to Aringar Anna Zoological Park at Vandalur near Chennai. The zoo lost some of its sheen when the tigress Rani (21), lion Raja (22), bear Pandian (26) and a 16-year- old Macaque left the zoo. These animals had come to the city in the 1980s all the way from Nandankana zoo in Odisha.

Coimbatore Corporation sources say the crux of the problem is the inability to identify land. In the past few years, the civic body with the help of Forest and HR & CE departments identified 68.4 acres at Ettimidai, 36 acres at Kavundampalayam and 26 acres at Kalapatti.

CZA wanted the Corporation to have a minimum of 12 acres, but it did not find any of the lands suitable for a zoo. This was because of reasons such as the railway line passing through the land in Ettimadai, the presence of an elephant corridor in Karadimadai and dispute in the land in Kalapatti.

The civic body also identified the Coimbatore Central Prison grounds, but it could not secure the enter-upon permission for it.

As it stands now, the Corporation is still looking for a suitable location. The Forest Department was roped in for assessing the ideal habitat and also to ensure that it was far from human-animal conflict prone pockets. A land outside the city could provide an ideal habitat, but there is a norm that a zoo run by a local body should be within the civic body's jurisdiction.

Forest Department officials dismissed rumours about the zoo being handed over to them.

Senior forest officials said that neither the civic body has made such a request nor has the Forest Department sought such a proposal. The Department could help in identifying a suitable land if the civic body so desired. However, running the zoo was a policy decision that required to be mooted at the highest level and must have concurrence from the government.

Likewise, the Corporation wanted to build a world-class aquarium at the VOC Park, but the State Government rejected its proposal of Rs. 10 crore.

The failure to develop the zoo and rejection of the aquarium proposal leave the city residents with only VOC Park as a public entertainment avenue. The Zoo sees upwards of 30,000 visitors a month.

Rare butterflies sighted, snapped in Nilgiris



Tamil Nadu Butterfly Society has recorded 271 species in State

The Nilgiri tit butterfly is rarely spotted and even less photographed. But members of the Tamil Nadu Butterfly Society (TNBS) have done both. They have photographed it at Kallar in The Nilgiris. “This is the second time in the last 100 years that this species has been photographed in Tamil Nadu. But you can see them in plenty in Sri Lanka,” says A. Pavendhan, president of TNBS.

The Jewel Four-ring is another rare sighting. “It is also called the Sinhalese Five-ring. We recorded it at Megamalai Wildlife Sanctuary in Theni district

and it is the first time it has been photographed in South India. We checked with the Bombay Natural History Society too,” says Paavendhan.

Then there is the Evershed’s Ace butterfly, often seen at high altitudes that fluttered into view at Virudhunagar district. The TNBS has recorded 271 species of butterflies in Tamil Nadu after meticulous data collection covering three years in several habitats. They also took help from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department to explore the forests.

There is an online forum called Tamil Nadu Butterflies on Facebook. Members are encouraged to upload their findings with photographs of the species as proof. “We have covered all the districts of Tamil Nadu. Initially, the bulk of data covered Coimbatore, Chennai, Madurai, Tirupur, Virudhunagar, and The Nilgiris.

Through Facebook, we now have postings and representations from over 23 districts including Sivagangai, Kanyakumari, and Salem. While the core team has 25 to 30 people, there has been an active participation from 650 members from other districts,” explains Paavendhan. Photographs of the 265 species are available on Facebook. While pictorial proofs of regular sightings were accepted, sighting of new species (new addition to the checklist) was validated by making a second visit to the place. Help was taken from pan-India forums and experts in the field of Lepidoptera to identify species.

Member Manoj Sedhumadhavan based in Wellington says the check-list is thorough and will be of great help to beginners, students and the scientific community. Another member H. Theivaprakasham talks about butterfly migration. “In September every year, butterflies move from the Eastern Ghats from places like Yercaud and Madurai to the Western Ghats to Valparai and Ooty. Our objective is to make people conserve nature, plant more trees and invite more butterflies.”

A target list of 323 species was arrived at after going through the check lists of the neighbouring states like Kerala and the ones available for the Western Ghats.

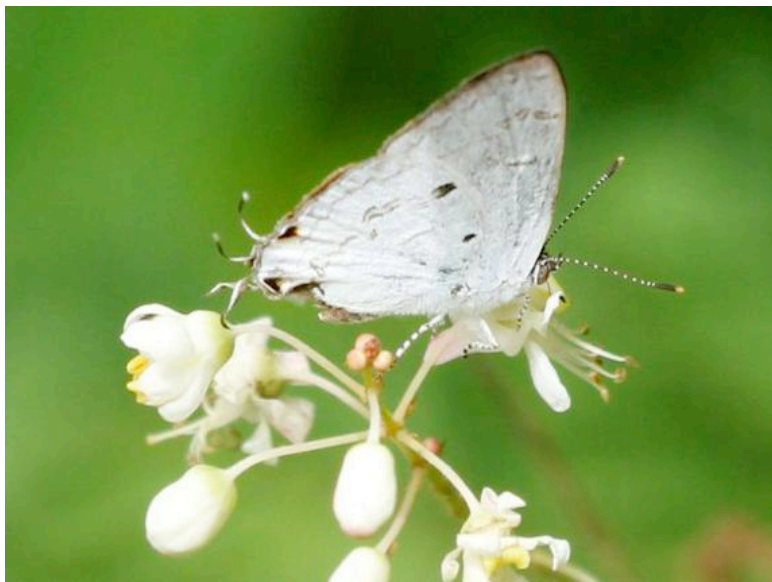
“We have covered 271 species. We are searching for the remaining 52 species in the southern part of Tamil Nadu and high elevation areas of Western Ghats. We have conducted awareness programmes in education institutions in Coonoor, Coimbatore and will shortly visit schools in Rajapalayam,” says Pavendhan.

Threat to habitat

Enough damage has been done to their habitat in residential settlements. A construction of an additional 50 ft or a 60 ft road on the National Highway does not affect them much. Most butterflies don't fly fast, they just flutter. But highways pose a danger during the butterfly migration which happens in April and May and September. There are road kills during these months, especially of species like Dark Blue Tiger and Common Crow.

In the months of June, there is an erratic local movement of emigrant butterflies. This species also gets affected by traffic.

In the Nilgiris, a feast for lepidopterists



Members of Tamil Nadu Butterfly Society. Photo: Special Arrangement.

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Govt has promised to form panel for better price: Basmati farmers

“Farmers feel that Modi spoiled relations with Iran and it has badly hit the prices of basmati,” said Satnam Singh Ajnala, Jamhoori Kisan Sabha leader.

“Farmers feel that Modi spoiled relations with Iran and it has badly hit the prices of basmati,” said Satnam Singh Ajnala, Jamhoori Kisan Sabha leader. (Source: Express file photo by Oinam Anand)



Farmers in Majha ended their protest after an assurance that the Punjab government and New Delhi will try to improve the situation of basmati farmers in the state. The farmers were, reportedly, assured that a high level committee would be set up to advise it on the matter.

One of the major cause of concerns was the export of basmati to Iran which had plunged in 2014-2015 for several reasons, including surplus stocks with Iran and increase in import duty. Farmers' unions in Punjab had been appealing to the governments to try and find a solution as Iran used to be one of its biggest customers.

Farmers had blamed Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s foreign policy as a contributing factor towards Iran reducing their procurement from India.

“Farmers feel that Modi spoiled relations with Iran and it has badly hit the prices of basmati,” said Satnam Singh Ajnala, Jamhoori Kisan Sabha leader.

“Punjab government has assured us that it would form a high level committee of agriculture experts. The board will explore methods to ensure that we get fair price for our produce,” said Ajnala.

Basmati is superior to paddy but this year it was sold at a price below paddy prices in Punjab grain markets. At least 80% of the area under cultivation in Mahja is under basmati. Although the Punjab government asked its agencies to procure basmati at the minimum support price of paddy, basmati prices in open market remained down.

SAD MP Prem Singh Chandumajra said that the CM assured the farmers of doing the needful in whatever was under the purview of the state government. He appealed to the farmers not to agitate any further.

“We appeal to the leaders that they should not gherao the ministers. In democracy everybody has their right of protest and we cannot stop them. But Punjab has seen very bad days. People of Punjab want peace. They should have faith in government,” he said.

From plate to plough: Does anyone love the farmer?

Since 2012-13, agriculture is limping, partly due to droughts and partly due to the collapse in commodity prices.

Policymakers in the corridors of power in Delhi are feeling upbeat. There is recovery and resurgence in India’s stockmarkets. The Make in India campaign is getting more publicity and being noticed by foreign investors. FDI inflows are improving, and India’s ranking in the Ease of Doing Business index seems to be improving, as per some selective ratings.

But agriculture, where almost half of India’s workforce is engaged, continues to be in the doldrums. And no one seems to be perturbed about it. That’s pathetic and tragic.

Between 2004 and 2011, domestic agricultural prices rose in line with global prices, which incentivised farmers to invest in agriculture. This, in turn, resulted in higher growth in agriculture, higher wages for farm labour, and the fastest decline in poverty since the initiation of reforms in 1991. The decline in poverty during this period was almost three times faster than during the 1993-2004 period. But the dream run seems to be over.

Since 2012-13, agriculture is limping, partly due to droughts and partly due to the collapse in commodity prices.

Government officials vie with the RBI in taking all the credit for taming inflation, especially food inflation. If their policy instruments are so powerful, how is it that they are helpless to control the prices of onions and pulses, which have gone up by more than 50 per cent in a single year? Our analysis shows that almost two-thirds of the decline in food inflation has resulted from the fall in global prices. This is leading to a decline in agri-

exports, rising imports and falling food inflation at home. This is a result of sheer good luck for the [Narendra Modi](#)-led government — not a policy success.

But there is some bad luck too — in the form of back-to-back droughts. Monsoon rains (June 1 to September 30) in 2014 were less by 12 per cent compared to the long period average. That led to a drought, and agri-GDP growth collapsed to 1.1 per cent. This year's rain deficit is bigger at 14 per cent, and water storage in 91 reservoirs is also lower than last year. Unless a miracle happens, or statistics are cooked, all reports from the ground suggest that growth is going to be even lower. That would mean that, against a target of 4 per cent, the average growth of agriculture during the first four years of the 12th Five Year Plan is going to be only around 1.5 per cent. That's a massive failure in a sector that engages the largest number of people, especially those at the bottom of economic pyramid.

So the big political question that needs to be addressed is: What is the role of public policy? I will not recommend sacrificing growth to attain equality, but the nature of growth must be tweaked to get at least 4 per cent growth in agriculture.

Farmers are losing patience with each passing day. Punjab farmers are already up in arms, blocking trains because their cotton crop is heavily damaged and basmati prices have collapsed by more than 50 per cent. Soon farmers from Maharashtra, the interiors of north Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh are likely to rise up in protest. Can the Centre hear the rumblings? It is a wake-up call. Only the deaf can ignore it.

On August 15, the prime minister announced a change in nomenclature, adding “farmers welfare” to the name of the department of agriculture and cooperation. But, so far, there is no sign of any welfare measure for the farmers. We have only heard of the OROP for jawans, but kisans have been left to fend for themselves. What can the PM do to improve the economic situation of those engaged in farming so that their poverty can be eliminated in the next 10-15 years? A number of things can be done to achieve this.

First and foremost, we need a true champion of agriculture in the Union cabinet — someone who has a clear vision and the commitment and passion to tap the full potential of Indian agriculture in a global setting. Second, it is about time the Centre declared a drought in the worst-hit states, like

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and even Punjab. The Centre should ask the states to assess the damages in the next two weeks. Further, the assessments being made today are more political than scientific. That needs to change. And based on the degree of damage, the Centre should frontload the compensation package. Crop insurance needs to be resurrected. And farmers should be mainstreamed so that they avail of life insurance schemes, the Atal pension scheme, etc. Among other things, loans can be restructured and interest rates waived off. These measures will reveal the PM's concern and compassion for the farming community.

It would be good economics, as well as good politics.

The writer is Infosys chair professor for agriculture at Icrier

hindustantimes

Going trekking? Don't forget to pack up on beetroot



Next time you go trekking in the mountains, carry beet juice with you, as researchers have found for the first time that drinking beet juice can help the body cope with low levels of oxygen at high altitudes.

Mountain climbers have always struggled with a basic problem -- altitude sickness, caused by lower air pressures which affect the ability of our bodies to take up oxygen. The best way to minimise the risk of developing acute mountain sickness (AMS) is acclimatisation, or simply spending enough time up high to allow the body to make adjustments to lower oxygen levels.

A team of researchers decided to see how nitrate-rich beet juice might affect acclimatisation on a 39-day expedition to Kathmandu and at 3,700 metres in the Rolwaling Valley, Nepal. Normal blood vessel function depends on the body's ability to naturally produce a compound nitric oxide (NO).

Production of adequate amounts of NO at high altitudes is a challenge since natural NO production requires oxygen. But the body has a “back-up system” for NO production at altitude, and it is here that beet juice can help. The secret ingredient in beet juice is high levels of nitrate, which the body can then convert to NO.

Previous research has shown that blood vessels tend to contract at high altitude. For the study, researchers measured blood vessel function with a standard test of arterial endothelial function, a flow-mediated dilatation test (FMD) that uses ultrasound. The researchers, from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and the Mid-Sweden University, showed that consumption of organic nitrate-rich beet juice restored reduced blood vessel function at high altitude.

Both men and women were studied with ultrasound to check their blood vessel function, before and during the high altitude expedition. As expected, high altitude made blood vessels contract. To test if beet juice could make the blood vessels relax again, the test subjects were studied after drinking two types of beet juice with a 24-hour break between tests.

One of the juices contained high amounts of nitrate while the other type had no nitrate in it (placebo). Neither the study participants nor the researchers knew what type of beet juice each person drank before blood vessel function was measured, and the juices (nitrate-rich versus placebo) were given in a random order.

The study showed that beet juice with high amounts of nitrate made the blood vessels relax and return to normal function, while the placebo did not have any effect. “Next time you plan a trip at high altitude, maybe it is worth carrying a bottle of beet juice in your backpack,” said the study's corresponding author, Svein Erik Gaustad, from NTNU. The study was published in the journal *Nitric Oxide: Biology and Chemistry*.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Farmer brings 7 acres under cultivation

A farmer from a remote village of Dongargaon, near Bharam in Yeola taluka, has brought seven acres of barren land under cultivation - courtesy the jalyukta shivar scheme.

Lush with green fields, farmer Baburao Somwanshi said the corn and onion farms promise refund of the entire investment in a single crop.

Having acquired 15 acres of land after splitting up with his brother, Somwanshi was wondering what he could grow in the barren area on the hill slope of Dongargaon (108 km from Nashik), located at a higher altitude than Yeola taluka. It belongs to the the drought prone eastern part of the taluka.

"I learnt about the scheme where I could get fertile soil free of cost. I deployed myself and my family members, along with some machines, to level the land on the downhill and lifted the silt from the neighbouring nallah. There is a blanket of 1.5 feet of soil now deposited on the field," Somwanshi said.

While farmers in the vicinity have lost their crops to lack of water, the corn and onion planted in Somwanshi's farm are now lush green and bearing fruit. "The crops in the vicinity are lost because there is no water to irrigate the fields. But the water stored in the nallah after removing the soil has provided me water even up the hill. The existing water will help me irrigate the summer crop of onion as well, the saplings of which are ready. This is in addition to the crops standing in the farm," Somwanshi added.

In stark contrast, in the same village just a few hundred metres apart, Sahebrao Somwanshi is unable to water the crop in his farms as he was not allowed take soil from the nallah in the village.

"I have planted corn, onion and groundnut in five acres of land. But there is no water to irrigate the fields. The crop is lost. I was denied lifting soil from the nallah in the village, which could have added water to the public hand pump in the area," Sahebrao said.

The village falls under Pimpalkhuta Budruk - the group gram panchayat and the gram sabha had decided to undertake the work at the nallah following the enriching of the water storage at the place. The villagers from Bharam, only 2km away, also fetch water from this common hand pump post. A small ridge of mountains separates this public place and the jalyukta shivar scheme is being carried out near Gajanan Somwanshi's farm.

"The water stored up the mountain will not come to this place as it will flow down to the villages downhill. Action towards water conservation was needed here. I called for excavator and trucks to transport the soil. But at the last moment, some villagers stopped the work. I had to pay Rs 10,000 to the excavators nonetheless," Sahebrao said.

The officials from the revenue department said there was a dispute between Somwanshi and his neighbours over land demarcation. "This led to stoppage of works by the villagers. Once the issue is resolved, the work will be carried out," the officer said.

9 food combos to make you lean

Nine food combinations that will make staying healthy and looking fit easier

Combination: Eggs and Mango

Gives you: Firm skin

There's no need to apply several products to get good, firm skin. Just eat some eggs and mango, especially now that the fruit is in season. Eggs are naturally rich in amino acids that are essential for formation of skin-plumping collagen. And mango, which is rich in Vitamin C, works with these acids to boost collagen production. This helps build back lost stores in the body, which can significantly improve the appearance of skin.

Do it right:

To give a boost to your next breakfast, pair an omelette with a cup of fresh

mango chunks, which supply nearly an entire day's supply of Vitamin C.

Combination: Red Bell Peppers and Black Beans

Gives you: Better Immunity

They look good at the veggie market and are expensive. But here's a good reason to buy them. You'll absorb more immune-boosting plant iron by adding in some red bell peppers on your plate. Iron in black beans is hard for the body to absorb, however, adding a dose of Vitamin C-rich produce like red peppers converts the iron into a type that's easier for the body to use.

Do it right:

There are great recipes online that show you how to mix your beans with red bell peppers and make the meal a tasty one too.

Combination: Extra-Virgin Olive Oil and Tomatoes

Gives you: Better protection from diseases

Tomatoes boast of four major carotenoids (alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, lutein, and lycopene) besides three potent antioxidants (betacarotene, Vitamin E, and Vitamin C) which may help fight cancer and heart disease. These protective chemicals are better absorbed with extra-virgin olive oil, which is high in healthy monounsaturated fats.

Do it right:

Leave the tomato skin on, since it is packed with phytochemicals. Extra-virgin olive oil is the least processed form, so it contains the most beneficial compounds. Store it away from heat and light to prevent it from going rancid.

Combination: Broccoli and Tomatoes

Gives you: Protection against cancer

Both are individually known to have cancer-fighting properties, but research has shown that together they are the Hulk of cancerfighting foods. Scientists found consuming tomato and broccoli at the same time was more effective at slowing the growth of cancerous prostate tumours than eating either vegetable alone.

Do it right:

Have one-and-a-half cups of broccoli along with twoand-a-half cups of fresh tomato, with pizza or spaghetti.

Combination: Oatmeal and Strawberries

Gives you: A healthier heart

Oats contain two important phytochemicals called avenanthramides and phenolic acids, which are known to work with Vitamin C to reduce harmful effects of bad cholesterol and help prevent plaque build-up that lead to heart attacks.

Do it right:

Enjoy a half cup of sliced strawberries with your morning bowl of oatmeal.

Combination: Green Tea and Lemon

Gives you: A healthier heart

Green tea, a rich source of powerful antioxidants called catechins, is known to help improve the heart's health. However, according to studies only about 20 per cent of these compounds are absorbed by the human body. Adding lemon juice to green tea has been shown to increase the catechins level to 80 per cent.

Do it right:

After brewing yourself a cup of green tea, squeeze in the juice of one whole lemon.

Combination: Cinnamon and Whole Grain Toast

Gives you: Extra energy and quicker weight loss

Sprinkling cinnamon on your toast may help keep your blood sugar at a healthier level, which prevents dips in your energy and spikes in your hunger level. In a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, cinnamon was found to slow the rate of stomach emptying after meals and reduce the rise in blood sugar after meals to negate more bingeing later.

Do it right:

Use whole grain bread, trans-free margarine and a teaspoon of cinnamon.

Combination: Garlic and Onions

Gives you: Full-body protection

Both these veggies contain a number of organosulfur compounds and heart-healthy plant chemicals that help keep arteries free of plaque. Some of these compounds have even been studied for their power to detoxify carcinogens in the body.

Do it right:

Most Indian cooking combines the two, however if you are in the mood for something else, the combination even works for soups and sauces.

Combination: Green Tea and Black Pepper

Gives you: A slimmer waistline

Forget crash dieting. After your next meal sip a cup of green tea with a little black pepper thrown in. The combination boosts the absorption of EGCG, a key antioxidant in tea tied to calorie burning, by 130 per cent. Experts say the compounds in green tea can affect the hormones that regulate hunger and fullness.

Do it right:

Studies say as little as a half-teaspoon of black pepper can increase the absorption of tea's beneficial compounds.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

South-West monsoon poised to withdraw from more parts of country

Conditions are becoming favourable for the remnant South-West monsoon to exit large parts of East, Central, West and even peninsular India as a defiant deep depression faded out over the outer Arabian Sea.

The monsoon has exited North, North-West and parts of adjoining East India almost on schedule but was stopped on track by brewing weather systems in both the peninsular seas.

Depression weakens

These systems, including the deep depression, has been bringing non-seasonal rain in the South delivering surpluses in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

The deep depression has weakened a couple of notches into a conventional low-pressure area and this has opened the window the South-West monsoon to resume its withdrawal process.

India Met Department said on Tuesday that conditions are favourable for its withdrawal from more parts of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, remaining parts of Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, North Arabian Sea, Telangana, north interior Karnataka and Central Arabian Sea over next three days.

The last vestiges of the monsoon may linger over the southern peninsula but more in technical parlance since it would have lost its capacity to rain anymore.

Pacific typhoon

The focus will now on shift to the North-East monsoon, which arrives on the back of its south-westerly counterpart and rains down its contents over Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

But the onset will depend on the behaviour of a strong typhoon building in the West Pacific, barrelling towards the Philippines only to turn around the corner and race towards Taiwan and Southeast China.

Its movement away from the region with south-westerly winds will be contra-indicative to the northeast monsoon and would stay as such until it makes a landfall over East Japan.

This is not expected to happen until May 20, the normal time for onset of the North-East monsoon, according to global model forecasts.

Storm in Bay?

The 'status quo' in the Bay of Bengal will be disrupted by the end of the month by when a low-pressure area is expected to shape up over the Andaman Sea and adjoining East Bay of Bengal.

This could be the trigger for northeast monsoon to come to its own.

At least two tracker models featured by the US Climate Prediction Centre pointed towards the possibility of a 'disruptive force' being generated in the sea during the first week of November.

This could be in the form of a storm, likely the result of intensification of the 'low' in the Bay as indicated earlier.

But these are early days yet and the Bay would need to be watched closely for signals of 'cyclogenesis.'

Pulses prices surge on strong demand, weak output

The prices of staples continue to burn a hole in the common man's pocket. After onions, the wholesale prices of tur (arhar) dal have risen by ₹500-1,750/quintal (qtl) across major markets such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.

| Retail prices of tur | | | | (₹/kg) |
|----------------------|------------|--------|---------|----------|
| City | 13.10.2015 | 1 week | 1 month | 3 months |
| New Delhi | 157 | 149 | 132 | 113 |
| Chennai | 175 | 150 | 145 | 116 |
| Mumbai | 155 | 140 | 132 | 106 |
| Kolkata | 150 | 140 | 132 | 104 |
| Bengaluru | 175 | 164 | 144 | 102 |

Source: Price Monitoring Cell, Department of Consumer Affairs, Govt

Tur prices have been trending on the higher side since late April, but the sudden jump is surprising given the government's intervention in procurement and maintaining a zero import duty.

Although some retail outlets are quoting nearly ₹200/kg in New Delhi, the prices of tur are unlikely to come down till the new crop hits the markets in December-January.

Unviable imports

“Domestic demand is rising and is estimated to be 3 million tonnes (mt). There was a shortfall in production last year. Imports are not viable since there have been shortages in major producing countries such as Myanmar, which is a supplier,” said Bimal Kothari, Vice-President, Indian Pulses and Grains Association.

Private companies have contracted 250,000-300,000 tonnes of tur from East African nations such as Kenya and Mozambique.

About 200,000 tonnes will be imported over this month and November, Kothari said. Only 50,000 tonnes are believed to have been imported so far by private contractors.

The Centre is looking to purchase about 10,000 tonnes through MMTC; 3,250 tonnes have already reached Indian shores.

“Imports by the government are too little to soften prices given the demand. Imports by private parties, too, are unlikely to bring tur prices down. It's difficult to see the situation change till the new crop arrives,” he said.

Veeresh Hiremath, Head of Research, Karvy Comtrade, said the government has to import at least 50,000 tonnes of pulses rather than placing orders for just 5,000-10,000 tonnes to bring down prices.

“With India shopping for pulses in the export markets, prices in the international markets have shot up substantially,” he said.

India, the world’s largest pulses buyer, purchased 4.58 million tonnes in 2014-15 against 31.7 mt in the same period last year.

Price movements

Tur prices on the Mumbai wholesale market touched a high of ₹15,250 on Tuesday. This was on the back of strong demand ahead of the festival season and expectations of lower arrivals. This is a whopping 126 per cent increase from the same time last year and 65 per cent higher than three months ago. In Delhi, it touched ₹14,000/quintal, while it hit ₹16,000 in Chennai — rising by ₹1,000 in just three days.

Retail scenario

On the retail front, Delhi recorded a 95 per cent increase in prices over last year and Kolkata, a 44 per cent increase in three months to ₹150, as of Tuesday.

Assocham expects prices to keep rising due to seasonal demand and continue to remain an exception to falling consumer inflation.

Normal output

The four-month-long South-West monsoon ended with a 14 per cent deficit last month but agronomists expect tur output to be the same as last year.

Acreage as of October 9 is pegged at 38.01 lakh hectares — about 5 per cent higher than that at the same time last year, which also saw a sub-normal monsoon.

Tur coverage is higher in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Maharashtra, which traditionally has the highest area under the crop, has recorded a marginal decline of 0.1 lakh hectare.

Hopeful outlook

“If rain has not been significantly lower in an area, the crop will not have suffered much since excess moisture is a bigger worry for tur. In most of Central India, the crop is showing good flowering and pod-setting,” said KV Prabhu, Joint Director of Research, Indian Agricultural Research Institute.

Further, late rains in areas such as Kalaburagi district in North Karnataka, a key tur producing region, would have helped during the grain-filling stage, he said.

“It’s unlikely that production will fall — it’s likely to be the same as last year,” Prabhu said, and urged government agencies to procure pulses like tur to prevent fluctuations in prices caused by traders who were hoarding the key protein source.

The government’s first advance estimates released last month, however, estimated tur production in 2015-16 will decline by 1 million tonnes (mt) to 2.61 mt from the 2014-15 fourth estimate of 2.71 mt.

This is likely to be revised over the year.

Consensus eludes first two hours of plantation talks in Kerala

Representatives of management and trade union leaders in Kerala failed to arrive at a consensus for ending the unrest in the plantation sector even at a fifth round of discussions.

The latest meeting of the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC) in Thiruvananthapuram has not come up with any mutually agreeable solution at the time of going to press.

Ministers Aryadan Mohammed and Shibu Baby John presided over the meeting in which they met with representatives of trade unions and plantation managements separately as well as in group.

The managements are learnt to have expressed their willingness to raise minimum wages by ₹33 to ₹255 which the trade unions rejected.

But sources privy to the talks said that the latter unions had ‘climbed down’ from their demand for ₹500 to ₹350 but not any further. This was not agreeable to the managements.

Meanwhile, the situation in ‘ground zero’ at Munnar is turning for the worse with the striking workers in ‘disarray’ and ‘thrown into all kinds of distress and poverty’ after estates closed down more than a month ago.

The trade unions had warned that should Tuesday’s talks prove a failure, they would open a second front in the form of an indefinite fast right in the heart of the capital city.

Speaking to newsmen after the brief meetings which ‘saw an exchange of ideas,’ John said the State government was hopeful of a solution being thrashed out.

He ruled out a unilateral notification by the government of wage rates since the High Court had banned a similar initiative twice in the recent past.

Indian raw sugar export subsidy ruled out for now

Indian raw sugar export subsidies will not be renewed before State elections finish next month and mills are focused instead on exporting white sugar, trade and government sources said.

India has been pushing mills to sell sugar on the international market and use the proceeds to clear huge debts they owe farmers for sugarcane.

The world's number two producer announced new rules last month making it compulsory for sugar producers to increase exports to at least 4 million tonnes in the present crushing season to cut stockpiles.

The raw sugar market has been on tenterhooks for any sign India might renew export subsidies, which expired on September 30, as they would potentially boost global supplies and cap a rally in prices last week to a 7-1/2-month high.

"The government can't take any decision until Bihar elections are wrapped up next month due to an election code of conduct," said an Indian government official.

The official, who declined to be named, was referring to elections in Bihar, India's third most populous state, that are seen as a key test of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity. The election process is expected to be finished by mid-November.

Under the code of conduct, the Government cannot announce policies during the vote that might be seen as appealing voters.

Raw sugar futures surged to 14.43 cents a pound on Friday, the highest since February, but remained well short of the 17 cents a pound level considered by many traders as a likely trigger for raw sugar export offers from Indian mills.

"Until we have clarity on the export subsidy, we will not produce raw sugar," said Balasaheb Patil, chairman of Sahyadri co-operative sugar factory in Maharashtra.

A Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading firm said: "Even after the rally in raw sugar there is no parity (incentive) for mills. Still their production cost is higher."

"Without subsidy, mills will try to export whites, not raw sugar," the dealer said.

A few mills have contracted to export 12,000 tonnes of white sugar for October shipment at about \$410 per tonne free-on-board (FOB) as they need money to start crushing in the new season that started on October 1, Indian trade sources said.

European traders said Indian white sugar was competing against Brazilian and Thai supplies in Asian markets.

Claudiu Covrig, senior agriculture analyst at data provider Platts, said Indian raw sugar would become competitive in the Middle East and Africa if authorities introduced a subsidy greater than 5,000 rupees per tonne.

The previous subsidy of 4,000 rupees per tonne expired on Sept. 30.

"So this year they will need higher support than last year to be competitive as Brazil really is the most competitive producer in the world," Covrig said.

Quality lends colour to turmeric

Spot turmeric prices increased at Erode markets due to quality arrivals.

"The traders received fresh upcountry demand for the quality turmeric. The farmers brought 6,000 bags , of which 3,820 bags were sold for a higher price. All the 120 bags of Salem Hybrid turmeric were sold. The local hybrid and other local turmeric were sold at ₹8,500 a quintal of the finger variety," said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The finger variety turmeric was increased by ₹200-230 a quintal and the price of the hybrid turmeric was up ₹150.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹5,619-8,589 a quintal; the root variety ₹5,409-7,755. Of the arrival of 1,629 bags, 900 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric traded at ₹7,319-8,359; the root variety ₹7,060-7,895. Of the arrival of 1,077 bags, 1,066 were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric fetched ₹7,750-8,421; the root variety at ₹7,499-7,859. Of the 795 bags offered, 695 were sold.