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THE HINDU

A distant dream for farmers



Despite the superior quality of cotton, unlicensed private cotton purchasers are known to pay as less as Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 3,200 per quintal.

With nothing in their favour in terms of trading their agriculture produce, Adivasi farmers in the agency mandals of Adilabad started harvesting cotton. They are likely to end up selling it in distress to unlicensed private traders as access to the agriculture market yards remains a ‘distant’ dream for a majority of them.

Farmers belonging to aboriginal tribes from the mandals of Ichoda, Gudihatnoor, Bazarhatnoor, Indervelli, Utnoor, Jainoor, Narnoor, Sirpur (U), Kerameri, Wankidi and Asifabad produce good quantum of cotton despite their yields being low. They however, stand to at least break even owing to restricted investment on cultivation in the shape of use of costly chemicals.

In general, an Adivasi family cultivates cotton in about two acres of land and gets a yield of 5 to 8 quintals. As many villages are situated far away from

the main roads, the expenditure on transportation is as high as triple as that incurred by other farmers.

“For transporting one quintal of cotton in an auto trolley, we are charged about Rs. 500,” says Atram Mutha of Chinna Patnapur talking about the usual practice. The village is located about 34 km from Asifabad where a market yard is located and the good carrier ownership is concentrated in the hands of unlicensed non-tribal businessmen.

“Moreover, it is difficult to find a vehicle to transport the produce,” he adds. Needless to say, there are hardly any autos plying on the 23 km stretch between Hatti and Jodeghat along which a dozen tribal villages are located. Under such circumstances, the Adivasis are forced to sell cotton or for that matter soyabean and red gram to private traders at respective mandal head quarters.

The presence of market yards at Indervelli, Jainoor and Asifabad where the Cotton Corporation of India has opened its purchase centres also do not make any difference.

Despite the superior quality of cotton, unlicensed private cotton purchasers are known to pay as less as Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 3,200 per quintal. On top of it, there is no guarantee that they do not cheat the gullible tribal people in weighing of the produce.

One of the solutions to the problem could be the 35 autos given to Adivasi youths by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) under the centrally-sponsored Conservation-cum-Development Plan. The youths can transport cotton at least from respective areas of operation to markets at reasonable rates.

Cup of woes overflows for Basmati farmers

Taking up cudgels for Basmati rice growers, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) has joined hands with an NGO for collaborating for an international conference on World Food Day on Friday. The

conference will deliberate on the issues and problems of farmers, millers, traders and promoters to strengthen linkages among them for boosting the export market.

Domestic prices for Basmati have fallen drastically even though there is no decline in exports and this is causing concern. On an average, India exports about 3.8 million tonnes of Basmati rice and is the biggest exporter. In 2014-15, Basmati exports were to the tune of Rs. 29,000 crore.

Seeking the constitution of a Basmati trading corporation to monitor the export of this brand of rice, IARI scientists K.V. Prabhu and A.K. Singh said policies on Basmati and non-Basmati rice production and export should be addressed.

They expressed concern over Madhya Pradesh wanting to be included in Basmati GI (Geographical Indicator) along with the traditional Basmati-growing states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. MP's claim has been challenged by Pakistan in the WTO Disputes Commission. A GI claim is based on quality, reputation and characterisation.

Former Deputy Director-General of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and president of Voluntary Action for Research Development and Networking (VARDAN) C. Prasad, who has organised the international conference, underscored the need for an interface between extension services and scientific research to the benefit of farmers. "Extension between States is also required for promoting exportable rice varieties and evolving a sustainable developmental model."

Saving water through 'wick irrigation'

At a time when organic farming is gaining popularity in the State, there are now more options for farmers. 'Wick irrigation' is the latest technique developed by Kamalam Joseph, a scientist at the Centre for Water Resource Development and Management (CWRDM) in Kozhikode, with an aim to

facilitating farming even when there is scarcity of water. ‘Wick Irrigation’ (termed Thiri Nana in Malayalam) reduces the water consumption for agriculture to a great extent. It is specifically designed for terrace cultivation, of mostly vegetables, in grow bags.

A specially designed wick of 30-cm length and 1.5 inches width is inserted through a hole at the bottom of the grow bag. Half of its length goes up to the surface of the soil while the rest is inserted into a bottle containing water. The wick sucks up the water supplying only what is necessary for the plant. The CWRDM had trained around 60 technicians from different parts of the State earlier in the year to provide expert help to those who wish to implement wick irrigation along with other irrigation and water conservation methods. Satheesh Kumar, one such expert in Kozhikode district, said that it took around two weeks to exhaust one-litre water.

The experts have formed a water management task force to reach out to the prospective farmers all over the State.

The task force members also give guidance in drip irrigation, aqua culture, Kitchen ponding, rain water harvesting and pisciculture. Kitchen ponding is the method of constructing a 1-metre deep pond near the kitchen for rearing fishes. Well charging is an effective method practised by the task force for rain water harvesting. Interested farmers can contact Santhosh Kumar on 9446695744.

IARI to highlight woes of Basmati farmers

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Odisha to construct 2000 check dams annually for efficient use of water

Even as deficit rainfall has already threatened to completely spoil paddy crop in 16 districts of Odisha, the State government has decided to construct 2000 check dams annually.

The decision to build check dams in medium irrigation projects were taken after the State experienced severe water shortage due to prolonged dry spell in different districts. A high level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary G. C. Pati recently discussed processes of creating check dams for better use of water.

It resolved to explore cost effectiveness and adoption of better technology for construction of check dams. Engineers in Water Resource department have been asked to look at possibilities of diverting surplus water to nearby tanks.

According Water Resource department, construction of bigger check dams having ayacut of 100 ha to 1000 ha and irrigation facility through lift and flow system should also attempted.

Panchayati Raj department was also asked to construct check dams in streams with less than 10 to 15 metre of width and cost up to Rs. 15 lakh per dam.

Moreover, periodic de-siltation of check dams should be carried out by Water Resource department or through Pani Panchayats. The meeting also

resolved to start construction of check dams in series on Kharkhar Nallah in Nuapada district from climate change fund.

A decade ago Naveen Patnaik government had drawn master plan to cover minimum 35 per cent of agricultural area with irrigation facilities in all 314 blocks. However, the targeted minimum irrigation coverage is yet to be extended to as many as 125 blocks. Several blocks of Nuapada, Bargarh and Bolangir district, it will take another five years to achieve minimum 35 per cent of irrigation coverage.

Several irrigation projects, which are one of major source of irrigation, are lying defunct in absence of constant supply of power.

State experienced severe water shortage due to prolonged dry spell in different districts

‘Swaminathan report only way to make farming profitable’

Concerned over the spurt in farm suicides, the Prakasam Zilla Parishad on Thursday adopted a unanimous resolution, urging the Union and State governments to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers headed by noted agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan.

Both the ruling Telugu Desam Party and the Opposition YSRC members agreed that farming could be profitable only if the panel’s recommendations were implemented in toto.

The Zilla Parishad also adopted a unanimous resolution, urging the Centre to provide a special package to Prakasam district on the lines of the one sanctioned for Rayalaseema and Uttarandhra districts.

It adopted resolutions urging the State government to declare all the 56 mandals in the district as drought-hit and demanding effective steps to regulate erection of flexi-boards.

TDP MLC and party central committee vice-president Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy underscored the need for a market stabilisation fund with equal contributions from the Union and State governments.

YSRC MLA from Kandukur Pothula Rama Rao demanded that the Centre release the compensation of Rs. 20 per kg of tobacco to all varieties of low-grade stock, while TDP MLA from Parchur Yelluri Sambasiva Rao wanted the district administration to encourage farmers to switch over from tobacco to other crops.

Telugu Desam Party MLA Dola Bala Veeranjanyaswami wanted the Tobacco Board to take farmers into confidence before finalising the Minimum Guaranteed Price.

YSRC MLA from Addanki Gottipatti Ravikumar pointed out that cotton growers were in trouble, as the Cotton Corporation of India had left ryots to the mercy of private traders.

He demanded a minimum support price of Rs. 5,000 per quintal of cotton. The house also adopted a resolution condoling the death of former Zilla Parishad chairperson Ch.Venkaiah and Kurchedu ZPTC K. Pichaiah.

KAU to sell seedlings of cool season veggies

Kerala Agriculture University (KAU) is distributing seedlings of cool season vegetables, suitable for agro-climatic conditions of the State.

KAU Director of Research Sajan Kurien inaugurated the sale of the seedlings produced by the Department of Olericulture, College Of Horticulture, Vellanikkara, on Thursday.

The quality-assured seedlings of cabbage and cauliflower are suitable for tropical climate.

These seedlings can be used for homestead farming, terrace cultivation or protected cultivation and raised in plains, grow bags or pots, according to KAU officials.

KAU's research stations distribute about 20 lakh vegetable seedlings per year, which is in great demand among the public.

Homestead farming

The trend has also encouraged homestead vegetable cultivation in a large way.

T.E. George, head, Department of Olericulture, said seedlings of other popular vegetable varieties were also available for sale in the department. The seedlings are sold at a nominal price of Rs.2.

KAU's Centre for Plant Biotechnology and Molecular Biology has started the sale of tissue culture seedling of Grand Naine banana while layers of lemon and Chinese orange are available at Instructional Farm, Vellanikkara.

The seedlings of cabbage and cauliflower are suitable for tropical climate, say officials.

KAU develops tech for processing solid waste



Scientists claim that the new technology for conversion of degradable waste to value-added manure is suitable for residential apartments, markets and community halls.

Scientists at the Kerala Agricultural University have developed a new technology for rapid conversion of degradable waste to value-added manure. A team comprising C.R. Sudharmaidevi, K.C.Manorama Thampatti and N. Saifudeen of the Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani, has joined hands with a private firm to fabricate a machine using the new bioconversion method.

The scientists claim that the process is fast, efficient and non-polluting, making it suitable for residential apartments, markets and community halls.

The prototype installed at the college has been operating for the last one year and a field demonstration was done at the W2M unit, Thiruvallam.

Named Suchitha, the automated machine has two components, one for grinding and the other for boiling. Any degradable waste, segregated at source, is reduced to a paste by wet grinding. Two chemicals (patent pending) are added to the paste and boiled for one hour to yield a brownish black product. This is dried by adding some agents and fortified with small doses of essential plant nutrients to produce organic manure. The whole process is completed within one day.

Capacity

The capacity of the machine ranges from 15 to 100 kg per batch. A machine with 15 kg processing capacity takes up only 1.5 sq m of space and three units of electricity for operation. The machine will cost Rs.2.5 lakh to Rs.5.75 lakh, depending on the capacity and allied equipment.

A pressnote issued by the university said the environment- friendly technology could help in safe management of degradable solid waste. Agriculture Minister K.P.Mohanan launched the technology at a function last month.

Hortcorp to extend procurement



The Kerala State Horticultural Products Development Corporation (Hortcorp) is expanding its vegetable procurement network to include individual farmers and collectives.

A press note issued here directed farmers to contact the Corporation for assistance to market their produce.

Hortcorp currently procures vegetables from farmers' clusters, markets of the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Keralam (VFPCCK), and world markets.

'Safe to eat'

The press note said vegetables procured by Hortcorp were tested for pesticide residue at the College of Agriculture here and certified as safe to eat.

Popularising minor millets through food festival

Dishes made using minor millets on display at Bharathidasan University in Tiruchi

Scores of women prepared mouth-watering dishes at a function to mark the observance of International Day of Rural Women organised jointly by

Pesticides Action Network — Asia Pacific and Kudumbam, both non-governmental organisations and Social Welfare Department of Bharathidasan University here on Thursday.

The dishes were prepared using *varagu*, *cumbu*, *samai*, *kuthiraivali*, so on and so forth, to mark the “Minor millets food festival”.

Soups using “manathakkali” and drumstick leaves, kuthiraivali sambar, samai curd, varagu biriyani, and kollu sundal were the dishes prepared on the spot.

The festival aimed at popularising conventional dishes which ensured health for people in the present-day lifestyle, said Pangayavalli, Deputy Director of Kudumbam.

She said that the programme was organised on the Khajamalai campus of the university to sensitise women students to the importance of conventional millets and minor millets, not usually found at many homes.

Oswald Quintal, Director, who inaugurated the festival, said the minor millets used for preparing the dishes, were produced by bio-farmer members of Kudumbam.

V. Sethuramalingam, Assistant Professor, and N. Rajavel, Professor and Head of Department of Social Welfare, said the festival aimed at patronising the minor millet growers who toiled hard in raising the crops utilising the available water in the rain-fed areas.

‘Crop diversification is the need of the hour’

Prakash Kammaradi, Chairman, Karnataka State Agriculture Prices Commission, has advised farmers to change their crop patterns to ensure stable prices.

He was speaking at a meeting with farmers and officials.

Market value

“We should not depend on one crop alone. Neither should all of us raise a single crop like sugarcane and suffer when we don’t get the fair price. Diversification is the need of the hour. We should realise that each crop has its own value in the market,” he said.

He suggested that Bidar farmers could adopt agro-forestry and grow crops like cashew. DC Anurag Tewari said that the zilla panchayat had released Rs. 50 lakh to the College of Horticulture to set up a cashew processing unit that could be used by farmers on hire/purchase basis.

SIMA seeks direct transfer of benefits to cotton farmers

With the beginning of the new cotton season (October 2015-September 2016), the Southern India Mills’ Association has suggested implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer to cotton farmers instead of Minimum Support Price so that the farmers received financial support from the Government directly.

Association chairman M. Senthilkumar has said in a press release that China was implementing Minimum Support Price system and it was hit by the volatility in prices during the last two years. This season, it has decided to pay the subsidy to the farmers directly. This system should be adopted in India too.

The Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) should adopt a transparent and fair cotton trading policy. It purchased substantial quantity of quality cotton grown in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and parts of Maharashtra in 2014-15 as the cotton prices in these areas were less than the MSP at the beginning of the season. But this quantity was not released in the market for at least two months. Hence, textile mills that normally used cotton from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were affected.

In a memorandum to the Union Textile Minister, the association said the CCI should commence cotton sales immediately and sell it in a phased manner throughout the season. It should sell cotton seeds also by e-auction and should offer cotton in smaller lots so that smaller textile mills can also buy from the CCI instead of buying from middlemen. A committee, including industry representatives as its members, should be formed to monitor the cotton trading policy adopted by CCI. The cotton consultative committee and the cotton advisory board should be merged to have transparency in cotton estimates.

Bargur Cattle Research Station sanctioned Rs. 6 crore

The Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS) have started works on construction of a research station for indigenous Bargur breed cattle in the district.

Levelling work is in progress on a 50-acre site provided to the University for establishing the Centre at a cost of Rs. 6 crore over a five-year period. The initial instalment of Rs. 1.37 crore has already been provided, Babu, Director of Animal Production Studies, TANUVAS, who would be inspecting the site on Thursday, said.

The Centre will focus on propagating population of the indigenous breed on Bargur hills and increasing their milk yield through selective breeding, official sources said.

At present, the cows of this breed yield only around two litres of milk a day. Aavin has initiated a milk society to source the milk, which at a later stage could be sold as a premium product, sources said.

According to the rearers, there is a niche market for ghee, butter and other products made out of milk sourced from Bargur cows.

Start of the Centre has been necessitated by a drastic fall in the numbers of the cows due to restrictions on grazing imposed by the Forest Department.

Until the last decade, rearing of this breed of the cows did not entail any expenditure as the cattle used to graze in the forest land in herds and return by themselves.

Bargur cattle breeders are hopeful that the Research Centre would prompt many among them to revive cattle-rearing for income generation.

The oxen are deployed by farmers for ploughing and are known for their running speed. The dung is used as natural manure.

For the last two years, the Animal Husbandry Department has been conducting annual exhibition on the breed at Thurasanampalayam village on the hills. There were many takers for Bargur breed at the cattle air conducted in connection with the Gurunathaswamy Temple festival at Anthiyur earlier this year.

Start-up adds to organic product menu

Terra Firma Projects eyes new markets, Rs.15 cr. revenue this fiscal

Terra Firma Projects, a Hyderabad-based start-up focussed on organic food, is looking to scale up by expanding the product range as well as getting into newer markets.

At the launch of Quinoa upma mix (with dehydrated vegetables), its eighth organic ready-to-cook processed product, executive director and CEO Likitha Bhanu said Terra Greens range of products are available in 300 stores across 16 States.

In all, over 100 products are made available – including those that are sold online – a list that includes cereals, pulses, spices, oils, beverages, as well as the recent addition of ready to cook breakfast mixes.

Though Ms. Bhanu is keen on taking the product range to new markets quickly, particularly the northern parts of the country, she is in no hurry when it comes to raising funds.

While a few VC funds have evinced interest, the two-year old firm would like to grow and consolidate.

The investment made in the business is Rs. 6 crore and the company expects to post Rs. 15 crore revenue this financial year.



Eggs in midday meal help boost attendance in Bengal, Telangana: Study by seventh JRM

The findings of the seventh joint review mission (JRM) come just a few months after Shivraj Singh Chouhan shot down a proposal to serve eggs to children in anganwadis on a trial basis.

Introduction of eggs in the midday meal menu has helped improve attendance in schools in Bengal and Telangana, a study commissioned by the Union Human Resource Development Ministry has found.

The findings of the seventh joint review mission (JRM) come just a few months after Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan shot down a proposal to serve eggs to children in anganwadis (pre-school) on a trial basis.

Chouhan, a strict vegetarian himself, had rejected the idea after receiving a representation from the Jain community.

Union Women and Child Development Minister [Maneka Gandhi](#) too had said she was against offering eggs in anganwadis, as they are perishable and full of cholesterol. She had also said that serving eggs could lead to corruption.

The eight-member team of the seventh JRM visited Maharashtra, Telangana, West Bengal and Assam in March this year to monitor the progress of the world's largest school meal programme, which serves over 10 crore children across 12 lakh schools.

In Bengal, egg curry is served twice a week. The JRM observed that there was an increase in attendance specifically on days when egg was on the menu.

“Students attended the schools in large number whenever the egg was served,” the JRM stated in its final report, adding that teachers reported that “children were much happier on the days when the egg is served than on other days”.

The addition of eggs to the midday meal menu has been at the centre of a heated debate ever since the HRD Ministry advised state governments to emulate each other’s good practices, including the serving of eggs.

Apart from Bengal and Telangana, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and [Kashmir](#), Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh are among the states that have introduced eggs in their school midday meals.

hindustantimes

Are you fasting or feasting this Navratri? Why not both



Navratri, the nine-day festival, is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement and fasting has become an intrinsic part of it now. However, it is observed that while fasting one feels drained out as the day passes.

Eating small meals and not starving yourself is the only mantra to easy fasting. Here are some effective foods and drinks that will save you from bingeing on tempting delights that are high on calories.

Make fasting a pleasure this Navratri because we have dieticians and nutritionists- Ritika Samaddar, Priyanka Jaiswal and Akshita Aggarwal help us shell out some eating tips for healthy fasting.

Nuts

Nuts are among the most effective foods consumed during fasting. “During the fasting period one does not get sufficient proteins as one has to refrain from consuming food rich in proteins like dal and meat. Thus nuts are the best substitutes to get sufficient protein. Nuts like Walnut, Almond, and Peanut are suggested.” says nutritionist Ritika Samaddar from New Delhi. She further adds, “Having 5-10 nuts does not solve the purpose. One should have a minimum of 20-25 nuts in a day to get the required proteins.”



Fruits

Intake of seasonal fruits is essential for a healthy lifestyle, especially if you're fasting. Samaddar suggests fruits with skin. "It is advised to eat fruits that can be consumed along with their skin. A lot of fibre is lost when we peel the skin of a fruit. Fruits such as apple, strawberry, sweet potato, grapes, etc not only lend energy and required fibre, but also give a glowing skin."



Boiled Veggies

People tend to eat a lot of fried vegetables in form of pakoras while fasting. Nutritionists and dieticians believe that this not only leads to an increase in weight but also destroys the vitamins and proteins present in the vegetable. Dietician Priyancka Jaiswal from Kolkatta, says, "Potatoes are very helpful during the fasting period provided one eats boiled potatoes. Ditto with other vegetables such as bottle gourd, spinach, and sweet potato. Boil the vegetables and add rock salt (sendha namak) for taste. Raw vegetables such as cucumber, beetroot, cabbage, spinach, pumpkin, are also suggested."



Juices

Fresh fruit or vegetable juices should be preferred over canned juices. Spinach and carrot juice, cucumber juice, tomato juice, bottle gourd juice (boiled bottle gourd and butter milk), lime juice, coconut juice, orange juice, and different fresh fruit juices are all recommended. “These are important for cellular functioning. Besides heartburn and acidity can be kept at bay with regular intake of these juices.” said Jaiswal.



Milk Products

Aggarwal says that one should start a day with a glass of milk. “When people take up fasting they should start their day with a glass of milk and abstain from having tea in the morning. As tea causes acidity. The other milk products that can be had are curds, cottage cheese, milk shakes, cold coffee, and buttermilk. I suggest a variety of raita and kheer. Ghiya (bottle gourd) ki kheer, carrot kheer, sitafal kheer, apple kheer, saboodana kheer, cucumber raita, ghiya raita, banana raita, to name a few.”



Soups

Soups and appetisers is a must says Jaiswal. “ Navratri calls for a lot of activity. Many are seen dancing through the nine day festival. For those who take up a lot of energy consuming activity during Navratri, I recommend soups.” Soup should be taken after a vigorous activity as the hunger pangs are higher. Vegetable soup satiates the craving for food and also lends fullness without bloating the stomach.



Sweet Binge

Both Akshita Aggarwal and Priyancka Jaiswal recommend the intake of sweets. “In order to boost the energy it is important to cater to sweet cravings when fasting. One can have 3-4 teaspoons of sugar in a day. It is advised to have sweets before undergoing any vigorous activity like dancing. “ said Jaiswal. “ Aloo ka Halwa, Sandesh, Rassgulla, fruit chat, help to gain energy. The quantity should not be high though.”



Other foods

Buckwheat and Chestnut flour (Kuttu and Singhare ka atta) along with Sagoo (Sabudana), and Samak are mostly used during fasting. Dietician Akshita Aggarwal from New Delhi, says, “Most people consume these in the form of pakoras and fried puris, which is very unhealthy. The better substitutes are Kuttu ka aata and Singhare ka atta ki roti and chilla (pan cake) with paneer. Saboodana khichdi should be opted over saboodana vada.”



Water

Needless to say it is very important to keep yourself hydrated. So have at least 8-10 glasses of water each day. “The most neglected advise is, to keep oneself hydrated. People know that water is important for their body yet they ignore the fact and this leads to a numerous health problems. Fasting without having sufficient water can give adverse effects” says Samaddar.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Implement solar policy in agri sector'

The use of solar energy in the agriculture sector has been largely unexplored though Tamil Nadu had formulated policies to increase its solar capacity, said experts at a discussion on opportunity for investments in renewable energy during the ongoing Global Investors Meet.

"By using solar power to operate all agricultural pumps, the state will save at least 20% of power that is currently being drawn from the grid and it can be used for industrial purposes," said SunEdison's Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa president Pashupathy Gopalan. All agricultural pumps in the state could be solar powered in the next five years if the government formulated a policy to address the issue, he said and promised all help in this regard.

Dismissing fears about wind power competing with solar energy, ReGen Powertech Pvt Ltd managing director Madhusudan Khemka said they would

supplement each other. "While solar power can be fed into the grid during the day , wind can be used during evening and night."

"A proper load demand response has allowed Canada to evacuate 50% of renewable energy and this will be a great power saver," said Biosirus Inc chairman Ravi Seethapathy. Demand response provides an opportunity for consumers to play a significant role in operation of the electric grid by reducing or shifting electricity usage during peak hours in response to time-based rates or other forms of financial incentives.

Some in the audience posed questions to power minister Natham Viswanathan and energy secretary Rajesh Lakhoni. Asked why the state chose preferential pricing of solar power instead of calling tenders, a practice which states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are following, government officials said the policy on solar power would change but didn't get into specifics.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Apple exporting nations snap at India's port curbs

Apple exporting countries such as the US, Chile, New Zealand and the EU have locked horns with India over recent port restrictions imposed by the Centre on import of the fruit.

The World Trade Organisation's agriculture committee (CoA) has advised the countries to settle the matter through bilateral discussions, but it might boil over into a larger dispute if no understanding is reached.

"Some countries tried to rake up the matter at a recent meeting of the CoA, but India opposed the move by asking the members to first state what provision of the Agreement on Agriculture had been flouted," a Commerce Ministry official told *BusinessLine*.

The Commerce Ministry had issued orders on September 14 restricting import of apples only to Nhava Sheva Port in Navi Mumbai. The move is likely to give some relief to local producers of apples in States like Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand, who had taken a hit due to a sharp increase in import of apples earlier this year and the resultant drop in prices.

But apple exporting countries are, obviously, unhappy as disallowing imports from ports such as Chennai, Kolkata and Krishnapatnam, is adding to their transportation costs. Traders have estimated that prices of imported apples could go up by ₹50 per kg (from existing prices of ₹100-150) by December if the port restrictions are not removed.

Although the CoA Chairman asked the complaining countries to first try and sort out the matter bilaterally with India, the Centre does not seem to be in a mood to relent.

“The decision to restrict imports of apple to one port had been taken to streamline our import procedures and does not concern other countries,” an official in the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said.

Import of apples into India from countries such as the US, China, Australia, New Zealand and Italy increased to over 2 lakh tonnes in 2014, a 5 per cent jump from the previous year. Domestic production of apples is about 19 lakh tonnes annually. Imports shot up sharply early this year as traders feared a slump in production in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand due to adverse weather conditions. However, there was no major loss of crop.

Interestingly, while the Agreement on Agriculture may not have any specific rules against imposing port restrictions, the General Agreement on Tariff & Trade (GATT), the foundation stone of the WTO, may have provisions that could be used to challenge the port restrictions.

An app that monitors farm water use

Researchers have developed an app that will allow farmers and experts in the US to monitor water requirements of agricultural fields by producing digital maps of water consumption.

Scientists at the University of Nebraska, Google and the University of Idaho in US, introduced the METRIC technology — an app called EEFLUX, which will allow anyone in the world to produce field-scale maps of water consumption. EEFLUX will put this information directly into farmers by allowing them to check water-use maps in near real-time.

Awareness on potential of organic farming still low: Minister

The market for edible organic products in India is growing at 25-30 per cent, but awareness about organic farming is still low despite huge spending, the government said on Thursday.

“While the government is spending crores of rupees on its promotion, still majority of people are unaware about organic farming and its benefits,” Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya said at an Assocham event here.

He said considering the growing demand for certified organic produce in the global markets, there is also a pressing need to create awareness about the export potential of organic products amid farmers.

The Minister said adoption of organic farming practices would also help in protecting land, water resources and improve farmers’ economic condition.

“There is a huge potential for growth and development of organic farming in India owing to factors such as soil health deterioration, change in climate and decline in per-capita land availability and others,” he added.

A study released at the event projected that the domestic organic food market would touch the \$1.36 billion mark by 2020. In 2014, the size of the organic food market, which is highly unorganised, was \$0.36 billion, and organic pulses and foodgrains grabbed the lion’s share of the market, said the study by industry chamber Assocham and TechSci Research.

The study noted that the level of awareness about organic food products was limited to consumers in Metro cities and suggested that companies in collaboration with the government should organise awareness and training programmes for farmers and consumers.

It also recommended that organic producers should focus on pulses and foodgrains to maximise earnings, besides tapping the export potential in West and South-East Asia, which have concentration of high net worth individuals.

According to government data, organic farming is practised in 12 States on about 4.72 million hectares. In 2013-14, organic food production was 1.24 million tonnes.