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THE HINDU

Rabi crop sowing operations begin



As per details given by the Ministry of Agriculture sowing of rabi crops has started in some parts of the country.

The total area sown under rabi crops as on October 23, 2015, has risen to 28.20 lakh hectares as compared to 17.36 lakh hectare last year at this time.

Wheat has been sown/transplanted in 0.20 lakh hectares, pulses in 9.83 lakh hectares, coarse cereals in 16.57 lakh hectares and oilseeds in 1.60 lakh hectares.

A model to conserve indigenous paddy varieties

model evolved for applying traditional wisdom in farming has also helped in conserving indigenous paddy varieties that are under threat of extinction.

The Biodiversity Rainfed Farming System, promoted by Rural Organisation for Social Education, a not-for-profit voluntary organisation, in four blocks of Pudukottai district of Tamil Nadu, has revived the cultivation of 18 indigenous paddy varieties that are disease and drought-resistant. Farmers also believe that they contain medicinal properties.



The system, successfully experimented with funding from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, factors in population explosion, which demands higher productivity, and climate change, which necessitates optimal use of available water.

“It focused on climate resilience, conservation of traditional paddy varieties, revitalisation of rainfed farming, sustained productivity and food and nutrition security,” says A. Adhappan of ROSE, who is also the Managing Director of Pudukottai Organic Farmers and Producers’ Company that is involved in production, value addition and marketing of indigenous paddy varieties and minor millets.

The results of the NABARD-funded pilot project, ‘Conserving traditional paddy varieties having medicinal values’, in 30 acres among 15 marginal farmers have encouraged many small and medium farmers to raise them in about 500 acres in Annavasal, Arimalam, Kunnandarkoil and Pudukottai blocks.

The 18 varieties raised using System of Rice Intensification techniques include Mappillai Samba, Garudan Samba, Poongar, Karunguruvai, Chandikar, Thooyamalli, Thanga Samba, Manjal Ponni, Milagi and Sornamusiri.

The biodiversity system brought down input costs -- two to four kg of seeds per acre against 30 kg needed for fertiliser-based, water intensive farming; 2.5 lakh litres of water (7.5 lakh litres); no fertiliser (Rs.3,740 of fertiliser per acre) and Rs.500 as average cost of pest management against Rs.1,200. The yield was 34 quintals per acre, against 21 quintals in fertiliser-based farming. The fodder yield was also high at 5.4 tonnes, against 1.5 tonnes.

The total expenditure per acre was Rs.9,050, against Rs.3, 000 and the net income was at Rs.56, 000 (Rs.35, 000). Non-application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides enhanced soil health and rejuvenated fertility of the farm. But the biggest benefit, according to Mr. Adhappan, was the presence of spiders, earthworms, bee hives and birds, post-harvest.

Small and medium farmers

The model has been used as a tool to enhance the income of small and medium farmers in the region. The producers' company, which has 1,023 farmers as shareholders, provides training in biodiversity farming, procures the produce in bulk and sells it in the market after value addition, thus ensuring a higher price for paddy and rice for farmers. It ensures a big saving on cost of transportation for farmers.

Says D. Raghupathy of Melur village in Annavasal block: "The company has liberated farmers from the clutches of middlemen. Now, we determine the prices for our produce and even sell it above the market price with value addition."

"Our farmers sell traditional rice varieties at Rs.80 when normal rice is sold at Rs.35-40 a kg," says Mr. Adhappan. More details about the traditional paddy varieties can be had from A. Adhappan, Managing Director, Pudukottai Organic Farmers and Producers' Company, 21 Selva Nagar, SIPCOT Post, Pudukottai 622002, Tamil Nadu. Phone: 98420 93143. e-mail:rosepkt@gmail.com.

Amaravati raises hopes of Srikakulam farmers



The rise of Amaravati promises to be a great opportunity for Srikakulam, which has a reputation for growing the best varieties of vegetables. The district's farmers currently export veggies to faraway markets like Hyderabad, Kolkata and Bhubaneswar but as new state capital gets built, they anticipate huge demand for their produce from there. According to the state's Horticulture Department, vegetables take up 21,000 acres of land in Srikakulam. This may go up to 40,000 acres if construction of the second phase of the Vamsadhara project is completed. Laying down a distributory network for the Thotapalli project would also boost vegetable production in the district.

Currently, export of vegetables to states like Odisha, West Bengal and Telangana is only benefitting middlemen as most of the farmers do not have access to good cold storage and transport facilities. This forces them to sell their produce at low prices. For instance, tomatoes are priced at Rs. 36 in the Srikakulam town market but the ruling rate in villages is not even Rs. 20 per kg. Against this background, the rise of Amaravati may be a ray of hope for Srikakulam as it is six hours away. "The Government should establish more cold storage points in Veeraghattam and Palakonda," said L.N. Naidu, a farmer from Talavaram village in Veeraghattam mandal. Farmers also seek better coordination between the marketing, horticulture and agriculture departments. "Amaravati would certainly create a huge market for our vegetables. The government should respond by improving infrastructure in Srikakulam," said K. Prakasha Rao, a farmer from Ponnada village in Etcherla mandal.

Fishing harbour being modernised



Modernisation of the fishing harbour here is under way in full swing. The World Bank-funded project, being executed in three phases, has been taken up at a total estimate of Rs.19.52 crore.

The entire harbour area has been divided into three segments and a large number of building workers have been pressed into service at each unit. Once completed, it will be a boon to the fishermen of the district. The project includes construction of slip way, power room, winch room, and boat repair yard in the first phase at an estimate of Rs.7.88 crore.

The second phase provides infrastructure such as a chilling plant, fish processing unit, and two sumps at an estimate of Rs.6.89 crore. The daily capacity of the chilling plant would be 30 tonnes and the fishermen would be able to handle the fishes hygienically, sources told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

The third phase of the programme, which was taken up recently, pertains to construction of effluent treatment plant. Based on Sequencing Batch Reactor (SBR) technology, the work pertains to erection and commissioning of the ETP. It could

handle one million litres of effluent per day and is executed on directly build, operate and transfer (DBOT) basis.

Mr. M. Chandrakasu, Minister for Agriculture, laying the foundation for the third phase recently, said that the project would be completed within a year. The modernisation project, sanctioned under the Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Project, is being implemented through the Project Implementation Agency here, said Collector E. Valluvan.

Once completed, the harbour would ensure hygienic handling of fishes for a longer duration.

The efficiency of effluent treatment plant would be monitored during its maiden operation for a period of three months to rectify technical defects, if any. The repair and maintenance of boats would be more convenient to fishermen once the winch is pressed into service. Now, boats are moved manually to the repair yard.

Survey spots 51 odonate species in Munnar



Of the 51 species identified, 44 were spotted in the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. Survey teams observed large-scale migration of Global Wanderer (commonly known as 'Onathumbi') at the Kurinjimala and Chinnar wildlife sanctuaries, he said. According to Tom Augustine of the Kottayam Nature Society, these dragon flies migrate all across the Indian sub-continent in the monsoon winds and cross the Arabian Sea to Africa. Travancore Torrent Dart, Blue Darner, Coorg Bambootail and Blue-tailed Forest Hawk were also recorded during the survey, he said.

Mr Prasad said the study of the odonates was important as they were good indicators of environment and habitat quality and the survey results too amply indicated the same. The survey teams could spot only 11 species at Kurinjimala wildlife sanctuary, which is a disturbed habitat because of its wattle plantation and agricultural lands, he said.

B. Sreekumar, KNS president, said pollution of water bodies due to agricultural chemicals posed a big threat to dragon flies.

The survey was led by Kalesh Sadasivan, Kiran C.G, David V. Raju, and Toms Augustine. Prabhu P.M, and Siby K. E, Assistant Wildlife Wardens, monitored the survey team under the guidance of Mr. Prasad.

Fix minimum support price, urge farmers

Farmers of Sakleshpur taluk have urged the State government to fix minimum support price for agricultural produce.

The farmers, under the banner of the Hassan District Planters' Association, on Saturday told T.N. Prakash Kammaradi, chairman of Karnataka State Agriculture Prices Commission, that the farming community would survive only if growers get at least 50 per cent of the production cost as profit.

Mr. Kammaradi was in Sakleshpur for an interaction with growers. During the meeting, the federation submitted a memorandum stating that many had stopped cultivating paddy because they were not sure of good returns.

Cost of production

The growers argued that cost of production for paddy in one acre would be around Rs. 30,700. In one acre, a farmer can get around 12 quintals of paddy. The returns for crop produced in one acre would be around Rs. 14,000.

“We will be losing more than Rs. 16,000 per acre by cultivating paddy. What is the purpose of cultivating paddy, when we are sure of registering loss,” argued K.B. Krishnappa, president of the Hassan District Planters’ Association. Mr. Kammaradi, addressing the farmers, stressed the need for a legislation to ensure profitable income for farmers.

“Farmers should get at least 50 per cent of the cost they invested in the form of income. Then only the farming community can survive. Now, farmers are not getting even 20 per cent of what customers are paying for agriculture produce in the market. We need to keep middlemen off the agriculture markets,” he said.

Losing interest

Further, he said farmers were gradually losing interest in cultivating paddy, potato, vegetables and fruits. “If this continues for next 10 years, some crops may vanish from our land. There is a need to promote cultivation of these crops,” he said.

Planters’ association president K.B. Krishnappa, vice president H.T. Mohan and many planters were present.

Farmers should get at least 50 p.c. of the cost they invested in the form of income.

T.N. Prakash Kammaradi

Chairman of Karnataka State Agriculture Prices Commission

Water hyacinth to be cleared shortly

Thick growth of hyacinth has been hampering flow of irrigation water through the Noolar channel near Tirunallar in Karaikal district.— Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

Thick growth of water hyacinth has been hampering the flow of water for irrigation in the Noolar channel hindering agricultural operation in a few commune panchayats in the district. The thick growth has been spreading its roots stagnating the water all through the channel.

Water through the channel irrigates fields in a cluster of villages including Tirunallar, Muppethankudi, Meyvaicherry, Thenpidagai and Thethankudi. Local residents said that the closure of shutters resulted in stagnation of water in the area and subsequently foul smell.

The Noolar channel separates the PWD road leading to Tirunallar from Karaikal on the one side and a number of residential colonies on the other. Residents complain that the channel was noted for copious water throughout the year in the past. The growth of water hyacinth testified to its pollution.

At an official meeting convened by the Collector E. Vallavan, it was decided to clear the hyacinth so as to facilitate free flow of water for irrigation.

Farmers urge Centre to secure Cauvery water

Concerned over the depleting water storage in the Metttur reservoir that would affect samba crop cultivation in the delta region, the Tamil Nadu All Farmers Associations Coordination Committee has called upon the Centre to press Karnataka to release Tamil Nadu's share of Cauvery water immediately.

The committee which met here on Saturday also urged the State government to take steps for expeditious hearing of the case filed by it recently in the Supreme Court, seeking a direction to the Karnataka government to immediately release 45.327 tmc ft

of Cauvery water from its reservoirs. The Centre should take steps to constitute the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulatory Authority to ensure Karnataka complied with the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal, the committee demanded.

The meeting, attended by 36 farmers associations, resolved to organise a fast in Chennai on December 8 to press the demand and to urge the Centre to give up all plans of shale gas and methane exploration in the delta region, said P.R. Pandian, committee president.

“Farmers in the delta have taken up samba cultivation amidst severe constraints in a critical situation,” he said. Cultivation in nearly 18 lakh acres of land was dependent on the Cauvery water. Karnataka’s refusal to release water as per the final award of the Tribunal has put the farmers in distress. The Centre should initiate steps on a war footing to get Karnataka release the 45 tmc ft of water.

The meeting also called for steps to declare the delta region as agricultural zone and ban all natural resource exploration.

Hard times for cotton farmers

Forest Minister Jogu Ramanna inspecting the damaged cotton crop at Kura in Jainad mandal.-Photo: By Arrangement

The delay in implementing the crop loan waiver scheme in tune with the assurance by the State government last kharif has cost cotton farmers dearly across the cotton growing districts of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Khammam, Nalgonda, Mahabubnagar and Warangal.

In Adilabad alone, over 50,000 farmers lost over an estimated Rs. 40 crore by way of insurance claims for crop damage during the kharif in 2014.

The scale and intensity of the loss has become evident only now when the Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd. (AICIL) has released its list of Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS) payouts for kharif-2014 cotton crop in unirrigated lands, which was damaged owing to natural calamities.

Only 1,773 farmers who were able to remit the insurance premium before the cut off date of July 5 last year got their claims worth Rs. 64 lakh settled.

Others who waited for the government to remit the first instalment of the waiver could not get that benefit as the government failed to do it in time. The subsequent move to notify insurance of unirrigated cotton under the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS) instead of the WBCIS (vide GO RT No. 84 of August 25, 2014) was of no help either as the scale of damage failed to satisfy the NAIS parameters designed to assess crop damage.

In the WBCIS, damage to crops is assessed soon after the end of monsoon and insurance protection is provided against losses in crop yield resulting from adverse weather incidences. The NAIS, on the other hand, has the crop loss calculation based on Crop Cutting Experiments spread over almost the entire duration of the crop which ranges between November and March.

The latter is not suited to the demands of farmers of rain fed cotton in Adilabad as it deduces the loss as against the average yields of the last five years. The yield of the current year may not differ greatly with the average yield of the previous years so as to qualify for insurance claims.

According to the AICIL figures, the highest insurance claim of Rs. 21,000 per hectare was paid to farmers in a few mandals of Karimnagar, Khammam, Mahabubnagar etc. In Adilabad, the farmers of Jainad mandal received Rs. 18,000 per hectare.

In 2011, 48,392 farmers got their claims worth Rs. 10.56 crore settled and the following year, 80,341 farmers received insurance payouts worth Rs. 29.99 crore while in 2013, 41,229 farmers were paid Rs. 10.66 crore towards insurance claims.

In Adilabad alone, over 50,000 farmers have lost over an estimated Rs. 40 crore by way of insurance claims for crop damage during kharif in 2014

Samba cultivation gathers pace in Karaikal region

Farmers raising different varieties in various regions in the district

: Samba cultivation has started gathering pace with farmers raising different varieties in various regions in the district. An estimated 4,500 hectares is expected to be brought under the paddy cultivation during samba and thalady seasons put together.

Many farmers have raised the CR-1009 variety, followed by Vellai Ponni, ADT-46 and ADT-38 varieties.

While CR-1009, a long-term crop, had been raised earlier, the other short duration varieties are being raised now. Paddy is cultivated largely in Tirunallar, Ambagarathur, Nedungadu, Thennakudi and Vizhudhiyur.

According to sources, the weather forecast that the North East monsoon would set in shortly has raised the hopes of farmers.

“By the end of this month, the agricultural activity will gain full momentum,” K. Mathiyazhagan, Additional Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

“We have been recommending right type of quality seeds and the Government Agriculture Farm at Mathur has been producing quality seeds,” he said. Farmers have been purchasing certified seeds at this farm. The seeds stocked included CR-1000, ADT-50, ADT-49 and ADT-39. He said that the department has been closely monitoring the cultivation practices being adopted by the farmers.

At Tirunallar, farmers who have raised the long-duration CR-1000 variety, said that weeds posed a problem for the growth of the crop. They had to employ agricultural labourers for clearing the weeds at present.

Many farmers have raised the CR-1009 variety, followed by Vellai Ponni,

ADT-46 and ADT-38 varieties

‘Moisture content a stumbling block in cotton trading’

Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao pays obeisance at the Hasan Hussain Devalayam at Ruyyadi in Adilabad district on Friday.- Photo: By Arrangement

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) will soon seek relaxation of the rule regarding moisture content in cotton as it has become a stumbling block in trading in Telangana. Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao said a delegation comprising MPs G. Nagesh and Jitender Reddy and he himself would meet the Union Textile Minister to represent the matter to him.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Mr. Harish Rao accused the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) of not purchasing cotton from its purchase centres. The fact that the Corporation has purchased only 310 quintals of cotton so far in Adilabad district despite it being provided with all kinds of facilities in the market yards is an example, he added.

The CCI's reluctance in purchasing cotton has become a major reason for cotton farmers not being able to dispose of their produce, the Irrigation Minister said. In Adilabad, the situation was not that bad as private traders were offering a shade more than the Minimum Support Price, he said.

Talking about marketing infrastructure, the Minister blamed the Congress and TDP for not paying enough attention in this regard.

He said against the existing storage capacity of 55,000 tonnes, the TRS had sanctioned the construction of godowns with a capacity to store 2.4 lakh tonnes in the district.

Mr. Harish Rao had earlier inspected the Adilabad Agriculture Market Committee yard and inaugurated a weighbridge. He was accompanied by Forest Minister Jogu Ramanna and Housing Minister A. Indrakaran Reddy as he also interacted with farmers.

Later, the Irrigation Minister visited Ruyyadi village in Talamadugu mandal to participate in Muharram festivities and conducted a review meeting with officials.

Boath MLA Rathod Babu Rao, Mudhole MLA G. Vittal Reddy, Bellampalli MLA

Durgam Chinniah and Sirpur MLA Koneru Konappa were also present.

Irrigation Minister says the CCI is not buying cotton from its purchase centres

Racket in import of gunny bags

Bulk import of used gunny bags has come under the government scanner on the suspicion that these bags are being pushed into the Public Distribution System (PDS) for packaging purposes in violation of government rules.

Use of recycled bags for packing foodgrains and sugar is prohibited under the Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act. The recycled jute bags are being imported mostly from Thailand, apart from Malaysia, the U.S. and Jordan. This month, about 1.3 crore used bags worth Rs.30 crore have been imported through the Chennai port, the Pipavav and Nhava Sheva ports in Gujarat and Mundra in Mumbai.

“The import cost on paper is shown as Rs.20-22 per bag. However, such bags are sold at a much higher price in the domestic market,” said RTI activist Gouri Shankar Jain.

The Act mandates that jute bags supplied to government agencies must be manufactured by Indian mills, using only domestically produced raw jute. “The Act’s objective is to protect the interests of about 35 lakh farmers and 2.5 lakh workers,” said Mr. Jain.

The Union Textiles Ministry recently unearthed a major racket in the import of cheap jute bags from Nepal and Bangladesh, for supply to government agencies.

CBI probe launched

On a complaint from the Textiles Ministry, the CBI has now launched an inquiry into alleged pilferage, illegal sale and recycling of new unbranded bags supplied to government agencies, in connivance with quality assurance inspectors and middlemen.

Beware of El Nino, say weather blogger



Weather bloggers are on a mission to create awareness among city residents about the El Nino year and its impact on the northeast monsoon. There is a sense of urgency to their message because we are in an El Nino year.

“We expect the monsoon to be normal. An El Nino year gives good northeast monsoon. It will be a good steady rain,” said a weather blogger. He was one of the many weather bloggers who had gathered at Semmozhi Poonga on Sunday, ahead of the northeast monsoon.

On the flip side, an El Nino year also brings cyclones and storms.

“We are planning to create a mobile app to give short-term warning to residents in the city,” said P. Gopalakrishnan, another weather blogger. “We are now checking whether we can add to the knowledge of government bodies. We blog on a daily basis and we get at least 2000 comments a day. We are trying to make sure our forecast is as perfect as possible. This particular meeting is aimed at understanding the monsoon,” he said.

Pointing to the development of a tropical storm in the bay, one blogger said “a disorganised area of thunderstorm persists to the east of Sri Lanka. This disturbance is showing some signs of intensification and would develop into a low pressure area in the next one or two days. Computer models show that this weak tropical feature will

develop into a cyclonic storm by the end of this week. Currently, conditions are somewhat favourable in southwest bay for further development. This system is expected to move closer to Tamil Nadu coast around October 27 and will bring heavy rainfall to the coastal parts, triggering the north east monsoon.”

The city’s blogging community plans to share information on monsoon with other communities in Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

We are planning to create a mobile app to give short-term warning to residents in the city

Vegetable prices go through the roof

TOUGH TIMES FOR CUSTOMERS

Excess rain in neighbouring States has damaged produce and lack of rain in Tamil Nadu has hit the harvest, pushing up prices

Vegetable/ kg	Sept. 2015	Oct. 2015
Beans	25	35
Broad Beans	30	40
Carrot	25	35
Onion	50	40
Tomato	30	25
Potato	14	15
Brinjal	20	25
Green Peas	90	100
Drumstick	35	40

***Wholesale rate in Koyambedu market** **Price in Rs.**

While wrestling with a water crisis, city residents find themselves having to deal with another bother – rising vegetable prices.

Apart from onions that have been priced high for a few months now, the prices of several staple vegetables, which are usually affordable by this time of the year, have also increased over the past few days.

The prolonged dry spell, caused by a delay in the arrival of the northeast monsoon, is cited as the major reason for the spiralling vegetable prices.

And then, diversion of produce for the Dussehra festival in Karnataka has further widened the gap between demand and supply. Vegetables like beans, carrot and broad beans are priced between Rs.40 and Rs.50 a kg in the retail market.

Green peas, which are usually available for Rs. 60-Rs. 70 a kg during October, are priced at Rs. 160 a kg. Cauliflowers too come with a costly price tag of Rs. 25-Rs. 30 per piece. P. Sukumar, acting president of Koyambedu Wholesale Fruits, Vegetable and Flower Merchants Association, said the produce from Karnataka had reduced over the past few days.

Only a few vegetables like potatoes remained affordable. The market received about 300 truck loads of vegetables a day, which was 100 truck-loads less than daily supply, he added. “The lack of rains in Tamil Nadu has hit the yield of vegetable crops like radish, lady’s finger and brinjal. The cost of many vegetables has gone up by 30-40 per cent,” he said.

Customers too have a tough time in choosing vegetables that are less costly. Kavitha Ravi, a resident of Perambur, alternates between different vegetable markets to shop for vegetables priced low compared to big grocery store chains. Traders say that the prices may not drop for at least a month.

S. Chandran, a wholesale trader, said while excess rains in some regions of neighbouring States had led to more damages to the produce, lack of rains in Tamil Nadu had meant less harvest. This had pushed up the prices. “We expect the prices to become stable only in December after the next harvest,” he added.

The lack of rains in Tamil Nadu has hit the yield of vegetable crops like radish, lady’s finger and brinjal. The cost of many vegetables has gone up by 30-40 per cent.

P. Sukumar, acting president of Koyambedu Wholesale Fruits, Vegetable and Flower Merchants Association

Many staples, which are usually affordable by this time, remain costly

Clogged waterways may pose a challenge during the monsoon

While the Chennai Corporation is bracing its civic infrastructure up for the northeast monsoon, expected to set in this week, the canals and drains still remain clogged, making the city's monsoon-preparedness anything but thoroughgoing.

Considering this is an El Nino year, which is expected to bring heavy downpours, cyclones and floods, this laxity can prove costly.

According to estimates, stretches along more than 30 percent of the city's drains, which together account for 1,700 km, are vulnerable to flooding. After the ban on manual cleaning of polluted drains early this year, the Corporation proposed mechanical desilting of stormwater drains. However, desilting work at a number of drains is yet to be completed, due to the delay in commencement of desilting operations ahead of the northeast monsoon.

"We have received a flood warning," said an official of Chennai Corporation. The Corporation claims that as part of monsoon-preparedness, it has completed work on 18 canals in addition to the work by the Water Resources Department in the major waterways of the city. However, there are still many bottlenecks in these canals, which hinder free flow of water and are expected to make life miserable for residents. The delay in completing the drain work on Velachery-Taramani Road near Vijayanagar Bus Stand is expected to cause flooding in a few areas of Velachery.

. Residents along stretches such as Bazulla Road have complained about water stagnation near the Rangarajapuram Flyover, stating that it hinders free flow of traffic. The Corporation is yet to complete work on clearing stormwater drains for such stretches.

Zonal level officials of many such low-lying areas have requested for super sucker machines to tackle any flooding that may arise after the monsoon sets in this year.

Ten per cent of Kodungaiyur canal is yet to be completed. Six metres of work along the 1.8-km long Guindy Industrial Canal has not been completed due to 42 encroachments.

Water disposal in the Adyar river is likely to be affected. Even after completion of Nungambakkam Canal, frequent blocks have been reported resulting in inadequate draining of stormwater along Valluvar Kottam High Road. MTH Road may be affected due to the absence of stormwater drains. Work is expected to start with World Bank funding shortly, said an official.

Corporation to initiate steps to tackle flooding

Chennai Corporation has started taking measures to prevent flooding during the onset of northeast monsoon this week.

“We have received a flood warning for the period between October 26-30. We have taken measures to prevent flooding,” said an official. Some of the residents of areas near waterways will be evacuated to safer buildings during the onset of the northeast monsoon.

The Water Resources Department (WRD) has started cleaning stretches of Otteri Nullah and Virugambakkam Canal.

While Cooum River is getting a facelift under Cooum River Eco Restoration Project, other waterways and surplus courses of water bodies in city fringes are being desilted as part of pre-monsoon preparedness.

Sources in WRD said the stretch of Otteri Nullah near Basin Bridge was periodically cleaned by Chennai Corporation.

The stretch was recently widened up to 50 metre using funds under JNNURM to ensure free flow of water.

Bhavani Sagar dam: farmers raise apprehension on water position

The depleting water level at Bhavani Sagar Reservoir caused by delayed Northeast monsoon rainfall has caused apprehensions about water availability till the end of the cultivation season in the district.

Water level

The level in the reservoir exceeded 18 tmc when water was released into the Kalingarayan, Thadapalli-Arakankottai and Lower Bhavani Project canals. Over the last month, the Public Works Department put in place turn system to optimise water utilisation.

Yet, the possibility for the existing extent of 6.85 tmc water to last till December was bleak.

Rains

At the same time last year, the storage was in the range of 14 tmc. Though there is hope that the level will rise up considerably with accrual from the Northeast monsoon rains expected to start later this month, the PWD has understandably made arrangements for obtaining six tmc water from hydel reservoirs in The Nilgiris district.

LBP canal

The LBP canal has the largest ayacut area of 1.03 lakh acres in Erode, Karur and Tirupur districts.

The Kalingarayan canal has an ayacut of 15,743 acres and the Thadapalli Arakankottai canals are the sources of irrigation for 24,504 acres.

On Sunday, water level stood at 58.72 feet. The inflow was 1,792 cusecs.

Discharge of 700 cusecs was made into River Bhavani, and 2,000 cusecs into the LBP canal.

The possibility for the existing extent of 6.85 tmc water in the reservoir to last till December was bleak

Water level at Mettur

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 60.69 feet on Sunday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 3,759 cusecs and the discharge, 2,269 cusecs.

‘Gandhi of organic farming’ passes away



Bhaskar Save, 94, acclaimed as ‘Gandhi of organic farming’, breathed his last at his Kalpavruksh farm at Dehri village in Umargam taluka in Valad district, on Saturday afternoon, family sources said. Bhaskar Save had committed his life to organic farming and had won many awards nationally and internationally.

The last award he got from German-based International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement in 2010 in recognition of his life time achievement. He started his career as a primary teacher in a village school. He was also doing farming work in the land which he got from his father. In 1956 he left teaching and committed his entire life towards farming and also had carried out a lot of research on it. Bhaskar Save is survived by his two sons and two daughters.

All the children are married while Suresh Save, the eldest one, was staying with him. Suresh Save said that the prime motive of doing organic farming was that his father did not want to disturb the nature’s cycle. He also opted for natural farming and created awareness among the farmers not to use chemical fertilizer in the agriculture as after longer time the fertile land would get affected. His funeral will be held at Umargam Sunday at 10 am

A new inspector raj



The government has reasons to be concerned over spiralling dal prices — even more so when arhar at Rs 200 per kg has become a major campaign theme in the ongoing Bihar assembly elections. But that does not justify the kind of desperate measures it has resorted to. Not only have states been allowed to impose stockholding limits on traders, but these have been extended to even importers, processors and larger retailers.

These actions, apart from reeking of short-termism, lack a basic understanding of the way the commodity business functions. Pulses imports are usually undertaken in bulk vessels carrying over 50,000 tonnes, whereas stock limits of 300-350 tonnes per importer is what many states have fixed.

Will any importer contract fresh consignments with such restrictions, which would require the pulses to be sold the moment they are discharged from vessels — a practical impossibility? Similarly, a dal mill processes anywhere from 10 to 100 tonnes of raw pulses daily. For smooth running, it needs to maintain at least seven to 10 days of stocks. But suddenly, we are seeing raids and stocks being seized, when these may have even been pledged with banks for securing working capital.

But administrative ignorance that could backfire — imports grinding to a halt or dal mills closing obviously doesn't help anyone — is only one part.

Of larger importance is the message that is going out. Till recently, the government was talking about the need for states to reform their agriculture produce market committee acts, allowing barrier-free movement of produce both within and outside the country, and setting up warehouses, cold chains and on-farm storage structures.

But today, the same government has rediscovered the lexicon of the 1960s and '70s. States are now being advised to “intensify anti-hoarding operations” and crackdown on “black-marketers and profiteers”. Not surprisingly, even millers and legitimate stockists — who ensure that the produce harvested over two to three months is stored

to ensure the market is supplied around the year — have not been spared from the recent “surprise inspections”.

While Bihar may be the immediate provocation for going overboard, the government should well bear in mind that the pulses problem isn't going to go away once the elections are over. As has been pointed out repeatedly, pulses defy easy solutions. Unlike edible oils, sugar or wheat, which are easily importable, there is very little production of pulses outside India.

For the same reason, the solution to bridging the growing supply-demand gap can only lie in augmenting domestic production — more so in irrigated areas where rice, wheat and sugarcane have become the default cropping options. Cracking down on the pulses trade, the government may be doing more harm than good in the long run.

After iodine, an iron shot for salt

For several years now, iodine has been a standard ingredient in common salt that we use in India. The presence of iodine has almost eradicated the goitre disease that occurred because of iodine deficiency.

Our team at the CSMCRI has often been asked whether common salt can be fortified with iron as well. Iron deficiency is a common problem in India. Women, especially during pregnancies, need a good dose of iron, which cannot be supplied by a normal diet.

About couple of years ago, we made attempts to add iron supplements to salt. While the process might seem to be a straightforward case of adding a chemical into salt, but that is not the case.

When we tried to add iron, we found that the iodine in the salt got destabilised. Iodine is present in salt in the form of Potassium iodate (KIO₃). When we tried to add iron, in the form of Ferrous fumarate or Ferrous sulphate (FeSO₄), the two compounds reacted to produce another set of compounds that produced a very pungent smell. In

addition, while Ferrous fumarate is dark in colour, Ferrous sulphate is greenish. This resulted in a change in colour of the salt.

We had to find a way to prevent the iron and iodine compound from reacting with each other. To tackle this problem we decided to use Magnesium hydroxide $Mg(OH)_2$ molecules. The Magnesium hydroxide has lattice-like structure which traps other molecules and acts like a cage. We decided to use this method for iron and iodine compounds.

In our experiments, we saw that the IO_3^- ion indeed was getting trapped inside the matrix consisting of layers of $Mg(OH)_2$ molecules. Even the iron, Fe^{3+++} , ion was getting trapped. We, therefore, produced two Magnesium hydroxide matrices, one comprising iodate ions and the other having ferric ions. When the common salt was fortified in this form, the iron and iodate ions don't come in contact with each other. This method imparted ultra fine stability to the constituents.

The resulting double-fortified salt has cleared animal trials. For this, three sets of mice were starved of iron because of which the haemoglobin in their blood dropped. Then one set of mice were given normal salt, that is available in the markets, and the other set was given the salt which had iron and iodine in the Magnesium hydroxide matrix, and the third set was given iron and iodine salt, without the Magnesium hydroxide matrix. The results showed that the maximum improvement in the haemoglobin levels happened in the mice that were given iodine and iron through the Magnesium hydroxide matrix.

We believe that salt fortification does not need human trials, but we have done that as well. Two trials on batches of 10 candidates each have been carried out and the toxicity results have been normal. Another round of human trials is currently on. Meanwhile, our laboratory has tied up with the district administration of Bhavnagar to include this salt in the mid-day meal programme.

Farmers say rain causes drop in both yield and quality

With the meteorological centre predicating the onset of rain in the city from Monday, agriculture experts believe that the change in weather would cause a delay in the harvesting of paddy.

Farmers in the region are also worried about the arrival of rain, stating that they have to incur losses because of unfavourable weather condition in almost every crop season.

“In the wheat season too, weather played a very negative role and the situation isn’t any different in the current paddy season. The worst thing is that it starts raining when the crop is heading towards maturity, which leads to a decrease in the crop’s yield and quality,” said a group of farmers.

Satnam Singh, a farmer from Gill village, said the farmers had to bear the brunt of a drop in the quality of crops due to rain. He added that the farmers also had to struggle in the mandis to get the right rate for their produce as the commission agents remained unsympathetic towards them.

“The Punjab Mandi Board has made it clear that this year too no wet paddy will be accepted in the mandis. But how is it possible to keep the crop dry if there is constant rain?” he said.

It is pertinent to mention here that in the last few weeks rain along with high winds has already damaged the paddy crop of many farmers.

Gurmeet Singh Buttar, additional director of extension education at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) said, “Paddy harvesting will continue to face delay if rainy days continue and the crop’s quality and quantity will also fall.”

SPS Brar, extension specialist from plant breeding and genetics department, PAU, said the farmers were right in saying that unfavourable weather had become the biggest challenge for them. “The delay in paddy harvesting will set off a chain reaction that will also result in a delay in the cultivation wheat crop which begins in early November”, Brar said. The procurement of paddy is also expected to be delayed to rain.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Chhattisgarh gets agriculture leadership award

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh has been awarded with agriculture leadership award for successful implementation of agriculture policies and provision of 24-hour electricity to farmers at nominal costs.

Union home minister Rajnath Singh conferred the award to agriculture minister Brijmohan Agrawal at a function held in New Delhi on Friday.

While addressing the gathering, Agrawal said besides gaining success in agricultural field, farmers received guidance to explore horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries segment for their additional income. Farmers in state avail benefits of zero per cent interest on agriculture loan, he added.

Manali hosts agriculture marketing meeting

A four-day seminar of officials of agriculture marketing boards of Karnataka, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Himachal started here on Monday. The seminar is organized to discuss the various aspects of marketing and strengthening of agriculture and horticulture produces. A group of officials, led by Delhi Agriculture Marketing Board vice-chairman V P Rao, visited agriculture produce market committee in Kullu on Monday and discussed the local marketing strategy.

Himachal Pradesh Agriculture Marketing Board managing director H S Baweja welcomed representatives of all the states and made them acquainted with the problems that farmers and fruit growers of Himachal were facing in markets of Delhi. He also said that Himachal was working towards making state's products special brand which would help get it better prices in other states. Delhi board secretary S K Singh assured to resolve the issue soon and provide better facilities in the national capital.

Agriculture institute to be opened in Jharkhand



RANCHI: Jharkhand will soon have a premier agriculture institute that would develop and research soil health, water use efficiency and management of both surface and ground water resources in the high rainfall regions through multi-disciplinary research.

As per his election promise to take eastern zone states at par with the other developed states in every sector, PM Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) at Goriya Karma village in Hazaribagh district on Sunday.

Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh would be present on the occasion.

"The IARI will soon have a thousand acre campus to give fillip to agriculture in the region. Jharkhand will achieve inclusive agricultural growth through integrated farming systems," an official press release said.

It would achieve through multi-disciplinary research through School of Natural Resource Management, School of Crop Improvement & Protection, and School of Horticulture and Forestry with integrated Animal Sciences, Basic Sciences and Social Sciences components for catering to the local farming system needs of the region, the release said.

Stating that the institute would attract cream of post graduate and doctoral students from all over India and abroad to conduct region specific research, the release said the major regional challenges would be addressed by the IARI, Jharkhand, through prioritised thrust areas of research, integrated with post-graduate education and extension programs.

This would lead to improved soil health, water use efficiency and management of both surface and ground water resources in the high rainfall (1200-1600 mm) regions through multi-disciplinary research and research on crop diversification to double the production in rice-fallow seasons.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

**Sugar exports quota useful, but Govt should move away from cane pricing:
Abinash Verma**



After falling 20 per cent in the first half of this year, sugar prices have now climbed by 25 per cent over the past two months due to global shortage, deficient monsoon in India and pick-up in festival demand. Sugar stocks are up as much as 100 per cent. In an interview with Bloomberg TV India Indian Sugar Mills Association Director-General Abinash Verma explains the upsurge and the future outlook for the sweetener.

What's the reason for the recent price uptrend?

In the last 12-13 months, sugar prices had fallen by almost ₹8-9 per kg. So this trend had to stop somewhere and there had to be an improvement. In the last couple of months, sugar prices have recovered by about ₹4-5. It needs to improve further to get

closer to the cost of production. The main reason for the rise in sugar prices is that everybody is expecting that there will be shortage in the next season and therefore, global prices have moved up by almost 30 per cent. There are chances that India can move out some of its surplus which is now at about 4 million tonnes (mt). Hopes of exporting about 3.5-4 mt in the next one year and concerns over production shortage in Maharashtra and North Karnataka due to low rainfall, have improved the market sentiments.

What is your outlook on prices?

There is an opportunity now for the domestic sugar industry to push out its surplus into global market. The global market is still offering not a great price. There will still be a loss but it is not as much as it was earlier and there is an opportunity that we can export at a smaller loss and recover that loss from the domestic market. As compared to October 2014, the current domestic ex-mill prices are still lower by a couple of rupees. It is still about ₹4 lower as compared to the cost of production.

Do you feel government steps have addressed the problems of the sector, particularly on the export front?

Yes, surely. We are all aware that there is almost about four mt surplus and that we needed to export this surplus into the global market and see that the domestic prices – accordingly – move up so that of the 85 per cent of our total production we sell in the domestic market, we get a better return. But that gap has been filled up by the government, which has given a quota to each sugar mill proportionate to the production. Secondly, the government has offered better price on ethanol in the last couple of years. Ethanol gives us almost 10-12 per cent of the total revenue and there is a scope of transferring some of the surplus sugar into ethanol.

Do you feel the worst is over?

I believe so. I think the bottom is now out and the last five years we have produced surplus sugar. The gap between the domestic requirement and production is now reducing. Also, there might be more shift of the sugar towards ethanol. The government is expecting that sugar production, which was hovering at about 28 mt, will be about 26 mt from the next year. We are expecting it to be about 27 mt.

Do you have any wish-list for the government? What would be the top priority going forward?

We want the government to actually move out of the policy making or the price fixation of sugarcane. The sugarcane price is up 70 per cent in the last five years compared to 30-35 per cent for paddy or wheat or other crops. So, we have been requesting the government to link the sugarcane price to the sugar price realisation

and leave the sugarcane prices to the market forces. Maharashtra and Karnataka have accepted a linkage formula. The other States need to come on board. The Centre also needs to accept it.

Maize prices rule high on slow arrivals: USGC



Even as the retail prices of pulses continue to pinch consumers, maize prices ruled high in the range of Rs. 13,000 to Rs. 14,730 per tonne last week amid slow arrivals of the crop, according to a report by US Grains Council.

“Harvest in India continues and the reports are not very encouraging. The market yard prices range between Rs. 13,000 per tonne in Telangana, Rs. 13,640 per tonne in Rajasthan, Rs. 13,520 per tonne in Andhra Pradesh, Rs. 13,830 per tonne in Uttar Pradesh,” USGC Representative for India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Amit Sachdev said.

In Tamil Nadu, which is not a maize producer state during kharif season, the prices ruled higher at Rs.14,730 per tonne and the grains size is small, especially in drought-hit areas, he said.

Since it was also a short week, with Dussehra and Muharram holidays, supplies were low leading to higher prices, he added.

In the futures market, prices on NCDEX were firm with October contract, which expired on 20th, up by 2.42 per cent at Rs. 13,960 per tonne, while the November

contract was up by 3.11 per cent at Rs. 14,240 per tonne, and December was up 3.32 per cent at Rs. 14,330 per tonne.

However, prices in the spot market were mixed, USGC said.

In Nizambad, prices were up by 1.20 per cent at Rs. 13,865 per tonne, in Davangere down by 2.37 per cent at Rs. 14,562 per tonne, in Karimnagar up by 0.12 per cent at Rs. 13,750 per tonne, in Sangli up by 1.03 per cent at Rs. 14,750 per tonne and in Gulabghat up by 0.65 per cent at Rs. 14,220 per tonne.

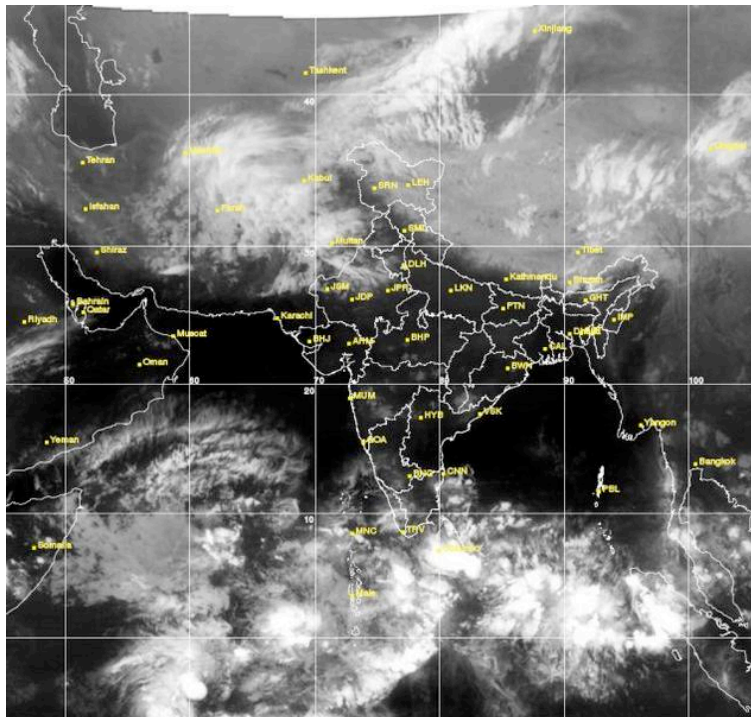
There also has been an improvement in poultry prices across the country. However, the prices in some areas are still below the cost of production, which have shot up considerably due to increased ingredient prices, especially corn and soyabean meal (SBM), USGC said.

It said that the prices also went up as end users still want to buy non-conventional protein sources.

Corn prices in the US remained stable as the harvest is still in progress.

As per an estimate, almost 60 per cent of the crop has been harvested, it added.

N-E monsoon may ride a storm to reach South in 4-5 days



Conditions are getting right for the commencement of North-East monsoon rain over the South over the next four to five days, an India Met Department update said on Friday.

All available indications suggest the season will set in with a flourish with storms developing over both the South-West Bay of Bengal and South-East Arabian Sea.

Bountiful season

The Met has already forecast a bountiful season this year which will be a godsend for parts of the South Peninsula scalded by near-drought conditions during the predecessor South-West monsoon.

The South Peninsula was left with a deficit of 15 per cent, most of the Met subdivisions managed to get into 'normal' thanks to a late surge in rains.

The North-East monsoon is crucial for five subdivisions of South India, namely Tamil Nadu, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, Kerala and South Interior Karnataka.

They receive about 30 per cent of their annual rainfall during the North-East monsoon season (October to December).

Tamil Nadu alone receives about 48 per cent of its annual rainfall during this season.

Easterly wave

The Met said that an easterly wave will pilot the monsoon, bringing rainfall over Tamil Nadu and adjoining southern peninsula from Tuesday onwards.

Easterly waves are elongated low-pressure areas moving in from the direction of South China Sea, carry their rain-heads upfront, and dump it over Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

These waves are also known to embed building storms within, one of which is expected to develop over Southwest Bay of Bengal (off Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu) early next week.

It can evolve into a deep depression/cyclone by the time it hits the Tamil Nadu coast, if early projections are anything to go by.

After hitting the coast, the weakened storm is forecast to slide along the rest of the East Coast, toying with the coasts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal.

At the moment, both peninsular seas are witnessing churn; the Sri Lanka coast apart, a preparatory cyclonic circulation has taken a perch over Lakshadweep (Southeast Arabian Sea) as well.

Evolving storms

Here too, the system is likely to evolve into a storm, break into two, with a leading edge careening into the outer (South-West) Arabian Sea towards Gulf of Eden/Yemen.

The remainder may move towards the Karnataka coast and clamber along north the West Coast towards Konkan-Mumbai, pushing some rain into West Maharashtra and Central India.

By this time, its counterpart over the Tamil Nadu coast would have reached Gangetic West Bengal, with a likely trough linking the two on both sides of the peninsula.

This trough will bring rain to West, Central and East-Central India.

Tea prices surge at Kochi auction



With active vendor participation and strong demand, prices of several tea varieties spurted at Kochi auctions amidst low arrivals.

The quantity on offer in CTC dust was very low at 8,87,500 kg, but there was a strong demand for good teas in sale no 43.

The teas which came under the selection of vendors such as AVT, Tata Global and Kerala State Civil Supplies was firm to dearer by ₹3 to ₹4. There was good demand from upcountry buyers also, the auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said.

However, the demand was fair in orthodox teas with only 7,000 kg was on offer. The market was irregular and lower by ₹2 to ₹3 and sometimes more. Exporters continued to be the mainstay for orthodox dust.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good grades quoted ₹101-153, mediums fetched ₹70-131 and plain varieties stood at ₹59-74.

In leaf grades, the quantity on offer in orthodox was 143,000 kg and the market for Niligiri brokens, whole leaf and Fannings was firm to dearer following quality.

In CTC, good liquoring brokens and Fannings barely remained steady and tended to ease. The quantity on offer was 76,500 kg and the demand was fair.

In dust grades, Monica SFD quoted the best prices of ₹155 followed by both Mayura SRD/SFD and Injipara SFD at ₹151 each. In leaf category, Chamraj FOP-sup green tea fetched the best prices of ₹309 followed by P'Woodlands – Hyson at ₹280.

DECCAN Chronicle

Rain water harvesting: Following Tamil Nadu's footsteps



Chennai: The Tamil Nadu government, which has pioneered rain water harvesting (RWH) with remarkable coverage rate of 90 per cent in Chennai, is now acting as an inspirational force for other states to take up similar initiatives.

The Delhi government has roped in TN rain man Dr Sekar Raghavan as an adviser to formulate RWH policy on lines with legislation on rainwater harvesting in Tamil Nadu.

Raghavan, 68, visited Delhi twice on invitation and gave a detailed presentation to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at the secretariat earlier this month. Raghavan, who is associated with TN government in promoting RWH since 2001, told Deccan Chronicle that the Delhi CM has appreciated TN government's determination and individual efforts of people of Chennai in making RWH a success.

“Kejriwal government has set up Delhi Dialogue Commission (DDC) to identify best practices and policies within India and around the world and translate them into concrete recommendations to the Government of NCT of Delhi for transformative change,” he said.

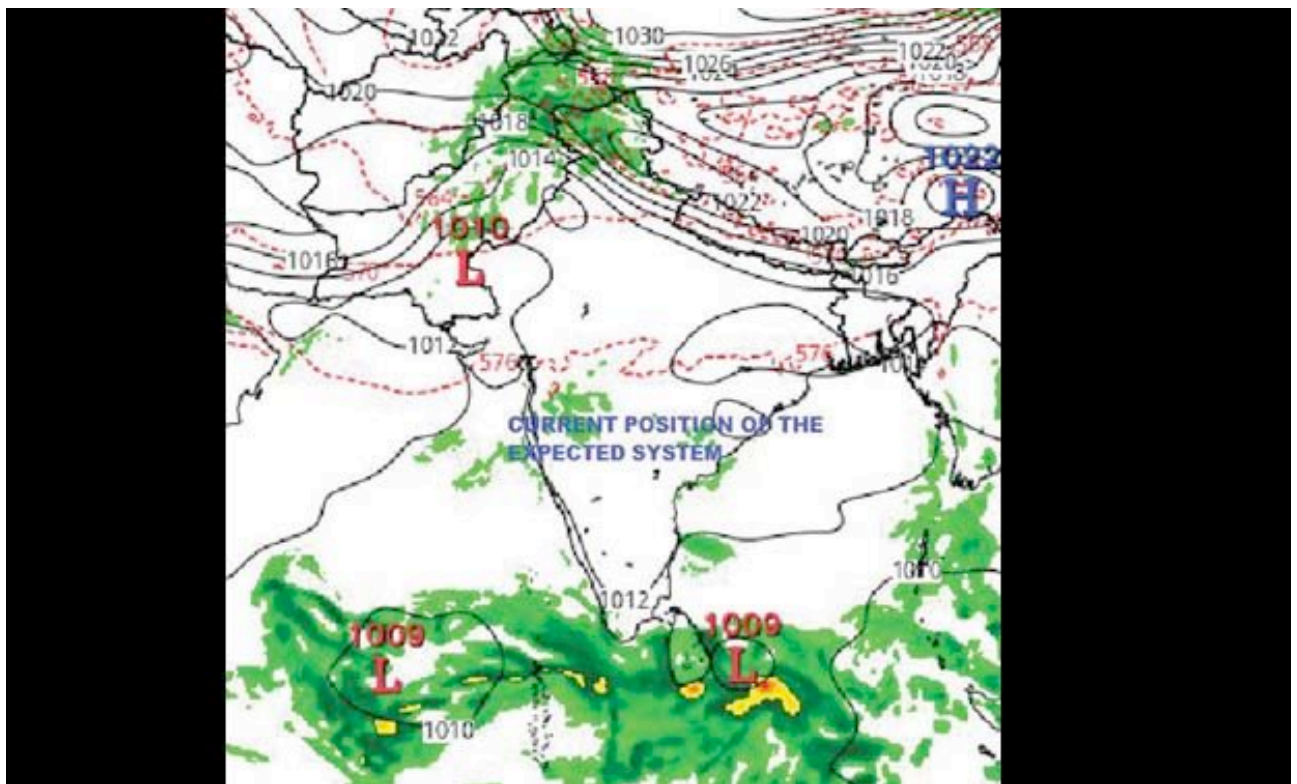
As a part of the initiative, DDC vice-chairman Ashish Khetan visited Chennai in July and met Raghavan at the Rain Centre and took inputs on how RWH system is working in Tamil Nadu. “On October 13, I was called for a one-day workshop on rainwater harvesting for Delhi. It was attended by Delhi CM, chief secretary and 40 senior bureaucrats,” he said.

Raghavan would be going to Delhi again for a two-week stay after Deepavali to set up a Rain Centre and finalise the design for 10-15 pilot projects in Delhi. Not just Delhi, even Rajasthan government is taking a clue from Tamil Nadu.

Recently, Kiran Maheshwari, Minister for Public Health Engineering and Ground Water in Rajasthan, visited Rain Centre in Chennai and held talks with Raghavan.

He visited Jaipur earlier this month along with A.L. Radhakrishnan, retired chief engineer of Chennai Metro Water Board, to share knowledge about TN’s RWH. “Though Rajasthan was once a leader in RWH, their traditional system has failed to deliver results following rapid urbanisation. The state is now searching for new ways to revive rainwater harvesting and ground water recharge systems, especially in Jaipur,” Raghavan said.

Brace for very wet weather in Tamil Nadu



As on date, Chennai has got 107 mm in the month of October and the normal rainfall for the month is 279 mm.

Chennai: International numerical weather prediction models are closely monitoring two Low Pressure Areas (LPA) in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian sea that are expected to bring heavy rainfall to Tamil Nadu in the next few days.

Though experts differ on the intensity and overall impact of these systems, weathermen concur that it will trigger the much awaited North East Monsoons, the onset of which has been forecast by the Met department on Oct. 27-28.

Analysis of the data gathered from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (ECMWF) and Global Forecast System (GFS), the two most credible models providing real time data on weather across the globe, shows how these two LPAs will impact Tamil Nadu.

P. Gokul, an IT professional by day and a weather blogger the rest of the time, said that the area of disturbance is close to the Sri Lankan coast and adjoining South West Bay of Bengal.

This is expected to intensify into a Well Marked Low Pressure Area (WM L) and move up towards the TN Coast and trigger the onset of the 2015 NEM in the state and the rains will be heavy in the coastal areas and of moderate intensity in the interiors in the coming week and Chennai is expected to get widespread rains Oct. 28 to 31, Gokul and fellow weather enthusiasts Pradeep John and Selvan explained.

The possibility of a cyclonic storm brewing is also being closely monitored. Currently, the wind speeds are 15-20 knots and according to officials, even if a storm is formed, it's landfall in TN coast will be minimised due to western disturbance over North India.

“Whenever this happens, it will modify the conditions making the Bay system to move along the East coast of India. The cyclonic storm would skirt along the TN coast and expected move in a northerly direction,” said Gokul.

Apart from this system in Bay of Bengal, another LPA lies in the South West Arabian Sea. It has the right set of conditions such as low wind shear, very warm Arabian waters etc. It is expected to intensify rapidly into a massive cyclonic storm and move away from Indian Coast. This system will indirectly help in increased rainfall activity in the interior areas of Tamil Nadu.

Odisha sets higher targets for production of potato, onion



The Odisha government has set a target to produce 5.28 lakh tonne potatoes and 4.50 lakh tonne onions during 2015-16.

“The state is going to be self-sufficient in the two commodities in the coming year,” said a senior official in the state agriculture department.

Odisha, which depends on West Bengal to meet its potato demands, is encouraging farmers with seeds and other inputs in a mission mode to make it a surplus state in potato by 2020.

The state is planning to cover at least 30,000 hectares under potato this year against 16,000 in 2014-15. Similarly, plans have been made to cultivate potato on 45,000 hectare land in 2016-17 and 60,000 hectare land in 2017-18. While agriculture department is planning to produce 5.28 lakh tonne this year on 30,000 hectare land, the production is expected to increase to 11.12 lakh tonne by 2017-18.

Relief fund row: Fadnavis clarifies, says ‘separate’ fund for farmers

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday clarified on the allegations that the Chief Minister’s relief fund had been used to send a dance troupe to Bangkok, saying that separate funds existed for the cultural activities apart from drought relief.

“To my surprise, I read in the news paper today that the same relief fund for drought had been sanctioned for the troupe to perform in Bangkok. I would like to clarify that there are three types of CM funds-one is for droughts, one is for Jalyukt Shivar (water conservation programme) and the third fund out of which 25 percent of the fund is reserved for cultural activities. Out of that 25 percent, we sponsor people for cultural activities,” Fadnavis said while addressing a Bar council of Maharashtra-Goa state lawyers’ conference.

“So 15 of our government servants have been selected for performing at an Art competition in Bangkok, but somehow it has been shown that the ‘drought relief fund’ has been spent instead,” Fadnavis added.

Meanwhile, an RTI filed by activist Anil Galgali found that the chief minister approved Rs 8 lakh for a government employee dance troupe that participated in a competition in Bangkok.

In his RTI, Galgali sought information from the CM Relief Fund desk about the assistance provided by it to the Sachivalaya Gymkhana. In response, the Public Information officer of the CM Relief Fund desk stated that Rs 8 Lakhs was given from the special fund.

The [Congress](#) trained their guns on the [BJP](#) saying how could Fadnavis shell out the money from the fund when a plague of drought had made the life of the farmers in the state miserable.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the other hand defended the charges against Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of doling out Rs 8 lakh for a dance

troupe to Bangkok from the state relief fund, saying that false allegations against a 'transparent' and fair leader will not be 'tolerated'.

5th Cultural Olympiad of Performing Arts 2015 is being held in Bangkok-Thailand by ABSS's Global Council of Art and Culture.

The grand event of performing arts will be held in "Aksra Theater" in Bangkok City from 26th to 30th December 2015.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Oilseeds crop production likely to be affected seriously: Solvent Extractor's Association of India



MUMBAI: With the country facing drought-like situation for the second consecutive year, oilseeds production is likely to be hit seriously, the Solvent Extractor's Association of India (SEA) said.

"It is unfortunate for India to face a drought like situation for the second consecutive year with just 88 per cent of the long term average monsoon, seriously affecting the oilseed crop production in the country," SEA President Pravin Lunkad said here.

"We expect soybean crop at around 85 lakh tonnes and of groundnut at around 31 lakh with sesame seed around 4.6 lakh tones and sunflower around 0.5 lakh tonnes. Thus between these 4 crops, the availability could be lesser by around 5.3 lakh tonnes compared to last year," G G Patel, former SEA President, said.

Lunkad pointed out that the country's oilseeds production is more or less stagnant and hovering between 27-28 million tonnes during the last few years. It is high time that

Commenting on artificial activity in soybean futures, Lunkad said, lately, the futures market on soybean has flared up without any fundamental support or reasons, causing financial damage to farmers, processing industry and meal exporters.

The Association has strongly requested SEBI Chairman to impose appropriate margins and take measures to cool the market.

Lunkad said that the industry needs to take steps to reverse decline in exports.

There is need for easy availability of railway rakes for exports to SAARC countries, higher import duty on edible oils to support exporters of oilmeals and also permit import of oilseeds at reduced import duty and also oilcakes and rice bran at nil duty to augment the raw material availability for processing, he added.

Private firms to buy 10 lakh tons rice in UP, other states: Food Corporation of India



NEW DELHI: State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) has decided to allow private players to purchase about 10 lakh tonnes of kharif rice in Uttar Pradesh and some eastern states in the ongoing procurement season.

Rice procurement for the 2015-16 kharif season began from this month. The government is targetting total procurement of 300 lakh tonnes, of which 69 lakh tonnes would be purchased from five north eastern states. The states are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal

FCI is the government's nodal agency for procurement and distribution of foodgrains.

The private sector is being roped in the government's procurement policy following recommendation by an FCI restructuring panel, headed by former food minister and veteran BJP leader Shanta Kumar.

The panel had recommended that government should focus more on north-eastern states to ensure farmers in those states benefit from the Centre's price support mechanism.

"FCI has set a rice procurement target of 69 lakh tonnes for north eastern states in the 2015-16 kharif season. Of which, private players will be allowed to procure 9.95 lakh tonnes," a senior Food Ministry official told PTI.

The FCI is in the process of shortlisting private companies for rice procurement in four states. For Bihar, the tenders for private procurement would be floated after assembly elections, the official said.

In Uttar Pradesh, private players will be allowed to buy 3.5 lakh tonnes of rice out of the targeted 27.50 lakh tonnes for the 2015-16 kharif season, the official added.

The north-eastern states with inadequate infrastructure for procurement have traditionally not been covered under the FCI's procurement programme and farmers are often compelled to sell their produce below the MSP.

These five north eastern states contribute over 40 per cent of the country's total rice production, but the procurement has been very negligible.

The government has fixed the minimum support price of paddy at Rs 1,410 per quintal (common grade) and at Rs 1,450 per quintal (A grade) for the 2015-16 kharif season.

As per the government's first estimate, rice production is estimated to decline to 906.1 lakh tonnes in the 2015-16 kharif season from 908.6 lakh tonnes last year due to ..

20% hike for sugarcane workers in Maharashtra this year



MUMBAI: A two-member arbitration panel of Maharashtra Women and Child Welfare Minister [Pankaja Munde](#) and the NCP leader Jayant Patil today capped the wages of [sugarcane](#) workers at Rs 270 per tonne for a period of five years, while approving a hike of 20 per cent this year.

NCP leader and leader of opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council [Dhananjay Munde](#) criticised their decision, which he said was tantamount to extortion of workers.

Maharashtra Cooperative Sugar Mill Federation had appointed the panel to resolve the dispute over wages between the sugarcane workers and the sugar mill owners.

Pankaja Munde represented the government while the former NCP minister Jayant Patil and former Congress Minister Harshvardhan Patil (who was consulted) represented the sugar mills. Nobody, however, represented the sugarcane workers.

Harshvardhan Patil said the panel approved 20 per cent increase in the wages of labourers, and 18.5 increase in that of supervisors ('mukadam'). The decision would put additional financial burden of Rs 600 crore on mill owners, he said. The workers' wages will this year will be Rs 228/tonne.

Pankaja Munde said she had met Sharad Pawar over the issue and had his "blessing". "I met Pawar and asked for his guidance. After getting his blessings, I took the decision to sort out the pending issues of sugarcane workers," she said.

But Dhananjay Munde -- her estranged cousin -- was scathing in his criticism. "If the government was serious about solving the problem, it could have increased the wages by more than 40 per cent. This is extortion of workers," he said.

According to an official of the Federation, a three-year contract was signed between the Federation and the labour unions in 2011 which hiked the wages by 70 per cent -- from Rs 110/tonne to Rs 190/tonne. Sharad Pawar and the late BJP leader [Gopinath Munde](#) were instrumental in working out the agreement, which expired last year.

Dhananjay Munde also objected to the tenure of the new agreement. "Labourers now can't seek increase for the next five years. How will they sustain themselves in this time of high inflation?" he asked.

Beed district in Maharashtra -- Munde family's stronghold -- is the biggest supplier of sugarcane workers. There are over 6.5 lakh registered sugarcane labourers in the state.

"The number of workers will increase this year because of the drought,' Dhananjay Munde said.