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# THE HINDU

## From software to soil



K. Shanthi at her organic farm in Tirupur.- Photo: R. VIMAL KUMAR

K. Shanthi (34), who worked as a software engineer in the United States, decided she wanted to return to her roots and her agrarian background. “Even though I was working as a software engineer, in my heart I knew I would go back to agriculture, sooner than later, “ she said. She quit her lucrative job and returned to Tirupur a few years ago to start agriculture on a 12-acre land she inherited on the outskirts of the city.

Ms. Shanthi decided to go in for organic farming and inter-cropping in order to get maximum unit value realisation (UVR) from her land.

Presently, she is raising around 1,000 coconut trees and uses the space between them to grow vegetables and fruits such as bananas, sapota, mango and papaya.

“I am raising different varieties of coconut to have a sustainable return. The dwarf variety is mainly grown to be sold as tender coconut while the other varieties are grown to produce copra when the income from tender coconut diminishes after the summer”, explained Ms. Shanthi.

Ms. Shanthi is now planning to come out with value-added products from the agriculture produce from her land.

“I have joined a consortium of organic farmers and we hope we can market the value-added products effectively by identifying sustainable market linkages,” she said.

*Shanthi quit her lucrative job in the U.S. and returned to Tirupur a few years ago to start agriculture*

### **Help for hi-tech farm entrepreneurs**

Considering its potential, Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation has identified hi-tech farming and farm-based enterprises and start-ups for ‘preferential system of financing.’

An official of the Corporation said here on Tuesday that the Global Agro meet here last year raised the prospects of Kerala seeing a boom in farm enterprises and start-ups in the sector. KSIDC is now working with Kerala Agricultural University to identify potential areas and to encourage new entrepreneurs. The official said that the university was in the process of drawing project details for start-ups and that the Corporation would try and get funds for start-ups under the Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (Inspire) of the Union Department of Science and Technology.

### **Rain triggers pest attack on jasmine plants**

Pest attack has affected the yield in jasmine in Perambalur and Tiruchi districts, particularly after the recent showers a couple of weeks ago.

Although the price for the flower has shot up in the wake of the festival season and auspicious ceremonies, the yield had been reduced following the pest attack.

A cross-section of jasmine cultivators near Esanai in Perambalur district and those near Podhavur in Tiruchi district say the flowers turned red, right from its budding stage.

Both the size and colour of the flower was affected.

“Against the usual 50 kg a day, we harvest only 30 kg to 35 kg from our fields,” they say.

V. Karuppannan, a farmer at Podhavur, said the problem cropped up only after the sudden showers early this month.

He had to spray some fertilizer after consulting the local fertiliser dealers. Official sources said the problem was caused by red pest, resulting in serious damage to the crop.

However, the problem had been under control because of rise in mercury level in the past few days.

***Against 50 kg a day, farmers in Perambalur and Tiruchi districts are getting only 30 to 35 kg***

### **Good growth in dairy sector: Mani**

*Asks youth to enter the sector in large numbers*

A two-day district-level dairy farmers’ meet concluded at Ramapuram in the district on Tuesday. Earlier, addressing dairy farmers, Finance Minister K.M. Mani said the State had achieved unprecedented growth in the dairy sector.

In fact, the rate of growth in the dairy sector in the State was 1.5 per cent more than that of Gujarat, so far the flag-bearer of the sector, he pointed out.

The State owed much to the 3,000-odd primary cooperatives in the dairy sector for achieving the feat of producing 15 lakh litres of milk per day, he said.

Mr. Mani wanted youngsters to come into dairy sector in large numbers. He pointed out that those who completed the entrepreneurial skill development programme launched by the State government stood to get Rs.20 lakh as interest-free assistance to commence new enterprises.

K.C. Joseph, Minister for Dairy Development, said the government was seriously thinking of increasing the pension amount for dairy farmers. He said the government had played a key role in stabilising the price of milk in the market. “During the past four years, the price of milk has been enhanced by Rs.13 a litre,” he said.

The incentives had played a key role in the unprecedented rate of growth of the dairy sector in the State which touched 17 per cent the past year. “For Kottayam the figure is 34 per cent,” he said and added that the district had already achieved self-sufficiency in milk production.

### **Self-sufficiency**

Mr. Joseph said that the government had earmarked the biggest share for dairy sector in the annual Plan with the target of achieving self-sufficiency in the sector.

Inaugurating the valedictory session, Mons Joseph, MLA, said he would raise the issue of enhancing the pension for dairy farmers to Rs.1,000 a month.

Awards for dairy farmers in various categories were distributed on the occasion.

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- *‘State plans to hike pension for dairy farmers’*
  - *Dairy sector growth touches 17% in State*

## Pest attack

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- *Against 50 kg a day, the farmers are getting only 30 to 35 kg*
  - *Some farmers spray fertilizers to control the pest*
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## Research on for five more products using banana



Banana fibre is being used for making various products. Picture shows table mats, shirts and saris made of the fibre in Tiruchi district.— Photo: A.Muralitharan

The post-harvest technology unit of the National Research Centre for Banana at Podhavur near here has taken up research programmes for producing five more new products using banana.

The products for which research is seriously on are production of banana fruit juice based jelly, stem juice based jelly, central core based jelly, central core powder based fruit mix and biscuits. The products which will be released within six months, according to K. N. Siva, Principal Scientist of the Centre, who is in-charge of evolving post-harvest technology for marketing value-added banana products. The research has been taken up after studying the demand for the products in the market.

Mr. Siva said that the post-harvest technology unit of NRCB had so far evolved about 50 products using banana fibre. It included banana fibre-based shirt, saris, pillow covers, yoga mats, mattresses, wall hangings, shopping bags, mobile covers, pen stand etc.

“A number of self-help groups are involved in producing value-added products in banana fibre. The fibre-based saris and shirts form 10 per cent of the fibre mixed with the balance cotton or other yarn,” he said.

The banana fibre has a capacity to absorb moisture and hence it can reduce the impact of sweat.

The post-harvest technology unit has been imparting training to entrepreneurs – individuals and members of self-help groups.

There has been an overwhelming response to the value-added products in banana and banana fibre, he added.

### **Onions likely to cost less in coming weeks**

Traders say the supply from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka is likely to increase soon.-Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

After going through weeks of spending a lot on onions, consumers might get some relief in the coming weeks. Traders said that the skyrocketing rates are likely to dip due to increase in supply from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Being one of the staple vegetables in every kitchen, the rate shot up from Rs. 20-Rs. 30 to Rs. 70, making spending on vegetables expensive, A. Balu, president of Vellore Town Nethaji Market Kaikari Vyabarigal Sangam said.

“The reason for this hike is continuous export of the vegetable. Steps should have been taken to either stop the export or bring down the rates,” he said.



### **Consumers apprehensive**

As a result of the high rates, consumers were apprehensive in buying onions. A few shopkeepers said that some consumers continued to buy onions as usual, while some bought lesser than usual.

“Cooking a meal at home without onions is difficult. Some persons cut down the quantity. For instance, if they usually bought one kilo of onions, they reduced it by half,” said a vegetable shopkeeper at Sathuvachari.

Mr. Balu said now, a kilo of onions were priced from Rs. 40 to Rs. 70 depending on the size and variety. “New load of onions from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are priced at Rs. 40. They are medium in size and rose in colour. The old load of onions from Maharashtra cost Rs. 50 to Rs. 70 depending on the size,” he pointed out.

### **Crop failure**

Usually, supply of onions from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu start this month. But TN was facing crop failure due to lack of rains, he noted.



“However, the supply from AP and Karnataka will increase in the coming weeks. So, there are chances that the prices will dip. It could drop by Rs. 10-Rs. 20 next week,” he added.

A vegetable vendor at Nethaji Market also pointed out to the better supply of onions now. “When compared to last few weeks, people have started to buy onions as they used to. Sale of onions was less when it cost Rs. 70 per kilo,” he said.

### **Protect farmers from moneylenders, DCs told**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah fixed the responsibility of protecting farmers from the harassment of moneylenders and financial institutions on the district administration, especially Deputy Commissioners.

He said that there were instances of banks and financial institutions insulting defaulting farmers by putting up their photos on notice boards. He directed the district administration to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

Mr. Siddaramaiah directed the Assistant Commissioners of sub-divisions to give priority to providing compensation to families of farmers who have committed suicide. He warned of initiating disciplinary action against them if there was any delay in disbursing compensation.

### **Bank not lending credit to small farmers'**

Farmers barged into the District Central Cooperative Bank office here on Tuesday alleging that the bank authorities were refusing to lend to small farmers.

They alleged that the bank had sent back small farmers saying they could not get loans for irrigation pump sets as their land holding was one acre or less than that.



They also complained that the bank was seeking repayment of kisan credit cards despite the State government's directions not to ask farmers to repay it during a drought.

They welcomed the bank's decision to lend money to farmers to install solar IP sets. They urged the bank management, however, to select deserving beneficiaries and to finance 100 per cent of the cost.

They also urged the bank to start releasing loans to help farmers take up sowing in the rabi season. Umakanth Nagamarapalli, vice president of the bank management committee, promised the farmers that the bank would consider their suggestions favourably.

### **National Nutrition Week inaugurated in Mysuru**



K.S. Mudagal, Principal District and Sessions Judge; Pushpa Amaranath, president, Mysuru Zilla Panchayat, K. Radha, Deputy Director, Women and Child Welfare, at a workshop on National Nutrition Week on Tuesday. — PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

K.S. Mudgal, Principal District and Sessions Judge, expressed serious concerns over one third of the population suffering from malnutrition. She said that while many people, particularly children, are suffering from malnutrition owing to different problems, many others are suffering from obesity.

She said that more than one third of the world's malnourished children live in India. Inaugurating National Nutrition Week, jointly organised by the Department of Women and Child Welfare, District Legal Services Authority and District Advocates Association here today, Ms. Mudgal called upon the people to have a balanced diet every day to stay healthy and physically fit. "Do not consume excess food and invite health problems," she said.

The Judge also underlined the need to consume tender coconuts and fruit juices instead of carbonated drinks. When nature has given us such a fantastic natural drink like tender coconut which is healthier, why do many people opt for carbonated drinks which are detrimental to health? she asked.

Quoting an adage "eat to live but not live to eat", she said that if people adopt good food habits without consuming junked food, they could live longer without being afflicted by any disease.

Pushpa Amaranath, president of the Mysuru Zilla Panchayat, in her speech said India is one of the highest ranking countries in the world for the number of children suffering from malnutrition. Quoting a survey, she said that the prevalence of underweight children in India is among the highest in the world. It is an open secret that a major cause for malnutrition in India is gender inequality, she said. She pointed out that nutrition-deficient individuals are more likely to have infectious diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis, which lead to a higher mortality rate.

She said that there are over 450 children suffering from malnutrition in Mysuru district and the ZP had taken all steps to provide them nutritious food and improve their health.

### **Seer announces scheme for farmers**

Subudhendra Tirtha, the head and chief administrator of Sri Guru Ranghavendra Mutt of Mantralayam, announced a scheme to offer financial help to farmers in distress while delivering his blessing-message during Uttararadhana celebrations on the mutt premises on Tuesday. He appealed to

the devotees to contribute as much as they could for the scheme titled ‘Abhay’ so that temporary relief could be provided to more farmers.

“Every devotee need not necessarily contribute large amounts. You can contribute as much as you can. It could be Re. 1, Rs. 100 or even more. It will be spent for giving financial assistance to farmers in crisis,” he said. He called upon farmers not to get disheartened and lose hope. After flagging off the Rathotsavam and offering flower-showering on the chariot that carried statues of Prahladraj and Sri Guru Raghavendra, from helicopter, the seer performed Bhumi Puja for construction of a super-specialty hospital in Mantralayam.

### **Coconut growers wait for their sweet deal**

*Absence of State policy on extraction of neera is an impediment for growers*



The process for the ‘Sweet Neera’ policy or the amendment to the Excise Act is yet to start in the State.— File Photo

Promises to bring about a policy to extract “Sweet Neera” – a natural intoxicant sapped out of coconut trees – have yet to fructify for farmers in the State. Coupled with wildly fluctuating coconut prices, farmers are yet to find a State policy that may have sweetened their moods on World Coconut Day on Wednesday.

Hopes had risen after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said while presenting State Budget this year that amendment will be made to the Excise Act to permit the members of the coconut producers' companies, federations and societies to extract neera. However, the process for the 'Sweet Neera' policy or the amendment is yet to start.

Neera is especially important for the farmers as it will give a steady monthly income irrespective of prices of coconuts in the wholesale market.

State Convenor of Sihi Neera Prasarana Samiti, Anekatte Vishwanath told *The Hindu* that the policy must be modelled after the one in Kerala. In the coastal State, members registered in Coconut Development Board can extract sweet neera and sell for Rs. 35 (for 200ml bottle) in the market. The policy even prohibits the fermenting of neera into toddy. This system has allowed farmers to get a profit of Rs. 50 per litre per day from one coconut tree. Each tree can give four litres of neera, added Mr. Vishwanath.

State secretary of KRRS B.S. Devaraj told *The Hindu* that in Karnataka, farmers can get a profit of up to Rs. 7,200 per tree per year if neera extraction is allowed.

### **Cardamom loses flavour for farmers as prices fall**

*Highest price per kg quoted at auction is Rs.885*



Farmers are selling cardamom in the open market at an average price of Rs.550 a kg and below.

The continuous fall in cardamom prices has put farmers in a spot. At the auction held on Monday, the highest price per kg was quoted at Rs.885 and the average price Rs.631.

However, the farmers are selling cardamom in the open market at an average price of Rs.550 and below. They say a price of Rs.700 a kg will make the cultivation remunerative.

### Employment

Cardamom plantations in the high ranges provide employment to many and have a bearing on the district economy too. Many plantations have failed to provide bonus and other benefits to workers during Onam. Sources said this was for the first time in the past five years that the average prices had fallen to such a low. The price was Rs.900 a kg eight months back.

“The high fluctuation in prices is a concern though there is a system to control auctioneers from forming a cartel to keep the prices at a low,” said an official at the Spices Park at Puttady, where auctions are being held in the State.

In 2012, the price of cardamom was about Rs.2,000 a kg, more than double the present price level.

The Cardamom Growers Association said the price level was being decided by the Mumbai-based business lobby depending on production. Initially, it was expected that the production would increase considerably owing to favourable climatic conditions.

### Heavy loss

However, there was heavy loss during the monsoon and the production level would be much lower than that of the last season, an office-bearer said.

Unlike the other produces, farmers could not keep it for long as it would affect quality, which was decided by the colour, shape, and smell of the produce.

Cardamom from Idukki was considered the best and there were apprehensions that low quality cardamom from Guatemala was also being put for auction to keep the prices down.

Binoy Joseph, a medium level farmer at Nedumkandam, said the low prices were detrimental to the industry. He said even as the prices of value-added products were remaining high, the low price for cardamom at the auctions was due to the lobby working at the market level.

### **Help for fishermen community**

A programme for the welfare of fishermen community, being introduced jointly by the State department of fisheries and Fishermen's Welfare Board, will be launched here on September 4.

A statement from the Public Relations Department said that fisheries minister K. Babu will launch the initiative at the Ernakulam Town Hall in the presence of officials from the fisheries department and people's representatives from the district.

A total of 630 students from the fishermen community have been selected for various educational and sports awards and Rs. 25.37 lakh will be given away, said the press release.

### **R&D centre for cashew processing equipment opened at Bantakal**

A research and development (R&D) centre for technology upgrade of cashew processing equipment was inaugurated at the Department of Mechanical Engineering of SMV Institute of Technology and Management (SMVITM) at Bantakal in Udipi district on Monday.



According to a press release issued by the institute on Tuesday, the facilities at the R&D centre have been provided by the Karnataka Council for Technological Upgradation (KCTU), Government of Karnataka.

## **Importance**

Inaugurating the centre, KCTU managing director Anil A. Uppin emphasised the importance of research and development in the field of agriculture. He lauded SMVITM for being the first functional R&D centre of the 16-sponsored projects by KCTU.

The R&D team at the Centre should have regular interaction with entrepreneurs of the cashew industry in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts. This will help them understand the problems of the industry and act accordingly. The KCTU will extend all support in the future projects of the R&D centre, Mr. Uppin said.

Chief guest P. Ramdas, managing director of Ace Manufacturing Systems, Bengaluru, emphasised the need for focus on excellence and passion for one's chosen field.

Bola Rahul Kamath, president of the Karnataka Cashew Manufacturers Association, urged students to take up R&D projects that would help the industry.

## **Minor irrigation projects go defunct**

*Lack of training and capacity building deprives small, marginal farmers of assured irrigation facilities*

The defunct Gattusingaram minor lift irrigation scheme in Kusumanchi mandal of Khammam district. —PHOTO: G.N.RAO

Several minor lift irrigation schemes on Godavari and Kinnerasani rivers besides, a host of other water bodies across the district have either become defunct or obsolete, thereby depriving scores of small and marginal peasants, mainly tribal farmers of assured irrigation facilities.



As per official records, there are around 330 minor lift schemes with an irrigation potential of 69,255 acres in the district, considered the agricultural and horticultural hub of Telangana State.

Most of them were constructed by the erstwhile AP State Irrigation Development Corporation Limited (APSIDC) in undivided Andhra Pradesh several years ago.

A few of them were built during former Chief Minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh N.T. Rama Rao's regime under the 'Telugu Grameena Kranthi Patham' scheme in the late 1980s for the benefit of small and marginal farmers in upland areas, sources said.

The SIDC has entrusted the operation and maintenance of the lift schemes to the farmers' committees representing the beneficiaries.

Although the lift schemes functioned optimally in the initial few years, a significant number of the schemes, especially those in the tribal areas, have subsequently developed frequent technical snags owing to damage of the motors and other equipment due to a combination of factors including flash floods.

Inadequate focus on training and capacity building of beneficiaries under social engineering, the vital component of the SIDC's minor irrigation initiatives, rendered several lift schemes defunct. The old lift schemes on Kinnerasani river at Payakariyanambailu, Suraram and several other villages in Palvancha division remained defunct for many years for want of repairs to the motors, sources said.

An exercise is underway to collect the data pertaining to the old lift schemes to ascertain the exact status of the schemes, the alternative irrigation methods, if any, adopted by the beneficiaries, for sending a detailed report to the government, said K. Vidyasagar, Executive Engineer, Telangana State Irrigation Development Corporation (TSIDC), Khammam.

When contacted, he told *The Hindu* that repairs were carried out on the motors of the lift schemes at Payakariyanambailu and Suraram in Palvancha mandal several times in the past.

The two-decade old schemes have become obsolete, he said, adding that renewed focus would be laid on social engineering to enable farmers make optimum use of the minor irrigation sources.

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*K. Vidyasagar*

*Executive Engineer,*

*TSIDC, Khammam*

### **KRRS wants special session of legislature convened to discuss farmers' issues**

*'Government is still to identify reasons for the suicides*

K.T. Gangadhar, working president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), has urged the State government to convene a special session of the Legislature to discuss the issue of the rising incidence of farmers' suicides across the State.

More than 350 farmers had committed suicide in the State since June this year. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had failed to identify the reasons for the agrarian crisis in the State and to evolve solutions for it, he said at a press conference here on Tuesday.

Except for visiting the houses of farmers who had committed suicide and handing over compensation cheques to the family members of the deceased, Mr. Siddaramaiah had hardly done anything precious to address the problem. Even the Opposition leaders had failed to initiate a detailed debate over the issue during the recent session of the State Legislature, he said.

The State government had so far declared 150 taluks as drought-hit. It was unfortunate that the government was not adequately prepared to tackle the drought. The government had not yet announced any contingency plan for taking up cultivation of low water-intensive crops during the rabi season. As the area under the cultivation of paddy and jowar was very low this year, the State would be facing acute shortage of fodder in the coming days, which would also result in the decline in milk production. A special session of State Legislature should be convened to discuss all these issues, he said.

On the State government's directive to banks that they should not issue loan repayment notices to farmers, he said, the farmers would not be benefited much from this move as they (borrowers) would have to repay the loan, along with interest, in future. He urged the government to waive the interest on agricultural loans taken from nationalised and cooperative banks.

Although the prices of agricultural inputs were skyrocketing, a paltry sum was being advanced as loans for agricultural purposes by banks. As a result, the farmers were forced to borrow money from moneylenders, albeit at exorbitant rates of interest.

At present, farm loans were being disbursed based on the scale of finance fixed by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 1992. As the cost of agricultural inputs had increased enormously since 1992, the NABARD should revise the scale of finance for agricultural loans, proportionately, he said.

Functionaries of KRRS Umapatyappa, Yashwanth Rao Ghorpade, Veeresh, Hirannaiah and Parameshwarappa were present.

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- ***'Already, 150 taluks have been declared as drought-hit in Karnataka'***
  - ***'Government is yet to come out with a contingency plan for rabi season'***
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## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Skill development centres launched**

Union minority affairs minister Najma Heptulla and Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh on Monday jointly launched skill development centres at three madrassas in Bihar. It is the pilot project of the Centre's plans to skill the minority community members with speed, scale and standards across the country.

Maulana Azad National Academy for Skills (MANAS) will train the youths at Madrassa Idara-e-Shariah, Sultanganj, Patna (where the project was launched), Madrassa Anjuman Islamia and Madrassa Islamia Anjuman Rafaqul Muslimin, Motihari.

"True to the slogan of 'Modi sarkar, apke dwar', we had gone to the 'basti' (settlement) to launch the programme. We want everyone's support and development," Heptulla told mediapersons in the evening.

MANAS aims at bringing together key stakeholders, including specialized trainers, leading industry bodies, community leaders and trainees to avail the benefit of quality training at one's doorsteps. "Altogether 3,600 minority community students will get training through the pilot project in the next four months. Once the pilot projects take off, the scheme will be launched across India," she said. The training programme will be monitored by MANAS-Project Monitoring Unit (PMU).

Heptulla said her department has fulfilled all its promises relating to minorities made before the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. "There were six programmes and the pilot projects for all have been launched," she said. The

minister, however, refuted the opposition's allegation that Union ministers were on an inaugural spree before announcement of the state assembly election to gain brownie points among the voters. "In India, election is an ongoing process. Somewhere or the other, some election keeps taking place. Should we stop our development work then," she questioned.

Heptulla accused the so-called secular parties and their leaders of treating Muslims as a vote bank only. "However, they have deposited nothing in that bank, did no development work. Instead, they have squeezed out everything," she said. Heptulla said there was no reason for the minorities to feel threatened under the Narendra Modi government. "The PM has himself said there is nothing to worry. Were there no riots or unrest in Congress or RJD regime?" she asked.

### **Onion breaches 3-figure mark**

While petrol and diesel prices are witnessing a fall, the retail price of onion breached the Rs 100 per kg mark in Satellite and other western parts of the city. However, the commodity's cost is unlikely to further increase following the arrival of new crop from south India and Afghanistan in the market.

Price of onion in areas like Satellite and Vastrapur crossed Rs 100 per kg and the commodity was being sold in the range of Rs100 and Rs105 per kg.

The wholesale price of the commodity at the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) in Ahmedabad crossed Rs 50 per kg and was being sold at Rs 55 per kg.

Arrival of onion in the city has gone down with every passing day, according to officials. On an average, 480 tonnes of onion are sold daily in the city, but over the past few weeks, the commodity's arrival has come down to only 100-150 tonnes.

Ghyanshyam Patel, an office-bearer of Mahuva APMC said, "With the arrival of fresh crop from Bangalore and Afghanistan, APMC in Mahuva saw a dip in price of the commodity. The wholesale price of onion, which was Rs 55 per kg on Friday, has come down to Rs 45 per kg."

The cost is not expected to remain constant and there may not be further rise in the price at least in the wholesale market. Patel said that the prices will now see a downward trend in the second week of October.

Officials in Ahmedabad APMC said that retailers are selling onions at double the wholesale cost. However, in some areas, retailers themselves are reducing the prices on dipping sales.

Bhavin Shah, an onion trader in western part of the city says, "I found that onion sale has gone down drastically. A person, who was earlier purchasing nearly two kg, is now buying only half a kg of onion. So, I had to reduce the price."

Bhanwarsinh Rathore, a dealer says, "I supply nearly 1,000 kg of onions to hotels and restaurants. But, now the demand is only 40 per cent of the supply. I only pick up 400 kg of onions. Small restaurants are using fewer onions."

### **Bitter harvest for cane farmers in Marathwada**

The sugarcane-centric rural economy of Marathwada is crumbling. The region has run out of water for the crop that gave it a major fillip in the 90's even as it soaked up Marathwada's groundwater. Sugarcane crop has remained stunted this year - with no rainfall and no groundwater left to nurture it. Cooperative sugar factories are closing down and countless people dependent on sugarcane for their livelihoods are staring at difficult times ahead.

Consecutive years of bad monsoon, more so this year has shrunk land usage for sugarcane cultivation in Marathwada. From 2.24 lakh hectare, sugarcane is now cultivated over just about 1 lakh hectare. And a significant quantity of crop grown may go as fodder this year. The crop's cultivation in the three worst drought-hit districts of Latur, Beed and Osmanabad has dropped considerably. Unable to sustain the dry spells, 24 of the 55 cooperative sugar factories here have already closed, while others are struggling to survive.

Lakhs of sugarcane growers, harvesters, transporters and traders and others are dependent on the sugar business. There are 14 sugar factories in Latur, 13 in Osmanabad and 10 in Beed. "An estimated one lakh people in the rural areas of these districts depend on each factory," said Jaiprakash Dandegaonkar, former minister and vice chairman of the Maharashtra State Cooperative sugar factory. "Even if we start factories, we don't have the water required for the purpose. The cane has not grown enough to be crushed in most parts," he said.

"Since most factories have now closed due to a variety of reasons, one major reason being drought, rural people are set to face difficult days ahead," said B B Thombre, chairman of the Natural Sugars, Latur, a private factory that in better times crushed 5,000 tonne sugarcane every day and 8 lakh tonne in the crushing season. He said this year there was no rainfall and not enough groundwater available. We will not be able to start the factory this season, he told TOI. "Rural economy was linked to the sugar industry and has collapsed particularly in Marathwada region," he said.

Abasaheb Patil, chairman of Rena Cooperative Sugar Factory, which is still functional, said the situation is grim and farmers may only be able to use the sugarcane produce as fodder.



"The closure of a cooperative factory affects at least 20,000 to 22,000 of its members, in addition to at least 200 workers and hundreds of sugarcane harvesters, other work force and allied businesses," said Sambhaji Patil of Jai Jawan Cooperative Sugar Factory in Latur, which is closed since 2009. He also admitted that sugarcane has dried wells and borewells and the good days that sugarcane had brought with it for a few years are now history. "Over exploitation of water has made it so scarce that we have to look for other sources for drinking water," he said.

"Once Latur had 47,000 hectare of land under sugarcane cultivation. Now it has dropped to about 20,000 hecare," said Pandurang Pole, Latur district collector. Majority of farmers have already shifted to soyabean farming this year, but due to inadequate rainfall, the growth is stunted and thus the soybean crop might go the sugarcane way, to be used as fodder.

"We have now launched a 'beyond sugarcane' campaign, which is getting an overwhelming response in Osmanabad and farmers have shifted to other crops like soyabean and pulses," said Prashant Narnaware, Osmanabad district collector. But, lack of rainfall has made the going tough for farmers in Osmanabad, majority of who have no other option than to think beyond sugarcane, Narnaware told TOI.

"Cash crop like sugarcane and cotton introduced most of these farmers to a lavish lifestyle. The drought for the last five years has made their life difficult," said a senior official, adding the farmers have no choice but to go for traditional crops. "But rainfall is needed for that too in this predominantly rain fed area," he added.

## **Rice farmer grows crop with 60% less water, awarded**

The Indian Rice Research Institute, Hyderabad, has awarded a farmer from Dharapuram for adopting drip irrigation system in rice cultivation, thereby reducing water consumption by 60%.

Parthasarathy M, 69, received the Innovative Rice Farmer Award on August 29. In all, 30 farmers from sixteen states were nominated for this award.

Parthasarathy bagged the award for largescale adoption of drip irrigation for rice cultivation in Amaravathy sub-basin in Tamil Nadu. The award was presented to his son during the Innovative Rice Farmers meet 2015 on August 29 at Indian Institute of Rice Research, Hyderabad, by the Union minister for labour and employment, Bandara Dattatreya.

Parthasarathy has been cultivating rice for 50 years. "In 2013, I was in Coimbatore for an agri fair in Codissia Complex. There I was introduced to the drip irrigation technology. I immediately went to Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and was given a demo. I first adopted it for vegetables and then for growing maize. And, in 2014, I used the technology for rice," he said.

The farmer, who draws water from the Amaravathi Dam, had installed drip irrigation to water trees in his farm in the 1980s. "But, I came to know about the use of this technology in rice only in 2014," he said. Parthasarathy said that he not only saved 60% water, but he also saw an increase in yield. "On an average, the yield was five tonnes per acre after I adopted drip irrigation, which was a 20% increase from the yield in 2013," said Parthasarathy.

What's unique about Parthasarathy's achievement is that he used drip irrigation and crop rotation together. He cultivated onion, maize and rice in

rotation. "This has helped improve his yield and save water consumption," said director of water technology department, B J Pandian.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University started research on the possibility of using drip irrigation for the cultivation of rice in 2010. "In 2012, we succeeded in cultivating rice through this technology. The state government also provides subsidy to farmers using drip irrigation," he added.

Parthsarathy said that he spent 40,000/acre after receiving subsidy from the government. He received 73,000 per hectare as subsidy for installing drip irrigation.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### September rainfall crucial for pulses' yield



Bean counting India needs all the pulses it can grow KK Mustafah

The production of pulses, arguably the most important source of protein for a large number of the domestic population, could be impacted if the monsoon flatters to deceive for the third consecutive month.

Area covered by major kharif pulses such as arhar (tur), urad and moong, is higher by 12 per cent over the year as of August 28. But a rainfall deficit in

September after a 23 per cent shortfall in August can hurt output and impact retail prices that have already shot over ₹100/kg in New Delhi.

“Deficit rainfall will have an impact on yield, but it is too early to tell by how much. Even if there’s scanty rainfall in September and water levels in the fields are at about 4-5 inches, pulses that are now entering the flowering stage can recover,” said KV Prabhu, Principal Scientist at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI).

### **Acreage rises**

Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra account for a bulk of the increase in pulses coverage, sufficiently making up for a drop in Karnataka and to a lesser extent in Odisha.

Rajasthan, in particular, has recorded an increase in area by nearly 25 per cent, from 20.54 lakh hectares (lh) last year to 25.64 lh as of last week, mainly due to receiving normal to excessive precipitation through the monsoon.

The crops in Maharashtra, where acreage is up 16 per cent to 17.24 lh, are a worry with vast tracts across the State’s interior and the Marathwada region receiving 40 to 50 per cent less rain between June 1 and August 31.

“Besides good water availability, high prices have encouraged more sowing in Rajasthan. In Maharashtra, there can be positives since heavy rain is actually a deterrent for moong – particularly across black soil region where there is heavy water retention. Scanty rain in these areas is sufficient,” said Prabhu.

### **Mixed outlook for prices**

Sowing of urad and moong are up 13.3 per cent and nearly 20 per cent and it is expected that prices for these varieties will reduce once the crop hits the market.

While sowing of arhar is up 2.7 per cent, retail prices could be under stress with depleted local stocks, uncertainty about production in Karnataka and Maharashtra, and imports from Myanmar slowing due to crop. arhar prices touched ₹132/kg on Tuesday – up 63 per cent from last year.

“There is not much concern for urad and moong since output is expected to be good in MP, UP and Rajasthan. Prices should come down and some decline has already been recorded,” said Bimal Kothari, Managing Director, Pancham International, a pulses importer.

### **Import data**

“Local arhar is, however, exhausted and we are dependent on African countries for the next three months. About 250,000-300,000 tonnes of arhar will be imported into India till December,” he added. Imports are expected to rise with private contracts having been signed for at least 1 million tonnes (mt) of chana and yellow peas, besides arhar.

With Australia expected to produce 800,000 tonnes of chana this year, Kothari said that 400,000 tonnes had already been contracted while imports of 800,000 tonnes of yellow peas will begin by September and continue till January.

The Centre earlier said that States will be provided a subsidy of ₹10/kg on imported arhar which is being bought at ₹77 by it. Around ₹81 crore is being spent on imports from the ₹500-crore Price Stabilisation Fund and 5,000 tonnes of arhar is expected to arrive by mid-September.

### **Rabi prospects**

Rainfall, however, was the need of the hour not just for the kharif crop but also for the rabi season which accounts for a larger share of India’s pulses output.

“We’ve had the driest August in a decade and soil moisture levels are low. If October rains fail, the rabi crop will also be stressed,” Pravin Dongre, Chairman, Indian Pulses and Grains Association, who expected prices to remain higher till December since imports were not likely to significantly impact the domestic market.

India produced 17.38 million tonnes (mt) of pulses in 2014-15 (July to June), down almost 10 per cent from the 19.25 mt produced in 2013-14, due to unseasonal rain and deficient rainfall.

## **Western disturbance may stop monsoon-on-retreat**

The overall rain deficit for the country as a whole has reverted to 12 per cent on the first day of September even as most parts of the country except the East witnessed dry conditions.

A formal announcement of the withdrawal of the monsoon is awaited but available indications suggest that the process may have started, bar the shouting.

## **Anti-cyclone on prowl**

A signature anti-cyclone (clock-wise circulation buffeted by barren north-westerly winds) could even weigh over the ground over north-west India and later over west-central India briefly during this week.

This anti-cyclone would later be the fulcrum around which the winter weather would set in as the north-westerly winds bring cold Arctic air into play over the plains over North and Central India.

But the rain-suppressing anti-cyclone will get unsettled by an incoming western disturbance during the weekend and later by some belated activity being predicted in the Bay of Bengal.

The latter will be underwritten by yet another typhoon building in West-central Pacific, the umpteenth time this season when a churn in that massive body of water would dictate weather in the Bay far to its east.

## **No big purchase**

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, however, doesn't seem to great store by the fresh low-pressure area building in the Bay in response to the call from the Pacific.

Initial forecasts made by the Centre suggests that the 'low' may help prolong the spell of showers along the East Coast, including coastal Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The productive session in the East and North-East getting extended to the East Coast is in the 'best traditions' of and observed pattern during a weakened monsoon when rains shut out elsewhere.

The US National Centres of Environment Prediction pointed to a scenario where the rains dry up rapidly from the Northwest first to East during the next two weeks.

Sporadic showers in the North-West from western disturbances and better organised rain from a monsoon fighting for a foothold in East and North-East and along the East Coast would be the only exception.

### **‘Rise in cotton value-added products good for industry’**

The steady growth in export of cotton fabrics and made-ups is expected to help the industry even as the cotton textile shipments remain sluggish, said RK Dalmia, Chairman, Texprocil.

Speaking at the 61<sup>st</sup> annual general meeting of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (Texprocil), Dalmia said though the overall exports of cotton textiles declined by 0.1 per cent last fiscal, it was heartening to note that exports of cotton fabrics and made-ups registered 11 per cent and five per cent growth to \$2.44 billion and \$5.05 billion, respectively.

“This augurs well for the industry as higher export of value added products in the long run will lead to greater employment and higher level of investments,” he said.

The emergence of mega trade agreements by the US and the European Union among themselves and other key trading partners such as Korea, Vietnam and Japan pose fresh challenges for India, he said.

“It would be in the best interest of India to take an integrated approach rather than ad-hoc decision while negotiating new free trade agreements or re-negotiating old ones,” he said.

### **Export concession**

Dalmia said the government has to extend export concession for few more years given the country’s infrastructural drawback, un-rebated taxes on exports, high cost of inputs and preferential benefits of competitors.



Being one of the largest new job creators and employers, the textile and clothing industry is poised to gain government benefits based on employment generated.

Urging the Government ensure that the industry gets all raw material at par or below international prices, Dalmia said the technology upgradation fund should be reactivated and include cotton yarn in the Merchandise Export from India (MEI) Scheme besides including dyed, printed fabrics and made-ups in sops provided for export to various markets especially the Sub-Saharan African countries.

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*The government has to extend export concession for few more years given the country's infrastructural drawback, taxes on exports and high cost of inputs.*

## Business Standard

**In Bengal, a rice economy rots away on food habits, subsidy**



The closure of 500 of 1,200 rice mills in [West Bengal](#) over two years is weighing heavy on the non-performing loans of banks. Changing food habits, rising food subsidy and falling exports have brought the rice

economy in Bengal, the highest rice producing state in the country, to the verge of a crisis.

With the size of loans of rice mills between Rs 4 crore and Rs 15 crore, and around 200-250 accounts turning into NPAs in the past few months, the amount of NPA addition could be between Rs 800 crore and Rs 3,000 crore, according to DN Mondol, president of the Bengal Rice Mills Association.

“The market for rice in West Bengal is shrinking, and there is no upgradation in technology. The parboiled rice produced in Bengal was in high demand in eastern India, Bangladesh and Africa. However, Bangladesh has attained self-sufficiency in rice, leading to a shrinkage of exports. Due to lifestyle changes, the consumption of rice is also going down. The mills have also complained about delays in payment for levy rice,” said the manager of [a public sector bank](#) in Burdwan district.

West Bengal produces 15 million tonnes of rice every year, mostly rice that has been partially boiled in the husk. Of this, the state government procures 2.2 million tonnes through the levy mechanism.

Ever since the Trinamool Congress government came to power, the procurement has more than doubled from around one million tonnes. Much of this owes to the state government’s scheme for providing 35 kg of rice per month at Rs 2 a kg in the Naxal-affected blocks of the state.

Under the levy mechanism, mills last year procured paddy at around Rs

1,310 a quintal, while the government bought rice from the mills at Rs 2,060 a quintal. The effective cost for mills for buying a quintal of rice works out to Rs 2,046 because a quintal of paddy yields 64 kg of rice.

However, the profit of Rs 14 per quintal turns into a loss of over Rs 50, when the cost of milling and transport is added. According to mill owners, against the Rs 80 per quintal cost of milling, the government provides only Rs 25 per quintal.

The market price of paddy, on the other hand, is lower than the government procurement price. At present the market price of rice is Rs 1,700-1,800 per quintal. Moreover, earlier, around three million tonnes of rice from West Bengal was exported annually to Bangladesh. This has come down to nearly 700,000 tonnes.

The demand for parboiled rice has also declined substantially as rising income has led the demand shift to better quality rice. In the rural market, the key market for parboiled rice, demand for non-PDS rice has shrunk because of government subsidy schemes.

Data from the NSSO survey on household consumption suggests between 2004-05 and 2011-12, the monthly per capita consumption of rice in urban areas declined from 6.77 kg to 6.24 kg. The monthly per capita consumption of PDS rice in rural areas increased from 0.61 kg in 2004-05 to 0.95 kg in 2011-12. But the monthly per capita demand for rice from non-PDS sources in rural areas decreased from 9.08 kg to 8.97 kg.

The trend is not restricted to West Bengal, as per capita monthly rice consumption in rural India declined to 5.98 kg in 2011-12 from 6.38 kg in 2004-05. In urban India, the fall in rice consumption was 0.2 kg per person per month. Per capita consumption of PDS rice has, however, doubled in rural India and risen by 66 per cent in urban India since 2004-05, implying the share of PDS purchases in rice consumption has risen substantially, according to the NSSO.

### **Import of pulses might be a record**



Triggered by a sharp decline in output last year, followed by the fear of lower production this kharif season, too, private traders have signed contracts for over a million tonnes of imported pulses, with delivery in three months.

Informed sources said importers are looking for huge quantities of chickpeas, yellow peas, pigeon peas (tur) and black matpe (chana) from Australia, Canada and some other countries. Lower prices in the ongoing harvesting season there and the rupees' slide against the dollar have also prompted importers to fix the price and supply commitment.

The price of pulses, led by tur dal and masoor dal, has risen substantially in a month. At Rs 120 a kg, tur has become costlier by 18 per. Masoor is up 16 per cent to Rs 89 a kg in wholesale markets. In retail markets, tur and masoor are quoted at Rs 140-150 a kg and Rs 110-120 a kg, respectively. Experts believe the prices will remain firm.

Consumption in India has increased steadily over recent years. Barring 2014-15, when importers had to face huge volatility in global prices, Indian importers have avoided building an inventory.

“Importers have contracted for 400,000 tonnes of chickpeas and caspa peas from Australia and 600,000 tonnes of yellow pea import, largely from Canada, Russia and France,” said Pravin Dongre, chairman, India Pulses and Grains Association.

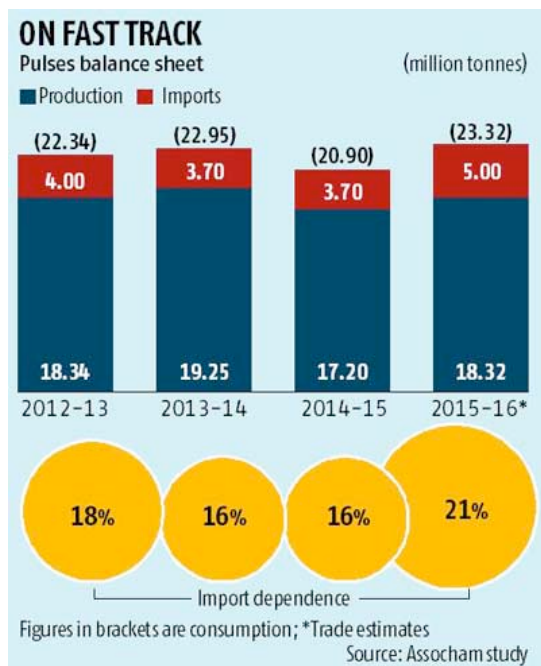
If the trend continues, India would have the highest import of pulses at around five million tonnes this year, about 21 per cent of the consumption, the highest ever.

India's pulses import is likely to remain up despite higher sowing this kharif season, whence comes a third of the annual output. “While a forecast of crop damage due to deficiency of rainfall is a bit early, another week or two of

dry spell would certainly damage standing crops. The meteorological department has forecast 12 per cent lower rain this [monsoon](#) season of the long term average. It appears this has begun impacting the tur crop in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The latest estimate, issued on August 17, of the Union agriculture ministry showed pulses output to decline by at least 10 per cent to 17.2 million tonnes in 2014-15.

Unseasonal rain in February–April had damaged the rabi crop.



“There is a huge shortage of tur in India. Importers are therefore bringing in large quantities of tur from African countries, in addition to yellow peas from Ukraine, Russia, Australia and Canada,” said Bimal Kothari, managing director of Pancham International, a pulses importer.

Dongre urged the government to start importing now.