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# THE HINDU

## Rate of global forest loss halved



The rate at which the world is losing its forests has been halved, but an area of woodland the size of South Africa has still been lost since 1990, a major UN report said on Monday.

Improvement has been seen around the globe, even in the key tropical rainforests of South America and Africa, according to a surprisingly upbeat Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), which is released every five years.

Despite the good news, it points out that since 1990, the world had lost forests covering some 129 million hectares — an area the size of South Africa.

“Even though, the extent of the world’s forest continues to decline... the rate of net forest loss has been cut by over 50 per cent,” said the report by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The assessment was released at the World Forestry Congress in the South African port city of Durban, host to the 14th edition of the conference.

“FRA 2015 shows a very encouraging tendency towards a reduction in the rates of deforestation and carbon emissions from forests and increases in capacity for sustainable forest management,” said FAO director-general Jose Graziano da Silva.

“The direction of change is positive, with many impressive examples of progress in all regions of the world. However this positive trend needs to be strengthened, especially in the countries that are lagging behind,” he said.AFP

### **Start-up village project for Kolelands**

The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) is all set to launch a start-up village project in Kolelands in the State.

The initial phase of the project in agriculture and allied sectors will be launched at Pullazhi in the district. The Directorate of Entrepreneurship of KVASU in association with the Thrissur Urban Development Authority and the Pullazhi Koleland Cooperative Society will implement the project.

“Many are under the impression that start-ups are possible only in the IT sector. But there is immense potential for agriculture and allied sector start-ups in the State. Kolelands are suitable for implementing agriculture start-ups. Agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sectors can easily be integrated in this ecosystem,” said K. Radhakrishnan, former Mayor and Chairman Thrissur Urban Development Corporation.

The project aims at establishing a start-up village in livestock production as a pilot project along with developing sustainable development models in farming.

“The project will pursue the market potential of agriculture, livestock, and fisheries products and will market them as separate brands through the Pullazhi cooperative

society and KVASU sales outlets. Thrust will be given to organic farm and allied products,” said T.P. Sethumadhavan, Director of Entrepreneurship, KVASU.

“At a time when the State is in the process of shifting to totally organic agriculture by 2016, this assumes more significance. Consumers are more aware of harmful effects of pesticides, antibiotics, and heavy metals. So, a move to market organic or pesticide-free products at a premium price will facilitate farmers to get better profit margins,” Mr. Sethumadhavan said.

KVASU will supply fodder slips and mineral mixtures to improve productivity in the dairy sector. A veterinary health-cum-infertility camp will be organised for dairy farmers, said KVASU Vice Chancellor B. Ashok.

“In order to control mastitis, disease-control kits will be provided to dairy farmers. Measures will be taken to produce and market organic eggs, broiler chicken, vegetables, fish, organic rice, inputs for organic farming like dried garden manure, vegetable manure and biodynamic mixture. It will be marketed under separate brands. Steps will also be taken to assure appropriate institutional linkage for technical and marketing support,” Dr. Ashok said. In order to overcome the shortage of milkers, KVASU is planning to implement the Milkobike project.

### **Heavy rain predicted in next three days in the catchment area of KRS**

Claiming that southwest monsoon has been active over south interior Karnataka, the weather monitoring station at Nagenahalli near here has predicted heavy rainfall in Kodagu over the next three days.

#### **Downpour**

“Heavy rainfall may be expected from September 9 to 11 in Kodagu district,” said a statement from Gramin Krishi Mausam Sewa, a weather monitoring station established by University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, and Indian Meteorological Department at Organic Farming Research Station at Nagenahalli on the outskirts of Mysuru.

Heavy rain in Kodagu will be considered to be “Godsend” in the light of the depleting water-level in the Krishnaraja Sagar on account of deficient rainfall.

“We had not received good rain in Kodagu since the first week of July this year,” Narendra Babu, Research Associate at the weather monitoring station, said.

Kodagu is the catchment area for the KRS. The storage of water at the KRS was estimated to be around 25 tmcft against its capacity of 49.25 tmcft while the water-level was hovering around 103 ft against the full-reservoir level of 124.8 ft.

Pointing out that Kodagu is expected to receive 67 mm and 64 mm of rain on Wednesday and Thursday, the weather officials said southwest monsoon had been active across the entire State, more so over south interior Karnataka.

Mysuru was also expected to receive moderate rainfall from September 9 to 11, the officials said adding that the rainfall in Mysuru is expected to be in between 28 mm and 29 mm a day over the next three days.

Government officials had expressed concern over the poor storage of water in reservoirs across the State, which threatened not only drinking water supply, but also production of hydro-electric power.

### **Enough stock of fertilizers: Collector**

There is adequate stock of fertilizers and seeds to meet the demands of farmers in Tiruvarur, District Collector M. Mathivanan has said.

In a statement here on Tuesday, Mr. Mathivanan assured farmers that it had been planned to raise samba paddy on 3.75 lakh acres of land in the district of which so far crop had been raised through System of Rice Intensification and direct sowing on over 1.08 lakh acres. Paddy seeds of 487 tonnes were with Agricultural Extension Centres.

As regards fertilizers, Mr. Mathivanan has said there was 6,014 tonnes urea, 2,463 tonnes Di Ammonium Phosphate, 2,927 tonnes potash, and 450 tonnes.

### **Groundnut auction fetches Rs. 4.5 lakh**

Groundnut was auctioned for Rs. 4.5 lakh at the Pallapatti Agricultural Producers Cooperative Society on Monday.

The farmers of Mallur, Panamarathupatti, Kammalapatti, Veerapandi, Parapatti, Ayothiyapattinam, Kuppanur, Vazhappadi, Omalur, and Mecheri brought groundnut for the weekly auction.

While totally dry groundnut fetched a price ranging between Rs. 3,015 and Rs. 3,085 a bag of 60 kg; the wet groundnut fetched a price between Rs. 1,605 and Rs. 1,989 a bag.

About 340 groundnut bags were auctioned.

The money was handed over to the farmers immediately, said sources in the cooperative society.

### **Workshop to create awareness on e-literacy held**



Raghavendra Bhat of National Payments Corporation of India making presentation on e-payments at a literacy workshop held in Ballari on Tuesday.

A workshop to create awareness among clients of the banks about e-payment literacy was organised jointly by Pragathi Krishna Gramin Bank and National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) here on Tuesday.

Raghavendra Bhat of NCPI, through a power point presentation, familiarised the participants with customs of ATMs, its numerous features, cash withdrawal, balance enquiry, customer redressal advises and other precautionary tips on PIN change and fund transfers.

He also gave tips on security and the like besides allaying fears about the modern technology by clearing their doubts.

R. Ravikumar, Chairman, in his address, underlined the need for the customers to be aware of the digital and smart banking system as the facilities could be accessed even in the remotest corner of the country.

He also said that the bank had organised e-payment literacy workshop in all the eleven districts served by the bank.

The main aim was to ensure every citizen should be empowered with technologically-advanced banking facilities.

A booklet containing 136 basic, relevant and easy to understand FAQs on ATM transactions, RuPay Debit Cards, Point of Sale usage, E-commerce transactions, Immediate Payment Service, Adhar Enabled Payment Service, was released by R.M. Chauhan, Deputy General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

### **Farmers demand water for irrigation**

Farmers, led by the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) and the Hasiru Sene, blocked Deodurg-Raichur Road at Sirwar Cross in Deodurg taluk on Thursday demanding water for the 17th and 18th distributaries of Narayanpur Right Bank Canal (NRBC).

The farmers aired their ire against the officials of the Water Resources Department for their “mismanagement” in distributing water to all farmers along the NRBC canal. “Deodurg taluk is already hit hard by drought. Ground water pump-sets are drying up. Those farmers who have better yielding pump-sets are unable to make use of them owing to improper power supply. The Irrigation Department officials are not taking any interest to ensure sufficient water at the tail-end of NRBC. Both Power and Irrigation departments are hitting farmers simultaneously,” Amaranna Gudihal, State secretary of KRRS, said.



Some of the farmers also alleged that the compensation released for providing relief to farmers who had suffered crop loss in pre-monsoon rains had not been disbursed among affected farmers. They demanded that the government pay the compensation along with the drought relief at the earliest.

“Thousands of acres of lands remain unsown. All the farmers who are hit by drought should be paid relief,” Lakshman Gowda Kadagamdoddi, a farmers’ leader, said. Deodurg tahsildar Shivanand P. Sagar, along with Krishna Bhagya Jala Nigam Limited official Shivanagowda Pawar, Public Works Department Assistant Executive Engineer Chennabasappa, Assistant Director of Agriculture Department Mahadevappa, Gulbarga Electricity Supply Company Limited Assistant Executive Engineer Basavaraj Chauhan and other officials, rushed to the agitation site.

Mr. Sagar told the farmers to bring the issues to the notice of authorities, and received a . memorandum from them.

Farmers’ leaders Siddaramayya Swamy Banniganur, Shankaragowda Chennur, Hanumantha Kakarakal, and Shivanagowda Huvinhedgi, and Aam Admi Party leader Bheemaraya Jaradabandi were present.

*Those farmers who have better yielding pump-sets are unable to make use of them owing to improper power supply*

### **ISRO scientist tells students to put knowledge to best use**



B.R. Guruprasad, scientist at Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has called upon students pursuing technical education to use their academic knowledge to bring positive transformation to the society.

Speaking after inaugurating ISRO's two-day exhibition at Jawaharlal Nehru National College of Engineering campus on Tuesday, Mr. Guruprasad underscored the need to create awareness among meritorious students on the career options in space research.

### **Many doubts**

He said that initially, few questions were raised about the socio-economic viability and feasibility of ISRO's projects.

There were views that space science was a luxury for a developing economy like India.

ISRO scientists put these doubts to rest through their hard work. The satellites launched by ISRO have brought positive changes in agriculture, commerce, information and communications, entertainment, and education and thereby accelerated economic growth.

The success of the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) has boosted the morale of the scientific community in the country, Mr. Guruprasad said.

Addressing the gathering, psychiatrist K.A. Ashok Pai said that scientists like Satish Dhawan, Vikram Sarabhai and U.R. Rao have become role models for youths through their professional ethics and conduct.

Secretary of National Education Society N.T. Narayana Rao and principal Srinivasa Rao Kunte were present.

### **Two-day expo**

Brass models of the spacecrafts of MOM, Chandrayaan, fibreglass models of launch vehicles, including PSLV, GSLV and LMV3, and panels depicting the history of India's space odyssey are on display at the exhibition.



## **Web portal to focus on farmers**

At a time when urban, tech-savvy youth and people with disposable income are buzzwords driving start-ups, a Hyderabad-based web portal focussed on farmers and agricultural solutions is gearing to scale up operations once broadband reaches rural areas.

Started in 2010, with the support of NABARD and National Horticulture Mission, efreshglobal.com is in the business of disseminating a range of information to farmers and serving as a market linkage platform.

There is also onsite side of the initiatives ranging from the Farmers Development Centres, market linkages for farm produce and the more recent Agricultural Knowledge Dissemination Centre (AKDC) for bankers.

Srihari Kotela, Managing director of eFresh Portal Pvt Ltd, the entity behind the portal, says farmers are in need of information that is reliable and useful. Since their ability to tap multiple sources is limited, the company has chosen to bridge the gap by associating with reputed institutions such as ICRISAT and agricultural universities.

### **Objective**

“We want to be a mini Google search engine for farmers,” he told *The Hindu*, adding the company has plenty to offer by way of information, data and videos. These could be about the process of collecting soil samples and maintenance of drip irrigation systems. The company wants to be an end-to-end information provider from essentials pertaining to crops, weather to market prices of the produce, latest farm technologies, godowns and warehouses in the vicinity besides new implements, all in a multi-lingual format.

Under the revenue model, farmers get access to the information free of cost, while companies and entities promoting products and services are charged a fee. AKDC is an emerging revenue stream as the company gets a licensing fee from the banks where such facilities are established to train bankers. Last week, an AKDC opened at the State Bank of Hyderabad Staff College in Secunderabad. The firm is setting up facilities for Canara Bank in Pune and Bengaluru and in talks with other banks.

On the roadmap ahead, Mr.Kotela says the company is in no rush to raise investments though investors have evinced interest.

***efreshglobal.com will provide information pertaining to crops, weather, latest farm technologies and also serve as a market linkage platform***

### **‘Strengthen toll-free centre’**

Ministers Etala Rajender and K Taraka Rama Rao had instructed the Agriculture Department authorities to streamline and strengthen the functioning of toll free call centre by deploying additional trained staff to counsel the distressed farmers. Expressing concern over not creating awareness among the farmers about the toll free number 18004254731, Mr Rama Rao instructed the authorities to launch a campaign by distributing pamphlets and erecting posters in the villages. He said that those manning the centre should guide and counsel the distressed farmer in a friendly manner.

### **Adequate stock of fertilizers available**

To cater to the needs of farmers relying on rain-fed agriculture, adequate stock of fertilizers has been maintained in the district.

Currently, 500 tonnes of Diammonium phosphate (DAP) had been stocked in a total of 152 Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS) and 687 tonnes of DAP with 169 private dealers across the district, Joint Director of Agriculture V. Jeyakumar told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday.

He said since DAP is the basic fertilizer material, the demand for it among farmers would be high.

Anticipating a good amount of rainfall in the upcoming Northeast monsoon, many farmers have started pre-monsoon sowing.

Fertilizers are essential, especially various forms of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous, and farmers have been advised to adopt suitable cultivation methods. Besides, the government had allotted 1,400 tonnes of DAP to Tuticorin district this month to meet the requirements.

Moreover, PACS in the district had placed an order for 1,120 tonnes of DAP from Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (TANFED), from where the required quantity was expected to be dispatched soon.

To ensure transparency, the government has introduced a new system to know the stock position of fertilizers maintained by cooperative societies and private dealers online from the website [www.agrisnet.com](http://www.agrisnet.com).

Collector M. Ravikumar was closely monitoring the stock position of fertilizers and urea, he said. Assistant Director of Agriculture (Quality Control) S. Mathiazhagan said all DAP brands should contain 18 percent of nitrogen and 46 percent of phosphorous nutrient and hence farmers need not demand specific brands. During surprise inspections conducted in shops selling fertilizers recently, six dealers were found guilty of maintaining nutrient-deficient stock and departmental action had been initiated against them.

As many as 145 samples of fertilizers had been collected so far this year to check the quality. If any fertilizer dealer was found guilty of unfair trade practice, necessary action would be taken under Fertilizer Control Order 1985 read with Essential Commodities Act, 1955, he said.

At a meeting convened in Kovilpatti with 76 secretaries of PACS and Cooperation Department officials, they had been asked to analyse the stock position of fertilizers in the interest of farmers, Mr. Mathiazhagan said.

### **Watershed, SHG systems impress them**

For nine young representatives from several nations, a visit to rural and hilly forest areas in the Visakha Agency has turned out to be a good experience.

They are impressed by the functioning of the rural system in India as also the way the watersheds and SHGs are able to improve the lot of villagers.

The representatives are officials from government departments dealing with planning, agriculture, and rural development.

Marshall Alhassan Adams and Akuoko Acheampong are from Ghana; Mohammad Ahmad Baniissa is from Jordan; Shanika Anuradhi Tennakoon and Chaminda Sanjeewa Kalanchige are from Sri Lanka; Rajmohunsingh Deesoruth and Bibi Saira Banu Ruhomutally are from Mauritius; Edward Antoun is from Lebanon, and Emmanuel Bulukutu is from Malawi

They are in Andhra Pradesh as part of a programme of the Ministry of External Affairs for representatives from developing countries to study and get trained in rural development.

They are being taken around by the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD). Associate professor in NIRD G. Rajani Kanth is helping them understand the practice of planning at the village level and rural development works.

The visit to Visakhapatnam has also provided them an opportunity to look at the forest sector and understand the way coffee plantations and spices are cultivated. They are exposed to the Girijan culture.

Watershed methods are different in India from Lebanon, but Mr. Antoun is impressed by the way the officials approach the villagers, hold meetings, and solve problems. Ms. Shanika Anuradhi found that the SHGs in India are on a strong footing with better training provided to the members.

Mr. Marshall Adams says that social audit on welfare schemes is a good idea as it will help in assessing how the schemes are benefiting people.

Mauritius is fast gaining the status of a developed country and now 70 per cent of its economy is depending on services sector, says Mr. Deesoruth.

***Nine representatives from several nations gain insight into the functioning of rural India***

## **Trees, grass turfs to make NH stretches green**

The National Highway (NH) stretches will be made green corridors by planting trees, landscaping, and laying grass turfs and ornamental shrubs.

The initiative of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) to make the NH stretches eco-friendly is part of the green highways policy to “tree-line” 96,000 km of NHs across the country.

### **Green Highways Fund**

In a communication to all States, the Ministry said a Green Highways Fund would be set apart utilising 1 per cent of the civil work cost while arriving at total road project cost.

The funds to be transferred to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) would be used exclusively for plantation and maintenance on all NH stretches being developed on the Engineering Procurement Construction (EPC) and Build Operate Transfer (BOT) mode.

The NHAI will act as Fund Manager for maintaining the account and for release of the payments made by the Regional Officer or Project Director based on the recommendation of the monitoring agency-Indian Highways Management Company Ltd (IHMCL).

At least one NH corridor in each State would be taken up for model plantation, which would be replicated in other stretches subsequently. The plantation and maintenance would be done through empanelled agencies of MoRTH through competitive bidding. The participation of community, farmers, non-governmental organisations, private sector, government agencies and the Forest Department will be ensured for effective plantation and better impact.

## **Diversion of water from Tatipudi lift irrigation scheme irks farmers**

The trial run of releasing water from the Pattiseema lift irrigation project to the Krishna delta has begun with releasing water from the nearby Tatipudi lift irrigation

scheme into the Indira Sagar Project (Polavaram) right canal. The water will reach the Krishna delta on Wednesday. However, releasing of water from the Tatipudi has irked farmers, who have been opposing the Pattiseema project expressing fears over the possible diversion of their water to Krishna delta.

“It is just a trial run to check the functioning of the canal. The farmers need not worry about diversion of water from Tatipudi to the Krishna delta just for the reason that the LI scheme is abutting the right canal,” V. Ramesh Babu, Superintending Engineer of the Irrigation department has told *The Hindu*. The farmers, however, are suspecting continuation of the diversion of water from Tatipudi to the Krishna delta in the wake of delay in the Pattiseema works. “Once the right canal is opened for water diversion, it would be difficult to stop outflows from the Tatipudi. The farmers under the Tatipudi LI are worried lot, as release of water to their farm fields is at question now,” says K. Trinadha Reddy, general secretary of the State Farmers Water Management Committees Association.

The Pattiseema project, on the other hand, seems to be missing the deadline again, as the engineers are apprehensive about the commencement of pumping from Sept. 15, as announced by the Chief Minister. “The pumps and motors from China are on the transit. We are not sure whether we can start the first pump on Sept. 15,” says K.V. Ramana Rao, associate vice-president of the contracting firm Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited.

### **Couple reaps success in organic farming**



S. Guhaan (34) and his wife Vidya (30), a progressive farming couple from Kundadam block, are proving that organic farming can give good yields.

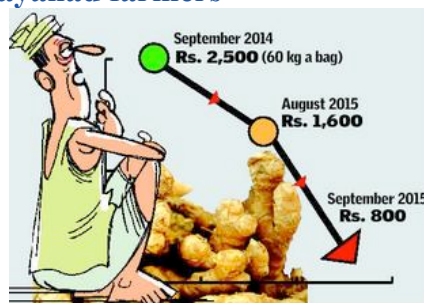
“Of course, there is scepticism among the agrarian community over the yield and marketing prospects. But enriching the soil before sowing, using organic fertilisers such as panchakavya, and going for crop rotations can help get rich yield,” says Guhaan, who switched over to organic farming three years ago.

The couple has raised crops such as cauliflower, tomato, beetroot, broad beans, ladies finger and chilli in their farm near Koduvai.

A mixture of sunn hemp, grains and cereals is used to treat the soil before sowing. This mixture helps the soil get organic carbon and nitrogen required for the plant growth. During the growth period, *panchakavya* (a mix of cow dung, cow urine, ghee, jaggery, milk and tender coconut water) is applied.

For combating pests , a diluted mixture of turmeric, aloe vera and chilli are sprayed. Guhaan said that they have established direct linkages with market chains in Chennai that supply organic vegetables in the retail sector. “We also have opened few shops in different parts of Tirupur district to sell the produce directly from the farm,” he added.

### Ginger turns sour for Wayanad farmers



The continuous fall in raw ginger prices has put farmers in a tight spot. The spot price for raw ginger in Wayanad on Tuesday was Rs.800 a bag (60 kg) as against Rs.2,500 a bag during the corresponding period last year. The price was Rs.1,600 a bag a few weeks ago.



A huge arrival of the produce in Kerala and Karnataka markets after a premature harvest owing to various diseases affecting the rhizomes was the major reason for the current fall in price, P.V. Eliyas, a ginger trader at Meenangadi, says.

Many farmers have tried their luck in ginger cultivation this year after a better price ruled the market for the past three years but most of them are facing huge loss now owing to the spread of soft rot, a fungal disease; and low price.

### **Bad investment**

P.V. Sandeep, a farmer at Ambalavayal, said he had invested nearly Rs.3 lakh to cultivate the crop on one acre of leased land but was compelled to take premature harvest from half of the land after the fungal disease hit the cultivation. “I got only 40 bags of ginger after the harvest,” Mr. Sandeep said, adding that he had no idea how to recoup the investment.

He planted the crop nearly five months ago and the crop needed a minimum period of eight months to reach its full growth.

The condition of the Keralite farmers who have cultivated the crop on leased land in various parts of Karnataka is no different, Navrang Mohanan, general secretary, Kerala Ginger Growers Association (KGGA), said.

The area of ginger cultivation had increased nearly threefold this season because of good price for the produce for the past three years.



### **1,866 hectares of Khed: SEZ land to be de-listed in a week, says Shirur MP**

As farmers supported by the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghathana again took to the streets on the issue of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Khed, local Shiv Sena MP Shivajirao Adhalrao Patil claimed the state industry minister has already signed the order for de-listing 1,866 hectares of land from the project.

Patil said the move will remove the rights of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) from the land records of the farmers whose land was initially acquired for the project.

Spread over 1,705 hectares of land in Khed taluka of Pune district, the land for the SEZ was acquired by the MIDC back in 2006-07. Official notification had appended the rights of MIDC on the land records of the neighbouring villages for Phase II and III of SEZ, but the land acquisition of it was not done. However, villagers had pointed out how the entry of MIDC's rights on their land records have prevented them for either developing or selling their lands. The SEZ is being developed by the Khed Economic Infrastructure Private Limited (KEIPL). Bharat Forge has 74 per cent shares in KEIPL, while MIDC has 26 per cent shares.

In March, Swabhimani Paksha MP Raju Shetti had conducted a 50 km long march to highlight the issue. Shetti, who was accompanied by the affected farmers, had also held a series of meeting with the state government to highlight the situation. Shetti had claimed that the farmers whose land was acquired for the first phase of the SEZ were yet to get back the 15 per cent developed land which was promised to them in the original Relief and Rehabilitation (R&R) package. The chief minister had announced in June that the names of the affected farmers whose land records would be freed from MIDC was finalized and the process of deletion of the names would take place soon.

Patil said that the state industries minister Subhash Desai had signed the order to strike off MIDC's name from the land records of 1,866 hectares of land on September 2. "The process of promulgation of the official government resolution (GR) is underway and it will be out soon," he said. Blaming the Swabhimani Paksha of trying to gain politically from the process, Patil said he is following up the issue consistently.

Meanwhile, Yogesh Pand, spokesperson of Swabhimani Paksha, said that they are demanding the government acquire the 15 per cent developed land which is promised to the farmers at four times the present cost. "Legally, the land belongs to the farmers and instead of asking it back we want the government to acquire it at the terms specified by the new Land Acquisition Bill," he said.

# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

**Government to seek legal advice to rein in hybrid seed makers**



HYDERABAD: The agriculture ministry will seek comprehensive legal advice on regulating the contentious royalty payments levied by global hybrid seed makers like Mahyco Monsanto Biotech to protect the interests of farmers and other stakeholders, a senior official has said.

The domestic hybrid seed producers under the banner of National Seed Association of India (NSAI) recently met Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh and urged him to invoke provisions of the Indian Patents Act and other laws to rein in Monsanto.

"The NSAI representatives have urged us to regulate the hybrid seed industry with regards to fixing trait values (royalty) and selling prices of hybrid seeds and licensing conditions," the official told ET on condition of anonymity. "The hybrid seed industry lobby body wanted the ministry to look into the provisions of the Seed Control Order, Indian Patents Act, Competition Act or the Environment Protect Act on the genetically modified crops to regulate the royalty and seed selling prices."

The official said the agriculture ministry will seek the views of the ministries of law & justice and commerce. "We have also asked NSAI to submit a report on the legal advices they obtained from various legal experts," he said.

NSAI sought the agriculture ministry's intervention weeks after some state governments began fixing caps on the royalty the seed makers pay to obtain technologies as well as on the price of hybrid cotton seeds sold to farmers. Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra are among the key cotton growing states that intervened to protect the interests of farmers and fixed royalty charges besides slashing selling price of hybrid cotton seeds.

## Organic cash crops are Kerala's new fad



KOCHI: Cash crops are increasingly becoming part of the organic food wave that is sweeping across Kerala. After the success in raising the production of organic vegetables, farmers in the state have turned to organic cultivation of cardamom, pineapple, coffee, tea and cocoa, given the widespread awareness about pesticide residues in food products.

The state government is focusing on increasing organic production of pepper and coffee in Wayanad; cardamom, tea and cocoa in Idukki; and vegetables and other products in Kasargod. "It is a continuous process. We need at least three years of organic cultivation to get APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) approved certificate," said K Pratapan, state horticulture mission director.

Taking the cue, some cardamom and pineapple grower associations have tied up with leading agri-biotech company Camson Bio TechnologiesBSE 3.05 % for using bio pesticides and fertilisers.

"We find big scope in Kerala as the awareness on organic cultivation is high here. Our microbe extracts based fertilisers have a shelf-life of three to five years and are effective in extreme temperatures," said Santhosh Nair, CEO of Camson. The Kerala Cardamom Processing and Marketing Cooperative Society has found the initial trials with the product encouraging and is now trying it out in the cardamom plantations.

"It is the indiscriminate use of chemical fertilisers that is harming the cardamom plants. So we are gradually spreading the use of natural fertilisers," said PC Punnoose, general manager of the society. Vazhakulam Pineapple Growers and Producers Private Limited is now using natural fertiliser in about 500 hectares of the total 13,000 hectares under pineapple cultivation in the state.

Kerala government is encouraging farmer clusters to take up organic cultivation and training them to produce their own bio fertilisers through cattle rearing. About 200 such clusters have been formed in the state.

"At present around 90 per cent of ethnic vegetables like pumpkin, ash gourd, bitter gourd, cucumber, etc required for local consumption are produced in the state itself," said Pratapan.

#### Grapes of wrath: Fruit faces uncertainty due to drought in Maharashtra



PUNE: Grapes, which have an investment of more than Rs 16,000 crore and where corporates are most active, face an uncertain future due to drought conditions in Maharashtra, the leading exporter of fruits and vegetables. Pomegranates and other vegetables too are likely to be impacted by the lack of rainfall.

Farmers usually prune orchards from September to November which gives fruits during December to May. However, fearing that there will be no water during summer to sustain fruit-bearing plants, farmers are likely to go for an early pruning.

"If it does not rain sufficiently in another two weeks, majority of the pruning will happen by September. This will bring grapes to the market by February, when there's no demand for Indian grapes as grapes from Chile and Africa are available in Europe," said head of one of the leading corporate grape exporters. The export window for Indian grapes is between March and May, when there's hardly any competition from Europe.

"Three scenarios are possible today. If it rains in September, things will not go haywire. Second, if it rains in October, farmers will go for pruning in October, which will lead to a glut in March. And third, if it does not rain sufficiently in September and October, then production can decline 25-30%," said a leading grape exporter, who did not want to be identified. This company has identified farmers with assured source of water from its huge database of farmers and is encouraging them to go for pruning after assessing their water sources.

According to Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Development Agency (APEDA), India exported grapes worth more than Rs 1,600 crore in 2013-14, which declined to Rs 1,086 crore in 2014-15 due to unseasonal rains and hailstorm in the key harvesting months between March and May in Maharashtra. This will be the second consecutive year when farmers have to deal with the vagaries of nature.

There was some rain in the grape and pomegranate growing belt of the state in the past two-three days, but more rains are needed this month for the survival of crops and farmers. "The situation is severe now. However, if it rains in another two weeks, we can hope to see a normal season this year," said Ashok Motiani, managing director, Freshrop Fruits BSE 9.67 %.

If it does not rain in the month of September, the impact can be devastating in 2017. Farmers will find it tough to sustain the orchards during summer. "We will go back by five years," said Jagannath Khapre, president, Indian Grape Exporters Association. Though not as capital intensive as grapes, pomegranates too need an investment of about Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.25 lakh an acre as running capital. "The rest period of plants is over and they need rains now. If it doesn't rain this month, we can lose about 70-80% of the crop that is planned for harvesting January onwards," said Prabhakar Chandane, president, Pomegranate Growers Association.



October to April is the peak season for Indian vegetable exports to Europe as the continent grows little locally due to the harsh winter. With water shortage in Maharashtra, exporters fear that vegetable prices might shoot up. "Prices can rise, which in turn can affect exports," said Kaushal Khakhar, CEO, Kay Bee Exports.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Plug type seedling unit to help grow better agri products**

RAIPUR: For the production of around one crore saplings annually, horticulture department has opened a 'plug-type vegetable seedling production unit' for farmers in Sarkanda, Bilaspur. This was inaugurated by Chhattisgarh agriculture minister Brijmohan Agrawal recently.

Agrawal said that the unit has a capacity of preparing 10 lakh saplings of vegetables, fruits and flowers monthly and around one crore plants annually. Through this initiative, farmers would be benefitted with high quality plants available at one point. The unit also facilitates farmers to provide their own seeds to nursery and develop it into a healthy sapling with less mortality.

Farmers can then buy the sapling at a nominal rate, which saves their time and energy. The aforesaid unit would be beneficial to farmers of Bilaspur, Mungeli, Janjgir, Champa, Korba and Bemetara.

Horticulture officials said vegetable cultivation is being done in Bilaspur division in 1,37,287 hectare area that results in a produce of 15,96,389 metric tonnes. With the establishment of seedling unit, the price of seed will decrease by 40-50% while production of vegetables will increase by 20%. The unit has a capability of turning seed into seedling in adverse climate as well. The unit has machines creating

favourable environment for speedy and proper growth of plants, one month faster than it takes to be grown in fields.

Notably, the establishment of this unit is result of the success of first ever seed multiplication centre in Bana, Raipur, benefiting farmers for past eight years.

### **Black clouds over BT cotton as whitefly runs amok**

CHANDIGARH: Farmers in Punjab and Haryana are perturbed over a sense of deja vu they are experiencing ever since the attack of the pest - the whitefly - on their BT cotton crop. It has unnerving similarities to attack of the American bollworm, colloquially known as 'Amrikan sundi,' in the 1990s and 2000s on hybrid cotton varieties. The bollworm attack had led farmers to shift to the BT variety post 2004 which resisted the pest. But the whitefly has shown that the BT cotton too can be vulnerable, creating a crisis at a time when the monsoon has failed.

Both Punjab and Haryana account for about 11-12% of country's total cotton output, but the pest could cause a noticeable drop in average yields thereby hitting output as picking of cotton has begun in the region. In Haryana, area under cotton is 5.80 lakh hectares and in Punjab it is 4.50 lakh hectares this season.

In fact, much like the bollworm, pesticides sprayed has not been able to eliminate the whitefly that attacks the leaves of cotton plants. In the early 2002, cotton farmers had used so much pesticide against the whitefly that the chemical is believed to have affected the soil and groundwater. Many believe this is the reason behind a large number of cancer cases being detected among people in the cotton belt.

Farmers in many parts of Punjab and Haryana have even uprooted cotton for other crops in recent days. Baljinder Singh Sidhu from Kotbhara village in Bathinda said, "Build-up to the pest was so sudden that it caught us unawares. Many farmers in my village have uprooted cotton since the damage to the crop was massive."

Farmers fearful that whitefly would become more aggressive in coming seasons as prolonged hot, humid conditions without rainfall led to the growth of the pest and could spread to other states. "The yield could drop by about 15% this season in Punjab," said noted farm economist professor P S Rangi, marketing consultant, Punjab State Farmers Commission (PSFC).

Prof Ashok Dhawan, former head of the entomology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, said, "The whitefly attack can lead to 30%-40% drop in average yield in the affected areas. Spraying pesticides is not the best solution. Farmers need to follow a composite plan. We need varieties that are resistant," said Prof Dhawan.

An official from the Punjab agriculture department said, "We are organizing camps in villages and telling farmers to use recommended pesticides, but that is only a temporary measure. Enormity of the attack can't be quantified immediately as picking of cotton has just begun. One thing is sure that we need varieties of cotton that are resistant to whitefly, otherwise farmers are going to suffer just like they did when American bollworm ravaged huge swathes of cotton about two decades back."

In the 1990s and 2000s the American bollworm or 'Amrikan sundi' had become resistant to pesticides and ravaged thousands of hectares of hybrid cotton planted in both Punjab and Haryana. While the cost of inputs went up significantly, average yield of cotton dropped sharply, hitting the farmers hard. Their fortunes changed as the government allowed cultivation of BT cotton in March 2005 in both states with the nod from the genetic engineering approval committee (GEAC). Even before government clearance, farmers from Punjab's cotton belt, had started bringing BT seeds from Gujarat in a train that was referred to as "BT Express".

As per the data from the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB), average yield of cotton in Punjab fell to 170kg per hectare in 1997-98 from 367kg per hectare in 1996-97, and in Haryana the average yield declined to 240kg per hectare from 354kg per hectare in the same period. Average yield of cotton dropped further to 151kg per hectare in 1998-99 in Punjab while Haryana also saw a decline to 204kg per hectare. However,

the average yields started improving from 2005-06 as BT cotton cultivation was allowed in both states. Provisional figures from CAB put the average yield of cotton in 2013-14 to 704kg per hectare and 702kg per hectare in Punjab and Haryana respectively. With BT cotton being resistant to American bollworm, area under these varieties shot up rapidly in Punjab and Haryana, which stands at over 90% in both states. While BT cotton varieties offered resistance to American bollworm, these are under the attack of whitefly in both Punjab and Haryana this season.

### **MCED proposal may help drought-hit farmers**

PUNE: The Maharashtra Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (MCED) has submitted a proposal to the state agriculture department to teach farmers allied agricultural activities, such as food processing and sericulture. The training is expected to help farmers acquire an alternative income source, particularly during drought situations, said Pradip Ingle, head of the special projects department, MCED.

The department is also considering tapping money spent by commercial establishments under corporate social responsibility (CSR) to help increase farmers' productivity and income. Elaborating further, Ingle said, "The proposal has been made keeping in mind the farmers' needs at present.

The agriculture market is unpredictable. Also, unfortunately, even when the produce is good, farmers do not benefit the most. For instance, when onion prices increased, the traders made money. Hence, we decided to work on developing allied agricultural activities so that farmer can have an alternative source of income."

The project aims to help farmers directly sell raw vegetables as well as goods made using agri-produce. "If a farmer grows spinach, then he can also make spinach powder. Since several farmers in Maharashtra grow onion, then they can make onion powder or paste. With a good marketing strategy, these products can become a big hit as they will be fresh. While vegetables are hard to transport over long distances, these

products can easily be transported from one place to another," explained Suresh Umap, regional officer, MCED, Pune.

If accepted, MCED's proposal will be implemented within a group of 50 farmers from a particular area. The first step would be need-based assessment of the area. "Based on the assessment, the produce under consideration, and availability of resources, we will suggest a suitable processing unit.

Experts will then conduct training in that field. Participants will also be given an understanding of the kind of infrastructure needed, the various ways to work in a unit, and so on. After the training process, an official from the department will help trainees with the required course of action to open a processing unit, which will include filling forms to seek a loan from district industries centre, acquiring Food and Drug Administration licenses, etc.," said Ingle

He added that while a copy of the proposal has been sent to the agriculture department as well as collectors of all districts in the state, the response to the project has not been up to the mark. "Only the collector of Washim district called to say that he would like to implement the proposal. We are hoping that the agriculture department takes more interest in the proposal as they are connected with a number of farmers' self-help groups and such training can be extremely beneficial to the farmers," Ingle said.

### **Premium export grade 'botto' soon**

PANAJI: After field trials for over 13 years, a new improved cashew selection from Tiswadi with impressive characteristics is being readied for release as a more productive planting material for farmers in Goa.

Branded as Goa-2 for its commercial launch, the Indian council of agricultural research (ICAR)- Central coastal agricultural research institute (CCARI), Old Goa, had picked this selection 18 years ago from a cashew plantation in Carambolim.

Agro scientists at Old Goa are agog over the notable features of Goa-2. "It has an ultra-bold cashew nut weighing over 10g, a bigger apple, medium yield but the kernel is of premium export grade," A R Desai, agricultural scientist (cashew) ICAR, Old Goa complex, said.

Technically, the kernel count of a bigger sized nut is referred to as W180 grade. A total of 180 processed whole kernels weigh a pound. The Goa-2 apple weighs more than 100g and the cashew nut yield is 8 to 10 kg per tree after 10 to 12 years of planting.

The premium grade nut may not yield as much as Balli-2, which was released as Goa-1 more than a decade ago. The Balli variety is a bold nut variety with a weight of 7.7g but per tree yield is slightly better at 12 to 15 kg per tree.

"Goa-2 has already been approved at national group meeting of scientists of all India coordinated research project (AICRP) on cashew of ICAR," N P Singh, director, ICAR-CCARI, Old Goa, said.

It will be further submitted for the approval of the state variety release committee for statewide release.

The Carambolim variety was researched by ICAR scientists at the Old Goa farm and offered to farmers under front line demonstration trials. "The long-term evaluation showed good results," Desai said. Research in developing high-yielding varieties is important, as farmers in Goa have to be content with low yields and smaller profits.

Agricultural scientists are keen to popularize multiple varieties to cope with climate change. "Concentrating only on a single variety may be risky, as it may be susceptible

to some disease or climate change and farmers may incur heavy losses in case of problems," Singh said.

Balli-2, along with Vengurla varieties, was recommended as better planting material for Goa, but it is also included for multi-location trials outside Goa under AICRP programme. "In some places like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, it has done well and has been recommended for planting," Desai said.

ICAR scientists are also developing two more selections, Ganjem-2, another bold nut variety like Goa-1 and Kn-2/98 from Quepem.

### **Agriculture cabinet meeting held**

BHOPAL: In view of deficient rainfall, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has directed officers to draw out an emergency plan to deal with the challenging situation. Addressing a meeting of agriculture cabinet at Mantralaya here on Tuesday, he asked the authorities to immediately launch an action plan for saving the crops from drought and diseases.

Chouhan asked the officers and experts to consider the weather forecasts before finalizing plans. He said all possible alternative measures should be taken and farmers should be given all possible relief.

Chouhan asked the revenue department's officials to immediately start survey of crops damaged by diseases or pests. Chouhan directed the officers of water resources and energy departments to ensure sufficient power and water supply so that Kharif crops are saved.

He said the areas situated away from dams have reported unprecedented increase in power requirement. This situation should be kept in view while designing actions plans; he added saying that he would review the situation by end of next week.



## **Farmers fear crop failure as monsoon hopes fade**

RAJKOT: Balvantsinh Jadeja, a farmer from Jamgadhka village of Kalyanpur taluka in Debhoomi Dwarka, had sown groundnut in 60 bigha land and hoped for a good monsoon this year. But torrential rains washed away his hopes. In absence of rains in August the entire groundnut crop in 60 bigha land has failed.

"There has been no rain in the last one-and-a-half months. The crop dried in front of us as we do not have enough ground water to irrigate our fields," Jadeja told TOI, giving an indication of the crisis that farmers like him are likely to face in the coming days.

Kalyanpur received only 20% of its average annual rainfall. Jadeja said that many farmers from the taluka have lost their crops.

Another farmer Kirit Patel, from Rupavati village in Vichhiya taluka of Rajkot, said that rain deficiency had taken a toll on cotton crops.

"I had sown cotton in 120 bigha and groundnut in 40 bigha land. The situation has worsened due to deficient rains. My entire cotton crop is on the verge of failure. Unlike last year, ground water levels have not come up. So, with limited water for irrigation, I decided to irrigate only groundnut crop," Patel said.

Similar is the situation of farmers in many parts of Saurashtra as monsoon has been deficient.

According to the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA), Saurashtra region has received 66.55% of average annual rainfall till September 7. While the state has received 66.53% average annual rainfall.

The major rain deficient districts of Saurashtra include Botad, Devbhoomi Dwarka, Porbandar which have received less than 50% of average annual rainfall. Water storage levels in all 137 dams in Saurashtra region was just 45.79% on September 7.

Meanwhile, the Rajkot Irrigation Circle has started releasing water from nine dams for irrigation. The demand for water has increased from different parts of the region in absence of rains during monsoon.

"We are already releasing water from nine dams. We will start releasing water from nine more dams as demand from farmers increases," said an official from irrigation department.

However, the water levels in dams are also worrisome in some districts as the irrigation department has to maintain the level of water reserved for drinking for different towns and cities.

Besides surface irrigation water demand, power demand in agriculture sector has also increased.

According to officials of state power distribution company Paschim Gujarat Vij Company (PGVCL), power demand in agriculture sector in Saurashtra and Kutch region at its peak.

"The power demand is between 2,700MW to 2,800MW per day in Saurashtra and Kutch as farmers are pumping out ground water to save their crops," said an official from PGVCL.

### **Relief for Farmers**

Water is being released for irrigation from dams like Bhadar, Aji (3), Aji (2), Nyari (2), Chaparvadi (2), Kankavati and Vartu (1) among others. Based on demand water

will be released from dams of Demi, Demi (1), Macchu (2), Shingodi, Machundri, Raval, Uben, Chaparvadi (1) and Gondli.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## **After two postponements, TN all set to host global investors meet**

Tamil Nadu officials are heaving a sigh of relief now that the Global Investors Meet 2015 is finally happening, after being postponed twice.

Originally, the event, with a budget of Rs. 100 crore, was to be held in October 2014. But it was postponed after Chief Minister J Jayalithaa was forced to step down following her conviction on corruption charges in September last.

Then the Government announced plans to hold the meet in May 2015 in the hope that the legal hassle would be sorted out by then. But that did not happen. The event was postponed again.

Jayalithaa resumed charge on May 23, after she was acquitted on appeal. That the event is finally happening is a major relief to officials and industry.

Starting with the inauguration by the Chief Minister at the Chennai Trade Centre, the event is packed with industry-related sessions and seminars by the eight country partners – Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, Singapore and the UK.

Parallel sessions will cover ease of doing business in Tamil Nadu, renewable energy, manufacturing and automobile sector, tax and regulatory frame work and IT industry. Country seminars will be held by France, Japan and the UK.

On the second day the focus is on mega infrastructure, MSME, engineering, agriculture and food processing, IT and ITES, pharma and biotechnology, textiles and seminars by the other partner countries.

According to information collected from partner countries, the UK delegation will include representatives from over 30 companies and partners including UK Trade Invest and the British Council.

The Italian Ambassador Lorenzo Angeloni will lead a 40-member delegation from 38 companies.

### **Japan delegation**

Japan will be represented by a 50-member delegation led by Muneo Kurauchi, Chairman, Standing Committee of Japan-India Business Cooperation. It includes representatives from Tokyo, Osaka and Japanese businesses in Chennai apart from the Embassy of Japan and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

From Korea a 60-member delegation headed by the Consul General Kyung Soo Kim will be participating in the event.

A 50-member delegation is expected from Singapore.

Paul Hermelin, Special Representative of France for Economic Relations with India and François Richier, Ambassador of France to India, will lead a 102-member French business delegation.

Companies in urban development and renewable energy sectors and those in Tamil Nadu will be a part of the delegation.

Patrick Suckling, Australian High Commissioner to India, will lead a 40-member delegation. Australia is a partner country in the event and has a pavilion.

Senior executives from leading Australian businesses, including Bluescope Steel, Insurance Australia Group, Macquarie, National Australia Bank, SMEC and Westpac Banking Corp, will be part of the delegation.

### **Falling farmgate prices of milk seen squeezing dairy sector investments**

Falling prices of milk at the farmgate is becoming a cause for concern. For, this can not only affect farmer incomes but also stress the industry's ability to invest and survive, said National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) Chairman T Nanda Kumar.



Though there won't be any shortage of milk, the Board is worried that the situation will hit the growth rate this year.

Poor rainfall in several parts of the country could add to the woes of dairy farmers. Recognising the problem, the Board has deputed teams to Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh to assess the impact of the deficient monsoon by collecting information from the vast network of co-operatives.

“There is discomfort at the farmer's level on falling farmgate prices. This is largely where the co-operatives are not present. Co-operatives have managed to hold prices. Though prices have come down for farmers, the benefit has not been passed on to the consumer,” he told *BusinessLine*.

He cited the example of Maharashtra where the price (for the farmer) had fallen below ₹20 a litre (cow milk) at some places.

Farmers selling buffalo milk were relatively better off, thanks to the higher fat content fetching better prices.

### **Industry size**

“What could happen (because of falling prices) is farmers may start reducing the feed quantity. The dairy industry's ability to invest and survive too would be impacted. This is one concern we have,” he said.

The dairy industry, which registered a production of 138 million tonnes (mt) in 2013-14, added 7 mt last year.

“We may not see a similar growth this year,” Nanda Kumar said. He felt that the situation was not alarming but there was a cause for concern, particularly with regard to small farmers having one or two cows.

The NDDDB Chairman felt that falling prices (for consumers) due to the intense competition among the dairy players in some markets was not sustainable.

“You need to have a balance in the long run. It is not sustainable,” he pointed out.

### **FSSAI issue**

He said the industry had no problem with the quality standards prescribed by the FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India).

“We absolutely have no issues with compliance. There were some reports of adulteration. Incidence of adulteration is minor. But these (lots) are stopped outside. There will be community level punishments on the erring suppliers,” he said.

### **Kerala planters seek nod for crop shift**

To tide over the current crisis in the plantation sector, the Association of Planters of Kerala (APK) has sought the State government’s nod for shifting from one plantation crop to another.

Shifting from one crop to another has become very difficult due to various provisions in different land laws prevailing in the State, C Vinayaraghavan, Chairman, APK said.

Even though all the plantation crops are exempted from Land Utilisation Act, he said the conversion from one crop to another is nearly impossible as the process is cumbersome and the cultivators have to receive permission from the State Land Board.

He requested the government to look into these anomalies at the earliest given the fact that plantations have become financially unviable following the current drop in prices for all crops.

## **Cocoa preferred**

Quoting reports, he said the scenario will be grim at least till 2020.

Therefore, the plantations should have the flexibility to cultivate any of the plantation crops. The soil and agro-climatic conditions in Kerala are well suited for cocoa cultivation.

As the demand for chocolates is to increase in geometric proportions in the coming years, he said there will be a huge shortage of cocoa in the world market.

According to the Chairman, the plantations in the State have reached a stage to close down the estate operations in order to reduce the mounting losses.

The current prices of all the plantation crops are much lower than the cost of production, which resulted in serious cash flow crunch for many of the association members.

### **Labour costs**

He pointed out that the labour productivity of all plantation crops is lowest in Kerala compared to other states as well as other countries.

But labour wages have been increasing on a quarter to quarter basis without any link to productivity.

Now it has become unsustainable for the industry to increase wages without any corresponding increase in the productivity level.

### **Ample stocks keep sugar steady**

Sugar prices on the Vashi market ruled weak as producers sold the fair quality at 20 a quintal lower amid limited volumes. Spot rates at Vashi declined by 5-10 and remained steady at *naka* level. Mill tender prices dropped over 20-25. Sufficient stocks at Vashi and supply from producers kept activities limited to local demand. Arrivals continued to be at 62-63 truck loads while local dispatches were 61-62 loads. On Monday, only 10-12 mills offered tenders and sold 38,000-40,000 bags at 2,380-2,480 (2,430-2,480) for S-grade and 2,470-2,570 (2,490-2,590) for M-grade.



The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade 2,480-2,621 (2,492-2,621) and M-grade 2,572-2,705 (2,572-2,705). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade □2,460-2,550 (2,460-2,550) and M-grade 2,550-2,650 (2,550-2,650).

# Business Standard

**Agriculture Expert Ramesh Chand appointed as new full time member of NITI Aayog**

The Prime Minister has approved the appointment of agriculture expert Prof Ramesh Chand as one of the full-time members in the NITI Aayog. He has been a member of a task force on agriculture development under NITI Aayog which is formulating strategies to give a boost to the agriculture sector. Shri Ramesh Chand has also



headed a government panel on Minimum Support Price and has been working as Director of National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NIAP) in [New Delhi](#) since 2010.

The National Institute of Transforming India, NITI Aayog under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been set up in place of place of Planning Commission. It has noted economist Aravind Panagariya as its Vice Chairman while economist Bibek Debroy and former DRDO Chief VKSaraswat along with agriculture expert Ramesh Chand now as full time members.

## THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

### **With monsoon deficit at 14%, agriculture ministry, IMD issue sowing advisory**

With several regions facing severe deficit in the monsoon, an agriculture ministry advisory has asked farmers to grow contingency crops such as short-duration pulses and millets and prepare the soil for the coming rabi, or winter, crops.

A region-specific advisory by the ministry and India Meteorological Department (IMD) has urged farmers in the flood-hit north-eastern states to immediately drain out excess water from standing crop fields and transplant submergence varieties of paddy. In the rain-deficient south and north interior Karnataka regions, the advisory has urged farmers to undertake sowing of short duration crops like pulses, minor millets besides growing fodder crops like jowar, maize and bajra.

For the Rayalaseema region, which has received 8% less rainfall than the normal benchmark long-period average (LPA), the advisory has urged farmers to continue sowing contingency crops like sorghum, cowpea, horsegram, korra and bajra, utilising the expected rainfall.

In Marathwada and Madhya Maharashtra, where rainfall deficiency is 49% and 43% of LPA, respectively, the advisory suggested preparation of fields for sowing of rabi jowar and safflower. It also suggested undertaking of compartmental bunding for rainwater harvesting for sowing rabi crops.

In Gujarat, the agri ministry note has suggested intercultural operations like hoeing and weeding and applying mulch in standing crops for conserving soil moisture. Besides, it also suggested sowing of castor and sorghum, transplanting of brinjal, tomato, chilli and other vegetable crops in the coastal zone. “As there was no significant rain during the last few weeks and mainly dry weather is likely to continue, apply protective irrigation for standing crops like pearl millet, vegetable, cotton, castor and groundnut crops,” the advisory said.

Meanwhile, the overall monsoon rainfall deficit continues to be 14% below LPA. The quantum of average monsoon rainfall across the country during June 1-September 8 has been 658 mm, 14% less than the LPA of 768 mm. The LPA is calculated on the basis of annual rainfall recorded during 1951-2000 (89 cm). IMD on Tuesday said the southwest monsoon has been vigorous over Karnataka and active over Marathawada, Vidarbha, Telangana and Kerala in the last 24 hours. The met department also said the monsoon has withdrawn from parts of Punjab, Haryana & Rajasthan.

## **Onion prices ease on imports, supply from AP, Karnataka**

Around 10-12 lakh tonne of onions are available for consumption in the country after around 65-70% of the stored stock got exhausted till August, the latest report of the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) says. About 15-20% losses too were reported in storage.

However, steady arrivals of onion from Afghanistan in the North, Egyptian crop in Mumbai and early harvesting of the crop in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have led to easing of prices despite lower arrivals at Lasalgaon, the country's largest wholesale onion market.

On Tuesday, around 1,600 quintals of onion arrived at Lasalgaon with prices averaging at Rs 4,500 per quintal.

Average prices remained the same on Monday as well with the arrival of barely 1,026 quintals on Monday. According to Agriculture Market Produce Committee (APMC) officials at Vashi, around 200-250 containers arrived at JNPT Port over the last few days. Of the nine containers that arrived on Monday, two were brought to Vashi while the rest were distributed across markets in the country, Ashok Walunj, former director, APMC (onions & potato), Vashi, and director, Maharashtra Rajya Bazaar Sangh, said.

Some 25-30 containers of onion have arrived in the last 10 days and till date around 200-250 containers have arrived, he said, adding it is difficult to give accurate estimates since traders prefer to remain silent due to competition.

However, there is onion shortage across India because of the poor monsoon, although crop arrivals have begun from the South, he said, adding this has led to less demand from consumers as well.

At present, new onion prices are retailing at Rs 50 per kg as against Rs 60-70 per kg for old variety. RP Gupta, NHRDF director, says there will be a drop in area and production in Maharashtra due to the drought. In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the area is normal but output will be low for the same reason. However, these shortfalls will be made up by the increased area in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat, he said.

According to earlier estimates given by the NHRDF, India had produced 193.53 lakh tonnes in 2014-15, slightly lower than 194.02 lakh tonnes a year earlier. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are traditional kharif onion producing states and the acreage here is on the rise due to water availability, he pointed out.

According to Jai Gopal, director, Garlic Research Centre, Nashik, Maharashtra will see a fall in both area — to the tune of 20% — and production this kharif season on account of drought conditions.

Rains are not sufficient and since onion is a rain-fed crop may farmers find themselves in a dilemma. In June, the rainfall was good and then the demand for seeds was very high, he said. However, there has been a gap in rains since then because of which farmers have not been able to transplant the crop, Gopal said.

Maharashtra is the largest producer of onion in the country. The increased area under the bulb in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, is likely to make up for the loss, said officials, even though estimates were yet to be confirmed.

Harvesting of early kharif crop have already started in the Kurnool area of Andhra Pradesh and Hubli, Chitradurga, Chilekere, Hiriyur and Molakalmuru areas of Karnataka. Fresh crop arrived in the markets of Kurnool, Hyderabad, Hubli and Bangalore.

### **Industry steps up call for cheaper capital at meet with PM Narendra Modi**

The top honchos of India Inc, who met with Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) today, highlighted the need for lower cost of capital to boost investments, propping up rural demand and more measures for ease of doing business.

In a meeting called to deliberate on how India can seize the opportunities that have emerged in the wake of a slowing Chinese economy and guard itself from adverse effect of recent global volatility, industry bodies suggested steps to tackle the turmoil and outpace other emerging economies.

CII said the two biggest issues are reviving demand and introduction of GST for higher economy-wide competitiveness.

“It is important that India does not get clubbed with other emerging economies. India’s economic fundamentals and current performance are superior to its peers,” CII President Sumit Mazumder stated.

“The Prime Minister said this is an opportunity for us to take advantage and invest... cost of capital is too high, but I don’t know how many people can go ahead to take risks and invest... many of us raised the issue of interest rate,” Ficci President Jyotsna Suri told reporters after the meeting of the Prime Minister with CEOs, bankers, economists and bureaucrats.

In a statement, CII pointed out that exports would be a “key concern” in the current environment to counter the global demand slowdown as India should target rural demand at home by investing in agriculture, irrigation and rural infrastructure.

Suri stressed on the need to push India’s global competitiveness in the current environment.

“While we should continue to market India as an attractive investment destination under the [Make in India](#) campaign, it’s equally important to encourage domestic investments,” she stated.

Assocham President Rana Kapoor said the Prime Minister asked industry to “catalyse risk-taking ability”.

In a set of recommendations submitted by Kapoor to Prime Minister to “maximise” the Indian economy, Assocham suggested that there was room for monetary easing to the extent of 75-125 bps over the next 7 months.

It recommended that in a subdued world trade environment, India should prevent any real appreciation in the rupee.

Assocham suggested investment revival by prioritising project clearances, protecting domestic industry from ‘dumping’ through adjustment in duties and FDI-FII fungibility in the banking sector through a composite cap to aid import of lower, effective cost equity capital, among others.

Ficci’s Suri said the talks during the meeting centred on how to push domestic investments, boosting infrastructure, skill development, promotion of start-ups and lowering the cost of capital to push up investments.

“We have requested that cost of capital be reduced, infrastructure development be expedited and tax incentives be provided to budding entrepreneurs,” Suri said.