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THE HINDU

Paddy in a pot



Raveendran at the paddy field in his housePhoto: S. Gopakumar

Thiruvananthapuram

R. Raveendran of Kochulloor, Thiruvananthapuram, is having a field day. In 2011, he entered the Limca Book of Records for harvesting a giant yam weighing 275 kg. And he's just grown more successful with every passing year.

Another unique aspect is that Raveendran grows paddy in flower pots on his 1850 sq.ft. terrace. "From 350 sq.ft., I harvested 35 kg of paddy. After reserving some for seed, I got 16-17 kg of grains. I cultivate Uma, a variety that does not need much standing water. The remaining 1500 sq.ft. is earmarked for vegetables," he explains.

For his Onam sadya, he harvested a part of the paddy and gathered all the vegetables necessary from the terrace garden. He only had to buy cucumber and drumsticks; that too, because the cucumber was planted early. "Ever

since I started growing vegetables, we eat only what is seasonal and grown here. We have to buy onions and potatoes, but beetroot, carrot, cabbage, cauliflower are all cultivated. These vegetables are planted in October. Beans, tomatoes, chillies and brinjals can be grown all year round.” Raveendran also cultivates different varieties of chillies, curry leaves, mint, lady’s finger and ginger in grow bags and pots.

Raveendran, who hails from an agricultural family, returned to his roots after working in the Gulf. “I did not want my children to eat pesticide-filled vegetables and fruits. Since my father and my grandfather were farmers, I was familiar with farming methods. All I had to do was put those into practice on my terrace and perfect them through trial and error,” he says. He also makes organic manure called Hridayaamrutham with a mix of jaggery, cow dung, biodegradable waste and green leaves. Raveendran distributes this to people and charges a nominal amount to buy ingredients to make the next batch. “I want people to make it at home, but if they can’t, I give them the mixture.”

However, the man with the green thumb is not resting on his achievements. He hopes to motivate others to set up terrace gardens and cultivate paddy too. “Facebook groups like Adukkalathottam and Krishibhoomi turn to me for advice. I have given the members tips and information on seeds, growing methods, pesticide control, organic conversion of waste into manure... I also take classes for resident associations and colleges and schools. The agriculture department also invites me to take classes for farmers. I don’t charge a fee. My real reward is the number of terrace farms that have come up in the city.”

SARASWATHY NAGARAJAN

Ever since I started growing vegetables, we eat only what is seasonal and grown here

How green is my roof?



URBAN FARMINGS. Natarajan. (Below) Archana DeivaPhotos: S. James



For the land-strapped citizen, the desire to take up gardening on the terrace of one's home is but natural. There's a growing trend in the country to fill small albeit useful spaces with a host of plants that yield rich dividends in the form of herbs, fruits and vegetables. TEAM MELANGE takes a look at people who have opted for self-sustaining ways when it comes to food

Man with a mission

In two years, S. Natarajan, a retired agricultural officer, has motivated and trained over 200 people in Madurai to create gardens on their rooftops or balconies. It is a good start, he feels, even if it begins with just a single pot. Growing vegetables at home shows that the movement is here to stay. “We should grow food and not ornamental lawns,” he says and believes housewives are the most effective agents of change in this green initiative.

When Natarajan started his own terrace garden after retirement in 2013, his wife — a Nursing Superintendent at the Government Rajaji Hospital — was the first to support him. “After the initial investment for trays, bags, seeds and manure, all I have given is an hour’s time daily and look what I get in return,” he says, pointing towards his 1500sqft rooftop.

Divided into two parts, one 750sqft has a green shed to grow seedlings in pro-trays. He transfers the saplings into small polybags and sells them at Rs.5 each. “I make it a point to talk, to explain and also give a sapling in order to create awareness.” In the remaining area, he grows plants in large trays and hydroponic bags and enjoys the yield round the year.

Natarajan grows green chillies, beans, lady’s finger, tomatoes, brinjal, drumstick, spinach and a variety of other greens. A bag of 5kg soil yields half to one kilo of vegetables within three months, while greens can be harvested every 30-40 days. Natarajan also runs a Agri Clinic and Business Centre, near the new bus stand, where he sells DIY kits and other supplies related to organic terrace farming. According to him, students and youths need to be drawn into the culture of terrace gardening because their generation will face shortage of space and water. “If more people take this up as a hobby, it will not only add to food production but everyone will also get to eat nutritious, tasty and healthy food,” he says, hoping that the State Government’s 50 per cent subsidy in supplies for organic terrace gardening will come to Madurai soon.

Better late than never

The desire to eat pesticide-free food and the plethora of articles on organic farming prompted Archana Deiva, a lecturer at the K.L.N.Polytechnic College, to start her own terrace garden. And, that was two years before 36 Vaiyadhinile released, she smiles.

Today she strongly believes there will truly come a time when only those who know how to plant will be eating. And that is why she has started a group called “Gather2Garden” (G2G) to promote the message that it is not too late to grow.

As a starter she began with growing the easiest – the greens – on 300 sq feet available space on her terrace. In less than a month, I got fresh green spinach and planted raddish next. That came in 45 days, she narrates. Then she bought more trays and now grows ladies fingers, chillies, brinjal, tomatoes round the year. Creeper plants such as snake gourd can be grown based on the appropriate weather conditions, she says.

Archana gets the harvest twice a week and it is enough for her own consumption. “My mother says vegetables grown in my terrace garden taste like what she used to eat in her childhood 50 years ago!” she says.

But what she is interested in is to get more people into growing their own food. I find the senior citizens are quite familiar with the basics of gardening. Young housewives who are lethargic and youngsters who grow up in apartments unaware about nature have to be motivated, she says.

Installing and maintaining your own terrace garden is like diverting yourself to doing exercise to keep fit,” says Archana, who conducts workshops, educates students and provides packages to set up organic gardens in available space. On an average she does two installations per week. Since January, her G2G has got 100 members and she uses the forum to inspire more people to grow and consume fresh and organic produce.

How the seeds of weed were sown



Adivasi farmers weeding ganja leaves from saplings at Darakonda village in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh.— Photo: Special Arrangement

20 years ago, ganja cultivation was not heard of in the Agency villages of Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh. With a heritage of podu cultivation, tribal farmers in the some of the more remote villages scratched about on the hill slopes to raise millets and coarse cereals and teetered on the edge of food security. Ganja cultivation as an alternative to conventional cropping was practised in the Lambada tandas of Warangal and Nalgonda districts in the then undivided Andhra Pradesh.

But then, around 2004, the Maoists retreated from Andhra Pradesh into denser foliage in Chhattisgarh and Orissa, leaving the Agency villages in Visakhapatnam in a power vacuum for a few years. Into this twilight zone stepped traders from Tamil Nadu, mainly from Salem, Dindigal and Theni districts. As with the Lambada tribals of Telangana, they found the tribals of the Agency hills easy to persuade to switch to ganja, a plant that needs little tending.

Without the support of logistics and a supply chain, the tribals might have found marijuana a useless crop to grow. But the shadow figures from down south offered not only a market but also support in the form of fertilisers, drip irrigation and diesel-powered generator sets. They also came with finances, leases and advance purchases.

Today, the Agency tracts exhibit the ironies of skewed development. Agricultural facilities like drip irrigation have been adopted in ganja-growing villages like Darakonda but other hamlets continue as before, practising marginal sow-and-reap agriculture. The kind of farm support technology seen in the marijuana villages in Agency Visakhapatnam has not reached even some of the more prosperous plains villages.

Like all clever plainsmen who come to these hills, the tribals were won over with a pittance at first. The traders offered little sums to prospective ganja farmers that still were better returns than millets offered. It wasn't until the Maoists filtered back into the hills that the marijuana traders began to cough up more. Today's ganja growers in Darakonda make about about Rs. 60,000 per acre — big money, something that a farmer from the fertile tracts of the Godavari delta might hope to make from his lush paddy. In some places the adivasi farmers are paid on the basis of the number of surviving plants per acre at the time of harvest.

As per an estimate of the Prohibition and Excise Department of Andhra Pradesh, the yield per acre is about 10 bags of 30 kg each. The rate for the 'Sheelavathi' variety of marijuana, for which the Agency's 'grasslands' have won some notoriety, could vary from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 16,000 per kg at the endpoint of the marijuana value chain.

To the traders, this is cheap raw material with promise of manifold returns. Perched in their safe zones in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra or Delhi these paltry leases are peanuts compared to the profits they stand to make. Some of the traders have made themselves at home here, the inaccessible hills keeping them out of the reach of the law.

Some of the traders who moved in early have even married adivasi women and set up home. No wonder, 90 per cent of the households in some of these villages have Sun TV dish antennae.

Agricultural facilities like drip irrigation have been adopted in ganja-growing villages with clever devices like farm technology, leases, advance purchases, etc

IICPT, CSIR sign MoU for a better curriculum

Both the institutes are working on post-harvest technology



IICPT director K. Singaravadivel and CFTRI director Ram Rajasekharan exchanging copies of MoU in Thanjavur on Friday. N. Ramachandran, Vice-Chancellor, Periyar Maniyammai University, is at right. PHOTO: R.M. RAJARATHINAM

The Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology (IICPT), Thanjavur, and the CSIR Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore, have jointly resolved to collaborate and synergise their efforts in research and curriculum development. The two premier post harvest technology and value addition research organisations signed a memorandum of understanding here on Friday.

The Director of CFTRI Prof. Ram Rajasekharan and IICPT Director Dr. K. exchanged copies of the MoU.

The MoU would pave the way for research collaboration and complementing each other in specific areas of strength while the CFTRI would help IICPT in designing and developing curriculum of academic courses, besides arranging guest lectures.

The MoU envisaged student exchange programmes for a deeper and wider understanding of the subjects and synergise energies that were the fruits of research.

Outlining the strengths of CFTRI, Prof. Rajasekharan told *The Hindu* that the primary focus was on developing post harvest process technology especially in unique areas such as application of nanotechnology, bio informatics tools to find out bio molecules in food such as reducing the metformin in intake.

The CFTRI was working on bio polymers from plant sources and was vigorously involved in finding alternative to sunflower oil and in converting oil into powder form. The institute provided technological support to entrepreneurs and industries in value addition and innovation, Prof. Rajasekharan added.

IICPT Director Dr. Singaravadivel pointed out that his institution was tasked with basic, applied, and adoptive research in post-harvest processing, preservation, and value addition of cereal grains, pulses, millets and oilseeds besides crops of wetland and storm-prone regions. The IICPT offered analytical services to food industries and research institutes for testing food and other organic samples. Training was given to academicians to upgrade their skills besides promoting growth of new food industry.

The MoU with the CFTRI would help impart the much-desired thrust in cutting edge technologies in the field of food processing and value addition. The agreement could be a boon to the academics and consequently to the entrepreneurs and farmers, he said.

Forest Minister releases logo of Project Kaliru

Project aims at resolving human-animal conflict



Forest Minister M.S.M. Anandan (second left) releasing the logo of Project Kaliru at the inauguration of the 22nd State-level sports meet for forest personnel in Coimbatore on Friday.

Minister for Forests and Environment M.S.M. Anandan on Friday released a logo of Project Kaliru (Kaliru in Tamil means elephant), an initiative of the Coimbatore Forest Division, at the inauguration the 22nd State-level sports for forest personnel. It was attended by over 1,000 staff of the Forest Department.

Project Kaliru is aimed at involving all the government agencies and stakeholders to bring about an amicable solution to human-animal conflict. The Minister also launched an e-compensation scheme for expeditious disbursement of compensation to farmers for crop loss by wild animals.

The Minister pointed out the Chief Minister's recent announcement to constitute a Rapid Action Force at a cost of Rs. 8.64 crore and place the personnel at The Nilgiris, Gudalur, Coimbatore, Tirunelveli and Krishnagiri to ensure swift action in the event of human-animal conflicts.

He also highlighted the various schemes and quantum of funds spent by the State towards afforestation, conservation and conflict mitigation initiatives.

The forest cover, which was at 17 per cent in 2011, had now gone up to 18.33 per cent, Mr. Anandan said and added that the State was committed to achieving 33 per cent forest cover soon.

Later, the Minister gave away compensation to the family members of those killed in wild animal attacks this year.

Coimbatore MP A.P. Nagarajan, Mayor P. Rajkumar, Collector Archana Patnaik, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests N. Krishnakumar, PCCF and Head of Forest Force (In-charge) V.K. Melkhani, Principal Secretary to Government for Forests Hansraj Verma, Conservator of Forests – Coimbatore, I Anwardeen, Rubber Corporation Chairman Srinivasamurthy, and District Forest Officer M. Senthil Kumar attended the function.

Govt is working on plan to boost sugar exports

India is working on a multi-year plan to boost sugar exports to deal with local oversupply, a government official was quoted as saying by an industry group, targeting markets in Africa, China and neighbouring countries in a move that could weigh on international prices.

Apart from boosting farm exports, government-backed overseas sales of sugar could also help mills clear billions of dollars they owe to 50 million cane growers – a group equivalent in size to the population of Spain and concentrated in politically heavyweight states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

India is the world's largest sugar consumer and biggest producer after Brazil, and with various state governments trying to out-do each other in providing incentives to their sugar cane growers, it has been producing more than it needs for the past five years. The trend is likely to continue.

“The government has decided to put in place a perennial sugar export policy not only for Africa and China but also for countries surrounding India.” The Food Ministry's new top bureaucrat, Vrinda Sarup, was quoted as saying by

the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Friday. Details were not provided. Food Ministry spokesman N.C. Joshi declined immediate comment.

Reuters quoted sources last month as saying India was likely to bring in rules to make it compulsory for sugar mills to export millions of tonnes of surplus supplies to support local prices, following a directive by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to boost sales.

India consumes 24-25 million tonnes of sugar a year and mills there are expected to produce 28 million tonnes in the next season starting Oct. 1, when inventories are expected to climb 37 per cent to 10.3 million tonnes.

PM inaugurates new terminal at Chandigarh airport



Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiling a plaque to inaugurate the newly-built terminal at Chandigarh airport on Friday. The Governor of Punjab and Haryana Kaptan Singh Solanki, Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, Union Minister for Civil Aviation Ashok Gajapathi Raju and Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar are also present on the occasion.- Photo: Special Arrangement

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated a swanky new terminal at Chandigarh airport which will handle both domestic as well as

international flights, and said it will play a key role in the economic development of the region.

Describing it as “magnificent” building, Mr. Modi dedicated to the nation the modern facility which is expected to boost the economic and industrial development in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

Harbinger

The ambitious Rs 939-crore project, which is being seen as a “harbinger” of regional development for the northern part of the country, will be operated and maintained by Chandigarh International Airport Ltd (CHIAL), a joint venture between Airports Authority of India (AAI) and the governments of Punjab and Haryana.

The AAI has 51 per cent stake in the project while Punjab and Haryana have 24.5 per cent equity each.

Mr. Modi, who was visiting Chandigarh for the first time after becoming Prime Minister last year, said at a public rally later, “I had been in Chandigarh. I never thought that such a magnificent airport could come up in Chandigarh. I am very impressed by the airport. It will enhance the grace of the city.

“Be it Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, this airport will play a major role in the economic development of these areas,” he said.

The Prime Minister asked officials concerned to make airport services beneficial for farmers to fetch them better returns.

Benefit farmers

“I have told officials that this airport should not only be meant for passengers. I have asked them to work towards how this airport could

benefit our farmers whose produce could reach every nook and corner of the country so they could realize better remuneration,” Mr. Modi said.

The Governor of Punjab and Haryana and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Kaptan Singh Solanki, Union Minister for Civil Aviation, P Ashok Gajapathi Raju, Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and his Haryana counterpart Manohar Lal Khattar were among those present on the occasion.

Before inaugurating the terminal, Mr. Modi was shown a model of the new building and taken around a photo exhibition depicting different stages in completion of this project and its salient features. He also showed interest in the murals on various cultural aspects of the region.

The PM was also presented a memento by Mr. Raju on the occasion.

Designed on green building concept, the terminal in Mohali (Punjab) is spread over 53,000 sqm and can handle 1,600 passengers, including 450 international travellers, during peak time.

The apron capacity of the airport will be eight aircraft, including cargo planes.

With a parking facility for 500 cars, it is equipped with 48 check-in counters, nine immigration counters, four arrival baggage carousels, three passenger boarding bridges, six escalators and 14 lifts.

Depicting heritage and culture of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh with murals, paintings and sculptures, the terminal building has five levels with arrival hall at ground floor, departures in the first floor and services, including baggage handling system, and offices in the basement.

New benchmark

Built by construction major L&T, the terminal sets a new benchmark in sustainability with green technologies like using about 55 lakh fly ash bricks, cavity wall, double insulated roofing, energy efficient chillers and sensor-based plumbing system to save water.

It boasts of a sewage treatment plant of 600 KLD, which is based on environment-friendly extended aeration technology, water treatment plant, rain water harvesting and re-use of treated water for flushing and gardening. International-level baggage handling system and Wi-Fi facilities have also been provided.

Punjab had given 305 acres of land at Jheorheri village in Mohali to AAI in 2008 for setting up the facility.

Both domestic and international flights will be operated from there once it is functional while the existing terminal building will be used for other civil aviation purposes.

Two airlines have already been given permission to operate international flights to Dubai from Chandigarh, official sources said adding that it would take at least a month to start operations from the new terminal.

International connectivity

With lack of air connectivity remaining the sore point for people especially from the industry here, this airport will allow the travellers, including Punjabi NRIs, to catch their flights for international destinations from here instead of Delhi.

Industry representatives have said that exporters of this region could now look forward to capitalize on the immense business opportunities this airport will offer.

Controversy

The new terminal has also been mired in controversy over its name as Punjab had been demanding that the airport be named as 'Shaheed-e-Azam Sardar Shaheed Bhagat Singh International Airport, Mohali'. The Punjab Assembly had unanimously passed a resolution in this regard.

However, the Haryana government had objected to the mention of 'Mohali' and insisted on keeping its name after Chandigarh. -- PTI

Jasmine price slides

The price falls from Rs. 250 a few days ago to Rs. 200 now



Price of jasmine has started sliding in the absence of strong demand coupled with good arrivals at the Srirangam market.— PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Prices of flowers in the district have registered a serious dip in the last week in general and during the past couple of days in particular. Traders say that the prices of jasmine, lotus, tuberose and marigold have gone down in the recent week.

The discharge of water from the Mettur for irrigation coupled with the intermittent showers parts of the district experienced in the last few weeks have resulted in the sudden increase in the production.

Jasmine has registered a sharp fall in the price. The per kg price which stood at Rs.250 on Sunday has come down to Rs. 200 on Thursday. A large number of jasmine growers from Ettarai, Koppu, and surrounding villages who brought their flowers to Satara Street in Srirangam said that an unusual phenomenon was witnessed this season.

V. Karuppannan, a jasmine cultivator, said that abundant availability of jasmine flowers in September had resulted in a fall in the price.

K. Rajasekar, another flower merchant in Srirangam, said the absence of auspicious (suba muhurtham) days during the Aavani month was a major factor resulting in reduced demand for jasmine in general and other flowers used for garlands in particular.

“Sampangi” which was sold for Rs. 200 a kg in the month of Vaikasi has come down to Rs.100; the price of samanthi (marigold) has come down to Rs. 40 from Rs. 100 a couple of months ago. At Sattara street, apart from the wholesale dealers, the hawkers vied with one another in attracting the customers by offering the lowest bid for their flowers. “Even lotus, a rare variety last year due to scanty rainfall, is abundantly available now,” says Mr. Rajasekar. The price per flower has come down from Rs. 5 to Rs. 2.50 this season.

According to Horticulture Department sources, a rare phenomenon was being witnessed this September. Although the prices of flowers were subjected to fluctuations, this phenomenon of sudden dip was something unusual. The recent showers was one of the reasons which had contributed to the abundant production and consequent fall in price. About 800 acres of land had been brought under floriculture in the district. The source said that it had been planned to increase the area in jasmine cultivation by 100 acres. “We have planned to distribute the saplings of jasmine to farmers,” the source said.

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- ***Prices of many flowers have come down by 50 p.c.***
 - ***Fall attributed to release of Cauvery water, rain***
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Tirupur to get 10 onion storage units, packing house

The Department of Horticulture is all set to extend subsidies to set up 10 onion storage units and a packing house in the district.

Green houses

Apart from these facilities, it has also been planned to extend subsidies to construct green houses and tubular model shade net houses.

Official sources told *The Hindu* that the storage unit would help onion farmers store the produce till they could avoid the glut in the market and thereby get remunerative prices.

Packing house

The packing house planned would be coming up at Gudimangalam area.

The facility will encourage the farmers to pack and sell the produces under hygienic conditions.

The green houses were to be allocated for a total space of 25,000 sq m with the space for every such facility not to exceed 4,000 sq m.

“Green houses and shade net houses help the plants from natural calamities like wind and heavy rain apart from controlling humidity and temperature during the cultivation,” the officials said.

Farmers launch campaign on wheels

Implement interlinking of rivers project at the earliest, they say

Farmers across the State have launched a campaign on wheels to draw the attention of the State and Central governments to demands such as taking up of interlinking of rivers in the State to solve water crisis.

On Friday, members of the Tamil Nadu Vivasaigal Sangam, Vellore, began the campaign at Tirupattur that covered several areas, including Kandhili, Gajalnaickenpatti, Natrampalli and Gudiyatham.

R. Mullai, district secretary of Tamil Nadu Vivasaigal Sangam, said the farmers travelled in a van and held meetings at many areas to reach out to other farmers and the public.

“One of the main problems facing farmers is water crisis. Groundwater level has dipped and the State government has not taken steps to implement the 11 schemes to interlink the rivers in Tamil Nadu. One of the schemes is to link the Thenpennai river with Palar,” he said. He said the Central government had given the clearance to the 11 schemes but said it would not provide funds. “The State government is not allocating funds citing there is no Central funding for these projects,” he added.

The association demanded that Vellore be declared a drought-hit district as there had been no rain for the past 12 years and relief measures should be initiated. Water sources in Vellore should be conserved and compensation should be granted for the lakhs of coconut trees withered owing to drought. The farmers also asked the government to protect the cooperative sugar mills at Vellore, Ambur and Tirupattur and wanted prompt distribution of seeds, manure and pesticides for farmers.

They called for a ban on the sale of drinking water by private parties. Mr. Mullai said the campaign would travel to Kancheepuram, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Perambalur and Ariyalur . It will culminate at a conference at Thanjavur on September 17.

Branded bananas from Natur Fruitamin

In a couple of days, select retailers in the city would have bananas under the brand “Theni Enrich”, supplied by Natur Fruitamin, a Chennai-based start-up.

Director of the company N. Jay Kaushik, told *The Hindu* here on Friday that Natur has tied-up with 24 farmers in Theni area, who jointly have 50 acres under banana cultivation (G9 variety).

The company offers plant and fruit care, starting from the sapling stage, has constructed a packing house at Theni, has taken space on lease at Dindigul for ripening the fruit as per international standards, and has cooler vans for delivery.

The fruit reaches the retailers in 11 to 13 days from the day of harvest, he says.

Farmers get technology help in sapling care and harvesting.

India is one of the largest producers of banana and has several varieties. Natur aspires to be a leading player in the branded fruit market in the country.

It is backed by Mirra Ventures from Mumbai and has received one million dollars investment from investors in Mumbai.

The company targets supply of 1,500 to 2,000 boxes (18 kg each) to the retailers every day.

Starting with Coimbatore market, it plans to expand across the State in three months and will offer nine varieties of bananas. It is looking at a turnover of Rs. 10 crore in the first year and Rs. 50 crore in the next three years, he said.

Paddy transplanting machine enhances returns

Taking cognisance of shortage of farm labourers, Agriculture Department officials on Wednesday demonstrated utility of machine transplanter at its State Seed Farm in Bhavani.

The demonstration carried out on a six-acre farm was in keeping with the State Government's keenness to utilise machineries and implements in crop cultivation, R.Savithiri, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Bhavani, said.

A new high-yielding paddy variety ADT (R) 49 was planted in the farm to convince farmers that the strategy will not only help in overcoming labour shortage, but also enhance returns by 20 per centage over traditional planting method.

As the seedlings are raised in the pro-trays, just one labourer could look after nursery preparations. Moreover, the seedlings are healthy and vigorous. There is no wastage while uprooting the seedlings, and the transportation cost to move seedlings to the main field is minimized.

As the standard spacing is maintained in entire cropped area, utilisation of full sunlight is possible and each hill will produce around 60-70 productive tillers, which is the determiner of increase in yield.

Farmers could easily carry out intercultural operation with power weeder, Ms. Savithri said, informing that the Agricultural extension centre, Bhavani, has been set 220 hectare target for machine transplantation with subsidy of Rs.3,000 per ha. So far, nursery for 200 ha has been prepared for machine transplanting.

Seemai karuvelam being cleared in Vaigai riverbed

**'SEEMAI KARUVELAM'
TREES BEING CLEARED**

In accordance with a High Court order, 'seemai karuvelam' trees were being cleared from the Vaigai riverbed for the past one year, said M. Muthupandi, Executive Engineer, Periyar-Vaigai Basin Circle. In a statement, Mr. Muthupandi said that newly-sprouted trees had been cleared from Kamarajar bridge to Anna Nagar bridge within the corporation limits. Clearing work was progressing at a brisk pace in other parts of the river too, the statement said.

Farmers want Rs. 1,000 for a bag of tapioca

Farmers on Friday asked the State Government to fix Rs. 1,000 as price for a bag of 73 kg of tapioca.

At a meeting held at Attur, K.A. Govindasamy, president of the Tamil Nadu Tapioca Farmers Association, said that the price fixed in Namakkal was very reasonable.

The farmers in Salem were getting Rs. 200 for a bag, which was meagre.

He said that the sago manufacturing units were behind the dip in price of tapioca.

Vetrimani, district treasurer of the association, and other farmers' representatives asked the State Government to take steps to set up a sago factory in the cooperative sector, or by the government to enable the farmers to get a reasonable price for tapioca.

The representatives of sago units, who participated in the meeting, promised reasonable price for tapioca this season.

They said they will announce the price after holding a discussion with all sago unit owners.

S. Jayachandran, Revenue Divisional Officer, who presided over the meeting, said that the interests of both the farmers and the sago units will be taken care of while fixing the price.

He said that the price mentioned by sago units in Attur will be forwarded to the higher authorities for a favourable decision.

'Nuclear energy can bring down greenhouse gases'

The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), a global forum studying climate change, recommended that there should be zero emission of

greenhouse gases by 2100 to avoid further rise in temperature, according to R.S. Sawant, Training Superintendent and Chairman, Public Awareness Committee, Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project, Nuclear Power Corporation of India limited.

During his keynote address at the State-level seminar on 'Nuclear Power- A Safe, Clean and Sustainable Option' at Kamaraj College here on Thursday, he said currently the largest proportion of power generated in India is by burning of carbon-based fuels (fossil fuels), which emits green house gases such as carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide.

To reduce emission of green house gases, it was essential to have a reliable alternate source of energy, he said.

In the present scenario, nuclear power was contributing only about three percent in the country's power generation scenario, he added.

By increasing the nuclear capacity gradually and also with renewable energy resources, dependency on fossil fuels could be reduced.

As many as 4,57,051 million units of electricity were produced through nuclear energy technology since the beginning of commercial operation in India in 1969 and till October in 2014.

About one third of the world's thorium reserves were in India and it has the potential to provide energy security.

This large scale thorium utilisation would go a long way in providing huge amounts of power on a sustainable basis, providing long term energy security for India, he said.

P. Pandaram, Head of TLD Lab, KNPP, D. Nagarajan, Principal, A. Sivadhas, Head, Department of Physics, J. Poongodi, Convener of Programme and students were present.

“About one third of the world’s thorium reserves were in India and it has the potential to provide energy security ”

KVASU to launch project for tribespeople

The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) will soon implement ‘Wayanad 2030’, a comprehensive project conceptualised during a prospective Plan workshop held at the university headquarters in November 2012.

The project will be launched on Monday in select tribal settlements and Model Residential Schools (MRS) in the district.

The three-year project is aimed at livelihood enhancement of tribal settlements in the district through need-based package of inputs.

“The project also envisages food, economic and nutritional security of the tribal population, strategies to increase enrolment ratio among students in higher education sector, and socio-educational development through teachers’ training programmes as well as educational awareness schemes for parents,” said B. Ashok, Vice Chancellor, KVASU.

Need-based package

The Directorate of Entrepreneurship of the varsity will implement the programme, which proposes need-based package of inputs to select tribal colonies, tribal schools and a new delivery model for sustainable growth in the sector by utilising the State Plan Fund for 2014-15, Dr. Ashok added.

“We have selected two tribal settlements at Boothanam and Chembatty in Pozhuthana and Vythiri grama panchayats respectively for implementing the project in the initial phase,” said T.P. Sethumadhavan, Director, Entrepreneurship, KVASU. Various programmes, including awareness drive on health and nutrition, Forest Rights Act, laws and regulations relating to tribal communities, ill effects of alcoholism and drug abuse, will be organised in the settlements under the project.

The KVASU would collaborate with the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation here to organise training programmes on vermi-composting and organic farming for tribespeople, Dr. Sethumadhavan added. The project would also be launched at the Ekalavya Model Residential School at Pookode and Government Model Residential School, Kaniambetta.

Modern fish market opened at Karuvatta

A modern fish market set up by the Kerala State Coastal Area Development Corporation at Karuvatta was inaugurated by Fisheries Minister K. Babu on Thursday.

The market, built at a cost of Rs.1.97 crore, has 35 fish stalls, cold storage, ice flakes unit, office, rest room, toilet, and effluent treatment plant.

The project is part of the Corporation's scheme to set up 41 modern fish markets at Rs.78 crore in the State.

Coastal areas

Inaugurating the market, the Minister said projects worth Rs.46 crore were being executed in the coastal areas of the district. Works worth Rs.9.14 crore have already been completed. The projects at various levels of execution include seven drinking water schemes, five electrification projects, four libraries, a fisheries station, a hospital and a school, totally worth Rs.37 crore.

Panchayats included

The Minister said Arattupuzha and Thrikkunnappuzha panchayats had been included in the Matsya gramam scheme of the government.

He said the possibility of developing a fishing harbour at Thrikkunnappuzha would be explored, as had been mooted by Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala.

The Minister laid the foundation for a new academic block, costing Rs.53 lakh, at the Thrikkunnappuzha government lower primary school, to be constructed by KSCADC.

DECCAN Chronicle

Eating apples may slow down ageing, research says



A new study tells us that including apples in your diet could keep you looking younger for a long time, the *Daily Mail* reports. This is because a chemical found in the fruit's peel prevents muscle wasting.

Scientists from the University of Iowa said that both apple peels and green tomatoes have natural chemical properties that can turn elderly people's muscles into those of a young adult after just two months of treatment. A protein called ATF4, which changes the formation of genes and starves muscles of proteins, causes muscle wastage in old age. Researchers say that the two natural compounds present in these foods could reduce ATF4 activity.

Christopher Adams, professor of internal medicine and lead author of the study, told the specialist *Journal of Biological Chemistry* that one of those compounds is ursolic acid, which is found in apple peel and the other is tomatidine, which comes from green tomatoes.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

'Current tea price level to spell doom for industry'

The tea industry is concerned about the current price level that has pushed the industry into deep crisis affecting over 3.65 lakh workers, 70,000 small tea growers and their families in south India, stated a press release from United Planters Association of South India (UPASI). At the current price level, plantations will have no option but to cut production costs by stopping all developmental work and cutting down on input costs which will in turn reduce employment, added the release.

Vijayan Rajes, president, UPASI, indicated in the release that the financial strength of the tea industry was severely eroded due to the continuous and steep fall in tea prices, increase in labour wages and high input cost. The current crisis, he said, was comparable to the darkest phase in the tea sector during the beginning of this century.

Importantly, he mentioned, that tea was the only plantation commodity where there was no significant difference in the price levels between the pre-crisis period and post crisis period, suggesting that industry was just about managing without any significant profits for many years.

"It is also pertinent to note that though the government of India in 2002 had permitted FDI up to 100% in tea plantations with certain conditions and thereafter in 2013 these conditions were omitted to attract FDI, no worthwhile FDI has flown into the tea industry," said the release, adding, "This suggests that the financial strength of the industry is not conducive to attracting foreign investments."

According to the release, made-tea prices in south India during the calendar year 2014 has dropped by Rs 15.85 per kg vis-a-vis 2013, while during the current year (up to August) this trend continued as prices further dropped by Rs. 6.08 per kg to reach Rs. 80.42 in the auction centre. Further, exports during the current calendar year (up to July) were down by 4.97 million kgs.

This being the plight of the industry, the workers must understand the graveness of the situation and in the best interest of this important agro-industry, all stakeholders are expected to cooperate so that this industry can tide over these difficult times.

UPASI also condemned any unlawful activities disrupting the estate operations when there were laid down procedures available for grievances, Rajes said, adding that the administration must also send a strong message to perpetrators of such activities so that they were not repeated.

Top 20 weight loss plan mistakes to avoid



In your fight against weight loss there are temptations that we face daily - easy accessibility of fast food joints, too lazy or tired to exercise, eating out helps you socialize, etc.

We know our own weakness but there are other habits we follow daily that makes up pile on more weight. To help you strike a cord we list out top 20 weight loss plan mistakes you could be making.

Daily cup of coffee adds 4.5 kg to weight annually

A daily cup of latte coffee can add around 4.5 kg (10 pounds) to your weight a year, British experts have warned.

The boom in high-street coffee shops is helping fuel the obesity epidemic in Britain, the Daily Express reported, citing fitness trainers' body the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPS).

A small cup of latte with full-fat milk contains 153 calories while a cup of black coffee with semi-skimmed milk has only 35.

Even health-conscious people who avoid junk food do not realise how much fat and sugar they are drinking, said REPS, which carried out a dietary study of 2,000 British adults.

30 minutes of daily exercise is enough to lower weight - Not to avoid!

Thirty minutes of daily exercise provides an equally effective loss of weight and body mass as does a 60-minute routine, according to a Danish research.

For 13 weeks, a research team at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences of the University of Copenhagen followed 60 heavy but healthy men in their efforts to get into better shape.

Half of the men were set to exercise for an hour a day, wearing a heart-rate monitor and calorie counter, while the second group was to exercise for 30 minutes, the American Journal of Physiology reports.

Research results showed that 30 minutes of exercise hard enough to produce a sweat was enough to turn the tide on an unhealthy body mass index, according to a Copenhagen statement. On average, the men who exercised 30 minutes a day lost 3.6 kilo in three months, while those who exercised for a whole hour only lost 2.7 kg.

Weight-loss procedures lack standardization and proficiency. None of the weight-loss solutions currently available in the country are functioning on any reliable logical science, leading to short term weight loss and several linked complications, experts said at the "National Conference on Tackling Nutritional Challenges Among the Diabetic Young".

"Lately, centres selling weight-loss in kilos and companies offering weight loss pills and drinks have cropped up as quick-fix solution. Most of them lack a holistic and customized approach, leading to various related health problems," said Manjari Chandra, senior nutritionist from Nutritionistsrepublic.com after attending the discussion, organised by Anna Adarsh Women's College, Chennai and Panacea Health Education.

Knee replacement linked to weight gain: Study

Being overweight is known to increase the risk of needing a knee replacement, but a new study finds that knee replacement surgery may also raise a person's risk of gaining weight, according to a U.S. study.

Researchers, whose findings appeared in the journal *Arthritis Care & Research*, analyzed the medical records of nearly 1,000 knee-replacement surgery patients, and found that 30 percent of them gained five percent or more of their body weight in the five years following surgery.

One possible explanation for the counter-intuitive results, experts said, is that if people have spent years adapting to knee pain by taking it easy, they don't automatically change their habits when the pain is reduced.

"Patients who undergo knee arthroplasty are at increased risk of clinically important weight gain following surgery," wrote study leader Daniel Riddle, a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Stick to healthy diet for weight loss

Cutting down butter and cheese, biscuits, cakes and crisps and going in for low-fat diet could help shed pounds, according to a new research.

In this way, people can get slimmer in six months without dieting. The more fat you stop eating, the more weight is lost, says a new research from the University of East Anglia (UEA).

Weight loss? There's an app for that - And it works

If in doubt check your weight loss app. Mobile devices that let people track how much they eat and exercise may help them shed weight over and above the benefits of a typical weight-loss program, according to a U.S. study.

Researchers writing in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that overweight and obese adults lost an average of over eight pounds (3.6 kilograms) more when they had personal digital assistants (PDAs) and occasional phone coaching to help them, in addition to a group program.

"The number one mechanism through which people lost weight is self-monitoring, just watching what you eat and keeping a record of it," said Goutham Rao, who wrote a commentary published with the new study.

Emotions could interfere with weight loss

The findings of a survey in the US indicate that the inability to control emotions could throw weight loss programmes off kilter.

In general, gaining self-control over behaviour and emotions related to eating were key to maintaining a weight-loss regime.

Ninety-two percent of the 306 respondents who provide weight loss treatment reported helping a client "address underlying emotional issues related to weight gain."

Pumping botox in belly won't help weight loss

Some of the obese are looking to botox shots for easy weight loss -- but now it is clear that they don't, according to a definitive study.

Injecting botulinum toxin A (BTA), or Botox, into the stomach had been believed to delay emptying of the stomach, increase feelings of fullness and reduce body weight.

Could an earlier lunchtime help you lose weight?

Eating lunch earlier rather than later may help you with that mission.

Dieters who ate early lunches tend to lose more weight than those who had their midday meal late in the afternoon, according to a Spanish study published in the International Journal of Obesity.

The finding doesn't prove that bumping up your lunch hour will help you

shed that extra weight, but it is possible that eating times play a role in how the body regulates its weight, researchers revealed.

Car commuters gain more weight, even if they exercise

People who drive to work every day are packing on slightly more weight than their colleagues who use trains, buses and bicycles to get to work, even if they exercise in their spare time, according to an Australian study. "People who have longer commutes tend to purchase a lot of their food and run a lot of errands on their way to and from work," which influence weight gain, researcher said. In addition, 80 percent of car trips are non-commuting.

Stick to a healthy diet to avoid unnecessary weight gain during pregnancy

A healthy diet and avoiding eating for two during pregnancy helps limit excess weight gain for both women and their babies. "Big babies become big children and big adults later on. If we can reduce that happening, we can have a big public health impact," says Lesley McCowan, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

"Babies born large are at risk of traumatic birth, and caesarean delivery increases the chance of complications for the mother," says McCowan, according to an Auckland statement.

Don't skip meals to shed weight

Maintaining a food diary faithfully and not skipping meals could be one of the safest and surest ways of shedding weight, especially for obese postmenopausal women, a study says.

"When it comes to weight loss, evidence from randomised, controlled trials comparing different diets finds that restricting total calories is more

important than diet composition such as low-fat versus low-carbohydrate," said McTiernan.

Soft drinks make it harder to lose weight: Study

Avoid soft drinks, as they could alter the way your body burns fuel and make it harder still to lose weight, says a study.

"This study proves our concerns over sugary drinks have been correct. Not only can regular sugar intake acutely change our body metabolism," said Hans-Peter Kubis of Britain's Bangor University, who led the research.

Eat smaller bites to lose weight

A team of scientists led by one of Indian origin have suggested that cutting food into smaller pieces can help dieters shed those extra kilos. A serving cut into several pieces will appear more filling even if contains the same number of calories.

"Cutting up energy-dense foods into smaller pieces may be beneficial to dieters who wish to make their meal more satiating," the Daily Express quoted Devina Wadhera, lead researcher at Arizona State University, as saying.

Will I lose weight only with cardio?

To burn the maximum amount of bodyfat in the least amount of time, it is ideal to have a good combination of diet, weight training and cardio. So yes, cardio is helpful in weight loss. However if one is to only rely on cardio then the results will not be optimal, especially if a lot of weight is to be lost. The problem with regular cardio like running, cycling, etc is that the body soon

adapts to the relatively low intensity of these activities and thus actually burns lesser calories per minute with time.

At what rate should I lose weight?

Experts suggest that one should not lose more than 1 to 2 pounds of weight in a week, in order maintain healthy weight loss. This means that you will have to shed 3,500 to 7,000 calories in a week. This further breaks down to 500 to 1,000 calories in day.

Low-calorie diets good in long run: Experts

Low-energy diets or short-spell diets which combine to less than 800 calories a day can have long term benefits, researchers said here Monday.

Researchers at Britain-based Robert Gordon University (RBU) reviewed over 30 studies investigating effects of controversial very-low-energy-diets (VLEDs) on obesity and associated disorders.

"The evidence suggests that VLEDs can help obese people achieve long-term weight loss and improvements in fertility, respiratory disorders and cardiovascular risk," the review said.

How much harm does a skipped meal cause to the body?

Skipping a meal is not the treatment for obesity. The body's metabolism slows down in starvation due to which it goes into a conservation mode and hence it's a natural process of the body to expend lesser energy.

Besides, an empty stomach for a long period of time also causes increased acidity and discomfort.

Follow the right weight loss exercises

A combination of aerobic and resistance training is recommended. Resistance training increases LBM. Fat is burned from the largest concentrations of adipose tissue. Consistency is key to realizing the health and weight management benefits of exercise. Diet is the key factor in weight loss programme; there are many other factors which influence weight loss.

A regular program of physical activity should be adopted by the dieter. The program should consist of simply brisk walk daily, or jogging, swimming, bicycling, sports, or a combination of activities. This would aid in both caloric expenditure and to tone and strengthen muscles.

How does alcohol feature in weight loss plans?

Remember, alcohol in any form has calories - about 7Kcal per gms. Over and above alcohol is considered empty calories since it has no vitamins and minerals

There is always a tendency to consume high fat foods along with alcohol like cheese, nuts, chips or kebabs.

Hence be cautious when consuming alcohol.

Wine is sweet and contains calories from sugar too.

Alcohol is directly absorbed from the stomach unlike your macronutrients.

Nestle cuts milk price by Rs. 15/litre



Nestle is making its dairy products more affordable for consumers.

It has dropped prices by Rs. 15 for its 1-litre pack of Nestle a+ milk from Rs. 75 to Rs. 60 a litre.

“It is competition which has made us drop prices for our packs,” admits Suresh Narayanan, Managing Director, Nestle India.

The company, until now, positioned its dairy portfolio at a premium compared to the domestic dairy players.

Not just milk, Nestle’s curd under a+ is also now cheaper by Rs. 10 for the 400-gm pack.

Amul’s Taaza variant at Rs. 58/litre is pitted against Nestle a+ milk

“Nestle’s a+ milk is similar to Amul Taaza as both are toned milk in special packs. But Nestle has been priced higher compared to our brand since the time it entered the special packaged category. Amul offers better prices since

it has its own sourcing capabilities unlike MNCs like Nestle which use third party sourcing,” says Jayen Mehta, GM, Marketing, Amul.

Poppy seed prices on a high as Narcotics Board curbs permits

An upsurge in poppy seed prices has begun as the Narcotic Commissioner, Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) Gwalior has stopped issuance of permits for imports from Turkey.

In a notification on Tuesday (September 8), the CBN Commissioner said that no action would be taken on applications for registration of sales contract for import of poppy seed into India from Turkey for the year 2015-16.

The CBN has issued the notification as a follow up to the stay orders issued by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu High Courts, trade sources told *BusinessLine*. Reports of stay by the Courts on imports from Turkey have pushed up the prices to above Rs. 400 a kg from Rs. 250 a few weeks ago, they claimed. They said poppy seed is an OGL item, but it is imported under permits issued by the CBN, Gwalior from three main producing countries such as China, Czech and Turkey.

Permits have been issued for imports from China and Czech Republic where the availability is reportedly limited. The major producer and supplier of poppy seed is Turkey with an estimated output of 18,000 tonnes this year. The trade alleged that the CBN had called for applications for registration for imports from Turkey on August 10, without giving 30 days time. Four big cartels allegedly cornered 12,000 tonnes in 80 applications filed by them within three days following which the counters were closed, some of the importers claimed.

Meanwhile, “several forward contracts have been made in India and all want delivery, but cargo cannot come soon”, market sources claimed.

Food production will be higher this year: Jaitley

Buoyed by reports of ‘reasonably good sowing’, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today expressed confidence that the country’s food production this year would be much more than last year’s despite less than normal rainfall.

“Information that has come is that sowing has been reasonably good and therefore the food production would be much more than last year. How much more is yet to be seen. I cannot accurately tell you the figure. Only at the end of the season, we will know the accurate figure,” he said.



Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a function here, he said even though rainfall was likely to be less than normal, food production would be much higher.

Asked about deficit rainfall this year, he said: “You had fair amount of rains in July, but in August it was a little low. September so far has not been satisfactory, but last two to three days, it has picked up.”

Although there were predictions, only after the monsoon season ended, the Meteorological department can give a final figure. “Of course by all likelihood it is going to be less than normal,” Jaitley added.

Centre to import additional 5,000 tonnes of tur

To boost the availability of pulses in the domestic market and bring down prices of the key protein source, the Centre has decided to import 5,000 additional tonnes of tur (arhar) and speed up the process of imports.



A further import of 3,000 tonnes of onions was also discussed at the weekly inter-ministerial committee meeting between the Consumer Affairs Secretary and officials from the Ministries of Agriculture and Commerce, Revenue Department and the Cabinet Secretariat, as well as States' representatives.

“In a high level committee meeting, the Centre has decided to import an additional 5,000 tonnes of tur dal to increase the availability and control prices of pulses. Imports of 10,000 tonnes of tur and urad is already in the pipeline and the first consignment will reach by September 23,” said a release from Consumer Affairs Ministry.

The Committee was formed in order to take stock of the issue regarding high prices and stressed supplies of pulses and onions, both of which have been included for assistance under the ₹500 crore ‘Price Stabilisation Fund’.

“The Government has asked the MMTC to expedite import of pulses to ease its availability and requested the State governments to gear up (for) distribution of pulses through retail outlets. MMTC has assured that 10,000 tonnes of pulses will arrive soon,” another release added.

The two releases highlighted the steps taken by the Centre to prevent shortages, including the imposition of stock limits, a ban on pulses exports and a zero duty on imports, and suspension of future trading in urad and tur. “Apart from short-term measures, the Committee also decided on medium and long-term strategy required to increase the availability of essential commodities...All the above measures are likely to moderate the prices of pulses,” added one of the statements.

Average retail prices for pulses, a staple for many, continues to remain high at ₹132 (arhar/tur) and ₹112/kg (urad) in New Delhi.

These prices are higher by 61 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, compared to the same time last year.

Dire water storage situation in South could impact Rabi prospects too

The South-West monsoon may have brought some respite to the parched southern peninsula, lower water storage levels in all but the northern region could have an impact not just on the Kharif but the Rabi season as well.

As a result, agriculture sector growth — almost flat last year — is likely to be less than in a normal year, said analysts.

Total storage level in 91 major reservoirs is pegged at 92.38 billion cubic metres (bcm), or 59 per cent of total capacity, as on September 10.

This is 77 per cent of the storage during the corresponding period last year and 81 per cent of the average over the last decade.

“There is a distinction between the northern irrigation systems and those in the west and the south. The latter depends more on tank irrigation which is banking on rainfall for replenishment, whereas in the North you have the systems being watered through perennial rivers and snow-melt,” explained DK Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisil.

Storage levels alarming

According to the Central Water Commission, the southern region has 31 reservoirs with a current storage level estimated to be 16.93 per cent – just 33 per cent of the total capacity of 51.59 bcm.

At the same time last year, storage was at 71 per cent in these reservoirs.

Available storage is pegged at 58 per cent of total capacity in the eastern and western regions, lower than last year in both cases.

The situation in northern India has improved, however, at 91 per cent against 82 per cent last year, while storage levels are down marginally in the central region.

“What this means is that without tanks getting replenished, the Rabi season is also likely to be affected in these regions. It need not be the same case in the North though,” Joshi added. Hence, Crisil has forecast agri-sector growth at 1.5 per cent for the current fiscal, lower than the typical 3-3.5 per cent rates achieved in a normal year, he said.

What could be a silver-lining, however, is the monsoon system gathering strength over the Bay of Bengal which could bring rainfall to areas most affected by the lack of rain over the four-month monsoon.

“The situation can improve in areas such as Marathwada, coastal and north interior Karnataka and Rayalaseema if this system intensifies,” said an IMD official.

Rainfall deficit

As of Friday, the IMD estimated rainfall to be deficient by 15 per cent but recorded rainfall in the southern region showed a marked improvement even as withdrawal has begun from northwest India. Out of 36 sub-divisions, 17 have reported deficient rainfall between June 1 and September 11.

“There has been a revival in the monsoon in the South and sown crops should find relief with an improvement in soil moisture content. If it keeps up through September and early-October, then the outlook for the Rabi should improve since it is not positive at this point,” said JS Sandhu, Deputy Director General (Crop Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Crop outlook

Around 96 per cent of Kharif sowing has been completed and total area under the season's crops such as rice, soyabean and cotton, is 1.76 per cent

more than at the same time last year. Almost all crops have registered increases in acreage, cotton and groundnut being notable exceptions. “Most of the varieties we urged farmers to use were a mix of short-duration and drought-tolerant varieties. As a result, we are hopeful that productivity should be better than last year,” said Sandhu.

Business Standard

India says working on plan to boost sugar exports

India is working on a multi-year plan to boost [sugar exports](#) to deal with oversupply, a government official was quoted as saying by an industry group, targeting markets in Africa, [China](#) and neighbouring countries in a move that could weigh on international prices.

Apart from boosting farm exports, government-backed overseas sales of sugar could also help mills clear billions of dollars they owe to 50 million cane growers - a group equivalent in size to the population of Spain and concentrated in politically heavyweight states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

India is the world's largest sugar consumer and biggest producer after Brazil, and with various state governments trying to outdo each other in providing incentives to their sugarcane growers, it has been producing more than it needs for the past five years. The trend is likely to continue.

"The government has decided to put in place a perennial sugar export policy not only for Africa and China but also for countries surrounding India," the

food ministry's new top bureaucrat, Vrinda Sarup, was quoted as saying by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Friday.

Details were not provided. Food ministry spokesman [N C Joshi](#) declined immediate comment.

Kharif pulses sowing up by 11%

Amid rising prices, the sowing of [pulses](#) has increased by 11 per cent while paddy acreage has risen marginally so far this kharif season.

According to agriculture ministry's sowing data released on Friday, the area under coverage for paddy has increased to 36.84 million hectares so far in this [kharif season](#) (summer-sown), from 36.65 million hectares in the year-ago period. Pulse's sowing went up to 11 million hectares, from 9.91 million hectares. Farmers are putting more area under this crop in view of a sharp rise in retail prices, which have gone up to Rs 150 per kg.

The total area sown under kharif crops as on September 11, 2015 has reached to 101.20 million hectares as compared to 99.45 million hectare last year at this time, an official statement said.

Coarse cereals' sowing area also increased to 18.1 million hectares so far this kharif season, from 17.11 million hectares in the corresponding period last year.

In non-foodgrain category, area under coverage for oilseeds is up, but sowing has declined for cotton.

Oilseeds sowing went up to 18.12 million hectares, from 17.55 million hectares. However, cotton's sowing fell to 11.48 million hectares as against 12.53 million hectares.

[Monsoon](#) rains have revived in the worst-hit central India and southern peninsula regions that would help boost kharif crops and water level in reservoirs, a top official of Met department said on Friday.

Monsoon deficit has been at 12 per cent so far this season (June 1 to September 2).

Govt to import 5,000 tonnes more of pulses to control prices



Imports of 10,000 tonnes of tur and urad dal were already in the pipeline and the first consignment would reach by September 23, it said. Barring chana

dal, retail prices of all pulses are ruling above Rs 100/kg across the country. The maximum increase in prices has been seen in tur and urad dal.

“In a high-level committee meeting held here today, the government has decided to import an additional 5,000 tonnes of tur dal to increase the availability and control prices of pulses,” Consumer Affairs Secretary C Vishwanth told PTI.

State-owned [MMTC](#) would float a tender in this regard soon, he added.

The government has also directed MMTC to expedite import of 10,000 tonnes of pulses tendered earlier and requested the state governments to gear up for distribution of imported lentils through retail outlets.

“The committee has directed agencies like MMTC, SFAC and Nafed to get in touch with states and also with Safal to supply imported dal through retail outlets,” the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement.

Pulses prices were likely to show a declining trend in the coming days on supply of imported dal, it said.

The committee, which reviewed prices of onion, pulses and other essential commodities, discussed about medium and- long-term strategies to increase availability of these items and moderate prices.

The government had put in place a weekly monitoring mechanism to keep a close watch on availability of essential commodities and moderating of prices, it added.

Retail prices of pulses have risen unabated in the last few weeks due to fall in domestic output in 2014-15 crop year (July-June) in view of poor monsoon.

According to official data, tur dal prices are ruling highest in Chennai at Rs 145 a kg, at Rs 135/kg in Mumbai and Rs 132/kg in Delhi and Kolkata.

Similarly, urad is costing more in Chennai at Rs 125/kg, whereas in Mumbai it is available at Rs 121/kg and at Rs 112/kg in Delhi and at Rs 102/kg in Kolkata.

Highlighting other measures taken to check prices of pulses, the government said stock limits have been imposed on lentils and state governments have been asked to take strict action against hoarding, using existing provisions under the Essential Commodities Act.

Besides, future trading in pulses like urad and tur has already been suspended and its export has been banned.

There is tight supply of pulses in the country because of fall in domestic production to 17.38 million tonnes (MT) in 2014-15 crop year (July-June) from 19.25 MT in the previous crop year, due to poor monsoon.

India imports about four MT of pulses largely through private trade. But this time, the government has started importing pulses after a gap of two years.