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THE HINDU

Idea of start-ups close to my heart: Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday launched the Bharat Fund at the India-U.S. StartUp Konnect programme. It is aimed at providing seed funding to Indian entrepreneurs. Seven MoUs were also exchanged to boost startup-creation between India and the U.S.

As it happened (in IST):

4:50 am: Mr. Modi completes his speech.

4:50 am: The potential of youth and innovation can ignite partnership between India and US and give new content to our strategic partnership: Modi

4:45 am: A girl child in remote Indian village dreams of own projects when she sees start-ups of today: Modi

4:43 am: I am honoured to launch the Bharat Fund today – which stands not just for India, but also for Better Health, Agriculture, Renewables and Technology, says Modi.

4:41 am: We are giving highest importance to data security and cyber security: Modi

4:39 am: I want to see the idea of start-ups light up our economy and fortunes of Indians: Modi

4:37 am: I see start-ups not as a short term investment but a long term commitment: Modi

4:36 am: New ideas always displace old ones. Start-ups have always been the engines of progress: Modi

4:35 am: India's own system of start-ups is evolving rapidly: Modi

4:33 am: Today, the start-ups defy the natural rates of growth. An idea can become a global name within a year: Modi

4:32 am: Startups are as old as the world itself, says PM Modi.

4:31 am: When I shifted to Delhi last year, I thought of my government as a Start-up. So, I also saw some of the bumps you face on the road: Modi

4:30 am: Reid Hoffman, you and your product LinkedIn inspire many in India: Modi

4:29 am: The idea of start-ups is close to my heart: Modi

4:28 am: Mr. Modi begins his address.

4:27 am: Mr. Modi releases logo of Bharat Fund which will provide seed funding to Indian entrepreneurs.

4:21 am: Seven MoUs being exchanged to kick off boost in startup-creation in India-U.S. space

4:20 am: The key success of Silicon Valley is not start-ups but scale-ups, says LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman

4:15 am: What the PM is doing in terms of Digital India is great leadership: Reid Hoffman

4:13 am: Honour to be here today. Entrepreneurship is key to how new technology is developed: Reid Hoffman

4:08 am: The 'K' in Konnect signifies 1000s of startups to incubate, says B.V.R. Mohan Reddy of Nasscom.

4:04 am: Mr. Modi arrives at India-US StartUp Konnect.

Programme to popularise mat nursery technique

The Agriculture Department has taken a special programme to popularise the mat nursery technique for transplanting the 'samba' nurseries in smaller landholdings for the benefit of small farmers.

The mat nursery aims at mechanisation of transplanting of nurseries from the 15th day of its germination and it ensures uniform planting of nurseries without any loss. With the district accounting for a large number of smaller landholdings, the department had evolved the strategy, said R. Chandrasekaran, Joint Director of Agriculture.

It has been planned to cover 10,600 hectares under the subsidy-based programme and a maximum of 2,000 hectares has been fixed for the Lalgudi block and 1,000 hectares for the Pullambadi block. The department sanctioned a back-end subsidy of Rs. 3,000 a hectare to farmers. Mr. Chandrasekaran said the yield would go up through this technique. The department has been organising awareness campaigns in villages to sensitise the farmers to the advantages of this mechanisation.

Kharif crop sowing crosses 1,026 lakh hectares

The total area sown under kharif crops as on September 24, 2015, registered a marginal increase of 1.18 per cent at 1,026.23 lakh hectares against 1,014.24 lakh hectare in the same period in the previous year.

In lakh hectare

AREA UNDER KHARIF CROP

Crop	2015-16	2014-15
Rice	374.09	373.86
Pulses	113.45	101.83
Coarse cereals	183.16	178.44
Oilseeds	183.68	177.49
Sugarcane	48.84	48.74
Jute & Mesta	7.80	8.13
Cotton	115.20	125.75
Total	1,026.23	1,014.24

Areas under pulses, coarse cereals and oilseeds register a rise

Going through the latest figures furnished by the Ministry of Agriculture, total area under pulses accounted for a significant increase of 11.41 per cent. While areas sown under coarse cereals and oilseeds recorded a rise of 2.65 per cent and 3.49 per cent respectively, cotton saw a big fall of 8.39 per cent, followed by jute & mesta (4.06 per cent). There was a marginal increase in area under sugarcane at 0.21 per cent.

With sowing operations for kharif season nearly coming to an end, the area under rice, the main kharif crop, remained almost flat at 374.09 hectares against 373.86 lakh hectares. Pulses covered 113.45 lakh hectares against 101.83 lakh hectares.

Under this moong dal accounted for a significant rise of 20.49 per cent in acreage at 25.56 lakh hectares against 21.28 lakh hectares. The area under arhar rose by 4.06 per cent stood at 37.64 lakh hectares (36.17 lakh hectares) and urad by 9.52 per cent at 27.83 lakh hectares (25.41 lakh hectares).

Sugarcane covered marginal rise of 48.84 lakh hectares (48.74 lakh hectares). The area under cotton stood at 115.20 lakh hectares against 125.75 lakh hectares in the previous year. The details of the area covered so far and that covered during last year this time are given in the table.

Advance estimates

The recently released first advance estimates of production of major kharif crops for 2015-16 by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare revealed that total production of kharif foodgrains at 124.05 million tonnes a rise of 3.78 million tonnes over the previous year advance estimates of 120.27 million tonnes.

However, compared to the fourth advance estimates of 2014-15, which placed kharif production at 126.31 million tonnes, there is a decline of 2.26 million tonnes (1.8 per cent).

‘Govt. will intervene in ryots’ distress’

The government is procuring onion at remunerative prices and supplying the commodity to people at reasonable prices, Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao said on Monday.

Speaking after the auction of onion at the Kurnool market yard, the Minister said the government was supplying the commodity at Rs. 20 a kg in the State, at a time when the price was as high as Rs. 80 in other States. “Onion sales counters have been opened in all constituency headquarters, and 2 kg of onion was being sold to each white card holder,” he said.

The government will implement programmes for the welfare of onion farmers, he said. “Onion crop should be publicly auctioned, and middlemen must be avoided. Farmers should not feel discouraged, as the government will intervene to help them when they are in distress,” he added.

District Collector Ch. Vijayamohan said the government would purchase onion and deposit money in the accounts of farmers who participated in auctions along with traders. He warned of stern action if any irregularities were reported during auctions. Kurnool MLC S. Chakrapani Reddy, Market Committee Chairman Samanthakamani, DCCB Chairman Mallikarjuna Reddy and former Minister K.E. Prabhakar were present.

A VILLAGE WITH 1,000 BOREWELLS



Welcome to Kutalapalli village in Nallamada mandal, once famous for its quality raw silk. Once upon a time, this village amidst two hills had ample water for mulberry cultivation.

Cut to the situation today. Mulberry cultivation and raw silk production have become virtually non-existent. And the village has progressively gone from being water-sufficient to being completely dependent on rains and well irrigation. Then, all in living memory, the rains became scarcer and the wells dried up. The villagers then dug borewells. Hundreds of them.

What could be worse? Well, the situation became even worse with the borewell too drying up. Today, the village has less than three functioning borewells, none of them useful for drinking water.

During that progression from water sufficiency to complete water scarcity, villagers have dug over 1000 borewells in just 16 years. That translates to more than one borewell per male in the village.

The village has 1400 voters, 850 of them male.

Bodugundlapalli Venkat Reddy, a septuagenarian, has seen it all: the riches brought by silk worm rearing as well as today's borewell forest. He once had 25 borewells in the 12 acres of land that he used to own. He's left with four acres now. And six borewells. All dry. "It's as if the entire village has become poor by just drilling borewells," he says.

Adding to Mr Venkat Reddy's narrative, his relative, Mr Obi Reddy, in his forties, says he has drilled in six borewells in his young life. Last year, he says, during one stretch of one month, three huge rigs stayed put in the village to dig borewells. The villagers paid out one crore rupees to the contractors.

Mr. Obi Reddy remembers that frenetic month: "Three rigs came to our village. One from Kadiri (in Anantapur district), one from Tamil Nadu and another from Hyderabad. A deal was struck for one crore rupees. A total of 90 bores were drilled. Seventy of them turned out to be dry. The remaining dried out within six months. Not a single one is operational today."

It's no surprise then that there has been a decimation of agriculture in Kutalapalli. Mr. A. Rajasekhara Reddy, the owner of the lone fertiliser store 10 km away at Nallamanda mandal headquarters, says his business from Kutalapalli has come down over the years from around Rs 15 lakh to less than Rs 1.5 lakh today.

This has been the story of agriculture in Anantapur district over the last century, when farmers began to turn to commercial crops around 1905. Their crop of choice was groundnut. They initially rose to prominence, becoming the largest producers of groundnut in the country. But it's all been downhill since then. The rains have all but vanished here, and the last two decades have been a ceaseless, seamless drought, which has left every social economic system in the village crippled.

If there are no borewells yielding any water, where do they get any water from? As in 70 per cent of the villages in Anantapur district, water comes by tankers these days. Kuttalapalli gets three tankers each from the Duddukunta Foundation and the Rural Water Supply, serving the 3000 residents of the village.

Kuttalapalli falls in Puttaparthi Assembly constituency, represented by the current Information Technology Minister Palle Raghunatha Reddy, but it seems to make little difference.

100 farmers to be taken abroad on educational tours



Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Monday announced that 100 enterprising farmers would be taken on educational tours to other countries that have successfully implemented advanced agricultural techniques.

Making the announcement under Rule 110 in the Assembly, she said that 10,000 farmers would similarly be taken on tours to other States in the country to study the best agricultural practices adopted there.

To increase the income of farmers in areas dependent on rains, she announced a Rs. 48.50-crore scheme to introduce integrated farming practices. “Farmers will be given cattle and sheep which will increase income. Around 40 per cent of agricultural lands in the State are rain-fed,” Ms. Jayalalithaa said.

A sum of Rs. 8 crore has been set aside to encourage organic farming practices. Farmers would be provided vermincompost, organic seeds and insects for pest control among other things given at subsidised rates. Steps would be taken to certify organic farms too, Ms. Jayalalithaa said.

The government would continue to subsidise the purchase of agricultural implements, including chaff cutters, groundnut pod strippers, gender-friendly equipment, specialised self-propelled machinery, brush cutters, multi-crop threshers and mechanical de-weeders for Rs. 80 crore.

In the last four years, subsidy worth Rs. 245 crore had been provided for the procurement of 1.72 lakh farm implements.

Ms. Jayalalithaa also announced that home garden kits to grow vegetables would be made available to residents of Tiruchi and Madurai. The Agriculture Department would tie up with the respective Corporations for the supply of seeds, grow bags and other materials.

This follows the successful implementation of the scheme in Chennai and Coimbatore where residents are enthusiastically growing vegetables at home.

Be a successful seller, farmers told

Don the role of producer, trader and consumer: Collector

Synergise your efforts and have clarity to become successful seller, Collector N. Subbaiyan told farmers here on Monday.

Addressing a regional workshop on farmers' producers companies, organised by the NABARD, he said several vegetables and essential commodities were being procured at government hostels, anganwadis and noon meal centres. If farmer producers could ensure an assured supply chain, then their offer to supply fresh vegetables and essential commodities could be considered.

Dr. Subbaiyan exhorted the farmer producer company leaders to motivate their members to achieve greater gain instead of blaming middlemen for all their woes. Instead of cribbing, let the farmer producers understand their role, have role clarity in donning the cap of producer, trader and consumer and act diligently for registering reasonable profit.

Adopt scientific advancements and try to innovate to achieve best results, he counselled the farmer producers. The CEOs and Directors of FPOs from Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts participated in the meeting.

Joint Director of Agriculture Gnana Oli said the FPOs must make use of the local market for better returns for their produce. There was wide scope for value addition in coconut in the Pattukkottai region of Thanjavur district and his department would extend technical support for any such venture.

Food production: Govt. sets target for Salem district

A total of 1.6 lakh hectares have been brought under cultivation in the district so far during the current crop season compared to 91,165 hectares covered last year.

The State Government has set a target of 6.548 lakh tonnes of food production for the district during the current year.

As far as paddy is concerned, 'kar' and 'samba' crops have been raised in 585 hectares and 965 hectares respectively.

The paddy production registered so far is 7,440 tonnes.

Millets have been raised in 37,023 hectares.

Cholam has got the lion's share and it has been raised in 23,168 hectares followed by Makkacholam in 8,760 hectares, Raghi in 1,888 hectares, Kambu in 1,610 hectares and minor millets such as samai, thinai, varagu, kuthiravali in 1,597 hectares.

The district has achieved 1.40 lakh tonnes of millets production so far against a target of 4.40 lakh tonnes. Against a target of 91,300 hectares, pulses have been raised so far in 36,886 hectares.

With regard to oil seeds, about 21,600 hectares have been brought under cultivation – groundnut 18,834 hectares, ellu 2,068 hectares, sunflower 22 hectares and castor 583 hectares.

The district has already achieved 45,864 tonnes of oil seeds against a target of 67,680 tonnes, N. Elango, Joint Director of Agriculture, said while addressing the farmers' grievances day meeting held at the collectorate here recently.

Cotton and sugarcane are other major field crops in the district. While cotton has been raised in 4,371 hectares so far, sugarcane has been raised in 4,269 hectares.

Stress on value addition in coconut products

Lauding the initiative by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) here in promoting organic farming, P. Karunakaran, MP, stressed on the importance of value addition in coconut and highlighted the technologies developed by the institute.

Mr. Karunakaran was inaugurating the two-day farmers' meet and agricultural technology exhibition organised by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) attached to CPCRI in collaboration with Kinanur-Karindalam panchayat. CPCRI Director P. Chowdappa, addressing the function, attended by 200-odd farmers, said the institute had already initiated steps to promote organic cultivation through farmers participation.

‘Supply water from the Hemavati to parched districts’



Ravindranath Shanbhag, president of the Human Rights Protection Foundation (HRPF), said on Monday that supplying water from the Hemavati was the best alternative to the “ecologically disastrous” and “costly” Yettinahole project.

He was speaking at a seminar on ‘Critical analysis of the Yettinahole project’, organised by the HRPF, here. The project aims to provide drinking water to the six parched districts of South Karnataka.

Dr. Shanbhag said that the Hemavati was an important tributary of the Cauvery, which took its birth in the Western Ghats at an elevation of about 1,219 metres near Ballalarayana durga in Chikkamagaluru district. It flowed through Chikkamagaluru, Hassan and Mysuru district before joining the Cauvery. The river was approximately 245-km long. A large reservoir against the river had been built on the river at Gorur in Hassan district. The water from this river could be supplied to the parched districts at a much lesser cost and without much environmental damage.

But the big problem was that the Hemavati was polluted as effluents from industries and sewage from the local bodies en route were let into it. It was easier to clean the 245-km long Hemavati. The local bodies and the industries could be directed to install effluent treatment plants to make the Hemavati clean and its water could be supplied to the parched districts, Dr. Shanbhag said.

“As the government is lethargic about cleaning the polluted Hemavati, we [HRPF] have approached some farmers’ groups and college students in towns and villages along the route of the river and encouraged them to clean it. They have responded positively,” he said.

Dr. Shanbhag said that the government had avoided an environmental impact assessment for the project under the pretext that it was meant for supplying drinking water. But the water from it would be supplied not only to agriculture but also to industries. He alleged that most of the figures provided by the government had been taken from convenient sources to support the project. For instance, the rainfall figures were compiled from the information given by private plantation owners.

The water flow had been taken at its highest point in Bantwal. Huge dams proposed to be constructed for the project in dense jungles of the Western Ghats would lead to incalculable damage to the flora and fauna there, Dr. Shanbhag said.

The government had not conducted any study to check if the plates below could bear the weight of water in such huge dams. Even a minor earthquake in the area could lead to a catastrophe and submerge large areas, Dr. Shanbhag added.

Farmers told to adopt advanced techniques to enhance their earnings

Students of Agriculture College explaining the exhibits to the visitors at an exhibition at Mosale Hosahalli in Hassan taluk on Monday.— Photo: Prakash Hassan

Students of Agriculture College, affiliated to the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, on Monday, conducted an exhibition to make the farmers aware of advanced farm techniques at Mosale Hosahalli in Hassan taluk.

The exhibition had been organised to spread awareness on the benefits of integrated farming. Through the exhibition, students tried to convey a message to farmers that they could enhance their earnings by adopting modern techniques in their farmland, instead of resorting to committing suicide.

As many as 193 final-year students, who spent three months in rural area as part of the Rural Agriculture Work Experience Programme (RAWEP), took part in the exhibition.

They exhibited models on integrated methods of pest management, disease and nutrition management and integrated farming.

Hundreds of farmers visited the exhibition and took part in the interactive sessions with students.

The students and the teaching faculty informed farmers about advanced technology and on how to adopt them to enhance their revenue. Departments of Horticulture, Agriculture and Fisheries had also set up stalls to create awareness among farmers about facilities and schemes offered by their departments.

Patel Shivaram, MLC, who inaugurated the exhibition, called upon the farmers not to lose confidence but consult experts, whenever there was a need. “Farmers should consult Krishi Vigyan Kendra and keep updating the farm techniques so that they do not lose yields,” he said.

D.P. Kumar, Director of Education (UAS), in his address, said that farmers’ economic status could be improved by providing them access to advanced farm technologies. “Demand for food products has been increasing constantly in India with the increase in population. Unless the farming sector adopts new techniques, the demand cannot be met,” he said.

L. Manjunath, Dean of Agriculture College, and others participated.

Distinction for TU faculty

Praveen Mamidala, head, Department of Biotechnology in the Telangana University got international recognition for his research on the evolution and characteristics of soyabean seed.

On his research done along with scientists Bansal, Priyanka and Brian J. Kassone of Agriculture and Research Development Centre of Ohio State articles were published in the internationally famous science magazine-Public Library Open Source. The magazine has four impact factors being given acknowledging the research in science. Dr. Praveen said that the research was the first of its kind on the particular subject. He thanked the university Vice-Chancellor C. Parthasarathi and the Registrar Prof. R. Limbadri for their encouragement for his research.

Farming meets tourism studies



Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) that has carved a niche for itself as the leading institute in travel and tourism is now emerging a role model for organic farming. A 1.5 acre area of the compound that houses the KITTS has been turned into an organic farm, where 21 vegetables are cultivated.

The farm was launched with the support of Agricultural Department's Rs.75,000 grant under the Intensive Vegetable Cultivation Programme. KITTS has pumped in Rs.40,000 for clearing the ground, purchasing seeds, and as labour charge for the initial work, supporting infrastructure for the creepers and climbers.

K.V. Rajendran, gardener of KITTS, guided the staff and students to nurture the saplings and to keep the pests away.

“There is high demand for pesticide-free vegetables. We sell them on market rates,” he said.

Bhavana Mohandas, second-year MBA Tourism student from Wayanad, said they watered the plants twice a day.

For Khusboo Jethania, a second-year MBA Tourism student from Kota in Rajasthan, organic vegetable farming was a different experience. Long beans, spinach– green and red, brinjal, okra, bitter gourd, snake gourd, cucumber, salad cucumber, pumpkin, tomato, cluster beans, ivy gourd, long broad beans, white pumpkin, different varieties of chillies, curry leaves, drumstick, agathi, winged beans, clove bean and carrot are cultivated on this farm. Over 80 varieties of plantains have also been planted in the farm.

Delcare ‘agriculture emergency’: TRRS

Telangana Rytu Rakshana Samithi (TRRS) has demanded the government to declare ‘agriculture emergency’ and come to the rescue of farmers.

In a release here on Monday, TRRS president P. Srihari Rao said that the farmers’ suicides in Telangana should be considered as national calamity and waive off farm loans immediately in a single stake and extend loans to the tune of Rs. 50,000 per acre by convincing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Similarly, Agricultural Insurance Company of India (AICI) should pay a compensation of Rs.10,000 per acre for each farmer who lost his crop due to lack of rain, he said.

He also suggested linking of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) with farming so that each farmer can get benefitted to the tune of Rs. 7,000 per acre in the form of paying half the labour charges by farmer while remaining would be borne by the government.

The other suggestion that was made by the TRRS was that long-term loans should be extended to farmers by hypothecating the pattadar pass books so that they can repay the private loans and get relived from additional interest to private persons.

It has also demanded meeting of Agriculture Ministers from across the nation at Hyderabad to discuss farmers' suicides and other related issues.

600-crore aid for cotton growers



fter facing criticism for paying meagre compensation to cotton growers, Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Monday announced to disburse Rs 600 crore of compensation to farmers whose crop were damaged by Whitefly attack in the state. Mr Badal said that he was well aware about the agony faced by the farming community due to loss suffered by them on account of pest attack for which he had

asked the officers to disburse Rs 600 crore so that farmers could be bailed out during this hour of crisis.

A gigantic operation would be launched by the state government to distribute this relief amongst affected farmers, Mr Badal said during a political conference at Chapar Mela in Ludhiana on Monday.

“We are firmly behind the hard working and resilient farmers of the state to help them in this hour of crisis” added Mr Badal.

The Chief Minister said that it was on record that whenever farmers had faced any problem the SAD-BJP alliance government has come to their rescue.

Citing examples, he said that during the last eight years, the state government has provided free power to farmers worth Rs 28,000 crore otherwise their problems would have accentuated manifold on account of tube well bills.

Likewise, Mr Badal said when wheat crop was damaged due to untimely rains in April 2015, the state government ensured that every grain was lifted.

He said that the state government took every step to resolve the impending sugarcane crisis by ensuring the payment of arrears to the farmers from private and cooperative sugar mills.

Whitefly has caused extensive damage to crop in Punjab with 1.36 lakh hectares of area out of 4.50 lakh hectares was affected by the pest attack in the state.

Farmers have uprooted the 100 per cent damaged crop from 11,780 acres area in Muktsar, Fazilka, Bathinda, Mansa, Faridkot and Barnala districts of the state.

Earlier, the Punjab government had announced to give immediate compensation of Rs 10 crore to cotton growers whose crop was extensively damaged by whitefly attack.

Punjab Congress has even accused SAD-BJP led state government of being insensitive towards cotton growers' woes, saying affected farmers were being given compensation cheque of meagre amount of Rs 10 to 100.

Agitating farmers have been protesting in Bathinda for the last several days against the "insensitive" attitude of state government and they have been demanding compensation of Rs 40,000 per acre for cotton damage due to whitefly attack

Lashing out at the Congress party for the plight of farmer's across the country, the Chief Minister said the successive Congress governments at the Centre had broken the "backbone" of the peasantry.

Mr Badal said due to the regressive policies of these governments the farmers were reeling under a whopping debt of Rs 32,000 crore.

He said the Congress party was not only "anti- farmer" but it was totally "anti-poor and anti-Punjab" which has been proved time and again.

"They have done nothing tangible to help the farmers but have always shed crocodile tears over their issues" added Mr Badal.

He also said the Congress governments at the Centre had deliberately denied the state of Punjabi speaking areas, its capital Chandigarh and even its legitimate share in river waters.

He said within a year of the formation of the NDA government at Centre, the state has got key projects like AIIMS, IIM, Post Graduate Institute of Horticulture Research and HRIDAY status for holy city of Amritsar, which would ensure massive inflow of funds for development of the holy city.

Later on interacting with the media, the Chief Minister said that the SAD-BJP alliance was everlasting and firm. - PTI

Farmers' support sought for industrial projects in Masula

Deputy Speaker Mandali Buddha Prasad on Monday sought the cooperation of farmers for the deep sea port and industrial corridor proposed in Machilipatnam.

Speaking at the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana loan camp here, Mr. Buddha Prasad said the town should not miss the opportunity to become an urban pocket with flourishing industrial activity. "The government is committed to bringing back the glory of the town, which witnessed robust trade activity till the early 20th century. Everybody should contribute to its development," Mr. Buddha Prasad added.

"The proposed port and industrial corridor will bring remarkable change in economic activity, as the government is planning to develop it on the lines of Amravati," he said. Admitting that the industrial corridor and port projects will affect several lives, the Deputy Speaker said the government would explore alternative options to ensure better living conditions for them.

"Those who are likely to be affected by the proposed projects should realise that the government will support them to rebuild their lives," Mr. Buddha Prasad said. He also distributed cheques for loans to beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana scheme here.

"The Mudra scheme will give a boost to people below the poverty line. Financial assistance will be extended to those keen on setting up small business units," he said. Loans under the Mudra scheme ranges from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 50,000 based on the units proposed.

"Karuvclam trees removed from 1,700 acres of land"

After launching Bharat India Jido (BIJ) in Sivaganga district in April 2012, Reliance Foundation (RF) removed 'karuvclam' trees from more than 1,700 acres of land, its Regional Manager H.K. Mahanthesh said.

Talking to reporters here on Monday, he said that the RF-BIJ encouraged farmers to adopt water conservation measures and replenishing practices.

“It has built rainwater harvesting structures to potentially harvest 898 million litres of rainwater,” he said.

Team leader V. Dhanasekaran said that 51 irrigation tanks and 43 ooranis were desilted, 121 farm ponds created, and 19 open wells dug.

He said that 20 sluices were constructed in irrigation tanks that supported 5,675 acres of land.

As part of the rural transformation initiative, 24 villages in Karaikudi, Devakottai and Tiruvadanai taluks were identified and various interventions initiatives were launched since April 2012, they said.

The foundation arranged more than 100 training programmes for the benefit farmers, they added.

Govt to reach out to farmers through SMS

PUNE: The Fadnavis government plans to reach out to 50 lakh farmers in the state through 'Kisan Portal', which gives cell phone alerts about weather forecast, cropping activities and even possibility of outbreak of disease affecting crops and livestock.

So far, the cellphone numbers of 48 lakh farmers have been uploaded in the system and the remaining two lakh farmers will be attached soon. The portal has a provision to send at least three SMSs in Marathi to every farmer each week.

Maharashtra is among top three states in terms of number of farmers linked to the 'Kisan Portal'. Officials say the response from farmers has been positive and information shared through SMSs has helped farmers save crops during crisis, an agriculture department official said.

The official said, "We collect basic information of every farmer and send advisory based on it. Farmers in Vidarbha area cultivate cotton. So they receive SMSs pertaining to cotton sowing. Likewise, farmers in Konkan receive inputs on mango farming. We have collected information from every farmer about eight preferred crops which helps us understand their needs better."

Linking of farmers began last year, however, a major push came in the last eight months. "In March, when several parts of the state faced untimely rain, the portal sent alerts in advance which helped farmers keep produce like onions, grapes etc in sheds and prevent losses," the official said.

Some new features have been added to the facility. In addition to inputs on weather condition, cropping pattern and outbreak of diseases, the portal now also sends alerts on benefits of crop insurance policies and deadlines for renewal of insurance. There are a total 1.37 crore farmers in the state. The government would come out with the second phase for linking the remaining farmers later.

Meanwhile, sources said that farmers who do not have cell phones cannot be covered under the project. Though most farmers have a cell phone connection, those in interior parts of the state are still to adopt the new communication device.

Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had given the target to link 50 lakh farmers to the portal by end of current year.

Govt sets up centres to train farmers in new technologies

PANAJI: In a bid to impart scientific training to farmers, the state government has set up the state agricultural management and extension training institute and agricultural technology management agency. The two bodies were inaugurated on Monday at the agricultural department at Tonca Caranzalem in the presence of senior officials of the agriculture department.

The government has initiated various steps to encourage agriculture and take it to greater heights by introducing farmer-friendly techniques with a special emphasis on organic farming," minister for agriculture Ramesh Tawadkar said.

SAMETI-Goa is a state-level training institute established to impart training and has been set up under the centrally sponsored scheme for support to state extension programmes. SAMETI-Goa will function as the nodal state-level training institute in the area of agricultural management and will provide capacity building support.

Apart from this, consultancy services in areas of project planning, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation will be offered to farmers.

The agricultural technology management agency is a district level body established to disseminate agricultural technologies to the farmers.

Tawadkar pointed out that agriculture provides maximum returns by way of yield and advised officials of the directorate to reach out to farmers, by maintaining friendly relations and providing proper guidance. He also urged the officials to formulate schemes to meet farmers' requirement so as to increase agricultural production.

1,872 tonne of tur dal arrives in Tamil Nadu

CHENNAI: The first tranche of 888 million tonnes and 984 million tonnes of tur dal arrived at Chennai Port and Jawaharlal Port Turst, Mumbai September 23, 2015 and September 24, 2015, said a press release issued by Union ministry of food and consumer affairs on Monday.

The dal is being imported to bring down its price in the local market.

The imported dal will be allocated to states as per their requests. The remaining consignment of 5,000 million, already ordered for, will also be received soon at these two ports, said the ministry.

Bids for importing additional 5000 million tonnes of tur dal have also been floated by MMTTC. These would be opened on October 1, 2015. While consignment of 5,000 million tonnes of urad dal from Myanmar will reach at the Chennai and JNPT by October 20.

This was informed during the fourth meeting of the inter-ministerial committee on prices and availability of essential food items chaired by secretary consumer affairs, C Viswanath in New Delhi.

The meeting attended by senior officials of ministry of agriculture, commerce, food, Delhi government, MMTC and NAFED reviewed the prices and availability of pulses and onions.

Regarding onion, the committee noted that the arrival of advance crops to the market from Karnataka and Rajasthan has helped in moderating the prices. It was indicated that post kharif sowing of onions has been good and is expected to lead to improved supply.

MMTC informed that the first tranche of onion being imported to improve domestic availability is expected from China and Egypt on October 3 in Mumbai. The imported stock would be made available to states/ UTs as per their demands to help moderate the prices further.

DECCAN Chronicle

Jaya announces 'Amma mobiles' for Women Self Help Group members



Chennai: In an effort that could go a long way in alleviating the hardship of the self help group members the state government on Monday announced the “Amma Kaipesi” (mobile) scheme for the benefit of Women Self Help Group members. This scheme could win more hearts for the Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa.

Making a suo moto statement in the Assembly, Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa said under the scheme, free mobile phones with a special software would be provided to trainers of SHGs in the state. Amidst loud thumping of desks by the Treasury Benches she said in the first phase, mobile phones would be provided to 20,000 trainers at a cost of Rs 15 crore.

“The trainers have to maintain various registers regarding the functioning of the SHGs, including details about meetings, payment of subscription, internal credits, savings, payment of loans and other things,” she said.

The mobile phones would be loaded with a special software in Tamil to facilitate the storing of details and to monitor them easily. Panchayat Union level federations were formed to co-ordinate with SHGs.

Now 'Amma Mobiles' to strengthen brand Jayalalithaa



Chennai: After 'Amma Canteens', 'Amma Mineral Water' and 'Amma Pharmacies', now 'Amma Mobile Phones' will take forward brand Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu. The latest in the series of Amma brand schemes was announced by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister on Monday under which computerised mobile phones loaded with special Tamil software would be provided to 20,000 women's self-help group (SHG) trainers in the first phase at a cost of Rs 15 crore.

SHG trainers use their expertise to help set up self-help groups and train their members.

"I am very happy to announce that the government headed by me would give Amma mobile phones to 20,000 social SHG trainers in the first phase at a cost of Rs 15 crore," Jayalalithaa, who is fondly addressed as 'Amma' by her followers, told the state assembly in a suo motu statement, amid a thunderous applause by her AIADMK MLAs.

The Jayalalithaa government had in the past launched 'Amma Canteens' which offer low-cost food, 'Amma Mineral Water' which costs Rs 10 a bottle, and 'Amma Pharmacies' where medicines are sold at lower rates, among others.

The SHGs maintain several registers, including those related to meetings, payment of subscription, savings, in-group loans and repayment.

"In order to supervise their (SHG) work on uploading data in registers, a special software in Tamil language will be created and computerised mobile phones will be provided (to trainers) under the Amma Kaipesi Thittam," she said.

Jayalithaa said SHGs were created by her government in 1991 for the social and economic empowerment of women and eradication of poverty and they have now grown into a huge force.

"Today, 6.08 lakh Women Self Help Groups function with 92 lakh members," she said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Sugar output to slide 5% next season on poor rains, says industry body



A poor monsoon through July and August is set to cut India's sugar output in the upcoming sugar season (October-September) by 4.6 per cent to 27 million tonnes (mt), the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said here on Monday.

“...In the preliminary estimates released by ISMA in July, sugar production was estimated at 28 mt...considering further poor rainfall during Southwest monsoon in July and August in Maharashtra and Karnataka, ISMA has revised its estimated sugar production in 2015-16 to around 27 mt,” said an official statement.

Mills have produced 28.3 mt in the current season and another 50,000 tonnes could be produced over the next 15 days, it added.

Sugar stocks are likely to rise to 9.6 mt at the start of the season on October 1, from 7.5 million last year, said Abinash Verma, Director-General, ISMA. Domestic consumption is pegged at 25.1 mt.

Maharashtra worst hit

While overall acreage is estimated at 5.3 million hectares (mh) – just 0.4 per cent lower than the current season (October to September), the lack of rainfall is likely to hurt the yield per hectare of the crop in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

It is a trend that could continue in Maharashtra, India's largest sugar-producing State, which was facing a third drought in four years until late showers this month helped reverse a prolonged dry spell.

The Marathwada region, in particular, was worst hit this Kharif season and had between 45-50 days of little to no rainfall.

“The situation in Maharashtra is not good due to the water situation. Sugarcane cultivation is water-intensive. During a drought, crop growth is stunted and each stage is affected,” said AK Srivastava, Principal scientist in-charge of the Agro-Meteorology Unit, Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research, Lucknow. Sugarcane acreage in Maharashtra is pegged at 1.05 mh but ISMA has revised its 2015-16 sugar output to 9 mt from 9.7 mt in its July estimates. The figure is 14.3 per cent less than the output of 10.51 mt in the current season.

“When there's a drought at the tillering stage or at the initiation of the ratoon, the effects are devastating. The plant may not recover entirely. Farmers will have to look for alternatives if there's a similar situation next year,” Srivastava added.

The association expects sugar output to fall to 4.6 mt in Karnataka next season, down from 5 mt in 2014-15. Production in Uttar Pradesh, however, is expected to rise to 7.5 mt next season from 7.1 mt this year, due to favourable weather and better varieties being cultivated.

Overseas sales are likely to rise after March when global prices firm following inclement weather in various sugarcane growing countries, said a leading consultant at an event here on Monday.

Exports to pick up

“I’m optimistic that India will export into a rising market by March as bad weather in Central America, Thailand, the EU and parts of India will lead to a rise in prices,” Jonathan Kingsman, Founder, Platts’ Kingman, told reporters.

The Indian Sugar Exim Corporation is likely to contract 100,000 tonnes of sugar for exports in the coming season. Around 1.1 mt of the sweetener have been exported in 2014-15.

Illegal pesticides usage may lower food output by 10.6 million tonnes: study

The use of sub-standard and spurious pesticides could lead to a loss of 10.6 million tonnes (mt) of food produce this year in India, according to a study by industry chamber FICCI conducted in association with the Tata Strategic Management Group. Titled ‘Study on Sub-standard, Spurious/Counterfeit Pesticides in India’ and released here on Wednesday, the report estimates the proportion of counterfeit pesticides as high as 40 per cent by 2019.

“It is a problematic area with serious implications for farmers and Indian agriculture, society and economy at large. These products not only fail to take care of pests but also inflict damage on crops and the environment,” JS Sandhu, Deputy Director General, Indian Council of Agriculture Research, is quoted as saying.

The use of such pesticides is growing at about 20 per cent every year with Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana and West Bengal being the worst-affected States.

Illegal pesticides can lower yields by 4 per cent, the study says, and render soil degraded for cultivation of succeeding crops in the cultivation cycle.

Ground and surface water is also contaminated due to heavy metals and toxic chemicals present in such products.

“Only 25-30 per cent of farmers are aware of the use of pesticides and don’t exactly know what to spray in their fields...hence, most can’t make out the authenticity of the pesticides they are buying,” the study says.

It blames the dependence on commission agents (*adhtiyas*) who typically run seed and pesticide retail shops as a source of the problem since they extend credit to farmers who are forced to buy inputs exclusively from them. “Our study indicates that 50 to 60 per cent of farmers purchase pesticides on credit. Therefore, it is not in their interest to refuse the product which is offered by these agents /retailers who often refuse to provide credit on branded products,” it says.

Recommendations include farmers demanding a receipt and maintaining a record of the crop care materials used, while the village community could identify authorised retailers.

The report urged companies to improve outreach programmes through the radio, organise awareness camps, and also monitor of end-retailers for whom a database should be maintained.

The Indian crop protection industry is estimated to be worth Rs. 25,000 crore (about \$3.7 billion) including exports, of which between Rs. 2,780 crore and Rs. 3,475 crore is believed to comprise non-genuine pesticides.

First shipment of tur dal reaches Indian shores



The first tranche of tur (arhar) dal imports arrived at Chennai and JNPT ports last week, the Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry said on Monday.

The shipments of 888 tonnes and 984 tonnes arrived on September 23 and 24, respectively, and were being allocated to States, in accordance with their requests. The rest of the 5,000-tonne consignment will be received soon, said an official statement.

“Bids for importing additional 5,000 tonnes of tur have also been floated by MMTC. These would be opened on October 1...consignment of 5,000 tonnes of urad dal from Myanmar will reach at the Chennai and JNPT by October 20,” it said.

The MMTC also informed Ministry officials that the first shipment of onions being imported from China and Egypt would reach India on October 3.

Prices of pulses such as tur and urad and staples like onion have continued to rule high over the past few months on the back of supply shortages across the country.

Edible oil industry makes a pitch for GM oilseeds

The Solvent Extractors’ Association of India wants the government to allow at least trial run for growing genetically modified (GM) oilseeds in the country.

Addressing the Association’s 44th annual general body meeting, Pravin Lunkad, President of SEA, said India took the bold decision to introduce new varieties of wheat to bring a green revolution and then successfully adopted Bt cotton.

Today, the need of the hour is GM crops in oilseeds, given the fact that India meets 75 per cent of its vegetable oil requirement through imports, he said.

Allaying concern on GM crop’s impact on human health, Atul Chaturvedi, Vice-President, SEA, said Amul and other milk producers are using cotton oilseed cake produced from GM crop as cattle feed and there has been no problem so far.

Allow oilseed import

With certain safeguards to protect domestic farmers, the government should lower import duty on oilseed to 5-10 per cent from 30 per cent to make seed imports viable for mills, said Lunkad.

In the last few years, oilseed production has remained stagnant at 26-28 million tonnes (mt) leading to huge shortage of raw material for domestic oil mills which are operating at 30 per cent capacity utilisation.

Terming the application of Biological Diversity Act 2002 as a sword hanging over the industry's head, he said the State Boards formed under the Act have issued notices to many oil mills seeking 2 per cent of sales turnover as 'benefit sharing charges' applicable under the regulation.

Imports seen up

"The Government should clarify that oilseeds, oilcakes, oilmeals and oils are exempted from the Act. Otherwise, the oilcake producers operating at 30 per cent capacity will be deep trouble," he said.

India will end up importing 14 mt vegetable oil worth ₹65,000 crore in the oil year ending this month.

In terms of quantity, imports will be 19 per cent higher compared to last year. The import bill would have been much higher if not for the 20 per cent fall in prices, he said.

Oil palm plantation

Of late, the governments of Goa and Maharashtra have been promoting palm plantation and invited industry to set up processing plants, he said.

Palm plantation would be hugely beneficial for the country as it can help produce 4 tonnes of oil per hectare, which is about 10 times more than other oilseeds.

Raise import duty

Renewing his appeal to increase import duty on crude oil to 25 per cent from 7.5 per cent and on refined oil to 45 per cent from 15 per cent, Lunkad said a duty difference of 20 per cent is required between crude and refined oils so that the domestic industry can survive.

However, he said, the Government in its own wisdom raised import duty on both crude and refined oils by 5 per cent last month, he said.

Vegetable oil imports to rise 19% this season: Industry body



The country's vegetable oil imports will rise 19 per cent to 14 million tonnes this marketing year ending October 30, an industry body said on Monday, after weak monsoon rains late last year hit output of rapeseed and other oilseeds.

Pravin S. Lunkad, president of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India, also said the government should lower the import duty on oilseeds to 5-10 per cent from 30 per cent currently so that under-utilised crushing plants in India can revive their business. Indian oilseed crushers have been forced to use a fraction of their capacity as the domestic market stays awash with cheap rival palm oil from top producers in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Business Standard

Imported pulses' 1st tranche reaches; onions expected this week



The first tranche of 1,792 tonnes of tur dal arrived last week, the first [import](#) of [pulses](#) in about last four years, which will help boost domestic supplies and check rising retail prices.

While, the first consignment of urad dal will reach by October 20 and [onions](#) by October 3.

Now, imported tur dal is being allocated to states as per their requests. The remaining 5,000 tonnes of tur, already ordered for import, is expected to reach by October 1.

"The first tranche of 888 tonnes and 984 tonnes of tur dal has arrived at Chennai Port and JNPT, Mumbai on 23rd September, 2015 and 24th September, 2015 respectively," the Food Ministry said in a statement.

This was informed at a meeting of the Inter Ministerial Committee on Prices and Availability of Essential Food Items Chaired by Consumer Affairs Secretary C Viswanath here today.

Regarding onions, the MMTC officials, who were also present at the meeting, informed that first tranche of onions imported from China and Egypt is expected to reach on October 3, 2015 at JNPT, Mumbai.

The imported stock would be made available to states/ UTs as per their demands to help moderate the prices.

The Committee also noted that the arrival of advance crops to the market from Karnataka and Rajasthan has helped in moderating the prices.

It was also indicated that post Kharif, sowing of onions has been good and is expected to improve supply.

Prices of both pulses and onions have risen unabated in the last few weeks due to fall in domestic production. Barring chana dal, prices of all other pulses have gone up to Rs 150 per kg in most retail markets.

Similarly, retail prices of onion are continuing to rule high at Rs 70/kg in Delhi and the same trend prevails in other parts of the country.

Indian investors must turn to Africa's agricultural sector

It looks like [Indian investors](#) would have to take a closer look at Africa's agriculture because of the potential the sector presents.

Proof that the continent has very high potential has come from the Alliance for Green Revolution in [Africa](#) (AGRA) which says in a recent report: "The value of Africa's agriculture output is about \$280 billion, yet it has the potential to reach \$800 billion by 2030."

"It could address a major problem in Africa by providing economic opportunities for the 200 million people between 14 and 24 years old that make Africa home of the youngest populations in the world," the report adds.

The [international](#) accounting firm, Pricewaterhouse Coppers (PwC), has also said Africa "represents the 'last frontier' in global food and agricultural markets. The continent houses almost 60 per cent of the world's uncultivated land and an abundance of natural resources." It however said that due to the large percentage of uncultivated, fertile land and the presence of water, sub-Saharan Africa is specifically attractive.

In addition, the lack of [finance](#) to invest in the sector has also been a problem. It is therefore no wonder that Africa's largest economy, Nigeria, is turning to China to develop its commercial agriculture. The country's permanent secretary in the ministry of agriculture, Sonny Echono, said the Chinese agricultural development model suited Nigeria's Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), adding that Nigeria was working to improve its milling capacity in rice and cassava.

It is against this background that Indian investors would need to turn their attention to an area that promises high returns. Accounting firm [KPMG](#) has said the Indian government was determined to achieve a target of \$70 billion in trade with Africa last year.

One way by which this can be achieved is through India's investments in agriculture and, perhaps, telecommunications that may have more of a direct economic impact on the lives of ordinary Africans, 70 per cent of whom are engaged in some form of agriculture, and at least 30 per cent of whom have access to a mobile phone.

"Unfortunately most governments on the continent are under severe fiscal pressure, with inefficient revenue collection practices, large public wage bills and severe infrastructure deficiencies. As such, the necessary funds needed to kick-start the agricultural sector may not always be available on time," KPMG added.

Thus, as [PwC](#) suggested, to take Africa's agriculture to the next level, there was the need for "public-private partnerships throughout the value chain as a whole," adding that the role of governments in supporting the private sector to grow their businesses should not be underestimated. They have pointed out that successful agricultural system requires reliable access to financing, as well as high-quality seeds, fertiliser and water.

Cotton procurement may plummet to 30-40 lakh bales next season: CCI

With the likelihood of another bumper crop in the coming season that could weaken prices yet again, Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has begun preparing for another year of minimum support price (MSP) operations. This time, however, the agency feels that the quantum of cotton under MSP could go down to 30-40 lakh bales, top officials of CCI said. In the 2014-15 season, CCI had purchased 87 lakh bales.

“The prices of cotton seeds are much better than last year. Moreover, the carryover stock with CCI from 2014-15 is to the tune of 19 lakh bales. These will have to be liquidated before we go in for MSP operations. CCI, however, has begun preparing for MSP purchase this year as well in the 11 cotton growing states and has set into motion the tendering process as well which should be completed by the month end,” BK Mishra, CMD, CCI told FE.

As in the previous year, CCI will set up 300 purchase centres this year as well. Mishra felt that market intervention by CCI may not be required to a great extent since market prices may not fall beyond the support price. Cotton prices are currently in the region of Rs 32,000 to Rs 34,000 per candy.

Last year, China had played a major role in determining the MSP operations in the country when it decided to stop cotton imports. This led to a huge stock of cotton in India that led to weakening of prices, which in turn resulted in the need for market intervention. Indian cotton production touched 400 lakh bales in the 2014-15 season.

CCI had begun procurement operation at the support price from October 2014 to protect farmers from sharp decline in domestic prices in view of expected higher production, though it didn't have to do large-scale procurement to support prices.

This time, CCI has urged the government to appoint more agencies for cotton procurement so that it could ease pressure on the corporation. In Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State Cotton Growers Federation was the sub-agency of CCI last year.

This time, CCI wants similar agencies in states such as Telangana and Andhra Pradesh as well. CCI has written to the Ministry of Agriculture to appoint Nafed as well as other agencies in different states. Last year, CCI had procured Rs 16,000-crore worth cotton from farmers incurring losses to the tune of Rs 2,700 crore. Cotton seed prices are currently in the range of Rs 2000 per quintal and should the prices go below Rs 1500-1600 per quintal, MSP may be required, Mishra said.

The acreage under cotton is likely to be 5-8% less than last year and the output is likely to touch 350-380 lakh bales.

The first estimates given out by the Ministry of Agriculture say that cotton output is likely to touch 335 lakh bales this season.