

18.04.15

THE HINDU

Haryana plans insurance corporation for farmers



With farmers facing heavy losses on account of crop damaged by freak weather conditions, the Haryana government on Friday announced bringing all growers under insurance scheme by setting up an insurance corporation.

This is aimed at ensuring proper compensation for their crop loss due to adverse weather conditions.

“We have plans to set up an Insurance Corporation on Public Private Partnership mode so as to bring all farmers under this fold whereby affected growers could get compensation for their crop loss,” Haryana Agriculture Minister O. P. Dhankar said here on Friday while addressing ‘Meet-the-Press’ programme.

Mr. Dhankar said that the State government was in the process of identifying suitable insurance companies for entering into a tie-up to undertake crop insurance activity in the State.

“We are studying various crop insurance policies in order to provide maximum relief to farmers for the loss suffered due to inclement weather conditions,” he said.

To a query, Mr. Dhankar said that farmers, who had taken insurance cover against existing weather-based crop insurance schemes operated by other companies were not

getting adequate compensation for crop loss. He further said that farmers were also not “much impressed” with insurance coverage provided by such companies.

Cooperative award for society

The Udupi-based Badagabettu Credit Cooperative Society Limited has bagged the National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC) Award for Co-operative Excellence for the second time.

Addressing presspersons here on Friday, Jayakar Shetty Indrali, General Manager of the Society, said that these biennial awards were instituted in 2002. The awards carried a citation and a cash prize of Rs. 50,000. The society received the award for the year 2014 in the category of best-performing credit cooperative society. It had earlier bagged this award in 2008.

Union Minister for Agriculture Radhamohan Singh would present the award at a function organised by the NCDC in New Delhi on April 29, he said.

Farmers’ plea to appoint only farmers in ATMA committee

Appoint only farmers as members of the Agriculture Technology Management Committee (ATMA), an advisory forum for implementing various schemes in the district, urged farmers in unison at the monthly farmers’ grievance day meeting held at the Collectorate here on Friday.

Speaking at the meeting, farmer Pulavar Chellappa alleged that non-farmers and people who do not know anything about agriculture were appointed as members of ATMA committee. As many as 27 committee members (three each from nine panchayat unions) were appointed as per the recommendations of the Assistant Directors of the concerned panchayat unions.

Presiding over the meeting, Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan asked the farmers to give a list of non-farmer members, so that he could take corrective measures.

Another farmer raised a query of whether the government had fixed procurement price for honey, as bee-keeping is one of the major sources of livelihood in the district. The farmer was informed that his request was referred to the Khadi Commission in Thiruvananthapuram.

P. Neelakanda Pillai of Vadaseri alleged that farm lands were being converted into concrete jungles near Putheri flyover by a politician with the connivance of revenue officials. A. Udhayakumar, District Revenue Officer, who was present at the meeting, said he would inspect the spot and take necessary action.

A farmer hailing from Dharmapuram complained about red soil from a local pond being looted by a few persons after blocking the water channel affecting irrigation.

Joint Director of Department of Agriculture Ponkaatha Perumal, Executive Engineer of WRO of PWD Balasubramanian and Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture) Nizamuddin participated in the meeting.

Debit cards for coconut farmers

The State Bank of Travancore has entered into an agreement with the Coconut Development Board (CDB) to offer 'Kalpakashree' debit cards to farmers who are members of coconut producers' societies affiliated to the board.

The card will be launched at a function at Flora Airport Hotel, Nedumbassery, on April 18 at 3.30 p.m. Jeevan Das Narayan, Managing Director, SBT, and T.K. Jose, Chairman, CDB, will jointly launch the card. Sixty-five coconut farmers have been selected from five Coconut Producer Federations in Ernakulam for receiving the card.

Around seven lakh farmers registered under the Farmer Producer Organisations can avail themselves of the benefits of the card. 'Kalpakashree' debit card can be used for cash withdrawal from ATMs as well as Point of Sale or e-commerce transactions. The card holders would be eligible for need-based agriculture loans, the press release said.

'ATMA scheme not properly implemented'



Farmers participating in the monthly agriculturists' grievances redressal day meeting at the Collectorate here on Friday complained that the ATMA (Agriculture Technology Management Agency) scheme is not being implemented properly in Vellore district for the last two years.

A farmer of Kaniyambadi block said that ATMA, under which various training workshops on modern agricultural practices and water management methods, was conducted for farmers. It was functioning well from 2007 to 2012.

But no training programme was held since 2013. Another farmer who was the director of the ATMA committee in Pernambut said that the committees in the district consisted mainly of politicians, and hardly any farmers in some. He urged the Collector to intervene and revive the ATMA scheme in Vellore district.

R. Jayasundar, Joint Director of Agriculture said that even at the meeting on Friday, aids under ATMA were distributed to beneficiaries. To this, a farmer said that the selection of beneficiaries was not proper.

The Joint Director said that steps would be taken to rectify the mistakes.

Borewells

C.K. Dhanapal, president of the Vellore District Farmers Association, said that the rules stipulating payment of Rs.5000 to the village panchayat by those desirous of sinking borewells would seriously affect the poor.

He said that owners of abandoned borewells could be prosecuted. But innocent farmers should not be asked to pay such a heavy amount, he said.

Another farmer said that the rule which required a farmer wanting to sink a new borewell to obtain permission from the village panchayat president may act against him if the president happened to belong to a different political party than that of the applicant.

R. Nanthagopal, Collector of Vellore district said that the rules were framed by the government at the state level in order to prevent accidents such as the one that occurred in Koorambadi.

The government has allotted Rs.20 crore for drought relief in Vellore district, of which Rs. 5 crore has been allocated to Vellore Corporation.

G. S. Purushothaman, president, Organic Farming Organization (OFO), Vellore said that the seeds of the Indigo crop, which is a manure crop, and other manure crop seeds should be sufficiently stocked in the agricultural depots and distributed on a subsidy to the farmers under the National Agricultural Development Programme.

He wanted the district administration to arrange for training to the farmers and women's self-help groups on organic farming and production of vermin-compost.

The Collector agreed to arrange for the training at the Exnora-OFO training centre in Fort Round Road, Vellore.

ICRISAT meeting



Chief Secretary to Government of Telangana, Rajiv Sharma, will visit Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, from April 21 to 24 to attend the meeting of Governing Board of International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). According to officials, Director General of ICRISAT has invited Rajiv Sharma to the Governing Board meeting and other committees in his capacity as a member of both the Governing Board and some of the Committees.

Annual credit plan launched

Forest Minister Jogu Ramanna has launched a Rs. 4,440.56 crore annual credit plan for 2015-16. The plan envisages a substantial increase in crop loaning from last year's Rs. 2,228 crore to Rs. 2,553 crore. Another major component is the increase in financial assistance for farm mechanisation.

Enriching an ecosystem



The declaration of wetlands in Suchindrum and Theroor and Manakudi estuary in Kanyakumari district as conservation reserve will not only offer protection to their biodiversity but also exploit the tourism potential

The southern most wintering ground of the migratory birds in the country comprising a host of wetlands in Suchindrum, Theroor and Manakudi estuary in Kanyakumari district has been declared as a conservation reserve for the purpose of protecting landscapes, flora and fauna and their habitat.

After consulting the local communities, primarily panchayats in Agastheeswaram taluk in Kanyakumari district, the State Forest Department has notified the wetlands, the habitat of over 90 species of birds and a variety of fish.

The southern tip of the peninsula where the Western Ghats terminates is a spectacular geography of undulating highlands and lowland plains studded with small and large tropical wetlands and an estuary system, all interconnected within a 50-km radius.

Originally, the Forest Department was looking to declare it as a sanctuary, but has now declared it as a conservation reserve as there are people all around the wetlands. The objective is to involve the community in improving ecology and the biodiversity, say forest officials. A profitable offshoot could be tourism potential, they add.

Management plan

While Forest officials at the headquarters in Chennai say that the Kanyakumari Collector has been asked to prepare a management plan for the reserve, ornithologist Robert B Grubh, a former principal scientist of Bombay Natural History Society, has already submitted a plan to the Kanyakumari District Forest Officer (DFO).

Like other eco-systems that are turning fragile by the minute, this conservation reserve has its own set of unique challenges. “The encroachments keep happening on the upper side of the wetlands during dry seasons. During rainy season, this area is topped with soil. The main pond in Suchindrum is heavily encroached,” says Mr. Grubh.

When Rajendra Ratnoo was the Collector, he held a meeting with the farmers associations, which demanded that the wetlands be declared a sanctuary like in Kunthakulam in neighbouring Tirunelveli district, but no headway was made, say officials.

Another trouble in the wetland is lotus cultivation. “While there is a ban on lotus cultivation by courts, the locals are into its cultivation big time,” says the ornithologist.

As the locals are operating with the knowledge of PWD officials, the entire ponds are covered with lotuses. Consequently, the birds and the fish are deprived of their space in the eco-system, he says. To add to the woes, crackers are being used to chase away the birds.

The declaration of the wetlands as conservation reserve and bringing it under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) will give forest officials an opportunity to protect this unique ecosystem.

Solid waste management planned in 74 village panchayats from May 1

To enable safe disposal of solid waste in villages, solid waste management (SWM) will be implemented in 74 village panchayats in the district from May 1.

Now waste generated in many villages is dumped in open places leading to environmental degradation.

Hence the government has decided to implement SWM in 12,524 village panchayats in the State and 2,000 village panchayats have been selected for implementation in first phase that has a population of more than 10,000 people.

Priority

Also, priority was given for peri-urban panchayats, villages with tourist, pilgrim or industrial centres and also villages near national highways.

The process includes door-to-door collection of garbage, segregating the waste into biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste.

The biodegradable waste would be dumped in pits and after it gets converted as manure it would be sold. The non-biodegradable waste would be dumped in sanitary landfill while the plastic materials would be sold. A worker, 'Thuimai Kavalargal,' would be selected for every 150 households apart from purchasing of tricycle for every 300 households. Officials said that Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) workers are likely to be selected and they would be carrying out the work for 300 days a year at a wage of Rs. 183 a day.

All the gadgets, machines, identity card, uniform, and safety equipments would be provided to them.

Training for village panchayat presidents, members of village poverty reduction committee and self help group would be held on April 18 to explain about the project.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

114-year-old agri farm to get a museum

If everything goes according to the plan, the 114-year-old agricultural farm at Karimbam near Thaliparamba here will have a museum showcasing the history of the institution as well as our agrarian tradition.

"The farm has a vintage building built by the then British rulers in 1905, which is being used as a guest house where many dignitaries like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi stayed," said district collector P Balakiran. The collector had visited the place recently along with district panchayat president K A Sarala.

"While the guest house, which is being renovated, is a monument worth visiting. There are many other related documents with the farm authorities as well as other departments which could be showcased here once a museum is set up. If we collect everything and set up a museum, which also showcases the agriculture implements, it could be worthy museum documenting our agrarian tradition," said the collector

The plan is to have the museum attached to the vintage guest house building and the action plan would be formulated soon, he said.

"The rest house had hosted many dignitaries in the past, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi when Nehru was the prime minister. The visitor's book with their signature is still preserved there," said farm superintendent P K Ismail.

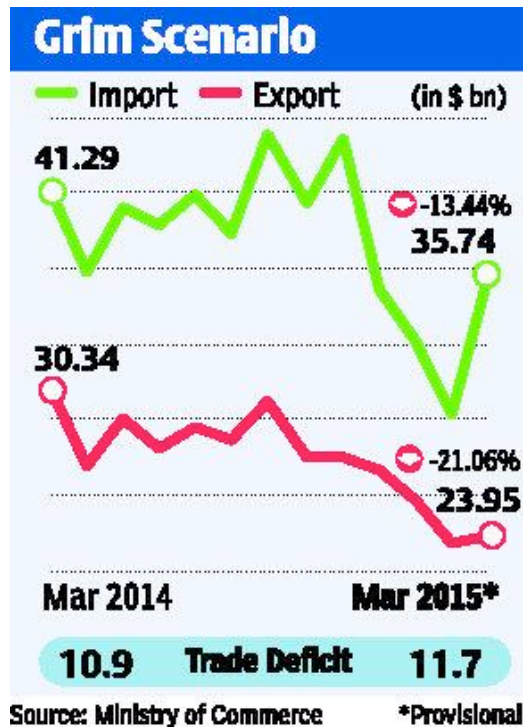
"Now, we have renovated it spending Rs 25 lakh and it will soon be opened to the public soon."

The collector said steps would be taken to preserve the genetic collection of 60-odd mango varieties, and a project would be formulated to expand polyhouse farming in the district.

The farm has a new agri-biotechnology division, which aims to produce organic farming inputs and tissue culture planting materials. This is the first agri-biotechnology initiative planned and developed by a local self-government in the state, said Sarala. She added that the farm's activities would be expanded further to improve the agriculture scenario in the district.

Exports fall 21% in March, miss annual target

Trade deficit widens to \$11.7 b despite a 13.4% decline in imports



Goods exports fell 21.06 per cent in March — the steepest drop in the past fiscal year — to \$23.95 billion, as demand from key markets such as the European Union, China and Japan remained low, painting a grim picture for the future.

The trade deficit, an area of primary concern for the Centre, widened to \$11.79 billion, despite imports falling 13.44 per cent to \$35.74 billion.

Import of gold, however, almost doubled to \$4.98 billion during the month as the restrictions imposed last year were withdrawn.

The export decline was seen across sectors, such as gems & jewellery, petroleum products, handicrafts, engineering goods, electronics and agricultural produce, according to data released by the Commerce Ministry on Friday.

Overall exports in 2014-15 declined 1.23 per cent to \$310.5 billion compared with \$314.41 billion in the previous fiscal year, a direct result of the decline in outbound shipments for four consecutive months (since December 2014).

‘Stand by exporters’

Exporters want the government to come up with supportive measures.

“Such a steep fall in March is quite serious and is a pointer to the problems in global markets, which are in the middle of a slowdown. Our cost of manufacturing coupled with transaction costs must come down and the Government needs to stand by exporters,” said Anupam Shah of the Engineering Export Promotion Council of India.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations wants the government to implement the interest subvention scheme at the earliest. “High cost of credit also played a role in the fall in exports,” said SC Ralhan, President of the exporters’ association.

The poor export performance over the past few months has resulted in the country missing the target of \$325 billion the second time in a row.

Oil price impact

Imports during the year fell 0.59 per cent to \$447.54 billion, mainly due to a drop in the oil bill as global oil prices contracted. The trade deficit widened to \$137.01 billion in 2014-15, compared with \$135.79 billion last year.

Oil imports in March, at \$7.41 billion, were 52.68 per cent lower year on year. During the April 2014-March 2015 period, they were valued at \$138.26 billion, 16.09 per cent lower than a year earlier.

Pre-monsoon showers improve prospects for next coffee crop



The timely arrival of pre-monsoon showers in the coffee growing regions has brought cheers to the planters even as lakhs of growers across the country have been affected by unseasonal showers.

Rainfall over the past few weeks in the country's key coffee-growing regions of Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Hassan in Karnataka has brightened the prospects for the next crop starting October.

“Blossom showers and subsequent backing showers were like made to order this year. The rain has given us hope of a good crop this year,” said Bose Mandanna, a large coffee grower at Suntikoppa near Madikeri in Kodagu.

Robusta prospects

The pre-monsoon rain is crucial for coffee as it helps flower buds to blossom.

Similarly, backing showers that come after a gap of 18 days following blossom showers help in the fruit development and retention.

“Pre-monsoon showers have been very good and most part of the coffee areas has received rains. Crop prospects, especially that of Robusta, looks good as of now but all depends on the monsoon rainfall,” said Y Raghuramulu, Director, Central Coffee Research Institute, Balehonnur.

The Coffee Board is expected to come out with the first estimate or the post-blossom estimates some time in May.

Borer scare

However, the only challenge that Arabica growers are facing is the white stem borer (WSB) menace.

“The WSB flare-up is very bad this year too. Even plants that were planted two years ago have been killed by the borers,” Mandanna said.

WSB is reported to be responsible for an estimated loss of about half a million plants each year, resulting in crop loss of about 1,500 tonnes per annum. The flight period of the borer beetles has started now and the situation is better than last year, Raghuramulu said.

The WSB has two flight periods in April-May and October-December, during which the beetles emerge from the affected stems and infest other plants. The CCRI has developed a package to control WSB, which growers said was too labourious.

The CCRI is trying to popularise the concept of killing the borer beetles in the affected plants before their emergence to prevent the spread of infestation.

“We are in talks with various growers association to create awareness,” Raghuramulu said, adding that largescale trials for the WSB control package were likely to be taken up during the October-December period.

Balance sheet

For the current 2014-15 season, the Coffee Board, in its post monsoon estimates, has pegged the crop size at 3.31 lakh tonnes, some 8.7 per cent higher than last year's final estimate of 3.04 lakh tonnes.

Arabica output is pegged at 99,600 tonnes, while Robusta is pegged at 2.31 lakh tonnes.

Coonoor tea auctions Q1 turnover down 8%

The turnover at the Coonoor Tea Trade Association (CTTA) dropped 8.04 per cent in the first quarter of this year compared with the same period of last year.

This is because despite lowering the prices by Rs. 5 a kg, there were no takers for nearly five lakh kg to equate the volume sold to last year's levels.

In all, 13 auctions had been conducted from January to March-end. On many weeks, nearly a quarter of the offer had remained unsold and to liquidate such unsold volume, producers lowered their price to an average of Rs. 77.90 a kg from Rs. 81.50 in the first quarter of 2014.

Despite this, the demand was slack for both exports and domestic market. Many times, even upcountry buyers limited their interest to brighter liquoring tea. Collectively, the volume sold was only 1.27 crore kg against 1.32 crore kg last year.

Consequently, the overall turnover dropped to Rs. 98.93 crore from Rs. 107.58 crore. This reduction of Rs.8.65 crore marked a decline of 8.04 per cent.

If this trend continues the trade fears a shortfall of around Rs. 35 crore over last year. However, last year itself was a dismal one with earnings eroding by a whopping Rs. 113 crore. “The current year is heading for a still lower turnover causing concern to all stakeholders”, CTTA Chairman Ramesh Bhojarajan told *BusinessLine* .

bl18 com turmeric

QUALITY LENDS COLOUR TO TURMERIC

Spot turmeric prices increased in Erode markets due to the arrival of quality produce. “Most of the traders have received good number of demand from North India and so they are quoting a higher price for the quality turmeric. Prices increased by Rs. 200 a quintal. Of the 11,500 bags that arrived, 65 per cent quality turmeric arrived for sale and all was sold,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. Salem

Turmeric: The finger variety fetched Rs. 7,514-9,591; the root variety Rs.7,399-8,691. Of the arrival of 2,490 bags, 1,210 were traded.

Orthodox tea prices dip at Kochi sale



Despite increased arrivals, the trend at the Kochi tea auctions was irregular and prices ruled lower especially for high-priced teas.

Though the market opened on a steady note, the drop was less for medium and plainer varieties. In sale no 16, the quantity on offer in CTC dust grades was 10,32,500 kg, with 88 per cent getting sold.

However, the demand was less for Orthodox grades and the quantity on offer was 18,500 kg, showing an upward trend. The market for primary dust was dearer, while others were irregular and lower, witnessing lot of withdrawals.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good grades fetched Rs. 100-145, mediums ruled Rs. 76-115 and plain varieties stood at Rs. 63-75.

In the leaf category, the quantity on offer in Orthodox grades was 99,000 kg. With a fair demand, the market for Nilgiri Broken was lower by Rs. 5-10. Corresponding whole leaf declined by longer margins by Rs. 10-20.

In CTC leaf, the market for good liquoring teas remained steady and the quantity on offer was 84,000 kg, registering a growth compared to last week.

In the dust category, Waterfall (Prm) SFD quoted the best prices of Rs. 146 a kg. In leaf grades, Chamraj FOP (SuP) Green Tea fetched the best prices of Rs. 325.

Wheat buying down 33% at 26.63 lakh tonnes

Delayed harvest, quality issues slacken the procurement process



Government agencies led by the Food Corporation of India and State entities have procured some 26.63 lakh tonnes of wheat till date from major producing States in the current marketing season.

This is a third lower than the 39.74 lakh tonnes (lt) procured in corresponding period a year ago, according to FCI officials.

The sluggish pace in procurement is on account of delayed harvest caused by an extended winter and unseasonal rains coupled with hailstorms across key producing States starting from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh to Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, causing damage to the standing crop.

So far, wheat procurement is highest in Madhya Pradesh at 19.69 lt – down 18 per cent over last year's 24.14 lt.

Similarly, in Haryana the procurement stood at 5.96 lt – down 55 per cent.

In Punjab, the agencies have procured only 8,113 tonnes against 1.12 lt.

In Rajasthan, procurement in the current season stood at 24,500 tonnes against 1.10 lt in the year-ago period.

In Gujarat, procurement stood at 15,440 tonnes, officials said.

Unseasonal rains have impacted the quality of the produce. As a result, the Centre has relaxed wheat procurement norms on the basis of requests received from States.

Quality suffers

“The main issue relates to the loss of lustre and higher moisture content,” officials said. According to procurement norms, wheat grains should have lustre.

However, grains with lustre loss of up to 50 per cent are allowed in Rajasthan, while the relaxed norm for Madhya Pradesh is 40 per cent.

Officials said the procurement of wheat with moisture content of up to 14 per cent, the maximum permissible limit for human consumption under the regulations of Food Safety and Standards Act 2006, is being allowed.

However, wheat arriving in the *mandis* has higher moisture of up to 16 per cent. Some States are seeking a relaxation in moisture content too, sources said.

However, it could not be ascertained as to how much wheat has been procured under the relaxed standards. “It is too early to segregate and quantify,” sources said.

Wheat stocks

The Centre plans to procure about 30 million tonnes (mt) wheat in the current marketing season.

The government, in its second advance estimates, had pegged the wheat output for 2014-15 season at 95.76 mt, almost same as that of last year. However, the output is expected to shrink on crop damages due to recent rains.

Wheat stocks in the Central pool stood at 17.22 mt as on April 1, more than twice the buffer and strategic norm for the period of 7.4 mt.

Early global models’ outlook indicates indifferent monsoon

A sneak peek into what international weather models deduce from evolving weather and extrapolate to the monsoon suggests largely indifferent rain for crucial geographies.

A survey of four leading models in the US, Europe (two) and Asia revealed that west and northwest India may likely be faced with below normal rain during the June-September season.

Early forecast

These are earliest available forecasts and are based on weather parameters as they measure up in April.

These can change on a weekly to monthly basis during the run-up to the onset of monsoon in June.

Conditions in the equatorial and east Pacific suggests a building El Nino in which waters of the west (and closer to India) cool down. This suppresses evaporation and cloud-building.

Instead, the equatorial and east Pacific warm up. Resultant stormy weather and excess rainfall are driven away from Asia and towards the South American coast.

El Nino has no direct cause-impact relationship with the Indian monsoon but has at times coincided with deficit monsoon as in year 2009.

Global models are assessing that there is a 70 per cent of an El Nino occurring this year with the equatorial and east Pacific starting to warm up from June.

El Niño shadow

It is forecast to progressively become stronger and entrenched during the next couple of months.

Available forecasts also tend to rhyme with this outlook with rains weakening in July-August. *BusinessLine* surveyed the April-based outlook from the European Centre for Medium Weather Forecasts (ECMWF); the UK Met Office (UKMO); International Research Centre for Climate and Society at Columbia University (IRI); and the APEC Climate Centre (APCC) at Busan, South Korea.

The forecasts for specific periods by these agencies are as follows:

May-June-July

ECMWF - Below normal for Gujarat, northwest India and east India.

IRI - No major deviation for whole country.

UKMO - 40- to 60 per cent chances for below-normal for northwest, central and east-central India.

APCC – (April-May-June) Excess rain for south peninsular and northernmost India.

June-July-August:

ECMWF - Largely below normal for west, north-west India and coastal Tamil Nadu.

IRI - Below normal in parts of Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir.

UKMO - 40- to 60 per cent chances for below-normal for most parts of country going up to 60- to 80 per cent in some regions.

APCC – (July-August-September) Below normal in west and northwest India.

July-August-September:

ECMWF: Below normal in west and northwest and more parts of Tamil Nadu.

IRI - Below normal in peninsular India, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.

UKMO - Below normal in almost entire country except east-central, east and north-east India.