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# THE HINDU

## **3,600 tonnes of rice arrives in Pudukottai**

A total of 3,600 tonnes of rice, meant for the public distribution system in Pudukottai district, arrived here from Andhra Pradesh on Monday. The supply was sourced by the FCI, official sources said.

With this, the stock position of rice has reached a comfortable level in the district, the source said. The rice was immediately despatched to the godowns at Aranthangi, Alangudi, Tirumayam, Keeranur, Gandarvakottai, Manalmelkudi, and Avudaiyarkovil.

Sources said the construction of a few godowns under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund of the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development in the coastal areas had facilitated the immediate despatch of rice to the godowns

## **Will protect farmers' interests: Pranab**

President Pranab Mukherjee's address to the joint sitting of Parliament on Monday, which marked the beginning of the Budget session, appealed to all MPs to "discharge their solemn responsibility in a spirit of cooperation and mutual accommodation." He underscored the government's commitment to protect farmers' interests in the controversial Land Acquisition Act and spoke about the significance of the Insurance Ordinance.

Indeed, even as the President said the government had "suitably refined" the Land Act to minimise certain procedural difficulties in acquisitions for critical public projects, he stressed that it attached paramount importance to safeguarding the interest of farmers and families affected by such acquisitions.

The Insurance Ordinance, the President said, would “enhance capital availability and ensure better access to insurance services.” The theme running through the President’s hour-long speech was “inclusive growth,” including the progress of the most- vulnerable sections.

### **Poor turnout at final day of Agrovision**

The 3-day ‘Agrovision South Summit-2015’ organised by Karnataka Small Scale Industries Association (KASSIA) in association with MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications (MM Activ) concluded here on Monday. The turnout was lower than expected.

However, the organisers claimed that over one lakh people attended the event.

Nearly 100 exhibitors participated and 18 workshops were addressed by 28 eminent speakers. The key topics that were covered in the workshops included water conservation technologies and rain-fed agriculture, new technology in sugarcane production and processing, food safety issues , nutria-cereals for human health, cultivation and exploitation, fruit and vegetable processing, fisheries, dairy etc. It also focused on agro, food processing and related sectors across south India. Ravi Boratkar, Jt. Managing Director, MM Activ, said, “We brought exhibitors and ensured that the equipment, technology and workshop topics match with the needs of the local population. The modern technologies that are currently showcased here are meant to attract the people back to farming and food processing.” KASSIA President Chidananda M. Rajamane said the KASSAI decided to bring together the agricultural sector and the MSME sector with a specific focus on food processing and claimed that the event benefited the region tremendously.

### **Tribal foray into biotechnology**

Inspired by their success in the production of biocontrol agents and bio-fertilizers, members of the Sabari, a tribal women self-help group (SHG) of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) under Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) at Ambalavayal in the district, are planning to repeat the success

story in the production of the liquid form of pseudomonas culture, which is easier to use.

The university is producing the liquid form of pseudomonas, a biocontrol agent used against crop diseases and as a growth promoter for plants, for the first time on a commercial scale, Reshmy Vijayaraghavan, Assistant Professor, plant pathology, KVK, who is supervising the project, says.

#### Technical guidance

The 10 members of the Sabari in the Nellarachal tribal colony were guided towards the biotechnology venture by A. Radhamma Pillai, former head of the KVK during a field visit in 2004. Later, the KVK trained them for six months in fungal and bacterial culture and packing.

The group produced 10.24 tonnes of trichoderma, a biocontrol agent to fight quick wilt disease afflicting pepper vines, and 9.1 tonnes of pseudomonas fluorescence last year. Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the university, the group will get 35 percentage of the income.

The cost of 250 ml of liquid pseudomonas is Rs.120, and 5 ml of it is mixed in one litre of water and used as soil drench and foliar spray. More details of these products can be had from 04936-260411.

#### **ICRISAT's Bhoochetana helps Karnataka make rapid strides**



It has been a great success in neighbouring Karnataka though little has been done to adopt the innovation in the State of its origin.

The Bhoochetana Programme to rejuvenate soil health, developed by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) here, has entered its third phase in Karnataka, where farmers have reaped huge gains from its adoption.

### **What it does**

The procedure focuses on rain-fed areas – 70 per cent of Karnataka’s cultivable land relies on rainfall for agriculture. Rainwater is held in farm ponds that have plastic sheets laid on their bed, so that the water would not seep into the ground. It is then pumped to farms through the drip irrigation system so that not even a drop is wasted, and the crop gets the required quantity of water at the right time for a better yield.

### **State support**

Disclosing these details along with ICRISAT Director-General David Bergvinson on Monday, Karnataka Agriculture Minister Krishna Byregowda said the State spent 80 per cent of the cost of each unit of Rs.1.2 lakh, and remainder was to be borne by the farmer.

“We are involving as many as eight international organisations in implementing and improving the programme so that the yield will be increased. Under Bhoochetana Plus programme, farmers are getting a return of Rs.15 per every Rs.3 invested,” said Mr. Byregowda, adding that the success of the programme had caught worldwide attention.

The Karnataka Minister said they were on the cusp of the third phase of programme, which involved molecular-based farming that would be climate-change resistant.

Towards this end, the State would sign an agreement with ICRISAT and Bengaluru-based National Centre for Biological Sciences producing non-GM genomic breed. A consortium would be formed for this purpose which would be funded by the Government of Karnataka.

Dr. Bergvinson said ICRISAT intended to have more partnerships of the kind they have with Karnataka. Director of Agriculture B.K. Dharmarajan, ICRISAT Development Centre Director S.P. Wani and others were present.

### **Sell cotton soon after harvest, farmers told**

The Agro Marketing Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI&BPC) has advised farmers to sell cotton upon harvest as its price is expected to hover in the range of Rs.4,100 - 4,300 a quintal during March – April.

The price of masi pattam (summer) cotton crop would be Rs.4,300 - 4,500 a quintal during July-August, the AMI & BPC said in a price advisory. Currently, long staple cotton is ruling around Rs.4,450 – 4,700 a quintal.

The advisory, to help farmers take selling and sowing decisions, was issued based on an analysis of the cotton prices that had prevailed over the past 10 years at the Konganapuram Cooperative Marketing Society and a traders survey conducted by the back office of the AMI & BPC at the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies (CARDS), Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

Cotton price has taken a hit owing to global factors such as decline in cotton yarn exports and lesser demand.

Until last year, China bought 60 per cent of India's cotton but has reduced imports to support its farmers. Also, demand from mills has come down drastically due to reduced exports coupled with financial crunch. All these factors led to fall in cotton prices.

World cotton consumption is expected to grow by 2 per cent in 2015 - 16 due to a moderate improvement in global economic growth as forecast by the International Monetary Fund. However, price of polyester has fallen eroding the price of cotton.

In 2014-15, India's cotton area and production stood at 13 million hectares and 34.62 million bales.

The Cotton Association of India (CAI) has estimated that low prices and lower demand may discourage farmers leading to reduced cotton cultivation in 2015-16 by 15-20 per cent.

The major sowing season in Tamil Nadu is January-February and August-September, the AMI & BPC said in a press release.

### **Biodiversity of Western Ghats on show**



From medicinal plants to bamboo and reed products, specimen collections of animals, fishes, insects and birds, different varieties of honey, cut flowers, banana and endemic varieties of paddy and tubers — the biodiversity expo organised at the Kanakakunnu Palace grounds here as part of the second National Biodiversity Congress provides a glimpse of the rich diversity of flora and fauna in the Western Ghats.

The expo features an array of eco-friendly products based on the biological resources of the region. As many as 100 institutions in the public and private sector have put up stalls to display their exhibits and products. While the stall of the Kerala Forest Research Institute features a



collection of different types of bamboo, rattan and seeds, the Worldwide Fund for Nature-India has an outlet displaying desk calendars, coffee mugs, caps, T-shirts, notebooks and key chains carrying colourful pictures of wildlife.

The stall of the Western Ghats regional centre of the Zoological Survey of India features a rich collection of preserved specimens of snakes, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, wasps, bees, crickets and grasshoppers as well as models of threatened species such as the pangolin, toddy cat, star tortoises and various types of amphibians. One of the attractions at the stall is a preserved specimen of the coconut crab found in the Andamans which climbs palms to pluck and devour coconuts.

A collection of baskets, kitchen equipment and other reed products is the main attraction at the stall put up by the Responsible Tourism Initiative of the Department of Tourism. The Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation has exhibited a range of products, including diaries, notebooks, informative CDs and steel bottles, all embossed with colourful images of the State's official bird.

Different types of solid waste management techniques, crops, organic manure and other agricultural products used by farmer groups are also among the exhibits. The expo is open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. till Friday. Admission is free.

### **Not a make-or-break budget**



Both India's executive decision making and policy thought are on a roll. Dynamic, steady incremental steps have been chosen as the way forward by the leadership. This makes sense when growth is on an upward move, and, no matter what, it's not going to take off into orbit just because we wish it. Therefore, a solid platform that opens doors to long-term sustained economic and social progress is imperative. Yet, all kinds of views are surfacing, branding the imminent Budget as a make or break occasion. In differing with this analysis, I echo Shakespeare — "striving to better, oft we mar what's well."

Can we, for a moment, view the Budget as analogous to a corporate annual report? Both occur because they are required once a year, to take stock of the financial situation and lay out perspectives for short and long terms. Rarely does one find this report covering all policies, tactics or actions required to run a company, or giving a solitary decisive signal to markets; in other words, this annual event is not a make or break occasion.

### **Strategy for Finance Minister**

The key signal from this government to global business and investor space is a capability for financial discipline and prudence.

The last Budget followed a fiscal deficit target of 4.1 per cent of GDP — a clear challenge — and an aspiration to bring this lower. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley seems to be indicating comfort with a long-term target sub -3 per cent. Such a road map is one obvious anchor for the Budget, even with some dilution in the short term. An astute balance between pushing for a public investment-driven growth, while domestic and global market growth remain an issue, and ensuring that subsidies are relevant, effective and delivered efficiently — more bang for less bucks — can be a cornerstone of his strategy.

Expansion of revenue base, particularly through well-organised implementation of GST is another. The Finance Minister may have to loosen purse strings to attend issues created by inverted duty structures and other levies or costs which make India uncompetitive. Intentions to simplify the direct tax regime and administration require concrete



translation to avoid ad-nauseam discussion for another year or more. Meaningful expansion of taxpayers without burdening existing ones is a tightrope walk requiring political will. The war on unaccounted monies must intensify, but one will have to be judicious in not creating a new set of problems by turning the clock back to revisit dismantled draconian concepts. If just writing tough laws ensures ethical behaviour, we would never have had problems under the FERA regime, for example, when much distortion actually took place.

The question persists if our expectations are running ahead of realities. Growth beyond the anticipated 6-7 per cent is needed to fill underutilised capacities and this could take time. The future levels of 7-8 per cent need deep structural reforms which will not happen overnight. Corporates face poor top-line growth so far; analysts see many top companies as overleveraged. Small and medium businesses are in tight spots. Indian manufacturing is not in the pink of health and a recovery time frame is not certain. Zeal for fresh investment is inhibited.

### **Measured expectations**

In the circumstances, the Budget can surpass reasonable expectations if it achieves a blend of strengthening consumer sentiment; creating a sound expenditure management and fiscal road map; addressing supply side inflation; proper channelling and timely implementation of public spending; ensuring that life is not further complicated for taxpayers and seriously address industry competitiveness. While it is correct and appropriate for us to retain high confidence in the aggregate, we also owe it to hold measured expectations from a single event.

## Local brinjals can be genetically engineered to tackle pests



Is it possible to genetically modify an insect that attacks a plant and use it to tackle other insects of the same species? No, says a senior agricultural scientist, in the Indian setting as the number of (problem causing) species is huge and may not be affordable to farmers. However, plants could be genetically engineered to take on problem-creating insects.

Addressing the symposium on Genetic engineering of agricultural crops and livestock here on Monday, P Ananda Kumar of National Research Centre on Plant Biotechnology, has said that genetically engineered crops could significantly reduce the number of pesticide sprays, particularly in vegetable crops.

Talking on pest resistant vegetable and pulse crops at the conference, he said, though there was not much export opportunity for (GM) eggplant, the technology could address the nagging problems the farmers faced. Answering a query on protecting the diversity of brinjal, he admitted that it was quite a diversified vegetable variety. He, however, said that it was possible to bring in technology intervention in the local varieties.

The conference was organised by the Association for the Promotion of DNA Fingerprinting and other Technologies, National Academy of Agricultural Research Management and University of Hyderabad.