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THE HINDU

State to allot 100 acres to Chinese firms

The Karnataka government has ‘in principle’ agreed to allot 100 acres of KIADB land in the Vasanthnarasapura Industrial Area, near Tumakuru, to set up a Chinese industrial park.

A press release said a high-power delegation from Yunnan Province in China met K. Ratna Prabha, Additional Chief Secretary – Commerce and Industries, regarding the proposed investment.

The Chinese delegation comprised the president of China Development Bank in Yunnan Province and other senior bureaucrats and bankers.

The Chinese companies will invest in sectors such as tele-health, manufacturing of medical equipment and accessories, solar power generation, among others.

Commenting on the visit, Liu Le, Director of Sunpa Group of Companies from China, and also an anchor investor, said his company would make an investment of around \$1 billion in the proposed Industrial Park. Mr. Le also mentioned about the potential for investments from Yunnan to Karnataka in sectors like fertilizer, agriculture, floriculture and food processing.

The visit of delegation is a follow-up to the visit of the Governor of Yunnan Province in May 2014.

Need for food fortification highlighted

The significance of food fortification to combat malnutrition was stressed at a workshop organised by consumer activists here on Tuesday.

Speakers highlighted the need for food fortification to fight micronutrient deficiencies and also prevent lifestyle diseases. The workshop was organised by Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) along with Delhi-based Consumer Voice and CII (Food and Agriculture Centre of Excellence).

Fortification of staple food, including wheat flour, edible oil, and milk, was an easy strategy to increase vitamins and minerals and reduce

deficiencies. Salt was the most recognised fortification initiative of the government, the speakers said.

Participants included students, representatives of consumer groups, and academics. Such workshops were the need of the hour to create awareness of food fortification, said S. Saroja of CAG. Speakers also appealed to the consumers to carry forward the message to prevent malnutrition.

“Kuruvai package, boon to farmers”

Ministers hail Chief Minister for her benevolent approach



Mannargudi S. Renganathan, general secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association, Ministers R. Kamaraj, R. Vaithilingam and EdappadiK. Palanisamy at a meeting in Tiruvarur on Monday.— Photo: R.M. Rajarathinam

The State Government has always stood up to fight and secure the rights of Tamil Nadu farmers, Agriculture and Housing Minister R. Vaithilingam said here on Monday.

Addressing a meet organised by various farmers organisations in the delta region to thank the government for extending kuruvai package worth Rs. 41 crore, he said it was during her regime that Mettur Dam was opened ahead of June 12 for kuruvai cultivation. In the Stanley Reservoir’s 80 year history, the dam shutters were opened beyond that date on 55 occasions while the appointed date was kept only on 12 years.

Observing that the shutters and sluices could be lifted for delta kuruvai cultivation if the water level touched 90 feet at the dam, Mr. Vaithilingam lamented that former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, and DMDK leader

Vijaykanth failed to grasp that fact and were criticising the government as if it was negligence and a wanton act. Delta farmers would not be misled by their smear campaign, he claimed.

Highways and Forests Minister Edappadi R. Palanisamy slammed the previous DMK regime for not taking adequate steps to get the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal published in the gazette and it was left to Ms. Jayalalithaa to fight legal battles to achieve that feat.

Mr. Karunanidhi's efforts pale when compared to that of Ms. Jayalalithaa's in protecting farmers rights be it on Cauvery or Mullaperiyar.

Drought might have stalked the State but poverty never set foot here under the AIADMK regime, Food Minister R. Kamaraj said adding that every scheme of the Chief Minister was tailor-made to meet the demands of farmers. The kuruvai package being rolled out for the delta ryots for the fourth time and the samba package granted in 2012 stood out.

Cauvery Delta Farmers Protection Association general secretary Mannargudi S. Ranganathan, who presided, thanked the Chief Minister for the timely gesture to release approximately Rs. 41 crore as kuruvai package when delta ryots were keeping their fingers crossed on dealing with the paddy cultivation.

It was a pleasant surprise and timely gesture to the delta farmers much like the manner in which a mother feeds her infant knowing what it required and when, he remarked.

Tamilaga Vivasayigal Sangam district secretary Krishnamani welcomed the gathering while general secretary of the Cauvery Delta Farmers' Forum Sathyarayanan proposed a vote of thanks.

Good response to horticulture schemes

The special camps conducted by the State Horticulture Department for collecting the applications for the subsidy provided under the different horticulture schemes evoked good response. The special subsidy application melas were held in all the 20 blocks in the district from July 1 to 5.

To promote the horticulture cultivation and bring more area under the horticulture crops, the Centre and the State Government is implementing the schemes such as National Horticulture Mission, National Mission on

Micro Irrigation, Rainfed area development programme under National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, pandal cultivation of vegetables programme under National Agri Development scheme etc.

The government has provided reservation for the farmers of Adidraavidar and ST communities.

As many as 900 applications were received for subsidy under the National Horticulture Mission, 300 applications were received for the National Mission on Micro Irrigation. The National Mission on Medicinal Plants is under implementation in only half a dozen blocks: Thalaivasal, Gangavalli, Attur, Bethanayakkanpalayam, Konganapuram and Edappadi. Even in these six blocks, more than 250 applications were received.

The farmers who wanted to join the scheme can approach the horticulture offices and submit applications, S. Kannan, Deputy Director of Horticulture, said.

ICRISAT and Telangana join hands to launch agri-phablet

The International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Government of Telangana have joined hands to empower the farming community in the State with information in farming and related activities by launching “Green-Phablet” service as part of its Digital Agriculture programme.

The device, a SIM-enabled electronic gadget, would be linked to an exclusive server maintained by ICRISAT to keep farmers connected to the service, and update them about crops best-suited for their lands, application of fertilizer when needed and market prices of agriculture produce in the nearby agriculture market committee yard and other markets in and outside the State.

It would provide farm-holding-wise information based on soil quality report.

The agri-phablet service was launched by Director-General of ICRISAT David Bergvinson, Minister for IT K.T. Rama Rao, and Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, here on Tuesday as part of the ongoing Digital Telangana week.

Initially, 10 agri-phablets were handed over to the Agriculture Department for their use on experimental basis by field-level officers – Agriculture Extension Officers or Mandal Agriculture Officers.

A tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by Mr. Bergvinson, IT Secretary Jayesh Ranjan and Agriculture Secretary C. Parathasarathi to bring ICT (information and communication technology) closer to the farming community in the State towards making agriculture a remunerative economic activity. “Expert advise, particularly on crops on which ICRISAT carries out research such as chickpea (bengalgram), pigeon pea (redgram) peanut (groundnut), pearl millet (bajra), sorghum (jowar) and six other minor millets will be highly beneficial to the farming community to improve productivity,” a senior officer of the Agriculture Department stated later.

The Minister for IT requested ICRISAT Director-General to bring down the cost of agri-phablet from about \$300 now by half so that the device could be made available at around Rs.10,000 (about \$150). He suggested utilisation of services of the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) located here to make digital agriculture a pathway to prosperity of the farming community to overcome the shortage of field staff in the agriculture department. “The partnership between ICRISAT and Telangana Government will help launch innovative digital platforms to revitalise information dissemination to farming community in rural areas,” the ICRISAT Director-General said.

Deficient rainfall hits paddy cultivation in Udupi district

Farmers are hoping that the monsoon will pick up in the coming weeks



Farmers can grow short-duration paddy varieties and make up for loss of time in the coming weeks, says the Agriculture Department.

Below-normal rainfall in June and in the first week of July has affected cultivation of paddy, the chief crop, in Udupi district even as farmers keep hoping that the monsoon will pick up in the coming weeks.

According to the figures provided by the Department of Agriculture here, the area where sowing of paddy has taken place in the district is just 17,390 hectares against a target of 45,000 hectares (ha).

The 17,390 ha in the district is spread over 5,440 ha in Udupi taluk, 8,050 ha in Kundapur taluk and 3,900 ha in Karkala taluk. Normally, by this period, sowing should have been completed in 24,000 ha in the district.

B. Satish, Technical Officer in the Department of Agriculture, said that there had been a shift in rainfall pattern since 2010. “Hence, farmers, who were earlier doing sowing/planting of paddy in the first and second weeks of June, are now doing it in the third and fourth weeks,” he said.

Rainfall is deficient by 26.35 per cent in the district since January. This year, the district received 1,117 mm of rainfall from January 1 to July 4, whereas, normally, it should have received 1,517 mm rainfall during the period.

But the dip in rainfall in the first week of July has been quite sharp. Normally, the district gets 371 mm of rainfall from July 1 to 7. But this year, it has got just 93.6 mm, while last year, the rainfall received was 126.7 mm.

According to Bantakal Ramakrishna Sharma, president of the Zilla Krishik Sangha, the deficient rainfall made it difficult for farmers to take up sowing operations for paddy, especially in the uplands of the district. “Rainwater should remain stagnant in the fields as this helps in paddy cultivation. So far, it is only farmers in the lowlands who have taken up sowing operations,” he said.

“Rainfall was deficient in June; it has been lesser still in the first week of July. We are praying that there will be rain in the weeks to follow,” he added.

“Farmers can grow short-duration paddy varieties and make up for the loss of time in the coming weeks,” said Anthony Maria Immanuel, Joint Director of Agriculture.

B.V. Poojary, a farmer from Perdoor village, said that the deficient rainfall in the district would not affect farmers much. “Most of the

farmers follow a mixed crop pattern. They grow arecanut, coconut, black pepper and other crops and are not dependent on paddy alone,” he said.

Seminar held on crisis in farming sector

The absence of a comprehensive agricultural policy and measures to prevent suicides of farmers were the major reasons for the prevailing crisis in the farming sector, Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) leader G.C. Bayya Reddy has said.

He was addressing a seminar on ‘Crisis in agriculture and farmers suicides’ at Gandhi Bhavan here on Tuesday. The Janapara Kriya Vedike had organised the programme.

Mr. Reddy has suggested that the governments to provide at least 10 acres of land to each family of the farmers to alleviate their problems.

Pro-farmer measures such as providing seeds, fertilizers, electricity, crop loans and irrigation facilities would uplift the distressed farming community, he opined.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader M. Krishnamurthy underlined the need of promoting scientific farming.

Both the Union and State governments have failed to provide scientific prices for farm produce, he said.

Harnahalli hobli to get Farmer Producer Organisation

Through it, farmers can form groups and register as a company



The department has selected 10 farmers from Harnahalli as local resource persons.— File Photo

A Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO), which will function on the lines of a corporate company, would soon come up in Harnahalli hobli limits in the district.

An FPO is an initiative of Ministry of Agriculture to help the farmers develop a professional attitude towards agriculture. Agricultural and horticultural farmers can form groups and register it as a company under the Indian Companies Act. The FPO company can extend technical and financial assistance to its member farmers and explore the market for their produces.

The FPO can be established at taluk, cluster or at gram panchayat level. The company will be floated by collecting share amount from the member farmers and the government will provide an equal amount of money as matching grant for the FPO. The FPO in Harnahalli will have 1,000 members and an amount of Rs. 1,000 will be collected from each member as share capital.

M. Vishwanath, Deputy Director of Department of Horticulture, told *The Hindu* that, vegetables including chilli, ladies finger, tomato, and gourds were cultivated by the farmers in Harnahalli hobli. The FPO would help the farmers to market these produces. After assessing the demand for agriculture produces grown by its member farmers, the FPO would help them reach out to the buyers.

The department has requested University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, to extend the necessary technical assistance to the FPO that would come up in Harnahalli. Experts from UAHS, Shivamogga, had already interacted with the farmers towards this end, he said.

The department has selected 10 farmers from Harnahalli as local resource persons (LRPs) to disseminate information to the farmers on modern agriculture practices and market linkages. At present, the department is providing training for the LRPs.

The vegetables cultivated in Harnahalli hobli enjoys good demand in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts. A survey is being conducted to explore new markets for the vegetables, he said.

Many FPOs are functioning successfully in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The members can appoint a CEO and supporting staff to run the FPO professionally. The ground work for floating the FPO in Harnahalli is nearing completion and it would be registered as a company soon.

Farmers seek committee to monitor desilting of Srivaikuntam dam

Appeal to authorities to expedite the work

Farmers belonging to the Tamirabharani River Water Protection Federation have sought the intervention of the district administration to set up a joint committee to monitor the desilting work under way in Srivaikuntam dam.

C. Nainar Kulasekaran, founder of the federation, said here on Tuesday that it was a victory for the farmers who had struggled for the last 25 years pressing the government to undertake the desilting work.

He said the committee should comprise farmers, officials and public to monitor the desilting work and assure transparency in the sale of silt.

By desilting the dam to a depth of eight feet and a distance of five kilometres, huge quantum of silt could be quarried and it would fetch a revenue of about Rs. 100 crore to the government.

He also appealed to the authorities to expedite the desilting work so as to ensure adequate storage of water during monsoon. A. Viyanarasu, president, Tamirabarani Paasana Urimai Paadhukaappu Peravai, said the authorities involved in the desilting work dam should display a detailed report of the project on a notice board at the work site to ensure transparency.

Collector M. Ravikumar said a government order was yet to be issued on the methods to be followed for distribution of clay soil and sale of sand.

The desilting by Public Works Department that commenced on June 30 was being carried out for 5.1 kilometre, in the upstream. In this stretch, a distance of 0.9 km was under the control of the Department of Forests and 4.20 km belonged to the PWD.

The deposits of silt, water hyacinth, mud and clay soil would be removed from the dam to ensure adequate storage of water.

Sheep corporation to develop hybrid lambs to help farmers



Karnataka State Sheep and Wool Development Corporation chairman Panditrao Chidri addressing at the convention of sheep farmers at Sri Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar Kala Mandir in Mandya on Tuesday.

Panditrao Chidri, Chairman of the Karnataka State Sheep and Wool Development Corporation, said that the corporation would draw up plans to promote sheep and goat rearing on a massive scale to provide economic security to farmers in Karnataka, particularly those below the poverty line.

He was speaking at the convention of sheep farmers at Sri Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar Kala Mandir here on Tuesday.

Sheep/goat rearing plays an important role in the development of rural economy as an alternative source of income to farmers. The corporation has decided to develop and provide cross-breed lambs of popular Bandur and NARI-Suvarna to farmers throughout the State, he said.

Mr. Chidri stated that the corporation would develop the sheep breeding and training centre at Dhanagur near Malavalli in the district.

Deputy Commissioner M.N. Ajay Nagabhusan inaugurated the convention and suggested the farmers to vaccinate their animals without fail.

Mandya City Municipal Council (CMC) member M. Mahesh, officials of various departments and sheep farmers from different parts of the district were present.

Seminar on crisis in the farming sector held



Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) leader G.C. Bayya Reddy addressing at a seminar on ‘Crisis in Agriculture and Farmers Suicides’ at the Gandhi Bhavan in Mandya on Tuesday

The absence of a comprehensive agricultural policy and measures to prevent suicides of farmers are the major reasons for the prevailing crisis in the farming sector, Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) leader G.C. Bayya Reddy has said.

He was addressing a seminar on ‘Crisis in Agriculture and Farmers Suicides’ at the Gandhi Bhavan here on Tuesday. ‘Janapara Kriya Vedike’ had organised the programme.

Mr. Reddy has suggested the Governments to provide at least 10 acres of land to each family of the farmers to stop farmer suicides.

Pro-farmer measures such as providing seeds, fertilizers, electricity, crop loans and irrigation facilities would uplift the distressed farming community, he opined.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader M. Krishnamurthy has underlined the need for promoting scientific farming among the farming community as, according to him, that could effectively prevent suicides of farmers.

The Governments ruled, both at State and Centre, have failed to provide scientific prices for farm produce. And, the anti-farmer policies have been forcing farmers to end their lives, he said.

KPRS leader T. Yeshwanth and a few others accused the Governments of ruining the lives and livelihoods of farmers by acquiring lands in the name of development.

C.K. Basavaraju of Mysore University, writer H.L. Keshava Murthy, G.T. Veerappa, M.B. Naganna Gowda, Bhumi Gowda, H.D. Jayaram and others were present.

Bio slurry pellet method of rice cultivation to increase production



All the farmers, especially the farmers in the modern generation are interested in adopting innovative techniques to increase the production of their crops or to reduce the cost of production.

For which either they follow the advise of agriculture experts or simply emulate the agriculture practices of the progressive farmers in their area. Though many among them will try to to develop their own techniques but, very few among them can only succeed in their attempt.

Aji Thomas of Kunnel,42, a marginal farmer at Ambalavayal in Kerala's hill district Wayanad, is belonging to the latter section of farmers .

The innovative method developed by Mr. Aji is most promising at a time the world is focusing on aerobic rice production, P.K. Abdul Jabbar, Assistant Professor (Agriculture Extension) Krishi Vijnan Kendra at Ambalavayal under the Kerala Agricultural University says.

'This method is a promising one in providing climate resilience to the rice farming sector, Dr. Jabbar says adding that productivity of many of the traditional varieties can be increased many fold by applying the unique technique.

Mr. Aji has developed the bio slurry pellet method of cultivation, a combination of direct way of sowing seeds, and the System of Rice

Intensification (SRI) after conducting nearly 15 trial and error experiments on his 40 cents of land.

He had started the experiments nearly two years ago by inserting two or three rice seeds in a specially prepared mixture of cow dung with bio control agent (*Pseudomonas*) and bio fertilizer (*Azospirillum*, a Potassium mobilizing bacteria).

The mixture was tied in small cotton pouches and in turn the pouches were attached to gunny ropes at definite intervals. But his first attempt was in futile after birds destroyed the gunny bags laid on the field.

Later he conducted nearly 14 different experiments with a financial assistance provided by the NABARD for the project and finally he developed the bio-slurry pellet method.

In this method he used a rubber mould with 64 holes to make pellets for the purpose. Wherein each hole was filled with 25 grams of the enriched bio slurry mixture and inserted one or two rice seeds on it before it was set. He also added 25 gram fenugreek paste (for bonding the mixture) as well as 5 gram each of *Pseudomonas* and *Azospirillum* with a kg of bio slurry.

He discharged the dried pellets in the field, after drench it nearly six hours, at a distance of 25 x 25 cm spacing. He used as many as 64,000 pellets on an acre of land for the purpose.

“The pellets can be sown manually. Rows are made facing east to west so that the germinating plant gets ample air and sunlight. This method saves both time and money and the need to prepare a nursery for paddy plants does not arise,” he says.

'By adopting the conventional nursery method, paddy crops take approximately 160 days to mature while using this technique it takes only about 140 days. The average yield of rice from an acre in the area is 1,400 kg. But under the innovative method it has increased to 22, 000 kg from an acre, Dr. Jabbar says. The manual labour have come down to six persons an acre as against 25 manual labour an acre ,including transplanting rice plants and weeding, in traditional agriculture practices, Dr. Jabbar adds.

The pellet method will be a boon to the members of the Self Help groups of women who cultivating rice on leased land, Dr. Jabbar said adding that

the KVK would train women Joint Liability Groups under the 'Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana' project to scale up this technology in leased land rice farming. Mr. Aji was conferred the best farmer scientist award by the Kerala Agricultural University in 2008 for his invention of a device to tap rubber plants. For More details contact: Mr.Aji Thomas, Kunnel house , Malika, Ambalavayal P.O, Wayanad district, Kerala. Pin code-673593.Land number-04936261291,Mobile number-+919495788460. Caption- Aji Thomas and his family members engaging in making bio slurry pellets. 2) Aji Thomas counting tillers of a paddy plant cultivating under the bio- slurry pellet method.



Long gaps lead to re-sowing, push up costs

The wide gap in rainfall between the first and second spells is detrimental for the health of crops.



Farmers in the drought-hit regions of the state, especially Marathwada, are worried about a second round of sowing cotton, cereals and soyabean seeds, with no rains over the last three weeks.

A “dopar perni” or re-sowing of seeds will mean an additional expenditure of Rs 3,500-Rs 5,000 per acre. What this implies is if there is deficient rainfall during the next few days, a farmer with a land holding of five acres will have to reinvest a minimum of Rs 20,000-Rs 25,000 in sowing as the money which they poured in for the first sowing would go waste.

The wide gap in rainfall between the first and second spells is detrimental for the health of crops. After the first rains, farmers

began sowing of seeds in the second week of June. By July 8, the agriculture department recorded almost 60 per cent sowing in the state.

But the long dry spell stretching for 20 days has the government worried. Senior officials in the agriculture department said that out of 355 talukas, almost 175 plus talukas will have to undertake a second round of sowing if there are no rains till July end.

A senior officer said, "According to the schedule, the entire process of sowing of seeds is completed by June end. But delayed monsoon coupled with the IMD prediction of low rainfall led to caution."

Almost 40 to 45 per cent areas have not undertaken sowing waiting for rains.

Sanjay Kute, an MLA said, "In my Jamod constituency in Jalna district only 18 to 20 per cent farmers have completed sowing. The process has been halted as there are no signs of rains."

The scenario is no different from remote villages in Yavatmal in Vidarbha or villages in Latur in Marathwada.

The government is holding discussions with agriculture experts on whether they should go for crop pattern change and also reschedule the sowing pattern. Normally, Maharashtra has always adopted a schedule where sowing begins by June 15 and completes by July 27.

The estimate for khariff sowing is 145 lakh hectares. It includes cereals, sugarcane, soyabean, oilseeds, pulses and cotton.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

'Agri-phablets' to help ryots raise yield

The goal of the state government is to ultimately have a debt-free farming community in the state that does not require loans to raise crops, agriculture minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy declared on Tuesday.

Speaking after the formal launch of an 'agri-phablet' the minister said the idea behind launching the device was to provide a digital platform for Telangana farmers to enable them to receive tips on raising crops and

information pertaining to prices of agricultural produce at market yards. "Ultimately farmers will be able to use the latest information technology to ensure good yields, receive good price for their produce and become economically independent," the minister said. The 'agri-phablet' is a collaboration between the agriculture and information technology departments with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat). The three have joined hands to implement Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based knowledge sharing platforms to improve productivity and profitability of small land-holding farmers in the state. The two government departments and Icrisat signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to make this happen.

The agriculture minister said that each new device, expected to cost around Rs 10,000, will be available in the next two to three months. Considering the high cost of the device, the government is considering providing loans to farmers to buy the agri-phablets, the minister added.

"Access to timely information can be of great help for millions of farmers in Telangana to improve their yields, incomes and achieve resilience since they will be able to make informed choices about good farming practices," information and technology minister K T Rama Rao said. Icrisat director general Dr David Bergvinson said, "Icrisat has been at the forefront of using the latest technology to benefit small farmers of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Digital Agriculture initiative will allow information to be precisely targeted to individual farmers."

Issues relating to internet connectivity of the agri-phablets and training of farmers in using them are expected to be taken up soon.

Telecom giant to connect panchayats

Telecom giant Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) is planning to provide 100 Mbps internet connectivity to 1,091 panchayats in the state by March 2016.

The public-sector company is not alone. Different telecom companies will provide 100 Mbps internet connectivity to over 2,000 panchayats across the state by next year.

Speaking at a press conference to commemorate Digital India Week on Tuesday, chief general manager of BSNL's Assam circle Rajiv Yadav

said BSNL is trying to provide better internet service to panchayats in Dibrugarh and Kamrup district.

"Internet connectivity in panchayats will enable people in rural areas to avail of benefits in the health, education, agriculture and other sectors," Yadav said.

He added that work is on to build another internet gateway for the northeast from Cox Bazar in Bangladesh to Agartala. This will provide an alternate and reliable source of connectivity to consumers in Assam.

Yadav said BSNL has initiated the process of improving connectivity in areas near international borders in the northeast. After the Union home ministry withdrew a ban on the erection of mobile towers within a 10-km radius of international borders, BSNL is planning to erect towers along the India-Bhutan, India-Bangladesh and India-Myanmar borders.

"We are receiving tenders. The towers will be complete by 2017," Yadav said. He further said BSNL will soon ink MoUs with state governments in the northeast to insert optical fibers in electric poles for uninterrupted service.

Global standards for food safety set for revision



As many as 185 countries, including India and the European Union, are likely to adopt new food safety and quality standards.

Countries all over the world have come together to revise international standards for food safety and quality, even as concerns have grown in India in the past two months after the food regulator cracked down on major brands including Maggi, Top Ramen and some products of Tata Starbucks.

As many as 185 countries, including India and the European Union, are likely to adopt new food safety and quality standards.

NEW QUALITY REGULATIONS

Revision of international food safety & quality standards to include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maximum levels for lead in fruits and vegetables (fresh and processed) 	<p>A new world-wide standard for ginseng products</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Standards for the safe use of food additives and pesticides 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Changes in food labelling norms 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To prevent residues of certain antibiotics in food of animal origin 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Guidelines for the control of <i>Trichinella</i> spp. parasites in pork meat 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maximum levels for a toxin (deoxynivalenol also known as DON or "vomitoxin") produced by a mould that can be found in cereal grains, flours, and cereal-based foods for infants and young children

The new norms will contain stringent benchmarks for various categories such as level of lead, standards for safe use of food additives and pesticides, new standards for ginseng products as well as guidelines on how food should be labelled according to the level of potassium consumption associated with a reduced risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases.

This is significant because recently when a lot of products including Nestle's Maggi were recalled from the Indian market, the regulator here had raised concerns on many of these grounds. While some packaged food products in India were found containing harmful substances such as lead and monosodium glutamate (MSG), many companies were caught flouting labeling and packaging norms.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, a joint inter-governmental body of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO), is meeting in Geneva this week.

The agenda is to review the existing standards for food safety and quality, while also revising and adopting new standards to upgrade the regulation to address the changes in the marketplace.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of Indian (FSSAI), which is the central enforcement agency for food regulation, also follows Codex standards to keep a check on products available in the Indian market.

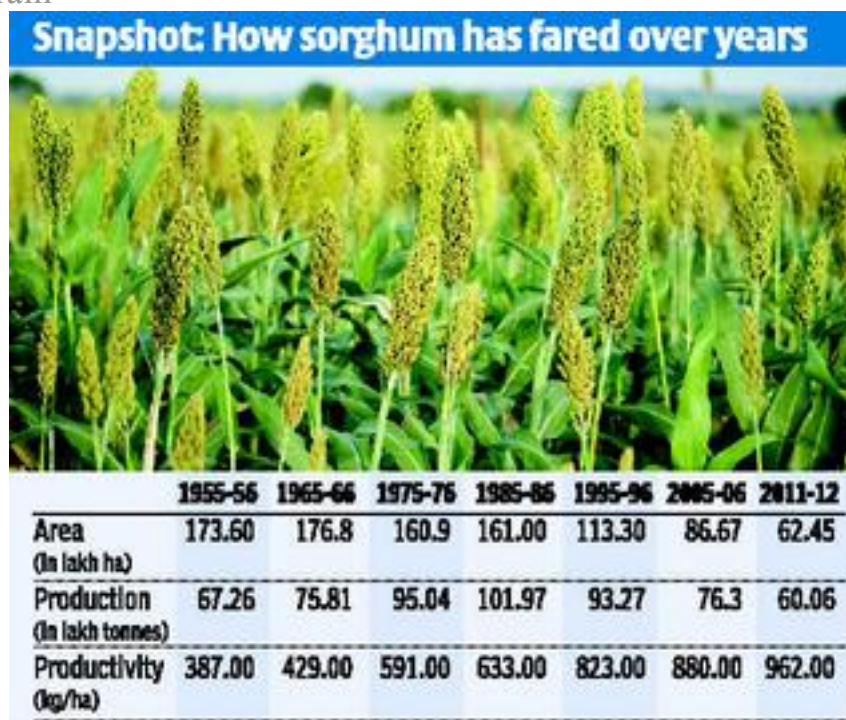
While the Indian regulator has already expanded its probe to milk, packaged drinking water, energy drinks and edible oil etc, the international meet will also witness discussions over prevention of residues of certain antibiotics in food of animal origin, control of parasites and levels of toxins in cereal grains, flours etc.

Recently, the FSSAI also asked state food inspectors to keep a close watch on food products of mass consumption and increase the frequency of sampling and testing of such products.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Nutrient-rich sorghum back on the menu

ICAR arm ties up with corporates to promote demand, varieties, supply of the grain



At Eatrite, a food processing unit in Rajendranagar near here, staff are quietly at work as first showers of the monsoon hit the experimental sorghum or jowar crop in the fields nearby.

They are busy preparing chips, biscuits and flour made of this millet for a Mumbai-based retail chain; they have so far delivered over six tonnes of sorghum products to retail outlets in the last few months.

Food products

Eatrite is not just another food-processing firm. It is an arm of the Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR) that works under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, and is selling the products under the Eatrite brand name. Formerly known as Directorate of Sorghum Research (DSR), the institute is developing processes, protocols and technologies to showcase products the food-processing industry can work on.

It publishes books in English and Indian languages on what people can do with millets.

Sorghum/Jowar, once a staple foodgrain along with other millets lost out to rice and wheat over time, is now making a comeback in Indian kitchens, with a health-conscious middle-class increasing its millet consumption.

Corporates' favourite

Britannia has joined hands with the institute to standardise protocols for the grain. The institute, in its earlier avatar, had decided to orient its research to create seed varieties that can trigger a demand to the nondescript crop, whose sowing area is vanishing over decades.

Besides Britannia Industries, ITC (Foods), Heritage Fresh and 11 other corporate firms have showed interest in the technologies that make valued added products using sorghum.

They have joined public-private partnerships with ICAR to help build a value chain from production to consumption. The idea is to promote sorghum varieties to suit the market requirements. DSR leveraged e-choupal infrastructure created by ITC to connect with farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra as stakeholders for transfer of technology and improvement of product-specific millets.

“We have also felt that it is not just enough to create awareness by telling people about nutritional benefits. We must also tell them what they can cook with sorghum. We are also working on fortifying the seed with iron and zinc to make it more nutrient,” TG Nageswar Rao, Director of the Institute, told *BusinessLine*. ICAR estimates that the overall demand for millets would go up to 30 million tonnes by 2025.

At the farm level

“The area (sown) has been shrinking. Sorghum is left with lands poor in soil health. Our challenge is to improve yields in the limited area,” B Dayakar Rao, Principal Scientist and Principal Investigator (Millets Value Chain) at the IIMR, said.

The area of sorghum acreage dwindled to 6-7 million hectares now from 18 mha in 1960s, with cash crops, rice and wheat devouring the area of traditional crops.

“Though the total cropped area has come down, we could still restore interest in the crop as we are able to more than double the yields to 1,100 kg/ha from 500 ha during the period,” he said.

NUTRITIVE VALUE PER 100 GM

- ***Protein: 10.4***
- ***Fat: 3.1***
- ***Crude fibre: 2***
- ***Carbohydrates: 70.7***
- ***Calcium (mg): 25***
- ***Iron (mg): 5.4***
- ***Riboflavin/Vit B2 (mg): 0.15***
- ***Energy: 329 (k.cal)***

25% Coonoor tea goes unsold

Nearly 25 per cent teas, worth Rs. 2.57 crore of the 18.12 lakh kg on offer at Sale No: 27 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions, remained unsold when the average prices rose to Rs. 69.29 a kg from previous week's Rs. 68.82.

Hittakkal Speciality tea, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, was the only CTC grade to enter Rs. 200-a-kg bracket and it fetched Rs. 200 a kg.

Homedale Estate tea, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped Dust market fetching Rs. 195. Darmona Estate got Rs. 191. In all, 51 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg.

Kodanad topped orthodox market from corporate sector fetching Rs. 269, followed by Karibetta Rs. 241, Chamraj Rs. 231 and Havukal Rs. 229. In all, 37 marks got Rs. 125 and more per kg.

Quotations held by brokers indicated bids ranging Rs. 40-44 a kg for plain leaf grades and Rs. 100-140 for brighter liquoring sorts.

They ranged Rs. 48-55 for plain dusts and Rs. 110-175 for brighter liquoring dusts.

There was some purchase for Pakistan in wide range Rs. 50-113 a kg.

Greece impact: imported oils slip

Edible oils market witnessed dull trading tracking bearish futures and isolated physical demand.

Malaysian palm oil and domestic soya oil futures continued bearish trend as cautious traders eyed the impacts of Greece on its debt repayment. Local refineries further reduced their rates by Rs. 2-3 for 10 kg.

Ample supply weighs on sentiment, said sources.

Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs. 501, super palmolein Rs. 533 and soyabean refined oil Rs. 591. Ruchi's rates: palmolein Rs. 500, soyabean refined oil Rs. 585, sunflower refined oil Rs. 690. Allana traded palmolein for Rs. 505, super palmolein Rs. 535, soyabean refined oil Rs. 587, sunflower oil Rs. 692.

In Saurashtra-Rajkot, groundnut oil *Telia* tin jumped to Rs. 1,630 (1,610) and loose (10 kg) at Rs. 1,050 (1,040).

BCE spot rates (Rs./10 kg): groundnut oil 970 (960), soya refined oil 590 (588), sunflower exp. ref. 615 (625), sunflower ref. 690 (690), rapeseed ref. oil 878 (878), rapeseed exp. ref. 848 (848), cottonseed ref. oil 608 (610) and palmolein 500 (501).

AP tobacco auctions extremely sluggish

Virginia tobacco auctions in Andhra Pradesh this season continue to be extremely sluggish, with only 52 million kg (mkg) of the crop marketed at an average price of Rs. 107.52 a kg, out of a total of 172 mkg of authorised crop. To make matters worse, there is said to be a surplus of 15-20 mkg in the State.

The trade participation in the auctions so far is poor and the reason is said to be the lack of export orders. As the bulk of the tobacco is exported, it is tugging on the floors. It is expected that the auctions in the State may stretch up to the last week of September, with 120 mkg yet to be marketed, not to speak of the surplus.

The best quality tobacco is produced in the northern light soils (NLS) of West Godavari and the maximum price touched Rs. 149 a kg. The average price was Rs. 117.41. The lowest price was recorded at Torredu in East Godavari in the black soils, Rs. 80.59.

Tobacco Board Chairman K Gopal said, “there has been visible improvement on the auction floors this week, after the week-end meeting held in Vijayawada and we see a spurt of Rs. 5-6 a kg for many grades on the floors.”

He said it was imperative for the growers to stick to the crop size fixed by the board in consultation with the trade in view of the international demand.

“When the demand is slack in the international market, it becomes trying for everyone – the farmer, the trade and the board – if there is a substantial surplus, a point which we have been impressing upon the farmer for quite sometime. We are also trying to reduce the area under cultivation,” he said.

Gopal said that board would take up export promotion vigorously, exploring new markets as well as recapturing the old ones.

“The RBI has also revised its earlier directives restricting foreign companies from taking up tobacco-related activities in the country. They can now participate in threshing, auctions and other such activities. It will stimulate competition if the global companies enter the fray,” he said.

Oilmeal exports dip 34%

Oilmeal exports dipped 34 per cent in June to 1.37 lakh tonnes (lt) against 2.07 lt registered in the same period last year, due to lower crushing of oilseeds by domestic mills.

Soyameal exports plunged to a record 2,098 tonnes last month against the previous low of 14,046 tonnes in May and 18,017 tonnes logged in April.

Soyabean crushing by domestic mills has fallen sharply due to high price of the bean in the domestic market. This apart, mills have been cutting down on their soyabean procurement as their realisations from both soya oil and meal were quite low compared to that being traded on the futures market.

Soyabean meal prices dropped seven per cent in June at \$553 (Rs. 34,839) a tonne against \$592 (Rs. 37,296) in May.

Compared to June last year, it was down 21 per cent. Between April and June, the overall export of oilmeals was down 29 per cent at 4.41 lakh tonnes (6.26 lt).

Icrisat’s \$300 phablet to offer timely tips for farmers

Tailor-made advisory from scientists to small, marginal farmers on the anvil

Farmers in the country can now have customised tips on their phablet on the agricultural inputs they might require for their field.

Based on the specific soil health of their small land holdings, scientists at the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat) and Government of Telangana would send timely messages to the farmers through the phablet.

The Hyderabad-headquartered Icrisat launched the Green Phablet, priced at \$300 (about Rs. 18,600), for farmers in Telangana.

The institute would maintain servers to safe keep the information. And even if the users lose their device, they could get back the information in no time.

“We are in touch with telecom provider Airtel to help us in this initiative. We however would like this open to other players as well,” Icrisat Director-General David Bergvinson told *BusinessLine* here.

He signed a tripartite agreement on Tuesday with the Telangana Departments of Agriculture and Information Technology to collaborate in transforming agriculture using digital technologies.

Addressing a gathering later, Telangana IT Minister KT Rama Rao said that there was a need to bring down the cost of the device to Rs. 10,000 to make it affordable for farmers.

“If need be, we will talk to electronic hardware manufacturers to bring down the prices. Technology will go a long way in filling up gaps in the agricultural extension system,” he said.

Icrisat would also take part in the T-Hub, the start-up initiative launched by the State Government.

“We need to utilise geo-spatial information, remote sensing capabilities, cloud services and genetic technologies to make agriculture viable for farmers,” the Icrisat Director-General said.

In the first phase, the Telangana Government is planning to give the devices to the district level agricultural officers.

“Specific information on soil health and other relevant parameters into the devices, prompting the scientists to come out with crop-specific, field-specific information,” Telangana IT Secretary C Parthasarathi said.

Urban agriculture order of the day: Sanjeev Chopra

“It’s time that agriculture in urban areas is promoted. Governments and institutions should focus on this,” argues Sanjeev Chopra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation.

Agriculture is no more just a rural affair, he believes. Therefore, the priority should be to make use of the available infrastructure in urban areas. He made this point while delivering a lecture on ‘Leveraging

Agriculture as the Key Growth Driver in India’ at the Administrative Staff College of India, here.

Sanjeev Chopra cited rooftop agriculture at Hero's new plant at Manesar in Haryana as an encouraging model to drive his point home.

He argued in favour of according priority to the agriculture sector. “Double digit growth is impossible if we ignore this sector. Agri-growth has a multiplier effect on poverty reduction and rural prosperity. It has a high potential for creating ‘near farm’ jobs.”

Sanjeev said the agri sector was more competitive than manufacturing. Further, “The world's most populous country can't outsource its food security,” he said.

He also identified 'post harvest management', 'imperative of diversification' and 'strategy for rain-fed agriculture' as the other three pathways for development of the agriculture sector in India.

Apart from Indian participants in various programmes being run by ASCI, senior executives from Laos, Fiji, Suriname, Lebanon, Tanzania, Nigeria and Bhutan attended the lecture.

The Director-General of the Institute, Ravi Kant, who happens to be Sanjeev’s batchmate (1985) from the West Bengal cadre, explained the initiatives taken for strengthening agriculture management.

Govt talks of crop contingency plans to tackle rain failure



Amid forecast of deficit rains this month, the government today asked farmers not to panic as contingency plans are put in place to handle any adverse impact of a possible poor monsoon on kharif crops.

The Met Department has forecast rainfall in July and August to be 8 per cent and 10 per cent deficient, respectively. In June, rains were 13 per cent more than the normal.

Monsoon rains are crucial as 55 per cent of cultivable land still doesn't come under irrigation. "So far, monsoon rains were better than expected although there is a forecast of deficit rains this year too. Farmers need not panic. We are ready with contingency plans to tackle any possible impact of poor rains on kharif crops," Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said while addressing state ministers on food inflation here.

Backing up his assurance, he spoke of the government's long history of handling a poor monsoon situation as "there is nothing to fear as of now".

"There was a drought-like situation last year, and sowing area was down 2 per cent because of 12 per cent deficit rains.

We took effective measures to bring down the damage on crops. We are prepared for this year as well. However, I feel that situation will not be that bad," he said.

Hopeful of good rains in coming days, the Minister said sowing of kharif (summer) crops is progressing well. Acreage under pulses and oilseeds has so far risen sharply on account of higher support price and decent rains in June.

According to government data, area sown under pulses has increased to 22.61 lakh hectares till July 3 of the kharif season, from 9.72 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

Acreage of oilseeds has gone up to 74.17 lakh hectares from 14.73 lakh hectares while that of paddy is up at 54.03 lakh hectares, from 53.56 lakh hectares a year ago.

Total area sown under kharif crops has climbed to 306.06 lakh hectares as against 194.25 lakh hectares in the period under the review, the data showed.