

16.07.2015

THE HINDU

Water released from Vaigai dam



Discharge to continue for the next 120 days for irrigation

Water was released from Vaigai dam near here for irrigation of the first crop in the double-cropping areas in Dindigul and Madurai districts on Wednesday.

After releasing water, Theni Collector N. Venkatachalam and Madurai Collector L. Subramanian said 900 cusecs had been released. On the whole, 6,739 mcft of water would be released for irrigation through Periyar main channel. This discharge would continue for the next 120 days, they added.

A total of 45,041 acres – 29,501 acres in Madurai north block, 13,747 acres in Vadipatti block in Madurai district and 1,793 acres in Nilakottai block in Dindigul district – would benefit. Turn system would be introduced if there was any slump in storage level or in case of monsoon failure, they added. The Collectors appealed to farmers to use water judiciously and raise short-term crops for bumper harvest. To increase the storage level in Vaigai dam in order to meet irrigation needs of farmers in Dindigul and Madurai districts

and to release water in mid-July, the PWD had increased discharge to 1,300 cusecs from Periyar dam for the past 10 days.

Water level stood at 51.57 feet in Vaigai dam, with an inflow of 815 cusecs. The storage was 2,205 mcft. A quantum of 60 cusecs has been discharged from the dam to meet the drinking water need of Madurai city.

The level stood at 124.3 feet in Periyar dam with an inflow of 391 cusecs and a discharge of 1,300 cusecs. The storage was 3,479 mcft. Periyar dam received a rainfall of 0.4 mm.

KAU to set up kole land research centre

To develop pest, disease warning system



Good news for farmers of the kole land. The Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) is all set to establish a research centre for optimum utilisation of biodiversity and resources in kole land.

Kole fields, which cover an area of 13,632 hectares in Thrissur and Malappuram districts, accounts for more than 40 per cent rice production in the State. Kole fields is a Ramsar site, a wet land of international importance.

According to P. Rajendran, KAU Vice-Chancellor, the kole land research centre will function under the Agricultural Research Station (ARS), Mannuthy.

Mandate

“The main mandates of the centre will be monitoring of rice productivity in kole lands with respect to soil, climate change, irrigation, bio diversity and cultural management,” he said.

The centre will develop a forewarning system against pest and disease incidence and will monitor toxicity and deficiency of nutrients. It will also do research on possibilities of restoration of kole lands spoiled due to mining of clay and sand.

The strategic interventions, including proper analysis of issues leading to deterioration of farming activities and damage to biodiversity systems and propagation of scientific solutions will help farmers rediscover the lost glory of kole land farming as well as restore the deteriorating ecosystem poise, the VC pointed out.

The physical facilities for new centre will be provided by Muriyad panchayat.

The centre, which will start functioning in Muriyad panchayat, will be officially inaugurated by Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan on July 19. It will be presided over by Government Chief Whip Thomas Unniyadan.

Three e-seva centres start functioning in Thanjavur



FIRST DAY:Mayor Savitri Gopal does the first transaction at e-seva centre which was inaugurated at the Thanjavur City Corporation on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, through video conferencing from Chennai, declared open three e-seva centres in Thanjavur City Corporation limits on

Wednesday. The centres are functioning at the Tax Collection Centres at the Corporation Office on the Gandhi Road, Manikkoonda Rajappa Park, and Municipal Colony.

Through the ELCOT, already there were e-seva centres in taluk offices and primary agricultural cooperative societies throughout the district where Revenue Department services, including Income Certificate, Community Certificate, Nativity Certificate, and such other certificates were issued. Even the Tangedco consumption charges could be remitted through the e-seva centres.

After the Chief Minister inaugurated the centres, Thanjavur MP K. Parasuraman and Mayor Savitri Gopal distributed sweets among the people at the venue to share the joy.

Deputy Mayor Manikandan, Corporation Commissioner T. Kumar, Engineer Srinivasan, and ELCOT Manager T. Bhaskaran were present.

· *Jayalalithaa inaugurated the centres through video conferencing*

· *Citizens can get several documents from these centres*

Farmers to get neem manure-blended urea

First time, farmers in Theni district, especially in Cumbum valley, will receive urea blended with neem manure this season that will reduce the quantity of chemical based fertilizers used by farmers.

The Agriculture Department stocked 500 tonnes of neem manure-blended urea in the district for distribution in the first phase.

When contacted, Joint Director of Agriculture V. Venkatasubramanian said that the distribution would commence immediately to farmers to raise the first crop in the double cropping area in the Cumbum valley.

Urea has been used as base fertilizer and also for top dressing for all crops, including paddy.

Blending neem manure with urea will slow down soluble level of urea in water. Normally, plants will not absorb the entire quantum of urea applied by farmers in the field. Sizable quantum of urea left unutilised in the soil.

Neem coated urea not only delayed dissolving time but also helped plants absorb it for a long duration. The plant will absorb the required quantum of fertilizer through its own course of time.

Such measure will reduce the quantum of fertilizers used by farmers in each farm. In this process, plants will absorb 95 per cent of the urea applied in the farm. Otherwise, 40 per cent of urea drained in soil.

Above all, the number of tillers in each paddy plant would be increased manifold and this resulted in better yield per acre, he added.

Neem-blended urea would enrich soil increasing micro-nutrient levels, Mr. Venkatasubramanian said.

The price of neem manure-blended urea was just Rs.13 more than the plain urea. But its benefits were immense, said agriculture officials.

Rain spurs farming activities in Raichur

District received 19.3 mm average rainfall on Tuesday

Raichur district, which is facing a drought-like situation, witnessed intense farming activities on Wednesday thanks to the rain that lashed the entire district on Tuesday night. Farmers, worried by the deficit rainfall, were found busy on their fields.

The district received 19.3 mm average rainfall on Tuesday. Raichur hobli recorded the highest rainfall of 48 mm followed by Chandrabanda (40 mm), Kalmala (34 mm), Gabbur (32) and Gurgunta (32). With Tuesday's rain, the total average rainfall that the district received between June 1 and July 14 rose to 58 mm, against the normal rainfall of 106 mm for the period.

As per the details provided by the Department of Agriculture, only 11,000 of 3, 03,410 hectares of cultivable land in the district had been sown till the second week of this month.

“Red gram, cotton and bajra are major crops that are sown in a majority of the 11,000 hectares. Paddy transplantation will be taken up on around 1.5 lakh hectares of irrigated land next month, after waters from Tungabhadra and Narayanpur reservoirs are released into canals. We have already sold around 4,000 quintals of paddy seeds,” M. Kiran Kumar, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* .

‘Disruption of auction will affect growers’



Saline, dark green tobacco and perished leaves find no buyers at the auction platforms in Prakasam district.

At a time when tobacco growers in Prakasam district are resorting to disruption of the auction proceedings, protesting the ‘miserable selling prices’ being offered at market yards and lack of government intervention, the Tobacco Board has urged farmers not to stall the proceedings to ensure early liquidation of the stocks.

“The stoppage of auctions would affect the interest of growers at it would lead to prolongation of the proceedings resulting in deterioration of the quality of tobacco. The cigarette manufacturers and traders had promised to liquidate the stocks by September,” pointed out Southern Black Soil (SBS) Regional Manager G. Bhaskar Reddy observed.

On the other hand, the farmers allege that they are still at the mercy of the traders, despite the promise of Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to ensure remunerative price to the beleaguered growers who are

caught between the sluggish market, cap on the crop acreage and rise in cost of cultivation.

Meanwhile, the Board officials say that the tobacco markets across the globe remain sluggish and Indian market is not an exception. The farmers should understand that in this crisis situation, the Board is doing its best to safeguard the interests of the growers.

The stoppage of auctions will prolong the proceedings resulting in deterioration of the quality of tobacco.

G. Bhaskar Reddy, SBS Regional Manager

Helpline to aid farmers in distress soon

The district administration will set up a helpline to help farmers in distress, said Deputy Commissioner P. Rajendra Cholan.


Speaking to presspersons here on Wednesday, Mr. Cholan said that farmers' awareness programmes would be organised in every hobli. Bank officials have been directed not to exert pressure on the farmers for crop loan recovery for next three months, he said.

As per reports, four farmers have ended their life in the district. Assistant Commissioner had been directed to hold inquiry and submit detailed report. After finding out the reasons behind the suicides, the government will release compensation of Rs. 2 lakh per farmer.

Last year only 10 per cent of the farmers got crop insurance. A meeting of the insurance company officials would be held soon to discuss crop insurance related matters, he said.

Sugarcane growers in doldrums

With no assurance from the Nizam Deccan Sugars Limited on purchase, farmers are undecided on growing cane this year

A BITTER PHASE			ARREARS TO BE PAID
Farmers waiting for the government to take over NDSL	If not, they may cultivate alternative crops like maize, sunflower, soyabean and paddy	A five-member committee appointed by the government to look into the matter	NDSL Rs. 10.5 crore
			TRIDENT SUGARS Rs. 40 crore
<small>-PHOTO:MOHD ARIF</small>			GANAPATHI SUGARS Rs. 3 crore

Farmers in the district are in a fix not knowing whether to grow sugarcane this year with the Nizam Deccan Sugars Limited (NDSL) not giving them any assurance on the purchase.

The mill has been facing several problems and the State government, that had announced that it would take over the mill, has not done anything in this regard yet.

The NDSL has arrears of Rs. 10.5 crore to be paid to the farmers.

The district administration came to the rescue of the mill in purchasing the crop stocked in godowns with the help the Civil Supplies Department. So far, Rs. 4 crore was released to purchase sugarcane and in the second instalment, the same amount was reportedly released on Wednesday.

“No farmer has taken up sugarcane cultivation so far and we cannot go ahead with our plans unless the mill assures us of purchasing the crop. We hope that the government takes over the mill before this month-end. If not, we have to opt for alternative crops like maize, sunflower, soyabean and

paddy,” said V. Nagi Reddy, a farmer and general secretary of NDSL Parirakshana Samithi.

Pandu Ranga Reddy, another farmer from Zaheerabad, said farmers who have been accustomed to growing sugarcane in this area may not go for alternative crops. They might wait for the government to act even though they have not gotten any assurance from the Trident Sugars, which has to pay arrears of Rs. 40 crore to farmers.

The factory has been signing agreements with the farmers for the purchase of sugarcane, but the area of cultivation may go down given the adverse market conditions.

Ganapathi Sugars at Fasalwadi, who has been signing contracts with the farmers, also has to pay arrears of Rs. 3 crore to farmers.

“Agreements are not being signed by farmers who fall under NDSL area as its fate is yet to be decided by the government. A five-member committee has been appointed by the government to look into the matter,” said Sugarcane Assistant Commissioner Ch. Venakat Ravi.

“Trident Sugars is eligible to get soft loan from the Union Government to clear their arrears and the process is on,” said Joint Collector P. Venkataram Reddy.

MP for better price for tobacco

MP Mekapati Rajamohan Reddy sought remunerative prices to tobacco farmers in view of increased cost of cultivation. During his visit to the tobacco auction platform at DC Palli on Wednesday, Mr. Rajamohan Reddy interacted with the officials and farmers. He said that the issue would be taken up at the national level as many farmers were left in the lurch owing to the rising cost of cultivations and sluggish market.

Students to be sensitised on man-animal conflict

The Forest Department is planning to sensitise school students in the district on the man-animal conflict. It is part of a series of workshops being held by the Department with farmers and heads of villages near forest areas already covered.

District Forest Officer M. Senthil Kumar said that schools located in conflict-prone villages that adjoin the forests in Coimbatore. The Department would partner with non-governmental agencies such as WWF India (World Wide Fund for Nature) to conduct the workshops. Teachers will also be taking part in the workshops, which would first be conducted in Government schools.

Students would be educated on the reasons behind this conflict, the importance of wildlife and forest conservation and the issues of their locality. Further, they would also be educated on elephant behaviour, migration pattern, elephant corridor and the 'Dos and Don'ts.'

“Students will be able to spread the awareness to their parents, relatives and the wider local community. They can be an effective medium to reach out to the stakeholders,” he said.

Training programme

A free training programme on rearing of Japanese quail for meat and egg purpose would be conducted at Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on July 21.

A press release from Dr. B. Mohan, Programme Coordinator, said that training would be given on varieties of quail, constructing of sheds, quantity of feeds to be given, procuring eggs and using incubator for hatching, disease prevention methods and how to enhance productivity. The release said that quail farming business was commercially undertaken by many for the purpose of meat and egg and the training would deal with the nuances of the business. Farmers, members of women self help group, youngsters and interested can participate in the training.

For registration contact phone 04286266345, 266244 and 266650. Farmers should bring their Aadhaar number for registration.

Helpline launched

The police have set up a helpline (Ph: 08392 258102) for the benefit of farmers and general public to pass on information about private moneylenders charging exorbitant rate of interest and harassing loanees to recover the loan amount.

“People, including farmers, who are being charged exorbitant rate of interest by private moneylenders and also facing harassment from them, could contact the helpline and register their complaint or go to the nearest police station and lodge their complaint, which would be attended to immediately,” R. Chetan, Superintendent of Police, told presspersons here on Wednesday.

Control room to prevent farmers’ harassment set up

A 24x7 control room has been opened at the District Police Office here to prevent any harassment of farmers by money lenders or finance organisations. A press release issued by the district police here on Wednesday said that farmers had committed suicide in some places in the State, unable to bear the burden of debt. No such incident had been recorded in Udupi district so far.

The Additional Superintendent of Police had been appointed as Nodal Officer to look into such cases. The control room can be contacted at 0820-2526444 or 9480800942.

Set deadline for kuvurai package implementation, officials told

Agriculture Department officials, particularly those at the field level, should ensure proper implementation of the “kuvurai” package in the district, said M. Rajendran, Director of Agriculture.

Addressing officials of the department at Tirumanur near here on Wednesday, Mr. Rajendran said the officials should achieve the goals of the package scheme by fixing a deadline for each and every phase of its implementation. He advised officials to sensitise farmers to adopt water-saving techniques for maximum utilisation of available water in the tail-end basin of the Cauvery delta. Earlier, at Palayapadi village near Tirumanur, he inspected the mechanical transplanting of kuvurai seedlings. He gave away gypsum to farmers.

B. Manoharan, Joint Director of Agriculture; Joe Bright, K. Rasu, Deputy Directors; and R. Mohan, Personal Assistant to Collector for Agriculture, spoke.

The department has planned to cover about 2,500 hectares of land under kuvurai this season in the district. So far, 1,100 hectares had been covered and by the end of this month, another 1,000 hectares would be brought under cultivation, they said.

Foundation laid for six fish landing centres

CM launches subsidy scheme for tuna longliners



Chief Minister Jayalalithaa laid the foundation stone for fish landing centres and launched subsidy scheme for tuna longliners through videoconferencing at Ramanathapuram Collectorate on Wednesday

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa laid the foundation stone for building six fish landing centres in the district, fulfilling the long-pending demand of the fishermen, and launched the much-awaited subsidy scheme for tuna longliners through videoconferencing here on Wednesday.

Ms. Jayalalithaa also laid the foundation stone for building an Integrated Fisheries Department Office complex at a cost of Rs 1.8 crore even as Collector K. Nanthakumar and fishermen association leader Devadoss thanked her for launching the 50 per cent subsidy scheme for tuna longliners, a first of its kind in the country, and building fish landing centres.

The government had designed the subsidy scheme to wean away fishermen of the Palk Bay area from trawler fishing to tuna longliners and avoid conflicts with Sri Lankan navy.

The government had selected batches of beneficiary fishermen from Nagapattinam, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram. They were offered a subsidy of Rs. 30 lakh each for constructing longliners, which cost about Rs. 60 lakh.

The fish landing centres would be established at Dhanushkodi, Muhuntharayar Chathiram, Thangachimadam, Pamban, Vedalai and T Mariyur at a total cost of Rs. 44.70 crore, official sources said. The first

three landing centres would have boat jetties, while the Pamban centre would have wharf with diaphragm wall, the sources said.

They would have auction centres, fish drying platforms and concrete roads. Barring the centres at Dhanushkodi and Muhuntharayar Chathiram, the others would have facilities for net mending, the sources added.

The construction work on these centres and fisheries office building would begin soon and would be completed in a year, the sources said.

The fish landing centres were built with financial assistance from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rural Infrastructure Development Fund), the sources added.

Deputy Director of Fisheries M. Kasinatha Pandian, Fishermen Association leader P. Sesu Raja and Fisherwomen Federation leader K. Iruthaya Mary were present.

School takes a step towards organic farming



Amarambalam Agriculture Officer Liju Abraham inaugurating the distribution of vegetable seed by giving a packet to Goodwill Farm Club president Shamil Salam in Malappuram on Wednesday.

Goodwill English School at Pookkottumpadam near Nilambur set up a farm club as part of the integrated organic farming development project promoted by the State government. Students were distributed vegetable seeds at a function held on Wednesday.

Amarambalam Agriculture Officer Liju Abraham inaugurated the seed distribution programme. Goodwill Farm Club president Shamil Salam accepted the first packet of seeds from Mr. Abraham. The school had won the best farm club award of the Amarambalam Krishi Bhavan for promoting organic farming. The farm club was given a grant of Rs. 5,000, and the students were given classes in organic farming.

The farm club distributed seeds to all 1,190 students on the campus. Apart from Shamil, farm club vice president P. Mohammed Finan, secretary K.V. Arya, joint secretary Aleena James and treasurer Shahshad Mon led the distribution. M. Abdul Nazar, president of the CBSE Sahodaya School Complex, delivered the keynote address. M. Kunhimohammed, Goodwill Charitable Trust chairman, presided. P.K. Bindu, principal, distributed the prizes for the best farm club members.

Cashew processors find north Indian lobby a tough nut to crack



Cashew harvest in progress at Ivory Coast. Processors say a lobby is dictating the price of raw nut instead of African planters.

Apart from the competition faced by the State cashew sector in the international kernel market, the industry is facing threat from a “north Indian lobby” in the raw nut markets of Africa.

Cashew processors in the State, largely based here, say though the threat was there for the past two years, it has become aggressive this season and is more pronounced in the West African countries.

The season is from April to August in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Benin, and Togo. Earlier, importing raw nut from these countries was a smooth affair for the processors.

Profit potential

Now, the lobby procures nut from plantations and hoards the commodity in warehouses there.

The profit potential of the raw nut trade was a recent discovery for the lobby, which has money power and local contacts in the African countries where they had been engaged in trade for decades, the processors say.

The Kollam-based processors said with the emergence of this system, the lobby was dictating the price instead of African planters. Kerala processors had strong competitors in the international market from within the country and Vietnam.

These competitors are able to quote higher prices than buyers from Kerala as their cost of production is much lower due to the low processing charge.

The processors said the bulk of African cashew this season was going to Vietnam.

Latest statistics of the Cashew Export Promotion Council of India showed that India's raw nut import from West Africa this year dropped by 20 per cent compared to last year.

While India exports around one lakh tonnes of kernel a year, Vietnam exports about two lakh tonnes. But the domestic consumption of kernel has gone up considerably in India to touch about 2.5 lakh tonnes annually.

Vietnam's annual domestic raw nut production is about five lakh tonnes but the requirement is more than 10 lakh tonnes, which is imported. To produce 3.5 lakh tonnes of kernel, India requires 16 lakh tonnes of raw nut but the domestic production is hardly eight lakh tonnes.

Orissa, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh are the other major cashew processing States.

The East African and Indonesian raw nut season is from November to March and March-April is the domestic raw nut season.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

TNAU predicts Rs 600 hike in turmeric price after September

There might finally be some good news for turmeric farmers in the region. The TNAU (Tamil Nadu Agricultural University) has predicted that the price of turmeric would go up by Rs500 to Rs600 per quintal after September-October. The Western region had been recording a constant fall in acreage of land under turmeric cultivation due to the constantly fluctuating prices. According to TNAU's Agro Marketing Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre, the price of good quality turmeric in the Erode market varies between Rs6,800 and Rs7,500 per quintal (49 kg).

"The present market arrivals of turmeric, however, are of poor quality because they were harvested during the intermittent rains earlier this month," said the statement from TNAU. "Based on our 19-year analysis of turmeric prices at the Erode regulated market, we predict that good quality turmeric could fetch between Rs7,500 and Rs8,100 per quintal from September," said the statement. As per the statement, farmers who have stocked up on turmeric since last year because of low prices, have been advised to sell after two months.

During 2013-2014, 4.62 million tonnes of turmeric was produced from 0.76 million hectares. Prospects of oilseeds, which are usually sown during the Aadi season or South-West monsoon, however, do not seem to be positive. The price of gingelly, which was around Rs6,291 per quintal this past June at the Sivagiri market is likely to fall to Rs5,700 per quintal in the same market from September. "Oilseeds are short-term rain-fed crops which are usually sown just after the monsoon rains in June-July and harvested after two months," said a TNAU official. There are chances of further fluctuations depending on the import and export market, he added.

The price of groundnut, based on a survey conducted by the market intelligence office among traders and analysis of earlier prices, is predicted

to be between Rs5,200 and Rs5,500 per quintal in Sevur regulated market and between Rs.5,500 and RS5,800 per quintal in Tindivanam regulated market.

Gene revolution can combat hunger, say agriculture scientists

Genetic engineering has become a hot button for debate and misinformation. When scientists genetically modifies a plant, they insert a foreign gene like a bacterium resistant to pesticide. And you can harvest a crop with a GM seed, which can withstand pests. The gene revolution to battle hunger, malnutrition with a bumper crop without pesticide was the centre of discussion at a two-day workshop held by Indian Institute of Mass Communication in collaboration with ministry of environment and United Nations Environment Programme at Makhanlal Chaturvedi University of Journalism and Communication in the city.

Ongoing tussle between organic farming and genetic modifying crops, Monsanto controversy and lack of progress in GM field trials may have bogged down the venture, but scientists at the workshop discussed threadbare how dissemination of information on biosafety could lift the cloud.

While fibre produce BT Cotton is the only GM crop grown for the market, Madhya Pradesh despite having black soil has only 6.10 lakh hectares under cultivation in Khandwa and Khargone, according to a study by International Service For Acquisition of Agribiotech Application. The state government is still cagey about field trials of GM crop in the state.

Senior scientist with ICAR, Milind Ratnaparkhe, said effective GM technology can be used in soyabean production through genetic recombination and identification of chromosome strands.

Director, Biotechnology Institute, JN Agriculture University, Jabalpur, Sharad Tiwari, spoke about molecular marker assisted selection (MAAS) as an useful tool to identify particular DNA strands to help generate more GM crops. "These innovations in agri-biotechnology can help improve crop yield in the state. Root modules of plants can help in nitrogen fixing by promoting rhizo bacteria and this can be used as bio-fertilizers."

Ranjini Warriar, director, ministry of environment, forests and climate change, and Prof Gita Bamezai, HoD, department of communication research, IIMC, spoke on the occasion.

Farmers set to get insurance amount soon

Over 1.61 lakh farmers in the district are set to get in next three days their share of compensation under crop insurance for Kharif 2014-15 season as Indian Agriculture Crop Insurance Company, Mumbai has released nearly Rs 84 crore for distribution to them.

District collector Kiran Gitte issued instructions to all bank managers to distribute this insurance compensation amount to the concerned beneficiaries in the next three days, ensuring that no beneficiary is deprived of the compensation.

The compensation has come at a time when the farmers are confronted with the prospects of resowing as monsoon has been playing truant for nearly a month.

Gitte said that the compensation amount of Rs. 83.93 crore has been released to 23 banks in the district for distribution to 1,61,130 beneficiaries who had insured their 2014-15 Kharif crop under the scheme. He said Amravati district central cooperative bank is to distribute the highest amount of Rs 49.06 crore to its 68,243 beneficiaries followed by State Bank of India, which is to distribute Rs 16.25 crore to its 20,375 beneficiaries. While giving details of the amount to be distributed through other banks, Gitte said that he has given instructions to all bank managers to distribute this amount to the concerned farmers within three days.

In MP village, weather app helps farmers clear clouds of doubt

When he had first come to India in 2009, senior AccuWeather executive Don Heaton was told that weather is of not much importance to the people here. On Wednesday, he saw for himself how it did matter to the people in a small village in Chhindwara.

A few youngsters of Paradsinga village had learnt about the app, that is known for its near-accurate weather forecast, from artist Shweta Bhattad

who runs an NGO in the village. Four months ago, they started putting up the forecast shown on the app in Hindi in the marketplace. This season, some farmers from the village have been depending on these forecasts to take decisions regarding reaping.

Navkesh Tekade (21), Adarsh Dhoke (18), Ganesh Dhoke (21), Parth Suryavanshi (17) and Vednath Lohi (18) thought of making use of information they got from the website and the app with other villagers. Having learnt about this development from Shweta's brother Saket, Heaton decided to pay the village a visit as he came down to India for work. Along with the company's Indian country manager Abhimanyu Chakraborty, he has been meeting government officials in India.

"We wish that the government share with us some of their data like those received from the radars. This will help us improve our product and services. We could also provide the government our expertise and any other help they need in exchange," said Heaton.

Farmer and activist Amitabh Pawde accompanied the team to the village. He explained to farmers how he was able to save his crops on several occasions due to accurate information about weather. "While apps such as these get most of their data from satellites, if they could also get that from ground sensors, it could be even more accurate. They can also help the farmers claim crop insurance as most times, these insurances are hard to get in the absence of government declaring a certain natural calamity. These sensors can only be installed by the government," he said.

Chakraborty said that the use of the app can be extended to not just businesses but individuals, too. "Businesses like railroads, construction and agriculture can reduce their losses with the help of accurate weather forecast. People with health problems like arthritis, asthma and migraine can also learn beforehand whether the weather of a place would suit them," he said.

It may be too early to say if weather forecast being displayed in the centre of the village proves a gamechanger for farmers in Paradsinga. However, it provides a ray of hope for a region where excessive dependence on rain has had much negative implications, believe the villagers. Some farmers say they will wait for a couple of years to see whether this use of technology helps those who have started basing their decisions on internet based information.

Agri dept's e-Krishi service set to sow seeds of relief among ryots

Ushering the state's farmers into the modern world of e-governance, the Goa agriculture department has launched the e-Krishi service for the speedier sanctions of agricultural subsidies, and other related schemes to Goan farmers.

Director of the agriculture department, Orlando Rodrigues, said that earlier, the department accepted applications only in hard copy from farmers for any scheme of subsidy. But now, it has registered all of the 22,000-odd farmers in the state and provided each one with a Krishi card. Embedded on these cards are electronic chips which contain all information about the farmer and his land holdings.

So, anytime a farmer wants to apply for assistance or a subsidy from the government, he does not have to produce all the documents of land ownership and other related details. "He only has to give the card number, the name of the scheme and produce the bills of the purchases he made for which subsidy is required. This information will be uploaded and provided to a 'kissan mitra' designated to visit village panchayat offices to assist farmers," Rodrigues explained.

"This will be very farmer-friendly. Farmers will not have to produce several documents nor will they have to make many trips to the department. If they are computer-savvy, they will be able to track the status of their applications online," he added.

The project has been launched in collaboration with Goa Electronics Limited (GEL), the firm that has helped launch most of the state's e-services.

Presently, the department has implemented the e-Krishi service for support price applications for paddy, coconut, sugarcane and arecanut among others. Gradually, every scheme of the department will be brought under the e-Krishi umbrella. Approvals and sanctions up to the level of the director will be given online. "This will speed up the process of giving subsidies to farmers which, today, take between three to six months," Rodrigues said.

The new initiative will also allow agricultural officers more time to carry out inspections. For instance, they will now find time to verify if a well has

Testing fragrance of jasmine to be easier & faster with 'E-Nose'

Testing the fragrance of jasmine flowers is all set to become an easier task. Researchers from the Floriculture Department of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Kolkata, have developed a hand-held device to measure the flower's fragrance.

Dubbed Electronic Nose or E-Nose can analyze the fragrance of the flower or the flower concrete in less than a minute. Flower concrete is a semi-solid waxy substance made from crushing and processing the flower. About 1kg of concrete can be made from one to 1.5tonnes of jasmine flower.

The gadget is expected to be a boon as it would bring down the cost of testing, speed up the testing process and create new standards in fragrance measurement.

Jasmine fragrance is now tested with a GC-MS (gas chromatography and mass spectography) instrument which is expensive and time consuming. "The machine costs around Rs15 to Rs40lakh, takes a minimum of three hours to give a reading and can be operated only by skilled personnel," said assistant professor of the floriculture department, K R Rajadurai. "It is also a destructive method where a much larger sample of flowers or concrete needs to be used for the reading," he said.

On the other hand, this new hand-held device and box-sized sample collector can be operated by any layman or farmer. "They need to collect 10gm of fresh flowers or a small paper strip of concrete and place it in the sample collector. The sensor analyzes the fragrance and gives an aroma index within 40 to 45 seconds," said M Kannan, head of the floriculture department.

The portable device has five sensors to test five components of the flower or concrete. "The jasmine flower has around 120 components of which 10 are prominent. This machine tests five of them and gives an analysis," said Rajadurai.

The sensors basically absorb the fragrance components generated by headspace in the sample holder. The device's sensor then tests the fragrance and gives a reading. A team from C-DAC and the floriculture department are

collecting feedback on the device from a private aromatic company in Mettupalayam and Jasmine Growers Association, Sathyamangalam, on Tuesday. Researchers had given the device and sample holder to both entities three months ago. "Once their feedback is received and the device is fine-tuned, we can start selling the technology and marketing it," said Kannan.

While a major portion of jasmine concrete is exported to France, fresh jasmine flowers are exported to many countries. The device would also help farmers decide on time of harvest. "They need to take a small sample of a few flowers and test it. Only if the aroma levels are satisfactory, they should harvest the flowers," said Rajadurai.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Keen to expand operations, Coconut Board looks at North-East region

The Coconut Development Board (CDB) hopes that its focus on North-Eastern States will help it expand the area of cultivation there.

In an informal chat with *BusinessLine* on the sidelines of a farmers' meeting in Mangaluru recently, TK Jose, CDB Chairman, said that coconut cultivation is happening in the seven north-eastern states of India.

Stating that coconut was grown in some places in the region long back, he said it was not an organised cultivation earlier. Area expansion is happening on a major scale in States such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

He said the expansion of coconut plantations was to the extent of around 50,000 hectares in Meghalaya, and around 40,000 hectares each in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in the last four years.

People there are taking up activities such as raising nucleus seed gardens and plants in a big way in the last three-four years, he said.

Giving the example of a model developed by the district collector of Bongaigaon in Assam to expand area of cultivation, he said the district identified around 1,000 acres of tribal land for this. Funds from NREGS,

tribal development fund and CDB and Spices Board were put together. Under this model, cocoa cultivation was taken up as an inter-crop.

Land development and fencing were done under NREGS. The farmers got coconut seedlings free of cost under the board's area expansion programme.

Sugar steady on ample stocks

Sugar market witnessed a steady trend for third consecutive day on Wednesday as demand remained need-based. Prices for fair quality S-grade dropped by Rs. 7 a quintal. *Naka* and mill tender rates also ruled steady.

Currently Vashi market carries about 105-110 truck loads stocks. Arrivals continued at 60-62 truck loads and local dispatches were 59-60 loads.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade Rs. 2,162-2,255 (2,162-2,262) and M-grade Rs. 2,240-2,502 (2,240-2,502). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade Rs. 2,120-2,190 (2,120-2,190) and M-grade Rs. 2,220-2,390 (2,220-2,390).

Icrisat to step up focus on 'smart crops' millets

'They play a crucial role in semi-arid area farming'



Batting for millets David Bergvinson, Director-General, Icrisat, inspecting a smart crop field near Hyderabad on Wednesday.

As millets making a slow but steady comeback, Icrisat has said it would have a special focus on millets, which it considers ‘smart crops’, considered the life-line of small and marginal farmers in semi-arid areas.

Headquartered at Patancheru near here, the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics has said sorghum, pearl and finger millets are among the mandate crops.

Asked about institute’s strategy for millets, which had been off track due to lack of policy support, Icrisat’s Director-General David Bergvinson has said that millets played a crucial role for countries such as India, with a large number of small and marginal farmers.

“They are rich in nutrition and consume less water. These water- efficient crops are relevant for India. They help farmers face the changes in climate,” he said.

David Bergvinson has taken over as the new Director-General of the institute, replacing William Dar, who headed the institute for about 15 years. Prior to this appointment, he worked with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle (US), handling crop value chains and digital design for agriculture development.

Priority areas

Icrisat has gathered about 6,000 finger millet germplasm accessions from 24 countries for conservation and research and development. He said his immediate priorities as the head of the institute was to focus on demand-driven innovation and to make agriculture viable for farmers.

“On my agenda include developing partnerships to achieve the missions. We would like to help small farmers in accessing markets and financial services making technology as a vehicle,” he said.

Kerala asks Centre to stop coconut oil import move

Kerala has asked the Centre to dissuade the State Trading Corporation from importing coconut oil.

State Agriculture Minister KP Mohanan has sought the Prime Minister's intervention, saying it would hurt the prospects of 30 lakh coconut farmers in the State.

The Minister's appeal comes in the wake of the recent tender floated by STC to import 2,000 tonnes of both crude and edible grade coconut oil through Mundra Port.

The Minister in his letter to the Prime Minister pointed out that the decision would have adverse effects on the coconut sector, which is expecting a 10 per cent production drop in the current year. The import of palm oil has also led to a price fall in the market. In the circumstances, the Government should give necessary directions to STC to stop importing coconut oil, he said.

Cochin Oil Merchants Association (COMA) has also taken up the issue with the Kerala Government, saying the declining prices has already affected the coconut oil market, which registered a drop of Rs. 1,000/quintal in the last one week.

Coupled with the import decision, Thalath Mahmood, Director, COMA, said that some of the branded coconut oil producing companies in Kerala also started copra imports from Indonesia to meet their production needs and this would further aggravate the situation. There were reports that these companies have already imported 200 tonnes of copra cake through Kochi Port, he said.

Meanwhile, the price slide continues in the market at Rs. 9,900 per quintal (Rs. 10,400) in Kerala, while Tamil Nadu price remained at Rs. 9,400 as quoted last week. Copra prices remained at last week's level at Rs. 7,000 in Kerala, and stood at Rs. 6,800 in Tamil Nadu, showing an increase of Rs. 300/quintal.

However, Thalath said that the surplus production in most of the growing centres and the government agencies move to look at import instead of depending on the domestic market may take the market to the 2013 situation. During that period, the prices dwindled to Rs. 6,500 per quintal, he said, adding that it would be detrimental for both traders and farmers.

Agri Ministry launches 3 portals

The Centre launched three new websites for farmers here on Wednesday aimed at making organic farming certification, fertiliser quality checks and disbursement of soil health cards easier. The portals, developed by National Informatics Centre, are part of the existing schemes.

The 'Participatory Guarantee System' portal will help small and marginal farmers engaged in organic farming to secure certification after checks for compliance to standards are carried out.

The 'Soil Health Card' portal has been developed to register soil samples and record test results along with fertiliser recommendations to create a national database on soil health for future use in research. The 'Fertiliser Quality Control System' portal will collate results of drawn samples of imported fertilisers helping both consumers and importers with analysis reports.

"The three agricultural portals will bring transparency and accountability and help the farming community," said Radha Mohan Singh, Union Agriculture Minister, at the unveiling ceremony.

Cotton prices rise on weather concerns, demand



Strong offtake The International Cotton Advisory Committee's forecast sees global area and production declining, while consumption and trade going up in 2015/16.

El Nino, China reserves quality could provide some upside

Cotton prices increased about Rs. 1,000/bale (of 170 kg), in 2 weeks to touch Rs. 16,800 in the futures market in April. This surge is due to forecast of below normal rainfall by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) in its first long range forecast in April.

However, the prices have been in a downtrend since the surge, with occasional recoveries due to weak international market, lower export demand and reports on record global stocks.

During May and June, cotton prices in domestic market moved both the sides, as bullish and bearish sentiments in market fluctuates depending on the fundamental factors. The prices moved down in June on reports of bumper harvest following a good monsoon progress, regular offloading of the fibre by the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) in the domestic market and China's decision to sell cotton reserves.

Meanwhile, prices improved on reports of bad weather in the US, affecting cotton sowing coupled with the lower planting and forecast of higher consumption and trade against lower production for the first time since 2019/10. In India, above normal rains during June has encouraged farmers to plant cotton in a record area.

According to the latest kharif sowing data by government, the cotton planting area has almost doubled compared to the area planted last year for the same period.

Since last two weeks, cotton-growing belts in the country especially, Gujarat, eastern Maharashtra and Telangana are facing a dry spell and farmers are waiting anxiously for fresh showers.

A long dry spell after the good initial showers last month is causing concern to farmers, which may results in production loss of more than 40 per cent or even have to re-plant.

Fear of El Nino

In late June, IMD forecasted a strong El Nino during July, August and September, which will result in less rainfall in the Indian sub-continent affecting the growth and maturity of kharif crop and less moisture for the rabi crops.

Meteorological models show forming of strong El Nino and gaining in strength due to warm Pacific Ocean temperatures. This may result in drought conditions in Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and India and torrential rains and flooding in parts of South America and the United States.

Lower area, higher demand

According to the latest press release by the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), forecast for world area and production is down while consumption and trade is higher for 2015/16 compared to last year. World cotton area is projected at 31.3 million hectares, down 6 per cent compared to last year while production is forecasted at 23.9 million tonnes (mt), down 9 per cent from 2014/15.

China's cotton area is forecast to decrease by 12 per cent to 3.8 million hectares, and production down by 16 per cent to 5.4 mt, while India's acreage under cotton is expected to decrease by 5 per cent to 11.6 mh which will limit the production to 6.6 mt.

World cotton consumption is forecasted at 24.9 mt, 3.3 per cent higher than last year.

Consumption in China expected to remain stable at 7.7 mt while India's domestic use is projected up 5.6 per cent to 5.4 mt.

Strong demand from countries such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, Turkey, Indonesia, etc is expected to boost world trade as they rely on imports to support their spinning sector.

Outlook

Currently, the new crop depends on the weather progress, which is just planted, or in its vegetative stage in India, US and China. Excessive rains and severe thunderstorm in the US during the planting season and below normal rains in India may affect the production for next season.

Further, in China, lukewarm response to cotton reserve sales might be an indication of concern about quality coming out of state inventories. This may be bullish for cotton as China may force to import as reserve stock locked from the market.

Meanwhile, as per the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) data, there was a large positive swing in hedge fund positioning in net longs on New York-traded cotton, by a record 26,990 lots in last two weeks. At present, cotton prices are lower on strong fundamentals and market is waiting for a bullish shock, if they occur, will lead to higher prices from current levels.

The El Nino phenomenon, China cotton reserves quality and consumption demand are some factors that could provide cotton with an upside shock in coming months.

The writer is Associate Director - Commodities & Currencies, Angel Commodities Broking Pvt. Ltd. Views are personal.