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THE HINDU

Banks told to meet farm credit limit

Government had expressed concerns over adverse impact of any reduction in direct credit to individual farmers given the recent difficulties faced by sector.

The Reserve Bank of India, on Thursday, directed banks to ensure that their overall direct lending to farmers should not fall below the average of last three years, as government has expressed concerns over impact of recent adverse weather conditions.

The RBI said government had expressed concerns over adverse impact of any reduction in direct credit to individual farmers given the recent weather related difficulties faced by the agricultural sector.

“Banks are, therefore, directed to ensure that their overall direct lending to non-corporate farmers does not fall below the system-wide average of the last three years achievement (to be notified shortly), failing which they will attract the usual penalties for shortfall,” RBI said in a notification.


Banks should also continue to maintain all efforts to reach the level of 13.5 per cent direct lending to the beneficiaries who earlier constituted the direct agriculture sector, it said.

After a good start, the south-west June-September monsoon has weakened in mid-July, including in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.

In an effort to increase direct lending to agriculture, the target for lending to small and marginal farmers under the recently revised priority sector norms has been increased to 7 per cent for 2015-16 and to 8 per cent for 2016-17. In its revised priority sector lending norms announced in April, the RBI also widened the definition of priority sector by including medium enterprises, social infrastructure and renewable energy while retaining the lending target to the sector at 40 per cent.

Soil Health Card scheme takes off gingerly

Centre launches portals for organic product certification, fertilizer quality

REPORT CARD		
The Soil Health Card portal allows for registration of soil samples along with recommendations for the correct use of fertilizers		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">⊙ While the north-eastern States are lagging, none of the other States have met their targets⊙ So far, against a target of 84 lakh samples in 2015, only 34 lakh have been collected⊙ 2.53 crore samples will	<ul style="list-style-type: none">be collected and tested to generate 14 crore Soil Health Cards⊙ The cards will be issued to farmers once every three years⊙ Outlay of Rs. 568.54 crore has been made for the programme during the 12th plan
<p><i>The portal gives farmers information about how to use major fertilizers.</i></p> <p>— PHOTO: REUTERS</p>		

The Narendra Modi government is projecting its programme for issuance of Soil Health Cards (SHC) to farmers as a “flagship programme” but so far against a target of 84 lakh cards, only 34 lakh have been issued. Some of the States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have not issued a single card to farmers against the targets set for them for 2015-16.

This emerged during a presentation made by Integrated Nutrient Management officials before Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh who launched the web portals for Soil Health Card, Participatory Guarantee System-India (Certifying Organic Products), and Fertilizer Quality Control System.

“These are flagship programmes in the farm sector aimed at improving soil health and reducing input costs for farmers,” the Minister said, adding that the implementation lay with States.

The Soil Health Card is a printed report that will be given to farmers once in three years for each of his/her land holding. It will contain crucial information on macro nutrients in the soil, secondary nutrients, micro nutrients, and physical parameters. The card will be accompanied by an advisory on the corrective measures that a farmer should take to improved soil health and obtain a better yield.

So far the Andhra Pradesh has taken the lead in disbursement of the Soil Health Cards to farmers. Tamil Nadu and Punjab exceeded targets for collection of soil samples during the kharif season. But while Tamil Nadu has not even started distribution of cards, Punjab had disbursed 27,307 till July 7, according to the official data made available here.

Till July 7, Andhra Pradesh had distributed 16.3 lakh cards followed by Uttar Pradesh that disbursed 47,378, Punjab (27,307), Chhattisgarh (22,570), Telangana (15,171) and Odisha (10,245).

Kerala, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh among others have not even begun to collect soil samples for testing, while the data for Karnataka was not available.

The Soil Health Card portal allows for registration for collection of soil samples along with testing in approved labs. The important aspect of the portal is that it not only gives an assessment to a farmer about use of major fertilizers but also micro-nutrients which are missing in his field and which must be added for a balanced soil. Information is given for different crops.

The system envisages building up a single national database on soil health for future use in research and planning. A total of 2.53 crore samples will be collected and tested to generate 14 crore Soil Health Cards to farmers once in three years.

Samples are collected in post-rabi and post-kharif harvests when there is no standing crop in the field. Samples are sent to state laboratories or can even be tested in mobile labs. The cost is borne by the Centre which has set aside Rs. 568.54 crore for a period of three years.

The Fertilizer Quality Control System web gives information on the quality of imported fertilizers at ports while States check the quality of indigenously manufactured fertilizers.

India imports 25 to 30 per cent of its requirement of urea, 90 per cent requirement of DAP (Di ammonium Phosphate) and 100 per cent MOP (Muriate of Potash).

The Participatory Guarantee System portal provides for online registration, approval, documentation, record of inspection and Certification of organic products produced by a farmer.

It is said to be cost-effective and farmer-friendly.

TNAU training programme

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre at Anna Nagar will conduct a one-day training programme from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. on July 22. A press release said that use of natural manures and bio pesticides will be part of the training.

A nominal fee will be charged from participants, who will get participation certificates. For details, call 26263484.

MoU on cultivation of medicinal plants

Arya Vaidya Pharmacy and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University have signed a memorandum of understanding to take up research and development in cultivating medicinal plants. A release said that thus far traditional medicine practitioners had been collecting herbs in forests. The quality and quantity were limited and this pushed up the cost of medicines. By signing the MoU, the two institutions would strive to provide sustainable and organic cultivation practices for potential medicinal plants and Arya Vaidya Pharmacy would provide market access. The University also planned to launch a one or two year certificate/diploma course in herbs cultivation.

Solar vegetable dryer pays rich dividends



S.Mukilan says solar dehydration not only ensures longer shelf-life but also retains nutrients.— Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

A youth belonging to Esanai village, about 12 km from here, has taken up an innovative venture to market dehydrated vegetables using a solar dryer.

A graduate in marine engineering, S. Mukilan took to this entrepreneurship at his family farm being motivated by his parents. He has so far marketed dehydrated vegetables worth Rs. 25,000 over a period of three months after commissioning the solar dryer at his farm.

The dryer was set up at a cost of Rs. 3.97 lakh with a subsidy of Rs.1.84 lakh from the Agricultural Engineering Department.

The process involves dehydration of vegetables. Solar dehydration not only ensures longer shelf-life but also retains nutrients, he says.

The vegetables that are dried here include brinjal, red chillies, lady's finger, garlic and bitter gourd. Mr. Mukilan purchases fresh vegetables from nearby fields and dries them at the solar dryer .

Mr. Mukilan has also bagged a few orders from foreign countries. "There is good demand for the vegetables in foreign countries, especially Malaysia, Australia and the Middle East," he says.

He has not been able to meet the demand for bulk orders from hotels in Tiruchi and Perambalur. One of the star hotels in Tiruchi has placed a bulk order to which he has been supplying on a weekly basis.

Mr. Mukilan is also keen on popularising the value-addition process. He plans to establish another solar dryer and a vegetable powdering machine to expand operations.

Coconut cultivators seek infrastructure for value addition



The returns from coconut are attractive, provided the crop is cared for. —
Photo: M. Govarthan

Coconut cultivators in Modakurichi desire establishment of processing centres in the block for increasing returns through value-addition.

The crop is ideally suited for the block where coconut farms constitute one-sixth of the total cultivable area of 20,500 hectares.

The area under coconut cultivation is around 3,600 hectares, L. Kulandaivelu, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Modakurichi Block, said.

Farmers desire coconut cultivation also because inter-cropping is possible in farms where there is spacing of seven metres for raising turmeric and cocoa crops, the official said.

The returns from coconut are attractive, provided the crop is cared for well with application of biofertilizers, manure and micronutrients.

Every tree yields 120 to 150 nuts in a year, ensuring a return of Rs. 500 after meeting all costs. 175 trees could be grown on an hectare.

Nuts harvested from one tree could be converted into 10 to 12 kg of copra.

Coconut oil

Neighbouring Kangeyam being a major production centre for coconut oil, there has been sustained demand for copra at the regulated market in Avalpoondurai. But, there has always been a question about the purity of coconut oil.

Of late, traditional method of oil extraction is becoming noticeable in the rural parts. Farmers are into extraction of virgin coconut oil that has wide applications in skin and hair care. Hence, start of processing centres in Modakurichi block would enable better returns, the cultivators emphasise.

Delegation to meet Maharashtra CM Fadnavis today on release of water

Ensure release of at least 5 tmcft of water: samiti

With an objective to mitigate the increasing water crises in villages located on the banks of Bhima river, on Friday, a delegation of the government is schedule to visit Mumbai to meet Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, to urge him to release water from Ujjini dam.

Water Resources Minister M.B. Patil, who is heading the delegation, accompanied by MLAs of Vijayapura and Yadgiri district MLA, said the delegation would apprise Mr. Fadnavis of the grim situation of farmers and seek the early release of water.

Meanwhile, Panchappa Kalburgi, president, Bhima Nadi Neeru Horata Samiti, has welcomed the decision of the government. However, he urged the delegation to ensure the release of at least five tmc of water.

Addressing presspersons here on Thursday, he said that about 189 villages of Vijayapura, Yadgir and Kalaburagi districts of the State were located on the banks of Bhima river.

“All farming activities of these villages have been severely hit, owing to scanty rainfall and dried up barrages built across Bhima river. Thus, the release of at least five tmc of water would address water crises at least for next four months,” he said.

Stating that as per the Bachawat Committee Report on inter-State sharing of water between Karnataka and Maharashtra, the latter was legally bound to release fifteen tmc of water to Karnataka in a phased manner.

“The Maharashtra government, if not morally, is legally bound to release water to us. Thus, the delegation should first request Maharashtra to release 5 tmcft of water, if it fails to acknowledge the request, then it should be reminded of its legal obligation,” Mr. Kalburgi said.

To a question, he asserted that the in order exert pressure on Maharashtra, the government should have taken all-party delegation instead of only Congress MLAs.

“Since Maharashtra is ruled by the BJP, the presence of former Chief Minister and leader of the opposition in Assembly Jagadish Shettar would have put additional pressure on Maharashtra government to release the water,” Mr. Kalburgi said.

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- *‘Agricultural activities in about 189 villages have been severely hit’*
 - *Scanty rainfall and dried-up barrages built across Bhima river blamed for crisis*
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Efficient policies sought for agricultural sector

Formulate methodology for scientific pricing of produce, say farmers



Farmers mourning suicides of fellow growers at a meeting convened by the district administration in Belagavi on Thursday. —PHOTO: P.K. BADIGER

Farmers' leaders have urged the Union and State governments to take the problems confronting the agricultural sector seriously, devise efficient policies, and formulate a methodology for scientific pricing of agricultural produce to address poverty and debt.

They raised these issues at a meeting convened by the district administration here on Thursday. Deputy Commissioner N. Jayaram, Additional Deputy Commissioner G.L. Praveen Kumar, Belagavi Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Bagadi Gautham, senior officials of the Agriculture Department, Lead Bank, national banks and moneylenders' association were present.

“We do not want your loan waiver packages but scientific prices for our produce, elimination of middlemen and a marketing system. As an immediate measure, the government should waive agricultural loans with interest,” the farmers said. The former Union Agriculture Minister Babagouda Patil said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's “pretentious” concern for farmers would not help as the meeting was convened only after the Supreme Court took cognizance of the issue of farmers' suicides and issued notices to the Centre and States such as Karnataka even as a public interest litigation petition was filed in the apex court seeking its intervention to review the country's agriculture policy.

He said the government implemented the Rangarajan committee report in the wake of media hype and decontrolled sugar prices, resulting in surplus stocks. Forty lakh tonnes of sugar were surplus in the country and the prices had fallen. The Centre should review its policy and create a buffer stock out of the surplus to control prices so that sugar mills could pay better prices to growers, Mr. Patil said.

Total subsidies to agricultural sector in the last 10 years accounted for Rs. 2.05 lakh crore, while tax exemptions given to the corporate sector was Rs. 43 lakh crore, as per an official report. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development disbursed interest-free loans to hardly 30 per cent of farmers, a majority of them big ones.

B.P. Sheri, president, National Farmers Organisation; Basavaraj Mallali, district president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha; Sidgouda Modgi of Bhartiya Krishik Samaj, and farmers' leader Kalyanrao Muchalambi said the “system” was against the growers to the extent that they had lost their faith in governance.

Other speakers suggested rejuvenation of minor irrigation tanks to increase water-levels, early completion of irrigation projects, effective

implementation of schemes under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and adequate power supply in rural areas.

Mr. Jayaram said the views of the farmers would be conveyed to the government and asked banks to suspend recovery of loans for 15 to 20 weeks.

ZP to organise Rozgar Day

Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat has stepped up the measures to open up avenues of employment to the needy landless agriculture workers by organising 'Rozgar Day' and provide them employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

Chief Executive Officer of the Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat P. Arvind Sravan told *The Hindu* in Kalaburagi on Thursday that Rozgar Day is being organised in all gram panchayats and important villages, particularly those in the rain deficit taluks, to extend the helping hand of the administration to those in need of employment and prevent the migration of the agricultural labourers in search of employment to bigger cities.

He said the gram panchayats were also collecting the details of those who require employment immediately and identifying the works that can be taken up soon.

"The demand for the work in the villages is very high and every single person in need of work would be provided gainful employment under the MNREGA," he said.

Major thrust

Mr. Sravan said that the government has given instruction that major stress of the MNREGA this year should be to create more employment avenues by taking up labour intensive works and at least 60 per cent of the MNREGA works should be in the agriculture sector.

He said that the officials have been instructed to prepare a shelf of projects in each of the gram panchayats and more stress should be given for taking up agriculture ponds in individual farmers land, contour bunding, soil conservation works, moisture conservation works and taking up desilting of the tanks. The officials have been asked to identify

the tanks which require immediate desilting and this work would be taken up using the MNREGA funds.

On the drinking water shortage, Mr. Sravan said the overall drinking water situation was not alarming except for few blocks in Aland, Afsalpur and Jewargi taluks where there was shortage of drinking water due to drying up of the groundwater sources, due to over exploitation of the groundwater sources. At present the drinking water was being provided through tankers in 11 villages in Aland taluk and one in Chincholi.

Steps initiated to open up avenues of employment to needy landless farm workers under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

P. Arvind Sravan,

Chief Executive Officer of Kalaburagi Zilla Panchayat

College students take out rally to boost morale of farmers



Students of D. Banumaiah College taking out a rally in Mysuru on Thursday.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

Students of D. Banumaiah College have expressed their concern over government “apathy” towards farmers and have urged the government to provide all facilities to them.

They said that farmers were hit by the absence of a market for agricultural commodities, the non-existence of scientific prices for agricultural produce and other facilities and strongly criticised both the State and the Union governments.

The government should come to the rescue of farmers by providing all facilities and prevent them from committing suicide, the students said.

Students, teachers and the non-teaching faculty members of the college have, in a memorandum to the government, said that farmers were in the clutches of middle-men and private moneylenders and government should provide them financial aid. Students took out a rally instilling confidence among farmers and carried placards calling upon the farmers not to commit suicide.

Vellore Aavin adds full cream to its menu

To get a new building with Rs.5 crore assistance from Nabard



New on shelf:T. Velazhagan (second from left), Chairman and Aruljothi Arasan (left), General Manager of Vellore Aavin with the sachets and bottles containing full cream milk, flavoured milk and badam mix powder introduced for sale at the Aavin office in Vellore on Thursday.— Photo: C. Venkatachalapathy

The Tamil Nadu Government has approved the proposal for the construction of a new building for the Vellore and Tiruvannamalai Districts Cooperative Milk Producers' Union (VTDCMPU) or Vellore

Aavin with an assistance of Rs. 5 crore from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard), N. Aruljothi Arasan, General Manager of Vellore Aavin told newsmen here on Thursday.

Earlier, Mr. Arasan along with D. Velazhagan, Chairman of Vellore Aavin, introduced for sale full cream milk, flavoured milk and new badam mix powder at the Aavin office in Sathuvachari.

He said that full cream milk (containing 6% fat and 9% non-fat) will be sold in one-litre sachets priced Rs. 45. New flavoured milk containing the flavour of mango and badam (almond) will be sold in 175-ml sachets priced Rs.10 while upgraded badam mix powder (weighing 200 grams) will be sold in plastic bottles priced Rs. 80.

The General Manager said that flavoured milk and badam mix powder will be sold in all Aavin parlours and booths.

The value-added Aavin products such as ghee, milk guava, milk cake, paneer, curd, buttermilk, lassi, seven types of ice cream and kulfi ice-cream have received a good response from the consumers.

Subsidy for equipment

Mr. Arasan said that grass-cutting equipment worth Rs.17.23 lakh would be given to 50 village level cooperative milk producers' societies under the control of Vellore Aavin at a subsidy of 75 per cent under the welfare scheme of Vellore Aavin, while lactometers worth Rs.26.50 lakh would be given to the societies at 50 per cent subsidy under the VTDMPU funds.

Mr. Velazhagan and Mr. Arasan distributed welfare aids including veterinary treatment kits worth Rs.7.50 lakh to 100 societies for treatment of cattle and stainless steel milk cans costing Rs.3.15 lakh at 50 per cent subsidy to the societies.

Ramachandran, Deputy Registrar (dairying); Murugan, Deputy General Manager, Vellore Aavin; Dominic Divyanathan, Deputy GM; and Lydia, Manager, Marketing Wing of Vellore Aavin participated.

The wonder of millets



They are healthy, hardy and versatile. Including millets in our diet is the best thing we can do for our well-being

In the last two years, R. Rajamurugan has conducted 60 workshops on millet cooking in Tamil Nadu. He is also the author of *Nalla Soru*, a recipe book that revives some of the tried and tested recipes made from thinai, varagu, saamai, kudiravali, panivaragu, kambu, cholam and kaelvaragu. Books on the health benefits of millets, TV cookery shows

and millet-based food festivals have contributed to the demand for millets, he says, and adds, “People are aware that they are packed with vitamin B, omega 3 fatty acids, are high on fibre, have a low glycemic index and are gluten-free. Now, they want to know what to make with them.”

Thinai, the yellow-coloured millet, can be used to make sweets, including halwa, adirasam, pongal, and payasam, says Rajamurugan. “Millets are so easily available to us. They have no side effects and are good for our well being.”

Even caterers are going the millet way. Idlis, dosas, paniyaaram, kozhukattai, kichidi...can all be made from ragi, kambu, cholam, and varagu.

Millets have made their presence felt on online retail stores too. Snacksbazaar.com, that sells traditional Indian sweets made in an organic way, now has a page dedicated to millets. “People can buy cookies made from ragi, cholam and kudiraivali, thinai murukku and all varieties of millets,” says G. Vengudupathi, director of the website. Rajamurugan says people are willing to spend extra money to invest in good health. “Families may have to invest 25 per cent more while moving to a millet based lifestyle. But the health benefits are immense. The change in lifestyle is the foundation for good health. Once people start buying more, the production increases and prices will naturally come down. Farmers always grow produce that gives good returns. The government should step in and give subsidies to such farmers in areas such as procurement of seeds, cultivation methods or processing.”

Iswar Iyyappan of Genius Nature Herbs Ltd from Coimbatore, that makes and exports millet-based cookies, ready-to-eat mixes, soups, teas and health supplements, says the changes are apparent in the last two years. “Doctors now recommend millets for patients who are diabetic and have hyper tension. This has also contributed to a change in food consumption. The area under millet cultivation has almost tripled in the last three years which is a good sign. People now know that bamboo rice or kavuni rice is healthier than white rice. We should give food that is healthy for the next generation.”

His company’s R&D is currently working on making millet-based nutrition bars. “We want to approach schools and educate students on food. Our R& D team is constantly innovating with millets. Currently, we are trying to use millets in a health drink. We are working on this along with Indian Institute of Crop Processing Technology in Tanjore. We have

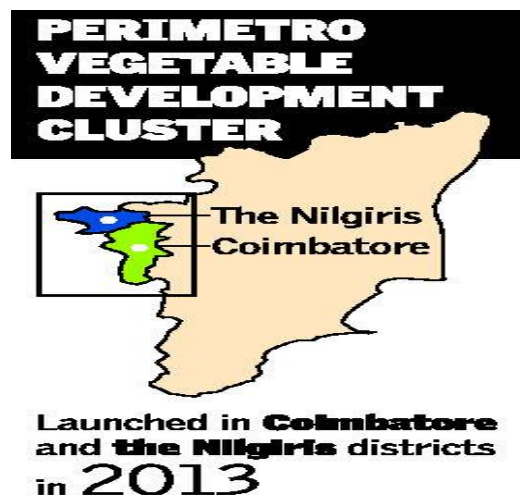
given inputs to PSG college of Technology in Coimbatore too. We have 20 millet-based products and we want to keep adding two every month. We also want to make millet noodles without preservatives.

You have sense of fullness after having two millet-based dosas, it helps in weight control and keeps blood glucose level at check too.”

Says Rajamurugan, “Cooking millets is not difficult. Avoid ready-to eat foods, pizzas and burgers. They are full of preservatives. Children especially should be educated about how the food on our table came about. They should be encouraged to buy food that builds stamina and energy, and not just looks pretty.”

Families may have to invest 25 per cent more while moving to a millet-based lifestyle

New facility offers vegetable farmers market price at doorstep



The Nilgiris district
nearly 4,400 farmers
Collection centres
Masakkal, and Ooty
Main vegetables
Potato, carrot, beetroot,
beans, broccoli, and
leafy vegetables

Coimbatore
800 - 900 farmers
Collection centres
Thondamuthur and
Pollachi
Main vegetables
Gourd varieties

Chandran, a vegetable farmer at Masakkal village near Kotagiri, cultivates potato, broccoli, ginger and red cabbage on two acres. He used to travel to the markets in Ooty or Mettupalayam at least twice a week to sell his produce with the transport bill eating into his meagre profits.

Vegetable farmers like him need not travel to Ooty or Mettupalayam anymore. A vegetable collection centre was opened at Masakkal, 15 km from Kotagiri, on Wednesday under the Perimetro Vegetable Cluster Development Project.

The project has been implemented by the Department of Horticulture and Plantation Crop, Tamil Nadu, on public-private partnership mode. Lawrence Dale Estates and Farms has set up the collection centre with subsidy from the department.

P. Vijayaraghavan, chief executive officer, says the company is involved in the project for the last six months. It has set up the procurement centre at a total cost of Rs. 70 lakh and can procure 20 tonnes of vegetables a day.

“We pay the market price to the farmers and the amount is either credited to their bank account or given as cheque. The company will clean, grade and sell the vegetables to retailers and customers. It has deployed mobile vans (‘Namma Thottam’) to sell the vegetables in Coimbatore on a daily basis,” he says.

In Coimbatore, the department has given the farmers three trucks to transport the vegetables to the markets. It is aimed at helping the growers get a good price for the produce, a horticulture official says.

Natarajan, another farmer who grows leeks and beans at Masakkal, says the farmers would lose a day when they travel to the market. Now, they can sell the vegetables at the collection centre and return to work at the farm. Exotic vegetable cultivation is high in Masakkal area and the collection centre would help the farmers get the market price, he says.

In Coimbatore district, the farmers have formed a company and plan to export vegetables under this project. The Horticulture Department officials say the project was launched in Chennai and Coimbatore in 2013 and has now been extended to other districts too. Farmers also get assistance under the scheme for organic farming and protected cultivation.

Bachchan's MSP for DD's Kisan Channel: Rs. 6.31 crore



Doordarshan's Kisan Channel was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 26, at a time of distress when debt-ridden farmers were committing suicide. Yet, months before the launch, officials in the public-funded channel were involved in a serious backchannel exercise to get Bollywood stars to endorse it. Their search stopped with Amitabh Bachchan, who was roped in for Rs. 6.31 crore, which is said to be the most expensive endorsement ever by the actor.

Earlier, the officials considered the actor-couple Ajay Devgn and Kajol. Also discussed was Salman Khan, before eventually settling for Mr. Bachchan, the face behind a wide range of products from cement to gold. The Bollywood legend also endorses Gujarat.

E-mails and documents with The Hindu show how Lintas India Private Ltd., an agency empanelled with Doordarshan, drove a hard bargain with the channel's officials to have Mr. Bachchan endorse the channel for Rs. 6.31 crore after initially agreeing to a sum of Rs. 4.02 crore towards the total cost of celebrity endorsement.

An e-mail sent to Lintas went unanswered, but an official called to say they had nothing further to add to the documents in Doordarshan's possession.

DD KISAN'S EXPENSIVE FACE

DOORDARSHAN OFFICIALS CLAIM THIS IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE ENDORSEMENT OF THE ACTOR TILL DATE

➔ Before choosing Amitabh, Doordarshan considered the names of actors Ajay Devgn and Kajol in the hope of projecting them as happy couple, and Salman Khan for his saleability

➔ The superstar's campaign was roped in for Rs 6.31 crore

➔ Emails and documents with *The Hindu* show Lintas India private Limited drove a hard

bargain with DD officials after initially agreeing to Rs. 4.02 crore as endorsement sum for Mr. Bachchan

➔ His campaign is expected to run till April 30, 2016

➔ **The total budget for the channel is nearly Rs. 45 crore**



“Ask DD officials,” he said. Mr. Bachchan’s PR agency confirmed having received an e-mail from *The Hindu* three days ago, but sought some more time to respond.

Under the conditions, Mr. Bachchan was required to shoot for a day, with the campaign playing on TV, print, Internet and cinema platforms till April 30, 2016.

Kisan Channel’s viewership dipping despite celebrity endorsement

While Doordarshan officials say actor Amitabh Bachchan’s endorsement of the Kisan Channel at Rs. 6.31 crore is his most expensive endorsement till date, *The Hindu* could not independently confirm it.

Under the terms and conditions, Mr. Bachchan was required to shoot for a day, with the campaign playing for a year on TV, outdoor, print, radio, Internet and cinema platforms till April 30, 2016. Despite roping in a megastar to draw viewers, the channel has been on a downward curve after viewership peaked days following the launch. In terms of reach, it has 3.6 million viewers compared with Discovery’s close to 43 million. Both channels share the same bandwidth.

E-mails in The Hindu's possession reveal concern about the dipping viewership of the channel. While officials say comparisons are unfair, the channel enjoys a must-carry clause, which means cable and DTH operators have to beam the channel dedicated to the Indian farmer.

The total budget for the channel is nearly Rs. 45 crore, and its adviser, Naresh Sirohi, belongs to the Bharatiya Kisan Morcha, the farmer's wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Ranjan Mukherjee, Additional Director-General, Prasar Bharati, who heads the channel, said the decision to have Mr. Bachchan as brand ambassador was taken by a high-power committee set up by the Prasar Bharati Board. "We felt the channel required a celebrity and also found that Mr. Bachchan had a strong connect with rural India," he said. Mr. Mukherjee clarified that Mr. Bachchan's name had been endorsed by the Prasar Bharati Board and that he had been paid for the services rendered.

The search began in January when the name of Salman Khan was shared with the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. However, after officials figured out the fee he commanded on a private channel, he was declared too expensive. It is learnt that Ajay Devgn and Kajol too were listed as probables. Officials said the actors' manager was told that as the channel was dedicated to the nation, their services could be pro bono. Even Siddhartha Basu of Synergy Communications was asked to do a farmers' quiz on the lines of Kaun Banega Crorepati. "It didn't work out," an official said.

Days before the official launch of the channel, Jawhar Sircar, chief executive officer, Prasar Bharati, had complained bitterly about increasing interference from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and was absent at the high-profile launch.

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Total budget

The total budget for the channel is nearly Rs. 45 crore, and its adviser, Naresh Sirohi, belongs to the Bharatiya Kisan Morcha, the farmer's wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Ranjan Mukherjee, Additional Director-General, Prasar Bharati, who heads the channel, said the decision to have Mr. Bachchan as brand ambassador was taken by a high-power committee set up by the Prasar Bharati Board. "We felt the channel required a celebrity and also found that Mr. Bachchan had a strong connect with rural India," he said. Mr. Mukherjee clarified that Mr. Bachchan's name had been endorsed by the Prasar Bharati Board and that he had been paid for the services rendered.

The search began in January when the name of Salman Khan was shared with the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. However, after officials figured out the fee he commanded on a private channel, he was declared too expensive. It is learnt that Ajay Devgn and Kajol too were listed as probables. Officials said the actors' manager was told that as the channel was dedicated to the nation, their services could be *pro bono*. Even Siddhartha Basu of Synergy Communications was asked to do a farmers' quiz on the lines of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. "It didn't work out," an official said.

Days before the official launch of the channel, Jawhar Sircar, chief executive officer, Prasar Bharati, had complained bitterly about increasing interference from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and was absent at the high-profile launch.

In terms of reach, it has 3.6 million viewers compared with Discovery's close to 43 million

Herbal garden showcases 'Dravidian heritage'



C. Varadarajulu Naidu, Dean of Herbal Studies and Naturo Sciences, Dravidian University, at the university herbal garden in Kuppam.—
Photo: K.V. Poornachandra Kumar

Can medicinal plants reflect heritage? How can plants be grown to showcase the cultural heritage of a region/race?

The answer is a firm 'Yes', going by the painstaking efforts taken by the Dravidian University to preserve and propagate the Dravidian culture through its herbal garden.

Developed at its Srinivasavanam campus near Kuppam, the garden is a classic example of reconstructing the cultural heritage by disseminating academic knowledge. The varsity's Department of Herbal Science, which was established in the year 2008 by the then Vice-Chancellor Gangisetty Lakshminarayana, is aimed at conserving and propagating the rare Dravidian herbal heritage for the benefit of posterity.

The 10-acre garden has 250 species of 4,500 plants representing the Dravidian culture, civilisation and languages of Dravidian States (south India). The plants and herbs grown here are the ones that are mentioned in the Dravidian literature.

“The department conducts research activities and preclinical studies under good laboratory practices”, says the varsity’s Dean of herbal studies and naturo sciences C. Varadarajulu Naidu. The varsity runs a two-year M.Sc. course in Herbal Science, with an intake of 30 students a year, besides post-graduation, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes to foster multidisciplinary research and education.

The UGC has also sanctioned eight junior research fellowships to conduct advanced experiments on medicinal plants.

The faculty members received nine major research projects from funding agencies like UGC, DST, NMPB etc., while the department has so far conducted six national seminars on herbal science. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, during his last visit to the campus, promised to sanction an advanced research centre on herbal science.

An herbal seed bank and an impressive nursery are also maintained in the garden to supply medicinal plants to farmers.

“We plan to expand the garden to another 10 acres,” Dr. Naidu added.

The garden also has an animal house where advanced experiments are conducted on animals using herbal extracts for study on human-related diseases like cancer, ulcer, diabetes, jaundice etc. besides propagation studies through plant cell, tissue and organ culture.

The 10-acre garden has 250 species of plants representing the Dravidian culture, civilisation and languages

Solid waste management programme in 38 villages

The district administration has selected 38 village panchayats for implementation of Solid Waste Management programme.

Announcing this here on Wednesday, Collector S. Malarvizhi said that the 38 panchayats were among the 2,000 panchayats selected across the State for implementation of the programme in the first phase.

Under the scheme, one ‘Thooimai Kavalar’ (sanitary guard) would be appointed per 150 families, and 187 such sanitary guards would be appointed in the 38 panchayats, she said.

They would be paid Rs. 183 per day for the first 100 days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme and from 101st to 300th day under the Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBMG), she said.

The sanitary guard would collect wastes, and segregate organic and inorganic wastes in separate compost pits. Recyclable plastic materials would be segregated separately and the panchayats would be helped to shred and sell the plastic materials for recycling, she said.

The selected panchayats would be given tri-cycles, shredders and other equipment for cleaning, the Collector said. The sanitary guards would soon visit households in the 38 panchayats and collect wastes, she said.

Heat takes a toll on broiler farms

Many companies yet to supply chicks to farmers

A number of broiler chicken farms in the district have been inoperative for the past couple of months as the broiler chicken companies are yet to supply the chicks because of the severe heat.

Although a number of farmers have set up broiler chicken farms on the Perambalur – Athur highway, many have been out of operation.

The farmers of this region enter into an agreement with the broiler companies in Athur or Salem district for hatching the chicks for 40 days. Each shed has a capacity of 1,500 chicks.

K. Thangasamy, a farmer, says although he had set up a shed with adequate infrastructure for the supply of feed and water to the chicks, the Athur-based company with which he had entered into an agreement, was yet to supply the chicks.

· *Farmers have been without work in the absence of chicks*

· *Many have taken loans to set up poultry farms*



THE TIMES OF INDIA

[TOI journalist wins award for agriculture crisis reporting](#)

Priyanka Kakodkar, Editor (Special Projects) of The Times of India, has won the Prem Bhatia Award for excellence in environmental and development reporting for her series of reports on Maharashtra's agrarian crisis and distressed farmers.

The award will be presented at the 20th Prem Bhatia Memorial Lecture at the India International Centre in New Delhi on August 11 at 6.30pm.

Kakodkar's four-part series highlighted how farmer suicides in Maharashtra had shot up by over 40% between August 2014 and February 2015 after freak rains and hailstorms claimed two successive crops. It showed how locals in the arid region of Marathwada had been forced to dig up dry river beds for water and how old people were compelled to work as farm hands as migration in the drought-hit region was up by 30%.

Centre for Policy Research president and chief executive Pratap Bhanu Mehta will be delivering the Prem Bhatia Memorial Annual Lecture on "India's Aborted Transitions" at the awards function.

[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 Sevir regulated market and between Rs.5,500 and RS5,800 per quintal in Tindivanam regulated market.

Kumbh brings brisk business to flower market

The flower market in the city has been doing soaring business since June 14, when the Kumbh flag was hoisted. The prices of marigold and roses have doubled in a week and the rates are expected to climb further as the days of the three shahi parvanis approach.

Devotees offer marigold during the prayers at the Godavari River and at the numerous temples on the river banks, while sweet-scented roses are preferred while meeting sadhus and mahants.

A single rose, which would cost Rs 5 till last Tuesday, now commands a princely sum of Rs 10. The bright marigolds, which were available at Rs 60-80 a kilo, are selling at Rs 120 per kg.

Meena Gadar, a flower seller in the city market, said, "The prices of roses and marigolds has almost doubled since Tuesday. It will increase as the Kumbh approaches. For the next three months, flowers would be expensive."

The brisk business since the flag hoisting of the Kumbh Mela on Tuesday has raised hopes for further spike in rates. The mega religious congregation in the twin venues of Nashik and Trimbakeshwar is expected to draw nearly 1.20 crore pilgrims and tourists.

Another flower seller, Vinod Salantre, said the marigold rates are expected to go up by another Rs 20 per kg. "Marigold is already selling at Rs 150-160 per kg at some places. The price would definitely go up by at least Rs 20 a kg. The rates for each rose will also go up by Rs 2-3," he said.

Besides marigold and roses, the prices of tulsi (holy basil) leaves have also gone up. From Rs 30-40 for one bunch, it has become Rs 50 per

bunch.

"Before the flag hoisting, we were selling tulsi leaves for Rs 30-40 a bunch. Now, the same bunch is selling at Rs 50. The price will increase in the coming days," said Leelabai Dole, a flower vendor.

Gauri Bavali, who came from Swami Shri Narendracharya Maharaj Ashram at Nanij, Ratnagiri, has already begun inquiring about the availability of flowers for the pooja at the sadhugram by Narendra Maharaj from July 19 onwards.

"We will be performing pooja regularly from July 19 onwards and will need plenty of flowers. If the flowers are not available here, then we will order it from Pune or elsewhere. I have given my number to the flower vendors here and they will let me know by tomorrow if they would be able to supply the flowers to us," said she said.

The flower vendors in the city said that they buy bulk of the produce from the farmers and sell it in the market.

"Flowers are cultivated in the outskirts of the city and sometimes are brought from places as far as 70 km. It all depends upon the demand and supply. If the demand is more and there is shortage, then farmers order flowers from other places including Mumbai and Pune. If the demand in these places is more and Nashik has the flowers then the flowers are supplied from Nashik," said Gaurav More, a farmer.

He said that as the demand increases, farmers would bring the flowers from the regions and sell it to the vendors here. "Marigold and roses are brought from Shirdi and Ghoti,. It also costs less and people prefer buying them for Rs 50 per kg and spending Rs 20 on transportation from Shirdi or Ghoti rather than buying it from Nashik, where they cost around Rs 100," he said.

THE HINDU
BusinessLine

Dip in Kenya's black tea output to dilute world production

Led by Kenya, the global black tea production is heading for a shortfall this calendar year.

“Global black tea production so far this year has fallen to 566.55 million kg (mkg) from last year’s figure of 586.63 mkg. This fall of 20.08 mkg marks a decline of 3.42 per cent,” Rajesh Gupta, compiler of annual ‘Global Tea Digest’ told *BusinessLine*.

Kenya is the major contributor to this fall. Its production has declined to 105.42 mkg from 152.05 mkg. Other African countries, Malawi and Uganda, have also reported lower production while Tanzania’s output remained flat.

On the contrary, Asian countries have reported a higher production. North Indian production rose to 176.09 mkg from 154.25 mkg (up by 21.84 mkg). South Indian production rose to 98.84 mkg from 90.82 mkg (up by 8.02 mkg or nine per cent. Sri Lanka’s production edged up to 142.97 mkg from 141.46 mkg.

Bypassing middlemen to boost farmers’ income, the Masakkal way



A farmer standing with his harvested carrot at a farm in the Nilgiris

Masakkal, a hamlet located about 15 km from Kotagiri in Nilgiris district is the hub for exotic leafy vegetables such as Iceberg lettuce, broccoli, celery, parsley, zucchini, thyme and rosemary among others.

The farmers here have been dependent on traders to buy the produce – on terms favourable to the latter.

Aggregation centre

This situation is expected to change with the opening of Farmer Support and Aggregation Centre in Masakkal. Lawrenceedale Estates and Farms

has been identified by the Tamil Nadu Horticulture Development Agency (TANHODA) for managing the aggregation centre under the State Government's Perimetro Vegetable Cluster Development Programme.

Though the aggregation centre was formally inaugurated on Wednesday, it is learnt that the aggregator (Lawrencedale) had already started working with the small farmers (since November 2014) by handholding the growers through the entire life cycle of the crop, advocating usage of less harsh bio-pesticides and also ensuring the last mile delivery by eliminating multiple intermediaries.

“Our strength is our forward-market linkage. After procuring the vegetables produce from the farmer, it is cleaned, sorted, graded and packeted before loading them on refrigerated trucks for despatch to neighbouring cities and states. While wholesalers procure bulk volumes, we also supply to neighbourhood retailers under the brand “LEAF”. Such packets are sold across cities in Tamil Nadu and Bengaluru in Karnataka and Hyderabad in Andhra as well,” Palat Vijayaraghavan, Chief Executive, Lawrencedale Estates and Farms, told *BusinessLine*.

“Yet it has not been easy to source the produce particularly from small farmers,” he said, explaining how these farmers have, over the years fallen into the clutches of the intermediaries.

Of the 500- 600 odd farmers in Masakkal, just about 150 are said to be selling the produce to Lawrencedale. “The rest are under the clutches of the traders,” he said and explained how the traders give a token advance at the time of sowing or mid-way, participate in the farmers' family functions and give elaborate sums as gifts, because of which the farmer feels obliged to sell the produce to the trader/ intermediary. “We are now working extensively to free the farmer from such practices.”

No intermediaries

The company does not send its staff to the farm gate to procure the produce as traders do. On the other hand, farmers bring the produce to the collection centre where the vegetables are sorted, weighed and paid for immediately, Vijayaraghavan said, adding, “We do not reject the produce brought to the centre. Good quality vegetables help the farmer get good returns. If they are agreeable to online transfer, we pay a little extra. This is just to ensure that they do not spend the amount immediately”.

According to public data, close to 80 per cent of the farming communities in the Nilgiris depend on intermediaries to sell the produce.

Admitting this, N Mani, Joint Director, Horticulture, Nilgiris, said that the district comprised 4,400 farmers in 224 clusters and a majority were still under the clutches of the intermediaries.

The department, he said, provides subsidy to the clusters at Rs. 22,500/hectare for open-pollinated crop and Rs. 33,750 for hybrid crop, imparts training to farmers covering all the villages in the district household-wise and farmer organisations as well. “We have also extended six collection centre vehicles,” (The vehicle subsidy works out to 40 per cent of the cost of the vehicle) he added.

“We are looking for more such aggregators to enhance fair trade and the ecosystem of the farming community in the district,” he said.

Farmers’ cooperation

To a query on farmers’ awareness level, he said: “a lot more is needed and we are doing our best.”

Meanwhile Lawrenceedale has, with the Masakkal aggregation centre expanded its footprints, having initiated wide-ranging engagement with farming clusters in Nilgiris, Mettupalayam, Karamadai, Thondamuthur, Pollachi and Udumalpet besides others across southern, western and northern India.

As part of taking the Perimetro programme forward, the company has deployed mobile vans under “Namma Thottam” (Our Farms) banner.

Godrej Agrovet to focus more on animal feeds biz

Godrej Agrovet Limited, a subsidiary of Godrej Industries, is looking to develop innovative technologies and products that would help reduce the production cost of poultry meat, eggs and milk. Several research and development (R&D) projects have been undertaken at its recently-launched R&D centre near Nashik in Maharashtra.

All the projects at the new centre are aimed at improving livestock yields. At the new centre, named Nadir Godrej Centre for Animal Research & Development (NGCARD), research would be aligned towards developing innovative technologies and products that will enhance animal feed nutritionally, thereby improving productivity and efficiency of animal agriculture.

The firm's animal feed business has a pan Indian presence with sales of over one million tonnes annually of feed and nutrition products for dairy cattle, poultry and aquaculture.

Balram Yadav, Managing Director, Godrej Agrovet, said that NGCARD would focus on developing innovative methods to address the growing demand for protein rich diets.

Continuing dry spell to hit soyabean acreage

The outlook for soyabean acreage appears to be weak even if official data state otherwise. Agriculture Ministry data show that oilseeds have been sown across 10.13 million hectares (mh) as of last week, up 355.3 per cent from 2.24 mh the same time last year.

But, with the monsoon slowing across central India over the past three weeks, experts are worried that the overall Kharif soyabean acreage may actually dip at the end of the sowing period.

“The situation is grim since there's been no rain for the last 20-25 days in many parts of Maharashtra and west Madhya Pradesh. Overall acreage could drop. Rainfall is required over the next day or two with the crop under severe stress,” said VS Bhatia, Director, ICAR-Directorate of Soybean Research.

The bump in sowing figures, said experts, was mainly due to soyabean sowing having taken place almost a month in advance compared to last year.

While planting had been completed across vast tracts of MP due to the timely onset of the monsoon, acreage in Maharashtra is considerably lower than normal. With dry conditions prevailing, there is a possibility of farmers switching to short-duration crops, such as maize and moong.

Only 1.8-2 mh have been covered in Maharashtra where the average acreage is usually 3-3.5 mh. He added that the Directorate has suggested that farmers could replant soyabean after July 30 in case there was rain and has suggested intercropping operations to conserve water.

Spot rubber rules unchanged



Spot rubber continued to rule unchanged on Thursday. RSS 4 was steady at Rs. 124 a kg, according to traders.

The grade finished flat at Rs. 124.50 and Rs. 121.50 respectively as reported by the Rubber Board and dealers.

August futures improved to Rs. 124.50 (Rs. 123.77) and September to Rs. 124.60 (Rs. 123.86) while the October futures weakened to Rs. 123.54 (Rs. 125.10) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange.

RSS 3 (spot) closed firm at Rs. 106.10 (Rs. 104.92) at Bangkok. July futures closed at ¥201.2 (Rs. 103.08) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber rates (Rs./kg): RSS-4: 124 (124); RSS-5: 122 (122); Ungraded: 110 (110); ISNR 20: 113 (113) and Latex (60% drc): 109 (109).

MCX crude oil moves in a narrow zone

The crude oil futures contract has been stuck in a narrow range between Rs.3,220 and Rs. 3,420 per barrel since July 7, within its overall

downtrend. It is current trading just above the lower end of this range at Rs. 3,290.

A breakout on either side of this range will determine the next leg of move for the contract.

A break above Rs. 3,420 can take the contract higher to 3,500.

On the other hand, a break below Rs. 3,220 will see the contract resuming its downtrend to the next targets of Rs. 3,157 – the 61.8 per cent Fibonacci retracement level and Rs. 3,000 – the psychological support. Traders who have taken short positions last week can continue to hold their position. Stop-loss can be revised lower to Rs. 3,440 for the same target of Rs. 3,170.

MCX-Natural Gas: The contract has reversed sharply higher in the past week from the low of Rs. 168.4 per mmBtu recorded on July 9.

It is currently trading near Rs. 185. Immediate support is at Rs. 182 and the next key support is at Rs. 180. As long as the contract trades above these supports, the outlook will remain bullish. A rise to Rs. 190-192 looks likely in the coming days.

Traders can wait for dips and go long at Rs. 182. Stop-loss can be placed at Rs. 179 for the target of Rs. 188.

The contract will come under pressure if it breaks below Rs. 180. The ensuing target on such a break will be Rs. 175.

Note: The recommendations are based on technical analysis. There is a risk of loss in trading.