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THE HINDU

Agriculture activity in full swing



Agricultural activity in the rain-fed region of the district is in full swing and areas under irrigation are bracing up for sowing from the end of July.

Sowing has been completed in more than 98 per cent of the rain-fed areas in the district. Joint Director of Agriculture M. Mahanteshappa told *The Hindu* that the target for completing sowing during the current season was 2,74,090 hectares, against which sowing has been completed on 2,68,039 hectares.

Under areas coming under irrigation, the target for completing sowing is 1,16,600 hectares, against which sowing has been completed on 2,992 hectares.

“Sowing in irrigated areas begins in late July and paddy transplantation takes place by August-September, as the storage levels in the reservoirs have to go up before water is released to the irrigation channels,” said Mr. Mahanteshappa.

The bulk of crops for which sowing has been completed so far include cotton, tobacco, pulses, ragi and maize. About 1.2 lakh hectares of land is expected to be brought under paddy cultivation by the end of September.

In some places where agriculture takes place under rain-fed conditions, pulses are ready for harvesting as sowing took place immediately after the pre-monsoon showers in April/May.

Pulses like green gram, black gram, etc have a gestation period of 90 days and the second round of sowing is also taking place in such places.

Meanwhile, rains across the district for the period June 1 to July 15 has been recorded as normal, as Mysuru district recorded 173.9 mm of rainfall during the period against a normal of 158.10 mm. However between July 9 and 15, the district recorded only 6.0 mm of rainfall against a normal of 27.3 mm of rain (considered scanty).

Twenty seven of the 33 hoblis have registered scanty rains, five hoblis have recorded deficit rain and only one hobli has recorded excess rain during the week.

Maharashtra mulling agri tax to fund farm sector development

Devendra Fadnavis did not specify which services or goods will come under this tax

Maharashtra is mulling the imposition of an ‘Agriculture Tax’ on various goods and services in an attempt to raise Rs. 5000 crore annually for the farming sector.

“The State government has decided to allot Rs. 5,000 crore every year for complete development of agriculture for next five years. If needed, we will apply additional agriculture tax,” said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday in the State Assembly.

He was replying to the four-day discussion on farming distresses in the State and possibility of a farm loan waiver.

While the Chief Minister did not specify which services or goods will come under this tax, the announcements regarding the same are likely during the ongoing Assembly session.

FIRs against banks

Mr. Fadnavis also declared that FIRs would be filed against banks which deny loans to farmers.

“Farmers are on our priority and we have given orders to ensure that FIRs will be filed against such banks who will not lend farm loans,” he declared.

Loan waiver

Reiterating that previous loan waiver did not reach the needy farmers and stating that such a waiver was not required in the current situation, Mr. Fadnavis claimed that the drought-affected regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha did not receive monetary help as they should have.

Mr. Fadnavis alleged that 53 per cent of the package was given to western Maharashtra, which is known as State's sugar belt. This part of the State is a stronghold of Congress-NCP combine, with adequate infrastructure for irrigation.

According to figures, out of around 60 lakh farmers from Vidarbha and Marathwada region only 25 lakh farmers have taken loans, at least once in their life time. "What is the use of loan waiver if 35 lakh farmers are not the beneficiaries of the institutional loan system," Mr. Fadnavis asked.

"Despite the loan waiver in 2008, around 9614 farmers have committed suicides in Maharashtra from 2009 to 2014," he said, adding that farming should be investment-based and not credit-based.

The Opposition Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) had demanded a farm loan waiver citing successive natural calamities such as drought, hailstorm and unseasonal rains. Protesting against the government's decision to not declare the loan waiver, the Opposition has boycotted the Assembly proceedings.

Rain deficit: alternative farm plan mooted

Collector Ch. Vijayamohan told nodal officers to prepare an alternative agricultural plan because the district has been having deficit rainfall this year.

Addressing a meeting with officials of all departments, the collector directed them to formulate a special action plan to tide over the drinking water scarcity in the district. Villagers should be enlightened on employment guarantee works in order to avert migration, he added.

Nodal officers must accord priority to building farm ponds, dug-out ponds, checkdams and water storage structures. He said the district was lagging behind in horticulture, drip and sprinkler irrigation.

Fisheries and sericulture officials must pay attention to farmers' welfare with seriousness, shedding their casual attitude, he said.

The collector told Zilla Parishad CEO Easwar to make MPDOs pay attention to adopted villages all over the district. He said he would review the progress of nutrition supply to children through ICDS.

Jayalithaa advises MPs on strategy for monsoon session



Chief Minister Jayalithaa on Monday met AIADMK parliamentarians and advised them on the strategy to be adopted during the monsoon session of Parliament, which begins on Tuesday.

With the AIADMK now taking a stand against Amendments to the Land Bill, the party may work with the larger opposition in the matter.

“The Chief Minister has asked all of us to be in constant touch with her. On a case by case basis, she will guide us on how to intervene in the House,” A. W. Rabi Bernard, party spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP, told *The Hindu* on Monday.

“She emphasised that our primary aim was to protect the interests of the people of Tamil Nadu,” he said.

The AIADMK, with 11 members in the Rajya Sabha and 37 in the Lok Sabha, will maintain its stance on the Land Bill, challenging the Centre's position, Mr. Bernard said. While the AIADMK had supported the Bill in Lok Sabha – The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill was passed in the Lower House on March 10, 2015 – the party has recently opposed some proposed Amendments, citing opposition from farmers.

“We believe that the present amendments take away important safeguards that farmers and agriculture require. Hence, I urge the Government of India not to press these amendments,” Ms. Jayalalithaa had said in a letter to Mr. Modi last week, explaining her party’s revised position.

Considering that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at an all-party meeting held in New Delhi on Monday, appealed to the parties to move forward on the contentious Land Bill, the AIADMK – whose say will matter for the passage of the Bill in Upper House – and the BJP may lock horns over the issue. A total of 47 out of the 48 MPs of the party attended the meeting held at the Secretariat, except Ramanathapuram MP A. Anwar Raja, who could not attend the meeting due to a personal loss, party sources said.

Dressing down

The same day, Ms. Jayalalithaa convened the first cabinet meeting after she became Chief Minister on May 23 following her acquittal in the disproportionate assets case.

While the Cabinet members remained tight-lipped as to what transpired at the meeting, a senior minister said the Chief Minister gave a dressing-down to a dozen Ministers on various issues.

Grievance meet for farmers

The farmers’ grievance day meet will be held on Friday at 10 a.m. at the Collectorate, according to S. Ganesh, Collector. Interested farmers could attend the meet to air their grievances related to agriculture, he said.

Training programme on financing Joint Farming Groups



A three-day training programme on financing Joint Liability Groups commenced here on Monday as the Government of India has planned to finance over 5 lakh farmers' groups.

NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) introduced the concept of financing of Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) by banks and the same has been well-accepted by many banks as one of the innovative credit delivery mechanisms.

In spite of the rapid growth of SHG-bank linkage programme all over the country, the credit requirements of certain important mid-segment rural clients like tenant farmers, small and marginal farmers, weavers, artisans, fishermen, small traders etc. have yet to be fully catered to by the banking system.

Hence, the Government of India announced the target of forming and financing over 5 lakh Joint Farming Groups all over the country.

In order to create awareness among bankers of the scope and possibilities in group mode of financing especially JLGs, Bankers' Institute of Rural Development (BIRD), Mangalore, organises a training programme for bankers through NABARD. A total of 40 bankers from the commercial banks, regional rural banks and cooperative banks from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Gujarat are participating in the three-day training programme that commenced on Monday.

Chief Regional Manager, Indian Overseas Bank, Tirunelveli, V.S Raghunathan, while inaugurating the programme, lauded the initiatives of NABARD in popularizing the concepts of alternative credit delivery systems like SHG financing, financing Joint Liability Groups etc.

He said financing of Joint Liability Groups would increase the quantum of loans in agriculture and allied activities.

Deputy General Manager, NABARD, V. Suresh the BIRD was conducting capacity building programmes for bankers all over the country to increase the credit flow in agriculture and allied activities. He said that exposure programme would provide field level experiences to bankers as they would interact with successful JLGs formed by different banks.

Deputy General Manager, NABARD, R. Bharath Kumar said that the exposure programme on JLGs would benefit the bankers and facilitate large-scale financing of Joint Liability Groups.

Assistant General Manager (District Development), K. Ramalingam and Lead District Manager S. Alagarsamy participated in the programme.

Farmers demand early release of crop insurance benefits



Farmers thronged the collectorate here on Monday seeking the intervention of the district administration for early release of crop insurance.

Affiliated to Indhiya Uzhavar Ulaipalar Katchi, they staged an agitation demanding insurance benefits for rain-fed crops, which failed owing to drought in 2013-14, according O.A. Narayanasamy, state president of this outfit.

The farmers also demanded interest-free loan of up to Rs.1 lakh to each of them. Since these farmers had been relying on rain-fed cultivation of agriculture crops, such benefits should be provided by banks under recommendation of government authorities, the State president said.

Moreover, the government should ensure adequate stock of farm inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides for supplying to farmers. He appealed to the Centre to scrap Land Acquisition Bill in the interest of farmers and the State government should firmly oppose the Centre's move to introduce the Bill.

A summer date with DATES

A LONG-TERM CROP that grows and yields better with time

This elongated scarlet fruit arranged in little mounds on carts adds colour to the dull monotony of the yawning national highways of Krishnagiri-Dharmapui-Salem. Yes, it's the season of the date palm harvest and the crunchy sweetness of dates. Ten kilometres from Dharmapuri, S. Nizammudin imports tissue culture date palm nurseries from Abu Dhabi and cultivates them at his Ariyakulam farm in Krishnapuram post here.

Largest producers in TN

Tirunelveli, Dindigul,
Coimbatore, Ooty,
Tirupur, and Erode

India

Imports one third of global
produce

Top varieties

Barhi, Elite, Mazdool and
Kalas

Retail profit margin

100 to 150 per cent

**Scale of finance needed
per acreage**

Rs.3 lakh

Crop yield

Doubles with the tree age.

Spread over 11 acres, this Ariyakulam farm is the single largest producer of dates in this region of Dharmapuri and Krishngiri, and is the only source of imported tissue cultured date palm nurseries for small farms in the region.

“There are over 1,000 varieties of dates and here in our farm, we grow 32 varieties,” says 56 year old Nizammudin, who sells imported date palm nurseries to farms as far off as Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The finest variety is Barhi, which is also the priciest, with one kilogram costing Rs. 300 in the retail market.

Similarly, Elite, Mazdool and Kalas are fine varieties, next only to Barhi, and yields good harvest and income to the farmers. The farm price of Barhi is Rs. 200 per kilogram. Dealers pick up one tonne at Rs. 2 lakh from here for retail sales.”

On an ordinary day this season, when the retail cart sells one kilogram of seedling variety at Rs. 200 on the highways, this farm sells the same variety at Rs. 80 per kilogram.

“Such is the profit margin for dates, once it reaches the retail outlets,” says Nizammudin, vouching for the remunerative prices once farmers take to date palm cultivation.

A date palm doubles its produce as the year progresses. The first crop, which is harvested in the second year of plantation yields 32 kilograms to 50 kilograms. The second crop will yield 100 kilograms and the yield doubles to 200 kilograms during the fourth year.

This is a long-term crop that grows and yields better with time, says Mr. Nizammudin. With any type of soil well suited to date palm cultivation, this could offer a remunerative alternative to other plantations, says Mr. Nizamuddin.

This once-a-year crop, flowers between January-February and is harvested in June-July. The fields are left fallow for six months. This year post harvests, dates are being sold between Rs. 80 per kilogram and Rs. 300 per kilogram, varying on varieties.

The Ariyakulam farm also specialises in sales of tissue culture plants of fourth year. The four-year old tissue cultured plants are imported from Abu Dabhi and partly cultivated here, and the rest sold to farms in Ananthpur, Chhattisgarh, Nagpur Bellary and Raipur. This year, Nizammudin's farm has seen a bumper harvest.

"Last year, we harvested 6.5 tonnes, but this year, the harvest has been doubled," says Nizammudin. Yet, it has not been an easy run, with the dry spell in the region. One tree requires 200 litres of water per week and a small plant requires 50 litres per week. This year, tankers were used to irrigate the trees here.

For now, his farm has for the first time, planted Ajuva variety, through organic farming. "This when harvested, will be pegged at a whopping price of Rs. 3,000 per kg," he says. When fruit treats can go beyond the summer delights of melons and mangoes, think dates. For all you know, these scarlet delights may have just come from this farm in Ariyakulam.

Crop needs a shot in the arm

The global production in 2012 was 9 lakh metric million tonnes and India imported 3.5 metric million tonnes annually. This is largely second or third quality varieties, says Mr. Nizammudin. The best quality is sourced by Europe.

Despite the fact that India imports a third of global produce, there is no incentive for local producers, since date palm has not been recognised in the list of horticultural crops for subsidies, says Mr. Nizammudin. In Tamil Nadu, there are 2,000 acres under date palms and the largest producers are Tirunelveli, Dindigal, Udthagamandalam, Coimbatore, Tirupur and Erode. Yet, the crop has still not been included in the list of horticultural crops.

Date palm should be included in the list of horticulture crops of the government. With its high scale of finance, recognition under horticulture would fetch the farmers benefits of subsidy, says S. Nizammudin. While no other crop provides an increased yield with every passing year like the date palm, the cost of cultivation is also equally high.

The scale of finance per acre is Rs. 3 lakh. The plant is expensive and the farmers could do well with government subsidy, says Mr. Nizammudin. Equally, farmers need to be incentivised since no other crop provides with an increased yield with age. A date palm tree lives for 100 years and gets better with age.

Rains help farmers raise sunflower after 8 years

For those using Madurai-Dindigul highway, the sight of sunflowers in full bloom on a few fields near Vadipatti comes as a treat to the eyes.

A few farmers in Kulasekaranpatti near Vadipatti have taken up sunflower farming after a gap of nearly eight years and said that they are waiting to harvest the crop after 25 days.

“Sunflower is mostly grown in Dindigul region and only a few farmers started cultivating it in Madurai district. Moreover, inadequate rainfall in the last seven years has resulted in many not venturing into cultivation of sunflower as water available is barely enough to meet our drinking needs,” said M. Periyasamy, a farmer at Kulasekaranpatti. Two more farmers are cultivating sunflowers on three acres of land each near his fields.

The farmers, who primarily raise maize, said that a decade ago they used to cultivate sunflower after April, once the main crop was harvested.

“In the last eight years, most of us had very poor yield of maize and we depend mainly on milch animals for income. Since there is no water, many cannot afford to raise sunflower even after the main harvest is over,” a farmer, said.

The farmers said that heavy rains during this ‘Chithirai’ prompted them to begin cultivation of the flowers again.

“Sunflowers actually need very less water and need to be watered only once in eight days. The crop can be harvested within 90 days and the produce must be taken to Vellakovil oil market since prices quoted by local dealers are less,” said S. Karuppan, another farmer.

Sunflowers from Vadipatti command a good price in the Vellakovil market, he said.

Mr. Periyasamy said that expected more rains. “Based on how favourable the Chithirai rains were in helping us raising an additional crop this year, we are hoping that the monsoon will also be as good,” he said.

Heavy rains in ‘Chithirai’ this year prompted them to go for cultivation of sunflower again

Farmers’ Producer Company launched in Salem district

The Salem District Farmers’ Club Group Federation (SDFCGF) has launched Vallalar Farmers’ Producer Company (FPC) with the objective of protecting the interest of the small and marginal farmers.

R. Amalorpavanathan, Deputy Managing Director, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), launched the FPC at a function held at Vanavasi village in Nangavalli Block on Sunday.

Mr. Amalorpavanathan said that the SDFCGF could graduate to the level of starting a FPC to protect the interest of the small and marginal farmers who are members of the SDFCGF. The forming of the FPC would enable the farmers to enjoy the benefit of technology advancement and economies of scale.

He earlier opened a Feed Input Shop of the Vallalar FPC which would supply low cost inputs, feeds, manure, other farm needs, etc., which would benefit more than 6000 farmers in the Western Blocks of Nangavalli, Mecheri, Omalur, Kolathur, Tharamangalam, Edappadi, Sankagiri, Magudanchavadi and Konganapuram in Salem District.

K. Venkateswara Rao, Chief General Manager, NABARD, Tamil Nadu Regional Office, in his special address said that more such FPCs should be evolved so that the small and marginal farmers have the advantage of utilising the scale to procure inputs at a lower price, have more bargaining power and leverage technology for enhanced production both quantitatively and qualitatively.

S. Natarajan, General Manager, NABARD, Tamil Nadu Regional Office, said that the SDFCGF, with the guidance from ESAF, a Producer Organisation Promoting Institution (POPI) identified by NABARD could form a FPC which would benefit all its members who become shareholders of the company.

Govindarajan, President, SDFCGF, narrated as to how the 70 Farmers’ Clubs promoted under the aegis of NABARD had graduated into a

Federation and has now matured to the level of FPC. The SDFCGF has been extending technical support services to more than 5,000 farmers and their families. The Federation has also trained all their members in farm related skills like organic farming; precision farming; value addition and marketing of vegetables; milch animals; fodder management; calf rearing; azolla farming; vermi compost and production of organic manure; etc., with the support of NABARD.

Inflow on the rise at Mettur

Inflow at the Stanley Reservoir at Mettur increased from 4,512 cusecs on Sunday to 8,781 cusecs on Monday morning.

Public Works Department officials said that the water level stood at 86.85 feet against the full level of 120 feet while the storage was 49.12 tmcft against capacity of 93.470 tmcft. The discharge for drinking water was 2,000 cusecs. Officials said that the discharge from Karnataka dams were increased and copious water is expected to reach the reservoir on Tuesday.

Refrain from exploiting ground water, say villagers

People of Alasandhapuram and scores of other villages in Natrampalli block submitted a petition to the collector to stop packed water companies from exploiting ground water that is already depleting.

The memorandum was submitted by R. Ravi, panchayat president of Alasandhapuram and scores of other people belonging to Simukkampattu, Kollappalli, Gandhi Nagar, Perumpallam, Kanagapuram, Mel Pallathur, Kil Pallathur, Thimmampettai, Mindappattu etc. in Natrampalli block.

Depleting ground water

According to the petition these villages are located along the Palar where the river enters Tamil Nadu. Since a flow eludes Palar for more than a decade water table in their villages are already in abysmal depths and agriculture has been largely affected.

Adding salt to their wounds, three water packaging companies viz. Aqua Jal, Yelgiris and Surabi, suck huge quantities of water from their deep bore wells in Kollappalli, the villagers contended.

Government told to take steps for farmers' welfare

Expressing concern over the condition of farmers in the State and the Kannadigas in Goa, writer Siddalingaiah has said that the government should initiate steps for their welfare instead of showing only lip service.

Agrarian crisis

Inaugurating the 126th anniversary programme of the Karnatak Vidyavardhak Sangha here on Monday, he said it was a matter of concern that the agrarian crisis in the State had reached a serious level wherein farmers were committing suicide.

Instead of consoling their family members, the government should initiate steps to help them.

Industry status

The farm sector should be recognised as an industry and a mechanism should be evolved to ensure scientific prices for agricultural produce.

The Goa government showed a partisan approach while dealing with the Kannadiga families residing there, he alleged.

The government should try to find out a long lasting solution for the issues concerning the Kannadigas in Goa, Mr. Siddalingaiah said. KVS president Patil Puttappa was present.

Cultural and entertainment programmes were held throughout the day to mark the occasion.

Award winning farmer fields queries from students



An awareness programme for farmers on the latest technologies in agriculture supported by the Tamil Nadu State Council for Science and Technology was organised at the Yadava College recently.

During the event in an interaction with college students, Periyasamy Solaimalai, a recipient of Krishi Karman Award from the President of India and the State-level award for best performance in Agriculture, spoke about the effects of chemical fertilizers on the quality of the soil.

“While farmers should follow scientific methods suggested by the government to improve their yield and crop, it is important to know what will adversely affect the soil. Farmers too should support the government by providing paddy fields and sharing their expertise,” he said.

Fielding questions from the students on agriculture as a career, Mr. Palanisamy said that despite agriculture having become less profitable due to procurement of crops by middle men and real estate growth, he was happy to see many youngsters taking an interest in it.

K. Balakrishnan, Head, Department of Seed Technology, Agriculture College, Madurai, gave a key note address and emphasised on the need for organic, green manure and bio fertilizers, conservation of water and other post-harvest technologies.

Students from the college as well as farmers from the district participated in the programme.

‘Sufficient stock of fertilizer, seeds’

Joint Director of Agriculture Department M. Mahanteshappa said here on Monday that there was a stock of over 20,000 metric tonne fertilizers, including urea, diammonium phosphate, and potash in the district.

Fertiliser would be made available to farmers on demand across the district, he added. Similarly there was a stock of over 40, 0000 quintal seeds, including 35,000 quintal paddy seeds in the district and the seeds were being distributed to farmers through 101 centres including the 32 Raitha Samparka Kendras.

Answering a query from the Commissioner of Agriculture Panduranga Naik during a video conference held here on Monday, Mr. Mahanteshappa said farmers would be supplied with fertilizer and seeds on demand in the entire district for the kharif season. He said that farmers were being enlightened and technically assisted by officials of the Agriculture Department. Paddy seeds are being distributed to farmers, particularly in K.R. Nagar, T. Narsipur, Nanjangud and Mysuru taluks. He also told the official that, by and large, there had been normal rainfall all over the district. However, there was no rain in the past 15 days. In spite of this, water was being released into canals from KRS reservoir.

Mr. Mahanteshappa said that of the 10 farmers who committed suicide, the family of one farmer had been given compensation of Rs. 2 lakh. Compensation would be given to the remaining nine farmers once the committees under the chairmanship of the Assistant Commissioner confirm that the reason for suicide was debt.

Mr. Mahanteshappa further said that the department had put up posters in all villages urging farmers to not give up hope. The posters highlight various schemes and programmes of the State government introduced recently for the welfare of the farming community. Dr. Dharmaraju, Director of Agriculture was present at the meeting.

The Indian **EXPRESS**

Maharashtra: Sugar, rice crops worst hit by continued dry spell in state



Sugar and rice growers in Maharashtra are the worst affected by July's extended dry spell amid a deepening agrarian crisis in Maharashtra.

Barely four per cent area under sugar cultivation — 644 lakh hectare out of 8,861 lakh hectare — has so far been sown, official statistics reveal.

For the rice crop, sowing has so far been undertaken on only 2,360 lakh hectare of the 14,926 lakh hectare usually under rice cultivation, roughly 16 per cent.

- Cotton covers one-third of total kharif cultivation
- Kharif cultivation crosses last year's figures, thanks to good monsoon
- Drought conditions affecting farmers, fodder
- Delay in monsoon hits kharif sowing
- Soy rise

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There has been a near total absence of rain in most parts of Maharashtra since the last week of June. Although intermittent showers hit Pune and Konkan on Monday, most other regions continue to be dry.

The weather forecast projects a bleak picture as well. Maharashtra Revenue Minister Eknath Khadse said the Indian Meteorological Department has projected that monsoon would become active in Maharashtra only in the first week of August. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis too sounded his concern over the grim forecast in his reply on the farm crisis in the state legislature on Monday.

KEEPING LAND FALLOW		
Major Kharif Crops	Area Under Cultivation (in lakh hectares)	Sown area (in lakh hectares)
Rice	14,926	2,370
Jowar	11,444	3,243
Tur	11,372	7,449
Sugarcane	8,861	644
Cotton	33,564	33,271

Conceding that there exists the threat of another season of crop failure, Fadnavis informed the state legislature that resowing might have to be taken up for at least 27 lakh hectare of the sown area across Maharashtra, if the rains continued to play truant till July 31.

The Agriculture Commissioner's office on Monday submitted latest sowing numbers and estimates for resowing due to the extended drought spell.

Incidentally the government's report has projected that the resowing percentage would be more in Western Maharashtra as compared to the more drought-stressed Vidarbha and Marathwada.

As things stand today, the Agriculture Commissionerate has told the government that over 35 per cent of the sown area in Western Maharashtra might have to be resown, followed by Vidarbha (32 per cent), and Marathwada (16 per cent).

State functionaries said that apart from the dry spell, sugar cultivation has also been hit by the crisis in the industry that has affected crushing. Incidentally, while cane cultivation has taken a big hit, another cash crop cotton, which is more pronounced in the Vidarbha belt, has seen almost 99 per cent sowing.

Sugar millers in Maharashtra have run up arrears of nearly Rs 3,500 crore to cane farmers and have found it difficult to provide fair and remunerative prices, owing to a worldwide drop in retail sugar prices.

Fadnavis on Wednesday announced that the government would provide financial support of Rs 1,500 per farmer up to two hectares for resowing if necessary. "The government has set aside Rs 360 crore towards this aid," he said. Spelling out the government's plan for water and fodder supply in arid areas, Fadnavis said that "a contingency plan was in place to face the crisis". Official figures also reveal that the total sowing in the food grain category was about 34 per cent, pulses 58 per cent, and oilseeds 89 per cent this kharif season.



Maharashtra's 'zero suicide mission': Govt plans additional tax to help farmers

The Maharashtra government plans to levy an additional tax to mobilise Rs 25,000 crore over the next five years to enable greater investments in water conservation and power projects, and to ensure food security for farmers across the state as part of its "zero suicide mission". Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said that a loan waiver would not serve any purpose.



As part of the zero-suicide mission, the state government is planning to bring 2.15 lakh hectares of additional land under irrigation through 132 projects in some of the suicide-prone districts within the next three years. It also plans to build 1 lakh wells over the next three years at an investment of Rs 2,074 crore. Besides, 47,277 new electric connections would be provided to farmers in the 14 suicide-prone districts. The government will also spend Rs 1,595 crore on premium for crop insurance for farmers.

Rejecting the Opposition's demand for a loan waiver aggregating Rs 16,000 crore, Fadnavis said in the assembly such a waiver would be of no help as 60 per cent of the farmers were still outside of the credit disbursement coverage. Rather, he said, the government's policy decisions to restructure loans with zero interest rates and repayment over the next five years had led to a rise in the number of farmers availing bank loans.

“If we were to go in for a complete loan waiver, only 25 lakh farmers in Vidarbha and Marathwada would benefit. But there would be 35 lakh equally deserving farmers who would not be covered under the loan waiver due to low credit disbursement,” said the CM.

According to him, the root cause of the agrarian crisis in Maharashtra was the mismanagement of district cooperative banks, which had benefited financial institutions in Western Maharashtra at the cost of Vidarbha and Marathwada. The state has already warned of criminal action against banks refusing loans to farmers.

[Wilt|Monsoon Break|Kharif Crops](#)

Kharif crops especially in Parbhani, Yavatmal, Latur, Jalna, parts of Amravati and others are in danger of dying because of the long break in the monsoon.

State agriculture department officials said there may be re-sowing in some regions if the dry spell continues for another week. Sources said the crop yield may be affected this year due to the break in rains. Yield of crops such as bajra, soybean and cotton may even reduce by 20%, farmers across the state said.

Yields of soybean, bajra and cotton was already severely affected in 2014-15 due to inclement weather and a deficient monsoon.

Sources from the state agriculture department told TOI that the long dry spell may affect some crops adversely. "The dry spell has continued for more than 15 days in several districts, severely affecting crops which require water during their early growth stage. Kharif crops that have already been sown are not getting adequate water. The inadequate supply of water is likely to cause wilting in crops, thereby stunting their growth, which is worrisome," a source from the state agriculture department said.

"If districts start receiving rain in another four to five days, crops may recover but yield may still come down," the official said, adding that rice transplanting has also slowed due to the break in monsoon.

Kharif sowing in the state predominantly takes place in Vidarbha and Marathwada. "Vidarbha and Marathwada received very good rainfall in June, accelerating the pace of sowing. It was assumed that the rain will continue. However, farmers are now facing a dry spell which has continued for over two weeks, which is a cause for worry. Kharif crops are rainfed and need good water supply during their growth stages. If crops begin to wilt, there are possibilities that farmers may have to re-sow," the source said, adding that there are chances of re-sowing in parched regions of Marathwada and west Vidarbha if rains are delayed by another week.

He added that crops in some districts in Marathwada and West Vidarbha are now in a critical state. As many as 140 blocks in 11 districts in the state have received rainfall that has been 50% below normal. The agriculture department is therefore advising farmers to opt for intercultural operations which help in retaining soil moisture. Areas where water storage is

adequate, farmers can opt for protective irrigation and use sprinklers to water crops.

Farmers with fields of soybean, mung and urad have been advised to open alternate furrows, which help in conserving soil moisture.

Govt rolls out incentives for renewable energy

The state government has come out with its promised New and Renewable Energy Policy under which sops have been declared for developing various types of renewable energy. It has set a target of generating 14,400 MW through renewable sources. Many sops are common for the sources while some are sector-specific.

The government has decided to promote six sources of renewable energy. They are: wind (5,000 MW), cogeneration using farm waste (1,000 MW), small hydel (400 MW), farm waste gasification (300 MW), inorganic industrial waste (200 MW) and solar (7,500 MW).

As per the policy, Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC) will declare separate open access (OA) regulations and cross subsidy surcharge (CSS) for renewable energy. If MSEDCL does not grant OA within time stipulated by MERC, the promoter will get deemed OA.

A committee will be constituted under the chief secretary for mid-term review of the policy. In case a promoter has power purchase agreement (PPA) with MSEDCL and wants to sell his renewable energy elsewhere, he can terminate the agreement.

Some of the sops are common. If the developer wants to use renewable energy for captive purpose, then he will get waiver on electricity duty for 10 years. MSEDCL and Mahatransco will not levy supervision charges for setting up transmission infrastructure. Maharashtra Energy Development Agency (MEDA) will give a grant of up to Rs 1 crore for transmission network.

Many incentives are common for solar and wind. They can get industry status if the developer wants. The land used for energy generation will be deemed non-agricultural (NA) use. No consent or no-objection certificate (NOC) will be needed from Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB).

The policy has identified four ways of selling renewable power: to MSEDCL and other distribution companies in the state to fulfill their renewable energy purchase obligation (RPO), captive use, direct third party sale or selling power to the exchange through renewable energy certificate (REC) mechanism.

The target for wind generation is 5,000 MW. Private players already have 1,350 MW capacity. So 3,500 MW will have to be for captive use or outside the state sale. In case of solar energy, Mahagenco is the sole generator at present. Now, it will create 2,500 MW capacity on public private partnership (PPP) basis. The remaining 5,000 MW will be developed by private players on their own. MERC will give preferential tariff to solar and MSEDCL will give it priority for open access. MEDA will give land up to 4 hectare without auction.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Rains arrest soya's bull run



Weak global cues and intermittent rains lashing Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states for the past three days have arrested uptrend in soyabean continuing for the past few days. On Monday, soyabean in mandis across Madhya Pradesh declined to ₹3,400 a quintal. With current rains standing to benefit soyabean crop profusely, hopes of increase in sowing area and bumper crop is expected to further bring down soybean prices in local mandis in the coming days, said Mahesh Purohit, a local trader. Plant deliveries were also quoted lower at ₹3,450 on sluggish demand in soya oil. Soya refined went for ₹592-595 for 10 kg (600-602), while soya solvent declined to ₹572- 575 (575-580).

Spot pepper rules steady



Spot pepper remained steady on limited activities as the arrivals shrunk due to wide spread heavy rains in the growing regions. Only nine tonnes of pepper were traded on Monday on the terminal market. This phenomenon has kept the spot pepper unchanged today, market sources told *BusinessLine*. Domestic buyers in the north Indian states are waiting for the holders of the released “allegedly tainted pepper” stored in the ware houses. Spot prices remained unchanged at ₹62,000 (ungarbled) and ₹65,000 (garbled) a quintal. August and September futures on the IPSTA moved up by ₹499 a quintal each to ₹66,500 and ₹66,999 respectively. Export prices were at \$10,725 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,975 for the US.

In this manner, the heavy to very rain is poised to spell over into the first few days of August, according to the US agency's outlook.

Heavy rain

The heavy showers until Monday morning have helped shave off one per cent from the overall monsoon deficit since June 1, which logged in at seven per cent by the evening.

However West Rajasthan and large parts of peninsular India will have to make-do with below normal rainfall for the week ending July 28.

During the 24 hours ending Monday morning, several parts of northwest India including Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, west Uttar Pradesh, and Vidarbha in Maharashtra too witnessed heavy rainfall.

An India Met Department outlook suggested that the heavy rainfall belt will move over Gujarat, Konkan-Goa belt including Mumbai, west Madhya Pradesh, coastal and south interior Karnataka during the next couple of days.

August outlook

Meanwhile, an experimental storm tracker featured by the US Climate Prediction Centre sees continued activity in the North Bay of Bengal into the first couple of weeks in August.

It sees a rain belt moving straight to the west for sometime and curving to the northwest later bringing even more rain to east India, adjoining northwest India and possibly the West Coast.

Peninsula and contiguous central India are projected to receive below-normal rainfall. North interior Karnataka, Telangana, Rayalaseema, Madhya Maharashtra, and Marathwada are likely to come under the suppressed-rain belt if the projections are anything to go by.

Garware-Wall Ropes upbeat on protected farming, aquaculture

Garware-Wall Ropes Ltd is betting big on protected farming and aquaculture to boost the country's rural economy, thereby benefitting both farmers and fisher-folk.

India has lot of opportunities to carry out protected cultivation in horticulture, floriculture, growing fruits, etc, which is abysmally low at 0.5 per cent acreage compared to 65-70 per

cent in Israel, Spain, Holland and other European countries, Shujaul Rehman, President and COO of the Pune based company said.



Farm incomes may rise

“A shift towards protected farming methods will have a direct impact on increasing the GDP and improving farmers’ per capita income. However, the need of the hour is to create awareness among farmers on this method,” he said.

The Rs. 800-crore company is catering to the needs of the agriculture sector by supplying net cords, ropes, etc for protected cultivation, horticulture, post-harvest technology and other yield improving applications. “We are looking at one-to-one contact with the farming community to convince them on the prospects of moving towards this farming model to fetch better returns. The government subsidy schemes are also likely to act as a major boost for protected cultivation in the country,” he said.

Fish farming

Likewise, he pointed out that fishing activities through aquaculture will also provide a major boost to the fishery sector in improving the catch and income.

Rehman, who was in Kochi for an official trip, told *BusinessLine* that the usage of marine aqua cages for fish farming activities is still at a nascent stage here compared to European countries. “Today majority of the fishing in the country has been through wild catch. The shift towards cage farming methods will be the next big leap in the fishery sector,” he added.

Export biz

The company's aquaculture cages and other equipments are widely used by fishery companies in the US, Canada and Europe.

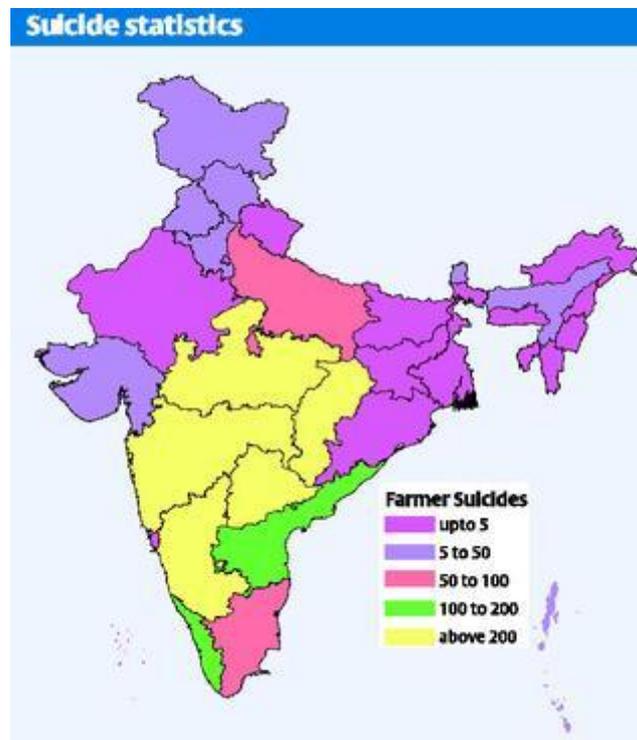
However, it will take time to implement such innovative fishing methods in India, he said, adding that nodal agencies such as Mpeda and fisheries departments have a major role in popularising such technological innovations.

With more than 50 per cent growth coming from export revenues, the company is looking at strengthening its presence in aquaculture, agriculture and defence segments for domestic markets.

Garware-Wall Ropes, which has a strong presence in more than 72 countries, is expected to be a Rs.1,000 crore entity in the next two years.

“We expect the growth will come from North America and Mediterranean regions apart from healthy growth in domestic market,” he said.

Cotton growing States top in farm Suicides



Cotton growing States continue to top the list of farmers' suicides in 2014 too. The five States of Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, which grow the bulk of the fibre, witnessed 4,773 out of the 5,650 suicides by farmers.

Small and marginal farmers formed majority of the deaths. About 73 per cent of all suicides (4,095) occurred in this category, hinting at the severe stress faced by the farmers in this segment.

The National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) has come out with the list of Accidental and Suicide Deaths in 2014. Farm suicides constituted 4.3 per cent of 1.31 lakh suicides in the country last year. Even as NCRB comes out with this data, farmers continue to commit suicide mainly in the Southern State of Karnataka, where the growing agrarian distress has claimed as many as 70 lives in the past one month. Ironically, close to half of these suicides have happened in the irrigated tracts of Cauvery basin mainly in Mandya and Mysuru districts, where sugarcane is the main cash crop.

NCRB, in its report, has cited two major reasons for farmers' deaths – 'bankruptcy or indebtedness' and 'family problems'.

About 66 per cent of all suicides happened in the age group of 30-60 years, followed by those in the age group of 18-30 years with 23 per cent.

Various headers

Though the total number of farmers' suicides had halved in 2014 from about 11,770 the previous year, some governments might have shifted some 'suicides' to other headers.

Critics felt that the reduction in numbers this time is not because any improvement in the lot of farmers but because of jugglery of numbers. "The numbers put out by the Bureau are only the tip of the iceberg. It puts suicides in Punjab at 22 in 2014, while independent reports point to over 500 suicides. Some States are reducing the numbers by putting them under different categories," Vijoo Krishnan, Joint Secretary of All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), told *BusinessLine*.

Vijoo, who has just returned from Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, said that the government was in denial mode while the magnitude of the agrarian crisis was very serious.

Monsoon & money

MS Swaminathan, considered to be an authority on Indian agriculture, said that monsoon and markets were the two important factors for farmers to succeed. "There is no proper coping mechanism to farmers when the two factors failed them. There is no proper insurance to insulate them when monsoon and markets fail," he points out.

He felt that farming needs policy support to make economics of farming viable for farmers.

The Karnataka government has recently announced constitution of a vision group under Swaminathan to suggest ways to boost the sector growth and make farming economically viable.

Kurbur Shantakumar, President of the Karnataka Cane Growers Association, blamed the State government for not being serious enough to take timely and adequate measures to curb this disturbing trend. “We don't know what to do,” he said, adding that the recent surge in farmers' suicides has baffled him. Pushed into financial crisis due to a combination of factors such as poor realisation for their produce, delayed payments and crop failures caused by poor rains, farmers are seen resorting to such extreme steps across Karnataka in recent months.

“There would be a serious crisis, if the Government continues to show its negligence,” Shantakumar warned.

NCRB data

Maharashtra topped the list with 2,568 (farm) suicides or 45 per cent of all the 5,650 suicides. This was followed by Telangana with 898 (16 per cent), Madhya Pradesh 826 (14.6 per cent), Karnataka 321 and Andhra Pradesh with 160. As many as 443 farmers ended their lives in Chhattisgarh.

Of the total unnatural deaths of 5,650, women constituted 472, with 147 women farmers ending lives in Telangana alone.