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# THE HINDU

## MLA's plea to agricultural scientists



A plea to agricultural scientists to undertake research to develop drought-resistant and water-saving varieties of paddy, sugarcane and groundnut in view of the chronic water scarcity in Vellore district due to the poor rainfall for the last 10 to 15 years was made by M. Kalaiarasu, Anaicut MLA on Thursday.

### Handbook released

M. Kalaiarasu who released a handbook on sugarcane cultivation and food processing at the Pre-Kharif Mela organized jointly by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at the TNAU Research Centre in Virinjipuram near here said that the monsoon failure has resulted in the drying up of the Palar, Ponnai and Goundanya Rivers, the 420 PWD irrigation tanks, 935 minor irrigation tanks, 99,977 wells, lakes and other bodies, leading to a rapid depletion of the groundwater table over the last one-and-a-half decade. Farmers who used to get water at a depth of 300 feet while drilling a deep borewell about 10 to 15 years ago, could not get water even at a depth of 1000 feet now. The TNAU should also do research on improving the soil health, he said.

The MLA wanted the government and the TNAU to teach the farmers the techniques for protecting their crops from damage by wild animals.

Farmers should be trained on post-harvest technology and encouraged to insure their crops against drought and other damages. Unfortunately, the farmers were not aware of the crop insurance schemes, he said.

### **Bio-repellant against wild boar**

M. Pandiyan, Professor and Head of the TNAU Research Centre, Vellore said that the TNAU Research Centre in Virinjipuram is currently engaged in research on the development of a bio-repellant to keep away wild boar from the agricultural fields. The bio-repellant is likely to be released and introduced for commercial use by farmers before the kharif season next year.

Boxes containing the bio-repellant have to be placed within a gap of 10 feet at the rate of 90 boxes per acre on the borders of the agricultural fields. The smell of the bio-repellant will keep away wild boar from entering the fields. In the light of the wild boar menace plaguing the farmers of Vellore district, the bio-repellant would be a boon to the farmers when it is ready, he said.

P. Karthiyayini, Mayor of Vellore appealed to the farmers to plant more trees and increase the vegetative cover in order to induce rains. She appealed to the officials of the agriculture department to provide timely advice to farmers on the application of fertilizers, sowing of seeds and cultivation techniques.

### **Identifying edible greens**

They should also advise farmers on identification of edible greens among the weeds and cultivate them as inter-crop and increase their income.

R. Jayasundar, Joint Director of Agriculture, S. Joshua Davidson, Project Coordinator of the KVK, Sooryakala, chairperson of Anaicut panchayat union and Ranjitha Anandaraj, chairperson of Vellore panchayat union spoke.

*We are developing bio-repellant to keep away wild boar, says Head of TNAU Research Centre*

## **Farmers demand 'samba package'**

*They also seek water release from Mettur dam by first week of August*

Farmers have urged the State Government to open the Mettur Dam for irrigation by the first week of August to save standing kuruvai paddy crop and enable farmers prepare their lands for samba season.

At the grievances meeting here on Thursday, P.S. Masilamani of the Tamilaga Vivasyigal Sangam, affiliated to the CPI, said farmers could not reap a good harvest in kuruvai in the absence of Mettur water and could not raise samba nursery without information about water availability for the rest of the season. The government must come out with a clear stand. It should exert pressure on Karnataka to release water as per the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal award.

Tamilselvi of Tiruthuraipoondi, a farmer, wanted the government to extend samba package on the lines of kuruvai package to tide over any crisis during the cropping season. Since only a few people benefited from the kuruvai package, outstanding dues of farmers must be waived during the samba season, she said. Peralam V. Balakumaran seconded her plea for a samba package.

Balakrishnan of Tiruthuraipoondi wanted the government and the district administration to take effective steps to prevent pollution of the Mullaiyaru, a source of drinking water to thousands of people in various towns and villages.

S.V. Ramakrishnan of Kandalanchery wanted the authorities to clear encroachments along the Kandalanchery Moongilkudi channel so that water flows unimpeded to the tail-end areas of the ayacut.

Collector M. Mathivanan, District Revenue Officer T. Mohanraj, and Joint Director of Agriculture G. Mayilvahanan participated in the deliberations.

## **Revise cold storage unit fee: Pudukottai Collector**



The vegetable cold storage unit functioning at the Regulated Market Committee in Iluppur has helped ensure proper post-harvest conservation of agricultural produce, said S. Ganesh, District Collector.

Addressing officials after inspecting the cold storage unit started under the National Agriculture Development Programme, he said that facility would benefit farmers and fetch more attractive returns.

The Collector advised marketing officials led by S. Mohamed Abdul Nazeem, Deputy Director of Agri Business, to explore the possibility of increasing the fee for stocking vegetables at the cold storage unit.

Kausalya Mohan, secretary of the Pudukottai Marketing Committee, said the cold storage unit formed part of the Iluppur Agriculture Producers Company. The vegetables were being graded according to the size and quality.

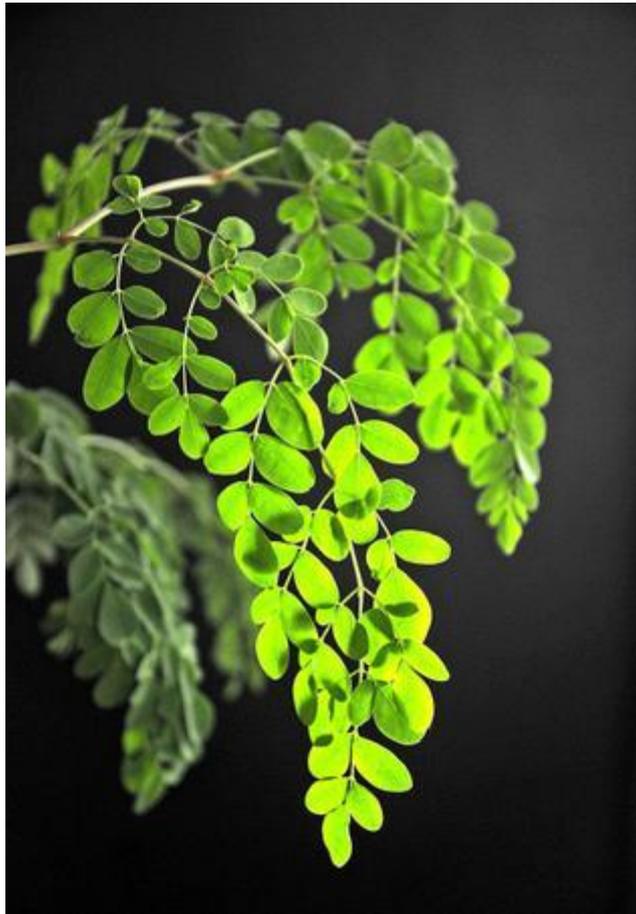
## **IIRR scientist nominated to FAO panel on soils**

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has nominated Brajendra, working with Indian Institute of Rice Research (IIRR), as one of the 27 top global soil experts to the panel of UNFAO-GSP Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS).

Project Director of ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research, V. Ravindra Babu, said on Thursday that the third plenary assembly held at FAO headquarters from June 22 to 24 has nominated Mr. Brajendra here for a period of two years. The scientist has also been invited by UNFAO from Asia to participate in the ITPS meeting to be held at Rome, Italy, from September 14 to 18 this year for developing global soil partnerships pillars of action.

Working as a senior scientist with IIRR here, Mr. Brajendra has more than 15 years experience in research, developing soil technologies, soil extension and popularising the sciences among the masses and making it accessible to the common people, Mr. Ravindra Babu stated.

### **Milk farmers to cultivate Mexican Lilac, drumstick trees**



Farmers in Latin America wash their livestock most often with a paste made of crushed leaves of Mexican Lilac to ward off torsalos. In Philippines, extracts obtained from Mexican Lilac leaves are used to remove external parasites. But in the deep interiors of Malabar region where farmers often fail to find enough fodder for their cattle, the Mexican Lilac, locally known as Seema Konna, is now getting a new lease of life.

As per a new initiative of the Malabar Regional Cooperative Milk Producers' Union (MRCMPU) under MILMA (Kerala Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation), farmers in the region are being encouraged to cultivate Mexican Lilac and drum stick trees, also known as muringa.

## **Climate change**

“It seems the climate change that is sweeping the world fast has affected adversely the animal fodder sector. Many people have stopped their traditional job of cow rearing. It was in this context that we decided to promote large scale cultivation of Mexican Lilac and drumstick as cattle fodder. National Commission on Farmers and National Agriculture Development Programme are advising farmers to cultivate these two plants which can withstand the challenges from climate change,” said K.N. Surendran Nair, one of the directors of MRCMPU.

The MRCMPU has started supplying saplings of the two plants to farmers apart from guidelines on how they can be provided as fodder to cattle. “Cows in our region may not like the taste of the two plants. They have to be dried using daylight for at least a few hours. Saltwater or jaggery must be applied on it. If consumed properly, they will help increase milk production apart from ensuring overall wellbeing of the milch cows,” said Mr. Surendran.

Large-scale training and introduction sessions for farmers have already been started. Experts say the medicinal value of both the plants would help increase resistance power of cows. The union is also encouraging planting of jackfruit, sababul and sesabania trees to ensure fodder security to cattle.

## **Government pursuing anti-farmer policies: Reddy**



G.V. Srirama Reddy, secretary of State unit of Communist Party of India (Marxist), said on Thursday that both the Union and State governments had failed to take steps to deal with agrarian crisis in the rural areas. He was speaking at the district-level convention of the CPI(M) against “anti-people policies” of Union and State governments here.

Mr. Reddy said that nearly 23 lakh farmers in the State did not have title deeds for the land in which they were carrying on agricultural operations. Though he had appealed to the Siddaramaiah-government to provide them with title deeds, it had fallen on deaf ears. “Though farmers are committing suicide daily, the State government is still in a slumber,” he said.

The Union government too had little sympathy at the plight of farmers. The budgetary allocation for agriculture was too low to bring any positive changes in the sector. Instead, the Centre was bent on promoting industry at the cost of agriculture.

The Land Acquisition ordinances promulgated by the Centre were aimed at the providing land to the corporate sector at throwaway prices. Once massive tracts of land were given to the corporate sector, there would be none left with the farmers.

Both the Union and State governments were least bothered about the condition of the workers. Though the Union government had made a lot of promoting industrial growth, it had actually fallen after the Narendra Modi government came to power. This showed the hollowness of the economic policies of the National Democratic Alliance government, he said.

The advent of the Modi government had seen an increase in communal incidents in the country. The Centre was “saffronising” all government institutions and bodies. The autocratic tendencies of the Modi-government had come in for veiled criticism from the former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, he said.

*Though farmers are committing suicide daily, the State government is still in a slumber.*

***G.V. Srirama Reddy***

***Secretary, CPI(M) State unit***

## **Sending voice messages to farmers may prove costly for Mysuru ZP**

The Mysuru Zilla Panchayat is in a dilemma whether to implement its proposed plan of sending voice messages to all the 3.68 lakh farmers in the district as it will prove to be very expensive.

ZP personnel held discussions with BSNL and a few private Internet providers who told them that each voice mail would cost Re. 1. It would mean that each day the ZP has to spend Rs. 3.6 lakh for sending voice messages. So, for now the ZP has decided to go slow on the project.

However, ZP president of the Mysuru Zilla Panchayat Pushpavathi Amaranath told *The Hindu* that she had a discussion with a private Internet service provider, and he had offered to provide the service at a very reasonable rate. Ms. Pushpavathi said that the private service provider had said that voice messages could be sent between 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. every day at a nominal cost. If the private service provider was willing to provide the service at a reasonable rate, the ZP would go ahead with the project as there is an urgent need to motivate farmers and instil confidence among them so that they will not resort to taking the extreme step. She added that the ZP will help farmers and rural folk, and build infrastructure in rural areas.

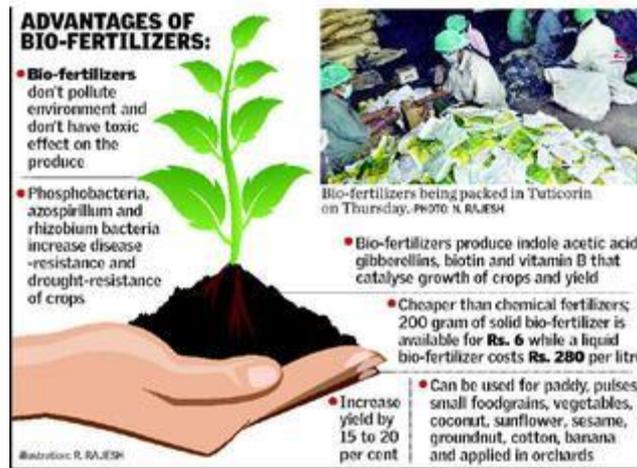
Meanwhile, the Agriculture Department has already taken the mobile numbers of over 55,000 farmers and has started sending text messages. The messages comprise tips to farmers about cultivation besides calling upon them to face challenges. According to Joint Director of Agriculture M. Mahanteshappa, the department is not incurring any expenditure on sending text messages to farmers.

***BSNL and a private Internet provider have said each voice message will cost Re. 1***

## **3,000-tonne target set for bio-fertilizers production**

Even as demand for bio-fertilizers is growing across the State as it enriches the soil in a phenomenal fashion while preventing environmental pollution, the State government has set a target of producing 3,000 tonnes of bio-fertilizers during this fiscal in its production centres across the State.





As a sizable section of the total population has started buying only organically grown vegetables and foodgrains even though these farm produces are slightly costlier, the State government has taken special steps to encourage organic farmers by ensuring adequate supply of bio-fertilizers.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, N. Malarvizhi, Agriculture Officer, Government Bio-fertilizer Production Centre here, said the Centres at Cuddalore, Kudumiyanmalai, Tiruchi, Ramanathapuram, Sakkottai, Kattankulathur, Polur, Palacode, Avinasi, Bhavani, Needamangalam, Uthamapalayam, Tenkasi and Tuticorin had been given a target of producing 3,000 tonnes of bio-fertilizers during this fiscal.

The production centre at Tuticorin had been entrusted with the job of producing phosphobacteria, two types of azospirillum and as many types of rhizobium bacteria with the 'mother culture' being supplied by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

On getting the 'mother culture,' a well-trained team would grow it in the laboratory, check its quality in several phases and send it to the Agricultural Extension Centres for distribution to farmers.

### **253 tonnes in Tuticorin**

"We've been given a target of producing 253.24 tonnes of bio-fertilizers – last year, the target was 217 tonnes – during this year and we're sending our products to the farmers of Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, Kanyakumari, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram and Nagapattinam districts," Ms. Malarvizhi said.

Collector M. Ravikumar, a staunch supporter of organic farming practices, reviews every week the production of bio-fertilizers in the government production centre at Tuticorin and the quantum of bio-fertilizer distributed to the farmers.

Moreover, he has instructed the officials to stock the bio-fertilizers in adequate quantity in all agriculture extension centres across the district.

### **Water level at Mettur**

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 91.85 feet on Thursday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 17,089 cusecs and the discharge 2,000 cusecs.

### **Training programme on 'Bio-tech products manufacturing'**

The Micro Small Medium Enterprises-Development Institute (MSME-DI), Ministry of MSME, Government of India is organizing a one-week training programme on 'Bio-Tech Products Manufacturing' at the MSME-DI, Guindy, Chennai from August 3 to 7 for the benefit of organic farmers and MSMEs.

According to a release, topics such as bio-fertilizers, industrial enzymes, bio-feed, microbial bio-pesticides, organic manure, sea weed liquid fertilizer and solid waste management would be covered. People will have ample opportunities for self-employment, besides jobs in organic farms, MSMEs, MNCs, and corporates as technician and adviser. Government of India Certificate would be issued to the trainees.

For registration call K. Kandasamy, Assistant Director (G & C), MSME-DI, 65/1, GST Road, Chennai 32 (Ph: 8939356245 /9941339788 / email: kandasamysmedichennai@gmail.com).

### **Ragi the super food**

Ragi is a finger millet, which is high in protein and minerals in comparison to all other cereals and millets. Also a source of protein, it is perfect for vegetarians.

Finger millets contains important amino acids—leucine, isoleucine, methionine and phenyl alanine which are not present in other starchy meals.



It has the highest amount of calcium and potassium. Ragi is a great source of iron making it beneficial for individuals with low haemoglobin levels. It is good for the stomach and for good digestion.

To use, ragi is sorted and washed. It is spread out in the sunlight for 5 to 8 hours to dry. It is then powdered. Millets also contains B vitamins, especially niacin, B6 and folic acid. Some of the health benefits of ragi are attributed to its polyphenol and dietary fibre contents.

Ragi possesses anti diabetic and antioxidant and antimicrobial properties; it protects against tumours and atherosclerosis. Low in fat and gluten free, ragi is easy to digest. It is therefore, given as first food to babies in the form of ragi porridge.

## RAGI PORRIDGE

### **Ingredients**

Ragi – 1/2 cup

Jaggery – 2 to

3 tbsp

Ghee – 1/4 tsp

Or

Milk – 1/2 cup

Sugar – 1 tbsp

## **Method**

Soak ragi in 2 to 3 cups of water for one hour. Drain. Adding fresh water, change the water 2 to 3 times. Grind with 2 to 3 spoons water into a pulp. In a pan, place the ragi and a little (2 to 3 spoons) water, adding either jaggery and ghee or milk and sugar. Stir to avoid base browning.

## **RAGI HALWA**

### **Ingredients**

Ragi – 1 kg

Jaggery syrup – Made by

melting and filtering 1 and

a half kg jaggery

Ghee – 1 and a half cups

Cashewnuts – 150 gms,

split, roasted in ghee

Cardamom – 6 to 8 pods,

deskinned and powdered

### **Method**

Powder the ragi to a fine dust. Add water that rises 2 inches above the surface. Let it soak for 2 hours. Drain the water. Wash, changing the water two to three times. Sort to remove any mud or small stones.

Grind adding a little water at a time (1 cup water). Add 2 to 3 cups water. When the water is clear above, drain. The ragi is now a little hard.

Place the ragi in a pan, add 2 cups water and jaggery syrup. Cook, stirring constantly. Add a cupful of ghee, stirring. Add a half cup of ghee. When it gets thick and slides off the pan, and is a firm ball as you stir, remove from flame. Stir in the roasted cashewnuts. Pour out any excess ghee.

In a greased thali, transfer the ragi mixture and pat with the ladle to get an even surface. Leave aside to cool for 1 to 2 hours. Slice the dark brown halwa into desired shapes and serve.

## RAGI ELA ADA

### **Ingredients**

Ragi powder – 4 cups

Jaggery syrup made from

one and a half kg jaggery,

melted and filtered

Chopped coconut slivers

– 1 cup

Salt – 2 to 3 pinches

Ghee – 3 tbsp

### **Method**

In a bowl, combine ragi flour and water to create a batter of idli batter consistency. Stir in the jaggery syrup, coconut slivers, salt and ghee. In a banana leaf (seasoned in heat/immersed in hot water so that the leaf turns 2 to 4 shades darker), spread the batter in a circle, wrap this carefully without leakage. Place in steamer and cook for 25 to 30 minutes. Serve hot.

## RAGI KOZHUKATTA

### **Ingredients**

Ragi flour – 3 cups

Salt – 1/2 tsp

Grated coconut

– 1 1/2 cups

### **For Mustard**

#### **seasoning**

Coconut oil – 3 tbsp

Mustard seeds – 1/2 tbsp.

Dried red chillies, broken

– 2 to 3

Curry leaves, separated

from the stalks – 2 stalks

### **Method**

Mix ragi flour with salt and grated coconut with enough water to form a tight dough. Roll into lemon sized balls . Cook in the steamer for 30 minutes.

In a pan, heat oil and splutter the mustard seeds, saute the red chillies and fry the curry leaves, tip in the ragi kozhukattas and stir well. Serve hot.

### **Red chilli chutney for ragi kozhukkatta**

#### **Ingredients**

Big onions – 2, minced

Kashmiri dried red

chillies – 3 to 4

Coconut oil – 2 tbsp

Salt – To taste

Curry leaves – 5 to 6 ,

torn

Tamarind paste – 1 tsp

### **Method**

In a pan, heat the coconut oil. Saute the onions and Kashmiri red chillies in hot oil until a fragrance issues forth. Grind this to a paste with salt.

Sprinkle the curry leaves and stir in the tamarind paste, which is an optional ingredient. Serve with ragi kozhukattas.

### **Concern over excess use of pesticides in pineapple farms**



The recent surge in pineapple cultivation on the slopes of Akamalavaram hills bordering the catchment areas of Malampuzha Dam has started raising widespread concern in Palakkad and surroundings as cultivators are spraying heavy doses of pesticides like ethephon on the crops. Lakhs of families in the district are depended on the dam for their drinking water needs. Residents fear the unregulated application of pesticides on pineapple farms would lead to contamination of the dam water.

Most of the private lands close to the catchment area and nearby forests were used earlier to cultivate rubber. It was only recently, pineapple cultivation started spreading in the region, especially on the slopes of the hills where most of the rivulets that contribute to the Malampuzha Dam originates.

About 400 acres of land taken on lease from Emoor Devaswam by a private individual is full of pineapple cultivation now. Local activists say the lease period is over and the new mode of cultivation is happening in violation of the lease rules. With the monsoon picking up, the threat of pesticides mixing with drinking water is on the rise.

“The indiscriminate use of pesticides in pineapple farms is also affecting adversely the fish wealth in the dam. Birds and animals depended on the dam and the contributing rivulets also will be affected,” says environmentalist Dr. P.S. Panicker.

Farmers say that they are now spraying 1.25 millilitre ethephon on 1,000 pineppale plants. In a hectre, they cultivate about 40,000 pineapples. Activists say the illegal diversion of water from streams to pineapple fields is also on the increase.

### **Bad months for bananas in Srikakulam**

Banana prices have hit a five-year low in Srikakulam district with sales dipping in the months of Ashadham and Adhika Ashadham when people tend not to perform special prayers and pujas. The Godavari Pushkaram is another reason why sales have decreased.

Bananas are a major crop in the district, grown in places like Narasannapeta, Amadalavalasa, Tekkali, and Nandigama. The crop is exported to Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal.

Normally a bunch of plantains costs around Rs.180 but prices have hit rock bottom at Rs.60 this month. Farmers’ profit margins have eroded, with production cost accounting for Rs.40. Many farmers are worried by the price drop this year.

Many of them are not able to even recover their transport expenses if they ship produce to Kanchili and other weekly markets. So they have taken to selling at throwaway prices on the highways, according to K. Kurmi Naidu, a farmer of Karajada village in Narasannapeta mandal.



“We are prepared for losses during Ashadham every year. But the extended Ashadham this year has become a bane to us this time,” said B. Lakshmana Rao, another farmer..

# DECCAN Chronicle

## Onion prices at near two-year highs on weak monsoon rains



**Mumbai:** The price of onions, a staple that has sparked protests in the past and toppled state governments, has jumped to its highest in nearly two years and could fuel food inflation as scant rain delays plantings.

Persistently high food prices, mainly for onions used in everything from bhajis to biryanis, are politically sensitive in India as more than a quarter of its 1.25 billion people live on a maximum of 74 cents per day.

High food costs lifted India's June consumer inflation to an eight-month high, and a further rise could stop the central bank from cutting lending rates that are key to boosting growth.

At India's largest wholesale onion market of Lasalgaon in Maharashtra state, the average price has leaped 54 percent in two weeks to 2,550 rupees (\$40) per 100 kg, its highest since November 2013.

Prices could jump further as a mismatch between demand and supply is expected to worsen due to weak monsoon rains, said Changdev Holkar, former director of the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation.

Rain in Maharashtra, India's top onion producer, has been over a third less than normal so far in the June-September monsoon season.

Karnataka, another major onion producer, has had a quarter less rain and the official forecast is that this year India could suffer its first drought since 2009 due to the El Nino weather pattern.

Unseasonable weather, hoarding and price manipulation have in the past led to dramatic price rises, and the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is keen to avoid the fallout that had hit the state governments of Delhi and Rajasthan.

The government has already decided to create a small buffer stock of onions to check any price spike but more needs to be done, industry body ASSOCHAM has said.

Indians eat up to 15 million tonnes of onions a year, using them as a base for most of their dishes.

The country harvested 18.9 million tonnes in 2014/15, but a significant amount was damaged due to untimely rains and hailstorms during February to April.

"Sensing a shortage, farmers are slowly releasing old crop," said R.P. Gupta, director at the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation.

A Lasalgaon trader said usually new-season supplies rise from end-September but this year that could happen only from November.

"Until then prices will remain firm at the current level or could rise further."

### **Polavaram irrigation project by 2018**

**Visakhapatnam:** The ministry of water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation (MoWR) has said that the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh, prestigious Polavaram irrigation project is scheduled to be completed by 2018.



In a written reply to queries raised by Vizag MP K. Haribabu and Ongole MP Y.V. Subba Reddy, Union minister of state for water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation, Prof. Sanwar Lal Jat on Thursday, in Parliament has said that the ministry has not received any proposal of the contentious Pattiseema project from the Central Water Commission.

He also added that Pattiseema project is not part of Polavaram project. He further said that the union government has released Rs 250 crore and Rs 100 crore during 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively for Polavaram project authority to meet the expenditure incurred on the project beyond 2014 and the expenditure incurred by the state government till March 2014 has been treated as state share.

The project was accorded investment clearance for Rs 10151.04 crore by the Planning Commission in 2005-06. The revised cost estimated of the project is Rs 16010.45 crore of 2010-11. Polavaram project authority has intimated that an expenditure of Rs 5575.35 crore has been incurred on the project up to March 2014.

### **State feels the onion pinch**

PANAJI: As if onions on their own were not enough, the price of the savoury bulb will once again make the aam admi cry. Currently sold at 35 per kg as opposed to 25 in June, vendors say the rates are expected to rise even further next week.

"There is a serious shortage of onions in the market. The situation is not likely to improve anytime soon and prices will increase further," said wholesale vegetable vendor Mohammad Jaffar.

"The monsoon is a significant player. Too much rain spoils the produce and too little reduces production rates. As vendors, there is very little we can do," said another vendor.

TOI reported on Thursday that onion prices at the country's largest wholesale market in Nashik had shot up by 30% in three days owing to a massive drop in supply.

Sources explained that the onion currently sold is the summer crop harvested in March and April.

As the crop has a shelf life of about six months, farmers store it to get a better price later. And the summer crop caters to the market till the arrival of the kharif crop in the first week of October.

"Unseasonal rains and hailstorm badly hit the summer crop in February and March. Most farmers also sold their crops in April and May. Now, very limited stock is available, but it difficult to predict how much stock the farmers have. Overall, there might be a 10-15% fluctuation in the onion prices, upward or downward," president of the Nashik District Onion Traders' Association Sohanlal Bhandari had told TOI.

Abdul Ghani, who has been in the trade in Goa for the past 25 years, says he has never seen such helplessness when it comes to supplying onions before. He attributes this partially to the lack of agricultural interest among Goans.

"Irrespective of less rain or low produce, agriculture in Goa is declining. I don't source from Goa as farms here can provide a maximum of just two months' produce. Kolhapur, Belagavi and Mumbai can supply vegetables all year round," Ghani says.

The Goa government should take concrete initiatives instead of merely providing schemes for farmers, he adds. "If the state government pushes for agriculture in Goa, then we won't have to shell out extra money on transport or agents to bring vegetables from neighbouring states. Home-grown produce will be fresher and cheaper," he says.

Dayanand Amonkar, whose family has been in the business since the pre-Portuguese era said, "The wholesale onion market has jumped by nearly Rs 10 per kilo and Rs 1,000 per quintal. Instead of giving relief on goods brought from Belagavi, the state government should give subsidies to farmers to grow and supply local produce."

Homemaker Lynn Rodrigues lamented, "Onion is a core ingredient in any cuisine. We neither have an option nor a substitute. People can compromise on other vegetables but how can we do without onions?"

The price of carrots has also spiraled to Rs 55 per kilo from Rs 40 in June. While capsicum too is being sold at Rs 48-50 per kilo compared to Rs 40 last month.

Bringing some relief is the reduction in prices of other vegetables. Potatoes, eggplants, long gourds, beetroots, cucumbers, chillis, cauliflowers, lemons, spinach, spring onions, coriander, lady finger and bitter gourd have come down by a margin of Rs 5 to Rs 10/20. The price of French beans has reduced drastically from Rs 120-140 last month to Rs 40 now.

## **Post-1999 colonies on agri land to be regularised in Rajasthan**

JAIPUR: In yet another populist move, the BJP-led government has decided to regularize illegal colonies developed on agricultural land after June 17, 1999 across the state. Residents staying in these colonies will now be able to procure lease deeds of their plots.

The state government had earlier banned regularization of colonies developed by the housing cooperative societies after June 1999.

After the ban, builders had started developing colonies on agriculture land without seeking permission and selling of plots was done through registered documents. Many residents constructed their houses on such plots. The urban development and housing (UDH) department order on Thursday paved way for such residents to get their houses regularized.

An official said, "As per the orders, the executive officer of the civic bodies will examine revenue records. Before regularizing the colony, seven days will be provided to invite objections. After redressing the objections, the official will carry out a 90-A (land use) process and fix the premium and lease money. A penalty will also be imposed on the plot owners before issuing the lease deeds."

The official further said that the department has decided to impose penalty in two categories. "Owners who have purchased plots through a registered agreement will have to pay 10% of the premium charge as penalty. Fifty per cent of the premium charge will be imposed as penalty against the owners who do not have registered documents," the official said.

The orders came two days after the state government announced re-launch of the Prashasan Shehron Ke Sang Abhiyaan, taking forward the incomplete work of regularising pre-1999 residential colonies built on agricultural land in Jaipur. The decision would affect close to 1.5 lakh families in Jaipur.

The campaign was first launched by the previous Congress government in 2012 when the decision to regularize over 1,700 such colonies was taken.

The state cabinet on Tuesday gave a go-ahead to the campaign and also announced to clear all applications received by March 31, 2013 as against the previous deadline of September 30, 2012. An official said, "The final dates of the campaign would be finalized and the department will announce them soon. More than 1.50 lakh families will benefit from the regularization campaign."

### **Agri dept plans slew of measures to boost mountain farming in state**

DEHRADUN: To prevent migration of farmers from mountains in search of livelihood and save agriculture in the plains -- which is dependent on hilly regions for irrigation -- the agriculture department has decided to popularize mountain farming in a big way.

For this, the department will undertake a slew of measures including cultivation of indigenous crops such as millet (mandua), amaranth (raamdana) and several medicinal plants, which are only found in extreme high regions and in cold temperature.

Besides, the static prices of mandua and raamdana will be decided so that farmers can yield good profits. The authorities have also decided to set up a marketing board for the produce to maintain a supply chain for the national and international markets.

During a symposium in the city on Thursday, which was also attended by chief minister Harish Rawat, green experts pointed out that the changed land use dynamics was causing floods, earthquakes and other natural calamities due to which plains faced natural disasters such as floods and incessant rains. This had impacted the overall agriculture scenario in the state.

On the effects of migration, the experts said, "Migration is interlinked with the disturbed topography of Uttarakand. Owing to rapid urbanization, habitants of mountains are leaving farming and land is not being used for agriculture. This invariably renders it barren and causes soil erosion, thereby damaging the topography of the upper regions."

Stating that hill topography was distressed due to persistent mining and natural disasters due to which farmers were being forced to leave farming, they added, "Through modern

technology and by following traditional methods of restoring hill topography, people can garner the benefits of farming."

Giving his take on the issue, Rawat, asked the farmers and agriculture department to produce off-season fruits and vegetables for higher profits.

Discussing groundwater depletion, he said, "Uttarakhand is noticing frequent depletion in the water table in areas such as Udham Singh Nagar, Haridwar and Gadarpur. In view of this, the agriculture department will promote water harvesting rigorously by giving profits to farmers who help restore the water table."

Echoing a similar view, the experts stated that a majority of areas in the state had witnessed groundwater depletion due to increased usage of chemical fertilizers. "Due to the current practice, cultivators are not being able to get better yield," they added.

### **Punjab eyes 2,000MW solar vault**

CHANDIGARH: With over 5,000 acres of land offered by farmers and NRIs across the state, Punjab's solar energy generation has jumped from mere 9 mega watt (MW) in 2012 to 541MW at present. Punjab government is now looking at a target of 2,000MW in the next few years. This was announced at the first solar summit on the theme 'Go Solar Punjab' organized here on Thursday.

Apart from rooftop projects, farmers in the state have pitched in to take the project to every part of the state, with one solar project located right at the no man's land along the Indo-Pak border.

Deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal said that the state would further encourage farmers to establish mini-solar plants on their own land. Sukhbir said the decision to allot projects between 1 to 2.5mw capacity to farmers to generate a total of 500MW would turn them into entrepreneurs. More than 5,000 acres of land had already been registered with Punjab Energy Development Agency (PEDA) with a large number of farmers expressing their interest to establish solar plants.



Renewable energy minister Bikram Singh Majithia said that Punjab had made a mark in tapping solar power despite the constraints. "We do not have any wastelands or deserts nor are we big states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. We have offering 25-year power purchase agreement with our electricity utility - the PSPCL. The fact that PSPCL has got a good credit rating of B+ has also boosted investor confidence."

The Centre had taken a decision to allow establishment of mega projects of 50MW each. Due to problems in acquiring large tracts of land in Punjab, entrepreneurs could avail of this scheme even if they establish their project in separate tracts of land, the deputy CM added.

Describing the wide network of irrigation canals another potential for solar power expansion, Majithia said that Punjab has more than 5000km canal length and it had decided to harness this potential by initially floating a tender for 20MW generation by roofing canals. Entrepreneurs bidding for this project would be eligible for a subsidy of Rs 3.5 crore per MW keeping in view the challenges in installation of such projects on canal tops.

Joint secretary at Union ministry of renewable energy Tarun Kapur, Punjab chief secretary Sarvesh Kaushal, chairman of PEDDA Upkar Singh Sandhu, chairman of Powercom K D Chaudhary, Invest Punjab CEO Anirudh Tewari were also present at the event.

Govt open to subsidizing solar tubewells

Deputy CM Sukhbir Badal announced that the state government was open to subsidizing installation of solar pumps for agricultural purposes from the funds being given to Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) for free power. "We can divert money being given to PSPCL as subsidy for free power for agricultural operations for installation of these pumps. The attempt would be to encourage the maximum solar pumps out of the 1.20 lakh pumps which are to be released to farmers soon. This will reduce the burden on thermal power plants and also reduce the free power subsidy quotient in the long run," he said.

## **Get 50 times returns in four years by growing casuarinas**

COIMBATORE: There is a popular saying that money does not grow on trees. But scientists at the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) are out to prove this is just a myth. They say money can indeed be grown on trees.

If you throw back an inquisitive look, they give you a small casuarina sapling for 4. In four years, they say this plant will grow into a 30m tall tree and can be sold for at least 200. This means the recently-released casuarina tree clone will make your money multiply by 50 times in four years. "This is more than what the stock market, mutual investment schemes or banks can promise. The only thing required is land and space," says, A Nicodemus, head of genetics and tree breeding at IFGTB.

To start marketing the 11 varieties of casuarina developed and released by the institute in October last year, the institute has started entering into agreements with paper mills to share their propagation prototypes

"It is basically us issuing a non-exclusive license to the paper mill company to propagate and grow the variety of casuarina tree for a period of 10 years," said IFGTB director R S Prasanth. "We are issuing licenses at 5lakh per clone variety," he said.

They recently entered into an agreement with International Papers-AAPM. "We are inviting casuarina farmers and other paper mills to come forward to acquire more licenses," he added. They have a total of 11 clones of casuarina. Vegetative propagation is a system where even a small shoot or stem can be plucked from a tree and administered with growth hormones, so they start growing into saplings. This way farmers or corporates, who have the license, can legally keep multiplying the number of these Casuarina clones in almost no time at all.

People who are not interested in propagation, can buy individual saplings from the institute for just 4 each. The institute said they are offering the variety at subsidized rates because this is the first time they have decided to commercialize a finding. "Since this is the first time we are issuing such licenses publicly, we have decided to set such low prices," said Nicodemus.

These newly-developed varieties considered 'low input, low value' can grow in various soil and weather conditions. Some of them are also disease and insect resistant. These trees, in three-to-four years, can give you at least 50 kg of wood each, and will have high biomass volume too.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

Backed by Bombay High Court order, cottonseed firms to seek a cut in royalty fee

| Cost break-up of Bollgard 2 |                |         |           |         |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Item                        | Andhra Pradesh |         | Telangana |         |
|                             | 2014-15        | 2015-16 | 2014-15   | 2015-16 |
| Procurement                 | 290            | 290     | 290       | 330     |
| Bt.royalty                  | 90             | 90      | 90        | 50      |
| Bt.cotton overhead charges  | 550            | 550     | 550       | 550     |
| Grand total                 | 930            | 930     | 930       | 930     |

Source: Govt GOs (AP, Telangana)



Move may result in reduction of the fee; verdict affirms State's right to fix price

## **Hyderabad, July 23:**

With the Bombay High Court upholding Maharashtra decision to reduce cottonseed price to Rs. 830 per packet of 450 grams, a few seed firms have decided to make an appeal to the genetic technology licence provider Mahyco-Monsanto to reduce the royalty fee (or trait value) component in the bilateral agreements.

A small group of seed firms would submit a memorandum to Mahyco-Monsanto asking it to take the court decision into consideration and reduce the fee.

While the technology provider charges a fee of about Rs. 180 (including Service Tax), the Maharashtra notification calculated it at Rs. 20 at five per cent of the cost of production.

“This is the first time a court gave an order on Bt cottonseed pricing. Though there are a few cases pending in other courts, this is for the first time a court spelt out the State’s right to fix the price. As Maharashtra government also indicated royalty fee in the order, this would help result in reduction of this component in different States,” a source, privy to the development, told *BusinessLine*. While dismissing a petition last month, the Nagpur Bench of the court had said that the State had enough material to ascertain the price and had the right to reject the recommendations made by the committee it set up.

### **Different rates**

The Maharashtra government had issued a notification on June 8, fixing the cottonseed price at Rs. 830 (for Bollgard-II).

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governments had maintained a status quo at Rs. 930. This has caused a stir in the seed industry that argued that reduction would mean severe losses to them.

### **Royalty fee contention**

The seed industry, however, is in a fix as different State governments announced different royalty fee.

While Telangana reduced it to Rs. 50 from Rs. 90, Andhra Pradesh kept it at Rs. 90, while Maharashtra fixed it at Rs. 20 for the current kharif season.

However, seed companies continue to pay Mahyco-Monsanto the royalty fee ( Rs. 165 plus a Service Tax of about Rs. 25) as agreed upon in the technology licensing agreements.

(The firm gives BGII technology to different seed companies which would use it in its seeds.

### **HC observations**

With the Bombay High Court upholding the State's right to fix the seed price, which includes the royalty fee at Rs. 20, a few seed firms have written to Mahyco-Monsanto asking it to consider reducing it in the licence agreements too.

A State agricultural university report, on which the Government based its order, put the royalty value at Rs. 20, calculating it at 5 per cent of ( Rs. 396) the ex-factory cost of production.

About 50 firms use the genetic technology in cottonseeds.

Of this, about 10 firms dominate with a share of 75 per cent of the five crore packet market.

### **PM to launch rural electrification scheme in Patna tomorrow**

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY), a flagship programme of the Power Ministry which will facilitate round-the-clock power, on July 25 in Patna, as per an official statement released here on Thursday.**

According to the statement, the scheme will help initiate much awaited reforms in the rural areas. It focuses on feeder separation (rural and agricultural households) and strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution infrastructure including metering at all levels in rural areas, the statement said.

The Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY), an earlier scheme, has been subsumed in the new programme which has an outlay of Rs. 76,000 crore, of which the Centre will provide grants of Rs.63,000 crore.

## Onion prices near 2-year high on weak monsoon



Onion price has jumped to its highest in nearly two years and could fuel food inflation as scant rains delay plantings.

At the country's largest wholesale onion market of Lasalgaon in Maharashtra, the average price has leaped 54 per cent in two weeks to ₹2,550 a quintal, its highest since November 2013.

Prices could jump further as a mismatch between demand and supply is expected to worsen due to weak monsoon rains, said Changdev Holkar, former Director of the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation.

Rains in Maharashtra, India's top onion producer, has been over a third less than normal so far in the June-September monsoon season.

The southern state of Karnataka, another major producer of the bulb, has had a quarter less rain and the official forecast is that this year India could suffer its first drought since 2009 due to the El Nino weather pattern.

The government has already decided to create a small buffer stock of onions to check any price spike but more needs to be done, industry body Assocham has said.

The country harvested 18.9 million tonnes in 2014/15, but a significant amount was damaged due to untimely rains and hailstorms during February to April.

“Sensing a shortage, farmers are slowly releasing old crop,” said RP Gupta, Director at the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation.

A Lasalgaon trader said usually new-season supplies rise from end-September but this year that could happen only from November. “Until then prices will remain firm at the current level or could rise further.”

### **Wet spell in North India may continue for another fortnight**

The India Met Department has hinted at the possibility of a cyclonic circulation taking shape over North Bay of Bengal by Saturday.

This would go on to set up a fresh low-pressure area there, according to the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts.

### **May stay wet**

Global models had gone on record suggesting the formation of the ‘low’ and probability of another round of rains for east India and progressively for central and adjoining north-west and west India.

A fortnightly outlook of the US Centre for Climate Prediction said that the northern half of India would stay mostly wet during the period July 23 to August 5.

The rains may become more widespread during the second week of July 30 to August 5 when a belt of heavy rain will be active over the geographical extremes to the west and east of the country.

According to the US agency, Saurashtra-Kutch, south Gujarat, Konkan-Goa including Mumbai in the west and coastal Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal and north-east India will be impacted in this manner.

## **Fresh ‘low’**

This would come about as weather systems get generated in the Bay of Bengal, which is now in active mode, and travel either to the west or the north-west over land.

One such has completed a productive run over the landscape and has weakened as a cyclonic circulation over Saurashtra and Kutch and adjoining northeast Arabian Sea.

The incoming one is also expected to travel mostly along this track while raining along the way. According to the US forecast, the rains are expected to penetrate into peninsular India which has been on a lean patch for quite some time.

The worst affected parts of western Maharashtra, Telangana, Rayalaseema and north interior Karnataka may get spells by turn as this ‘low’ marches past followed by a possible third one.

## **Castorseed prices to take cue from kharif sowing**

Amid large carryover stock and reduced demand, castorseed prices are likely to remain subdued even as the initial kharif sowing in the largest growing State – Gujarat – has remained sluggish.

Analyst estimates suggest an overall castorseed carryover stock in the range of 5-6 lakh tonnes this year, against the total crop of about 13 lakh tonnes last year.

“Huge carryover stock and subdued demand conditions would keep castor prices range-bound. There is no likelihood of upside in prices in near term,” said Biren Vakil of Paradigm Commodity Advisors Pvt Ltd in Ahmedabad. Spot prices hovered in the range of ₹37,500-39,250 a tonne in Gujarat.

Notably, in February this year, the experts from Solvent Extractors’ Association of India (SEA) had projected a subdued price outlook for a period of about 8-10 months amid high inventory.

Gujarat has seen sluggish beginning of kharif sowing. According to the recently-released data of the State government, area under castor was 7,500 hectares as on July 20, which is about 1



per cent of the three-year average of 7,28,600 hectares. Last year during same time, about 10,400 hectares was covered under castor.

“It is premature to comment on the production or price outlook as the sowing is likely to pick up after July or by mid-August. Also, the farmers will decide on their preferences based on monsoon,” added Vakil.

### **Turmeric pales on higher inflow**



Spot turmeric prices decreased at Erode markets by ₹200 a quintal due to higher arrivals.

“On Thursday, 7,500 bags arrived for sale. Only medium variety turmeric was placed for sale. The traders quoted lesser price and purchased 3,990 bags. The buyers showed special interest in buying the root variety as they have received some orders for the same,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The finger turmeric lost ₹200 a quintal in all the markets while the root variety was down ₹150-200. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹4,589-7,586 a quintal; the root variety ₹4,399-7,168. Of the arrival of 2,021 bags, 650 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric fetched ₹6,799-7,749 and the root variety ₹6,409-7,373. Of the 1,495 bags placed for sale, 850 were traded.

### **Panel raises questions over rise in P&K fertiliser prices**

Calls for higher production of low-cost indigenous fertilisers



Echoing an industry demand to focus on balanced use of fertilisers, a Parliamentary panel has urged the Centre to tackle rising prices of phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers and recommended higher domestic production of low-cost indigenous fertilisers.

“The fact remains that prices of P&K fertilisers have gone up sharply under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) regime, which is one of the reasons for unbalanced use of fertilisers by the farmers as they have gone for less costly urea,” the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilisers said in its 16th report, submitted to the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

#### **The subsidy factor**

The price of urea is capped at Rs. 5,360/tonne with the difference in cost of production and retail cost paid out to manufacturers as subsidy.

For P&K fertilisers like Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Muriate of Potash (MOP), the subsidy has been fixed for the current fiscal year at Rs. 12,350/tonne and Rs. 9,300/tonne, respectively.

The retail price of Di-ammonium Phosphate is Rs. 22,000-24,000/tonne and it is around Rs.16,500/tonne for Muriate of Potash.

The committee did not share the ministry’s view that the only way to reduce non-plan expenditure — largely subsidies — was to reduce Nutrient Based Subsidy rates since this would push prices of P&K fertilisers up and hurt consumption.

“The Fertiliser Department being the nodal authority, cannot simply ignore its responsibility to ensure supply of fertilisers to farmers at affordable prices and also its balanced utilisation by farmers in order to check degradation of soil,” the panel said under Recommendation 4 in the report.

### **The solution**

The way forward is to increase production of low-cost indigenous fertilisers to reduce the subsidy burden, it suggested.

The Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) has pitched for P&K fertiliser makers to be treated on par with urea manufacturers, particularly with regard to gas supply.

“Gas must be supplied to all P&K units as it is required for balanced use of fertilisers. The soil needs various nutrients and micronutrients beyond just nitrogen through excessive urea usage,” said Satish Chander, Director General, FAI, speaking a few days before the submission of the Parliamentary panel report.

The statement followed the Delhi High Court’s order to the Centre last week to resume gas supply to Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals’ plant in Maharashtra. Supply to the plant had been stopped last May.

It ordered the government to unveil a comprehensive policy for gas allocation within six weeks, to be implemented uniformly.

### **Ample stocks hold sugar steady**

Sugar prices on the Vashi market ruled steady on normal activities on Thursday. Producers continued selling at prevailing prices and kept their sale offer open. *Naka* rates were also unchanged. Enough stocks at Vashi market kept stockists away from building up fresh inventory. Arrivals at Vashi market were 59-60 truck loads and local dispatches were 58-60 loads. On Wednesday, 21-22 mills offered tenders and sold about 38,000-40,000 bags at ₹1,980-2,140 (1,980-2,140) for S-grade and ₹2,140-2,250 (2,140-2,250) for M-grade.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates: S-grade ₹2,105-2,242 (2,115-2,240) and M-grade ₹2,252-2,502 (2,272-2,502). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹2,110-2,180 (2,110-2,180) and M-grade ₹2,210-2,350 (2,210-2,350).

# Business Standard

## Agriculture to be Modi's pitch in Muzaffarpur rally in Bihar



Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) is all set to charm Bihar with a slew of projects that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hopes will go a long way in projecting the party as farmer-friendly. The PM on his Bihar visit this Saturday will inaugurate an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), flag off a new train and signal the opening of a new railway line. But the focus will be on showcasing the efforts of his government towards improving the lot of farmers for which the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has received much flak of late.

Officials in the know said that Modi during his visit to the state will announce upgradation of the 110-year-old Rajendra Agricultural University in Pusa in Samastipur district into a central university at an expenditure of Rs 295 crore. The PM is also expected to announce two more colleges of agriculture, a college of veterinary science, a college of horticulture and forestry at Motihari and reviving the Banana Research Centre at Goraul Vaishali.

## MODI'S BIHAR PUSH

Upgradation of Rajendra Agriculture University Pusa to a Central University

Inauguration of a new IIT in Bihta, Patna

Four new programmes for farmers and youth-engaged in farming

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, for power sector reforms in rural areas

Inaugurate the 87th Foundation Day of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR)

Inaugurate Daniawal-Biharsharif railway line

Flag off a Patna-Mumbai train and the Rs 10,000 crore over 2,000 kilometers long Jagdishpur-Haldia gas pipeline

He will also launch the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, for power sector reforms in rural areas with a view to ensuring round-the-clock electricity supply to farmers and rural households.

Inception of university and colleges is of added importance as these will cater to the eastern Indian states of Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha. These states, along with Bihar, contribute 35 per cent of country's rice production and have a large percentage of their population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. These states have also traditionally been electorally a weak area for the BJP.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, an MP from East Champaran, has stationed himself in Muzaffarpur to make the PM's rally a success. "The PM's visit will prove to be a milestone for agriculture in general and Bihar in particular, which will benefit entire eastern India," Singh

The Bihar Assembly verdict will impact not only the complexion of the national politics of the next few years but also the PM's economic agenda as well as determine the internal dynamics within the BJP. Reasons enough for the party rank and file to put in a herculean

effort to make the rally, which will mark the beginning of an aggressive election campaign leading up to the polls in October, a success.

The PM will also travel to Patna to inaugurate the 87 th Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and a national conference of Krishi Vigyan Kendras. This will be the first time ever in the 87 years of ICAR that the foundation day function is being held outside Delhi. The ICAR headquarters in New Delhi derives its name from Pusa - a town in Samastipur district

The PM will also launch four new programmes – farmers first, Students READY or Rural Entrepreneurship and Awareness Development Yojana, ARYA or Attracting and Retaining the Youth in Agriculture and Mera Gaon, Mera Gaurav or my village my pride. The Student READY project aims to provide skill development to students to improve their employability and that agriculture training should be incorporated as an integral part of undergraduate curriculum and allied disciplines. ARYA's objective is to attract rural youth under 35 towards agriculture while farmer first aims to enrich farmer scientist interface for technology development and application through a network of KVKs. The project Mera Gaon, Mera Gaurav scientists from ICAR and state agricultural universities will be earmarked to adopt a village where they will disseminate their knowledge and information. Modi will also launch Vision-2050 for agriculture.

Apart from these projects, the PM is also expected to inaugurate IIT at Bihta, Daniawal-Biharsharif railway line, flag off a Patna-Mumbai train and the Rs 10,000 crore over 2,000 km-long Jagdishpur-Haldia gas pipeline, which is expected to be completed by 2019. Earlier, the Union Cabinet had cleared the restart of Barauni fertiliser plant. The [BJP](#) has galvanised its workers not only in Bihar, but also neighbouring Uttar Pradesh to ensure good attendance at the PM's rally. The Bihar unit has sent out personal invites to 500,000 households to attend the rally.

In addition, it has been distributing 'Modi saris' among women and as many as 160 'raths' or vans are travelling across the state to spread the PM's message of good governance and development. It has plans to hold 100 public meetings a day for the next 100 days until the

elections. At the rally, the PM is likely to claim that the BJP, along with its allies, was the real legate of Gandhian leader Jayaprakash Narayan and first President of India Rajendra Prasad.

The BJP has decided not to announce a chief ministerial candidate and go into the elections with Modi as the face of its campaign.

### **PM to launch Gram Jyoti Yojana from poll-bound Bihar**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch Rs 5,000 crore Deendayal Upadhyaya [Gram Jyoti Yojana](#) (DUGJY) from Patna on Saturday this week.

"Around 40 districts from [Bihar](#) have committed to be part of DUGJY and the scheme would kick start from Bihar benefitting millions by lighting their life," said Piyush Goyal, minister of state for coal, power and renewable energy.

Bihar is poll bound for assembly elections next year.

The state suffers from massive power crunch with peak deficit around 2.8 to 3.5%. DUGJY was announced in the maiden budget of the NDA government last year.

It aims at strengthening power supply to rural areas and agricultural populace. The scheme provides for feeder segregation for agricultural and domestic demand in rural areas. This same scheme helped get 24X7 power supply in Gujarat by cutting down on discom losses.

Goyal also said that the central government has finished dialogue with all states to be part of the flagship schemes - DUGJY and Integrated power development scheme (IPDS) - strengthening of last mile power supply in urban areas and 100% metering.

"Around 7-8 states have expressed intention to be part of strengthening of their power supply systems. We had a healthy discussion with them and we are hoping work will commence in many states soon," said Goyal.

The minister though rejected the idea of any financial restructuring package for the ailing state power distribution companies.

"Giving financial incentives is not the solution. We have conveyed to the states that we will provide all possible assistance to improve their power supply and expertise to reduce their losses," said Goyal.

Discoms across the country have cumulative loss of Rs 70,000 crore. Due to subdued demand, power supply of close to 3 billion units remained unsold during last financial year.

While the UPA government introduced a financial restructuring plan for the discoms, the Modi led NDA government has scrapped off any financial bail out package in its last union budget for the power sector. Almost all states had defaulted on the earlier FRP scheme.

### **Soil health card scheme makes slow progress due to manpower shortage**



A severe shortage of field staff at the state level along with inadequate funds is impacting the progress of the [soil health card](#) scheme.

The programme received a big boost after Prime Minister Narendra [Modi](#) relaunched it in February, with the target of providing a soil health card to 14 crore farmer families. But officials say the scheme is yet to take off on the ground due to staff shortages at the state level.



The relaunch was needed as the scheme made little progress during the previous UPA regime.

As per the scheme, [farmers](#) would get soil health once a sample was collected from their field and was tested in designated labs. For this, the 2015-16 Union Budget had earmarked Rs 200 crore. An equal amount was to be contributed by the state governments.

Data shows that till June 2015, around 3.48 million soil samples have been collected from across the country as against a target of 9.05 million in 2015-16.

However, out of this just around 0.65 million soil samples have been tested for their nutrient content.

As a result of this, as against a target of 3.14 crore soil health cards to be issued in 2015-16, only around 0.18 million cards have been issued to farmers in the first six months.

“This effectively means that states need to scale up their manpower requirement and funding on a war footing,” a senior government official said.

He said the state-run soil testing labs are poorly manned and therefore it takes a lot of time for a farmer to get a soil health card after a sample is collected from his field.

“Ideally, the time gap between sample tested and card issued should be not more than 1-1.5 months provided all other factors remain satisfactory, but more often than not it is much more,” the official said.

The soil once tested is valid for three years, after which the card needs to renew again to check for new nutrients.

In some states like Karnataka till June 2015, not a single soil sample has been collected from farmers leave alone any progress on testing.

“For Karnataka, the state has transferred the entire staff engaged in soil testing to some other departments and are now planning to engage private players, due to which no work has started till now,” the official said.

He said the Centre has been repeatedly asked Karnataka to take action, but little impact is seen.

### Wholesale onion price soars 70 pct in a month



Wholesale onion price at Lasalgaon in Maharashtra, Asia's biggest market for this kitchen staple, has shot up by 70 per cent in just about a month — hitting its highest level for the month of July in the past two decades.

Prices in July usually tend to be higher because the supply goes down and the onset of monsoon season also affects the onion quality.

The onion was being sold at Rs 25.50 per kg in Lasalgaon market today, while the retail prices are in the range of Rs 35-40 per kg here in the national capital. Lasalgaon accounts for a bulk of the supply in various parts of the country, including Delhi region.

The prices have shot up by 70 per cent since June 27 when the government increased the minimum export price (MEP) for the commodity. Spiralling prices could further fuel the food inflation in the coming weeks.

As per the data maintained by the Nasik-based National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF), the average price at Lasalgaon stood at Rs 15 per kg last month.

A sharp increase is being seen in the retail markets in most parts of the country.

The prices in both wholesale and retail markets have been rising in recent weeks due to sluggish supply of good quality onion in the wake of the crop getting damaged in storage across major growing states, including Maharashtra.

Apprehending further increase in onion prices, the government has already increased MEP of the commodity to USD 425 per tonne and extended by another year the ban on hoarding of the key kitchen staple beyond a prescribed limit.

The Centre is also planning to import onion, though in limited quantity, to boost the domestic availability.

Much of the Rabi (winter) onion crop is stored to meet the demand in lean period. But this year, most of the onion kept in storage is of poor quality as the Rabi crop got damaged due to unseasonal rains in early March.

According to agri-experts, high storage losses have reduced availability of onion in the market and put pressure on prices and this situation will continue till the arrival of new kharif crop from mid-September.

To check prices, the government had imported a small quantity of onion last year too. It had also eased fumigation norms for smooth shipment of onions.

The country's onion production is estimated to have declined to 189.23 lakh tonnes in the 2014-15 crop year (July-June), as against 194 lakh tonnes in the previous year, as per government data.

The country's onion exports declined to 10.86 lakh tonnes in the 2014-15 fiscal due to high MEP (minimum export price), as against 13.58 lakh tonnes in the previous year.