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# THE HINDU

## **Mettur dam likely to be opened in August first week**

With Mettur dam continuing to receive good inflow for the last few days and water level crossing 92 feet mark on Friday, the dam is expected to open for Samba cultivation in the Delta districts in the first week of August.

The Public Works Department has forwarded a proposal to the government which will take a final decision on the exact date of release of water, said N. Elango, Joint Director of Agriculture while speaking at the Farmers grievances day meeting here on Friday.

The water level stood at 92.40 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow into the dam which was 17,081 cusecs on Thursday evening, further dropped to 15,597 cusecs at 8 a.m. on Friday. The discharge from the dam is 2,000 cusecs.

The storage improved from 54.790 tmcft on Thursday to 55.43 tmcft on Friday morning, against the full capacity of 93.470 tmcft.

Following the good storage level of water, the PWD has forwarded the proposal to the government suggesting opening of the dam by first week of August, Mr. Elango said.

Water was expected to be released from Mettur dam on June 12. But due to poor storage level following failure of monsoon in the catchment areas, the government decided against opening the dam on the above date.

## **Rain revives hopes of good yield of kuruvai crop**

*Dry and humid weather conditions had threatened to destroy the crop*

Scattered and widespread rain in several parts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts over the past two days has provided the lifeline to standing kuruvai paddy crop in close to 1.20 lakh acres that were craving for water.

Normally with the commencement of the Tamil month Adi, cool breeze with heavy moisture content in the air would strengthen the health of the kuruvai paddy. But that was not to be this season as the dry, hot, and humid weather conditions threatened to undo the efforts of the farmers who went in for kuruvai banking on the motor pump sets for irrigation.

Overloaded electrical transformers could hardly feed the parched paddy fields to the extent required and in many regions, the kuruvai crop came to depend on water from the Cauvery that was not to be as the customary opening of Mettur Dam for the delta kuruvai cultivation was not possible this year too.

To some extent, the kuruvai package of the State government helped sections of farmers tide over the crisis for the time being but many were yearning for rain.

Answering their prayers, the rain gods showered their mercy on the delta districts on Thursday and Friday as several parts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts experienced scattered and moderate rainfall. That followed dark and cloudy days when the mercury came down considerably in the region.

On Friday too, the sky remained cloudy but made no further progression.

“One or two more such spells would help us see through the critical stage in this year’s kuruvai paddy life cycle as the possibility of the Mettur Dam being opened for delta irrigation is seemingly nearer. “If the dam was opened in the first week of August, then we might see through kuruvai with some success,” say farmers in Kodavasal of Tiruvarur districts, reflecting the expectation of their delta fraternity.

### **Water level at Mettur**

The water level at the Mettur Dam stood at 92.65 feet on Friday against its full reservoir level of 120 feet. The inflow was 11,495 cusecs and the discharge 2,000 cusecs.

### **A subsidy and some questions**

The Central government’s decision this week to extend the [interest subvention scheme](#) on bank loans given to land-owning farmers at 7 per cent is essentially a welcome move. This is especially so in a context where there is no real clarity on how the current monsoon will turn out to be, running at a deficit of 7 per cent as it does currently. With an additional subvention component of 3 per cent to encourage timely repayment, farmers can effectively avail themselves of up to Rs. 3 lakh at just 4 per cent interest. This scheme, basically offering a sort of agricultural subsidy, has been in place since 2006-07, with the subvention component fluctuating between 1.5 and 3 per cent. With agricultural yield levels and incomes per acre falling or languishing, the need to extend such loans to farmers at low interest levels admittedly exists.

However, what is less clear is the purpose for which many of these loans are being put to. The Reserve Bank of India recently initiated an investigation into the apparent diversion of agricultural loans for unintended purposes. It would appear that farmers’ existing debts to money-lenders, weak supervision of credit utilisation and the categorisation of gold loans as agricultural loans are creating significant grey areas and avenues for loan amounts to be used for purposes other than farming. At certain points of the cropping cycle farmers need large amounts of money and they turn to money-lenders, who charge high rates of interest and often insist on their loans being re-paid first — which forces farmers to divert a part of the subsidised bank loans to repay them. Some farmers put the amounts in fixed deposit accounts to earn higher interest than what they pay. Most farmers do not earn enough to meet their needs, including consumption expenditure, and so these loans serve as an auxiliary source of

income. The government needs to recognise the fact that the system of interest subvention will increasingly finance consumption rather than farming, and take one of two steps. It could instruct banks to step up scrutiny on the use the loan is being put to. Or it could rethink the manner in which it wants to subsidise farmers. Implementing direct transfers to bank accounts and investing in research and development to bolster crop yields should serve the same purpose that the low-interest loans currently serve. This step will have the added advantage of potentially improving the plight of farmers. The soft loans are a good idea that needs to be managed and supervised well in order to ensure that the intended outcomes are ensured, and that they help address actual distress in the field.

### **Sustainable farmhouses**



*Built with green technologies and at half the cost of a conventional edifice, they are ideal getaways for city dwellers. By M.A. Siraj*

People tired of visiting crowded hill resorts in summers are increasingly opting for their own farmhouses raised on the principles of sustainability. These work out inexpensive and provide opportunities to familiarise the children with rural living style and endowing them with the knowledge of the basics of agriculture and rural economy.

With land available in plenty, and locally available material being the choice, these farmhouses are easy to erect with rural masons and labourers. Baradanahalli, 18 km south of Mysuru on the H.D. Kote Road, has become a hub of many such houses that appear attractive. These serve as a weekend retreat for families looking for getaways from the heat and dust of urban life. Some NGOs working for alleviating rural woes have taken up construction of these farmhouses in the picturesque village for training and experimenting with sustainable techniques.

## **Cost reduction**

Using precast slabs, pressed mud blocks, slotted steel frame verticals, pre-powder coated sheets for roof, bamboos for ramps and such other materials, the farmhouses can be raised at just about two-third of the cost of a conventional edifice and can be readied with the help of even unskilled labour. Time saved is also phenomenal i.e., just within half the duration a pucca farmhouse would take. They are being equipped with solar panels, harvest rainwater for use, could have biogas plant and are set amidst farms which act as labs for teaching organic farming and watershed development to the neighbouring farm communities.

## **Rainwater harvesting**

The Mysuru-based Vivekananda Institute for Leadership Development (V-Lead) has guided the construction of four such farmhouses in the village where the students of the Masters in Development Management (MDM) are trained in sustainable construction techniques. An 18 ft. by 18 ft. farmhouse nearing completion on a 4-acre farm in the village has been entirely raised out of precast material.

Ramesh Kikkeri, a teacher at V-LEAD, who holds an MBA in Environmental Management, says the house can harvest and store 20,000 litres of rainwater. The house, with a 12 ft. by 12 ft. room and a 6 ft. by 8 ft. washroom, has a loft for a couple to sleep and an 8 ft. by 12 ft. verandah for a sit-out. The precast slabs were joined with special cement called 'Tile Grout' bonding material.

The house, constructed for a teacher from Chamrajnagar, is equipped with biomass stove and solar lighting. Ramesh says the pre-powder coated sheet roof is rain-proof and does not add to any weight. Doors are made of PVC and are resistant to rodents and rains. Minus land, the house cost comes to Rs. 2.5 lakh while a house of the same dimension with conventional material would have cost Rs. 4 lakh.

According to Ramesh, the house can last for 20 years and was raised in 12 weeks. The verticals were painted with zinc oxide and sandur blue tiles have been laid on the ground.

## **Use of mud blocks**

Shamsundar, who heads the Centre for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Material (CREST) at the National Institute of Engineering (NIE) in Mysuru, has constructed a farmhouse for a collective of professionals with interest in green technologies, in the same village. He raised a 40 ft. by 20 ft. house with compressed mud blocks. Providing thermal comfort, it stays cool in summer and is warm in winter. The families source their vegetables from the organic farm around the house.

Says Shamsundar, while the rain run-off from the roof is collected in large Thai jars on either side of the house, no drop of water from the farm is allowed to drain away from the land.

Watershed techniques enable them to collect nearly 80,000 litres of rainwater in a kalyani and another 50,000 litres in two big ponds, all on the farm. The attractively built farmhouse has smokeless chulha and has lighting with solar energy.

## **Wood house**

Yet another collective of families has built a wood house on stilts. The 10 ft. by 10 ft. house stands on Nilgari poles two ft. above the ground. It can be reached by a ramp constructed by joining local wood poles. Walls have been fashioned out of split trunks of areca trees. M.S. Sheets have come in handy for the roof which has been laid over with thatch comprising coconut waste and local grass.

Shamsundar says CREST is laying the rainwater harvesting system for the Mysore Palace and for the Dasara Exhibition Ground. It also helps establishments to turn kitchen waste into biogas and is promoting bio-diesel.

### **Last year's compensation yet to reach drought-hit farmers**

Even as farmers are ending their lives due to the burden of loans, farmers in drought-hit taluks of Tumakuru district are yet to receive compensation for 2014 kharif crop loss.

The Central team had visited the district to assess the extent of crop loss in November 2014. The amount was fixed based on their report submitted to the Union government. However, compensation is yet to be distributed to the beneficiaries.

Five taluks out of 10 in Tumakuru district were declared drought-hit in 2014–15: Koratagere, Madhugiri, Sira, Pavagada, and Kunigal. A total of Rs. 52.79 crore is yet to be paid by the district administration as kharif crop compensation from June to September 2014, to the farmers of the five taluks.

### **'Delay from Centre'**

Joint Director of the Agriculture Department, Tumakuru, R. Krishna Murthy, said the amount given by the Union government for crop loss came only by the end of May to the Deputy Commissioner. "We had sent the list of the beneficiaries to the Deputy Commissioner," he said.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Anuradha told *The Hindu*, "The amount from the Calamity Relief Fund of the Union government was given in May in three instalments, and the last instalment came by May-end."

"Only after getting the funds, is the list of beneficiaries prepared. Now the list has been finalised, their bank account numbers and IFSC codes of the respective banks are being taken from the beneficiaries, and the amount will be put directly into the bank account of the farmers," she said.

### **Ryots against MGNREGS work during farm season**

*Acute scarcity of labour in Salem has hit agricultural activity*

Farmers representatives pleaded with the authorities to allow the farm workers enrolled under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to involve themselves in other agricultural activities during the farm season. There is an acute

scarcity of farm labour in the district and this had hit the farm activities in a big way, they said.

C. Vaiyapuri, president, United Farmers Association – Tamil Nadu, said that no concrete work is being implemented under the MGNREGS in the district. The involvement of the farm workers in it has led to scarcity of hands for other farm activities, he complained.

K. Sundaram, general secretary, Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, said that even the senior government officials concede that this concept has not served any real purpose. The implementation of this programme has caused much hardship to the farmers in the form of non-availability of farm hands. On many occasions, the workers of these programmes were seen idling. Mr. Sundaram made a forceful plea not to implement the MNREGS works during the agricultural season. This will enable availability of adequate man power for undertaking the farm activities without any difficulty.

Even while executing the MNREGS works, the authorities should ensure that they are implemented strictly as per the government norms.

District Collector V. Sampath said that about 4,500 farm ponds have been dug under the MGNREGS in the district.

#### **‘Offer compensation for banana crop damage as Kerala does’**

Farmers urged the district administration to adopt the Kerala model in awarding compensation for banana crop damage during the recent gusty winds with rain here on Friday.

Participating in the monthly grievance day meeting, farmers said that the Kerala government is giving compensation for damage of even one tree whereas in Tamilnadu, officials recommending compensation for the affected area of land instead of the damaged crops. This will affect the farmers who are taking up cultivation on leased lands.

Crop damage adds to the woes of the farmers who had already been affected by pests in the current season.

Farmers also appealed to the administration to desilt the Pechipparai dam. An official from the Water Resources Organisation of the PWD said that a proposal has been sent to the government to desilt 1,643 ponds in the district under the World Bank Scheme.

A student pursuing agriculture demanded the administration to safeguard the Amaravathi pond, spread on a sprawling 14.75-acres, which was becoming a dumping yard of medical wastes, plastic and garbage posing health hazard to the local people. The residents too were letting drainage into the pond, he alleged.

The student submitted petitions to the District Collector on several occasions in the past demanding that the pond be desilted and fenced. The pond was the main source of irrigation to Thiruvithancode area, he said.

A farmer made a scathing attack on the officials for their failure to evict encroachments on the irrigation canals across the district. Another farmer appealed to the Collector to ensure the presence of district-level officials at the grievance meeting.

It was also informed at the meeting that coconut seedlings were being sold at low cost at the Government Coconut Farm in Puthalam.

A. Nijamudhin, Personal Assistant to Collector (Agriculture), Subramanian, Executive Engineer, WRO of PWD, Elango, Joint Director, Agriculture among others participated.

### **Drop in turnover at Maradu market**



New regional auction centres and fall in the price of bananas and tapioca this season have combined to bring down sales turnover at the EEC wholesale vegetable market at Maradu by about half.

The last season, stretching from June to September, saw weekly sales turnover touching Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 5.5 lakh. However, sales are down these weeks at Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 1.4 lakh, said an official of the Department of Agriculture.

On Wednesday, sales turnover was Rs. 2.17 lakh for a total volume of 30 tonnes, comprising mostly nendran bananas, elephant foot yam and tapioca.

However, during the weeks in July last year, sales volumes hovered over 60 to 65 tonnes.

One of the key reasons is that farmers are now using new auction centres opened by farmers' groups in places such as Thiruvaniyoor, Nedumbassery and Kunnukara.

At the same time, farmers have said that they were not getting remunerative prices for most of their produce. They pointed out the case of tapioca and some of the plantain varieties.

Though the nendran banana has held its own, prices of varieties such as palayamthodan, njaalippovan and robusta had crashed this season, said Sunny Puthussery from Nedumbassery on Wednesday, the weekly auction day for the Maradu market.

Babu Painadath, farmer and general convenor of the Maradu market committee said farmers were at the receiving end of a skewed pricing system in which the farmer got only a small share of the price a customer paid for the produce.

He said while tapioca sold for Rs. 6 a kg in the wholesale market on Wednesday, the retail price was Rs. 20 a kg. Nendran sold for Rs. 36 a kg; njalippoovan for Rs. 25 a kg; palayamthodan for Rs. 14 a kg; robusta for Rs. 11 and elephant foot yam for Rs. 28 a kg on Wednesday.

### **DIC gets proposals for Rs. 100-cr. investments in MSMEs**

Ernakulam District Industries Centre has received proposals for investments to the tune of Rs. 100 crore in 633 micro, small and medium enterprises during the first quarter of the current financial year.

More than half the proposed investments would go into the services sector, while investments in the manufacturing segment will go into food, agro, engineering and textiles and garments units, industry department sources said here.

The district has also seen 569 new enterprises taking off the ground during the April-June quarter generating employment for nearly 3,800 people.

### **Industrialisation drive**

The buoyancy in the investment scene continues from the last financial year when, through the Intensive Industrialisation Drive, the district received fresh investments of more than Rs. 130 crore in 168 enterprises with individual outlays going above Rs. 25 lakh each. The special drive also created employment for 1,865 people.

Industries department also expects investments of more than Rs. 300 crore in 200 new enterprises with average outlay topping Rs. 50 lakh.

### **Survey of potential**

Meanwhile, a recent survey of Ernakulam's potential for drawing investments into the MSME sector has identified food processing sector as gelling well with the conditions in the district. Metal-based units for products like automobile gaskets and filters; garments units; rubber-based units for foam, latex-dipped and fibre foam products have also been identified as having great prospects for entrepreneurs here.

While food processing bridges the gap between agriculture and industry, the nature of the industry is attractive to first-time entrepreneurs. The industry is low capital intensive and has low working capital requirements, the survey report said.

The average investment requirement for a unit in the food processing segment is around Rs. 10 lakh.

It can generate employment for 10 people and the unit can take off in two years, the report said as it pointed to areas like frozen ready-to-eat products from fish and meat; fruits and beverages, oleoresins, dehydrated green pepper, coconut milk and cream.



## **Banks told not to force farmers to repay loans**

*DC asks bank officials to pass on the message to all branches*

Hassan Deputy Commissioner Umesh H. Kusugal on Friday directed the banks and the Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies not to put pressure on farmers to repay loans.

“Banks and cooperative societies should not issue loan recovery notices or force farmers to repay loans in any form,” Mr. Kusugal said at a meeting here. He said, no banks should display photos of defaulters. Mr. Kusugal urged the bank officials to pass on the message to their branch managers and ensure that no farmer was harassed for repayment.

“Officials of all departments, during their official visits to rural areas, should take time to speak to families of farmers, instil confidence among them and appeal to them not to lose hope,” he said.

Bank officials, senior officials of the departments of agriculture and horticulture, and assistant commissioners were present.

Meanwhile, Public Works Minister H.C. Mahadevappa, who is also in-charge of Hassan district, will visit the families of farmers, who had committed suicide, at Hassan on Saturday.

According to a communiqué released from the district administration, the Minister would be visiting farmers’ houses in Channarayapatna, Holenarsipur and Arkalgud taluks. In the last two months, seven farmers committed suicide in Hassan district.

## **Field survey completed in 49 villages in Idukki**

*Part of preparing report on eco fragile areas*

A two-day quick field survey under the panchayat committee has been completed in the 49 villages as part of submitting the final report on the ecologically fragile areas in the district.

A temporary subdivision number was given to agriculture land under the forest survey number, a press release said on Friday. The report, which was finalised on Friday, will be submitted to the field survey directorate office at Thiruvananthapuram. The disputed areas in the panchayats were visited by the committee consisting of the village officer, panchayat secretary, forest ranger, and agriculture officer.

The final report will be submitted on the basis of the quick verification. In areas where the forest and agriculture land are interlinked, subdivision boundary with footnotes will be given in the final report. District Collector V. Ratheesan said that community and individual rights and development concerns would be addressed in the Adivasi settlements that fall under the ecologically fragile areas.

## **New map not ready**

All the disputed areas are being surveyed by the panchayat committee after going through the prescribed criteria. The areas are surveyed on the basis of old taluks and panchayats and the land documents under them. This is because the boundary map of the new taluks and panchayats were being prepared, he said.

Joice George, MP, said that there was a concerted move in the national- and State-level to torpedo the Oommen V. Oommen report and implement the Kasturirangan report. He said the Centre had agreed to remove farmlands and human habitations from the final report after sustained pressure.

He said he had discussed the issue with Union Minister for Environment Prakash Javadekar. He alleged an attempt to block the Union government's favourable stand on the issue. District Congress Committee president Roy K. Paulose said there was no concern over the Kasturirangan issue and the Idukki MP and a group of people were spreading fear among people. He said there was a campaign before the Lok Sabha election that the Oommen V. Oommen report was a farce. He said the quick verification survey was only a follow-up of it and the survey number was given on the basis of the map of the Oommen V. Oommen report.

## **‘Rescue farmers in distress’**

At the interactive session on Friday on ways to prevent farmers' suicides, students of Sri Vani Vilas Urs PU College came up with some suggestions.

While a student by name Divya was of the view that the government should not pay Rs. 2 lakh compensation for the kin of farmer who commits suicide, another student said that instead of providing compensation to the dead farmers' family, the authorities should come to the rescue of farmers in distress. Ms. Divya also said that the government should ensure that farmers get a fair price for their produce, and they insure their crops.

Namratha, another student of the college, urged the government to provide interest-free loans to farmers to buy tractors and other agricultural equipment.

Yet another student said that most people in society, including Vijay Mallya, were debtors. While banks can let Mr. Mallya default on loans, why should they be after farmers who would have taken loans for agricultural purposes. Joint Director of Agriculture M. Mahanteshappa spoke. ZP president Pushpavathi Amaranath said that farmers should not take the extreme step just because they have taken loans.

***Govt. should give interest-free loans to buy farm equipment, say students***

### **Call for village-level contact programmes**

The sudden spurt in farmers' suicides, especially in Mysuru district, has left the farmers' leaders stunned. They are blaming people in power and government officials for failing to understand the ground realities and work as a team to stop the disturbing trend.

A shocked Kurubur Shanthkumar, president, State Sugarcane Growers' Association, who is in the forefront of farmer agitations, expressed his deep condolences to the families of farmers who committed suicide in Mysuru and Chamarajanagar district on Friday.

“The mass contact programme with farmers should be done in each village instead of hoblis. I feel the farmers are feeling isolated despite promises from various quarters to be with them in the hour of crisis. The officials must work together as a team and instil confidence among farmers, but this is not happening. Seriousness in handling the issue is lacking,” he told *The Hindu* .

Mr. Shanthkumar said a great deal of responsibility lies on the officials in the revenue, agriculture and police departments, and of course banks. N. Nanje Gowda, State Convener, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, suggested simplification of farm loans by banks besides implementation of M.S. Swaminathan's recommendations.

### **'Invest Karnataka' to include farm investors' meet**

This year's edition of the global event 'Invest Karnataka 2015' will also have place for Agri Investors' Meet in a bid to showcase the potential for investments in the agriculture sector, according to Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda. The event is being held in Bengaluru from November 23 to 25.

Replying to Congress member Shivanand S. Patil during the Question Hour in the Assembly, the Minister said various investment areas, including the food processing sector, would be showcased in the global event to attract private investments.

Meanwhile, the Minister alleged that the four food parks being developed by private promoters in the State had failed to serve the purpose as they had turned out to be real estate business entities. He said these four parks too would be showcased at the global meet.

He said notices had been issued to the promoters of food parks at Malur, Hiriya, Bagalkot and Jewargi through Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board which had given them land.

Replying to JD(S) member N. Cheluvaryaswamy, Mr. Gowda said the government was considering a proposal to include the component of covering farm ponds with shade nets under the Krishi Bhagya scheme.

### [NCRB data claims no farmer suicides in Rajasthan in 2014](#)



In Rajasthan, at least 414 farmers committed suicide on an average every year over five years till 2013. However, in 2014, not a single farmer ended his life in the state, thanks to a new methodology adopted by the National Crime Records Bureau to calculate farming distress. In fact, the latest NCRB data shows the desert state to be an oasis of farming bliss, surrounded by distress-ridden Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat. While MP reported 826 farmer suicides, UP and Gujarat reported 63 and 45 suicides each.

Even Punjab and Haryana — the so-called granaries of India — witnessed 24 and 14 farmer suicides in 2014. But in Rajasthan, where people from all walks of life — from street vendors to businessmen to those in plush government jobs — ended up taking the extreme step, no farmer committed suicide.

Ironically, the data is inconsistent with past trends, especially when the state reported a six percent rise in farmer suicides in 2013 over 2012 and has witnessed a total of 2,071 suicides since 2009. Before this year, farmer suicides were to be found under the “Self Employed (farming/agriculture)” category in the NCRB’s Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India data

sheet. This year, the NCRB created a separate farmer suicide category, which resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of farmer suicides across the country leading to 12 states and 6 Union Territories reporting zero farmer suicides.

This include large states with huge agricultural economies like Rajasthan, West Bengal and Bihar. In the latest NCRB data, farmer suicides have been clubbed under Self Employed (Agriculture) category. Under this, Rajasthan has reported 373 farmer suicides, all of whom strangely were ‘agricultural labourers’.

If this figure were to be taken as representing farmer suicides — since all other entries pertaining to farmers report zero — then Rajasthan would have seen quite a steep surge of 22 percent in farmer suicides.

“The change in methodology has rendered the data incomparable to previous years,” says senior journalist P Sainath, who was among the first few to bring the phenomenon of farmer suicides to national mainstream. “The new methodology enables state governments to conceal the number of farmer suicides across new categories. In fact, many states are now declaring zero farmer suicide,” he said.

Congress state president Sachin Pilot said it was not possible that no farmer committed suicide in the state. “I myself have visited over 50 families of farmers who committed suicide. The government has given compensation to some of these farmers.

Then how did they report zero suicides?” he asked. “The economic distress on the farmers of the state is telling and the government is in absolute denial,” he said.

### **Gov will have to act if banks refuse loans to eligible farmers: CM Devendra Fadnavis**

The state government has decided to continue cracking the whip against financial institutions that refuse to extend crop loans to deserving farmers in violation of norms even as the Union finance ministry has not approved of the earlier FIRs lodged against some banks. Chief

Minister Devendra Fadnavis told The Indian Express, “At the outset let me make it clear that government is not on a spree to file FIR against any and every bank across Maharashtra.



But we will certainly act where things are going absolutely wrong and farmers are suffering. I cannot remain a silent spectator when my farmers are in pain.” Earlier, the state government lodged FIRs against 16 banks who failed to disburse loans. In a letter written on July 8, financial services secretary Hasmukh Adhia wrote to state chief secretary Swadheen Khstriya to stop filing FIR against nationalised banks refusing loans to farmers. “Taking criminal action against banks would be catastrophic and not help in achieving the purpose,” the letter read.

“Such decisions could become counterproductive as employees of bank would not cooperate with government which could have unintended consequences,” the letter said. Responding to

the Centre's warning, Fadnavis said, "I want to place things in the right perspective as the Opposition has raised a hue and cry on the matter without taking the right context. The state government cannot overlook the interests of the farmers. If those who are eligible are seeking loans it is mandatory for financial institutions to consider their cases on humanitarian grounds." Fadnavis said, "We have not initiated any campaign against banks nor filed FIR against anybody and everybody. In most cases only notices have been served. I held several meetings with the banks and discussed how to go about to tackle the agrarian crisis. The Union Ministries of Finance and Agriculture has also been extremely supportive to state in tackling the crisis.

" While acknowledging that government is seized of the pressure on banks which avoid bad debt, Fadnavis said, "To find a solution we have agreed to become the guarantor. The process of restructuring of loans was to wipe out the debt in the first year of seeking loan to make larger number of farmers eligible for loans. Now we have got rid of interest rates for all five years." The state government's initiatives coupled with the FIR threat has resulted in a rise in total loans disbursed to farmers, which now stands at Rs 17,317 crore as on July 15, which is Rs 4,230 crore higher compared to last year.

The total number of farmers who have borrowed from banks in the 18 districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada together have crossed 14.5 lakh compared to 9.5 lakh last year. Revenue and

Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse said, "The state government has the right to act against banks refusing loans. What ever decisions have been taken are within the given jurisdiction of the laid norms." While ruling out any conflict between the state and Centre, Khadse said, "The decision to initiate action against some institutions which faulted was to send a strong message across. We have to ensure banks cannot avoid loans to deserving farmers." Sources in the state finance ministry said, "It is a fact that banks are not willing to lend to farmers because of bad debt. The average lending is only 35-40 per cent."



### **Frequent power cuts hit Kuttanad farms**

KOTTAYAM: The few remaining farmlands in R Block in Alappuzha district, one of the few places in the world where farming is done below sea level, are facing extinction. This is after the frequent power cuts which hindered the pumping out of water from the fields using motor pumps. As the pumping gets affected, the water levels in the fields rise, leading to crop loss. Motor pumps with the power of 50-75 HP is used to pump out water from the fields. Hindered power supply to R Block resulted in extensive loss of crops, said Titto Abraham, convenor of R Block Kayal Samithi.

"Most of the motor pumps are as old as 50 years and many are not in working condition now. There are 24 motors for the entire R Block. One motor is for 50 acres," said Benny, a landowner. Benny suffered heavy losses in 2013 when the motors got damaged after water level rose. "My entire coconut plantation got ruined," he said. He also said that the landowners here are also to be blamed as they are not properly maintaining the motor pumps.



Around 1,550 acres of agricultural land spread out in Vembanad lake, where farmers tried out various experiments, is now on the verge of decline. The farmers here are facing the threat of floods since 1992, said Titto.

Though several projects like Kuttanad package was introduced to rejuvenate the farmers, nothing worked out, said a farmer Raghavan, adding that during rainy season, they seldom get power supply. Apart from paddy, coconut, vanilla, plantain, cocoa, pepper, etc. are the crops cultivated here by farmers.

According to the farmers, it is the KSEB and the agricultural department which is responsible for the present situation in the region situated in the middle of the lake.

Recently, the situation has worsened here as pumping was affected as power supply was disrupted for over a week. The remaining farming is also now under threat of getting ruined. The electric posts in the region are also in a bad condition. The electric lines are also not properly maintained. Currently, power is supplied from one feeder in Pallom punja to the entire fields here.

The only solution for the present crisis is the construction of a sub-station here, said Titto Abraham. One of the landowners here had donated five acres to KSEB years ago for the purpose of building a sub-station.

However, the KSEB has cited difficulty in access to the region as the reason for not starting a sub-station there. "If there is difficulty in building a sub-station there, KSEB can built one in Konchu Mada in Kumarakom to solve the power crisis here," he added.

### **Centre announces Rs 2800 crore relief for UP farmers**

The Centre on Friday approved release of Rs 2,801.59 crore as relief for Uttar Pradesh's hailstorm-affected farmers. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by home minister Rajnath Singh and attended by finance minister Arun Jaitley and minister of state for agriculture Sanjeev Kumar Balyan.



The relief amount was sanctioned after examining the report of the central team which had visited the hailstorm-hit areas in the state. The high-level committee on central assistance to states affected by natural disasters decided that the entire fund will go to the UP state disaster relief fund and the state government will distribute the compensation amount to farmers as per the damaged crops, sources said.

The NDA government has changed the norms for giving compensation to farmers whose crops were damaged. Now, those farmers whose crops were damaged up to 33 per cent will be entitled for compensation. Earlier it was limited up to 50 per cent.

The Centre has made changes in the norms to purchase shrivelled grains and tweaked the standards on moisture content to help the farmers.

The move is aimed at ensuring that wheat farmers get the full minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 1,450 per quintal.

According to the new norms, farmers in rainfed areas will be eligible to claim assistance - in the form of input subsidy - of Rs 6,800 per hectare, compared to the earlier Rs 4,500.

Compensation for crops in areas with assured irrigation has been increased from Rs 9,000 to Rs 13,500 per hectare, and that for perennial (horticultural) crops from Rs 12,000 to 18,000 per hectare. The relief is subject to a cap of two hectares per farmer.

## **UAS launches farmer helpline**

DHARWAD: The University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, and the Dharwad Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Dimhans) have jointly started a helpline 'Raitha Chetana' to help farmers out of crisis. The new facility became functional from Thursday with deputy commissioner P Rajendra Cholan formally inaugurating it.

Cholan said that panic-stricken farmers needed proper counseling to boost their confidence and make them desist from taking extreme steps like suicide. While the government is trying to bail them out, it was also necessary to make them mentally strong and come out of depression.

This helpline will function round the clock and agriculture varsity staff and PhD students will attend the calls. Farmers from across the state can dial this toll free number 18004251150 and get advise from psychiatrists. Officials at the Raitha Seva Kendra will also impart valuable suggestions on new and viable agricultural schemes. UAS vice-chancellor D P Biradar said that the helpline which will go a long way in addressing agrarian issues.

Dimhans director Dr Raveesh and other officials were present.

## **Farmers must diversify their crops to be successful: Expert**

MYSURU: "During interaction sessions with farmers, I have heard stories of farmers who committed suicide after losing money in betting and gambling. Many were involved in betting especially during IPL seasons," said M Mahanteshappa, joint director, agriculture department.

Speaking at a discussion on farmers' suicide organized jointly by Jayachamaraja Urs Education Trust and Vani Vilas Urs Girls Pre University College on the college premises on Friday, he said many farmers are not using agricultural loans availed on meager interest rates for farming. "Some of them use the money for gambling and drinking, and some others spend it to maintain a luxury lifestyle and on their kids wedding. I am coming from a farmer family and I know how financially strong our farmers are. Apart from a few, most farmers incurred heavy debts because of mismanagement of money," he added.

"Agriculture should be looked at as an industry. Farmers in Mandya and Mysuru are mostly into sugarcane and paddy cultivation. They have to diversify their ventures. As the number of farmers cultivating sugarcane and paddy is more, the supply is more than the demand.

Diversification is the solution for this problem. Farmers must seek the guidance of experts and adopt multiple cropping," he added.

Pushpalatha Amarnath, president of the zilla panchayat, said, "Suicide is not a solution for debts. It is not just farmers, everybody will have debts. Officials must interact with farmers to find out and sort out their issues. Instead of spending lavishly on kids weddings, farmers should invest in their education. Farmers in distress must be given counselling by their successful counterparts."

Students who participated in the discussion suggested that government open warehouses in taluk and hobli levels for farmers to sell their products directly to consumers

### **Raipur village farmers make their organic rice a brand**

RAIPUR: In a span of six months, several infrastructural developments and facilities of basic amenities are being developed by gram panchayat Bhakurrah as local farmers of Gahira village in Raigarh district have proved their mettle by branding and selling locally grown organic rice within Chhattisgarh and neighboring states.

Farmers' initiative came through Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, a scheme under which MPs adopt a village for its overall development. MP from Raigarh, Vishnudeo Sai, who is a Union minister, has adopted this village.

100 farmers of village Gahira formed Kisan Club and rice varieties 'Javaaphul and Jeeraphul' were already grown there. Around 30 farmers visited Kerala to learn about organic farming. Now, these local famous varieties got a new avatar after it was packaged and branded.

District panchayat CEO Nilesh Shirsagar said, "Since the mission of cleanliness was launched under 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' in village, residents took the initiative of construction toilets in every house, without taking any hardware subsidy from administration and made village Gahira an 100% open defecation free zone. This movement has created inspirational waves in nearby village Pilaidaraha as well."

*A committee of women in village to inspect the use of toilets and impose fine on those who are not using it. (TOI photo)*

327 new toilets were constructed from 127 existing toilets in village.

The village is also free from alcohol consumption and mostly people are vegetarian, living on agriculture. In a local 'ashram' there Sanskrit language is being learnt by around 250 students.

Besides basic amenities, the village is also equipped with electricity supply by installation of solar energy plant by Chhattisgarh Renewable Energy Development Agency (CREDA).

### **Mahavitaran forms committee to study agriculture connections**

KOLHAPUR: The Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company (Mahavitaran) on Wednesday formed a fact-finding committee acting on allegations that the company is hiding electricity theft behind agriculture-related connections. The allegations were raised by Ichalkaranji-based Pratap Hogade, president of the Maharashtra Electricity Consumers Association.

Since the last three years, Hogade has alleged that the Mahavitaran's agriculture connections and power usage is false. He alleged that the company is hiding electricity theft cases by exaggerating agriculture supply. Hogade had also demanded that a committee be constituted to conduct an inquiry into whether the power connections are real or falsified. State energy minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule directed the Mahavitaran to appoint a committee to study the allegations in June this year.

The three-member committee comprises Vishwas Pathak, the director of the Maharashtra State Electricity Board Holding Company, who will chair the committee. Ashish Chandrana, an expert from Akola and Hogade himself are the other two panel members. The committee has been asked to verify agriculture connections across the state, the billing of such connections and the amount of electricity consumed by these connections.

The committee has asked that a third-party institution be recommended to visit the 100 feeder lines and present a draft report by December this year.

Hogade has said that in the last 13 years, the Mahavitaran had hidden electricity theft of Rs 60,000 crore behind the exaggerated agriculture consumption and this is the core reason of high per unit consumption tariff in Maharashtra, Hogade's association has claimed. Over 41 lakh agriculture power connections were recorded in Maharashtra by December 2014.

The panel will scrutinise the number of live and defunct agricultural connections (metered and unmetered), connected load, metering status and meter readings, billing and recovery in the last three years. Apart from this, the water supply source, irrigated area and cropping pattern of live agriculture connections on the feeder and verification of maximum agricultural metered consumers will be done. The actual reading will be compared with the readings recorded by Mahavitaran in its energy bills on these sample feeders. The committee will also examine the energy audit of these 100 agriculture feeders in the last three years.

The Mahavitaran will provide logistics and data support required for the study. This will also include assistance for feeder sampling, field validation exercise and data sharing available with the company.

### **Modi to unveil vision for 2nd green revolution**

PATNA: PM Narendra Modi is likely to unveil his vision for the second green revolution in eastern India with focus on Bihar, while addressing the inaugural function of the two-day national meet of Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) here on Saturday.

Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh said the launch of Rs 76,000-crore mega project under Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana for Bihar is also a step towards that end as it envisages to create a separate feeder for supply of electricity for irrigation purposes. The Centre would give Rs 63,000 crore while the remaining Rs 13,000 crore would be the state share for the purpose.

"Of the total sum, Rs 4,707 crore would be spent on creating a separate feeder for irrigation purposes in the state. The PM's dream is to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply to every household in the country by 2022," Singh said.

As many as 2,500 agriculture scientists, 642 representatives of Krishi Vigyan Kendras, farmers and other agriculture experts would be participating in the two-day meet of ICAR, Singh said. The PM would also give away awards under different categories, including 18 to contributions made in agricultural research education, three to institutions, nine to KVKs, 55 to scientists, seven to farmers and six to mediapersons, Singh added.

The agriculture scientists, experts and farmers would deliberate on preparing the road map for second green revolution that would be in tune with the dream of the PM, Singh said.

### **Centre to come up with farmer friendly insurance**



The central government is planning to come up with a "more farmer friendly" crop insurance scheme in the next two months, an agriculture ministry official said here on Friday.

The proposed scheme was aimed at enhancing the insurance coverage in the agriculture sector and helping farmers in mitigating the loss to their crops from different reasons, the ministry's joint secretary Ashish Bhutani said.

"We are working on restructuring of present crop insurance schemes and likely to come up with a restructured crop insurance scheme in next two months and it will be more farmer friendly," the official told the media at an event organised by the PHD Chambers.

Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya, who was also present at the meeting, said there was a need to explore possibilities of exchange of ideas between the government and private insurance players to develop an effective, integrated and affordable insurance package for farmers.

The minister said: "The need of the hour is to make agriculture a risk-free activity by protecting farmers from financial and crop yield risks."

Kundariya said the government has been implementing three major insurance schemes such as National Agriculture Insurance Scheme, Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme and Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme.

"However, due to lack of awareness among the farmers on risk mitigation effects of insurance and inadequate enthusiasm of bankers and other financial intermediaries, these schemes have not made large impact even through these insurance products have tremendous risk mitigating capabilities," he said.

### **Nalanda woman farmer to receive award from PM**

BIHARSHARIF: A progressive woman farmer from Nalanda, who turned around her own fortune as well as scores of other women farmers in the district through mushroom farming, has been selected for this year's prestigious 'Jagjivan Ram Innovative Farmer's Award'. She will receive the award from PM Narendra Modi at the 9th National Agriculture Science Centre Workshop in Patna on July 25.

Anita Kumari, hailed as a symbol of women empowerment in the district, is one who not only made herself financially independent by taking up mushroom farming and its associated work but also contributed in the financial independence of scores of other poor women farmers by inspiring them to adopt mushroom farming as a viable source of sustenance.

A resident of village Anantpur under Chandi block in Nalanda district, Anita started mushroom farming after receiving training in Nalanda in 2010 on the request of the then district magistrate Sanjay Kumar Agrawal and other officials. Within five years she helped in the formation of dozens of women self-help groups (SHG) who too are emerging financially strong by virtue of mushroom farming, said Anita.

Before 2010, her family was on the verge of starvation as the small land her husband owned was not enough to feed the entire family and meet other requirements and sending children to school was a distant dream for them, she said and added that on the request of the then district magistrate and others she reluctantly took to mushroom farming and it started paying off. Encouraged by the success, she inspired other women folk and now all of them are financially stable and are imparting best available education to their wards as one of Anita's sons is pursuing a course in chartered accountancy.



Also a name in mushroom processing, Anita markets mushroom pickles and several other mushroom products which immensely contribute to her income.

### **Bharuch farmer's date with success**

SURAT: A farmer from Ankleshwar taluka of Bharuch district has successfully used tissue culture to grow yellow dates.

The fruit is generally not cultivated in this region as it requires an arid and dry climate.

However, Jayesh Patel, a businessman-turned-farmer, has cultivated nearly six tonnes of yellow dates in this two hectare land. Moreover, he has started selling the produce directly and chucked out the middle men.

Patel gave up his business in 2008-9 to start agriculture and set up a farm in Piplod near Ankleshwar. He decided to cultivate tissue-cultured yellow date palm (Barhee) variety, which is a rarity in south Gujarat.

He brought 700 plants of yellow dates from Atul Co. for Rs 2,700 each in 2012.

The horticulture department the state government, which is promoting innovative practices in agriculture, gave a subsidy of Rs1,250 per plant.

Date plants started yielding fruits from the fourth year but Patel started getting good harvest from the third year itself.

"Generally, yellow dates are cultivated in arid and dry climate whereas our climate in south Gujarat is humid. I saw 15-20 per cent falling of the fruits but still the crop yield is very high," said Dinesh Padaliya, assistant director of horticulture, Surat- Bharuch.

At present, Patel has nearly 5-6 tonnes of fruits on the trees besides the six tones that he has already harvested.

"I decided to sell and market the fruit directly to retail customer. As a result, I am getting good rate for my produce and people are getting fresh product at cheaper rate than the market," he said.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### Sugar output for 2015-16 seen down at 280 lakh tonnes



Though the forecast is less than last year, this will be sixth consecutive year of surplus

With sugarcane acreage keeping pace with sown area at the same time last year, the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) estimates production for the 2015-16 season (October-September) to be around 280 lakh tonnes (lt).

#### **Glut extends**

While the forecast is 3 lt less than the expected total output by the end of this season, it would be the sixth consecutive year when supply exceeds demand, which is pegged at 252 lt.

With poor realisation from a glut in the domestic market and a global price slump, opening stock on October 1 is expected to be 102 lt, the highest in seven years.

According to data released by ISMA here on Friday, cane acreage stood at 53.58 lakh hectares (lh) in the latter part of June, marginally higher than 53.23 lh at the same time last year. "This preliminary estimate of sugarcane crop and production is on the current monsoon progress, water situation and other fundamental factors across India," said a statement.

It added that ISMA will release the first advance estimates for 2015-16 in September when the crop is fully mature.

Sugarcane area in Uttar Pradesh, the largest cane producing State, is estimated at 23.14 lh, against 23.07 lh in 2014-15.

### **State-wide break up**

The association expects better yield and expects sugar output in UP for the 2015-16 season to be 73.5 lakh tonnes (lt) – 3.5 per cent higher than the 71 lt produced in 2014-15.

Maharashtra is expected to match last year's 10.6 lh though ISMA sees lower yield due to poor rainfall in the region. Sugar output may fall by 7.6 per cent to around 97 lt in the upcoming season.

Production in Karnataka is likely to keep pace with the record output of 49.6 lt this season. The association expects acreage to be about 5.14 lh while production will touch 49.8 lt.

Tamil Nadu is expected to produce around 12.7 lt in 2015-16.

### **Farmer suicides: Minister draws flak for 'insensitive' remark**



Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh came under fire on Friday for a clumsy written reply to a question raised in Parliament on the sensitive issue of farmer suicides in the country. Later, his office swung into damage control mode, saying his statement “has been taken out of context and is being highlighted in an unwarranted manner.” Incidentally, Singh was in Patna all this while.

To a question raised by CP Narayanan, an MP, Singh, while highlighting the numbers and quoting National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, went on to list love affairs, dowry,

impotency, drug abuse and property disputes, as some of the causes behind some farmer suicides.

His reply stated that of the 5,650 farmer suicides under the “persons self-employed in farming/agriculture” category in 2014 according to the NCRB, 1,400 were attributed to agrarian distress.

On Narayanan’s question whether a lack of support to farmers by way of greater inputs and better support prices was the leading cause behind increasing numbers of suicides, Singh went on to respond with a list of general causes for suicide.

“According to NCRB, causes of suicides include family problems, illness, drug abuse/addiction, unemployment, property dispute, professional/career problems, love affairs, barrenness/impotency, cancellation/non-settlement of marriage, dowry dispute, fall in social reputation and unknown causes.” “Causes of suicide by farmers due to agrarian reasons inter-alia, include indebtedness, crop failure, drought, socio-economic and personal,” he added.

Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, led the count having recorded 2,568, 898, 826 and 443 fatalities respectively .

### **Ministry response**

After the media and the Opposition went whole hog, criticising Singh’s ‘insensitive’ remarks, the Agriculture Ministry attempted to clarify later in the day that: “The NCRB reports suicides by different categories of people profiled by their professions. One of the professions on which suicide data is provided for the calendar year i.e. January-December is listed as persons ‘self employed in farming/agriculture’.”

It said annexure II of the written response – that shows the number of suicides by farmers due to agrarian reasons as reported by State Governments – shows only six States having reported such deaths. Maharashtra reported 1,250 fatalities followed by Telangana (84), Karnataka (47), Andhra Pradesh (13), Kerala (3) and Gujarat (3).

Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Sikkim did not send in reports while all other States and Union Territories reported no farmer suicides under the category, which has recorded 263 farmer suicides till June 2015.

“It is generally seen, that all the States do not report the data in time and, therefore, the department is compelled to show as ‘not reported’ (NR) against various States. Hence, the NCRB data also is submitted as part of the answer along with that reported by the State Governments,” said the Ministry statement.

Meanwhile, sowing of Kharif crops across India edged higher by 26.1 per cent at 693.83 lakh hectares (lh) compared to 550.42 lh at the same time last year.

Agriculture Ministry data released on Friday shows pulses acreage having risen 50.6 per cent to 72.64 lh (48.22 lh). Urad and moong, in particular, have recorded higher acreage by 91 per cent and 69.2 per cent at 18.68 lh and 18.41 lh, respectively.

Area under coarse cereals such as jowar and bajra stood at 135.77 lh against 87.18 lh at the same time last year. Oilseeds such as soyabean and groundnut have been sown over 143.02 lh – a 32.6 per cent increase from 107.84 lh during the corresponding period in 2014.

Cotton acreage is also up 30.7 per cent from 76.13 lh to 99.52 lh. Rice, the main Kharif foodgrain, has been sown over 188.52 lh – 6.8 per cent higher than last year.

### **Kerala varsity to launch vannamei hatchery**

The success of Vannamei shrimp farming in the State has motivated Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS) to launch more aquaculture initiatives in the State.

The University is gearing up to set up a Vannamei hatchery at its fisheries station in Puthuvypeen to produce around 20 lakh seeds within one year.

The other proposals include extending this shrimp farming into more ponds, developing farming practices of brackish water species Pompano and Cobia suitable to Kerala's particular ecosystem.

It may be recalled that Vannamei harvest in the pilot farming in June recorded 85 per cent of survival rate with a production of 5-6 tonnes and fetching a profit of ₹14 lakh.

According to B Madhusoodana Kurup, Vice-Chancellor, the first of its kind hatchery would be utilised for farming purposes of the University and for farmers associated with it in the initial stage. However, KUFOS has sought permission of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority, Chennai, for converting its newly-completed hatchery complex. In the second phase, shrimps will be cultured in 11 more ponds with a size of 1,000 sq m each. It is expected to produce 11 tonnes from 11 ponds after farming in mid-September, he said.

KUFOS has been engaging with the development of Vannamei farming technologies in varying densities in association with Central Institute of Brackish water Aquaculture. There are also plans to develop a Vannamei farming system similar to that of being followed by Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu by fully exploiting the potentials of brackish water resources in Kerala.

Some private entrepreneurs have shown interest in associating with KUFOS to popularise this farming method in Kerala, Kurup said, adding that the proposed hatchery would boost shrimp production and thereby exports from the State.

## Surprise 'low' over west Madhya Pradesh promises even more rain for North



The monsoon has thrown up a surprise in the form of a low-pressure area over west Madhya Pradesh and adjoining east Rajasthan from what appears to be an intense atmospheric churn in the region.

Three atmospheric systems – cyclonic circulations over west Rajasthan and Saurashtra and an incoming western disturbance – have interacted with each other to trigger the 'low.'

The western disturbance had dug into the northeast Arabian seawaters already whipped up by the 'low' over Saurashtra to supply incremental monsoon flows and moisture into the 'low.'

### **Heavy rain**

The result was heavy to very heavy rainfall over west Madhya Pradesh, Konkan-Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, south interior Karnataka and Kerala during the 24 hours ending Friday morning.

Rain for Madhya Maharashtra is particularly welcome since this Met subdivision, along with Marathwada in Maharashtra, has been witnessing dry conditions for quite some time.

This 'low' may weaken over the next couple of days and lie as an elongated trough along the breadth of central India.

### **Fresh 'low'**

But it would only make the way a clear for another low-pressure area likely emerging over North Bay of Bengal early next week.

The India Met Department has already set up a watch for a preparatory cyclonic circulation to set up a perch over the basin as early as tomorrow.

The resultant 'low' is shown as strengthening over coastal Odisha and likely growing into a depression. Around the same time, enhanced monsoon flows across the Arabian Sea would spark off activity over south-west Rajasthan and adjoining north Gujarat.

In what looks like a rare show of strength in the area by a peaking monsoon, the Met sees a second 'low' spinning up here and strengthening.

### **Deficit at 6%**

It will bring heavy rain not just on the Indian side of the international border but also over east Pakistan to the other.

The US Climate Prediction Centre has forecast that an elongated wet spell would prevail over Pakistan, northern India and into South-East Asia during the next week. It sees these conditions extend likely extending into early August.

On Friday, seasonal rainfall for the country as a whole was in deficit at six per cent. South had the highest deficit of 13 per cent; central India 10 per cent; and east and north-east India, five per cent each. North-West continued to show a surplus at six per cent.

Meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific Climate Centre at Busan, South Korea, came out with an outlook on Friday suggesting rain-deficient August and September for India.

### **IIRR scientist on FAO panel**

The Food and Agricultural Organisation has nominated Bajendra, a senior scientist with Indian Institute of Rice Research (IIRR), as a member of an international panel on soils.



### **Nestle India loses its head in Maggi noodle fiasco**

Swedish FMCG major Nestle on Friday recalled its current head of the India operations Etienne Benet to its Switzerland head office and appointed Suresh Narayanan as his successor — the first Indian to get the position after a gap of over 16 years.

The development comes at a time the company is fighting its worst public relations crisis in the country following the controversy relating to its popular instant noodle Maggi being unsafe for consumption, eventually leading to its withdrawal from the market early last

month. The company has since challenged the government's withdrawal order in the Bombay High Court.

Narayanan, a former Nestle India executive and currently chief executive of the company's Philippines unit, will take charge from August 1, a move that analysts say is positive since it would be advantageous for an Indian to handle the crisis at this stage and make a fresh beginning.

Analysts also said that since the company has faced widespread criticism over its slow handling of the crisis, a change of guard was expected. "A new face brings in fresh perspective, sympathy and a new way of handling the situation. In this case the new head being an Indian definitely makes it a wise move," said brand strategist Harish Bijoor.

### Cooking up a storm

**MARCH 2015:** VK Pandey, a Barabanki-based officer of the Uttar Pradesh Food Safety and Drug Administration (FDA) collected samples of Maggi for test

- Test in a Gorakhpur laboratory revealed monosodium glutamate above prescribed level
- Nestle disputes finding, says Maggi safe according to tests done by the company
- FSSAI intervenes, and asks FDA to do tests in other states. Some states ban the 2-minute noodles

**JUNE 4:** Paul Bulcke, Nestle's global CEO, flies into India, meets FSSAI officials

**JUNE 5:** Bulcke holds conference in Delhi; FSSAI declares Maggi "unsafe and hazardous"

**JUNE 8:** Nestle announces its biggest recall ever—400 million packets of Maggi

**JULY 24:** Nestle India MD Etienne Benet replaced by Suresh Narayanan, former Nestle India executive and currently CEO of the company's Philippines unit

▼ **ETIENNE BENET**, MD, India operations for Nestle





Kiran Khalap, co-founder, Chlorophyll Brand and Communication, a Mumbai-based brand consultancy firm, agreed, saying that “complexities of the Indian market is such that expats often fail to understand how to handle a difficult situation. Keeping in mind how tough it is to manage a business in India, a ‘desi’ boy is always better than a ‘videshi’”.

“Nomination has been received from Nestle SA for the appointment of Suresh Narayanan as the MD of Nestle India with effect from August 1, 2015,” the company said in a statement.

This is not the first time that a global firm with operations in India has resorted to a change of guard in the wake of a controversy. In the past, beverage maker Coca-Cola and Cadbury India had effected changes in the top leadership when besieged with the pesticide-in-colas and worms-in-chocolates controversies, respectively.

Last month, at the height of the Maggi controversy, Nestle’s group CEO Paul Bulcke had to fly down to India where he addressed a crowded press conference to reiterate that its products are safe to consume and it applies the same quality standards and the same food safety and quality assurance system everywhere in the world.

Though sales of Maggi in India account for roughly 0.005% of Nestle’s global revenue of almost 92 billion Swiss francs (\$98.6 billion), Bulcke had acknowledged that the recent developments had damaged its brand and the company was in for a long haul. “If you have confusion, there is something wrong with communications. That’s why we are sitting here,” he had said.

### **Climate change has resulted in decrease of nutritious and quality food crops: Experts**

The Amity School of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (ASNRSD) organized a two-day national workshop on “Climate Change Impact, Mitigation and Adaptation for a Sustainable Horticulture” at Amity University, Sector 125, Noida.

The workshop aimed to provide a platform for exchange of views among the experts to set a road-map for adaptation options towards resilience in horticulture crops and future strategies.

The workshop was inaugurated by Chief Guest Prodipto Ghosh, IAS (Retd.), Former Secretary MoEF, Distinguished Fellow and Director, Earth Sciences and Climate Change, TERI; N.K. Krishna Kumar, DDG ( Hort.), Indian Council of Agriculture Research; Prof.

B.K.P. Sinha , Advisor, ASNRSD;Sunil Saran, Vice President, Amity Science Technology and Innovation Foundation; J.C. Kala, Advisor, Amity Institute of Global warming and Ecological Studies and Dr. Indrani Chandrasekharan ,Director, ASNRSD.

Sharing his views on horticulture in India, N K Krishna Kumar said that horticulture is a rising enterprise which contributes nearly 30 percent to original GDP and last year, horticulture production for the first time, was more than agricultural production since Independence.

Dr. Krishna emphasized that the impact of climate change and global warming have become a matter of grave concern for the sustainable horticulture development. He mentioned that environmental conditions such as increase in temperature, variability of rainfall and cyclonic patterns are causing adverse effect on the production. He apprised that price rise of commodities are due to the crop destruction caused by frequent rains, cyclones or other natural calamities.

Dr. Krishna informed that Apple farming is an important activity in Indian Horticulture and it is being affected due to increase in atmospheric temperature. He outlined that there is a lack of research in the area of Horticulture in order to determine the impact of climate change on it.

Dr. Krishna called for capacity building and awareness of the researchers, students, policy planners and farmers working in the area of horticulture which is the need of the hour.

Encapsulating the link between climate change and horticulture, Prodipto Ghosh said that Climate change, a global phenomenon, has attracted attention to mitigate adverse impacts on horticulture, considering the production level in tonnes in India. He added that the entirety of human existence depends on six inches of top soil.

Air Pollution and other harmful adulterations in urban areas affect the health of entire ecological system. Hence, the scale of the challenges posed by climate change requires urgent action. Dr. Prodipto apprised that Climate change is allied to two aspects, mitigation and adaptation. He stressed that it is important to understand the impact and develop relevant adaptation strategies to sustain the productivity and profitability of horticulture crops in the climate change scenario.

Addressing the gathering, B K P Sinha said, “India is a land with diverse soil and climate which provides perfect conditions to grow a variety of horticulture crops which cover nearly 11.6million hectares area with an annual production of 91 million tones. The magnitude of climate change impact depends on the region and its location, still climate change is expected to impact adversely on Indian agricultural productivity.”

Dr. Sinha opined that proper strategies had to be envisaged for saving horticulture and called upon the researchers, students, policy planners, horticulturists and farmers to identify risks and create adaptation options for resilience in horticultural crops.

Naresh Kumar, Principal Scientist, Indian Agricultural Research Institute briefed the participants on topic “Climate change sends India’s Apple farmers up the Himalayas” and said that Apples in Himalayan foothills are seeing the worst effect of climate changes.

He further added that due to rising temperature, Apple cultivation in low altitudes has reduced by 77 percent in Solan between 1981 and 2007. He apprised that the most visible change for farmers has been in snowfall which shapes the apple crop and majority of farmers admitted delay in apple’s harvesting period. He mentioned that farmers of lower altitudes are unable to adapt to erratic weather conditions which is affecting the production. Dr. Kumar averred that in the light of global warming, researchers should give more emphasis on development of heat and drought- resistance crops.

During the session, M K Reddy, Head, Division of Plant Pathology, Indian Institute of Horticulture Research apprised on changing virus disease scenario in Horticultural crops due to climate change. Dr. Reddy informed that there has been an increase of 2 percent in new viruses in crops which have developed due to changing climatic conditions. He stressed that the impact of climate change has resulted in decrease of production of quality food and nutrition. Dr. Reddy remarked that many insects and viruses are adopting to the climate change with most them in Asia which resulted in increase to frequency of application of pesticides.

During the two day workshop, various topics were deliberated during the technical sessions including “Climate Change Impact, Mitigation and Adaptation”; “Climate Change and Its Effect on Horticulture and Livelihood”, “Mitigation and Adaptation Measures” and “Institutional Mechanism and National Plan” amongst others.

During the workshop, participants posed various questions pertaining to mitigation and adaptation strategies, new crop model and virus control which were efficiently addressed by the speakers.

The workshop was attended by more than 100 researchers, horticulturists, forest officers, horticulture officers and students.

### **Horticulture production jumps over 51% in eight years**

The country's horticulture production, mainly consisting of fruits and vegetables, jumped by more than 51% to 277 million tonne in 2013-14 from the level in 2005-06, when the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) and other associated programmes were initiated.

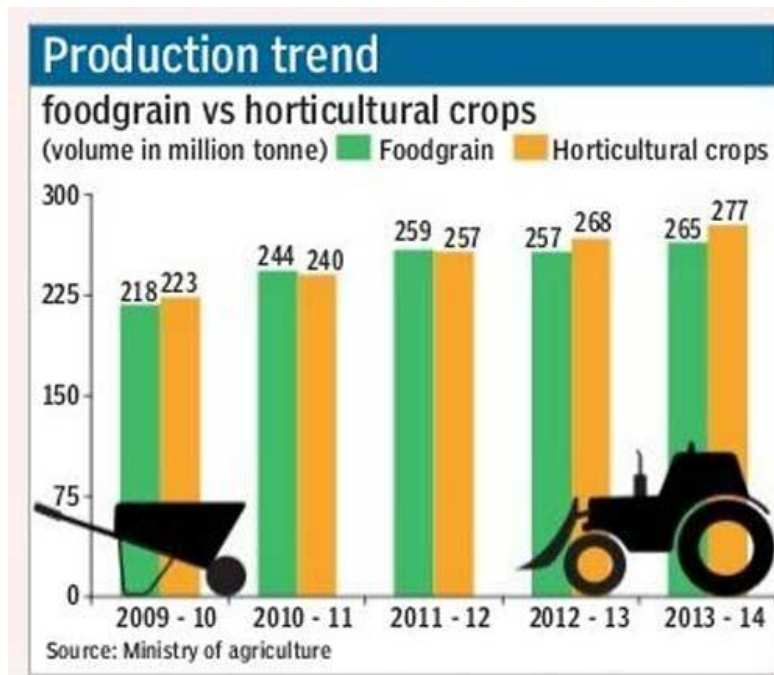
According to an agriculture ministry official, the horticulture produce has surpassed foodgrain output in last few years mainly because of thrust given to horticultural crops in the 11th Plan (2007-2012) through NHM, Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH), National Bamboo Mission (NBM), etc.

The official told FE that implementation of National Horticulture Mission paved the way for adoption of cluster-based approach for the development of horticulture crops through linking with creation of infrastructure for post harvest management and marketing.

According to agriculture ministry data, between 2005-06 and 2013-14, allocations to the tune of Rs 14,487 crore were provided under NHM, which has led to the output of horticulture crops rising across the country.

The area under horticulture crops, which was 12.77 million hectare during 1991-1992, increased to 23.69 million hectare in 2012-13. The total production of fruits, vegetables and plantation crops during the period increased by nearly 2.8 times and corresponding productivity has increased by 1.5 times.

The production of fruits and vegetables has increased from 152.1 million tonne in 2004-05 to 251.9 million tonne in 2013-14. Accordingly, per capita availability of fruits and vegetables has increased from 397 gram to 539 gram a day during same period.



Besides, under the mission mode, a cold chain capacity of about 32 million tonne created as horticulture crops are highly perishable. The official said around 11 lakh farmers have been trained so far on improved horticulture practices.

From the previous fiscal, a new mission, Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), has been launched wherein six ongoing schemes —National Horticulture Mission, Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States, NBM, NHB, Coconut Development Board and Central Institute for Horticulture — have been subsumed.

The official said only by 11th Plan government funding for the horticultural sector had got a boost. “Prior to that, the entire focus was on rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton and tobacco probably because horticultural crops were not mainstream in Indian lifestyle and diet.

Since then, purchasing power has improved and the Indian middle class has grown, which perhaps explains the sudden spurts we have seen in the prices of onions, tomatoes and potatoes,” the official said.

The official also said the horticulture sector would get further boost if 240 million acre of cultivable wasteland is brought under orchard crops without curtailing the area under food crops.

## Coconut price crash sparks row in Kerala Assembly

Kerala Assembly on Wednesday saw the CPI (M)-led opposition staging a walkout over the adjournment motion on the huge price crisis faced by coconut farmers. While the Left Democratic Front (LDF) walked out in protest over disallowing the adjournment motion, the government maintained that it had already sought Centre's intervention.

Replying to the notice for the motion, agriculture minister KP Mohanan said the government had already written to Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) seeking his intervention and reconsider the decision to import 2,000 tonne of coconut oil, which was said to be the reason for the fall in prices.

However, he said price fall had not seriously affected the state coconut farmers, as the government was able to check the price fall to a great extent with its coconut procurement policy at a price of R25 per kg.

According to Mohanan, the state government has plans to make value added products with the coconut procured through Krishi Bhavan.

Coconut price that fluctuated for the last few years has now touched R15 to R17 per kg. But, with a view to the helping farmers, the government procured the nuts at R25 per kg, he said.

## New GM rice “can cut greenhouse emission”: Scientists

Scientists from China, Sweden and the US have developed a high-yielding genetically modified rice that can reduce methane emissions, a major greenhouse gas blamed for global warming from paddies.

By inserting a barley gene into rice, Sun Chuanxin and his colleagues created SUSIBA2 Rice, which stores more starch in the section of the rice above ground, according to a paper published on the latest issue of Nature, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

This means the grains will have more starch while the root will exude less nutrients that will later be turned into methane by microbes in the soil, Sun, who works with Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences said.

“It solves two major problems mankind faces at one time: environmental degradation and the need for increased grain output,” Wang Feng, co-author of the paper from Fujian Academy of Agricultural Sciences said.

Wang said the rice can cut methane discharge by more than 90 per cent during summer and more than half during autumn, as “the rice displays a greater emission reduction effect in high temperatures.”

Meanwhile, small-scale trials have also suggested an increased output: a single plant of the new breed has 300 more grains with a starch content 10 percent higher, Wang added.

He said the team is working on applications for the breed in different areas, seasons and using different farming techniques.

“It’s still far away from mass application, but at least we see the light of hope,” he added.

Human-induced methane, though less abundant than carbon dioxide in the air, is responsible for 20 per cent of the global warming effect. Rice paddies are the largest single source of methane linked to human activity.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, China produces 209 million tonnes of rice in 2014 or 28 per cent of the world’s total of 734 million.