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THE HINDU

Govt. gears up for deficient monsoon

Concerned over prediction of a deficient monsoon this kharif, the Centre on Friday expressed its readiness to give subsidy on diesel, power and seeds to farmers in affected areas.

Even as monsoon set over Kerala, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh convened a meeting with top officials of ministries concerned to review the government's preparedness.

“We will offer diesel, seeds and power subsidy to States like last year to tide over monsoon deficiency,” the Minister said later. The meeting was attended by Minister of State Sanjeev Baliyan and officers from the India Meteorological Department and from the departments of agriculture, food, dairying, power, fertilizer, water resources and rural development.

He said the government was ready with a contingency plan for 580 districts in 25 States. Plans are afoot for 30 vulnerable districts in the north-east based on the experience last year when kharif production was hit by about nine million tonnes owing to deficient monsoon.

The ministry has been holding review meetings with states that have been affected by below par rainfall.

Poor rain may not hit grain output

A deficient monsoon does not necessarily affect India's foodgrain production severely. Since 1976, rainfall dropped by more than 10 per cent over the previous year nine times. However, only in two of these years, food production fell by a corresponding percentage. In the remaining seven, the fall was minor, an analysis by *The Hindu* shows.

The finding is in line with Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's statement on Thursday that foodgrain production would not be affected in the event of deficient rainfall this year.

NOT ALL GLOOMY



9 Number of times rainfall has dropped by **10 %** or more **since 1976**

2 Of these, only two years saw **food production falling by as much**

➔ This year is **a rarity** as it'd be the second consecutive year of poor rainfall

➔ Analysis shows **food management** will be more of a problem than production

This year, however, is a rarity — if the forecast of the India Meteorological Department of deficient rainfall holds, then this would be the second consecutive year to experience the shortfall. “There could be a cause for worry ... The effect on agriculture of deficient rainfall two years in a row is much more disastrous — the detrimental effect can be more than double the effect of a single year of deficient rainfall,” former Planning Commission Member and economist Abhijit Sen told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Sen pointed out that the last time India had two consecutive years of deficient rainfall in 1986 and 1987, food production did decline, but it bounced back sharply owing to surplus rains in 1988.

Data for the previous incidence of back-to-back rainfall deficient years, 1904-05 and 1965-66, were not available.

Mr. Sen said that since this was the first time the IMD had predicted a drought, it was a very strong signal that should not be played down.

Since 1976, nine years recorded there has been a more than 10 per cent drop in rainfall over the previous year. However, of these, only two years saw

food production falling by a corresponding amount. In the remaining seven, the fall in food production was minor, an analysis by *The Hindu* shows.

The analysis, however, shows that the problem India is likely to face is of food management — getting food from surplus areas to deficient areas — rather than production.

In half of the nine years analysed above, the rise in wholesale price inflation during the subsequent year was more than normal.

Rainfall and wholesale price inflation usually move in opposite directions (excess rainfall reduces inflation while deficient rain causes it to shoot up sharply).

The Modi government had managed to contain inflation last year despite poor rainfall with measures such as foodgrain releases from buffer stocks. It will have to repeat its feat this year as well, Mr. Jaitley had said.

Professor of Economics at the Indian Statistical Institute in New Delhi Bharat Ramaswami told *The Hindu*, that the quantum of rainfall is not the only parameter that affects foodgrain production. The geographical spread of the rainfall is as important, if not more so the overall quantum of rain the country receives. “The average rainfall level across the country usually fluctuates within a narrow range. More important is to see how many regions are facing rainfall deficiency,” Mr. Ramaswami said.

Often, only some regions experience deficient rainfall while others receive the normal amounts of rain. Other times, a large number of regions experience deficient rainfall, and that is much more harmful, he said.

Drumstick trees destroyed in gale

Standing drumstick trees in several acres at Viruveedu panchayat were uprooted owing to sudden gale that rocked Batlagundu and nearby areas on Thursday night.

Farmers told revenue officials that around 1,000 trees at the village were destroyed in the wind. Drumstick was being cultivated on thousands of acres at Viruveedu, Rengappanaickenpatti, Sandhiayur, Viralimayanpatti, Nadakottai, Chekkapatti and Kunnuvarankottai. Nadakottai and Viralimayanpatti villages were the worst affected.

“We raised paddy, vegetables and cotton a decade ago as we received seasonal rain properly. With the change in climate, absence of rain and depletion of groundwater table in the subsequent years, we were forced to shift to drought tolerant crops like ‘Murungai’ and sapota,” said K. Periyasamy, a farmer at Viralimayanpatti.

With moderate income and less expenses, several farmers shifted to drumstick cultivation at Viruveedu and nearby panchayats. They appealed to the revenue and agriculture officials to inspect the damaged crop. Revenue officials will inspect the fields and submit a report to the government recommending them to provide suitable compensation to the affected farmers for the loss of standing crop, said Nilakottai Tahsildar Mohan.

Tea saplings at subsidised price

The Nilgiris district Horticulture Department will offer tea saplings at subsidised price to small and marginal farmers, says a release.

The Department will encourage farmers to establish tea gardens, and inter-crop tea gardens by offering saplings at 50 per cent cost or at Rs. 2 a sapling.

Subsidy

The Department has made available the saplings at the Government Horticulture Farm, Thummanatty, Doddapetta, Nanjanadu, Pollgrain, Fruit Centre, Coonoor, Devalla and Katteri. And, the farmers can get the subsidy for tea saplings by approaching the assistant directors of horticulture in their blocks or the assistant directors of agriculture or at the Horticulture Information Centre in Charring Cross.

Jackfruit fete a big draw

The jackfruit festival, organised by the District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) on the Pookode lakeshore, has on offer close to 100 varieties of dishes.

The three-day festival, organised in association with Uravu Bamboo Village and Vythiri grama panchayat, also gives an opportunity to farmer-entrepreneurs to tap the commercial potential of the fruit.



The bamboo village has on offer at least 100 jackfruit dishes, including jackfruit biriyani, fried rice , samosa,wine, halwa, puffs, cutlet, cake, jam, squash, idli, jelly, toffee, sweets, pappad, and pickles, beside the traditional preparations such as payasam and chips .

'We have trained 25 select members of five Kudumbasree units in Vythiri grama panchayat in making value-added products as part of tapping the potential of the fruit, said M. Baburaj, president, Uravu Bamboo Village .

“There is a good response from the people, including tourists, and we are planning to set up a sales counter on the lakeshore to sell value-added products, said N. Aysha, secretary, Varnam, a Kudumbasree unit at Vythiri.

The Krishi Vijnan Kendra at Ambalavayal under the Kerala Agricultural University has offered eight varieties of dishes developed by the Home Science Department of the institution.

The event will conclude on Sunday.

Farmer-friendly projects need of the hour, says Minister



Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan has called for a farmer-friendly, need-based research approach by farm research institutes.

Speaking after inaugurating the two-day State workshop organised by the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) for the revision of Package of Practice recommendations (PoP) on Friday, the Minister stressed the need for close coordination among farm scientists, extension workers and farmers at all the levels. He appreciated the move to formulate a separate package for organic farming.

“KAU’s research contributions are significant and laudable. We can be proud about the fact that agricultural growth rate of the State has improved. Since we are striving to make the State fully organic in 2016, spreading awareness on scientific organic farming practices is imperative and the package on it would be of great help.

I also request the researchers to develop packages for the cultivation of all vegetable varieties so that self-sufficiency in vegetable production can be attained,” the Minister said. He also dedicated the new crop varieties developed by the KAU to the farming community by handing over them to farmers’ representatives.

P. Rajendran, KAU Vice Chancellor, in his presidential address, said the PoP workshop on Environment Day was a befitting coincidence. “Farming is essentially a productive exercise for conservation and enhancement of

nature. This is where soil-friendly farming, soil enriching technologies and bio agents become relevant,” the Vice Chancellor said. The workshop began with a detailed presentation on new crop varieties. The three technical sessions on the first day of the workshop were devoted to rice and rice-based cropping systems, plantation crops, spices, medicinal plants and tree crops and vegetables, pulses and tubers.

The Minister earlier inaugurated Environment Day celebrations at KAU by planting a sapling on the campus and opened the new innovation square at College of Cooperation, Banking and Management.

Food management vital to tackle drought



Since 1976, nine years recorded there has been a more than 10 per cent drop in rainfall over the previous year. However, of these, only two years saw food production falling by a corresponding amount. In the remaining seven, the fall in food production was minor, an analysis by *The Hindu* shows.

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Country’s top corporates owe U.P. farmers Rs. 6,000 crore

Several sugarcane farmers in Uttar Pradesh have committed suicide as they are yet to get more than Rs. 6,000 crore owed to them by some of the country’s top corporates for this crop season alone.

The corporate houses that owe the State’s farmers money include Bajaj, Birla, Modi group and the liquor baron Ponty Chaddha-led Wave group. These private defaulters, which own 40 of the 103 sugarcane mills, have left the farmers in a state of crisis.



Highest in country

According to an Uttar Pradesh Cane Development department document accessed by *The Hindu*, the figures of arrears the industrialists owe the State's farmers are the highest in the country.

The top defaulter is Bajaj group which is yet to pay Rs. 1598 crore to the farmers. The Mawana group, which owns three mills in the State, has defaulted on the payment of Rs. 524 crore. The Birla group, which owns five mills, owes Rs. 376.5 crore, the Modi group, with two sugar mills owes Rs. 406 crore.

The Yadu group, owned by U.P. strongman D.P. Yadav has defaulted on payment of Rs. 50 crore. The Dalmiya group which owns three mills is yet to pay Rs. 94.3 crore. There are 20 others in the list with smaller outstanding amounts.

Senior officials of the Cane Development department told *The Hindu* that the officials will soon initiate action against the top defaulters.

A senior office-bearer of the Sugar Mill Owners Association said, on condition of anonymity, that the "government needs to seriously look at the crisis in the sugar industry and reward those who pay the farmers even in this crisis."

“There is no dispute that the private sugar mill owners owe more than Rs 6,000 crore as arrears but frankly, the industry is going through a big crisis. Due to the decreasing sugar prices we are unable to recover the money from the market. So, we are just not in a position to pay Rs. 240 per quintal,” he said.

Sudhir Panwar, a farmer expert argued that farmers have not got even a fourth of the price of the sugarcane they sold to these private players.

‘Control sugar prices’

“The Central government needs to control the sugar prices which are continuously falling. When Modi addressed the rally in Meerut ahead of the parliamentary election last year, he raised the issue but he is yet to do any thing. The Centre abolished its control on the sugar market because of which the prices are continuously going down,” Mr. Sudhir Panwar added.

Sowing the seed of hope



It was the driest of days in Kadavur. Parched lands looked up at the sky hopelessly. Just then, the van carrying the mortal remains of organic farming pioneer Nammalvar trundled on the mud path leading to the village. Suddenly, the skies opened-up. As the rain beat down, his close aides who were in the van remembered how Nammalvar always spoke of rain with

prayerful respect. Every farmer does so. For him, life begins when it rains, and on occasions, ends when it doesn't.

Farmers across the country await the onset of the southwest monsoon with bated breath. What is the chemistry between the sky and the soil? V. Murali, an organic farmer in the village of Pandeshwaram, near Avadi, recalls how in the past, when farmers met for a chat after dinner, all they would talk about was rain. "We would sit on the *thinnai* all night and discuss how the rains that year would be," says the 65-year-old. "Rain is everything for us."

For tilling the land, the soil has to be wet. "A nice shower is needed for this," says Murali. The crops, such as paddy, sprout only when there is a *thooral* or drizzle. If there's rain at the stage when grains fill with milk, the crop could be of no use. The stage before harvest is extremely important.

Heavy rain now could undo all their labour. This is a very delicate cycle; the tiniest tilt could cost a farmer his entire year's income.

"We need rains at the right time," feels Murali. For, a farmer times his sowing and harvest based on the monsoon pattern. "Sometimes, we get a lot; and sometimes, there's nothing. Rain is a gift; Nature decides whether to give it to us or not." Water, stored for irrigation purposes in wells and tanks, can supplement rain water, but in rain-fed lands, which constitute 60 per cent of the total area sown in India, rain decides the fate of the crop.

A good spell of rain, with thunder and lightning, equals the effect of spraying the field with urea, observes Murali. Naturally, a farmer uses more chemicals on his land if there is a dry spell to make up for lack of rain. Sometimes, a drizzle can make all the difference to a crop.

For Arujunan, who works as a farm hand, a dry spell means more debt. "We sow hoping and praying that it will rain that year. If it doesn't, it's as though my son, whose college admission I've spent a lot of money on, fails his exams," he says.

Murali explains that he sows his crop in the Tamil month of Aadi (mid-July to mid-August) and harvest is done towards Karthigai and Thai months (mid-November to mid-December and mid-January). In rural Tamil Nadu, temple festivities are associated with rain. Festivals for Mariamman, the

goddess of rain, are held predominantly during Aadi, coinciding with the time the crops are sown.

Farmers can read the signs that Nature gives out to predict rain. “Our ancestors believed that the arrival of dragonflies meant that there will be a shower the next day. *Eesal* (winged termites) signified the end of a downpour,” says Murali. “Then there is the sound of frogs. We can read them to predict rains as well.” He recalls a proverb that goes ‘Porattasiyila ponnuruga kaayndhu mannuruga peyyum’, roughly translated to ‘the rains of the month of Purattasi will melt the earth’. But Murali doubts if these hold good in the present time, given the drastic change in climate patterns.

Then there are the beliefs associated with rain. “If there was a *sevvanam*, red sky, it was believed it would pour, much like how our eyes water if they are red,” he smiles. They also take cues from the moon. “If the moon develops a wide ring around itself, we read it as a good sign. The closer the ring is to the moon, the lesser the rain.”

Farmers in Pandeshwaram have just harvested their crops and have started preparing their land for the next season. “Whether or not it rains, we will go on with our jobs,” says Arjunan. Ask him if he thinks this monsoon will be good and he looks up at the sky. “Only Nature has the answer,” he says.

‘Soil, source of lead in Maggi’

The heavy presence of the lead in Maggi noodles has precious lessons to offer us this World Environment Day. Food safety officials investigating the matter say the source of lead contamination in the product is the soil.

“Higher lead content was found in the tastemaker of the product, which contains onions, than in the rest of the product, which led to the inference that the presence of heavy metal in the soil in which these were grown must have led to its presence in the food item,” Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) CEO Y.S. Malik told *The Hindu* .

Rarely tested

Mr. Malik said food samples reported for adulteration in the FSSAI’s Annual Report for 2014-15 were mostly milk, milk products, edible oil and water. Processed food was rarely tested in government laboratories. Asked if

that would not leave consumers in the dark about whether it was safe, he said: “The FSSAI has been functional for merely four years, though the Food Safety and Standards Act was passed in 2006, and as per Section 26, there is huge responsibility on the shoulders of food business operators for self-compliance. If FSSAI starts cracking down on the enforcement front, there will be the allegation of running another inspector raj on our part.”

Rup Lal, general secretary, Indian Network for Soil Contamination and Research, and Professor of Molecular Biology, Delhi University, said the lack of efficient environmental regulation to stop the release of toxic industrial effluents into waterbodies was one of the primary reasons heavy metals such as lead had found their way into the food chain.

B.D. Tripathy, Professor at Banaras Hindu University, said that in the course of a study conducted at the Centre for Environmental Science and Technology, sewage generated from Varanasi was found to be high in lead, cadmium, chromium and nickel content due to its mixing with effluents coming from thousands of small-scale industries there. “The sewage mixed with untreated effluents was released into the Ganga without treatment,” he said. “Even when this effluent mixed river water was treated, the heavy metal presence in it was not removed, and this was later used to irrigate crop fields where wheat, vegetables and other such items were grown.” The findings of Mr. Tripathy’s research were admitted as evidence in the Allahabad High Court which held the Dinapur sewage treatment plant as responsible for toxifying the river water.

Over 30 varieties of mangoes on display at festival

A festival showcasing different varieties of mangoes grown by farmers across the State and from nearby States began at Government Boys Higher Secondary School grounds here on Friday.

Inaugurated by Collector T.P. Rajesh in the presence of Superintendent of Police P. Kannammal and other officials, the 23rd All India Mango Festival, would give visitors a chance to see over 30 varieties of mangoes.



Popular varieties including Alphonso, Senthura, Neelam, Malcova were on display.

More than 250 farmers from various districts in the State and farmers from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh displayed their products.

Organised by the Horticulture Department, galleries made of mangoes attracted huge crowd.

Also, demonstration would be held on producing value-added mango food products, pulp production and other food varieties out of mango during the 22-day festival. Cultural competitions will also be held everyday and best mango exhibiting farmers would be awarded.

Various government department stalls explaining about schemes being implemented were also part of the festival.

Organisers said that the district leads in mango production in the State as it is cultivated in over 40,000 hectares. Hence to encourage farmers, the festival is held every year, they added.

Also for the first time, Police Department was allotted a stall, in which various weapons, including AK 47, were on display. Visitors thronged the stall in large numbers as personnel explained to them the application of each weapons.

Farmers were encouraged to go for value-addition of the product so as to reap the huge export market. Farmers were asked to go for processing mangoes into jams, pickles and canned fruit that were also kept on display. Officials from various government departments, farmers and the public participated in large numbers.

Training in solar energy technology

The MSME Development Institute here will organise a training programme on solar energy technology from June 15 to 26 to develop entrepreneurs in the renewable energy sector.

According to a press release from the institute, the programme will include sessions on government norms, support schemes, design, project engineering, technical inputs, and field visit. For details, contact:

C. Alagirisamy, Assistant Director, Branch MSME Development Institute, 386, Patel Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore – 9 (mobile number: 94 441 40585, 93 811 31456).

World Environment Day observed in districts

A range of events were organized across the district on Friday in connection with the World Environment Day.

A group of school students cleaned the Collectorate premises after Collector M. Karunakaran flagged off the exercise.

Chairman of Indian Red Cross Society, Tirunelveli, D.A. Prabhakar, Chief Educational Officer Swaminathan and others participated. Students from a

few schools in Palayamkottai and Tirunelveli participated in the cleaning operation.

In the lecture organized at District Science Centre, Albert Rajendran, former professor of St. John's College, Palayamkottai, addressed the students on the threats to environment and its consequences. The Department of School Education organized an environment awareness rally in which students from schools participated.

Tuticorin

Tuticorin Corporation has launched a 'Green Campus', a programme aimed at converting waste into wealth on the occasion of World Environment Day. It was inaugurated by Commissioner S. Madhumathi.

Corporation authorities had been asked to segregate degradable and non-degradable waste on the campus. To collect waste papers from educational institutions, a vehicle named 'Green Track' had been introduced. She also said the best institutions would be identified and 'Green Campus' certificates would be given to them.

Executive Engineer S.A. Rajagopalan, Junior Engineer, (West Zone of Corporation) Saravanan, City Health Officer Pradeep V. Krishnakumar, Executive Engineer (Planning) S.M. Rakkappan, sanitary inspectors and others were present.

Residents pledge to plant 1,000 saplings during monsoon

Various government departments and agencies celebrated World Environment Day here on Friday by planting saplings and holding awareness programmes.

Environmentalist and ENT surgeon Mahanthesh Tapashetty inaugurated the celebrations by planting a sapling on KIMS Hospital premises. While 15 saplings were planted on the premises on Friday, the participants took a pledge to plant 1,000 sapling during the monsoon.

In an initiative by the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community's Hubballi hub, saplings were planted at the HDMC Garden in Lingarajnagar South. Mayor Ashwini Majjagi launched the initiative aimed at rejuvenating the park.

At Moon Maternity, Hubballi, the 'Life Plants' programme under which the hospital plans to plant a sapling for every birth at the hospital was launched.

Subsequently the hospital staff planted saplings on the hospital premises.

In Dharwad, District Principal and Sessions Judge M. Ramesh Rao said that the revival of the organic farming should be part of the environmental protection movement in the country.

Inaugurating a World Environment Day function, organised by the District Legal Services Authority and the district administration and others, he said that organic farming had taken a back seat as farmers opted for more modern methods.

The need of the hour is to retain organic farming and give rise to a healthy society, he said. In Bidar, various schools and organisations organised the World Environment Day. Students of Gnyana Sudha Vidyalaya participated in a 'Green Run'.

Mango brings prosperity to school



A government school in Srinivasapur taluk, the mango bowl of Karnataka, in Kolar district has fetched a fair amount of money from the mango crop grown on the land belonging to the school.

The auction of the mango orchard belonging to the Government Kannada Lower Primary School at Avalakuppa village took place a couple of days

before the beginning of the new academic year and it fetched more than Rs. 4 lakh.

Avalakuppa falls under Hodali gram panchayat limits. The 10-acre land had been donated to the school by Munivenkatappa, a good Samaritan farmer, way back in 1959.

The mango orchard on the land started to yield fruit about eight years ago and the yield is being auctioned since then, Block Education Officer K.T. Raghavendra told *The Hindu*. This time around when the bid was called for the yield, it was finalised for Rs. 4,26,500 by J. Shankar, beating another bidder Athallah. The auction process took place in the presence of the School Development and Monitoring Committee office-bearers and the village residents.

The amount earned is maintained in a SDMC joint account. Two-thirds of it will be given for the maintenance of the orchard, school headmaster M. Ravindra Singh said.

The remaining amount will be spent for the maintenance and development of the school.

The students of the school will also be supplied uniforms, ties, shoes and stationeries after taking permission from the BEO.

Farmers' welfare board to be set up

The State government intends to set up a farmers' welfare board on the lines of other welfare boards in the State, Minister for Agriculture K.P. Mohanan has said.

He was speaking at a session of farmers, people's representatives, and officers of the Department of Agriculture and allied departments on the State agricultural policy here on Friday.

The suggestion to set up a welfare board for farmers came up at the session, during which a brief of the agricultural policy was read out, after which farmers and others came up with suggestions on improving the agricultural scenario in the State.

Chairman of the committee which drafted the agricultural policy and former MLA K. Krishnankutty and Director, Agriculture, R. Ajithkumar were present.

Mr. Mohanan, however, declined to agree with a suggestion that the name Department of Agriculture should be changed to reflect the position that the department worked for farmers' welfare. The name would not be changed, he told the gathering.

The Minister said farmers who suffered financial losses on account of natural calamities like rain and heavy winds would be compensated at a rate fixed earlier by the State government.

Farmers who sustained crop losses in 2012, 2013, and 2014 would be given compensation, he said.

The payments had been held up these years since the Centre objected to the State paying high compensation for farmers' losses.

For example, the State government had fixed Rs.100 as the compensation for a banana plant. However, the Union government intervened and said that the payment should be restricted to just Rs.3.60 a plant. As a result, the State decided to stop the payments, which would now be revived.

Mr. Mohanan said the Union government had congratulated the State for its agricultural policy, which emphasised farmers' welfare.

225 saplings of 25 species planted

World Environment Day was celebrated across the city and the region to draw greater attention to the imperatives of environmental conservation, afforestation and to adopt green technologies, on Friday.

More than 225 saplings of nearly 25 different species were planted by the students and staff of the College of Horticulture, Yelwal to mark World Environment Day on Friday.

B. Huchaiah, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Mysuru, underlined the importance of growing more trees to neutralise the impact of environmental degradation.



B.N. Dhananjaya, Assistant Professor of the College of Horticulture, spoke on soil health and the importance of abstaining from excessive use of chemical fertilizers.

Schoolchildren took out awareness rallies while the district administration in association with the District Legal Services Authority, Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, Institution of Engineers and other organisations celebrated World Environment Day by planting saplings.

Live demo

Nesara Farmers' Market on the Geeta Road near Ballal Circle and NIE-CREST will celebrate World Environment Day on Saturday on its premises by organising a daylong live demonstration of green technologies for a sustainable living.

Shamsundar, head of NIE-CREST, will inaugurate the programme and the demonstration will be on till 6.30 p.m. Exhibition of farm fresh mangoes from Melkote and Raichur is also being organised on the same day at Nesara premises, the release added.

ZP plan

Mysuru Zilla Panchayat will organise different programmes for a month as part of World Environment Day celebrations from June 7 under the banner of 'Hasiru Abhiyana'. As many as one lakh saplings will be planted in

government offices, schools, anganwadi centres, libraries and other public places. The zilla panchayat will also promote renewable energy and install solar lighting system in GPs and other government institutions.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will flag off Hasiru Abhiyana.

ZP president B. Pushpa Amaranath and ZP CEO P.A. Gopal said that the Forest Department had been asked to keep over one lakh saplings ready a few months ago. Those saplings, that include medicinal plants, will be planted at primary health centres, anganwadis and schools. Over 23 departments, including horticulture, agriculture, education and health, will be involved in the programme.

The ZP has also organised a programme to create awareness on water conservation and rainwater harvesting among high school students. Ms. Puspa said it is time for promoting renewable energy and reducing green house gas emissions and to introduce solar systems in all the places. She made an appeal to people of the district to abstain from using conventional lights and electrical implements in the third week of June from 7.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Concern over violation of ‘one rice-one fish’ policy

The violation of ‘one rice-one fish’ policy came under sharp criticism during a meeting on State agriculture policy here on Friday.

The target of some of the farmers’ ire was the ‘shrimp lobby’, which was allegedly hindering pokkali rice farming in the coastal areas of the district. Lack of mechanisation of pokkali rice farming and low support price also came under focus during the session.

Secretary of Kadamakkudy Nellulpadaka Padashekara Samithi K.A. Thomas said pokkali farmers incurred heavy losses for several reasons, including the recent years’ rain patterns. He called for higher support price for pokkali rice. Geetha Hariharan from Chittattukara Grama Panchayat said some vested interests continued to disrupt pokkali rice operations under one pretext or the other.

One of the farmers, who spoke at the session, said pokkali rice farming was essential for successful shrimp farming in the same fields because the natural cycle helped the shrimps fight diseases.

Other farmers said lack of mechanisation of pokkali operations had resulted in heavy cost to the farmers. One of them also pointed to the practice of land owners staying away from their holdings and leasing them for round-the-year shrimp farming.

Minister for Agriculture, K. P. Mohanan, who responded to the queries, said the State government was committed to following the agricultural cycle in the pokkali fields too and would need the needful. K. Krishnankutty, former MLA and chairman of the sub-committee, which drafted the agricultural development policy, and R. Ajithkumar, Agricultural Production Commissioner and MLAs Benny Behnan and V.P. Sajeendran were among those who participated in the interactive session.



Maharashtra: State seeks Centre's help as pulse prices soar



The Maharashtra [government](#) has written to the Centre seeking assistance to keep the spiralling price of pulses, specially tur dal, under control. A letter has been sent to Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh about the sharp increase in prices of cereals and pulses.

The price of tur dal (yellow pulse) has crossed Rs 110 per kg from Rs 70, and the steep rise was attributed to a 35 per cent shortfall in production. Maharashtra is the second highest producer of tur dal in the country.

“The drought, coupled with recurring hailstorm had adversely hit overall food production. Production was worst hit due to climate changes and poor rainfall,” Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse said.

Production of pulses in Marathwada and parts of Vidarbha, areas worst hit by drought, had been already affected. The recurring unseasonal rainfall had damaged pulses and cereals like jowar, bajra in the state.

There is enough food grain stock in the country though pulses are seeing an overall shortage. There are indications that pulses will be imported, if needed. The state has sought a higher supply of pulses looking at the dip in production in the state.

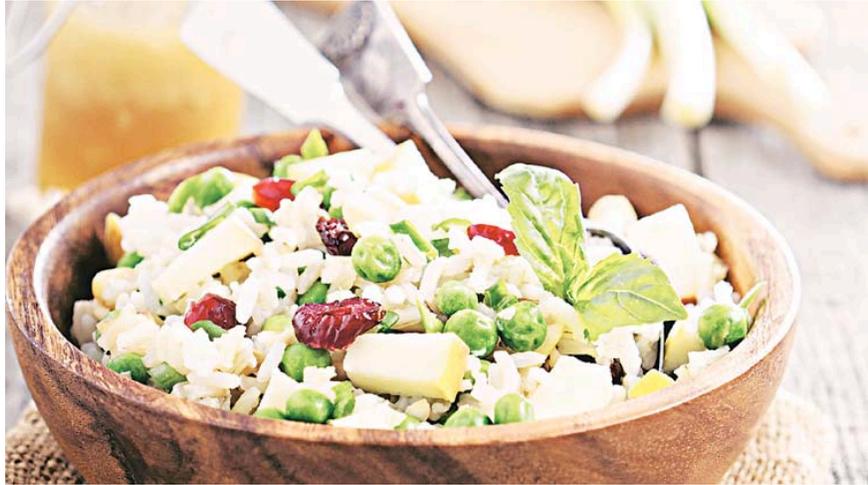
Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, asked about the situation, said there was enough food grain stock though pulses were a matter of concern. He added that prices of pulses were rising across the country.

He added, “There is no reason to panic. There is adequate food grain stock. Yes, prices of pulses are going up...”

“The onset of monsoon will bring relief and stabilise overall prices of food grains and vegetables. The shortfall in pulse production has affected prices across the country,” Fadnavis said.

The [government](#) has also ordered a watch on any hoarding of food grains. Sources in the union agriculture ministry said that with prices of pulses and edible oil increasing across the country, almost all the states are looking at the Centre’s help to tackle the crisis.

Diet diary: Rice & arsenic



Rice, a staple for many across the world, has been considered one of the safest and easily digestible nutritious foods. It is also an important alternate grain for those who are gluten or wheat intolerant and those suffering from celiac disease. However, some recent reports on its toxicity, specifically related to arsenic have been a cause for concern.

In a consumer report in the US, analysis of US federal health data found that people who ate rice had arsenic levels that were 44 per cent greater than those who did not. Certain ethnic groups like Asians and Mexicans were more affected.

A study by the European Food Safety Authority found cereal products could account for more than half of dietary exposure to inorganic arsenic, mainly because of rice. Rice absorbs arsenic from soil or water much more effectively than most plants. That's in part because it is one of the only major crops grown in water-flooded conditions, which allows arsenic to be more easily taken up by its roots and stored in the grains.

Arsenic is found in water, air, food and soil in organic and inorganic form. These together are referred to as "total arsenic". The US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has found arsenic content in over 30 samples of Indian basmati rice in its preliminary analysis. USFDA is in the process of collecting and analysing a total of approximately 1,200 samples of rice from different countries including India to examine the issue thoroughly. This data collection will be completed by the end of 2012. Once the

data collection is completed, FDA will analyse these results and determine whether or not to issue further recommendations.

Arsenic not only is a potent human carcinogen but also can cause other health problems in children later life. Long-term exposure to high levels of arsenic is associated with higher rates of skin, bladder, and lung cancers, as well as heart disease.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

NAFED procures 1,100 tonnes of onions under PSF

The National Agricultural Co-operative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) has procured 1,100 tonnes of onions from Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) to stabilise onion prices in the domestic market.

NAFED has started procuring onions for the central government under the Price Stability Fund (PSF) to supply them to consumers at reasonable rates when prices rise during scarcity.

Speaking to TOI, sources from NAFED said, "We started procuring onions from May 15 at Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon for the Centre to stabilise onion prices in domestic market, which generally increase from August to October every year. At present, onions arriving in the market are the summer crop having shelf life of six to seven months. We have procured around 1,100 tonnes of onions so far at a total cost of Rs 1.80 crore. The central government has given us Rs 5 crore under the PSF so far. More funds are expected to be released soon."

The sources further said, "The government has given us a target of procuring 10,000 tonnes of onions. We have onion storage capacity of 2,500 tonnes at Lasalgaon and Pimpalgaon. We are also planning to use the storage facilities of farmers."

The government has made a provision of Rs 500 crore under PSF in the budget to control the prices of perishable commodities. The fund is to be used to control prices of onion and potatoes for the current and next financial years. The PSF is to be used to advance interest-free loans to state

governments and central agencies like NAFED, which will buy onions directly from the farmers or at the APMCs, keeping in mind the scarcity of onions and rise in prices in future.

The summer crop, which is harvested in March and April every year, has a shelf life of six to seven months and caters to the market until the arrival of the kharif crop by September-end.

Thereafter, the kharif and late kharif crops cater to the market until arrival of the summer crop by March every year. The shelf life of kharif and late kharif crops is not more than a month. Hence, only summer crop is stored by farmers with the hope of getting better price to the commodity.

Scarcity is created if this cycle is affected. Hence, August-October is a crucial period when chances of onion scarcity and thus price rise are high. The state government has, therefore, asked NAFED to procure onions to overcome scarcity and rising prices of onions in the coming few months.

New wetland off Barapullah to curb pollution in Yamuna

In a bid to curb pollution in Yamuna, the Delhi Development Authority has decided to develop a wetland on the floodplains to treat the water of Barapullah drain before it is released into the river. Also in the works is a biodiversity park near Okhla bird sanctuary. The wetland project will start in a month's time.

DDA vice-chairperson Balvinder Kumar inspected both sites along with DDA officials and environmentalists on Thursday. The wetlands will come up at the mouth of Barapullah drain near Sun Dial. The development agency plans to divert the untreated water through channels to interconnected ponds and swales where it will be naturally oxidized and cleaned with help of aquatic plant species including algae and then released into the river. The wetlands will be developed on both sides of the drain.

Barapullah is one of the most polluted drains in the capital, carrying waste from all of south Delhi's colonies. Taking serious note of growing pollution in Yamuna, the National Green Tribunal has directed civic agencies and the Delhi government to take appropriate measures.

"We have over 300 acres of land near the mouth of Barapullah drain where we can develop the wetlands. At present, people are illegally carrying out agricultural activity here. I have directed the land department to immediately stop the farming and begin work on the wetland project," Kumar said.

The idea is to construct ponds at different levels so that the partially treated water can keep flowing through the successive swales until the process gets over. "We will plant grasses and other native river species here which will help in the treatment of water through a natural process. This will also restore the ecosystem," said Kumar.

The land owning agency will require help from South Corporation as the drain belongs to the municipal body. "We will write to South Corporation in this regard. We plan to rope in experts for the project," said a DDA official.

The biodiversity park is another project which DDA is keen to start work on. This will be its third biodiversity park project. "It will be located between DND flyover and the under-construction Kalindi bypass. It's a huge area and we must work out a plan to develop it," he said.

Officials say it will take at least six-eight months to develop the wetlands. As for the biodiversity park, the project is in a nascent stage.

DDA is taking several other measures to bring down pollution in the river. Following NGT orders, the Authority has started work on installing 100 CCTV cameras at 25 strategic locations to monitor dumping of debris and waste on riverbed. These cameras will be connected to two control rooms.

The Authority has also constituted a quick response team for manning floodplains and constructed 20 dhalaos where used puja offerings can be dumped. It is also exploring the possibility of installing waste recycling units near the banks for such material.

Sowing in Vidarbha may be delayed till July first week

Citing Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) prediction about delay in monsoon in Vidarbha, the divisional level agriculture officials have issued

advisory through district administrations to farmers against starting sowing till onset of proper rains.

Sowing operation in the region, where kharif is the main crop, normally takes place by June end. But this season, farmers may have to wait till first week of July to start sowing.

Joint director of agriculture of Nagpur division VN Ghawate told ToI on Friday that there was likelihood of delayed sowing. "We have sent SMS advisories to district officials and farmers. Quite often farmers are misled by pre-monsoon showers and start sowing. This leads to loss of seeds as unless there is enough moisture that sustains for few days, the seeds do not germinate. To avoid resowing it is advisable till at least 75mm of rainfall is recorded before soyabean seeds are sowed. For the cotton crop, slightly lesser rains would do," said Ghawate.

In Chandrapur, district collector Deepak Mhaisekar too called upon farmers to wait till proper onset of monsoon. "Prediction by IMD suggests delay in monsoon by 8-10 days. Hence farmers should not hurry," said the collector.

He said Vidarbha could expect proper monsoon showers by June 15. However, this is mere prediction and actual date of arrival could change.

Ghawate also said that there may not be much deviation in crop choices in the total 20 lakh hectares area under cultivation in the revenue division. This time cotton is expected to be taken up in 5.81 lakh hectares, barely 18,000ha more as compared to last year.

Soyabean crop area may see a small dip of 5000ha and is expected to cover 3.64 lakh ha. Paddy, another major crop, will be sowed in 8.17 lakh ha, which will be an increase of 23,000ha from last season. Tur would also see increase of 41,000ha to 1.77 lakh ha in the six districts of Chandrapur, Nagpur, Gadchiroli, Wardha, Bhandara and Gondia.

"We are going issue prediction of rains for five days through SMS service for the farmers from June 11. If monsoon is delayed by 15 days, farmers would need to increase seed rate in sowing by 20% for proper yield," Mhaisekar said.

Detailing the preparations for kharif season, he claimed that agriculture department expects the cultivation in 4.67 lakh ha in Chandrapur district. Paddy in 1.77 lakh ha will be dominant crop followed by cotton in 1.34 lakh ha and soyabean in 1.09 lakh ha.

"For soyabean, instead of the conventional seeds 335 variety, we are advising the farmers to take up new 9,560 variety which gives better yields and is more pest resistant," Mhaisekar said. "The new variety has also reduces crop cycle by about 15 days and would be more suitable if monsoon id delayed," he added.

Agriculture department has arranged for adequate quantity of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides to ensure proper supply to farmers, he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Australia eyes India for export of agri-products

Australia is looking into exporting pulses and oilseeds to India. Australian High Commissioner to India Patrick Michael Suckling told *BusinessLine* that Australia was seeking greater access to Indian market for its agricultural commodities and processed food products.

"Pulses and oilseeds could be among such items," he said.

He, however, said that the Australian agriculture was not subsidised.

"Australian agricultural products are of high quality and costlier, too. We are seeking premium segment of the Indian market," he said.

Australia, which is negotiating a free-trade agreement, is appreciative of India's sensitivity to opening of its doors for agricultural products.

"What we are saying is – don't close doors on everything (agricultural)," he said.

The Down Under is currently preparing two of its provinces – Northern Territories and Western Australia – for enhanced agricultural export baskets.

“We are even ready to tailor made supplies of agricultural items. Earlier, we had faced similar resistances from the Japan and China regarding agricultural produce exports,” he said.

However, Australia established greater access to these markets for its agricultural items and eventually entered into free-trade agreements.

Govt to give farmers power, seeds subsidy in case rains fail



The Government today announced it will offer subsidy on diesel, power and seeds to farmers in case a deficient monsoon affected crops.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh today held a meeting with senior officials of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which earlier in the week had revised the monsoon forecast to “deficient”, triggering drought fears.

Officials from the power, water resources, rural development, food, and fertiliser ministries, among others were also present in the meet.

“We will offer subsidy on diesel, power and seeds to farmers like last year to deal with the drought-like situation,” Singh said after the meeting.

The Minister said the Government is fully prepared to face a drought-like situation. A nodal officer has been appointed in every department to deal with the deficient monsoon situation.

According to sources, the Centre may continue the Rs. 10 per litre diesel subsidy this year as well.

The subsidy on seeds could be up to 50 per cent under different schemes, they added. Similarly, free power could be given to farmers for irrigation.

Earlier this week, Singh had said the Centre was ready with contingency plans for 580 districts and was in touch with the States and farm research bodies to tackle the situation.

A new crop insurance policy would be introduced this year to protect farmers’ income. The Centre would import pulses to improve domestic supplies and check rising prices of pulses.

On June 2, the Met Department revised its forecast from 93 per cent to 88 per cent Long Period Average (LPA), with the north-west region of the country expected to be hit the most.

Last year, the country had received 12 per cent less rains, which hit the production of grains, cotton, and oilseeds.

The growth of agriculture and allied sectors stood at a mere 0.2 per cent in the 2014-15 fiscal.

Foodgrains production declined to 251.12 million tonnes in the 2014-15 crop year (July-June) from a record production of 265.04 million tonnes in the previous year.

ITC to scale up conservation programme

ITC Ltd has announced a scale-up of its Integrated Watershed Development Programme. The programme, which has already brought soil and moisture

conservation to half a million acres in the country, aims to double conservation to nearly 1 million acres by 2018, ITC said in a statement. Water conservation initiatives at its facilities have enabled the company to reduce its water intake progressively over years, despite a significant increase in its production volumes.

Ashesh Ambasta, Vice-President and Head, Social Investments of the company, said ITC's water initiative benefited farmers in nine States. The programme benefited over 1,60,000 households. The programme has so far generated over 4.7 million-person-days of work. It has built over 6,400 water-harvesting structures and created more than 1,480 functioning water user groups.

ITC has entered into public-private partnerships with governments and NABARD in five States.

WTO ruling on US chicken: Govt mulls scientific options to stop imports



The Indian poultry industry is likely to face competition from cheap chicken leg imports from the US which could soon flood the domestic market if New Delhi is not able to come up with fresh reasons why poultry from the world's largest producer should not be allowed.

The World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Appellate Body (top decision making body) on Thursday ruled that India's ban on US poultry items on the

ground of checking spread of avian influenza was not based on science and has to be scrapped.

“India has up to 18 months to implement the decision after which one could expect chicken legs from the US, priced much lower than the ones available locally, to take over the domestic market,” a Government official told *BusinessLine*.

However, if India is able to put in place fresh restrictions that could better withstand scientific scrutiny, the situation could be saved, he said.

The Commerce Ministry has asked poultry associations to examine the feasibility of restrictions such as banning of chicken which are fed genetically modified food or ones that are kept frozen for long periods.

But before new restrictions are introduced, India has to be sure about two things: “Any new restriction should have scientific validity. Moreover, it should be such that the domestic industry should not have any issues implementing it as these would apply on all poultry,” the official said.

Following complaints from the US, a WTO panel had ruled last year that that India’s ban on US poultry product imports flouted global norms. India appealed against the verdict in January this year.

After hearing India’s appeal, the WTO Appellate Body upheld the panel’s findings that India’s avian influenza measures were neither ‘based on’, nor ‘conformed to’, the relevant international standards.

India’s over four lakh poultry farmers – who produce an estimated 3.5 million tonne every year – could lose up to 40 per cent of their domestic market once US products start flowing in, according to industry estimates.

Oilmeal exports decline to 83,221 tonnes in May

Oilmeal exports more than halved in May to 83,221 tonnes against 1,69,607 tonnes as high oilseed prices forced companies to cut down on production.

The overall export of oilmeals in the first two months of this fiscal was down 36 per cent at 265,859 tonnes (418,052 tonnes), according to data released by the Solvent Extractors’ Association of India on Friday.

Soyabean crushing has come down drastically due to sustained disparity and high prices in the domestic market, thanks to heavy speculation in the futures market, said BV Mehta, Executive Director, SEAI.

The high operational cost and lower realisation from oil and meal is affecting the industry at large and availability of edible oil for consumers, he added.

Soyabean meal exports

In spite of five per cent reward rate under new Exim Policy and rupee depreciation, the export of soyabean meal is at a historic low and touched just 18,017 tonnes (89,883 tonnes) in April and 14,046 tonnes (8,226 tonnes) in May.

Adding to industries woes, the domestic demand for oilmeal has plunged after the outbreak of bird flu in which lakhs of birds were culled by the government. This apart, the unusually hot weather in most parts of the country has killed lakhs of chickens across states.

Capacity utilisation at many oil mills has hit its lowest level and many plants have closed down due to the crisis, he said.

South Korea remained the largest buyer of oilmeal from India importing 179,569 tonnes (161,241 tonnes) consisting 87,275 tonnes of rapeseed meal and 92,294 tonnes of castor meal. It was followed by Iran and Thailand shipping in 9,050 tonnes (63,115 tonnes) and 11,391 tonnes (42,550 tonnes), respectively.

Shipments from the Mumbai and JNPT ports dipped 74 per cent to 14,250 tonnes, while that of Kandla was down 27 per cent to 204,844 tonnes. Exports through Kolkata and Mundra ports were also down.

Spot pepper rules steady

Spot pepper prices continued to remain steady while the futures have shown an uptrend on Friday. Likely overseas demand in the coming days is attributed to the uptrend in the futures, market sources told *BusinessLine*. They said exporters were, therefore, buying aggressively

from Karnataka low bulk density 500 GL pepper. moved into the upcountry markets were now finding their way to Kerala, trade sources here claimed.



Availability of high bulk density physical pepper is very much limited, they said. Pulpally and Bathery pepper was traded at ₹620-625 a kg while the High Range material was being traded at ₹630-635. On the terminal market, 72 tonnes of pepper arrived and traded. Spot prices were steady at ₹61,000 (ungarbled) and ₹64,000 (garbled) a quintal. June, July and August contracts on the IPSTA platform increased further by ₹500 to ₹65,000 for each contract. Export prices were at \$10,425 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,675 for the US.

Monsoon makes weak onset, may advance into peninsula

The monsoon made a weak onset over Kerala on Friday with only one centre in Kasaragod district recording a heavy rainfall of 8 cm during the 24 hours ending in the morning.

The local Met office said, however, that moderate rain of varying amounts was reported from most places in Kerala and Lakshadweep.



High winds

But it did not issue any heavy rainfall warning for the state or Lakshadweep until June 9.

A warning valid for fishermen said winds speeding up to 55 km/hr are likely until Saturday evening. For the first time in 10 years, the onset happened outside of the time band set four days to the either side of the May 30 median.

The outer limit of this band had lapsed on Wednesday (June 3).

Shows up again

A persisting anti-cyclonic circulation in the Arabian Sea had been working at cross-purposes with the timely arrival of the monsoon, according to experts.

An array of western disturbances passing just to the north over Pakistan and north-west India only helped sustain the circulation, offering strong resistance to the monsoon flows.

In fact, the circulation showed itself up prominently on the day the monsoon onset was announced, parked just to the northwest of a 'trough' over Lakshadweep. In the process, it has delayed the formation of a crucial low-pressure area here by two more days, the Met said.

The monsoon requires a 'low' or a similar weather system to push the rains along the coast and into interior peninsula.

Even assuming that it materialises, the 'low' will not be allowed to gather significant strength.

It will be allowed to move north towards the Mumbai coast by June 12, as per Met forecasts.

Spell in East

It would strong monsoonal flows and heavy rain into coastal Karnataka, Konkan-Goa, Mumbai and adjoining south Gujarat during this phase.

According to the US Climate Prediction Centre, the monsoon will bring heavy rainfall over the south peninsula until June 10. The north-eastern States also will receive heavy rain during this phase.

The following week is likely to see a spike in rain over Mumbai and neighbourhood while the monsoon spreads out over east and north-east India.

The north-eastern States, including eastern parts of Gangetic West Bengal, will go under a punishing spell during the week, the US forecasts said.

But the west coast is seen quietening down a bit with below normal rainfall until June 17. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune agrees with this outlook.