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# THE HINDU

## India in pact for biggest deals in wheat import



*Despite surplus stocks at home, country to source wheat from outside.*

Indian flour millers and the local units of global trading giants have sewn up deals to import five lakh tonnes of premium Australian wheat since March, trade sources said, the biggest such purchases in over a decade, despite surplus stocks at home.

Concerns that untimely rains in February and March would cut wheat output, especially of high-protein varieties grown in central India, first drove flour millers in the country's southern ports to place the orders.

Attractive prices then prompted traders such as Cargill, Louis Dreyfus and Glencore to follow, said three sources directly involved in the deals.

**1** There are concerns that untimely rains in February and March would cut wheat output, especially of high-protein varieties grown in central India.

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**2** Industry and government officials estimate this year's wheat output at about 90 million tonnes, nearly 5 per cent lower than the 2014 harvest, but still exceeding domestic demand of about 72 million tonnes.

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3 Since wheat is largely grown in India's Central and Northern plains, flour millers from Southern States sometimes find it attractive to import high-protein grades.

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The traders and millers could import another five lakh tonnes from France and Russia, where harvests are around the corner. The deals could further push up benchmark prices that have jumped recently on concerns about crop quality in the US.

“There are strong chances French and Russian wheat will find their way to India because of attractive prices and surplus stocks there, and if the euro goes down, I expect more French wheat coming to India,” said one source.

Almost half of the already-contracted quantity, bought at \$255 to \$275 per tonne, has reached India and the rest is scheduled for July delivery, said the sources, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the subject.

Although rains and hailstorms wilted the wheat crop, India, the world's second-biggest producer of the grain, has large stockpiles accumulated after eight straight years of bumper harvests.

Industry and government officials estimate this year's wheat output at about 90 million tonnes, nearly 5 per cent lower than the 2014 harvest, but still exceeding domestic demand of about 72 million tonnes.

Since wheat is largely grown in India's central and northern plains, flour millers from southern States, hemmed in by the Indian Ocean, sometimes find it attractive to import high-protein grades from Australia.

But this year's unusually large volumes have surprised some.

“Other than large amounts of wheat that we're importing, we see two other significant changes,” said one of the sources. “Perhaps for the first time some imports are taking place in vessels and perhaps for the first time millers will end up buying French and Russian wheat as well.”

At about \$185 to \$190 a tonne free on board, French and Russian wheat is attractive for India, said another source.

High-protein wheat in India costs more than \$300 a tonne and imports could ebb if prices fall to about \$283, the sources said.

But Russian wheat may not meet India's quality requirements, despite its higher protein content than French wheat, said Tajinder Narang, a New Delhi-based trade analyst.

### Cutting the Food Act to the bone



*Two years after vociferously arguing for an expansion of the provisions of the National Food Security Act, the BJP in government is bleeding it with a thousand cuts, both fiscal and otherwise*

When [Parliament passed](#) the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, it had already become one of the most debated pieces of legislation in decades. Those for and against it had fought it out across yards of space on the [editorial](#) pages of newspapers, not to forget the slugfests on television channels. The [parliamentary standing committee](#) studying it, while it was still a Bill, received over 2,00,000 public responses. A vast majority of those comments called, in writing, for expanding the provisions of the Bill.

The NFSA was, after all, an outcome of remarkable public and judicial action — a battle of over a decade to secure freedom from hunger for millions who had not gained from India's emergence as a major economy. With all its inadequacies, the Act is still seen by many as a final assault on the unconscionable hunger that has stalked the countryside and urban slums. Over two-thirds, or more than 820 million Indians, came under its ambit.

## **Political reversal**

In the debates in Parliament, those who vociferously argued for the expansion of the provisions, pitching in for universalisation and an increase in the quantum of the entitlements, included stalwarts from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) like Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley, Murli Manohar Joshi and Prakash Javadekar. The then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, wrote to the Prime Minister, asking for the law to be further strengthened. It was not unsurprising because the BJP-ruled States, led by Chhattisgarh, had considerably enhanced the outreach of the Public Distribution Systems (PDS) in their respective States and were credited with having put in place robust systems of transparency and accountability in public food schemes. Therefore, the BJP was determined not to let the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and the Congress Party walk away with all the credit for this landmark legislation.

That was then. And two years is an interminably long wait in politics. Now, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government seems equally determined to throttle the NFSA by bleeding it with a thousand cuts, both fiscal and otherwise, even before it is fully implemented. In the last one year, the mandarins at the Food Ministry have not allowed a single provision of the NFSA to remain unmolested.

The first salvo against the Act [was fired in July last year](#) with the illegal extension accorded to the State governments to implement the Act. Illegal, because the NFSA itself specifies that the implementation would commence within a year of the legislation being enacted. Therefore, any change in the roll-out should have been first approved by Parliament. Subsequently, the Ministry has extended the date of the implementation twice. All this ostensibly because States have not been able to identify those who should be covered under the provisions of the Act. Yet, the final lists from the the Socio Economic And Caste Census (2011), which most States will use for the identification have not yet been made public. This survey, which was conducted by the Central government, was delayed by six years despite Supreme Court orders that the exercise should be completed by the beginning of the Eleventh Five Year Plan.

Subsequently, in July last year, the Food Ministry arm-twisted State governments not to declare a “bonus” for farmers over and above the Minimum Support Price that is provided by the Central government. This

despite the fact that it was paid from the coffers of State governments. Ironically, it was a move that hurt farmers in the BJP-ruled States of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan the most. The procurement of food grains from farmers was severely restricted as a result of this decision, one that we will rue if there is a monsoon deficit, as predicted this year.

### **Budget cuts**

The Union Budget for the current fiscal dealt the next decisive blow with [punishing cuts to some of the key programmes](#) under the Act. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) had a 50 per cent cut, prompting the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Maneka Gandhi, warning the Finance Minister that the “political fallout of such a situation can be grave”. Similarly, the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) saw its budget reduced from Rs.13,000 crore to Rs.9,000 crore for a flagship programme universalised by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s government. Other social sector schemes which have a direct bearing on nutrition have seen similar and vicious cutbacks. The weak argument that States can compensate the deficit with the additional 10 per cent of revenues that they will have now from the share of taxes does not bear the scrutiny of numbers or logic. The majority of the programmes that bear the brunt of the austerity, like the MDMS, are Centrally sponsored schemes.

To tackle India’s shameful track record in maternal deaths and women’s nutrition, the NFSA introduced the maternity entitlement scheme. Every pregnant and nursing mother was to receive Rs.6,000 as a one-time cash transfer. Two years down the line there are still no signs of the scheme taking off.

But credit must be given where it is due. And the one for driving the last nail into the coffin of the NFSA, if it was required at all, must go to the Food Ministry and the latest round of revisions made by it to the Public Distribution System (Control) Order. This order was notified by the Department of Food and Public Distribution on March 20. There are three elements in this order that are in total contempt of Supreme Court orders and the provisions of the NFSA which stand out.

## **Phase out and freeze**

First, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) is being sought to be phased out, with States being instructed not to add any new household to this category if any household drops out of the programme due to an improvement in social or economic status, death, etc.; the number of households would be reduced to that extent. This means that over time, the programme would be phased out. AAY provides 35 kilogrammes of food grains per month (irrespective of the number of members in the household) to 20 million of the most vulnerable families in the country, and which is currently accessed by the most vulnerable tribal communities, persons with disability and the aged. Launched on Mr. Vajpayee's birthday 15 years ago, when the NDA was in power, it was a scheme that he took personal interest in and nurtured through his tenure. The effectiveness of this programme led even the UPA to expand it twice. There couldn't have been a surer way to disrespect Mr. Vajpayee's legacy programme than to wind it down.

Second, in complete contravention of Supreme Court orders and the NFSA (Section 9), the PDS (Control) Order freezes the number of people who can access the entitlements, to the decadal Census figures rather than expand it each year based on the population estimates of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India. What this means is that State governments cannot add to the number of beneficiaries to accommodate the increase in population in the 10-year period between the publication of the final Census results.

## **Establishing citizenship**

Most damningly, for the first time, the PDS (Control) Order explicitly places an additional burden of citizenship, besides being a resident of the State, for someone to access benefits under the NFSA. Ostensibly, this is to check foreigners, (especially the large number of Canadians who are perhaps queuing up at our ration shops!) to get the benefits of the PDS. In practical terms, what this means is that some of the most vulnerable migrant communities of India would find themselves excluded from the PDS. And if you thought this was an entirely theoretical proposition, try getting a ration card in Delhi if you are a Bengali migrant who also happens to sport a Muslim name. Well, try getting yourself a ration card anyway. The last PDS (Control) Order issued in 2001 did not think it necessary to make this distinction, nor did the NFSA, where the entitlements are defined for

“persons” rather than citizens. Since the jurisprudence on the right to food flows from Article 21 of the Constitution, on the right to life and liberty, the right to food should be available to all persons without their having to establish their citizenship first.

The impact of these measures is already being felt across the country with the visibly weakening political will of the Central government impacting programme implementation in the field. Chhattisgarh’s PDS, arguably one of the best in the country — even the Supreme Court has repeatedly highlighted as an example that other States should emulate — is tainted by a procurement scam. Close to 7,00,000 ration cards were cancelled. While a large number of them were reinstated subsequently, the most marginalised sections of the population did not manage to find their way back into the system.

Pulses have been removed from the PDS in non-tribal districts. Despite provisions made in the State budget this year, the pioneering Phulwari crèche programme for children is not being expanded; the scheme for nutritional supplements for patients suffering from tuberculosis is languishing in files. Bureaucratic intransigence coupled with a diminishing political commitment is threatening to dismantle the State’s welfare architecture. Heartbreakingly, Chhattisgarh had two starvation deaths in quick succession last month, for the first time in years. And as the elections to the local bodies showed, Maneka Gandhi was right after all. There is a political price to pay.

The irony that the world will not miss is that the Modi government has emerged as a global champion of farmers’ rights and food security with its progressive position on the public-stockholding issue at the World Trade Organization to fix unjust trade rules. A classic case, if there was one, of do as we say and not as we do.

*(Biraj Patnaik is the Principal Adviser to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court in the Right to Food case. The views expressed are personal.)*

## WHO: Insecticides lindane, DDT linked to cancer



*IARC said high exposures to lindane have previously been reported among agricultural workers and pesticide applicators.*

The insecticide lindane, once widely used in agriculture and to treat human lice and scabies, causes cancer and has been specifically linked to non-Hodgkin lymphoma, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday.

The WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) also said that DDT, or dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, probably causes cancer, with scientific evidence linking it to non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL), testicular cancer and liver cancer.

In a review of various agricultural chemicals, IARC's specialist panel said it had decided to classify lindane as "carcinogenic to humans" in its Group 1 category, DDT as "probably carcinogenic to humans" in its Group 2A class, and the herbicide 2,4-D as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" in its Group 2B.

It said epidemiological studies did not find strong or consistent increases in risk of NHL or other cancers from 2,4-D exposure, but there was strong



evidence it induces oxidative stress, a process that can damage cells in the body, and moderate evidence it can suppress the immune system.

Lindane, which since 2009 has been banned or restricted in most countries under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, was previously used extensively for insect control in agriculture. An exemption to the ban allows it to be used as a second-line treatment for lice and scabies.

IARC said high exposures to lindane have previously been reported among agricultural workers and pesticide applicators.

"Large epidemiological studies of agricultural exposures in the United States and Canada showed a 60 per cent increased risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma in those exposed to lindane," it said.

"Exposure to DDT still occurs, mainly through diet," IARC said, adding that DDT is still used, mainly for malaria control in parts of Africa, although under very strict conditions.

### **Forest Department to restore green cover in Coimbatore**



Saplings will be planted along arterial roads in Coimbatore, under a Forest Department initiative.

*To plant 2.20 lakh saplings in the district*

The Forest Department is implementing a project to plant 2.20 lakh saplings in the district as part of 'Massive Tree Planting' campaign. It has joined hands with the Coimbatore Corporation and the Highways Department to identify suitable places along Tiruchi and Avanashi Roads.

District Forest Officer M. Senthil Kumar told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday that one of the main objectives of the initiative was to restore green cover that has been lost due to development projects such as road-widening. The project is being given a thrust now on account of the recent showers and the Department was looking to increase the saplings planting now.

"Avenue plantation, done along the roads, was being given priority now in coordination with the civic body. The Forest Department has tied up with volunteers and non-governmental organisations to maintain these saplings."

Apart from the public locations, he said that commercial establishments, schools, colleges, and industries have also come forward to maintain saplings in public places, as well as plant saplings on their own premises. They are given saplings free of cost.

In Coimbatore Forest Division, the sapling planting has been taken up in all the six Ranges of Coimbatore, Mettupalayam, Karamadai, Sirumugai, Periyanaickenpalayam and Booluvampatti, covering both urban as well as the rural district areas, the District Forest Officer said.

### **Indigenous species**

Only those indigenous species that can thrive in local soil and climate conditions were being planted in this campaign.

Those include shade-giving and flowering species such as gulmohar, copper pod, bauhinia, pungan and neem.

Further, Mr. Senthil said that these species were not water-intensive and required watering just once in a week or 10 days.

The recent spell of rain will also help them thrive in the initial stages.

*The Department has joined hands with*

*the Coimbatore Corporation to  
identify suitable locations on arterial roads*

### **Maharashtra gets ‘State butterfly’**



*Blue Mormon, the second largest butterfly found in India, was the choice of research scholars and nature lovers alike.*

Maharashtra has become the first State in the country to have a ‘State butterfly.’

The BJP-led government has declared the Blue Mormon (*Papilio polymnestor*) as the State butterfly. The decision was taken at a meeting of the State Wildlife Board in Mumbai on Monday.

The Blue Mormon is a large, swallowtail butterfly found primarily in Sri Lanka and India, mainly restricted to the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, South India and coastal belts. It may occasionally be spotted in the Maharashtrian mainland between Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra.

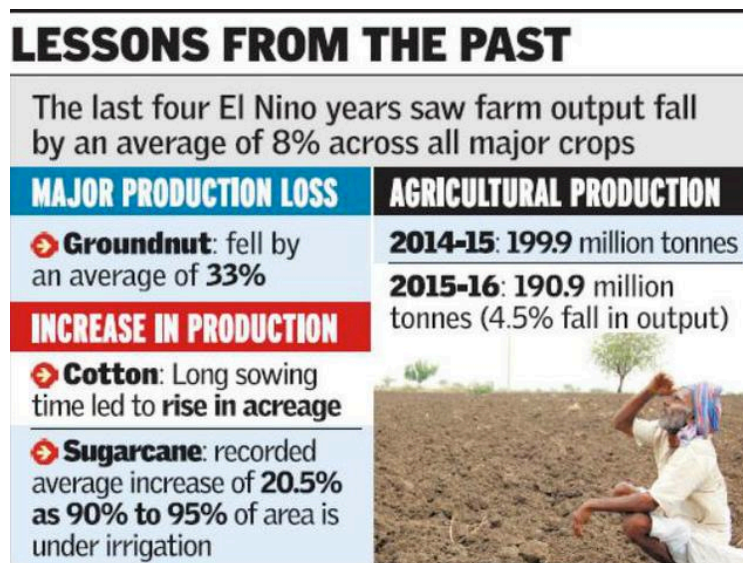
It is reportedly the second largest butterfly found in India, just smaller than the southern birdwing. “No State in India has ever declared a State butterfly and the species has been one of the most neglected,” said a statement from

the office of State Forest Department Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar, explaining the rationale behind the announcement.

Mr. Mungantiwar also seems to have considered the requests of butterfly academicians, research scholars and nature lovers who wished to see the Blue Mormon chosen.

Easily identifiable, the Blue Mormon boasts exquisite velvet-like black wings with bright blue spots.

### El Nino may have only a minor impact



*Paddy, maize, groundnut, and castor likely to see low yield, says report.*

This year's farm output may fall by only around 4.5 per cent despite the projection of a strong El Nino year by the India Meteorological Department, says a recent report. During the previous El Nino years, farm production fell by an average of 8% across all major crops. A normal monsoon, however, could lead to a 0.6-% growth, the report says.

The report by brokerage house Edelweiss has found that over the last four El Nino years (1997, 2002, 2006 and 2009), production fell by an average of 8 per cent compared to the production in the previous years, across all major crops. However, some crops suffered more than others.

“Major production loss is observed in groundnut followed by moong, castor seed, bajra, sesame, jowar, maize and paddy. The increase in production of

cotton is mainly attributed to an increase in acreage due to its long sowing window as compared to other crops. Sugarcane has done well even during El Nino years as almost 90-95% of cane area is under irrigation across the country,” the report says.

Groundnut production, for example, fell by an average of 33 per cent across these four years compared to sugar, which saw an average increase of 20.5 per cent.

However, this year will not see such a drastic fall in production despite it being subject to a strong El Nino effect, according to the report. The report forecasts 2015-16 agricultural production to be 190.9 million tonnes compared to 199.9 million tonnes in 2014-15, a fall of 4.5 per cent. Here, too, some crops will suffer more than others.

### **Sugarcane not rain-dependent**

“In the case of a below-normal monsoon we would be forced to downsize our production prospects. Cotton has an advantage of the longest sowing window, sugarcane is hardly rain dependent as most of it is grown in irrigated regions and urad will do well in terms of yields with lower rains. However, crops like paddy, maize, groundnut, guar, castor, tur, moong and bajra would suffer due to lower yields,” the report says.

While the IMD has forecast a deficient monsoon, private weather company Skymet has maintained that this year will see a normal monsoon. June so far has seen 16 per cent more rainfall than the average. In the event of a normal monsoon, the report predicts an average increase of 0.6 per cent overall, with only castor seed, rice, bajra and sugar seeing a fall in production levels.

However, the report pegs this as more to do with acreage under these crops rather than productivity levels. “Acreage under paddy, bajra and castor are likely to shrink this year. Higher returns from other competitive crops will keep the trend of shifting acreage from bajra to other crops ongoing for this season as well. While, poor returns fetched from castor last year will result in a drop in acreage,” the report says

## **Self-help is the best help**

### *Tribal women farmers in Tamil Nadu hills manage weather stations*

Women tribal farmers are helping many community managed automatic weather stations at various agro-ecological zones here that could be game changers for the region in providing timely and accurate forecasts and ensuring food and nutrition security.

Of the seven automatic weather stations(AWS) in the hill ranges here, four are run by women and three by men with all of them being tribals and farmers. The AWS provide meteorologic information with a local focus to support agriculture.

“We at the automatic weather stations collect data on temperature, rainfall, relative humidity, wind velocity, wind direction and radiation,” Vijayalakshmi Pradeep, a 23-year-old tribal woman and a small farm holder managing the weather station at Thuvarapallam said.

The primary purpose of AWS is to support farming and related activities, the source of livelihood for people here who are predominantly “Malayali” tribes. Malayali is the name of the tribe, meaning dwellers of hills. Weather stations are run with community participation.

The weather stations were set up by M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) with the support of Bioversity International and The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a UN agency.

Vijayalakshmi moved to Thuvarapallam in Namakkal District following her marriage and studied upto 12th standard. “I was trained on fundamentals related to weather conditions, to handle the computer, and in managing the information system,” she said, adding, the data gets fed automatically into the system.

The first AWS was set up at Moolakadai in Kolli hills last year. This year, six other such stations were established in Navakadu, Thuvarapallam, Aripalapatti, Keeraikadu, Vendalappadi and Puliampatti. PTI

## **Tobacco Board told to buy stocks from ryots**

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday asked the Tobacco Board to ensure purchase of accumulated tobacco stocks from farmers.

Mr. Naidu held a meeting with tobacco growers from Guntur, Prakasam and West Godavari districts, which was also attended by Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao and Tobacco Board Chairman K. Gopal. Mr. Naidu wanted the board to take the initiative to ensure remunerative prices for the growers and said following good price earlier and by accepting traders' suggestions, the growers increased the area of cultivation. As a result, the demand fell and the prices plummeted.

He urged the traders to come to the rescue of tobacco growers 'in this hour of distress' and asserted that there must not be loss of even a rupee to farmers. He said the accumulated stock should be purchased by traders and stocked in godowns.

Promising that the Centre and State and the Board would take necessary steps in this regard, he told the growers that he had taken up the issue with Union Minister of State for Commerce Nirmala Sitharaman.

## **Special crop loan camps**

Special camps for sanctioning crop loans through nationalised banks would be held across the district from July 1 to 21, Collector (in-charge) P. Madhusoodhan Reddy has said. In a press release, he said farmers who have not got crop loans so far would be given preference. Those who had obtained loans, should repay the same promptly, he said. Farmers seeking loans can attend the camps with relevant documents and certificates. Officials of Revenue, Agriculture, Horticulture, and Cooperative departments would attend the camps to issue necessary certificates to farmers.

## **Remunerative prices for farm produce demanded**

The Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam has urged the Central government to bring about a comprehensive change in its policy on fixing prices for agricultural produce.

"The current policy of fixing prices for farm produce does not offer remunerative prices for farmers. The fixation process seems to be an eye-

wash. The government should bring about suitable changes in the policy so to ensure that the procurement price fixed by it was profitable to farmers,” said a resolution adopted at the State executive committee meeting of the association at Perambalur on Tuesday.

The association urged the government to sanction drought relief even if farmers had sustained 33 per cent crop loss. Suitable changes should be made in the national crop insurance scheme so as to sanction compensation for crop losses at the village level.

Nationalised banks should continue to extend crop loans without any change in interest rate and the interest subvention scheme, the association said through other resolutions.

Referring to the recent sanction of Rs.6000-crore loan to sugar mills by the Union government to help them clear arrears to farmers, the association said it would not be beneficial to cane growers. The government should deposit the arrears in the bank accounts of farmers directly, it demanded.

### **Black gram cultivation to be taken up on 16,000 acres in Vennar**

An area of 16,000 acres will be brought under black gram cultivation in the Vennar basin where kuruvai paddy cannot be raised because of depletion in water table, said M. Mathivanan, District Collector.

Inaugurating the black gram cultivation as part of the package for the district at Viswanathapuram village near Koradachery in the district, the Collector said the moisture content of the soil in and around Koradacherry was ideally suited for black gram as an alternative crop to kuruvai.

The State government had allocated Rs. 14.418 crore for the kuruvai package for the district, which included Rs. 2.72 crore for raising black gram or green manure crop. He appealed to farmers of Viswanathapuram to take to black gram cultivation using the moisture content of the soil without delay. He gave away free seeds of 10 kg an acre to farmers on the occasion.

### **Control room**

The Collector said the district administration had set up a special control room for monitoring the effective implementation of the kuruvai package.



Those interested in raising the crop through mechanical planter, could immediately contact the control room and register their names. The telephone number for the control room is 04366-224956 and the mobile number is 9750963315.

K. Mayilvahanan, Joint Director of Agriculture, spoke.

### Farmers trained in zero budget farming

As many as 42 farmers from across the state were trained in ‘zero budget farming’ and production of value-added products from dung and urine of Kangayam cattle breed recently.

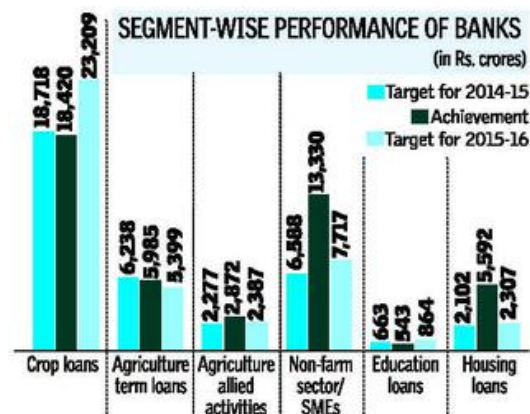
This novel initiative was organised by Senapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation (SKCRF), which is involved in ‘in-situ’ conservation of breeding and conservation of genetically pure Kangayam cattle for the last six decades at Kangayam.

“Urine and cow dung of Kangayam cattle are also used to prepare ‘Jeewarmitham’, a mixture that could be used for soil reclamation. We are also have been propagating the use of cow urine with neem leaves for preparation of pest repellent, which is named as ‘Vembuasthram’,” K. S. M. Karthikeya, managing trustee of SKCRF and also member of Board of Management in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, told *The Hindu* .

The farmers were taken on a tour to Korangadu, the typical grazing land.

### Bankers fix Rs. 23,209 crore target for crop loans in 2015-16

*State-level bankers’ committee okays credit plan with Rs. 72,119-crore outlay*



The State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) of Telangana on Tuesday approved the annual credit plan for the State for 2015-16 with an outlay of Rs. 72,119 crore including Rs. 23,209 crore earmarked for crop loans.

Speaking at the launch of the credit plan, Managing Director of State Bank of Hyderabad Santanu Mukherjee, who is also the president of SLBC, said it was projected to give Rs. 47,460 crore advances to the priority sector that includes crop loans. On the performance of banks in the State during 2014-15, he said they had surpassed the targets to the extent of 180 per cent as the advances disbursed last year stood at Rs. 1,13,552 crore against the credit plan of Rs. 63,048 crore.

He claimed that target achieved for priority sectors lending last year was 119 and that of the non-priority sector at 290 per cent. Mr. Mukherjee explained that the deposits in the banks stood at Rs. 3,28,181 crore as on March 31, 2015 with a growth of Rs. 42,302 crore during the year and the advances at Rs. 3,54,166 crore with an increase of Rs. 29,202 crore.

However, the achievement of crop loans was about 98 per cent with the banks lending Rs. 18,420 crore against the target of Rs. 18,718 crore during 2014-15. Disbursement of agriculture term loans was also below the target at 96 per cent, but the activities allied to agriculture got a better deal with the banks lending Rs. 2,872 crore against the target of Rs. 2,277 crore during the last year.

For the current year, the banks have set a target of Rs. 15,807 crore for crop loans during the kharif season and Rs. 8,122 crore during the rabi season. The allocation for agriculture term loans has been pruned to Rs. 5,399 crore this year against Rs. 6,238 crore earmarked last year as the achievement was below the target at Rs. 5,985 crore.

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy said the government would release the remaining Rs. 2,207 crore amount as part of the second instalment of crop loan waiver and requested the banks to give loan waiver certificates and renew their crop loans for issuance of fresh loans.

### **‘Ensure 9-hour daytime power to farmers’**

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has directed the energy officials to ensure nine-hour continuous power supply during daytime for the farm sector during oncoming Kharif crop season. He also asked them to arrive at

the quantum of power needed to ensure such supply through scientific analysis.

Mr. Rao asked the officials to stop industrial supply for a day in August when agricultural operations peak, so that exact demand for agriculture can be arrived at. Precise figures for estimation of agricultural demand are not available, as uninterrupted power supply has never been given to farm sector, he noted at a review meeting with the officials from TSGenco, TSNPDCL and TSSPDCL.

Mr. Rao hinted at nine-hour supply for next Rabi too, thanks to the 3000 MW additional power projected to be available by then.

### **Demand for 'pesticide-free' vegetables climbs**

*Not all 'organic' products are pesticide-free*



Organic vegetables sold by a residents association in Thiruvananthapuram.

With increasing awareness of the health hazards of consuming vegetables cultivated in a polluted environment, residents who have no option to grow veggies at home have started turning to outlets that sell 'pesticide-free' vegetables grown using organic manure. A number of shops have sprung up in the city that claim to sell organic vegetables.

What was considered a passing fad a few years ago is slowing and steadily becoming a trend, a manager of an outlet that sells organic products, including vegetables, said.

## **100 customers**

“In the beginning, I never had more than 100 customers a month wanting organically grown vegetables, but today I get more than 100 customers a day. We even have a database of customers with whom we are in touch on a regular basis through phone call and SMS. We inform them about the arrival of fresh stocks so that they can make purchases at the earliest,” he said.

The trend of buying organically grown products was not restricted to the higher income class; even the middle class was willing to pay extra to buy ‘safe’ vegetables, the manager said.

However, the Office of the Commissioner of Food Safety has a word of caution for people who shop for organic vegetables.

A senior official in the Office of the Commissioner of Food Safety, Thiruvananthapuram Circle, said not all products sold in these shops were produced organically.

“It’s not true that products sold in these outlets are completely free of pesticides and are grown organically. We have warned the outlets using the tag organic products for marketing. A popular outlet near Kuravankonam was denied licence as the owner refused to remove the organic tag,” the official said.

## **Act to be amended**

The Food Safety Act needed to be amended to bring in more clarity on what constituted an organic product, he said.

According to Jayakumar of Thanal, a third-party certification was a must for a product to claim that it was produced as per standards prescribed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements.

## **Output of a process**

“The challenge in organic vegetables is to understand that ‘organic vegetable’ is not a product but an output of a process. Organic farming guarantees worldwide that the farmer/producer has followed the pre-agreed verifiable standards. Kerala is not generally seeing organic farming in the above detail and is rather caught up at a different level,” he said.

## Healthy vegetables from the backyard



A boy waters a kitchen garden set up in his home at Ramanamudhali Pudur near Pollachi in Coimbatore district under 'Shubh Aarambh' initiative.

For K. Sundareswari (23), a resident of a remote village in Vettaikaranpudur past Pollachi, buying vegetables and fruits for her family of four was quite expensive.

She and her husband work as farm labours and make just a few hundred rupees a day, assuming they found work. Hence, providing a nutritious meal to her two daughters was almost impossible. Now, she has none of these worries. For, she gets all the vegetables necessary right from her backyard, which barely stretches 10 X 10 metres.

Under the 'Shubh Aarambh' initiative, she got the seeds and agricultural supplements. She now grows vegetables such as bitter gourd, beans, ladies finger, onion, radish, snake gourd, tomato, chillies and brinjal in her own kitchen garden.

"I can see the difference between my crops and those purchased in the market. As I do not use pesticides, the produce is lot more nutritious," she says proudly.

Ms. Sundareswari's family is one of the 410 families in Anamalai Block near Pollachi in Coimbatore district that has set up kitchen gardens under the Shubh Aarambh initiative, implemented by Mondelez International, Magic Bus India Foundation and Save the Children.

Vinay Kaushik, Communication Coordinator, Save The Children, says demonstrations are given to the local communities about kitchen garden and material support is provided to those families who are interested.

The kitchen garden is completely organic with no fertilisers involved, which helps to keep the cost low. Further, he says they are in talks with the Government schools to set up kitchen gardens for their noon meal centres.

### **Special package to be sought for paddy growers in rain-fed areas**

*'Support price announced for crop less than cultivation cost'*



Prakash Kammaradi, chairman of the Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, speaking at a workshop in Shivamogga on Tuesday

The Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission will urge the State government to announce a special package for the benefit of farmers engaged in cultivation of paddy in rain-fed areas, said chairman Prakash Kammaradi.

The cultivation of paddy in rain-fed areas, including Malnad, is no more a lucrative venture, and as a result many farmers are switching over to commercial crops like ginger and maize, he said at a workshop on cultivation of paddy held at the University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, here on Tuesday.

The minimum support price of Rs. 1,360 for a quintal of paddy announced by the government was much less than the actual cultivation cost incurred by the farmers, he added. Along with posing a threat to food security, the trend

to switch over to cultivation of commercial crops has also resulted in shortage of fodder for cattle. In Kerala, the government has announced a special package for cultivation of paddy in rain-fed areas. It includes providing inputs for farmers for subsidised price and extending financial assistance for farm mechanisation. A similar package should be announced in Karnataka, he said.

The native varieties of paddy cultivated in rain-fed areas in Malnad including *sanna valya*, *mattaga*, *hegga*, and *gandhasale* are known for their special aroma and taste. The rice from such varieties is also rich in fibre and nutrient qualities. It was possible to undertake sustainable cultivation of paddy in Malnad region under natural farming method, he suggested. The commission would request the government to explore the possibilities of payment of wage for labourers who work in paddy fields in rain-fed areas with funds available under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, he said.

C. Vasudevappa, Vice Chancellor of UAHS, Shivamogga; K.T. Gangadhar, working president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha; and H.C. Basavarajappa, general secretary of the KRRS were present.

*The cultivation of paddy in rain-fed areas is no more a lucrative venture, and many farmers are switching over to commercial crops.*

*Prakash Kammaradi*

*Chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission*

### **Krishi Abhiyan from July 1 to 15**

The Agriculture Department will take up Krishi Abhiyan in Mangalore taluk from July 1 to July 15. They will be conducted in Mangaluru B hobli, Mulki, Moodbidri and Gurupura hoblis. There will be interactions with farmers during the abhiyan, a press release said.

## Rare breed of insects in huge demand



The soil-friendly Arudra Purugulu, a breed of rare insects with velvet crimson body that appears exclusively in Arudra Karthe after the first rains in farms of Telangana, are being purchased by some agents reportedly associated with Ayurvedic medicine industry at Rs. 600 per kg illegally.

The oil from the red velvet mite *Trombidium grandissimum* (*Arudra Purugulu*) is used in traditional Indian medicine to treat paralysis. Also, considered as an aphrodisiac, *Trombidium* mites are referred in several websites as Indian Viagra. These agents have made some villages in Alair, Yadagirigutta, Rajpet, Turkapally mandals as their home to collect the Arudra Purugulu. Since the collection of Arudra Purugulu is fetching more money than daily wage, for over a week now a large number of labourers and farmers have lined for picking them.

The agents have appointed one sub-agent in each village in these parts of the district to collect the insects from labourers.

A labourer at Saigudem village of Alair said that sub-agents are being paid Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 per kg by the agents of industries. However, the labourers had no clue why the agents are buying Arudra Purugulu. Since the Arudra Purugu is very crucial in maintaining the soil fertility and controlling the pest on crops, the development is worrying the farmers and agriculture officials.

An agriculturist in Yadagirigutta said that Arudra insect feeds on the harmful pests at larva stage to help the farmer to control pest. On the condition of anonymity, a sub-agent said that the agents boils the insects alive and pack into kg bags after drying up for transportation to Bangalore,



*Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad and some other Arab countries. The farmers and agriculture officials want the State government to take stern action against the mafia to protect the insects.*

*Agents scout Nalgonda villages to buy red velvet mite which is considered as an aphrodisiac and also used in Ayurvedic medicines*

### **Government in damage-control mode over sugarcane issue**



As the issue of long-pending dues to sugarcane growers by factories threatens to take over the legislature session, starting in Belagavi on June 29, yet again, the State government appears to be in a desperate damage-control mode. It has called a meeting of sugar mill owners on Wednesday in Bengaluru with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at the head of the table.

The government is at the receiving end for its inability to fully implement its own decision on payment of Rs. 2,500 and an incentive of Rs. 150 per tonne of sugarcane for the crushing season 2013–14 to the growers. Now, a fresh crisis is on the cards due to non-fixation of the price for the year 2014–15 and delay in payment to the growers.

At the root of the crisis is the reluctance of sugar mills to pay the price announced by the State government for 2013–14 and fair and remunerative price (FRP) announced by the Centre for 2014–15.

A half-hearted approach to resolve the crisis is due to the fact that Ministers, MPs and legislators of both the ruling Congress and the Opposition BJP and JD(S) have stakes in various sugar mills, say farmers.

On the other side, the managements of the sugar mills had been maintaining that it was not possible to pay higher prices due to increased cost of production and low price of sugar in the market, even as the government has belatedly taking action against defaulting mills by issuing notices and seizing their godowns for recovery. Farmers, however, say that these half-hearted efforts are aimed more at checkmating the Opposition during the session.

*The govt. has called a meeting of sugar mill owners today in Bengaluru*

### **Training programme in aquifer management**



More than 200 farmers, staff of various central and state government departments, representatives of NGOs, and academic institutions underwent a two-day training programme in ‘aquifer information and management on participatory approach’ at the Periyar University.

The tier-III training programme was organised jointly by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), South Eastern Coastal Region, Chennai; Rajiv Gandhi National Ground Water Training and Research Institute, Raipur, in association with the Department of Geology of Periyar University here.

### **Lectures**

The scientists and resource persons from CGWB and other departments gave technical lectures on aquifer mapping project of the country and capacity building. The main objective of the training was to disseminate information on aquifers, need for aquifer mapping, managing and protecting ground water for sustainability with people’s participation.

A.Subburaj, Scientist, Head of the office of the CHWB, in his lecture on the topic 'village level aquifer management plan and its importance', explained the importance of the local people to know the ground water position under their own feet, so that they could manage the resource by adopting different local techniques. Sivakumar, scientist, CGWB, spoke on 'climatic variability and its impact on water resources'.

K. Kumaresan, scientist, delivered a lecture on 'Hydrogeology of Tamil Nadu with special reference to Salem district'.

S. Venkateswaran, Professor, Periyar University, explained the sources of fluoride in ground water.

R. Ramasamy, Executive Engineer, Ground Water division of the Public Works Department, explained the impact of large diameter shafts in River Vasishta flowing in Salem district.

Stephen, Head of the Department, Vinayaga Mission Dental College, spoke on the impacts of fluoride in human health.

Scientists and experts also spoke on the topics 'ground water regime monitoring', 'ground water quality monitoring', 'use of geophysics in aquifer delineation', 'rain water harvesting and artificial recharge to ground water at village level' etc.

On the second day, elocution, poetry, skit contests on the theme 'water conservation' was held in which a large number of farmers and others participated and displayed their talent and the expertise knowledge they possessed on the importance of conserving water. Interaction session also formed part of the two-day event.

### **Farmers want more water from Gunderipallam Dam**

Water availability in the Gunderipallam Dam has raised hope among farmers for a fifth cycle of water release.

After the water level reached 105.17 million cubic feet during March because of summer rain, the Public Works Department started releasing water for irrigation of 2,498 acres in Kongarpalayam, Vaniputhur, Kavundampalayam, Panchathurayampalayam, and Arasankottai.

During April, rainfall in Kundri hills caused the dam to overflow.

According to PWD sources, water in excess of the planned extent was released in four cycles until the first week of this month.

In the final stage water was released from May 22 to June 4, the sources said.

The reservoir has two canal systems on either sides.

About 879 acres of ayacut area are wetted by the canal to the dam's right, and 1,619 acres get water from the left canal, sources said.

### **On freedom for organic living**

A farmer-to-farmer exchange of seeds based on mutual trust and appreciation should be the basis of a revolution that can help society regain the lost freedom for an organic living, said P.K. Abdul Jabbar, assistant professor, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Ambalavayal.

Delivering a talk on 'Safe food through family farming' as part of 'Njattuvela' festival comprising awareness sessions and exhibition of planting materials under the aegis of the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad at Town Hall here on Monday, Dr. Jabbar said that conservation of the traditional seed varieties was vital to organic farming.

Stating that different vested interest groups of the prevailing market economy had stolen the freedom of people to live organically, Dr. Jabbar said that the per capita pesticide intake of an Indian citizen was more than 10 times higher than that of a person in the United States or in United Kingdom. "That freedom can be reclaimed only through a collective effort from different stakeholders," he said.

He said that the evolving technologies such as soil-less farming, terrace farming, and vertical garden concepts had enabled people to participate in the collective effort.

Emphasising the importance of conserving the traditional wisdom related to farming in different parts of the country, Dr. Jabbar said different conventions to exchange traditional farming wisdom should be organised periodically between different villages. A regional food system connecting

village production clusters and urban consumer clusters should also be established to ensure a dynamic interdependence between the two.

### White arecanut prices going up

<b>MARKET TREND</b>			
<b>White arecanut (Chali)</b>	<b>Prices in the first week of June (Rs./per kg)</b>	<b>Prices on June 23 (Rs./per kg)</b>	<b>Hike in percentage</b>
Old stocks	330	355	8
New stocks	250	275	10
<b>Arecanut harvested in 2013-14 are old stocks</b>	<b>Those harvested in 2014-15 are new stocks</b>	<b>The last highest price was Rs. 320 a kg in June 2014</b>	<b>Crop loss in 2013, hike in base import price have pushed domestic prices up</b>

*It has now touched Rs. 355 a kg, the highest ever*

A fortnight after the Union government increased the base import price of arecanut, prices of white arecanut (also called chali) in the domestic market have begun scaling up. Prices have now touched Rs. 355 a kilogram, the highest ever.

The Union government increased the minimum import price of arecanut from Rs. 110 a kg to Rs. 162 a kg on June 3, 2015. It appears to have had an impact on the domestic arecanut market.

### Old stocks

The prices of old stocks of arecanut (called chol) have increased by 8 per cent from Rs. 330 a kg to Rs. 355 a kg and prices of new stocks have shot up by 10 per cent from Rs. 250 a kg to Rs. 275 a kg during the period.

Ramesh Kaintaje, a farmer and a member of G.V. Joshi Committee, which revised the production cost of arecanut for the government, said that some private traders were purchasing them by paying Rs. 5 more per kg on Tuesday. He said that in the past three months till the end of June first week, arecanut prices have consolidated at Rs. 250 a kg (for new stocks) and Rs. 330 a kg (for old stocks).

Mr. Kaintaje said that the prevalent prices of old stocks of arecanut is an all-time high. The maximum price old stocks fetched was Rs. 320 a kg in June 2014.

A Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative Ltd. (CAMPCO) official said that the prices of new stocks had touched Rs. 300 a kg in June 2014.

Konkodi Padmanabha, president, CAMPCO, told *The Hindu* that crop loss during the 2013 rainy season due to wide spread kole roga (fruit rot disease) has also contributed to the rise in prices.

### **Fruit rot disease**

It was because farmers had lost about 50 per cent of their crops to the disease. As a result, old stocks were not arriving in the market, though there was demand from Gujarat for the chali variety, particularly old stocks.

Mr. Padmanabha said that as there was a dearth of old stocks and demand for new stocks (harvested between this January and April) is likely to go up pushing the prices further up.



### **Multiple events to mark Olympic Day**

With state agriculture minister Om Prakash Dhankar and Panchkula MLA Gian Chand Gupta attending an event hosted by Haryana Olympic Association (HOA) — led by Bhiwani MP Dhrambir Singh — to mark International Olympic Day, more leaders of the ruling saffron party are being roped in to the sports body.

Meanwhile, the HOA faction led by INLD leader Ashok Arora did not organize any event following court orders. Dhankar chaired the programme and inaugurated a boxing tournament at Tau Devi Lal Stadium in Panchkula. He was accompanied by Gupta, who was special guest of honour at the function.

In another event organized in Kurukshetra by the Olympic Association, Haryana — third sports body in the state backed by the BJP — as many as five BJP MLAs attended the function. Those who attended the programme included Badhkhal MLA Seema Trikha, Ladwa MLA Pawan Saini, Naraingarh MLA Naib Saini and Guhla Cheeka MLA Kulwant Bazigarh.

Joint secretary of the Dharambir-led HOA faction, Sajjan Kumar, said their group had organized the event officially and confirmed that Dhankar and Gupta had joined two units of its affiliated state sports associations. "Since ours is a body authorized to organize programmes officially, the agriculture minister and MLA attended the same. They are also part of our sports activities," he clarified.

Olympic Association, Haryana president Shyam Singh Rana chaired the programme at Kurukshetra as state assembly speaker Kanwar Pal Gujjar failed to make it to the venue. Rana avoided commenting over the HOA function held in Panchkula.

"Our organization is registered and has been created for the welfare of sportspersons. As far as the faction headed by Dharambir is concerned, it is under dispute. We have a clear title, hence we organized the programme in Kurukshetra," Rana said.

### **To keep ryots happy, AP to develop layouts by Aug 2016**

To prevent further protests by farmers in the capital region, the AP government wants to commence work on the layouts at the earliest and ensure that all of them are developed by August 2016.

"The only way to prevent protests by farmers is to ensure that they get the benefits of land pooling as quickly as possible. Hence, the decision to develop the layouts within one year," municipal administration minister P Narayana told TOI.

Sources said that the decision to hasten the layout development was taken after several land owners expressed apprehensions over getting the land pooling certificates in the near future as the state had not fixed any timeline for the same. The land pooling certificates, which will clearly stipulate how much land the farmer has given to the state and how much developed plots

he will be entitled to in return, will act as a security and put at rest any uncertainty on the part of the farmer, the state government feels.

By August this year, when the three master plans for the capital are expected to be notified, the harvesting and rainy season will also come to an end. The government plans to begin work on the layouts immediately and start work on infrastructure, including road laying, by October 2015.

In the meantime, the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) wants to complete the entire process of land pooling agreements with all the owners who have parted with their land. The entire process involves obtaining the consent, agreements to be signed in various forms, and finally, handing over of the land pooling certificates. Till now, only the first process, of obtaining the consent forms, has been completed. The second step, of getting the agreements signed on various forms, is half-way through.

So far, the CRDA has secured the consent for 31,000 acres out of the targeted 33,000 acres of private land. The state is yet to acquire 1,300 acres due to opposition from farmers of the three riverside villages of Undavalli, Penumaka and Tadepalle.

According to sources, by this month-end, notification for acquiring this land under the Land Acquisition Act will be issued. This apart, CRDA officials are currently engaged in resolving boundary disputes and property issues between farmers who have parted with their land.

"Our immediate aim is to start the process of developing the layouts in the next two months, even before the laying of the foundation stone on Vijaya Dasami this year," an official said. The government will ensure that farmers get developed plots in the same village where their land was, he added.

The layouts are being planned in a manner to accommodate 20 to 24 economic clusters in the capital region. According to the master plan developed by Singapore, the existing land pooling villages will each get one economic cluster that would include IT, industry, education and other commercial facilities, which would increase the monetary value of the developed plots of farmers.

If all goes well, the state wants to have the administrative complex in place by 2018 and complete the seed capital building by 2019. Accordingly, the



capital city development management company (CCDMC) floated to undertake construction activity in the capital city, recently invited applications for consultants to build the administrative complex along the river side.

### **Amid good monsoon run, El Nino gains strength**



*Monsoon's countrywide rain tally this season grew to 23% above normal on Tuesday.*

NEW DELHI: Even as monsoon's great run continued and the season's countrywide rain tally grew to 23% above normal on Tuesday, US and Australian agencies reported a further strengthening of El Nino, the weather condition that is predicted to hit monsoon's performance in the coming months.

Both updates, one from Columbia University and the other from Australia's weather bureau, said El Nino was likely to grow stronger in the coming months.

"There is now a 99% chance of El Nino for the June-August season," said the update from Columbia's International Research Institute for Climate and Society.

The Australian forecast was similar. It added that conditions in the Indian Ocean were expected to remain neutral in the coming months. A positive phase is said to favour the southwest monsoon.

## **Farm varsity gears up to meet demand-driven requirement**

Will bring back some traditional varieties, says TNAU Vice-Chancellor



The farm varsity here is trying to bring back some of the traditional varieties that have stood the test of time, albeit with some technology intervention, TNAU Vice-Chancellor K Ramasamy said.

In a brief chat with *BusinessLine*, he said, “the focus of the varietal releases in recent years has been more towards short duration crops with high yield levels. While this seemed good, it did not bring about the desired impact. Farmers by and large stuck to familiar varieties rather than try new ones. We are, therefore, preparing ourselves to understand the farmers’ requirement. The gene bank is resource rich,” he added.

He further said that the issue at present “is not seed multiplication, but the need for a climate resilient, sustainable cropping system with innovative

technology,” adding “Paiyur 1 (a fine grain variety) is almost a decade old; it was developed in Krishnagiri. This variety is today in huge demand.” To address this demand-driven requirement, the varsity is gearing up to work with farmers, attempt multi-location trails if the farmer is ready, take a participatory approach and buy back the seed.

Reverting to technological interventions, he said, “by synchronising the crop maturity, one time harvesting is now possible in crops such as green and red gram. We are now working to synchronise maturity for black gram and small millets.”

### **Industry raises alarm over falling rubber output**

Raising concerns over the fall in rubber production for the third consecutive year, the tyre and rubber industries have sought urgent government intervention to stem the slide.

Quoting data released by the Rubber Board, the rubber consuming industries pointed out that there was a significant decline in production of 11 per cent in the first two months of the current fiscal. The fall in production comes on the heels of a 16 per cent drop in production in FY14 and 15 per cent drop in FY15.

This has emerged as a major concern for rubber consuming industries.

With auto sector coming out of a long recession, the demand for natural rubber is expected to go up during the current fiscal, Rajiv Budhraj, Director-General, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association, said. The tyre industry has put in large investments to meet the pick up in auto demand but raw material concerns are likely to play a spoilsport in the Make-in-India story, he added.

According to the consuming industries, rubber consumption increased by 4 per cent in FY15 and has held steady during the current fiscal. As a result, the domestic production-consumption gap is widening. In the previous fiscal, the gap was more than 3.6 lakh tonnes. This is likely to increase further in the current fiscal.

“Uncertainty in domestic rubber availability is giving the jitters to rubber MSMEs who do not have the wherewithal to have large inventories,” said Mohinder Gupta, President, All India Rubber Industries Association.

## **Slack upcountry buying grounds turmeric**

Spot turmeric prices declined at Erode markets on slack upcountry orders. “The price was down Rs. 200 a quintal in the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association Sales yard. But a few bags in the Regulated Market Committee fetched increased price and buyers procured 50 per cent stocks to fulfil local orders,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said the arrival was stable with 3,500 bags of which 1,700 were sold. Only medium variety was sold. Traders are expecting fresh upcountry demand only in August, so they are very cautious in buying the stock.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety turmeric was sold at Rs. 4,665-7,209 a quintal; the root variety Rs. 4,523-6,928. Of the arrival of 1,900 bags, 570 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger turmeric fetched Rs. 6,169-7,366 and the root variety Rs. 6,036-6,939. Of the arrival of 401 bags, 359 were traded.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger turmeric traded at Rs. 6,161-7,209 and the root variety Rs. 5,895-6,969. Of the 1,297 bags on sale, 1,273 were sold.

## **India in deals to import 5 lakh tonnes of wheat**



Indian flour millers and global trading companies have sewn up deals to import 500,000 tonnes of premium Australian wheat since March, trade sources said, the biggest such purchases in more than a decade despite surplus stocks at home.

Concerns that untimely rains in February and March would cut wheat output, especially of high-protein varieties used to make pizzas and pasta, first drove millers in India's southern ports to place the orders.

The traders and millers could import a further 500,000 tonnes from France and Russia, where harvests are around the corner. The deals could push up benchmark prices that have already jumped on recent concerns about crop quality in the United States.

Almost half of the quantity contracted so far – bought at \$255-275 a tonne – has reached India and the rest is scheduled for July delivery, said sources. At about \$185-190 a tonne on a free-on-board basis, French and Russian wheat is attractive for India, another source said. High-protein wheat in India costs more than \$300 a tonne.

#### **New records at Coonoor tea sale**



New price and volume records were created at Sale No: 25 of Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions when 85 per cent of the 18.74 lakh kg on offer was sold.

For the first time in calendar 2015, prices crossed ₹300 a kg. Broken Orange Pekoe Fannings of Vigneshwar Speciality topped CTC market when Jay Kay Enterprises bought it for ₹306 a kg.

Broken Pekoe grade of Hittakkal Speciality came close when Sree Sai Corporation procured it for ₹300. Darmona Estate tea, auctioned by Paramount Marketing, topped Dust market when Om Enterprises bought it for ₹201.

Kairbetta topped orthodox market from corporate sector fetching ₹246, followed by Kodanad ₹242, Havukal ₹240 and Chamraj ₹232.

### **Above-normal rain in June brightens Kharif sowing outlook**



A better-than-expected start to the South-West monsoon this year has brightened the outlook for Kharif sowing, with rains advancing further into Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, and covering Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Sowing is gathering pace with most States having received normal to above-normal rain between June 1 and 23 with cumulative rainfall at least 21 per cent above normal as on Tuesday.

Interestingly, officials and experts appear to be showing more faith in private agency Skymet's prediction of a normal monsoon at 102 per cent of the 50-year Long Period Average (LPA) of 89 cm than the State-run Indian Meteorology Department's (IMD) expectation of a deficient monsoon at 88 per cent of the LPA mainly due to the El Nino phenomenon. "Sowing is almost at what it was last year, the numbers are matching," JS Sandhu, Agriculture Commissioner, told *BusinessLine*.

### **Crop cover**

As of last Friday, Kharif acreage touched 91.61 lakh hectares (lh), down 7.4 per cent from 98.88 lh recorded at the same time last year.

Asked about the discrepancy, Sandhu said, "It's the beginning of the season and some States have not supplied information. It's not a worrying factor."

Sowing of kharif crops such as paddy, soyabean and pulses are likely to rise over the next week with the four-month-long monsoon covering most rain-fed areas which account for 60 per cent of total cropland.

### **Soya gains ground**

Central India, the main cultivable area for soyabean, has received around 19 per cent excess rainfall and sowing is gaining ground. "It's on full-swing; almost half the area is covered, and has been completed much earlier than expected. Yield potential improves with timely sowing but alternate periods of rain and sunshine over the next three months will be crucial," said Davish Jain, Chairman, Soyabean Processors Association of India.

### **Cash crops**

An Edelweiss Agri Research report released on Monday expects paddy output to fall irrespective of a normal or deficient rainfall. It forecast output of soyabean sesame and urad dal will rise 2.4 per cent, 6.4 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively, if IMD's prediction is correct.

Cotton production will match last year's output of 38.5 million bales (of 170 kg each) and area under sugarcane could rise in the same scenario.

### **Farm varsity highlights new mechanised tools**

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), having succeeded in mechanising inter-cultural operations in cotton, is all set to try it in pulses as well.

M Gunasekaran, Professor, Plant Breeding and Genetics, TNAU pointed out that mechanisation of field operations was becoming inevitable due to shortage of farm hands.

Highlighting the striking features of the newly developed farm implements, the professor said they were cost-effective, and time-saving. "The tools can be manufactured in India and it will not cost more than ₹25,000-₹30,000. Further, each of the tools can be adjusted and fitted to requirement."

The important component is the main frame he said. "The shoe attachment can be fitted on to the main frame for line marking; an attachment with tynes is used for forming ridges and furrows and row spacing – adjusted as per requirement. The implement includes different sizes of blades for different row spacing and these blades can be attached between the tynes," he explained.

Apart from removing weeds, these blades help level the soil and retain the water holding capacity of the soil.

Field operation can be repeated 2-3 times once every fortnight. Further, in cotton, key operations such as top dressing and earthing can be done by fixing an adjustable ridger, he said and pointed out that an area of about two acres could be covered in 60 minutes.

That is not all. The farmer can use the attachments for inter-crop cultivation by fixing it on to a tractor. The implement is now being used by cotton farmers in a big way in this region.



## Higher arrivals pound pulses

Sluggish demand continued in pulses and pulse seeds with arrivals outstripping demand. Tur (Maharashtra) declined to ₹7,100 (down ₹200 from last week), while tur (Madhya Pradesh) ruled at ₹6,000-6,100 a quintal.

Tur dal (full) was being quoted at ₹9,600-10,100 (9,800-10,200 last week), tur dal (sawa no.) ruled at ₹9,100-9,300 (9,500-9,600), while tur marka was quoted at ₹10,200-500 (10,300-600).

Slack buying and rise in arrival of domestic pulse seeds also dragged moong and its dal with moong (bold) at ₹6,500-6,800 (down ₹200 from last week), while moong (medium) ruled stable at ₹6,000-6,200. Moong dal (medium) fetched ₹7,900-8,000, moong dal (bold) ₹8,300-8,400, while moong mongar ruled at ₹8,600-9,100 (down ₹200 from last week).

Urad (bold) went for ₹7,800-8,000 (down ₹200 from last week), while urad (medium) ruled at ₹7,300-7,500 (down ₹200 from last week). Urad dal (medium) traded at ₹8,700-9,200, urad dal (bold) at ₹9,300-9,600, while urad mongar declined to ₹10,800-11,100 a quintal respectively.