

24.03.2015

THE HINDU

‘Debt relief will benefit 33 lakh ryots’

State government will spend Rs.23,000 crore in the next four years to implement debt redemption scheme benefiting 33 lakh farmers in the State, said Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu here on Monday.

“This is the highest ever amount spent by any State in the country under debt relief. Despite financial constraints, the Telugu Desam government implemented the scheme to free farmers from debt burden of up to Rs.1.5 lakh each. I took it up as a challenge and delivered it against all odds and consistent misleading campaign by the Opposition party,” Mr. Naidu said in the Assembly here on Monday.

Giving a reply to the discussion on Debt Redemption scheme to farmers under Rule 344 in the Assembly, Mr. Naidu said of a total of 83 lakh accounts of farmers registered by the banks, 51.45 lakh accounts were found eligible for debt relief under phase I and II.

The scheme as per the guidelines benefited 98 per cent of farmers in the State and so far Rs.4,664 crore was released under the first phase and another Rs.2,176 crore was being released in the second phase during the current financial year.

The list of beneficiaries would be displayed in the notice boards at every village along with their Aadhar, ration card or voter card ID details.

Farmers with any complaints could bring their grievances to the grievance redressal cell for resolution within three months.

The government provided debt relief at one go if the loan amount was below Rs.50,000 freeing 22 lakh farmers from the debt burden.

The Chief Minister urged the farmers to renew their outstanding loan accounts to bring down their interest burden to four per cent. It would

benefit them as they could also earn six per cent additional interest from the bonds issued by the government.

Mr. Naidu said he decided to implement debt relief after witnessing the heart rending plight of farmers during his padayatra across 16 districts before elections. Caught in the debt trap and with no remunerative prices, crop insurance, input subsidy, farmers were resorting to suicides while youth were abandoning farming. “ I resolved then to bring youth back to agriculture by making it profitable and launched primary mission,” he said.

Of Rs.23,000 crore debt relief, Rs.2,000 crore would be for horticulture farmers who borrowed upto Rs.10,000 per acre with a ceiling of five acres. Another Rs.9,000 crore would be released soon for DWCRA women to waive loans upto Rs.10,000.

Water Day celebrated

Water technology experts in the city got together to discuss ways to conserve and judiciously use water at the World Water Day celebrations organised by the Karunya University here on Friday.

According to a release, the event that saw 30 students from 25 different institutions present papers on the topic and experts B.J. Pandian, Director, Water Technology Centre, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, P.A. Azeez, Director, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, D. Tensing, Director, Civil, Karunya University, and E.J. James, Distinguished Professor, Karunya University, exchange ideas on water conservation.

The university honoured R.K. Sivanappan, the water technology expert who established the Water Technology Centre at the TNAU. Students presented dance shows highlighting the importance of water conservation.

‘Sell black gram, green gram immediately after harvest’

The Agro Market Intelligence and Business Promotion Centre (AMI&BPC) of the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri

Business has advised farmers to sell black gram and green gram upon harvest.

In a price advisory to farmers, the AMI and BPC said the price of black gram could increase slightly by up to Rs. 3 a kg and there was no chance for increase in the price for green gram in June and July.

The advisory was based on an analysis of the prices of black gram and green gram at the Villupuram regulated market. The analysis was conducted by the back office of AMI and BPC at the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies (CARDS) in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

As per the analysis the price of black gram is expected to hover in the range of Rs. 57 to Rs. 59 a kg and green gram would be in the range between Rs. 64 and Rs. 65 a kg between March and May.

At present, the price of black gram was Rs. 54 a kg and green gram was ruling at Rs. 64 a kg at the Villupuram regulated market. Now, harvesting season has commenced for green gram and black gram, especially in the rice fallows areas.

In Tamil Nadu, black gram was mainly cultivated in Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Villupuram, Thanjavur, and Tiruvarur districts. Green gram was grown in Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Thiruvallur, Thoothukudi, and Salem districts.

As per the fourth advance estimate of the Union Ministry of Agriculture, pulses production in India stood at 19.78 million tonnes in 2013-14. Pulses production was expected to touch 19.50 million tonnes in 2014-15. Black gram and green gram accounted for 7.85 and 7.76 per cent in the pulses production of the country in 2013-14, the advisory said.

Plan to increase green cover

The Forest Department has planned to increase the green cover in the district by planting 2.09 lakh saplings under the massive sapling planting programme in the district during 2015-16, said M. Kumar, Forest Range Officer, here.

Presiding over the World Forest Day observance here on Saturday, he said there has been an overwhelming response to the programme and a total of 2.06 saplings had been planted with the help of students and volunteers across the district.

Based on the success, it has been planned to plant 2.09 lakh saplings during the next financial year.

Similar was the success of the Tamil Nadu Bio-diversity Conservation and Greening Project under which saplings are being planted in agricultural farms and private lands. Last year, 1.22 lakh saplings had been planted in the district and it has been planned to plant 1.40 lakh saplings.

He said farmers preferred varieties like teak, red sandal and helianthus.

He said that the department had initiated steps for raising the saplings at its farms in Pudukottai, Tirumayam, Aranthangi, Keeranur and Ponnamaravathy.

It would be distributed to the public and farmers in course of time in a phased manner.

N. Chelladurai, Principal of District Institute of Education and Training, spoke on the importance of raising the green cover. S. Viswanathan, former Head, Department of History, H.H. The Rajah's College, Rangarajan, coordinator of Green Corps, spoke on the role of students in creating awareness among the masses about bio-conservation and its significance.

Earlier, Mr. Chelladurai planted a few saplings on the premises of DIET. A cultural programme was organised as a part of observance.

Mountaineer Purna receives Ruby Healthcare award



Standing out from among a group of achievers recognised for their contribution in the field of medicine was 14-year-old Malavath Purna from Nizamabad district. The tenth class student who became the youngest girl to scale Mount Everest when she reached the summit on May 25, 2014, was awarded the Ruby Jubilee Healthcare award in Mumbai on Monday.

The award, instituted by Sri Shanmukhananda Medical Centre, a service arm of Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha, was given away by former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, along with Arundhati Bhattacharya, Chairman, State Bank of India, in an event organised to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the medical centre.

Born to parents who are agricultural labourers hailing from the remote Pakala village of Sirkonda mandal in Nizamabad district, Malavath was handpicked from among 108 climbers by the Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Residential Schools, a government organisation which provides free education to underprivileged groups in society.

Her achievement is a result of the organisation's challenge to send tribal children on this expedition.

Malavath who is giving her tenth class exams, could not make it to the event and hence her father Devidas Purna received the award on her behalf. "I am feeling very happy. My daughter struggled hard to achieve it," said her elated father.

The Ruby award carries a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh, besides a citation and a lamp.

A few lessons out of syllabus



Students from the Vellanikkara Forestry College of the Kerala Agricultural University were in action on Monday for emergency harvest of paddy from an eight-acre paddy field to save the crop.

For the past one week, four women farmers, who raised paddy on eight acres of leased land at Nadathra panchayat, were frantically searching for support to save their crop raised out of a joint liability group loan.

Their crop was to be harvested next week. But the crop got submerged and machine harvesting became impossible and manual harvesting was the only way out.

However, due to the scarcity of manual labour and the expenses involved, it was a tall order.

At this juncture, the women approached the head of the Centre for Gender Studies in Agriculture as the KAU centre was involved in field studies of women farmers' needs and problems.

NSS students and the Bhoomithra Sena of the forestry college launched a joint operation to save the crop.

Geethakutty and A. Prema of the Centre for Gender Studies in Agriculture, Binoo, Assistant Professor, and A.V. Santhosh Kumar,

Associate Professor at the College of Forestry, were in the field to lead the team of 40 students.

‘GM crops hold potential to herald second green revolution’

Taking a view contrary to that of environmentalists on genetically modified crops, an agricultural scientist said GM crops had the potential to herald a second green revolution in the country.

At a workshop on ‘Micro-organisms and human welfare’ conducted by the JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science in the city on Monday, agricultural scientist M. Mahadevappa, Director (Rural Development), JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysuru, said crops such as Bt. Cotton had higher yield and farmers should be encouraged to take them up in a big way.

He said India was able to move from fifth to second highest cotton-producing country in the world, due to Bt. Cotton.

“From an importer, India has become an exporter of cotton,” he added. S.R. Niranjana, Professor, Department of Biotechnology, University of Mysore, delivered the keynote address.

Fertilizer sale without permission banned

Special inspection teams of Department of Agriculture that conducted surprise checks in fertilizer shops in the district during the ‘pisanam’ paddy season have banned the sale of Rs. 16.54-lakh-worth, 206.72 tonnes of fertilizers as the chemical nutrients were being sold without proper permission.

According to Joint Director of Agriculture C. Chandrasekaran, the special teams conducted surprise checks in 207 retail outlets selling fertilizers and pesticides in the district. When 76 shops were found to be selling fertilizers without proper permission, the officials banned the sale of 206.72 tonnes of fertilizers, worth Rs.16.54 lakh.

“During last week, the special teams conducted surprise checks in retail outlets in Kalakkad and Valliyoor areas and banned the sale of 12.60

tonnes of fertilizers as they had not obtained permission for the sale,” Mr. Chandrasekaran said.

He said that the special teams and the assistant directors concerned would continue the surprise checks.

Sea rise forces thousands out of Sunderbans



A rapid rise in sea level and salinity in the Sunderbans has triggered migration of inhabitants from several blocks in the forest to other parts of the country.

“Human habitation in several blocks of the Sunderbans has witnessed migration in the last few years to other parts of the country on account of the rise in sea level and salinity in water,” a senior consultant with the World Bank, Sanjay Gupta, told *PTI*. The migration of people from Sunderbans - the world’s largest mangrove forest - has in turn brought about a change in the socio-economic condition of the area.

According to a World Bank report, two kinds of migration are taking place: seasonal and permanent. “It is true migration is taking place in several parts of the Sunderbans and if this is not checked by using the resources for capacity building of the inhabitants, it could lead to massive migration in the coming years,” WWF consultant on Sunderbans Ratul Saha told *PTI*.

Nearly 30 per cent of households have a family member who migrates in search of work, according to the World Bank report. According to Mr. Saha, the rising sea level and increasing salinity have deprived the people

living in core Sunderbans areas of their main sources of livelihood: agriculture and fishing.

“Due to rise in the sea level, large parcels of agricultural land have gone under water and the rising level of salinity has brought down the quantity of fishes,” Mr. Saha said. More than 7,000 people have already been displaced in the last 30 years due to climate change and 70,000 more people are at a high risk of displacement, Mr. Saha said citing a WWF report.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Aila in 2009, Sonargoan village – one of the worst hit - has faced severe migration with most of the families having migrated to Kolkata. “After Aila, we are yet to get back to the mainstream. Our fields are not yet fit for cultivation. The yield of fish has come down too. So in order to survive most of the male members have either migrated alone to other parts of the country or with his entire family,” said Satinath, a 50-year-old resident of Sonargaon.

Few buyers for organic vegetables



A large acreage under certified organic vegetable crops at Perumkulam, near Kottarakara, is ready for harvest. But there are few buyers since the prices are higher than the vegetables available in the local market, which have been sourced from Tamil Nadu.

Talking to *The Hindu*, C. Narendranath, farmer, said though there was a clamour for organically grown vegetables and the government had declared that the State would be converted into an organic food-

producing State within two years, government support for such initiatives was yet to take off.

No insecticides even

“So far, there has been no instance of a Krishi Bhavan in the State giving any encouragement for organic farming,” he said..

Mr. Narendranath does not even spray insecticides on the crops leave alone chemical fertilizers.

The fertility of his farm completely depends on water and organic manure. Hence, the crops may not look as rich as vegetable crops in other farms.

But they are genuinely organic; he says. He alleged that fake organic farm products on supermarket shelves were being sold at double the price. But Mr. Narendranath’s farm is open for everyone to see and he spends an amount each year to get it organically certified. Vegetable traders who visit his farm want the produce at the rates they pay in Tamil Nadu. The only encouragement for Mr. Narendranath is that he has a handful of regular customers from various parts of the district. They travel long distances to purchase vegetables from his farm for their household use. At times, he informs his clients in advance and transports the vegetables in an autorickshaw to their location. Even his repeated pleas through formal petitions for a bunk in Kollam city are not being considered, he said.

Mr. Nardendranath said there should be concerted efforts on the part of the government towards promoting organic farming,

Workshop on birdwatching

The Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) at Peechi in Thrissur will conduct a workshop on birdwatching for women. A KFRI press release said that experts in the field will lead the two-day workshop for women interested in bird watching and nature conservation. Those willing to participate in the workshop should send their detailed bio-data along with a page-length write-up on “Bird watching for nature conservation” to the Registrar, KFRI, Peechi - 680 653. Details on the programme will be

available on contacting KFRI scientist K.V. Muhammad Kunhi on his phone 9447126861 or via email kunhikvm@gmail.com



Price woes for sugar units

Sugar industry is heading towards a major crisis which if not looked into might lead to shutting down of many factories.

Unrest among sugarcane farmers is likely to erupt as an amount of Rs 17,000 crore payable to them by the factories is still due in 2014-15. The basic reason behind this is the price of the sugarcane getting higher than sugar which makes the operations unviable.

"How do we survive if the cost of production of sugar is higher than the sale price?" asked O P Dhanuka, chairman and managing director, Riga Sugar Company. with other five core sugar cane growers/farmers. To save the sugar industry, Dhanuka further appealed to the Centre for the cane prices to be directly linked to sugar prices for 2015-16 and for fair prices as the rates have been higher all around the world than India.

"An enhancement of 50% on the cost of production would be done and then paid to the sugarcane farmers," said Najendra Prasad Singh, general secretary, Bihar, re-quoting the Prime Minister, when he was present at Bihar's Hari Nagar to which no response has been given as of now.

The sugar mills in the country have produced 221.8 lakh tonne of sugar during the current season up to March 15, 2015 which is 28 lakh tonne higher than the production up to the corresponding period in the last season of 193.8 lakh tonne.

Shankar singh, president, district progressive farmer union, said putting a ban on importing sugar as there is an advance production in the country and demands to make the sugar price be at Rs 4,000 per bag.

BusinessLine

CapAleph partners Meeran Family Trust to promote start-ups in agri-biz

CapAleph Indian Millennium SME Fund has partnered with Meeran Family Trust, initiated by Eastern Condiments, to support entrepreneurship in food and agriculture space.

The fund is a ₹125 crore domestic private equity fund targeting investments into early stage food and agriculture businesses in India and other relevant markets.

It is advised by CapAleph Advisors, which is run by George Thomas, who has been involved with the food and agriculture space. He spent his professional life at Brooke Bond India, Hindustan Lever Limited etc.

The SME fund is targeting a first close by June with a corpus of between ₹50-75 crore and a final close by December 2015. It will make investment commitments of up to ₹10-15 crore in companies in the food and agriculture space, where it will seek significant ownership to help build these businesses with deep operational engagement.

It has formal alignment with a few international funds, with a view to jointly investing into larger ticket size investments of up to ₹75 crore. According to Navas Meeran, Chairman of the Eastern Group, the company's engagement with the fund is a testimony to the family's long-standing commitment to support entrepreneurship in the food and agriculture space.

Firoz Meeran, Managing Director, Eastern Condiments said that the trust will also collaborate with CapAleph to set up a dedicated accelerator to incubate and support early stage entrepreneurship in selected entrepreneurial ventures in food and agriculture. A part of the fund will be reserved for investments into young businesses being incubated by this accelerator, he said.

Cardamom rules steady as demand loses flavor

Buying by North Indian traders slows; harvest of the spice crop comes to an end



Cardamom prices have ruled by and large steady last week as supply matched demand at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Arrivals remained almost unchanged and was much below the volume arrived at the same time of the previous season.

The harvesting has almost come to a close and whatever material arrives currently are from the stocks held by the big growers who are making a regulated release, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, told *BusinessLine*.

Major dealers in north Indian markets have slowed down buying and are liquidating stocks held by them on anticipation of a good and early next crop from June, he said. Upcountry buyers were not active but they purchased whatever material came to the market, Ranganathan, a dealer in Bodinayakannur said. According to him, only the medium quality cardamom is arriving at present.

Hardly, 25 per cent of the total volume might be of superior quality and much of the rest is of medium variety, he said.

Arrivals last week were at around 395 tonnes against 425 tonnes during the same week of the previous season, trade sources claimed.

The steady market was visible at Monday's two auctions (FN/AN) conducted in Bodinayakannur by Cardamom Planters, Association (CPA) where the individual auction average of each auction remained nearly steady, they said. The individual auction average vacillated between Rs. 730 and Rs. 780 a kg against Rs.740 and Rs. 800 the previous week. Total arrivals during the season up to March 21 stood

were 15,557 tonnes against 17,085 tonnes during the same period last year. Sales were 15,178 tonnes against 16,543 tonnes respectively.

The individual auction average as on March 21 was at around Rs. 775/kg and on the corresponding date last year was at around Rs. 700.

Prices of graded varieties (Rs. /kg): 8mm bold green 1,050; 7-8mm 875-900; 6-7mm 775-800; below 6 mm 750-760.

Wineries ferment relief for grape farmers

During the festival season this year, tipplers will have one more reason to celebrate.

About 30 lakh litres of cheap wine will hit the market.

A 750 ml bottle could be sold in the range of Rs. 150-200, almost same as the price of premium beer.

Panic selling

After the recent rain damaged table grape production in the Nashik region of Maharashtra, producers had to resort to distress sale to the wineries.

They are now fermenting the grapes for cheap table and port wines.

Chairman of Indian Grape Processing Board, Jagadish Holkar, told *BusinessLine* that since table grapes are cultivated using the canopy technique, the crop suffered extensive damage.

Prone to fungus attack

“Farmers panicked as they feared that cracked berries could lead to fungus attack. Local wineries including Sula came to their rescue and as a result about 5,000 tonnes of table grapes have been crushed, which will help produce 30 lakh litres of cheap wine,” he said.

Table grape varieties are usually sold as fruits or dried as raisins. Good quality wine is not made from table grapes. Only port or table wine is made from these grapes.

A grape farmer from Gajarwadi village near Nashik, Valmik Chorge, said that on February 28 there was a heavy downpour in the region which affected the three acre table grape plantation in his farm.

"I had only two alternatives for my crop, either to sell the produce for Rs. 9/kg for making of raisins or throw it because of the imminent fungus attack. But then a winery approached us and I managed to sell my crop for Rs. 17, which has helped me recover my cost," Chorge said.

Relief from wineries

Rajeev Samant, Founder and CEO of Sula Wines, said that usually his winery procures a certain amount of grapes for table wine but due to unseasonal rain, table grapes were available in large quantity.

Therefore, the winery decided to procure about 2,000 tonnes of grapes, which helped the distressed farmers. As Sula ran out of space, it had to take storage capacity on hire from other wineries for fermenting the wine.

Business Standard

Surinder Sud: In search of the right potato

The production of good quality potato seeds has been posing many problems. However, the aeroponics technique of growing plants in the air could prove to be a game changer

The novel aeroponics technique of growing plants in the air, instead of soil, is going to be used in India to get over the glitches faced in producing disease-free [potato](#) seeds. This technology involves hanging plantlets in the air where they are supplied the necessary nutrients through water mist or water vapour. This system, believed to have been evolved in the early 1940s, has since been refined considerably and put to commercial use in some countries, though only on a limited scale and under special circumstances. The plants propagated under controlled conditions in this manner are usually free of soil and vector-borne diseases.

Since potato is neither an indigenous crop – it was introduced from [Europe](#) – nor ideally suited for cultivation under Indian conditions, the production of its good quality seeds has been posing formidable problems. Till around the 1960s, potato seeds (small, disease-free tubers for planting fresh crop) were either imported or grown in hills. However, the exotic seeds, produced in areas having cold climate and long days, could not perform to their potential in India, where the days are relatively shorter during the potato-growing season. The supply of seeds from the hills, on the other hand, was too meagre to allow any appreciable

extension of area planted under this crop. These constraints made it imperative for the potato scientists to evolve innovative and indigenous methods to produce good quality mini potato tubers in the plains for use as seeds.

The first significant breakthrough in this regard came in the mid-1960s with the development of the “seed plot technique” by the Jalandhar station of the [Central Potato Research Institute](#) (CPRI), Shimla. This technique involved raising seed crop during a period when the population of aphids (carriers of various diseases) was low and taking up regular pest-control measures. Besides, unwanted and diseased plants were uprooted manually to stave off seed-borne infections. This method helped in increasing the [potato seed](#) supply considerably. The other notable technical advances in potato seed production included the development of technology for producing “true potato seeds” – the botanical seed that the potato plant occasionally bears after flowering – and in-vitro production of disease-free plantlets in test tubes through tissue culture.

The latest instance in the unceasing endeavour to improvise seed production systems is the standardisation of indigenous mechanism for producing mini seed tubers through the aeroponics technique. Since such methods developed and commercialised abroad are mostly patent-protected, [CPRI](#) had to evolve its own mechanism for this purpose. Its efforts have, of course, been supported by the [Lima](#) (Peru)-based [International Potato Centre](#) (*Centro Internacional de La Papa*).

According to CPRI scientists, the new system yields several times more seed tubers than most of the available techniques. It also requires 90 per cent less water and 50 per cent less nutrients compared to traditional seed production methods. Being efficient and cost-effective, this technology is expected to help meet the requirement of potato seeds to meet the growing consumption demand.

A prototype of the aeroponics unit devised at CPRI consists of an electric unit, two dark growth chambers, a nutrient solution chamber, a high pressure pump and spray nozzles. The potato plantlets are hung in the growth chambers where the nutrient-enriched water is sprayed on them in the form of a fine mist at fixed intervals. The root system starts developing in about a week and harvesting of seed tubers can begin from about 60 to 65 days. On an average, about 30 to 35 mini tubers can be obtained from a single plant in this system, as against just eight to 10 in the case of conventional methods.

To facilitate its rapid spread, CPRI has licensed this technology to five commercial enterprises. Two of these will be engaged in fabricating and installing the equipment, while the other three will produce the seed tubers for sale to potato growers. Several other entrepreneurs are also said to be in touch with CPRI to seek licences for commercialising this technology.