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# THE HINDU

## **NITI Aayog finalises Model Act for farm land lease**

Even as the Bill to amend the land acquisition law remains stuck with a parliamentary committee, the NITI Aayog is all set to propose a Model Act for freeing up of farm land through leasing.

The Act is meant for States that plan to legalise farm land leasing. State governments are expected to improvise it to suit the local socio-political requirements.

“Land ownership will remain secure and will revert to the owner and in case the parcel of land is sold before the tenure of the lease is complete, the rights of the tenants will be secure,” an official source told reporters. No changes will be made in the land records, he said.

Attestation of the lease is proposed to be done at the level of the sarpanch, local bank official or notary. The Model Act proposes that farmers and farmer groups be allowed to lease out land. The definition of ‘farm land’ is proposed to be broadened to include food processing.

The Model Act proposes quicker litigation process in case of disputes, by suggesting recourse through criminal proceedings and special tribunal, the source said.

“It is expected that the dispute settlement will be taken up at the level of the Gram Sabha, Panchayat and Tehsildar.”

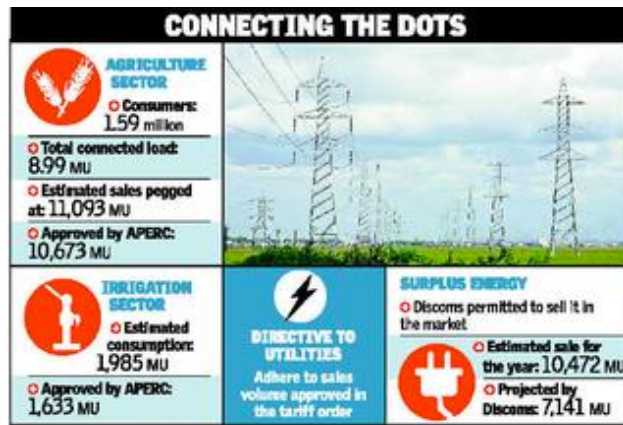
At present, only land owners can avail of crop insurance schemes or loans. Also, disaster relief in case of drought and crop damage is provided only to the owners and not cultivators. The Model Act will enable share croppers to

receive such benefits and relief. “Lessee cultivators could raise crop loans on the basis of expected produce,” the official source said.

The Model Act is being finalised by an expert committee which NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya had set up in September 2015 under former Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) chairman T. Haque.

### ‘Give projection of power used by farm sector’

*Discoms directed to file monthly progress report without fail from next year*



The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) has directed power utilities to complete estimation of sales for agriculture consumers for 12 consecutive months from the next financial year.

Expressing dissatisfaction that the licensees — the Eastern and Southern Power distribution companies — could not complete the estimation of consumption of the agriculture sector for the whole year during 2015-16, the commission wanted the utilities to file monthly progress reports in this direction without fail from next year.

The APERC has pruned the sales estimates submitted by the distribution companies for 2016-17 by 742 million units — from 50,733 MU to 49,991 MU — stating that this aspect warranted caution in estimation and approval

of sales volume that would impinge upon the expenditure and revenues of the Discoms.

It cited the estimated sales for 2015-16 were less than the approved sales in the tariff order wherein the actual sales volume was 44,679 MU as against the estimated 47,387 MU. The variation was because of the modified trend approach for estimation of sales of most of the consumer categories. The trend approach was more appropriate in estimation of sales for general consumer categories, but had limited use in estimation of the exceptional categories like agriculture and lift irrigation.

In respect of the agriculture sector, there were 1.59 million consumers with a total connected load of 8.99 million units and the estimated sale to the sector had been pegged at 11,093 MU by the utilities while the commission approved 10,673 MU, less 419 MU. In respect of irrigation sector, the utilities estimated consumption at 1,985 MU and the APERC had approved 1,633 MU, marking 352 MU decline.

Almost all these consumers were not metered individually and this would prohibit computation of consumption by aggregation for these consumers for any time period. Though the commission, in its earlier tariff orders, asked the utilities to measure agriculture consumption based on sample DTR methods as suggested by the Indian Statistical Institute, no progress had been achieved in this direction.

The commission wanted the utilities to adhere to the sales volume approved in the tariff order category wise as sales volume exceeding the approved volume could put the utilities' finances in jeopardy as tariff would be less than the cost of service and cross/external subsidies were embedded into the tariff only up to the approved sales volume.

The commission has also decided to allow the licensees to dispatch the available surplus energy and sell it in the market subject to grid constraints, demand and economic benefit to the utilities. The APERC estimated saleable surplus energy for the year at 10,472 MU as against the 7,141 MU projected

by the Discoms and had adopted conservative sale price of Rs. 4.29 a unit against the Rs. 4.90 a unit proposed by the utilities.

The saving in power purchase cost estimated by the commission due to sale of surplus energy was expected to be of the order of Rs. 4,492 crore as against the Rs. 3,502 crore filed by the Discoms.

### **More farmers go in for mechanisation**



The Agriculture Department has been able to convince agriculturists about the need to switchover to mechanised farming to overcome the problem of labour shortage.

Mechanisation will be highly beneficial for cultivation of sugarcane crop, in particular, agriculture department officials say.

Compared to other cash crops, area covered by sugarcane is more and hence farmers need to be trained in use of small-sized mechanised harvesters, said Joint Director of Agriculture, P. Ponkathaperumal.

Last month, a demonstration of sugarcane harvester manufactured by Sakthiman campnay was carried out by the Agriculture Department at a field in Thottiyampalayam in Bhavani block belonging to Ramalingam.

The suitability of the 175 HP motor for small farms was explained to the farmers.

Sakthi Sugars Ltd., Appakudal, was also involved in the exercise to orient 300 farmers on the advantages of mechanised harvesting.

The sugarcane harvester, according to Chezhiyan, general manager of Sakthi sugars, is a best replacement for manual harvester that involves tedious work.

The district-level action-plan for 2016-17 submitted under the NADP programme envisages providing 50 per cent subsidy for farmers purchasing mechanised equipment.

The farmers could form groups to buy the mechanised harvester, said Assistant Director of Agriculture, Bhavani Block R. Savithri.

The department has been similarly encouraging farmers to derive utility of paddy transplanters for saving time, money and labour.

Farmers have been facing severe shortage of labourers at the time of transplanting and harvesting.

The main reason is migration of workers to urban areas for employment.

Also, a chunk of the available workers prefer to be under the ambit of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme rather than doing farm work in private fields. The Nabard, on its part, has also been encouraging farmers to form clubs for purchase of paddy transplanters, harvesters and weeders at subsidised rates, by arranging for loans.

### **Farmers told to go for alternative crop**

District Collector M. Jagan Mohan on Friday called upon farmers to go for alternative crops to register success in agriculture.

He said through various schemes the government was making efforts to help out farmers get out of difficult times.

Addressing a press conference, the Collector said the government is offering subsidy of 50 per cent on two quintals of turmeric seed of the Salem variety

to farmers, who want to opt for that crop in the coming season. He said about 3,000 farmers would be given the seed on subsidy in this instance.

The Collector said the government had certified the seed for its quality after subjecting it to necessary tests. The certification was meant to protect farmers' interest, he said.

Horticulture scientist Kishan Reddy also spoke.

### **Gujarat declares 527 villages scarcity hit**

The Gujarat government has declared 527 villages in Saurashtra region as partially scarcity hit due to deficient rainfall last year. The villages are located in three districts: Rajkot, Jamnagar and Dwarka.

“In these villages, drinking water will be provided through tankers while subsidised cattle fodder will be made available to the farmers and cattle breeders. The government will also initiate drought relief works,” said senior Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, who is heading a ministerial committee on assessing the drought situation in the State. Sources in the government said in the next review meeting, more villages in other districts are likely to be declared partially scarcity hit.

The last two monsoons were below normal, causing a huge distress on the farm community and also creating drinking water shortage, as major dams and reservoirs are nearly empty.

### **Empty water bodies**

“Except Narmada dam, all other dams and reservoirs, which supply water in the State, have only 30 per cent water storage while in Saurashtra region, most of the dams and water bodies are almost empty,” a senior official said, adding, “the authorities will be dependent on Narmada dam to supply water in Saurashtra and Kutch.”

In several towns and hundreds of villages in Saurashtra comprising almost a dozen districts, drinking water is supplied only once a week.



“Water situation is very bad and going to worsen in next months because the government has not been able to connect far flung areas with Narmada pipeline network,” said Congress legislator Raghavji Patel from Jamnagar (rural) constituency.

### Price of red chilli comes tumbling down



After an initial euphoria, the prices of red chilli have started tumbling at Asia’s largest chilli yard here. The low prices for medium grade chillies have disappointed farmers, who were hoping to make some good sales as the trading season draws to a close.

The price offered for medium grade chilli has slid to about Rs. 9,500 a quintal while the price for higher grades has fallen to Rs.11,000 a quintal for the first time this season.

“I have invested over Rs. 4 lakh on my five-acre farm, but the returns have been extremely disappointing. Owing to successive droughts in 2014 and 2015, the yield has fallen by 40 per cent,” said Venkaiah, a farmer from Pedagarlapadu in Dachepalli mandal.

Officials of the Department of Horticulture, however, attribute the phenomenon to excess arrivals at the chilli yard.

“The dip in prices is due to excess arrivals of chilli. Every day, more than one lakh bags are arriving at the yard, resulting in slackening of demand, but the prices are likely to go up soon as there is demand for quality chilli,” said Deputy Director, Department of Horticulture, Jayachandra Reddy.

This was in stark contrast to the initial euphoria, when the famed red chilli commanded a price in excess of Rs.15,000 a quintal this February.

For chilli farmers in Guntur, it has been a double whammy this year as there was a slump in production owing to unfavourable weather. Farmers in the Palnadu region even tried to salvage the crop by digging borewells, but groundwater levels too dipped to an all-time low.

According to estimates, there could be a shortfall of 25.30 lakh bags this season, which could be a major setback to farmers. Failure of both the southwest and northeast monsoons has wiped out any chances of crop revival.

India is among the leading producers of chilli in the world, along with China, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Andhra Pradesh accounts for more than 65 per cent of chilli output in the country. Of the 11 lakh tonnes produced in the country, 6.7 lakh tonnes comes from Andhra Pradesh alone.

### **‘Nendran’ banana growers hit a jackpot**

*Some farmers have reaped 10 tonnes of banana per acre*

K. Kannaiyan (60), a marginal farmer who has raised “nendran” variety of banana on his 60 cent land holding at Meenatchipuram near Perugamani, heaves a sigh of relief as he has got back the money spent on raising nendran banana, a sought-after variety in Kerala.

With more than half of the bunches yet to be harvested, he is hoping to get a substantial return from his field for the hard work that he had put in for the last 10 months for raising banana.



Kannaiyan is not the only farmer who feels happy about the yield.



Workers carrying nendran banana harvested at a plantation at Meenakshipuram in Tiruchi.— PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Several other farmers in Sirugamani and Perumani have expressed satisfaction over the output.

Interaction with various farmers revealed that several of them had netted 8 or 10 tonnes of banana per acre as against the average of 11 to 12 tonnes.

There were reports that farmers, who maintained the banana field well as per the standard practices, had got the yield of 12 tonnes.

Long spells of rain during the last year was said to be the main reason for good yield.

“The yield is good when compared to last year. I feel happy that I have produced high quality banana,” says Kannaiyan, who has more than 20 years of experience in raising Nendran variety of banana. He said the merchant who bought the banana bunches from his field had exported it to a West Asian country.

Reports said the harvest of nendran banana had gained momentum over the last few weeks in Tiruchi and Karur districts. Harvest had been completed in about 50 per cent of banana fields.

Asked about the rate offered for nendran in Kerala market, another grower said they had been offered between Rs. 26 and Rs. 28 a kg, which was slightly lower than the price of last week. However, it could not be considered as nominal.

*Harvesting of nendran banana is picking up momentum in Tiruchi and Karur districts*

*At present Rs. 26 to Rs. 28 a kg is the price offered for the produce in Kerala market*

### **Foot-and-mouth disease vaccination drive**

With the aim of preventing a possible outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, the Department of Animal Husbandry will on Monday launch a 27-day comprehensive 10th round of vaccination programme for cattle across the taluk.


Senior officials will inaugurate the programme, a release from the Department of Information and Public Relations said here on Friday.

The department has constituted teams comprising veterinary assistant surgeons, livestock inspectors and animal husbandry assistants to administer vaccine to the cattle. All farmers have been requested to make use of the opportunity and get their cattle vaccinated, the release said.

## Poultry hit by heat wave

*Farmers unable to keep the birds cool by using sprinklers as there is an acute shortage of water*

**POULTRY SECTOR IN CRISIS**



There are a total **50 lakh birds**, including **35 lakh layer** and **15 lakh broiler** in Karimnagar. Everyday, the production of eggs is **30 lakh** in the district in normal days. Now, the egg production had come down to **25 lakh per day** due to drought.

A poultry farmer arranging water sprinklers to control temperature inside the coops at Polampally village in Thimmapur mandal of Karimnagar district on Friday. —PHOTO: NAGESH KUMAR

It may further go down due to high mortality rate of birds.

Worst ever drought I have seen in my career with acute shortage of water for cattle and poultry industry. —**S. Ramchander**, Joint Director (Animal Husbandry)

Presently, the bird mortality rate is **10 per cent** and it may reach **50 per cent in May** with the temperature crossing **45 degrees Celsius**. Prices of chicken and eggs would increase further in coming days.

We could protect birds from bird flu, but are unable to save them from heat wave. —**Ramana Reddy**, poultry farmer

Blistering heat wave conditions with temperature soaring above 40 degree Celsius have cast its shadow on the poultry industry with high mortality rate and decline in production of chicken and eggs in Karimnagar district.

Karimnagar district tops in egg production with around 30 lakh eggs per day.

### Mortality rate

But, due to the prevailing heat wave conditions, the egg production has come down by 10 to 20 per cent with high mortality rate of birds and it may further increase in the coming months with further rise in temperature.

### Drought-like conditions

Following drought-like conditions, poultry farmers were unable to keep the birds cool by using sprinklers, drips and foggers as there was acute shortage of water due to depleting groundwater table.

Compared to normal season, the poultry industry requires more water during the summer months.

As a result of the severe shortage of water, more than 50 per cent poultry units were closed in the district.

### **Huge loss**

Ramana Reddy, a poultry farmer of Nusthullapur village in Thimmapur mandal, said that he was struggling hard to keep the birds alive by sprinkling water frequently. Though, the government provides subsidised power to poultry units, they couldn't draw water as the ground water level has depleted, he complained.

He said that mortality rate of birds increased from 5-10 per cent as the intake of food has come down due to the sweltering heat.

“We could protect the birds from the birdflu, but we are unable to save them from the prevailing heat wave,” he said and added that they were incurring losses due to fall in production.

### **Struggle for**

#### **poultry farmers**

Joint Director (Animal Husbandry) S Ramchander said that there was acute shortage of water for the cattle and the poultry units due to drought.

### **No respite**

Poultry farmers were struggling to keep the birds alive due to water scarcity and incurring losses due to high mortality rate and fall in egg production.

He said the mortality rate of birds would increase in the coming days.

*As a result of severe shortage of water, more than 50 per cent poultry units have been closed in Khammam district this summer*

## **We must invest more in research to beat Bt monopoly: ICAR**



Trilochan Mohapatra, Director-General, ICAR

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has said that it's important to break the monopoly in Bt cotton, the only genetically-modified crop in the country, to safeguard the interests of farmers.

The newly-appointed ICAR Director-General Trilochan Mohapatra has said the public systems must increase investments on research to come up with alternatives in case Monsanto quits the country.

Mohapatra took charge of Secretary (Department of Agricultural Research and Education) and Director General, ICAR from S Ayyappan last month.

“India is a huge market for them and I don't think they would withdraw from this important market. But in the event of their leaving the country, we must be prepared with alternatives to take care of the interests of the farmers,” he told *BusinessLine*.

Mohapatra was in the city to take stock of the research activity in the institutes in the city that come under the purview of the ICAR. “It is true that the country has benefited from the Bt cotton technology. We have tasted the success. It helped in increasing country’s cotton exports and productivity,” he said.

“The company (Monsanto) licensed the Bt technology (to Mahyco Monsanto Biotech) and it in turn sub-licensed it to scores of seed firms. Bt cotton hybrid seeds mushroomed. There’re over 1,500 hybrid with Bt embedded in it hit the market ever since the technology was introduced,” he said, explaining how fast the adoption spread in the country.

“But how much do the farmers pay for the seed? The government has a responsibility to take care of the interests of the farmers. Both sides have different views and discussions on,” he said.

He pointed out that this also showed how the country depended on one agency (Monsanto) for the technology, creating a monopoly. “In case if it leaves, it emphasises the need for the public system to invest more on research to take care of the needs of our farmers. It also ensures we are not over dependent on one particular agency (Monsanto),” he said.

“We must see to it that there is no monopolisation of the marketplace. If that happens, we are in trouble or we might be in trouble. The government is getting ready with alternatives. The CICR (Central Institute of Cotton Research) has made some progress in this regard. There’s a need to invest more and a greater effort required. We will live up to the aspiration,” Mohapatra said.

## **Challenges**

On the challenges the agricultural sector is facing, the ICAR Director-General said climate change posed a big challenge. Temperatures and extreme rainfall events have gone up, adversely impacting crops. “Submergence and flooding cause damage to crops like paddy, maize and soya,” he said.



He said the ICAR institutes had been developing varieties that could withstand such extreme weather conditions.

Pulses and oilseeds too were a cause of concern for the country as it spent ₹60-65,000 crore on importing these commodities. “We need to take measures to achieve self-reliance in pulses and oil seeds,” he observed.

### **Met warns of harsh summer for most of country during April to June**



The India Met Department has assessed that there is a high probability (76 per cent) of maximum temperatures in the ‘core heat wave zone’ during April-June to be above normal.

This zone covers Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Telangana and Met subdivisions of Marathwada, Vidarbha, Madhya Maharashtra and coastal Andhra Pradesh.

### **Seasonal forecast**

This in turn suggests high probability of moderate and severe heat wave conditions in the zone during the hot weather season of April to June, the Met said.

The special forecast has been made available as part of the seasonal outlook for summer temperatures over the country being initiated by it.

The Met will also provide extended range forecasts of (five-day averaged forecasts for next 15 days) heat wave conditions over the country.

They will consist of probability of occurrence of hot days, heat waves and severe heat waves for the next 15 days updated every fifth day from April 1.

### **El Nino influence**

According to the forecast for the hot weather season of April-June, the Met said warmer than normal temperatures are expected to prevail in all meteorological subdivisions.

Average temperatures over North-West India are expected to be above normal by more than 1 deg Celsius.

Above normal heat wave conditions are very likely over Central and North-West India.

In the past, El Nino events over the Pacific were known to cause severe heat wave conditions over the country. Strong El Nino conditions that started in 2015 are still continuing.

It has been observed that the hot weather seasons following El Nino years have seen above normal temperatures, including moderate to severe heat wave conditions, prevail in most parts of India.

For instance, years 1973, 1995, 1998, 2003 and 2010 followed by El Nino years of 1972, 1994, 1997, 2002 and 2009.

### **Heat wave conditions**

During 2015, prolonged severe heat wave conditions prevailed over Andhra Pradesh and parts of Telangana which claimed more than 2,500 lives.

Recent research analysis suggests that frequency and duration of heat waves over the country are showing an increasing trend.

Abnormally above normal temperatures can have devastating effects on human health, water resources and power generation and outage.

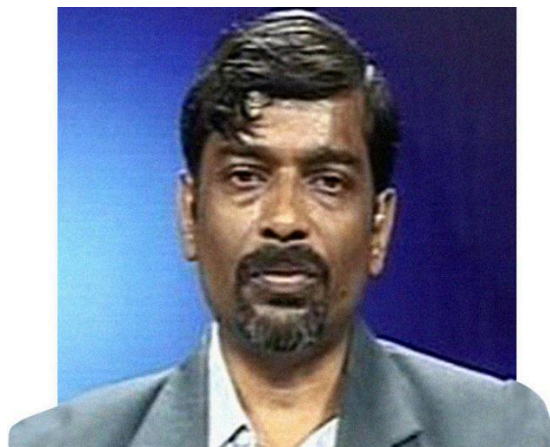
There is a marked relationship between human mortality and thermal stress.

The Met said that year 2015 was the third warmest for the country since 1901.

Significantly above normal temperatures prevailed during the last two months (January and February).

These temperatures were higher by 1.53 deg Celsius and 2 deg Celsius respectively above the 1961-90 normal.

### **Why the Met department has made its first-ever summer forecast**



DS PAI, Director, IMD

IMD has developed a dynamic system that not only forecasts rainfall but also temperatures: Pai

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued its first ever summer forecast which predicts a slightly higher temperature during April-June across the country in 2016 than what it was in 2015. Speaking to Bloomberg TV India, IMD Director DS Pai said the dynamic forecasting

system will not just help in forecasting monsoon but also summer and winter temperatures.

**What has prompted the first ever summer temperature forecast from IMD?**

So far, we have been concentrating more on the rainfall forecast — the north-east monsoon. Now our concentration is shifting to temperature along with rainfall. In recent years, we have been witnessing increasing temperature in addition to rainfall. We know that 2015 was the warmest globally and Indian temperatures were also the warmest in the record. So there was a requirement for this type of forecast. We have developed a dynamic forecasting system, which has some useful skill for forecasting not just rainfall but temperature also.

**What is the IMD forecast this time year? Is it going to be a hotter year?**

The annual temperature is going to be close to that of 2015. But as far as the summer is concerned, generally we see that with the declining impact pace of the El Nino, the temperature rises in north-west and central India. So, we expect a warm summer this year.

**Is the heat going to be concentrated in some parts of the country?**

Generally, in summer you get maximum temperature in north-west and central India. However, the forecast says all sub-regions will have above normal temperature. However, in the core heat wave region of north-west and central India, the temperature will be around 1 degree above the average in the three months this summer.

**What is the summer period that we are considering?**

The summer forecast that we have given extends from April to June.

Generally, in April heat waves will be more in the central part, in May it is in north-west and central India, and in June more of heat waves will be in

north-west India. So April- June is generally known for the hot weather season. And our forecast is for these three months.

### **How are the early indicators of monsoon looking like?**

As of now, the monsoon indicators are not so bad because El Nino is declining. However, the forecast from our climate model shows that even if the La Nina effect impact is felt, it will be take place only after the monsoon season. So during the monsoon season, El Nino conditions are most likely to be neutral.

It is not just El Nino that affects the monsoon as other factors like the temperature over Indian Ocean, land heating, snow cover and more factors have to be taken into account. So generally the picture becomes clearer in the middle of April and that is when we are expecting to give the first forecast for monsoon.

### **Can we anticipate a temperature forecast for winter as well?**

Yes, we are planning to give one this year.

### **Closure of tea gardens in Bengal may cause crop shortfall of 50 million kg**

Tea dealers body sees prices rising due to crop shortage

The Western India Tea Dealers Association (WITDA) raised serious concerns about closing down of tea gardens in Dooars region of West Bengal, which is feared to affect tea supplies in next one year.

Lower realisation from tea prices and increasing input costs is bleeding the tea garden owners, who are subsequently closing down operations, thereby posing a challenge to tea production in the country.

According to WITDA, about seven tea gardens run by a renowned tea group have closed down its operations leaving about 25,000 unemployed.

“Tea industry is passing through a critical phase. The costs are rising and the realisations are reducing. A leading tea player, Duncan Industries, has closed its seven gardens. If the current crisis continues, we fear a crop shortfall of 50 million kg (mkg) next year,” said Piyush Desai, President, WITDA.

The Dooars region, according to Desai, has seen almost a flat price trend for the past couple of years, whereas the wages have increased by ₹20 per day from ₹112.50 in April 2014 to ₹132.50 likely by now. A loss of crop to an extent of 50 mkg would directly impact tea prices in the country, cautioned Desai.

India’s overall tea output is estimated at around 1,250 mkg, of which about 200 mkg is exported, while the rest is available for domestic consumption.

Desai mentioned that India has nearly 14,500 tea gardens, of which 8,500 are in the North-East, while about 4,500 are in the South including Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

### **Amul’s sales turnover crosses ₹23,000-cr mark in FY-16**

The sales turnover of Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets the Amul brand of milk and dairy products, has crossed the ₹23,000-crore mark in 2015-16.

According to provisional turnover data announced on Friday, the milk behemoth has registered a turnover of ₹23,005 crore during the financial year ended March 31.

This is 11 per cent higher than the last financial year's sales turnover of ₹20,733 crore. The entire sales turnover growth has come because of volume. In fact, GCMMF’s turnover has increased by 187 per cent during the last six years, a spokesman said.



The provisional unduplicated group turnover of member unions of Amul group has crossed ₹33,000 crore, which is also higher by 14 per cent compared to the last financial year.

GCMMF, which had planned to achieve sales turnover of ₹30,000 crore by 2017-18, has been achieving a value growth of more than 20 per cent since the last six years because of higher milk procurement, continuous expansion in terms of adding new markets, launching of new products and adding new milk processing capacities across India.

In order to reach interior markets, GCMMF had started twelve new branches in India during the last three years.

Rs. Sodhi, Managing Director, GCMMF, said that pouch milk is the highest turnover product, showing a double-digit volume. Majority of Amul products have shown a double-digit growth. GCMMF passes on 80-85 per cent of consumer rupee back to milk producer members, encouraging them to produce more milk.

### **Cigarette makers fume over pictorial warning, shut shop**



ITC, Godfrey Phillips and VST, who account for over 98 per cent of domestic cigarette sales, along with other members of the Tobacco Institute

of India (TII), have decided to shut their cigarette factories with effect from Friday (April 1).

The unanimous decision was in response to the “ambiguity” in the Centre’s policy on pictorial warnings on tobacco product packs, said a statement by TII, which represents manufacturers, exporters and farmers.

TII estimates a daily loss of ₹350 crore in revenue for the tobacco industry from the production stoppage. It asserted that the revised pictorial warning would promote the trade in illegal cigarettes and affect the livelihood of 45.7 million people dependent on the industry.

Under new rules, the images have to cover 85 per cent of the pack, against 40 per cent earlier.

An affidavit filed by the Health Ministry before the Rajasthan High Court on March 28 stated that the 85 per cent warning would appear on both sides of tobacco products and come into force from April 1. Reports indicate that the affidavit also mentioned observations by a Parliamentary Committee, which had said a warning covering 50 per cent of the pack was enough, giving rise to “ambiguity”.

“The Indian tobacco industry has written to Ministry of Health on March 15, seeking clarification,” said Syed Mahmood Ahmad, Director, TII, adding that TII members had decided to shut the factories “fearing, potential violation of rules by continuing production.”

TII claims that illegal cigarettes account for one-fifth of the industry, resulting in an annual revenue loss of ₹9,000 crore to the exchequer. It even blamed “foreign-funded anti tobacco activists” and “vested interests” for pushing such a policy.

Sources within ITC told our Kolkata bureau that the company has closed its five factories, in Kolkata, Pune, Munger (Bihar), Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Bengaluru for an indefinite period or till the ambiguity over the pictorial warnings ends.

## Monsoon likely to be ‘above normal, well-distributed’



A long-range forecast is not authoritative, but sets the mood for farmers, industry

After two consecutive years of drought, the monsoon this year promises to be above normal, going by an early forecast.

A long-range weather forecast by climate management company Weather Risk Management Services indicates that the monsoon this year may end up 5 to 10 per cent above normal — with well-distributed rainfall over the country.

However, some areas such as the North-East may receive lower-than-normal rainfall, the forecast released on Friday — based on the dynamic climate model CFSV2 used by the US national weather agency NOAA — pointed out.

“We will be coming up with our monsoon forecast every 15 days. While it is possible that the forecast based on data collected in April will be different from that in March, I do not expect much variation,” said K Prasad, climate scientist and consultant for Weather Risk Management Services, at a press conference.

### **March data**

Prasad said his optimism stems from the absence of significant variation in the data collected through March, which was averaged out, to arrive at the forecast.

While a long-range forecast may not be as reliable or detailed as medium- or short-range forecasts (which are much closer to the start of monsoon), it helps in setting the mood for farmers and industry, and also the government to do contingency planning if required, say experts.

“Long-range forecasts can’t be used by farmers to take sowing decisions or by the industry to take business decisions. But it is certainly a guiding factor and can help certain sectors, such as juice manufacturers, take inventory decisions,” said Vanit Kathuria, an agriculture professional.

### **Long-range forecast**

KK Singh from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that while a long-range forecast made in the beginning of April may not be of much use at the district level, the data would be of use at the State and national levels, especially for decisions related to the input industry such as seed and fertilisers.

Elaborating on its forecast, Weather Risk said that during mid-March 2016, the tropical Pacific Sea Surface Temperature was weakening, but still at a strong El Nino level.

Most prediction models indicate continued weakening of El Nino conditions over the coming months, returning to neutral by late spring or early summer 2016, and a chance for La Nina development by autumn. These signals are favourable for the above normal monsoon rainfall.

# Business Standard

## **West, South may face severe water stress this summer**

The combined water level in 91 major reservoirs across the nation is just 25% of their full capacity

As the country braces for a long and drier than usual summer season, water levels in 91 major reservoirs across the country do not look promising. There could be a serious drawdown if the heat wave persists beyond June.

From Central Water Commission (CWC) data as of Thursday, the level in the reservoirs is a combined 25 per cent of their full capacity.

More than the national average, the regional picture is of greater concern. A severe drinking water, power and irrigation crisis looms in parts of Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Levels in the reservoirs of southern and western India are 17 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, of their full capacity.

Worryingly, this is also part of the area which might see a 0.5-1 degrees Celsius above normal temperature in April-June, according to the India Meteorological Department forecast of Thursday.

It said maximum temperatures in the core heat wave zone that included the meteorological sub-divisions of Marathwada, Vidharbha, Madhya Maharashtra, coastal Andhra and Telangana was expected to stay above normal. This could lead to quicker than expected drying of water in regional reservoirs.

## IN DIRE STRAITS

Water levels in major river basins as on March 31, 2016

Basin	Capacity at FRL*	Storage* as in March	
		2015	2016
Ganga	28.09	11.47	8.77
Indus	14.73	4.713	3.54
Narmada	17.41	6.38	5.21
Tapi	7.39	2.83	1.93
Mahi	4.012	1.94	1.04
Sabarmati	0.73	0.12	0.21
Rivers of Kutch	0.887	0.1	0.14
Godavari	15.39	5.62	3.36
Krishna	32.83	7.87	3.26
Mahanadi & other EPRS	13.18	7.50	5.16
Cauvery & EFRS	8.35	2.45	2.05
West Flowing rivers of South	14.76	6.14	4.93
<b>Total*</b>	<b>157.79</b>	<b>57.17</b>	<b>39.65</b>

\*In bn cubic meters; \*Total capacity of all river basins in the country; FRL= Full reservoir level; EFRS: East-flowing river systems Source: Central Water Commission

The CWC data showed the water level in the Yeldagri and Manikdohi dams of Maharashtra were around four and eight per cent, respectively, of their full levels. Yeldagri is the second largest dam in the state's Marathwada. The Girna (Nashik), Ujjani (Solapur) and Paithan reservoirs have already gone dry. The Nagarjunasagar reservoir in Andhra is dry. Levels in the Almatti, Malaprabha and Tungabhadra reservoirs are less than 10 per cent of their full capacity.

All 12 river basins have water levels less than last year at this time.

"The winter rainfall was less and if the summer turns out to be drier than usual, it can cause severe shortage of water in vulnerable areas as in the next



three months demand will peak," Bharat Sharma, coordinator at International Water Management Institute — India Programme told Business Standard.

He said there is a serious mismatch between demand and supply of water in Vidharbha, Marathwada, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra as these areas do not have adequate canal irrigation, while the ground water is also falling.

"The production of green fodder and summer vegetables, on which the livelihood of millions of small farmers depend, could also get impacted and also lead to conflicts in highly populated areas with low piped water supply," Sharma said.

IMD's forecast also said the warmer than normal temperatures might prevail over all the 36 sub-divisions of the country during the April-June period, with temperatures in Northwest India expected to be at least one degree above normal.

It plans to issue regular heat wave alerts and other warnings, valid for the next 15 days.

### **Village development campaign from April 14**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's is to begin a big rural outreach programme, 'Gram Uday se Bharat Uday' (roughly, From Village Uplift to Country's

Uplift) from April 14, to culminate on April 24. It is officially described as both commemorating the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar (born on April 14) and also to mark 'National Panchayati Raj' day (declared to be April 24).

The campaign, to be run jointly by the Union ministries of rural development and panchayati raj, agriculture, social justice, labour and information & broadcasting, along with states. On the final day, April 24, Modi will address villagers near Jamshedpur. However, the poll-bound states of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as also Puducherry, will be excluded.

On the first three days of the campaign, the government says discussions will be held on social harmony and justice across all villages. The next four days will have discussions and programmes on how to strengthen farmers by increasing their incomes. In this phase, scientists and government officials will go to villages and discuss in this regard with farmers. The Centre has asked officials to note suggestions by farmers on design of policies.

“During the last four days, there will be discussion on how the panchayati raj system can be strengthened. During these days, gram panchayats will discuss their one-year or five-year development programmes,” minister of state for information and broadcasting Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore told reporters. In the agriculture ministry, an additional secretary-rank officer will coordinate with other ministries and departments. Participants in the 250,000-odd gram panchayats are to be informed about the various government schemes on agriculture and rural development.

And, officials from the 600-odd Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Agricultural Technology Management Agencies are to interact with farmers through the panchayats to spread information. Print, television and radio would be used extensively in this regard.



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## **Israel may set up centres of agricultural excellence**

From drip irrigation techniques to growing oranges and flowers, Israel's agricultural experts will train state farmers in the methods of better food production.

Israel's consul general David Akov met chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan here on Thursday to discuss the country's possible participation in agriculture, water management, smart city projects and defence production in the state.

Speaking to TOI, Akov said, "The government is very enthusiastic to work at different levels. We discussed plans to set up two centres of excellence for agriculture in Shajapur and Sehore. While Shajapur will specialise in production of oranges, Sehore will extend technical support and training to farmers for flower production."

He added that Israel plans to take a delegation of farmers from the state to show them the techniques of agricultural production in their country. "Of course, our expertise in agriculture cannot be transferred ditto to Madhya Pradesh. Israel's expertise and skills in agriculture can be used in MP, which of course has the fastest growth in food production in the recent years," the consul general said.

The state government invited Akov and Israel's business houses to participate in the Global Investors' Summit (GIS) in Indore in October.

## **Tobacco farmers' group denounces new health warning rule**

April 1 (IANS) The rule requiring that packets of tobacco products carry larger pictorial health warning will increase smuggling into India of foreign cigarettes that come without such a warning,

said a farmers' grouping on Friday.

"It is a black day for us. By implementing the 85 percent pictorial warning rule, the government is actually trying to murder the tobacco farmers," Murali Babu, general secretary of the Federation of All India Farmers' Associations (FAIFA), told IANS.

The rule increasing the display area of the pictorial health warning on packs of cigarettes and other tobacco products from 40 percent to 85 percent came into effect on Friday. That will be in addition to textual health warning.

"The government has finally done what we have been requesting them not to do keeping in mind the lives of lakhs of tobacco growers in the country," said Babu, a tobacco farmer from Andhra Pradesh.

The government should not be shocked if a few more tobacco farmers commit suicides, following further revenue loss due to the implementation of the new rule, said Babu.

FAIFA represents tobacco growers in the country.

The government must now focus on checking the smuggling of cigarettes into India, which has risen due to higher taxes and harsher health warning rule, said Babu.

The sale of tobacco grown in India has been going down for the same reason, he said.

"It's clear that the government does not want to think about the farmers and wants to encourage smuggling," said Babu.

The implementation of the 85 percent pictorial warning display rule comes despite a parliamentary committee determining that the requirement is too harsh. The committee instead recommended pictorial warning be confined to 50 percent area of the pack's cover, which the government rejected.

There are over two lakh tobacco growers in the country and the tobacco industry provides further employment to lakhs of others, according to Tobacco Institute of India (TII), which represents the cigarette industry.

The tobacco grown in India includes FCV (Flue-Cured Virginia) which is used in making cigarettes.

Exports are estimated to earn more than Rs.6,000 crore in foreign exchange with FCV tobacco alone contributing Rs.4,000 crore, said the TII.

The market in India for foreign cigarettes, which come without any pictorial warnings on their packets, has been expanding without the government being able to crack down on such contraband products, said the TII.

### **Poor paddy procurement adds to farmers' woes**

Despite tall claims of the state government of providing minimum support price for paddy to farmers during the financial year 2015-16, Rohtas, which is considered as the 'rice bowl' of the state, could achieve only 50% of its target on the last day of procurement, i.e. March 31, said sources.

As against 60,000 registered farmers, the State Food Corporation (SFC) and 217 Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) could oblige only 12,000 of them. Of the total paddy procured, contribution of three SFC centres was only 2,110 tone which comes to around 2%. This added to the farmers' woes who were forced to sell their produce at throwaway prices.

SFC district manager Dinesh Kumar also said that paddy procurement this season is poor. "We have fallen short of the target but exact details could be available once records of all procurement centres are compiled," he added.

Sources in the district administration said, the district, which hitherto recorded the highest procurement in state every session, has procured only 1 lakh tonne paddy which is 50% of the target."While Suryapura has procured

the lowest quantity, Karahagar block topped in the district with 10% contribution in total procurement," said sources.

Sources said altogether 6,0199 farmers had got themselves registered with the SFC for procurement of their paddy on minimum support price.

Records, however, revealed that only 12,799 farmers could reach the SFC procurement centres. Remaining 48,000 were forced to sell paddy in open market on low price. centres in three sub-divisions of the SFC were closed in the first week of March.

According to district agriculture office records about 12 lakh tonne paddy were harvested by the farmers and the state government had given a procurement target of 2 lakh tonne, which was about 17% of the total production.

### **Issue crop loss report: Govt to collectors**

The state government has asked collectors to take urgent steps for issuing annewari certificates on crop loss in drought-affected areas of their respective districts. This will help farmers get loan relief declared by the government, official sources said.

"I would request you to declare annewari and issue the certificate so that the crop loans advanced during kharif 2015 in the drought-affected areas can be converted into medium-term loans by cooperative and commercial banks," said cooperation secretary Manoj Ahuja in his letter addressed to the collectors.

Though crop cutting exercise and assessment of crop loss have been completed, annewari certificates are yet to be issued to facilitate crop loans, he said.

Ahuja also wrote a letter on this matter to the convener of state-level bankers committee. "The government is taking expeditious steps for declaration of



annewari by the collectors to facilitate conversion of crop loans into medium-term loans," it said.

Since the conversion process couldn't be completed by March 31, the due date of loans advanced to farmers by the commercial banks should be extended by three months or up to actual conversion of such loans, whichever is earlier, the letter added.

"All member banks may be advised accordingly so that drought-affected farmers remain default-free to avail fresh loans during the ensuing kharif season," it added.

The letter assumed significance since the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), in its report placed in the assembly last week, pointed out that farmers of Odisha suffered a lot and were deprived of assistance under various schemes due to government's negligence.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Heatwave likely to delay planting of summer crops**

NEW DELHI: Summer planting of crops including paddy and cotton could get delayed due to above normal heatwave conditions expected to prevail over central and northwest India from April to June this year as forecast by the weather office.

Above normal temperatures can also have devastating effects on human health, water resources and power generation.

However, with El Nino conditions expected to weaken by June, the monsoon rains could be widespread and normal.

"Anticipating that heatwave conditions will prevail across northwest India,

with temperature being 1 degree above normal, it will impact cereal and horticulture crop planting," said KK Singh, head-agromet at the India Meteorological Department.



Farmers in Punjab, Haryana & Rajasthan will start planting of cotton by May and paddy nursery by June. In MP, soybean cultivation will begin after the monsoon sets in.

Higher temperatures could also affect livestock, he said. Heatwave is said to be in effect if the maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40°C in plains and at least 30°C in hilly regions.

The weather conditions could, however, change in the coming months since El Nino conditions over the Pacific Ocean are likely to weaken further and reach weaker El Nino conditions during April-June, Singh said.

Farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will start planting of cotton by May and paddy nursery by June. In Madhya Pradesh, soybean cultivation will begin after the monsoon sets in.

Similarly, in Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, planting of paddy, cotton, pulses and millets begins once the monsoon sets in. Even in irrigated regions the germinated crop could die due to heatwave and stress on plants, said Vikas Rai, a cotton farmer from Fazilka district in Punjab.

"Farmers should be advised not to burn the wheat stubble after harvest and to cultivate land, thereby ensuring moisture is retained.

This will protect newly germinated crop," he said. Ajay Vir Jakhar, chairman of farmers' association Bharat Krishak Samaj said extreme heatwave will be bad for rural population and farming considering scarce water resources. He said vegetable prices could increase further. The water situation in parts of the country has worsened after an extended period of deficit rainfall, including two consecutive monsoon failures.

### **India heading towards becoming major agricultural importer after two failed monsoons**



India heading towards becoming major agricultural importer after two failed monsoons

Green Revolution? Think again. India is heading towards becoming a major agricultural importer after two failed monsoons. The country has started shopping around the globe for stuff it exported until last year. Jayashree Bhosale analyses:

### **What's happening?**

- > Private traders say they will import wheat again this year
- > India's pulses imports are rising as demand is up while output is sluggish
- > India has started importing large amounts of corn after exporting it for years
- > In November, it imported soymeal, used as poultry feed. India was a big exporter
- > Now, another large shipment of soymeal has arrived from Ukraine

### **Why is it happening?**

- > Monsoon failed for two consecutive years
- > The intervening winter crop was severely damaged by hailstorms and unseasonal showers
- > Last fiscal, post-monsoon season was exceptionally dry and warm No new technological breakthrough after the 1960s' Green Revolution
- > The price of many indian grains is higher than international rates

### **What can be done?**

- > Ensure big improvement in farm productivity
- > Need to introduce modern irrigation practices
- > Another Green Revolution badly needed

> Hope for a good monsoon. Rains have never failed thrice in a row

**India will receive normal monsoon rainfall this year, says a private forecaster**



The forecast from the government's India Meteorological department is expected by the last week of April.

NEW DELHI: Private firm Weather Risk Management Services has said that India will receive normal rainfall during the June-September monsoon season, welcome news in a country where as much as 60% of the farmland is rain-fed.

The forecast from the government's India Meteorological department (IMD) is expected by the last week of April. Local authorities use IMD's prediction to decide on their monsoon preparations.

"The 2016 monsoon rains will be normal and well distributed. The models are indicating above average rainfall from June to September," said Kanti Prasad, head-meteorology at Gurgaon headquartered Weather Risk Management Services.

Monsoon rainfall was deficit in 2015-16 and 2014-15 at 14% and 12%

respectively.

However, Prasad said that there may be some areas in northeast India, Maharashtra and Rajasthan where overall rainfall activity may be somewhat on the negative side of the normal during monsoon.

"In the four-month rainy season, rains in June are expected to be the maximum, thereby reducing over the next three months," said Prasad.

The meteorologist said that most global models indicated continued weakening of El Nino conditions over the coming months, returning to normal by late spring or early summer 2016 and a chance of La Nina development by fall. "These signals are favourable for above normal monsoon rainfall over the country during June to September, 2016," he said.

Sonu Agrawal, managing director of Weather Risk Management Services, said that the firm will update its monsoon forecast fortnightly.

Information and forecasts of weather are largely sought by clients in aviation, energy, insurance, banking, agriculture and trading, apart from logistics, chemicals and commodity companies. Weather Risk Management Services has clients from Pepsico, Bayer, Syngenta, Mother Dairy, Multi Commodity Exchange and Reliance infra-backed BSES power distribution company, among others.

Presenting its long-range weather forecast on April 1 in Delhi, the company said it processed data from the American scientific agency National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to come to this conclusion.

Land preparation and sowing of kharif crops, largely paddy, soyabean, cotton, pulses such as pigeon peas (arhar) and green gram (moong), coarse cereals such as bajra and jowar, pick up with the onset of the monsoon in the country.