

04.04.2016

## THE HINDU

### **Minister promises all help to cow-based farming**

*Goshalas to be set up in all the districts to take care of aged cattle*



Back to nature:Endowments Minister P. Manikyala Rao feeding a cow at the TTD Dairy Farm in Tirupati on Sunday.—Photo: K.V. Poornachandra Kumar

: Endowments Minister P. Manikyala Rao has promised support to cow protection and also to accord preference to use of agricultural produce grown under natural farming practices in temple offerings ('prasadam').

Speaking at the meet on cow-based farming organised jointly by Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), the Cow-Based Farmers Association (CBFA) and the Prakruti Foundation at TTD's Sri Venkateswara Gosamrakshanasala here on Sunday, the Minister asked the cow-based farmers (farmers who use only cow dung and urine sans any chemicals) to form themselves into a society and supply the naturally-grown produce. While remaining non-committal on the request for compulsory procurement of produce grown through natural farming and lease of endowments land only to farmers practising natural farming, Mr. Rao, however, agreed to utilise the services of TTD's dairy farm to train farmers in cow-based farming. He announced that the Endowments Department would set up modern 'goshalas' in every district to take care of the aged cattle. They would be bought from the cattle-rearers for a nominal price to obviate the necessity of selling to slaughterhouses.

## Lifestyle disorders

Mr. Manikyala Rao lauded the progressive farmers for going back to natural farming practices in tune with the people's yearning for food products without chemical residue. He attributed the lifestyle disorders to the drastically-changed food habits and farming practices. TTD trust board member G. Bhanuprakash Reddy offered all help to train farmers and to protect native cattle breeds. TTD SV Gosamrakshanasala Director K. Harinatha Reddy and District Project Manager (Natural Farming) Jayachandra Reddy offered all support to farmers wishing to 'go natural.'

BKS national executive member J. Kumaraswamy, CBFA State president B.H. Ramakrishnama Raju and vice-president M.C.V. Prasad announced that the message delivered at the 'chaitanya yatra' here would be taken to the last farmer in Kaviti village of Srikakulam district.

## Commodity prices

*Bitter gourd prices have eased in the last one month. Hopes of a bumper crop this season have dragged prices lower. Also, an increase in arrivals in recent times is putting pressure on prices. In Chennai, one kg of bitter gourd now sells at ₹25. It is down about 30 per cent from ₹36 per kg a month ago.*

Here are the prices of various commodities in Chennai.

Price scale is given as Rs./kg

Commodity	Quantity	Now	Year ago
Rice	1 kg	30	30
Wheat	1 kg	32	31
Atta	1 kg	30	30
Gram Dal	1 kg	73	56
Tur Dal	1 kg	133	91
Urad Dal	1 kg	150	91

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Now</b>	<b>Year ago</b>
Moong Dal	1 kg	102	110
Masoor Dal	1 kg	83	76
Sugar	1 kg	37	32
Milk	1 ltr	37	37
Ground Nut Oil	1 ltr	125	109
Sun flower Oil	1 ltr	92	89
Gur (Jaggery)	1 kg	46	45
Tea	1 kg	220	220
Salt	1 kg	18	17
Lime	1 kg	80	70
Apple	1 kg	160	160
Papaya	1 kg	30	30
Pineapple	1 kg	40	40
Pomegranate	1 kg	140	150
Sapota	1 kg	40	40
Banana	1 kg	30	30
Bitter Gourd	1 kg	25	26
Brinjal	1 kg	30	24
Cabbage	1 kg	20	14
Cauli Flower	1 kg	40	35

Commodity	Quantity	Now	Year ago
Garlic	1 kg	120	100
Ginger	1 kg	60	60
Chilly	1 kg	48	32
Onion	1 kg	12	22
Potato	1 kg	24	20
Tomato	1 kg	10	10

\*Source: Ministry of Consumer Affairs, National Horticulture Board

### **Tobacco accounts for 40 p.c. of crop loans in Mysuru**



Rain or shine:Tobacco cultivation is what many public sector financial institutions are happy to back.— photo: m.a. sriram

*Even during drought and farmer suicides, financial institutions had no issues lending money to tobacco growers*

The government's professed commitment to reducing tobacco cultivation by 80 per cent by 2020 has not been backed by policy initiatives, and this is best evident in public sector financial institutions sanctioning nearly 40 per cent of their agricultural loan outlay to tobacco crop alone.



Tobacco is largely cultivated in Mysuru district and parts of Hassan in Karnataka. The Flue-cured Virginia (FCV) variety has an international market.

There are nearly 75,000 to 80,000 tobacco cultivators — big and small — in the region and the crop is grown on 80,000 acres. Even during drought and farmers suicides due to loss of food crops last year, financial institutions had no issues lending to tobacco farmers.

“Agricultural loans come under the priority sector in the District Credit Plan and lending to tobacco farmers accounts for more than 40 per cent of the total crop loan in the district,” according to District Lead Bank Manager K.N. Shivalingaiah.

It is a low-risk loan with repayment virtually assured due to MoU with the Tobacco Board and hence banks feel safe to lend crop loan to tobacco farmers, he added.

During 2015-16, the total advances made by various public sector banks, regional rural banks and cooperative banks to tobacco farmers in Mysuru district was nearly Rs.1,200 crore out of the Rs. 2,499.72 crore allocated for agriculture.

There is consistency in this lending since many years and loan to tobacco cultivators is almost 40 per cent of the total allocation for agricultural credit in a given year, said Mr. Shivalingaiah.

## **Getting serious**

### **about tobacco**

Anti-Tobacco Forum (ATV) convener Vasanthkumar Mysoremath said that there should be efforts to scale down agricultural credit to tobacco cultivators if India was serious about scaling down tobacco cultivation.

“The lending policies of the public sector financial institutions should also reflect the larger national policies of the Union government,” he said.

Though the crop size has remained stagnant at around 105 million tonnes, what is intriguing is that no efforts have been made to bring down the scale

of cultivation. One way to discourage its production was to reduce credit outgo, said Mr. Mysoremath.

India is one of the 150 countries which is a signatory to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control as per which tobacco cultivation has to be scaled down by 2020.

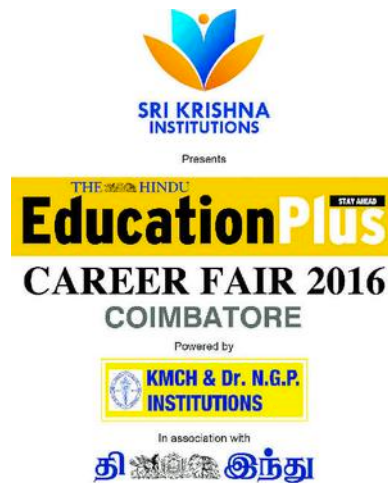
“But if the loan size for tobacco crop is any indication then the government is not serious about it,” said the ATF convener.

*The lending policies of the public sector financial institutions should also reflect the larger national policies of the Centre*

*Vasanthkumar Mysoremath*

*Convener, Anti-Tobacco Forum*

**More opportunities in store for agriculture graduates, says Dean**



Tamil Nadu, which had three private agricultural colleges five years ago, now has 18 private agricultural colleges, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) Dean S. Mahimairaja said here on Sunday. Addressing students and parents, he said there was a bright future for agriculture graduates. The increase in number of colleges reflected on the demand for agriculture-related courses.

He was speaking to students on the second day of the two-day ninth edition of *The Hindu* Education Plus Education Fair 2016.

Sri Krishna Institutions are the presenting sponsor of the fair that is powered by KMCH and Dr. NGP Institutions. Nehru Group of Institutions, The TIPS Global Institutions, Kalignar Karunanidhi Institution of Technology and Kathir College of Engineering are co-sponsors.

In a presentation, Director (Operations) Realworks Studios India Private Limited, Sivaprasad Velauthan, asked students to think out of the box. He asked students to do anything with passion, be it studies, entrepreneurship or a job. “Only then you can excel,” he said.

He urged parents not to instil fear in the minds of wards. Good employees were not laid off by employers. On studies, he said that acquiring knowledge was more important than getting a degree.

Motivational speaker Kirtanya Krishnamurthy from Mindfresh Training Centre gave tips on choosing the right course based on the strengths of the individual, to overcome challenges in college and staying focussed to overcome hurdles. “Don’t take decisions based on your friend’s choice,” she said.

Group Captains A.S. Verma and P. Parthasarathi from the Air Force Administrative College elaborated on careers in the Air Force and defence sectors. They also spoke on the qualification and channels through which young men and women could join the force as officers and in other ranks. At the expo, science group students learnt that there were 13 different undergraduate programmes in agriculture that they could pursue. Colleges explained that a host of parameters including NAAC rating were factors to determine a good college.

### **Good yield of ‘elarasi’ banana**

*Demand for this variety is growing in States like Karnataka, say cultivators*

Realisation of adequate quantum of rain during the North East monsoon last year in and around Tiruchi district, good agricultural practices by farmers and above all absence of a gale all through the season have all gone in favour of good yield from ‘elarasi’ banana, grown in specific blocks in the district.

Although ‘poovan’, ‘karpoora vazhai’ and ‘rasthali’ are some of the major varieties of banana being cultivated in the district, it is ‘elarasi’ and ‘nendran’ varieties which are grown in specific areas or by particular group of farmers with enterprising skill.



Farm workers carrying harvested 'elarasi' banana near Anbil. —Photo: A. Muralitharan

According to banana cultivators, ‘elarasi’ banana forms the raw material for a wide range of value-added materials and there has been a growing demand for it in states like Karnataka.

They said that the ‘elarasi’ variety additional good practices for registering high yield.

One of the farmers, D. Duraisamy of Ariyur village near Lalgudi, said that the ‘elarasi’ variety, with a crop duration ranging between 10 and 11 months, found its immediate market in Karnataka where it is dried up and powdered as an value-added product. He had raised the crop on two acres and had to take intensive care till the harvest.

“The average price ranged around Rs. 200 per bunch and Rs.18,000 per tonne,” he said. He had to immediately take it to Bengaluru for marketing it. He could harvest at least 17 tonnes from his one acre of the crop this season.

Farmers said that the crop needed good practices till it is harvested.

“Casuarina poles should be set up and the bunches should be properly tied so that it will escape the influence of any gale,” says D. Duraisamy, another farmer near Anbil.

They said post-harvest wastage caused a problem. “Although I could harvest 18 tonnes, at least one tonne of banana is wasted during the course of harvest or transit to Bengaluru,” says Mr. Duraisamy.

### **Cotton fetches good price in auction**



Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 74.90 lakh at the Konganapuram branch of the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Society on Saturday.

#### **DCH variety**

While DCH variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,720 and 6,549 per 100 kg bag; BT variety fetched between Rs. 4,420 and Rs. 5,049 per bag.

About 3,990 bags of cotton were auctioned for Rs. 74.90 lakh, society sources said.

## Commission moots support price for horticultural produce in State



Karnataka produces around 125 lakh tonnes of horticultural commodities on over 18 lakh hectares of land, according to T.N. Prakash Kammardi, chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission. —File photo

T.N. Prakash Kammardi, chairman, Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, has said that the government is planning to provide support price to horticultural produce.

He was here on Saturday to inaugurate an information centre on the premises of the University of Horticulture Sciences-Bagalkot.

Mr. Kammardi said, “We have seen farmers in distress dumping tomatoes on the road when they do not get even minimum returns. To prevent this, the government is planning to set up a commission on the line of the Agriculture Price Commission to give support price to horticulture farmers.”

He said that the commission would ensure maximum benefits to farmers. Mr. Kammardi said that the commission was working towards turning agriculture into a profit-making sector by ensuring facilities such as better pricing and marketing platforms.

Mr. Kammardi said that Karnataka produced around 125 lakh tonnes of horticultural commodities on over 18 lakh hectares of land.

To give a major boost to the sector, better marketing facilities and scientific pricing were needed.

He said that a national policy was required for fixing the prices of onion.



Mr. Kammardi said that a joint effort by the Union and the State governments could ensure relief to farmers who were suffering losses due to unstable prices of horticulture commodities.

### **Raichur onion growers in tears as prices crash**

*They have dropped from Rs. 1,200-Rs. 1,500 per quintal to Rs. 400-Rs. 500*



Heaps of onion produce remain unsold at the Agricultural Produce Market Committee yard in Raichur. —Photo: Santosh Sagar

While farmers in rain-fed areas of the State are struggling to come to terms with the crisis due to drought-induced crop failure, the small farmers, who managed to get a successful onion crop in summer with the help of borewells, are literally in tears as the prices of their produce have crashed.

The summer onion prices have sharply dropped from the range of Rs. 1,200-1,500 per quintal in January this year to Rs. 400-500 a quintal now. In fact, onion growers had got Rs. 2,500- 5,000 in October-November last year for their monsoon crop.

What is ironic is that there are no buyers for a large quantum of produce even at the above price range of Rs. 1,200-1,500. This has resulted in heaps of onion produce remaining unsold at the Raichur Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) yard.

“We have spent around Rs. 25,000 for cultivating onion on one acre. We got better crop this year both in terms of quality and yield. Unfortunately, there is no good price in the market. Wholesale buyers are asking the crop for a

throwaway price. How can we survive?" asked Hanumayya, a farmer from Sasivegera village in Deodurg taluk.

His produce in 45 bags, each having 50 kg of fine quality onion, has remained unsold at the APMC for the last two days. "I have decided to sell the produce at whatever price the buyer asks," he added.

Most of the onion growers in the AMPC yard were in a similar condition as onion is a perishable agricultural produce and there was no hope of recovery of price in the immediate future. They were left with no option other than selling their produce at whatever price they get as they cannot take their crop back to their villages incurring additional transportation costs. They sleep beside their onion heaps in open protecting their crop from pigs and cattle.

According to the traders, glut in the market caused by heavy imports from Nashik in Maharashtra caused the dip in the price of onion. "The traders are heavily importing onion from Nashik. Supply is greater than the demand. This caused the prices to crash," Nagaraj, a trader, said.

Chamarasa Malipatil, state president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, expressed similar views. According to him, the government imported onion from different countries when the onion prices were high in the domestic market.

"Massive imports, much greater than the required quantity, has caused the glut in the market. Now, domestic farmers have to bear the brunt. Farmers are in a very pathetic condition as they are repeatedly hit hard by problems— floods, drought, Bt cotton failure and now price crash," he said. He demanded that the government open onion procurement centres at APMCs and purchase the produce directly from farmers offering minimum support price.

### **Two drown in agricultural pond in Ramanagaram**

Two schoolchildren drowned in an agricultural pond at T. Halli Doddi, in Channapatna taluk, Ramanagaram district, on Sunday.

The victims have been identified as Kushal (12) and Nayan (12).

According to the police, the duo had gone to a farmland at their village to swim in *krishi Honda*, an artificial pond. Both of them did not know how to swim, the police said.

The tragic incident came to light when some farm labourers noticed the bodies floating.

The bodies have been sent for autopsy and cases of unnatural death have been registered, police said.

### **Farmers urged to store produce in warehouses**

Paddy farmers in Tiruvannamalai district are asked to make use of the 239 cooperative warehouses while awaiting good price in the market.

According to a release from the Information and Public Relations Office in the Collectorate, 157 Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Societies and seven Agricultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Societies in the district have 230 warehouses of each 100 Metric Tonne (MT) capacity, five warehouses of 500 MT capacity, three warehouses of 1000 MT capacity and one warehouse of 2,000 MT capacity.

These warehouses that have scientific storage facilities required to store agricultural produce were built with the help of Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and Warehouse Infrastructure Fund of NABARD.

Members of those societies would be allowed to store their produce in these warehouses and avail mortgage loan for six months at 13.75 per cent rate of interest. They will be given 70 per cent of the market value of the produce. Non members would be allowed simply to store their produce in these warehouses by paying Rs. 7 per bag per month (including insurance).

## Workshop on millets



A culinary workshop on cuisines prepared from millets will be conducted on April 6 at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre. For details, call 044 - 26263484

## Panel chief assures farmers of all help

*Farmers seek cold storage facilities for tomatoes and onions and transport facilities to market vegetables*

The Special Task Force constituted by the Andhra Pradesh Government to gauge the plight of farmers owing to a severe drought, will submit a comprehensive report detailing measures to be initiated to provide succour to ryots, Agriculture Commission Chairman R. Radhakrishna said on Saturday.

The Chairman, commission members Narasimha Reddy and Ghalib, sub-committee members Venkata Reddy, Prithvikar Rao, Srinivasa Reddy, Joint Director Agriculture Umamaheswaramma and Lead District Manager Narasimha Rao interacted with farmers on their woes and lack of remunerative prices for their produce, at a meeting in Sunayana Auditorium here.

## Gloom descends as price slump hits paddy ryots

*To tide over the crisis, authorities open paddy purchase centres at 81 centres in Nellore district*



Following copious rain in November last and favourable weather thereafter, a record high production of nearly 30 lakh tonnes of paddy is expected as the current harvest season comes to an end in the district by April-end. This is considered a bumper harvest, considering the fact that just 12 lakh tonnes was produced in the district last year.

Till a week ago, paddy farmers had no complaints as they were getting a reasonably good price for their produce in the market.

But as the prices dropped all of a sudden, farmer leaders and associations started demanding market intervention by government agencies to enable purchase of paddy at minimum support price (MSP).

Traders and millers were blamed for the sudden drop in the market price, considering the fact that the crisis cropped up only after huge quantities of harvested paddy began arriving in the last few days. “We are expecting nearly 15 lakh tonnes of paddy harvest in April alone. Farmers will be saved if a minimum of 6 lakh tonnes is purchased at MSP,” said Ch. Koti Reddy, president of the Nellore District Farmers’ Association.

The farmers are now a worried lot as the market price has come down, and has been ranging between Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 4,500 per tonne since the past one week for different varieties of paddy.



In view of this, they have stopped selling their produce in the open market and prefer to wait for some more time.

Considering the widening demand-supply gap and falling prices, the district administration has opened paddy purchase centres at nearly 81 centres all over the district to offer MSP to the farmers.

The farmer leaders say that purchases began at just four to five centres and other centres are yet to become active due to various technical reasons. There is a demand for opening nearly 160 paddy purchase centres so that it would meet the requirements of the farmers this season.

The farmer leaders and people's organisations are demanding that the government remove inter-State and intra-State restrictions for movement of paddy to enable farmers get a better price in the market. Also, the problem of tenant farmers should be addressed effectively to ensure a fair deal.

General secretary of BJP State unit S. Suresh Reddy demanded that free movement of paddy be made effective immediately to solve the problems of the farmers. He also wanted the district officials to make sure that the farmers were supplied enough bags. The tenant farmers should also not face any problem from village-level officials in getting certificates to bring their produce to the purchase centres, he said.

Mr. Suresh Reddy alleged that rice millers formed a syndicate and colluded with the officials to deny a good price to the farmers this season.

### **Tonnes of paddy goes waste at paddy procurement centre**

*Owing to poor maintenance and stocking method*





HEAVY LOSS:Paddy being stocked on the ground in the paddy procurement centre in Chinnamanur in Theni district.— PHOTO: Special Arrangement

Several tonnes of paddy procured from farmers in Cumbum valley has been damaged at the procurement centre in Chinnamanur owing to poor maintenance and stocking method.

Farmers found that the paddy perished in large quantities as it was packed in plastic bags and covered with tarpaulin sheets. However, paddy packed in jute bags was intact.

They said that traders too had been using the open space inside the procurement centre to stock paddy for hypothecation. The officials would accept paddy only after removing foreign bodies from it. A machine to clean the paddy was also provided at the centre.

They said that the traders shifted to plastic bags from traditional jute bags as they were weightless and easy to pack. But they restricted air circulation. The situation turned worse as local workers covered the paddy bags with tarpaulin sheets. Moisture damaged the grains and turned them unfit for use. Moreover, foreign bodies present in the grains expedited perishing, said the farmers.

Several tonnes of paddy was stocked in the procurement centres also by traders as buyers from other States could not offtake the large quantities at one stroke owing to the ban on carrying heavy cash.

They solely depended on local buyers who procured and stocked the grains in the procurement centres and released to buyers in a phased manner. Several buyers could not procure paddy from the farmers owing to stringent norms of the Election Commission. The damage to paddy would certainly slash the price further, the farmers said.

The traders and the farmers who checked the condition of grains advised the workers at the centre not to cover them with tarpaulin sheets and keep the surroundings clean.

## **Good demand for tamarind makes farmers happy**

Good demand for tamarind of the villages on Palamalai hills near Edappadi has brought much cheer to the farmers.

More than 25 villages on Palamalai hills including Nilakkadu, Nagampothi, Thimmampothi, Periakulam and Thuvarankadu have a large number of tamarind trees.

The farmers used to dry and pack the tamarind fruit and market the same at Poolampatti market at the foothills.

With the commencement of the season, the tribal people have been bringing the tamarind stock to the Poolampatti market daily. Since the Palamalai tamarind is rich in taste, there is a good demand for this fruit from the wholesale traders and other consumers across the district.

The people of Edappadi and the surrounding areas are making a beeline to Poolampatti for fetching the Palamalai tamarind.

The price of a basket with 12 – 15 kg of tamarind fruit stock ranges between Rs. 1,100 and Rs. 1,300.

## **Peacocks damage crops**

The farmers in Thammampatti area in the district are suffering financial loss, as peacocks which stray into the abutting villages from the reserve forest destroy their crops.

The farmers have raised paddy in a large area near Thammampatti. They complain that a large number of peacocks strays into the villages both in the morning and evening hours and destroy the paddy crop.

The farmers try to chase away the peacocks by firing crackers. Due to the peacock menace, the farmers expect to get only 50 per cent of the crop this season.

## Pearly nautilus may get extra protection



Shell of the Nautilus from Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.  
Photo: Special Arrangement

*Nautilus pompilius*, the pelagic marine mollusc with one of the oldest animal lineages on the planet, may get an extra global legal protection soon.

The palm-sized adult animal, which could live up to 20 years in ocean depths, may soon be included in the Appendix 2 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna (CITES). The CITES authorities have sought the views of their Indian counterparts for determining the qualification of the species.

Marine fisheries experts have recommended that the species shall be listed considering the rarity of the animal and its poor regeneration capacity. The species is commonly known as pearly nautilus considering the pearly nacre on its external shell. The animal has a chambered shell with limited mobility. It's commonly found in ocean depths of 700 metres, explained a scientific evaluation paper.

Earlier researches have pointed out that the “low egg number, late maturity, long gestation and long life span of the Nautilus make the species vulnerable.” The shell of the animal is traded widely across the world though

there is no targeted fishery in India. However, there are reports of some targeted catch from Indonesia and Philippines. At times, marine researchers have reported the accidental catch of the bright orange banded species during mid-water trawling, pointed out a researcher.

The species has been accorded legal protection by including it in the Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The hunting or possession of the animals included in the Schedule is a punishable offence in the country. Some animals, which die a natural death may float in water and land in shores, which are picked up by collectors. The fancy look and the shiny lustre make it a collector's item. The shells are believed to be fetch high price in trade. There are reports of the shells, which are washed ashore, collected and clandestinely traded.

The species has relatively small population and are vulnerable to fisheries and also anthropogenic activities. Yet, no scientific data is available on its population in India. The species has not been currently assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, says a scientific report.

The inclusion of the animal in the CITES list would ensure a global regulation in its trade. It would also extend the legal cover globally for the species, which is considered as rare link to the evolutionary history of animals, he said.



### **Mission to figure out ground reality takes off in parched Marathwada**

Besides understanding farmer suicides, the mission will look at various govt schemes designed for farmers

The one-man team will to go from village to village to do a reality check and submit its report directly to the chief minister.

In a bid to curb the rising number of farmer suicides and to find out whether the government schemes are actually reaching the farmer families, a special one-man team – on the directives of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis – Sunday began a 'stock-taking mission' in the drought-hit Marathwada

region. The one-man team will go from village to village to do a reality check and submit its report directly to the chief minister.



The chief minister has asked Kishore Tiwari, who heads the state government-appointed Vasantao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission, to take charge of this mission.

“From today, I will be visiting as many as 300 villages in three districts of Osmanabad, Nanded and Latur. The first phase of the mission will last till April 8,” said Tiwari.

In the second phase, Tiwari added, the remaining parts of Marathwada will be covered.

“I will try to find out the exact reason as to why farmers commit suicide. Is it because of crop failure or financial constraints. Or is it due to harassment by the banks,” said Tiwari.

On Sunday, Tiwari landed at Omri village in Nanded taluka to meet a family of a farmer who committed suicide a few months ago. “I spoke to the family. They told me that the bread earner ended his life due to crop failure as result of poor monsoon,” he said.

Besides understanding farmer suicides, Tiwari said, the mission is aimed at taking a closer look at various government schemes being implemented in the parched districts.

“All efforts will be made to find out whether wheat and rice given at subsidised rates are reaching the farmer families, if the crop insurance

scheme covers all farmers, whether farmers are availing the health schemes specially designed for them,” he said.

Tiwari plans to keep all political leaders away from this mission, and take help from local villagers and activists working in the area. “I don’t want anything to be staged. Efforts are on to find out the truth,” he added.

When contacted, Beed district collector Naval Kishore Ram said whenever the team visits, Beed it will find that a lot of effort has been made in the district to ensure that all government schemes reach farmers.

“Whether it is tackling fodder shortage, water shortage, critical healthcare or ensuring implementation of crop insurance scheme, Beed district has led from the front,” he said. “In the past few months, farmer suicides were also down by half compared to last year,” he said.

Meanwhile, MIM MLA Imtiaz Jaleel said Tiwari should visit fodder camps and cattle camps as well.

“Here, he will realise what all is wrong. The duplicacy of names will show the kind of racket that is being run here. The reality check, if carried out honestly, would expose the wrongdoers and make life easier for farmers,” Jaleel said.

### **From the lab- Coming soon: a zinc-rich variety of wheat**

Wheat is the staple diet in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The farmers here typically have very small landholdings and consume about 70 per cent of what they produce.





A farmer feeds harvested wheat crop into a thresher as a woman collects de-husked wheat in a field at Kunwarpur village, Allahabad.

**By V K Mishra, Ramesh Chand and Arun Kumar Joshi**

One of the side-effects of the Green Revolution has been a change in the cropping pattern in many parts of the country. Farmers have shifted to crops with higher yields.

In the Indo-Gangetic plains, for example, rice and wheat have replaced many other crops. This has reduced crop diversity, affected dietary patterns, and led to malnutrition due to poor supply of proteins, vitamins, iron and zinc.

Wheat is the staple diet in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The farmers here typically have very small landholdings and consume about 70 per cent of what they produce. One of the essential minerals missing from their diet has been found to be zinc.

The deficiency of zinc leads to malfunctioning of several proteins and enzymes, and manifests itself in a variety of diseases, including diarrhoea, and skin and respiratory disorders.

One way of making up for this kind of deficiency is to provide fortification, that is add the missing nutrients to the food items. But this has several complexities, including increase in prices, problem of quality control, and possibility of adulteration.

We tested the genetic bio-fortification technology for enhancing the zinc content in wheat crops under the HarvestPlus Project of the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Bio-fortification is a seed-driven technology that enables crops to extract higher amount of zinc from the soil and store it in the edible parts.

Through cross-breeding, we produced several thousand wheat genotypes and screened them for high zinc content and high yield. In India, a new variety would not be acceptable if it doesn't deliver a higher yield than the variety already under cultivation. We isolated several of these cross-bred varieties that had both high zinc and high yield, and put them through field trials. The

existing varieties of wheat crop had 29 ppm of zinc and the varieties we selected had 40-45 ppm of zinc.

These field trials were conducted at 70 different locations. Two specific varieties of wheat were then distributed to about 5000 farmers for cultivation.

The next stage is national trials, to be conducted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

The first thing that ICAR does is to put the recommended varieties to disease trial. The ICAR tests take about three years. One of the varieties, BHU-35, has recently cleared the disease-testing stage and is ready to be released in Uttar Pradesh for cultivation, after a few more regulatory clearances.

Seven other varieties are currently undergoing disease testing, and in the next few years, many other zinc-rich wheat crops would be ready for cultivation.

## BusinessLine THE HINDU

### **Crop insurance: new dawn for farmers?**



The new scheme offers lower premium, more risk cover and hassle-free settlement

How they compare			
	NAIS	MNAIS	New crop insurance scheme
Premium rate	Low	High	Lower than even NAIS
Insurance cover	Full	Capped	Full
Settlement through banks	No	Yes	Yes
Localised risk coverage	No	Hailstorm, landslide	Hailstorm, landslide, inundation
Post harvest loss coverage	No	Coastal area- for cyclonic rain	All-India - for cyclonic and unseasonal rain
Prevented sowing coverage	No	Yes	Yes
Use of technology	No	Intended	Mandatory

Source: Ministry of Agriculture

Crop insurance schemes have not been a hit with Indian farmers in the past. High premia, limited coverage, complicated ways of assessing losses and delayed payment of compensation have kept farmers away from them.

Given the high risk of crop damage in India, with significant loss in food grain production in 18 of the last 54 years (which is once in every three years as per data from the Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices), it has become vital to address the flaws in the existing crop insurance schemes — the National Agriculture Insurance scheme (NAIS) and MNAIS (modified NAIS).

Out of the total farm land of 195.26 million hectares in the country, only 42.82 million hectares or 22 per cent is insured. It is in this backdrop that the Centre launched the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in January this year. While the outline of the scheme looks attractive, the success of the plan lies in its implementation.

### **Adequate sum insured**

The main setback with the existing crop insurance schemes is that the sum insured (SI) is too small to make any difference to the farmer. In 2013-14, for instance, while the average per hectare output was worth ₹41,442, the sum insured (SI) under various crop insurance schemes was just ₹18,464 (kharif - ₹19,141 and rabi - ₹16,927).

While the insured sum here looks sufficient to cover the cost of production, it is way less than a farmer's income in a normal season. In MNAIS, the Centre capped the maximum premium that can be paid for a crop. So, in

crops where actuarial rates were higher, insurers reduced the sum insured proportionately, says Ashish Agarwal, Head - Agri Business, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, which covers about 38 lakh farmers under its crop insurance scheme in 2015-16.

For instance, suppose in Uttar Pradesh's Lalitpur district, the actuarial premium (based on the assessment of risk by the insurer) was fixed at 22 per cent for paddy, but 11 per cent was the cap on premium fixed by the Centre. So, even if the farmer wanted SI of ₹30,000/hectare, he would get cover for only ₹15,000 ( $₹30,000 * 11\% = ₹3,300$  = is the maximum amount that can be collected as premium, but the insurer can go only with his actuarial rate, so he will reduce the SI to ₹15,000:  $₹15,000 * 22\% = ₹3,300$ ). T

his, however, will change with the new scheme. Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, there is no cap on premium. So the farmer will be covered for the full ₹30,000 and the premium will be paid to the insurer — ₹600 by the farmer and ₹6,000 by the State and the Centre (earlier, the farmer paid ₹900 and the Centre ₹2,400).

In the new scheme, the sum insured is the average of the past seven years 'threshold' yield for the specific crop (excluding calamity years) in the village it is grown, multiplied by the minimum support price (MSP).

### **Lower premium**

In the existing crop insurance schemes, farmers cough up substantial costs for insurance. In the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, however, the premium outgo will drop substantially. Farmers will have to pay just 2 per cent of the SI for all kharif crops, 1.5 per cent for rabi and 5 per cent for commercial or horticulture crops.

### **Wider coverage**

Unlike in the earlier schemes, in the new one, there is greater risk coverage. For instance, there was no cover for risks specific to a region (landslide, inundation) in NAIS. In MNAIS, risk of loss to cyclonic rains was given only to coastal regions.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana all risks are covered. Post-harvest losses due to cyclonic rain or thunder are covered for farmers across India. Also, unlike in NAIS, the new scheme covers loss due to adverse

weather conditions preventing sowing of crops after expenditure has been incurred.

### **Faster settlement**

A delayed settlement process for crop loss defeats the very purpose of insurance. The delay in settling claims for existing schemes was sometimes as long as six months to a year.

Amit Bhandari, Head – Health & Agriculture, Underwriting and Claims at ICICI Lombard General Insurance, says, “Estimation of yield through manual crop cutting experiments and the time lag in sharing the yield data with insurance companies results in delay in settlement.”

To expedite the process, the Centre has directed the use of drones and other satellite-based technology when assessing crop damage and estimating acreage. It has also mandated authorities to use smart phones to capture images of crops to improve the quality of yield data. As the images come with GPS time stamping, the process will be more reliable.

Another leading general insurer says the Centre has now laid down the deadlines clearly. From the number of days within which the State has to give the certified yield data to the insurance company, to the maximum number of days within which the Centre/State has to pay their premium subsidy to the insurer, and the number of days for the insurance company to settle claims — everything has been put down on paper.

### **Stock up pulses from Central buffer system, States told**

The Centre has asked State governments to stock up pulses, especially tur and urad, from the Central buffer system to avert price spikes in the coming months.

Retail prices of pulses are still ruling high at ₹160-170 per kg in most places even as the rates have cooled down from the peak of ₹210 per kg last year, following a slew of measures including crackdown on hoarders.

The Centre has created a buffer stock of 50,000 tonnes of tur and urad procured in the 2015 kharif season and is also in the process of buying rabi pulses.



## **Review meeting**

“In the review meeting last week, state governments were told to be proactive and place their demand for pulses from central buffer stock at the earliest, and not to wait for price rise,” a senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official said.

The states have been asked to be prepared to ensure adequate quantity of pulses is made available during lean and festival season, the official said.

The states have also been told to make necessary arrangement for milling and storage of pulses in their states. Pulses would be allotted to states on first-come-first-serve basis.

## **Unfair practices**

Beside the states, Central government enforcement agencies have been asked to be alert to curb any unfair trade practice in pulses, the official added.

Meanwhile, the government is importing pulses through MMTC to boost domestic supply.

The government is using Price Stabilisation Fund for creating buffer stock and import of pulses and other essential commodities so that to intervene in the market to check prices.



## **Second year of drought**

Despite several steps, pulses prices are expected to remain firm this year as well because production is unlikely to increase significantly because of drought for the second straight year.

As per the Agriculture Ministry's second estimate, pulses production is estimated at 17.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), marginally higher than the previous year's production of 17.15 million tonnes.

## **Palm oil on the boil**



Lower production due to El Nino is fuelling a rally

Crude palm oil (CPO) has witnessed a strong rally this year. Malaysian CPO futures traded on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives Exchange have surged 12 per cent in the first quarter of 2016. The rally has gathered momentum in the last two months, and the prices are up 14 per cent since January. The contract now trades at MYR 2,717 per tonne.

A sharp fall in production from Malaysia and Indonesia, the world's largest producers of palm oil, due to El Nino, has fuelled CPO prices.

Data from the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) shows that output from Malaysia, the second-largest global producer, has dipped since October last year. Monthly production is down 49 per cent from 2.04 million tonnes in October last year to 1.04 million tonnes in February this year.

Market experts forecast the total production for oil year 2015-16 (October to September) to be lower by 2 million tonnes compared to the previous year.

On the domestic front, the crude palm oil futures contract traded on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) has risen 33 per cent in the first quarter of this year, taking cues from the Malaysian CPO contract.

It is currently trading near ₹550 per 10 kg.

There is talk in the market of demand shifting to soya oil due to the prolonged rally in palm oil prices. Soya oil is used as a substitute for palm oil. Though this is a threat to the rally, charts suggest that there is room for CPO prices to rise further.

### **Medium-term view**

The Malaysian CPO contract made a multi-year low of MYR 1,800 in August 2015 and surged to a two-year high of MYR 2,740 last week. Resistance is at around MYR 2,700 and MYR 2,750, which have held as of now and the contract has come off slightly from this high. A strong break above MYR 2,750 will see the rally extending to MYR 2,800. Further break above MYR 2,800 will then take the contract higher to MYR 2,900 and MYR 2,950 in the medium term.

On the other hand, if the resistance at MYR 2,750 is maintained, then there is a possibility of seeing a short-term corrective fall in prices. Strong support is seen between MYR 2,500 and MYR 2,400, which is likely to limit the downside for the contract.

Only a strong break below MYR 2,400 will turn the trend bearish. But such a strong fall looks unlikely at the moment and the CPO price could rally to MYR 2,900 and MYR 2,950 before we see any strong reversal.

On the domestic front, the 10 per cent rally last month in the MCX-CPO contract has taken it well above the 200-week moving average. The region between ₹475 and ₹450 will be a strong medium-term support which can limit any intermediate corrective fall. That said, a rally to ₹600 and ₹620 looks likely in the coming weeks.

### **Short-term view**

Resistance is in the ₹540-550 zone. Failure to decisively break above ₹550 can trigger a corrective fall to ₹510 and ₹500. Since the contract has rallied sharply in a short span of time, the chances of seeing a short-term corrective fall cannot be ruled out. The 21-day moving average at ₹508 is an important short-term support for the contract.

A strong break and a decisive close below this level can turn the outlook negative. Such a break can drag the contract lower to ₹490 and ₹480 thereafter.

On the other hand, a strong break above ₹550 can take the MCX contract higher to ₹580.

## **Business Standard**

### **Rajasthan to seek Centre relief for crop damage**

In some areas of Rajasthan, 10-20% of the standing crop has been damaged



Rajasthan could be the first state in the country in the current rabi season to formally seek assistance from the Centre for damage to the standing crop due to untimely rains. The state is preparing to send a formal memorandum soon.

A senior state government official said preliminary estimates show that in

some areas, 10-20 per cent of the standing crop has been damaged, while in others, the damage is to the tune of 20-30 per cent.

Most of the damage was in four districts of the state, including Jodhpur and Bikaner, which received hailstorm during the recent bout of unseasonal rains.

"Our teams are in the field taking stock of the situation. A final figure would be known around April 15 when the survey teams return," said a senior official with the state agriculture department.

He said once the extent of damage is known, only then would a formal memorandum be sent to the central government.

Senior officials with the Union agriculture ministry confirmed they have received information that Rajasthan is planning to send a memorandum on crop loss.

"We are ready and as soon as we receive a formal memorandum, we would send our teams to assess the situation," said an official.

States can avail compensation for crop loss under the laid-down provisions after making an assessment of the extent of damage and sending a memorandum to the Centre in a prescribed format.

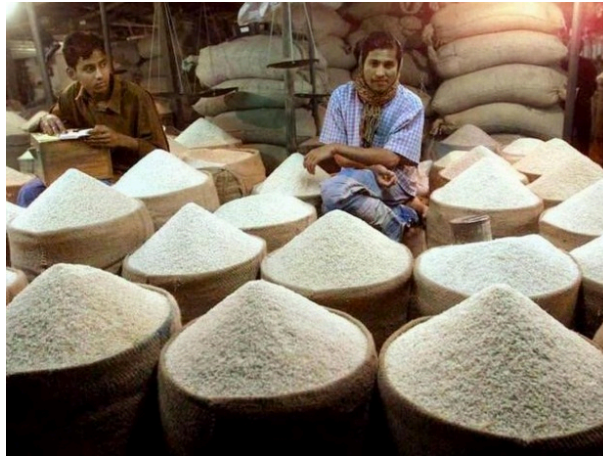
Before sending a memorandum, it has to first notify the disaster in the state gazette. In the first and second weeks of March, unseasonal rains accompanied by isolated incidents of hailstorms impacted parts of northern and western India.

Officials said although the impact was spread over six states, it was not severe anywhere except for parts of Rajasthan, where the assessment is on.

In Punjab and Haryana, some standing crop was impacted in the districts of Ferozpur, Bathinda, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Patiala, while in Haryana, some damage was seen in Hisar, Sirsa, Jind, Bhiwani, Sonapat, Fatehbad, Karnal and Rohtak.

However, nowhere was it very widespread or severe. In Madhya Pradesh also, some damage was seen in around 20 districts mainly in the wheat crop.

In 2015, the standing rabi crop in 19 million hectares of land was affected due to unseasonal rains, which pulled down the final harvest.



The domestic basmati rice industry, which is witnessing excess supply and weak demand, may revive in the next harvest season in the second half of 2016-17, a report said.

"The basmati rice industry faced headwinds - weak demand and oversupply in FY16. The current scenario of excess supply and weak demand is expected to continue in the near term and exporters are likely to continue facing financial stress in the near term.

"Any improvement in the situation is likely only from the next basmati paddy harvest season in the second half of 2016-17 due to improvement in demand," rating agency Icria said in its report in Mumbai.

The supply of basmati paddy is expected to witness some moderation as farmers are likely to shift away from basmati, given the non-remunerative prices in the last two crop cycles.

Moreover, since Iran has removed the ban on import of rice, demand is also expected to witness some improvement, it said.

Rice is one of the most crucial food crops in the world and a staple diet for nearly half the global population. Over 90% of the global rice output and

consumption is centred in Asia, wherein the world's largest rice producers, China and India, are also the world's largest rice consumers.

India accounts for over 70% of the world's basmati rice production. Basmati rice constitutes a small portion of the total rice produced in India.

By volume, the share of basmati rice is around 6% in 2014-15, even as by value, basmati rice exports account for 57% in 2014-15, of India's total rice exports.

Basmati rice exports have increased at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27% from Rs 28.24 billion in 2004-05 to Rs 275.98 billion in 2014-15.

The proportion of basmati rice exports in India's total exports has increased from around 0.6% to around 1.3% during the last one decade.

While basmati rice is consumed across the globe, West Asian countries account for 75% of Indian basmati rice exports in 2014-15.

Within West Asia, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the two largest buyers, together accounting for over 50% of basmati rice exports from India.

However, even as Iran emerged as one of the largest importers of basmati rice in recent years, the country imposed a ban on basmati rice imports from India in 2014-15, citing its own healthy rice crop and large basmati inventory.

Commenting on pricing scenario, Icra said basmati paddy is also vulnerable to cyclical price fluctuations. Higher prices in the market encourage higher basmati paddy cultivation, which increases supply in the next season.

This depresses the price, thereby erasing gains and shifting farmers away from basmati paddy cultivation.

During the procurement season of 2012-13 and 2013-14, there was a steep rise in paddy prices from around Rs 18,000 per tonne (MT) in 2011-12 to around Rs 37,000 MT in 2013-14, due to strong demand in the international market.



By volume, the share of basmati rice is around 6% in 2014-15, even as by value, basmati rice exports account for 57% in 2014-15, of India's total rice exports

### **Punjab opens its heart - and purse - to farmers**

Instead of addressing systemic problems in agriculture, farm politics in the state is about how much money the government can offer the farmer as a dole



*Punjab, known as the country's grain bowl with over 80 per cent of its land under irrigation, recorded the second highest farmers suicides in 2015, after Maharashtra*

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), led by Parkash Singh Badal and son Sukhbir, was in a dilemma a year before the 2012 Assembly elections in Punjab. The Akalis had ruled Punjab since 2007 but no party had ever returned to power for a second spell since Punjab was created as a Sikh majority state in 1966. The Badals mulled whether they should flirt with their sectarian "panthic" agenda, the politics of Sikh religious identity or focus on development.

The predicament faces the Badals yet again. Five years earlier, they'd defeated anti-incumbency by opening the government's purse strings - pumping money into rural areas. With elections to the state Assembly barely 10 months away, and the Akalis faced with not only a resurgent Congress but the increasingly visible Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as well, the Badals have plumped for their tried and tested strategy to arrest the 10-year anti-

incumbency amid allegations of having run a corrupt government.

The strategy involves wooing their predominantly rural Sikh-Jat-peasant support base by announcing a slew of promises. By taking strict action against radical Sikh groups for holding a Sarbat Khalsa and the events in the aftermath of the "desecration" of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Akalis have continued with their non-panthic secular politics.

Last September, they had also supported a pardon for Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim by the Akal Takht, the highest temporal body of the Sikhs. He had angered Sikhs by appearing in an initiation ceremony wearing clothes associated with Guru Gobind Singh, which had led to violence in several parts of Haryana and Punjab.

This acceptance of apology and pardon to the godman has kept the party attractive to Dalit Sikhs. Its non-sectarian agenda has also allowed its Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ally to remain credible among its core support base of urban Hindu-Khatris-traders.

### **Rural rot**

However, the biggest push by the SAD-BJP government to repair its image has come in the agrarian sector. The peasantry in Punjab faces a crisis. In the Budget session of Parliament, junior Agriculture Minister Mohanbhai Kundariya stated in a written reply that Punjab had the second highest number of farmer suicides in 2015, after Maharashtra, 449 against 720, respectively.

Other states on this list are Telangana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Barring Punjab, all the others have featured regularly on the list of states with the highest number of farm suicides. The suicides were attributed to the presence of large unirrigated area, poor response to cultivation of cash crops and the traditional systems of farming.

Punjab, known as the country's grain bowl, with 80 per cent of its land under irrigation, is a surprise inclusion. Two consecutive drought years, interspersed with unseasonal rain and pest attacks, a rapidly falling water table, falling farm export and near-stagnant minimum support price (MSP)

growth in paddy and wheat, and overall slump in farm commodity prices seem to have broken the back of India's grain country.

So much so that farmers in Punjab and also adjoining Haryana, perhaps for the first time, sold a variety of basmati rice (PUSA 1509) to the Food Corporation of India for the Public Distribution System (PDS). The price of PB 1509 crashed from Rs 4,500 a quintal to a mere Rs 1,700 a quintal, despite a fall in sown area.

Even the usually robust kinnow farms in Punjab were not spared. There were reports that in the past two years, farmers uprooted kinnow orchards as prices remained static while input costs kept climbing. The state had around 42,795 hectares under the citrus fruit.

All this points to a systemic failure in Punjab's rural hinterland. With agriculture and farming the backbone of the state's economy, and one with national repercussions, the ruling SAD-BJP government is expectedly rattled, with elections scheduled for early 2017.

There have been numerous peasant protests for higher compensation for damaged crops. Allegations of corruption have flown thick and fast. In the whitefly episode, when hectares and hectares of farmland in the state were wiped out in days, fingers were pointed at the state administration for failing to control the spurious pesticide mafia, which not only gave farmers wrong instructions about effectiveness of the chemicals but also lulled them into complacency.

The Rs 1,700-crore scam claimed the head of the state's agriculture director, Mangal Singh Sandhu.

A friendly government at the Centre after years of acrimony with the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance was of little assistance. The Narendra Modi government's push for ill-thought amendments to the Land Acquisition Act and low MSPs nailed the perception of both the Centre and state government being pro-rich.

### **PUNJAB 2016-17 BUDGET FOR FARMERS**

Interest-free crop loan of Rs 50,000 per crop to small and marginal farmers having landholding up to five acres

Bhagat Puran Singh Sehat Bima Yojna to provide insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh to a farmer family in case of death or disability of head of the family and the family will also be entitled to free medical facility up to Rs 50,000 per year; approximately 1.1 million farmers to be benefitted

Provident Fund-cum-Pension Scheme for farmers to provide secure and stable income

Kisan Vikas Chamber in Mohali district to bridge the gap between farmers and policymakers, and to redress their problems

Abolish VAT on raw honey and bee-keeping equipment, which currently attract tax rate of 6.05 per cent. Pig feed, which attracts tax rate of 6.05 per cent, is proposed to be exempted from VAT

To showcase the innovative initiatives of farmers and to motivate others, Punjab to start suitable awards

#### PUNJAB 2016-17 BUDGET FOR WOMEN

Swasth Kanya Yojna: Provide free school bags containing stationery items to girl students. Bags will contain 'benefit eligibility card', showing benefits being provided to girls under various schemes

Special women safety initiatives like extensive patrolling and a new women safety app- 'Shakti'

Mai Bhago Women Empowerment Scheme to provide loan at subsidised rate of five per cent per annum to women members to establish small business enterprises

#### PUNJAB 2016-17 BUDGET FOR YOUTH

Unemployment allowance of Rs 1,000 per month

Free sports kits to youth

Interest-free education loan up to Rs 5 lakh for the duration of the course to the economically weaker

#### **Badals' moves**

In recent months, the Badals have attempted to change this perception and reach out to its peasant support base. The state Assembly passed a

contentious Bill that paved the way for returning of land acquired from farmers in the 1960s and 1970s for the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal to the original owners. This meant the canal would need to be filled, leading to massive repercussions in neighbouring Haryana and in Delhi. The Badal government was unrelenting. Intervention by the high court and formation of a high-powered committee might have put the lid on the issue for the time being, but the message has been conveyed.

Then, the state government passed the "Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness Bill", which not only provided for a one-time settlement for debt-related disputes of farmers with arhtiyas (commission agents) but also created a comprehensive mechanism to the district level through which farm debt could be settled.

The Act empowered the state government to fix a maximum rate which non-institutional creditors (moneylenders and arhtiyas in this case) could charge from debtors. The Act covers non-institutional debt of up to Rs 15 lakh and only those taken for agricultural purposes. The state government, in one stroke, has tried to address the big issue of growing indebtedness in rural Punjab, singularly blamed for several of the farm suicides.

A survey on indebtedness among farmers and farm labour in rural Punjab, done for the Indian Council for Social Science Research sometime earlier, had pegged the debt on state's farmers at Rs 69,355 crore. Other estimates put the figure at a little over Rs 36,000 crore, including Rs 12,000 crore of non-institutional loan advance given by arhtiyas.

According to reports, the Punjab government is also planning to raise of the compensation to be given to cotton farmers for the damage to their standing crop in 2015. The state has asked officials to go to the fields to assess damage to the standing rabi wheat and mustard crops from the recent rains, though the intensity of showers this year was much less than in 2015.

Punjab is also among the first states to start implementing Prime Minister Modi's pet crop insurance scheme, though 80 per cent of its farmland is under irrigation and crop loss due to water shortage or drought is among the lowest in the country.

The SAD-BJP government's 2016-17 Budget is devoted to the welfare of farmers and rural youth. Among the measures are a Rs 5-lakh insurance

cover with annual free medical facility of up to Rs 50,000, interest-free crop loan of Rs 30,000 to small and marginal farmers, a provident fund-cum-pension scheme for farmers, Rs 1,000 monthly allowance to 100,000 youths for vocational training and allocating money for creating "smart villages".

### **Competing populism, cynical voters**

These sops have become par for the course in Punjab politics in the past decade and a half. In 2002, the Congress led by Amarinder Singh defeated the incumbent Akalis with the promise of free electricity to farmers and removal of octroi. The Congress manifesto committee was, then, chaired by Manmohan Singh.

However, after coming to power the Congress government backtracked on its electoral promises and announced a number of initiatives towards reform, including imposing electricity rates on agriculture. The party did poorly in Punjab in the 2004 Lok Sabha Elections.

When it went into the 2007 Assembly elections, Manmohan Singh, the then prime minister, opposed some of the sops that Amarinder said should be announced. The Akalis, however, outdid the Congress by not only promising free electricity but also atta at Rs 4 a kg and pulses at Rs 20.

Incidentally, it was the Amarinder-led Congress government that had ensured passage of the Punjab Termination of Agreement Act of 2004 on the SYL canal. The Akalis beat anti-incumbency to return to power in 2012 on the back of constructing canals and delivering several other sops.

Observers of Punjab politics say the state has entered into a non-ideological phase, with the relationship between its politicians and voters being increasingly transactional, more than anywhere else in India. This also stems from a deep cynicism for the political class.

"Chitte bagule, neele more, eh vee chor te oh vee chor", is a saying from the 1970s still popular in rural Punjab. In English it loosely translates as cranes are white and peacocks are blue but all politicians are thieves. In Punjab politics, traditionally Congress workers and leaders tie a white or sky-blue headgear, while the Akalis wear a deep-blue one.

According to Pramod Kumar, who heads the Chandigarh-based Institute for Development and Communication, the situation in Punjab is fluid, with all



three contestants - SAD, Congress and AAP - changing their responses from one event to another. And, each such new event suggests somehow one or the other party has become more acceptable to the public.

The "events" of the past 12 months include holding of a Sarbat Khalsa, "desecration" of the Guru Granth Sahib and the consequent by-poll to Khadoor Sahib, farmers' protests over crop damage and finally the SYL canal controversy.

"This phenomenon is being witnessed because none of the major political players has any ideological heft. Since people no longer connect with these political parties, they have been wise enough to hire event managers to connect with the people," Kumar says.

It would seem the Akalis, with the reins of government in their hands, are trying to make the best of what looks like an uphill electoral battle, by assuaging their rural support base.

They have done it before in 2012 but against a Congress plagued by infighting. This time they have to contend with not only a more united Congress but also the formidable freshness of the AAP.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Arvind Kejriwal announces compensation for farmers**

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said his government has decided to give compensation to farmers in the national capital who have lost their crops due to hailstorm and nonseasonal rain.

Addressing a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' in north-west Delhi's Kanjhawala area, the Delhi chief minister said the compensation will be provided later this year after an assessment report is received from the Divisional Commissioner about the loss suffered by the farmers.

"We will give compensation to those farmers who have lost their crops due to hailstorm and unseasonal rain earlier this year," he said.

A senior government official said the quantum of compensation would be decided on the basis of the assessment report from the Divisional Commissioner.

Last year, the Kejriwal government had paid Rs 50,000 per hectare/ Rs 20,000 per acre to farmers who suffered losses due to nonseasonal

### **Govt declares 20k relief for farmers**

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced a compensation of Rs 20,000 per acre for farmers who lost their crops during unseasonal rain and hailstorm recently.

Speaking at a kisan mahapanchayat in northwest Delhi's Kanjhawala district, the CM said that the revenue office would carry out a survey to determine the extent of loss and eligibility, after which the compensation would be distributed to the farmers. This would largely cover those who lost their wheat crop.

"Delhi has a policy of giving the highest compensation for crop loss to farmers. Hundreds of farmers who lost their crops in 2015 were given suitable compensation," said the CM. The compensation scheme, named was distributed to an estimated 19,000 farmers last year.

Unlike last year when rain and hailstorm played spoilsport to the crops in Hadauti region and other parts of the state month of April, farmers this year have reasons to rejoice. They have started harvesting their crops as weather has been conducive past fortnight. Farmers who still have to harvest their crop have kept their fingers crossed and are praying that the sultry weather, which is beneficial for their wheat crop, continues.

Frenzied activity started at the Kota mandi from Saturday where farmers are pouring in in large numbers with their harvested crops.

"Thankfully, I could harvest the crop of wheat. I have had a yield of 8 quintals per bigha and I have sown wheat on almost 9 bighas of land," said Netram, a native of Shergarh village in Baran.

Last year was bad for Netram and his family as he took a loan of nearly Rs 3

lakh from the cooperative bank. "I hope to repay my loan this year as this season has been good," he added.

Likewise, in some areas of Bundi, Kota and Baran, farmers will take another one week to harvest their full crop. "Wheat crop is almost ready and needs heat of at least one more week before it is harvested.

I am hopeful that weather is not going to play a spoilsport the way it did last year," said Chotu Lal Meena, another villager from Dharbheeji village in Kota district. Meena, who had sown wheat on 22 bighas of land, is a happy man as he is expecting a good yield.

Last year, there was a damage of almost 60% crop in Hadauti region, which includes Kota, Jhalawar, Baran and Bundi districts, due to abrupt weather.

Meanwhile, the Kota and Baran mandis, where farmers from Madhya Pradesh also come to sell their crops have geared up to sell the harvest.

"Farmers arrive at the mandi even at night time and wait until the shops open morning. We have made arrangements to ensure they do not face any kind of inconvenience," said Soha Lal, a wholesale dealer of wheat.

### **Ber tree: Hardy, bearing nutritious fruit too**

The ber tree is a hardy tree that survives extremes of temperature. In fact, it needs hot summer and adequate water to bear abundant fruit. There is a sapling of this tree growing right outside the editorial offices of the Times of India at Raja Park.

Most of the ber trees in India grow from seedlings, and the fruit is not very large. These trees are found widely across north India. What is unique about this species is that it is used extensively in traditional medicine across Asia.

In Korea and Japan, the fruit is recommended as a balm for those dealing with symptoms of stress. The leaves are used for hair- and skin-related ailments, and the seeds, some Ayurvedic doctors claim, can slow the spread of cancer.

The fruit of this tree finds mention even in the Ramayana - Shabari, the daughter of a hunter, is a big worshipper of the Lord. So punctilious is she

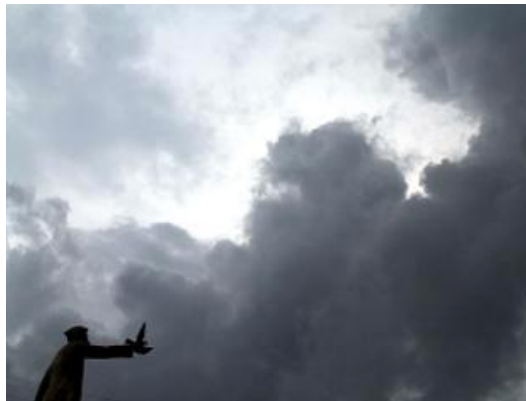
that Ram eats only sweet fruit that she tastes and every single one of the ber she later offers him!

Given how hardy the tree is, it is ideal for use by horticulture departments of cities like Jaipur. One popular website says, "It is a shade-giving tree, that also bears fruit."

Attempts to reach the horticulture department of the Jaipur Development Authority to check if the tree was being planted in city limits proved futile. The forest official who previously was posted in the JDA horticulture department has now been posted out, and the new official, also from the forest department, pleads that he is not very knowledgeable about urban trees.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Met prediction: Talk of normal monsoon set to cheer India Inc**



India's latest monsoon forecasting model predicts good rainfall this year, which will end severe water shortage that is threatening power supply and cheer farmers who have been devastated by two consecutive droughts.

PUNE/NEW DELHI: India's latest monsoon forecasting model predicts good rainfall this year, which will end severe water shortage that is threatening power supply and cheer farmers who have been devastated by two consecutive droughts.

The Climate Forecast System (CFS) of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) predicts mostly normal and sometimes heavy rainfall across the country barring parts of coastal Gujarat, western Rajasthan, northern Kashmir and parts of the Northeast.

Its forecast is in step with predictions of Australian, US and Indian scientists who say that the monsoon-disrupting El Nino phenomenon is ebbing and will be completely neutralised before the monsoon strikes the Kerala coast on June 1.

However, weather scientists caution that CFS is still an experimental model and its current assessment is based on weather parameters until February, while the India Meteorological Department (IMD) needs weather parameters till March to give its official monsoon forecast.

"We will issue our official forecast only when all the parameters till March are available," said DS Pai, head of long-range weather forecasting at IMD.

However, many forecasters are already saying this year's monsoon rainfall will be normal. Last week, Weather Risk predicted good rainfall this season.

"The models are indicating above-average rainfall from June to September," said Kanti Prasad, head meteorology at Weather Risk and former director of the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting at the weather office.

The IMD, which accurately forecast last year's weak rainfall, and Skymet, which got its forecast completely wrong in 2015, are also expected to issue their predictions this month.

Scientists said the new forecast model of the IITM is a fully coupled ocean-atmosphere-land model being developed by the institute.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences wants IMD to use CFS model as the main model for official forecast of India's summer monsoon by 2017.

Weather scientists across the globe say the El Nino conditions, which led to two consecutive droughts in India, are weakening, while La Nina conditions are likely to set in only after the Indian summer season is over.

The Australian meteorological department in its forecast on March 29 said the decline of the 2015-16 El Nino continues in the tropical pacific.

"International climate models suggest El Nino will continue to weaken... returning to neutral levels by mid-2016. For winter (June-August in Australia) and spring (September-November), climate models suggest neutral and La Nina are equally likely.

However, the accuracy of forecasts made at this time of year is lower than those at other times, and some caution should be exercised," it said.

The American National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Centre agrees. "A strong El Nino is present and is weakening," itsaidonMarch 28.

### **India imports 10,000 tonne soyameal due to high domestic prices**



Despite an import duty of 15%, imported soyameal is cheaper than the domestic produce by 7.8%.

PUNE: India, which has been a traditional exporter of soyameal, had to import the commodity after many years. After wheat and maize, soyameal is the third commodity that India had to import as two back-to-back droughts have depleted production and deteriorated its quality.

"Three poultry aggregators from south have imported a total quantity of 10,000 tonne soya meal with 48% protein content from Ukraine, which will be sufficient to take care of our requirement for the next two months," GB Sundararajan, managing director, Suguna Foods, said.



Despite an import duty of 15%, imported soyameal is cheaper than the domestic produce by 7.8%. The cost of domestic soyameal in Coimbatore, including transportation cost from Nagpur is Rs 41,000/tonne while the landed cost of imported soyameal including the import duty is Rs 38,000/tonne, said Sundararajan.

The NCDEX spot prices of soya meal in Indore mandi have increased by 15.4% in less than a month, jumping from Rs 32,050/tonne on March 3 to Rs 37,000/tonne on April 1.

India does not allow import of Genetically Modified (GM) soya meal, while 90% of the soya meal available in the world is GM.

According to industry body Solvent Extractors Association of India, India's soyameal exports have declined by 52% during the April 2015 to February 2016 period due to very high prices of domestic soyameal when compared with international prices.

India has become an island of high commodity prices, forcing industries to explore international markets, where prices are much lower. Incidentally, India had to import maize after 16 years.

The private trade had imported wheat last year and is preparing to import it again this year after July as it reckons that production of the winter crop could be much lower than government estimates. "We think domestic prices can rally after July and India may have to import wheat," said Rajiv Yadav, vice president (grains and oilseeds), Noble Agri.

### **Basmati rice industry may see revival from H2 of 2016-17: Icra**

MUMBAI: The domestic basmati rice industry, which is witnessing excess supply and weak demand, may revive in the next harvest season in the second half of 2016-17, a report said here.

"The basmati rice industry faced headwinds - weak demand and oversupply in

"Any improvement in the situation is likely only from the next basmati paddy harvest season in the second half of 2016-17 due to improvement in demand," rating agency Icra said in its report here.

The supply of basmati paddy is expected to witness some moderation as farmers are likely to shift away from basmati, given the non-remunerative prices in the last two crop cycles.



The supply of basmati paddy is expected to witness some moderation as farmers are likely to shift away from basmati, given the non-remunerative prices in the last two crop cycles.

Moreover, since Iran has removed the ban on import of rice, demand is also expected to witness some improvement, it said.

Rice is one of the most crucial food crops in the world and a staple diet for nearly half the global population. Over 90 per cent of the global rice output and consumption is centred in Asia, wherein the world's largest rice producers, China and India, are also the world's largest rice consumers.

India accounts for over 70 per cent of the world's basmati rice production. Basmati rice constitutes a small portion of the total rice produced in India.

By volume, the share of basmati rice is around 6 per cent in 2014-15, even as by value, basmati rice exports account for 57 per cent in 2014-15, of India's total rice exports.

Basmati rice exports have increased at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27 per cent from Rs 28.24 billion in 2004-05 to Rs 275.98 billion in 2014-15.

The proportion of basmati rice exports in India's total exports has increased from around 0.6 per cent to around 1.3 per cent during the last one decade.

While basmati rice is consumed across the globe, West Asian countries account for 75 per cent of Indian basmati rice exports in 2014-15.

Within West Asia, Iran and Saudi Arabia are the two largest buyers, together accounting for over 50 per cent of basmati rice exports from India.

However, even as Iran emerged as one of the largest importers of basmati rice in recent years, the country imposed a ban on basmati rice imports from India in 2014-15, citing its own healthy rice crop and large basmati inventory.

Commenting on pricing scenario, Iera said basmati paddy is also vulnerable to cyclical price fluctuations. Higher prices in the market encourage higher basmati paddy cultivation, which increases supply in the next season.

This depresses the price, thereby erasing gains and shifting farmers away from basmati paddy cultivation.

During the procurement season of 2012-13 and 2013-14, there was a steep rise in paddy prices from around Rs 18,000 per tonne (MT) in 2011-12 to around Rs 37,000 MT in 2013-14, due to strong demand in the international market.

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



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.

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.

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.

### **States asked to stock up pulses from central buffer system**



Beside states, central government enforcement agencies have been asked to be alert to curb any unfair trade practice in pulses, the official added.

NEW DELHI: Centre has asked state governments to stock up pulses, especially tur and urad, from the central buffer system to avert price spikes in the coming months.

Retail prices of pulses are still ruling high at Rs 160-170 per kg in most places even as the rates have cooled down from the peak of Rs 210 per kg last year, following a slew of measures including crackdown on hoarders.

The Centre has created a buffer stock of 50,000 tonnes of tur and urad procured in the 2015 kharif season and is also in the process of buying rabi pulses.

"In the review meeting last week, state governments were told to be proactive and place their demand for pulses from central buffer stock at the earliest, and not to wait for price rise," a senior Consumer Affairs Ministry official said.

The states have been asked to be prepared to ensure adequate quantity of pulses is made available during lean and festival season, the official said.

The state have also been told to make necessary arrangement for milling and storage of pulses in their states. Pulses would be allotted to states on first-come-first-serve-basis.

Beside states, central government enforcement agencies have been asked to be alert to curb any unfair trade practice in pulses, the official added.

Meanwhile, the government is importing pulses through state-run MMTC to boost domestic supply.

The government is using Price Stabilisation Fund for creating buffer stock and import of pulses and other essential commodities so that to intervene in the market to check prices.

Despite several steps, pulses prices are expected to remain firm this year as well because production is unlikely to increase significantly because of drought for the second straight year.

As per the Agriculture Ministry's second estimate, pulses production is estimated at 17.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), marginally higher than the previous year's production of 17.15 million tonnes.

India is the world's largest producer of pulses, but its domestic demand outstrips production. The shortfall is met from import.

### **Poultry industry demands permission to import feed during lean period**

PUNE: Poultry industry has demanded permission to import feed ingredients during lean period to tide over the high prices of feed, which, coupled with decline in consumption on account of two back-to-back droughts in the country, have slowed down the industry's growth.

Dinesh Bhosale, vice president (west), Poultry Federation of India said, "From last two years, supply of feed ingredients like soyabean and maize has been less, their prices are high, there is speculation. Adulteration of feed is also a big challenge in front of the poultry industry."

"Due to high prices of maize and soya meal, the poultry industry has been making losses for the past two years," said commodity analyst and poultry



expert Dipak Chavan. Two big poultry feed companies have become bankrupt in the past two years, while many have shrunk in size.

The imported soyameal is currently cheaper by Rs 3000/tonne including duties as compared to the domestic soyameal. However, due to less availability of non-GMO soyameal, there are very few sources available to Indian buyers in the international markets. "We need to allow imports during the lean period from April to September when there is no local harvest," said Bhosale.



Along with high feed prices, poultry industry could not see its expected growth during last two years as rural consumption declined due to two back-to-back droughts in the country.

Along with high feed prices, poultry industry could not see its expected growth during last two years as rural consumption declined due to two back-to-back droughts in the country.