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## **Canadian project to propel growth of millets**

*It will enhance value addition and strengthen the food service providers*

A project created by public-private synergy was launched here to improve area under cultivation of small millets, enhance value addition and strengthen the food service providers.

The “Scaling up small millets post-harvest and nutritious food products project,” funded by the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund, to be implemented by the Madurai-based Dhan Foundation in association with McGill University, Canada, and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), aims to create awareness of food products made from small millets among the public, besides enhancing the capacity of equipment manufacturers to meet value addition needs at the micro level.

Addressing a press conference after launching the project, K. Shanmugam, Additional Chief Secretary, said that the government would promote value addition in small millets under the poverty eradication programme. The Agriculture and Rural Development Secretaries had already been instructed to add this in the list of enterprises to be promoted.

The State had vast stretches of dry land and cultivation of small millets would be encouraged in a big way.

Greg Giokas, Consul General of Canada, said that India and Canada had identical GDP and were “made for each other.”

India had potential for growth in agriculture and food sectors and the Canadian funding of Canada \$ 1.5 million for the project was in mutual interest.

Kevin Tiessen, Senior Programme Specialist, said that the project was one among the eight funded by Canada across the world.

Vijaya Raghavan, Professor, Bioresource Engineering, McGill University, said that awareness of the value of millets should be created at all levels. The project would give an opportunity for farmers to market their produce worldwide and value addition for small millets must happen at the village level, he said.

C. R. Anandakumar, Registrar, TNAU, said that 10, 000 acres of land had been identified for cultivation of small millets all over the State and the variety ideal for a particular district had also been identified.

The objective of the project was to make farmers entrepreneurs.

Malathi, Professor, Food Science and Nutrition, TNAU, said that two incubators – one each in TNAU, Coimbatore, and Home Science College and Research Institute, Madurai – would train farmers in the nuances of value addition.

M. P. Vasimalai, Executive Director, Dhan Foundation, spoke about the need to reposition millets in the mind of farmers.

It had been planned to encourage cultivation and value addition through farmer-producer companies.

The 26-month project will be implemented across India, with focus on Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

A machine to provide value addition for millets that can be used at the village level has already been fabricated by a Salem-based entrepreneur.

### **Turmeric auction fetches Rs. 3.10 crore**

Turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 3.10 crore at the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Cooperative Society on Saturday.

While ‘Virali’ turmeric variety fetched a price between Rs. 8,699 and Rs. 11,403 per quintal, ‘kizhangu’ variety fetched a price between Rs. 8,599 and 9,499, and ‘panangali’ variety fetched a price between Rs. 10,919 and Rs. 20,299 per quintal. About 5,000 quintal of turmeric was auctioned for Rs. 3.10 crore on the occasion, according to society sources.

### **State releases Rs. 21 cr. input subsidy to farmers**

The Agriculture Department has distributed an input subsidy of Rs.21.85 crore to farmers in the district whose crops were damaged due to scanty rainfall and drought last year. The district has achieved 85.8 per cent progress in distribution of this input subsidy.

The subsidy amount has been credited to the accounts of farmers directly using the real-time gross settlement system (RTGS). As many as 88,508 farmers have already been given the input subsidy.

M. Mahanteshappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* that Rs.6,800 per hectare has been given to farmers as input subsidy in rain fed areas.

Also, Rs.13,500 per hectare per farmer has been distributed to farmers in irrigated areas. Since the cost of cultivation in irrigated areas is more compare to rain fed areas, the government has allocated more money for irrigated lands.

As per government directions, about 68 per cent of the total input subsidy amount had been deposited in farmers’ bank accounts, Mr. Mahanteshappa added.

“A few farmers are yet to receive the subsidy as they are yet to furnish their bank account details and also due to technical reasons,” he further said.

Crop in over 58,700 hectares was damaged due to scanty rains in the district last year and Rs. 37 crore was sought to compensate farmers by means of input subsidy.

## **‘Food processing policy a hit with entrepreneurs’**



CEO of Andhra Pradesh Food Processing Society (APFPS) Y.S. Prasad has said that the State traditionally squandered the opportunities offered by the food processing sector, but the Food Processing Policy 2015-20 opened new vistas for prospective entrepreneurs.

The encouraging response evoked by the FPP is evident from the nearly Rs.3,500 crore investments that are in the pipeline.

“A high-level committee is evaluating up to 70 applications and sanctions will be made in the next couple of months,” Mr. Prasad has announced.

Addressing the media on Monday, Mr. Prasad said Andhra Pradesh was No.1 in the country in production of fruit, vegetables, milk, poultry, and fish, but the post-harvest loss, which was estimated at a staggering 30 per cent, inflicted heavy losses on the farmers.

Keeping this in view, emphasis was laid on strengthening the cold chain network and introducing technologies that keep the produce fresh for longer durations.

Mr. Prasad said seven applications were received for establishment of food parks in addition to three (Srini Food Park at Chittoor, Godavari Mega Aqua Food Park at Bhimavaram in West Godavari district, and another one coming up under the aegis of the APIIC in Krishna district) which were in different stages of execution.

Mr. Prasad further said that a ‘banana revolution’ was in the making in Anantapur, Kadapa, and Kurnool districts with Jain Irrigation Systems Limited playing the lead role. The districts were highly prone to desertification, but the intensive methods of growing fruit and vegetables with minimum use of water reaped rich dividends.

Incubators called Smart Agri Platform Network Areas (SAPNA) were being set up to strengthen production and marketing of agriculture and horticultural production.

### **Tuna fishing**

Mr. Prasad said the government had placed ‘tuna fishing’ high on its agenda as it had tremendous potential abroad. These massive fish were available in huge quantities off the Visakhapatnam coast, he added.

Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation president-elect M. Murali Krishna and executive director P. Bhaskar Rao were present.

### **PMFBY awareness workshop for farmers**



Officials show a board with information about PMFBY to Bhagwant Khuba, MP, at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Bidar on Tuesday. Photo: Gopichand T.

*Insurance scheme will provide security in the wake of rising prices of seeds and fertilizers, says MP*

A workshop to create awareness about Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana was organised in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Bidar on Tuesday. Resource persons spoke to farmers and explained the salient features of the scheme and how it was different from the old insurance schemes. They said that the scheme was mandatory for farmers who took farm loans, while others can make use of it voluntarily.

Lok Sabha member Bhagwant Khuba inaugurated the event and urged farmers to benefit from the scheme. All the earlier schemes have reached only one-fifth of the farmers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants each farmer to be covered in this scheme, the MP said.

He said that the benefits included uniform premium of 2 per cent for Kharif crops, 1.5 per cent for Rabi crops, and five per cent for horticulture, cash or annual crops. The rest of the premium will be paid by the Union government, even if it is beyond 90 per cent.

Those who take Kisan Credit Cards are automatically covered as their contributions are deducted while releasing the loans, while other farmers will have to buy insurance by paying premium amounts separately.

He said that this would provide the much needed security to farmers who were suffering from rising prices of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers and unstable prices of farm produce.

Crop cutting experiments were earlier held at taluk or hobli levels. Now that will be done at village or gram panchayat levels. Technology will be extensively used to assess crop damage. Remote sensing will be used to give accurate estimates, the MP said.

He found fault with the earlier UPA Government for restricting the amount of premium to be paid by the government, that had allegedly resulted in lower compensation amounts. This cap is removed now and farmers will be fully compensated for their losses, he said. The MP listed the pro-farmer measures taken by the NDA Government and said they were better than schemes of the earlier regimes.



## Objection

However, Veerabhushan Nandagave, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha leader, objected to the leader's speech and said that benefits of the schemes were not reaching the intended beneficiaries. He countered the MP's claim that the MUDRA bank scheme had benefited over 10,000 persons in Bidar district alone, by saying that bankers were not entertaining applications by several deserving youth.

The MP said the scheme was one of the most successful schemes of the government and the criticism was not valid.

Ravi Deshmukh, KVK training coordinator, K. Ziaulla, Joint Director of Agriculture, Vishwanath Patil Koutha, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha president, and others were present.

University of Agricultural Science, Raichur, Department of Agriculture and Reliance Foundation had jointly organised the workshop.

## **E-auctions: price fall forces tobacco growers to withdraw produce**



Crisis deepens: Market slide puts tobacco growers in a quandary in Ongole on Monday. —Photo: kommuri Srinivas

*Exercise suspended in six platforms in SLS and SBS regions*

E-auctions in six platforms were suspended in the Southern Light Soil (SLS) and Southern Black Soil (SBS) regions on Monday as farmers stalled the proceedings in protest against the drastic fall in market prices as a fallout of the cigarette manufacturers' decision to stop production decrying the stipulation of larger pictorial health warning.

Upset with the unremunerative prices offered by the cigarette manufacturers and exporters for the 239 bales brought by them, the farmers in Ongole I auction platform withdrew their produce after 14 bales were traded, Tobacco Board sources said.

In Tangutur II, the auctions were suspended after 86 of the 204 bales were traded as the farmers were dissatisfied with the prices offered by the traders, the sources said, adding that the auctions were also suspended in Kondepi, Kanigiri, D.C. Palli, and Kaligiri.

In all, 95,229 million kg of tobacco could be traded in SBS auction platforms at an average price of Rs. 125.87 per kg, the sources said.

Expressing concern over the market going southwards, noted farmer leader and former MP Y. Sivaji urged the Union Commerce Ministry to take note of the snail's pace at which e-auctions were progressing with the manufacturers reneging on the commitments they made at the time of fixing the crop size by reducing their off-take from the market.

"It is high time a full-fledged Chairman was appointed for the Tobacco Board, as also Executive Director and other board members to deal with the present crisis effectively," he said.

Alarmed by the lacklustre market condition, Virginia Tobacco Growers' Welfare Association president Ch. Sessaiah said: "The growers will decide their next course of action in a couple of days."

"The Tobacco Board can suspend the auctions till the deadlock is broken as the farmers are agitated over the high rejection rate of 34 per cent of the bales brought for auctions," he said.



It was unfortunate that the cigarette manufacturers chose to put the farmers to trouble instead of dealing with the larger pictorial warning issue at the appropriate level, he added.



### **Bengaluru scientists gift farmers an aerostat to scare away pests, birds**



The small craft, a floating balloon measuring three or four metres in length, will be deployed about 100 meters from the ground and fitted with acoustic devices and lasers to scare away birds. (HT Photo)

Scientists at Bengaluru's National Research Development Forum (NDRF) are developing an aerostat – a hot air balloon or craft – to help farmers in agriculture, including scaring away pests and birds.

The small craft, a floating balloon measuring three or four metres in length, will be deployed about 100 meters from the ground and fitted with acoustic devices and lasers to scare away birds.

“Birds and rodents can be scared or chased away using lasers that will emit short lights. Similarly the noise emanating from acoustic devices can scare them,” said Dr K Ramachandra, director, NDRF.

“During our interaction with the agriculture researchers and the farming community, we got to know that birds carrying viruses contaminate fresh water bodies while they come to quench their thirst. This can have a devastating impact on aquaculture farms that rely on freshwater for breeding of fishes and prawns.”

The NDRF team has been working with the farming community in the Bhimavaram region of Andhra Pradesh along with horticulture and fisheries departments, and students of a private engineering college to execute the project.

The aerostat can be deployed for a week or two before it is anchored for refuelling. The team of researchers are yet to decide on the whether to use hydrogen or helium to keep the balloon afloat.

The cost of the aerostat is still being worked on but NDRF said there is a conscious effort to keep it affordable for the farming community.

The project is part of a broader push by the NDRF – the research and development wing of the Institution of Engineers (India) – to use technology for conservation of soil, monitoring crops and preventing contamination of water.

The NDRF is also developing mini-autonomous underwater vehicles that will monitor the quality of water in fish-breeding farms.

“The surface board of these mini vehicles will be fitted with sensor suite to monitor the quality of the water at aqua farms. They will rely back data about the pH level etc,” said Ramachandra, also the CEO of the National Programme for MAVs (NP-MICAV).

The NP-MICAV is a Rs 90 crore programme sponsored by the central government to build mini-autonomous flying objects.

Government R&D institutes such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation, National Aerospace Laboratories, Indian Institute of Science, IITs and universities are part of the programme.

“We are currently working on it so it can be deployed soon,” said Ramachandra.

The role of aerostats in India has been largely confined for surveillance purposes till now. An imported aerostat was put on display during the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi to create special effects during the opening and closing ceremonies.

The NDRF was established in 1969 and has been mandated to innovate and carry R&D, design, production in various fields of engineering. Development of Micro Air Vehicles (MAVs) is one of its core activities. These MAVs can be used for defence surveillance, disaster management, search and rescue etc. These comprise fixed, rotary and flapping wing MAVs. Fitted with cameras and sensors, they can carry surveillance and search and rescue operations.



### **‘Inefficiency’ could cost Duncan six tea gardens**

Bengal govt will decide on GP-Goenka-led company’s ‘competence’ after tenure of management control by new entity is over

The GP Goenka-headed Duncan Industries, which is set to lose management control of six tea gardens in West Bengal on grounds of “inefficiency”, may additionally lose ownership of the gardens if the State government so decides after the tenure of management control by a new entity is over.

“The management control of the six ailing tea gardens identified by the Centre will soon be handed over to a new entity for a maximum period of 11 years. After that, the State government, together with the Tea Board, will take a fresh call on whether Duncan has the competence to run the gardens or if the ownership should be passed on to the new entity,” a government official told *BusinessLine*.



### **EoI for 6 gardens**

On March 22, the Tea Board invited Expressions of Interest (EoI) from tea companies, firms and co-operative societies, for taking over management control of Duncan’s tea gardens in Birpara, Gardanga, Lankapara, Tulsipara, Huntapara and Dumchi, all located in West Bengal.

The Commerce Ministry cited Duncan’s failure to comply with the requirements of timely payment of workers’ dues, provident fund, gratuity, ration and other fringe benefits while announcing the takeover of the gardens through the Tea Board in January this year.

“The Tea Board will evaluate the competence of the new agencies to manage the tea gardens and then make its choice and hand over management control for five years, extendable by another six. Ownership of the six gardens during the period will stay with Duncan,” the official said.

### **New entity**

During this period, the State government has the authority to cancel the lease of the tea garden land, which is currently with Duncan, and hand it over to the new entity, if it wants, the official added.

The entity that gets management control of the tea gardens will have to pay all the dues to workers and the current management. All current profits will also be theirs.

Duncan will not get anything for the period that the tea gardens are managed by the new entity. Based on how Duncan performs in the next five to 11 years, the State government will decide whether the company gets to keep the gardens or if it should be passed on to new owners, the official added.

### **Payment dues**

Duncan Industries has 14 tea gardens in West Bengal with estimated dues of around ₹70 crore.

There were a number of deaths reported in some of the tea gardens owned by the company last year, but no direct links were established with non-payment of dues.

Duncan Industries had challenged the Centre's takeover move in the Calcutta High Court, but the court ratified the Commerce Ministry's action.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the takeover was good if the gardens started functioning properly and the Centre ensured that all the workers were given the benefits they are entitled to.

### **Farmers' meet demands law to guarantee income**

The conference called for enactment of a Farmers' Income Guarantee Act that ensures dignified life to farmers and their kin.

The three-day Kisan Swaraj Sammelan, which concluded here on Sunday, has called for an income guarantee scheme for farmers. The meeting,

attended by farmers' representatives and non-governmental organisations, from 25 States in the country, demanded that the Union government must bring out an Act to ensure minimum incomes for farmers.



In a declaration announced at the end of the three day convention, the conference called for enactment of a Farmers' Income Guarantee Act that ensures dignified life to farmers and their kin.

It also demanded an Income Commission for farmers on the lines of Pay Commission appointed periodically to revise salaries of government employees.

The declaration also asked the government to come out with timely relief and offer insurance to protect the interests of farmers in times of natural calamities. "We demand a comprehensive revamp of the Bima Yojana making individual farms as assessment units and covering all risks including wild animal attacks," it said.

"There should be an automatic re-scheduling of bank loans in times of distress," it said.

The conference demanded immediate halt to acquisition of land, particularly of farmers and adivasis, for "infrastructure and industrial development".

"Primacy of prior informed consent of Gram Sabhas should be upheld in all cases. We oppose the dilution in rules and bypassing of the 2013 Act



through Government Orders and methods such as Land Pooling. No land acquisition should take place from assigned landholders,” it said.

The conference also wanted the government to protect the interests of tenant farmers by recognising their rights. “Tenant farmers, sharecroppers and women farmers are the worst affected in the agrarian crisis because they are left out of all the government support systems including low-interest bank loans, disaster relief and crop insurance,” the Declaration said.

While demanding the government to phase out agri-chemicals in a time-bound commitment and stop environmental release of genetically-modified organisms. “The government should put an immediate halt to the processing of the application for commercialization of GM mustard,” it said.

The conference was organised by Medha Patkar (National Alliance for People’s Movements), Vijoo Krishnan (All-India Kisan Sabha), V Rukmini Rao (Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch), Devinder Sharma (agricultural economist) and Kodandaram (Telangana Raithu Joint Action Committee) were among those who addressed the valedictory session.

### **Cardamom tops ₹600/kg on buying interest**



Cardamom markets showed signs of recovery at last week auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu following a revival in buying support.

At the auctions held on Saturday, the average price moved beyond ₹600 a kg for the first time after mid-January, market sources said.

“Upcountry dealers, especially those based in Delhi, were showing interest to buy,” trade sources in Bodinayakannur told *BusinessLine*.

The main reasons attributed to the renewed life in the market are the protracted dry spell in the main growing region of the aromatic spice in the country, Kerala’s Idukki district, without summer showers so far and secondly the completion of harvesting with no material to come from the field, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, said.

Given this situation, it is likely that the next crop would be delayed and no new cardamom is expected to hit the market before July, they said. This phenomenon is pointed out as the reason for the resurgence of the market, they claimed.

North Indian buyers were active. Exporters have reportedly bought an estimated 20 tonnes. Last week only 10 auctions were held in place of 12 auctions and total arrivals stood at around 565 tonnes as against 440 tonnes the previous week.

The individual auction average improved and was vacillating between ₹535 and ₹619 a kg last week.

Total arrivals during the season up to April 2 were at around 25,156 tonnes and sales were at 24,259 tonnes. The individual auction average stood at ₹598.16.

Prices of graded varieties (₹/kg): 8mm bold good colour 950; 7-8 mm 680-700; 6-7 mm 550-580; below 6 mm: 500-510.

# 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 ECONOMIC TIMES

## **FM Arun Jaitley wants focus on irrigation projects for immediate results**



Jaitley observed that the past two years were "most challenging" due to "less than adequate" monsoon, which he noted, resulted in "very marginal" growth of economy.

NEW DELHI: Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley today made a strong pitch for working on irrigation projects to fuel economic growth of rural India and meet the Centre's target to double income of farmers over the next few years.

Speaking during the inaugural session of fourth 'India Water Week', Jaitley noted that irrigation projects, vis-a-vis infrastructure projects, bring "immediate results" in terms of growth and promised that the the Centre will help state governments in such efforts they "alone cannot fight the challenges" posed by erratic weather conditions among others.

"And the objective of the entire exercise is, even when you have adverse monsoon conditions, the rain-fed areas don't starve, they still have and they do have benefit of good agricultural crop. And that is going to be the essence.

"You will have a contribution being made by agriculture to India's economy and therefore, one of our basic targets today is to make sure the income of our rural population doubles over next few years. If that is to double, these are the various instruments including irrigation that we are using to make sure resources are fed into the rural areas," Jaitley said.

Jaitley observed that the past two years were "most challenging" due to "less than adequate" monsoon, which he noted, resulted in "very marginal" growth of economy.

The Minister stated that the trend had its impact on services and manufacturing sector as it impacted the purchasing power of India's 55 per cent population and underscored the need for conserving water and creation of irrigation projects to tackle such situation.

While noting that irrigation is "strictly" a state subject, Jaitley said the Centre will help states in completing such projects for ensuring availability of water.

During his speech, Jaitley also lauded BJP-ruled states such Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh for their irrigation projects for dry areas and agricultural growth attained thereby.

"Investment in irrigation almost gets you immediate result. If you create physical infrastructures in terms of highways, roads, railways, ports, airports, power, before it can contribute to growth and manufacturing, it will take a couple of seasons before the impact is seen.

"Irrigation is one area if you invest in irrigation now, and create a facility you almost get the impact in next season. And therefore, the states which have invested in irrigation have actually added to the growth process," he said.

He said the Centre has made its contribution toward improving and creating



irrigation infrastructure and said NABARD has been asked to create sufficient funds for large projects, while efforts are being made under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sichai Yojana to fast track completion of unfinished works by 2017.

The Finance Minister also stated that Indian economy is doing "reasonably well" as far service sector is concerned.

He said that even though there is a demand problem world over, the manufacturing sector is "slowly picking up".

The session was also attended by Union Ministers Uma Bharti, Birender Singh, Radha Mohan Singh, Prakash Javadekar, Sanwar Lal Jat, Israel's Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

### **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.

### **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.