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Evergreen revolution the way forward, says M.S. Swaminathan

Calls upon youngsters to take up agriculture and be part of food production

Integrating ecology and technology is the way forward towards an evergreen revolution. Renowned agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan on Friday said that organic agriculture could help us move from green revolution to evergreen revolution.

He delivered the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Madanjeet Singh Memorial Lecture on the topic 'Achieving the zero hunger challenge' on Friday at the Pondicherry Central University. The founder of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation said that the land for agriculture was shrinking with the infrastructure development.

“The world would require 50 per cent more rice in 2030 than what was in 2004, with approximately 30 per cent less arable land of today. Hence, the need for a sustainable development goal set towards providing food security and nutrition,” he said.

In his lecture, he emphasised that mainstreaming ecology in technology development and dissemination was the road to sustainable agriculture. He added that information technology is a transformational technology and it has to be used towards sustainable development.

Mr. Swaminathan was instrumental in bringing 'Green Revolution' in India. Noted as the Father of Economics Ecology, Mr. Swaminathan has held various research and administrative positions. He has served as an independent Chairman of the FAO Council, president of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Chairman of the National Commission on Farmers and held many more posts over two decades.

Stating that green revolution focussed on high-yield, he said that the need was for an ever green revolution that could be achieved by organic

agriculture. Explaining that though there has been an extraordinary economic growth in South Asia, Mr. Swaminathan said that the population in this region has been largely dependent on agriculture. “Yet, two out of five children are stunted. Women and children from this region suffer more from under and malnutrition,” he said.

Considered to be one of the 20 most influential Asians of the 20th century, Mr. Swaminathan stressed for legislation on the lines of Norwegian model of national biosafety authority. He stated: “At least 97 per cent of world’s water resource is sea water. We should think of sea water farming.” Adding that with genetic modification, rice could be cultivated that has the ability to elongate with the rise of water levels where it could be carefully harvested.

He called upon the younger generation to get into farming. “There is also a need to ensure that youth get excited about agriculture. Now, even agriculture has seen several developments in technology and youth can take part in food production and agriculture,” he said. The welcome address was given by Dr. A. Subramanyam Raju, Centre Head, Centre for South Asian Studies, Pondicherry University.

Maharashtra releases water from Kalamawadi dam



Water released from Kalamawadi dam of Kolhapur district in Maharashtra cascades into the Krishna river course. It crossed Kallol Bridge in Chikkodi taluk of Belagavi district around 4 p.m. on Friday.— PHOTO: By Special Arrangement

The Water Resources Department in Maharashtra has started releasing water to Karnataka from its Kalamawadi dam across the Dudhganga river, a tributary of the Krishna river in Kolhapur district, since Thursday.

The river water, entering through Rajapur barrage across the Krishna on the Karnataka-Maharashtra boundary, was seen cascading into the Krishna river course near Yadur in the afternoon on Friday and subsequently, at Kallol Bridge in Chikkodi taluk around 4 p.m. Given the quantity of inflow into the river course, it could reach Manjri in Chikkodi taluk.

Small Scale Industries Minister and district in-charge Satish L. Jarkiholi and Deputy Commissioner N. Jayaram have asked farmers against drawing water for irrigation. They can draw water only for drinking considering the acute shortage in several villages in the district and other parts of North Karnataka region.

Mr. Jarkiholi said that Maharashtra conceded the State's request to release water from out of Karnataka's share in the Kalamawadi dam.

Meanwhile, when contacted, a senior official in the Irrigation Department in Kolhapur, told *The Hindu* that water from Kalamawadi dam was being released since Thursday, as part of the water-sharing agreement between the two riparian States. Karnataka's total share in the dam was 2.42 tmcft, to be released between November 15 and May every year. So far, about 1.98 tmcft of water had been released since November last year.

Chikkodi Tahsildar C.S. Kulkani said that around 500 cusecs of water was entering at the confluence of the Dudhganga and the Krishna near Yadur and that it would help ease shortage of drinking water in some of the villages in the taluk along the Krishna.

Mr. Jayaram, who is also Regional Commissioner, said that 553 villages in Belagavi, Dharwad, Gadag, Vijayapura and parts of Uttara Kannada districts of the Belagavi Revenue Division were facing drinking water shortage, owing to prevailing drought conditions and lack of rainfall. Water was being supplied through tankers to these villages, including 105 in Belagavi district. So far, 10 fodder banks have been opened in the division, including two each in Belagavi and Vijayapura districts.

Cabinet Sub-Committee

He also said that a Cabinet Sub-Committee, consisting of Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Large and Medium Industries Minister R.V. Deshpande, Minister for Information Technology and Bio-technology S.R. Patil and Mr. Jarkiholi will meet in Belagavi on April 19 to take fresh stock of the drought and water shortage conditions and also discuss mitigation measures.

Onion prices hit a new low

Rates crash owing to a glut of supplies from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra

After having to deal with repeated spikes in the prices of onions during the last fiscal, there is finally a huge respite for people. Wholesale rates of the edible bulb have crashed to as low as Rs 4.5 per kilo in the Capital owing to a glut of supplies from States like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The bumper harvest this year, however, has left farmers in tears with reports suggesting that prices have fallen to an all-time-low of Rs. 30 paise per kg at Madhya Pradesh's mandi in Neemuch district.

“There has been surplus onion production across the country this time, and the demand is relatively low. The farmers are badly hit as they spend at least Rs. 12 per kg in the entire process of producing the crop, excluding their labour cost,” said Rajender Sharma, member of Azadpur, Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC).

In Delhi, which primarily relies on these two States among a few others for onions, the situation is equally grim.

At the Azadpur Mandi, the kitchen essential is being sold at Rs. 7.86 per kilo on an average.

The best-quality onions are being sold at a wholesale rate of Rs. 10.5 per kg, whereas the poor-quality and the smaller ones are being bought by traders at Rs. 4.5 per kilo. The retail prices in the city range between Rs. 18 per kilo and Rs. 20 per kilo.

If data of onion prices at Azadpur Mandi of over a year is compared, then it's the lowest this month. "In August last year, the rates were a staggering Rs. 53 per kilo, and the average cost itself was Rs. 39. In January also the price was as high as Rs. 17 per kg," said Mr. Sharma.

Lasalgaon mandi in Maharashtra's Nashik district is also facing the same situation, but prices have not dropped so drastically there, he added.

The supplies increased March onwards during which the Lasalgaon mandi recorded a 25-month low price of Rs. 6 per kilo.

The last time the country's largest wholesale market recorded an all-time low of Rs. 6 per kilo was on February 15, 2014.

At the Azadpur Mandi in the Capital, the kitchen essential is being sold at Rs. 7.86 per kilo on an average

Temperature hits 41 degrees in Salem



The daytime temperature scaled to 41.1 degree Celsius in the city and across the district here on Friday.

Officials at the Meteorological Department at the Collectorate said that the maximum temperature was 41.1 degree Celsius while the minimum temperature was 28.8 degree Celsius.

Intense heat kept people indoors. Movement of vehicles from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. was less compared to other days. Shops selling fruit and sugarcane juices, watermelon and ice creams made brisk business.

With temperature expected to increase on Saturday, the Namakkal district administration has asked people to take all precautionary measures to prevent loss of human life. Collector V. Dakshinamoorthy has asked people to stay indoors between 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. and consume adequate water during daytime. He urged people to wear white cotton dress, sunglasses and caps while moving out of their home. “Carry water bottles while travelling,” he added.

He asked people to avoid alcohol, coffee, tea and carbonated soft drinks that reduce water content in the body and instead consume protein rich food. “Do not to leave children and pets unattended in stationary vehicles. Take oral rehydration salt tablets, buttermilk, lassi and lemon juice to increase water content in the body,” he added.

Muskmelons are the flavour of the day



Muskmelons are available in plenty in Salem for about Rs. 20 a kg— Photo: E. Lakshmi Narayanan

With summer at its peak, tasty and delicious mulampazham (muskmelon) are in good demand in the city. A variety of other fruits too have started hitting the streets.

The price of mulampazham, considered an ideal summer fruit, has crashed in the city in the last few days, because of the bulk arrival from different parts of the district and Andhra Pradesh.

It is available for about Rs. 20 a kg.

Also known as Kharbooza, it is a sweet fruit that gives a cooling effect on the body. These fruits have a high percentage of water content. The seeds of this fruit too have many health benefits.

It is rich in minerals and vitamins too.

All the four Uzhavar Santhai in the city, Koranguchavadi, big market, Shevvapet, New Bus stand, Old Bus stand, Bengaluru high road, Tiruchi high road, Guhai, Yercaud road have turned into small hubs for sale of mulampazham and other summer fruits.

The fruits can control blood pressure, strengthen eyes, check weight loss, control diabetes, and boosting immunity.

“We get loads of muskmelons from Attur, and Edappadi in the district daily. A large number of fruits come from Andhra Pradesh too,” says G. Saravanamuthu, who has put up a road side shop near the Suramangalam Uzhavar Santhai.

Nongu, water melons, and cucumber, too sell like hot breads.

Kamban koozh is yet another much sought after summer drink in both urban and rural areas.

Of late mobile fruit juice stalls could be seen along the city roads selling orange and mosambi juices.

Jigar thanda stalls too have sprung up in many residential localities.

The summer fruits, and drinks are a major relief from soaring mercury, says K. Rajalakshmi, a homemaker at Hasthampatti.

Cash credit limit: Wheat procurement crisis looms as banks say no to Punjab

A major procurement crisis is looming before the SAD-BJP government in Punjab in the last wheat season before the 2017 elections, with the nationalised banks that lend money to the state for foodgrains procurement refusing to release the Cash Credit Limit (CCL).

The state government had asked the Centre for CCL of slightly over Rs 20,000 crore before the procurement began. But the banks turned down the request, owing to Punjab's failure to account for the money received for procurement in previous years and the state's foodgrain stocks. Since the time of the previous Congress-led UPA government at the Centre, Punjab has not submitted accounts for Rs 20,000 crore, sources in the state food ministry said.

Over a fortnight into the procurement season, Punjab farmers who, according to the State Agriculture Minister Tota Singh, have produced "virtual gold" this time with not a single grain discoloured, have not received any money from the government.

According to Tota Singh, 8.5 lakh tonnes of wheat had been lifted from mandis across the state so far. Not a single farmer, the sources said, had been paid yet as the state was yet to receive its first installment of CCL.

Punjab is already in the grip of a serious agrarian crisis after the failure of two successive crops. There have been a number of farmer suicides. Farmers were pinning hopes on this harvest to bail them out of financial difficulties. But despite the good harvest, their woes may continue because of the standoff between the Punjab government and the Centre.

Punjab had sought Rs 20,000 crore for procurement for an expected harvest of 120-130 lakh tonnes of wheat. Punjab food supply officials say the first installment of CCL is received by the government before the procurement season sets in.

The second installment is received before the season gets over. The season normally lasts 45 days, but this year, said Tota Singh, it may not last that long as the wheat had already ripened and was ready for harvest.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister of Punjab, Adesh Partap Singh Kairon, and his team of officials had met with Finance Minister Arun Jaitely and other officials twice in the past fortnight in a bid to get the CCL released but to no avail. Kairon was unavailable for comment.

Tota Singh, however, put up a brave front. “What is this issue of CCL? We will get the money. Farmers will be paid. It has never happened in Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal’s time that farmers do not get the money. It has been just 15 days... the wheat is being lifted,” he told The Indian Express. The state government seeks a cash credit limit from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) against its existing foodgrain stocks before every procurement season.

The state gets the funds after a recommendation by the union food ministry. This time too, the ministry recommended the release of the demanded amount and the RBI directed the national banks to pay the state.

The banks, however, want the earlier accounts cleared first as a report on total amount of foodgrains in Punjab’s granaries by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) does not match with the claims of the state government.

The situation that the state finds itself in is partly an extension of its failure to provide the accounts during the time of the first UPA government, when despite outstanding amounts and a Congress-led Centre, the state, ruled by the SAD-BJP combine from 2007, managed to get its CCL on time.

When the NDA government took office in 2014, Punjab had an unaccounted outstanding of Rs 45,000 crore. Jaitely, as Union Finance Minister, raised the issue for the first time during the paddy procurement season in October 2014.

That time too, the second installment of CCL was released only after Kairon prepared a presentation and managed to clear accounts pertaining to grains worth Rs 25,000 crore.

Jaitley had objected then to the state diverting foodgrains from the Central pool to distribute wheat to its atta-dal scheme beneficiaries.

After that brief stand-off, for two subsequent procurement seasons, the state did not face problems. None of the FCI officials posted in Punjab and the Food department were available for comment.

Maharashtra: New crop pattern for drought-hit districts

The centre has set a target of 8 per cent growth over the next five year plan (2012-17) for plantation and horticulture in Maharashtra.

The state government is promoting crop patterns suitable to drought-hit Marathwada and Vidarbha regions, and is roping in agriculture research council and universities to provide crops with shorter life-cycle to sustain agriculture in the dry belt.

Apart from crops like cotton, sugarcane, jowar and tur dal (pulses), there is emphasis on promoting horticulture and floriculture under controlled water and temperature technology to ensure assured income for farmers. The region-wise crop pattern changes are being modelled, and would be discussed with farmers in the next two months.

While the decision to enforce drip irrigation for sugarcane will be mandatory from next season, the campaign to intensify beyond cane cultivation is being pushed in entire Marathwada and parts of Western Maharashtra such as Solapur which is drought prone.

According to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, “Along with soil health card, we are emphasising on district-wise crop pattern to ensure higher yields and better remuneration for farmers. New experiments had become inevitable in the wake of growing financial investments with no assured returns making agriculture a risky venture.”

Apart from corrective steps, the agriculture department, along with research centres are working with groups of farmers to take up short-cycle crops suitable to the soil, and regulate water usage, he said. Adopting scientific methods would help minimise financial risks in the agro-sector.

The government is making higher investments in horticulture and floriculture which brings better returns for farmers, he observed. In Osmanabad, at least 12 farmers' groups have launched a campaign to explore alternative crop patterns. District collector Prashant Narnavere said, "The cultivation of betel leaves (paan) has become a success."

The vines grow in three to six months. It requires moderate wet soil but not waterlogging. Some have taken to cultivation of "jerbera" flowers which do not require intense water. There is a move to promote tur dal in the drought belt as it is not a highly water intensive crop.

The centre and the state are giving incentives to promote tur dal cultivation and oilseeds in some parts. The emphasis on plantation and horticulture has support from NABARD. The centre has set a target of 8 per cent growth over the next five year plan (2012-17) for plantation and horticulture in Maharashtra.

The allocations for 2016-17 exceeds Rs 2,800 crore for horticulture. The short, inter- crop cycle is also being re-looked to promote seasonal vegetables and fruits in small land holding. However, the state government would need to provide the logistics of robust market and value chain for fruit processing units to channel the yield.

Horticulture crops account for 17.63 per cent of national production. The eight diverse agro-climate conditions, like make in Maharashtra a suitable destination for horticulture mission. It includes fruits, flowers, tuber crops, aromatic crops, spices, and medicinal plants.

According to a report from the agriculture ministry, "Total area under horticulture approximately works out to 25 lakh hectares with production of 175 lakh metric tonnes. State has highest grape production (60%); guava (13%); sweet orange (49%); strawberry (87%) , banana (14 %) and mangoes 21 % among others. Vegetables can cover 6 lakh hectares with estimated production upto 85 to 90 lakh metric tonnes. Floriculture, making inroads under protected ambience, has covered 260 hectares.

Lessons for unifying agricultural markets

Karnataka's experience shows success depends on taking along all stakeholders.



It is important to note that growth rate of agriculture and allied sectors in India has historically tracked the movement of the overall income growth in the country quite closely.

The government of India launched the National Agricultural Market Scheme in July 2015 in 585 markets and has, since April 14, started e-trading on the platform.

This is in line with the Union Budget's target to double farmers' incomes in six years. To be sure, a doubling of incomes by 2022 would require them to grow at an annual average rate of just over 12 per cent. Achieving such a high rate of growth would require multi-faceted reforms in the agriculture sector.

Agricultural and allied sector in India grew at an annual average rate of 1.7 per cent per annum between 2012-13 and 2015-16 (at 2011-12 prices). The gross value added at factor cost in the agricultural and allied sector, which is a first approximation to the income generated in the sector, has shown a growth rate in excess of 10 per cent only in four years between 1950-51 and 2011-12 (measured in constant 2004-05 prices).

All these supra-10 per cent growth rates came on the back of negative growth rates ranging from minus 1.1 per cent (1987-88) to minus 11.1 per cent (1979-80).

It is important to note that growth rate of agriculture and allied sectors in India has historically tracked the movement of the overall income growth in the country quite closely.

The task of improving growth rates in the agricultural sector in a growing economy is easier than in a stagnant one. As such, this imperative for an unprecedented growth rate will require reforms covering all facets of the agricultural sector, such as irrigation, soil health, traditional farming, fertilisers, and extension services among others.

In this context, the e-trading initiative attempts to improve the marketing aspect of the agriculture sector. Reforming agricultural markets in the country is a project that requires serious effort and concerted action.

As the Economic Survey 2014-15 pointed out, India has 2,477 principal regulated primary agricultural markets in the country. These markets governed by APMC Acts create segmentation and lead to inefficiencies in price discovery. There are often complaints of vested interests of commission agents (arhatiyas) and other middle-men driving a wedge between the farmers and the traders (who are the buyers of the crops).

A similar experiment, called the Rashtriya electronic Market Scheme (ReMS), was launched in Karnataka in February 2014. By December 2015, 100 principal markets were unified by this e-platform. The reforms in the state have succeeded to the extent that an autonomous body — the ReMS Private Limited — is in charge of the entire process of unification and is proceeding according to a definite plan.

But the gains to farmers have remained muted. The software that is used for trading has a provision for including quality parameters of the traded commodities. To actualise this, plans are afoot to start assaying facilities in mandis. Since marketing of agricultural produce affects farmers, commission agents, traders, the APMCs and the government, introduction of these facilities without allaying the concerns of all these stakeholders may not have its impact.

For example, the commission agents in these markets fear that unification will affect them adversely. The farmers can directly enter the details of their commodities in the e-platform and sell to the highest bidder without any

mediation from the commission agents. This creates a very potent impediment against the forward movement of reforms and a standalone e-product may not have the full desired impact. In some mandis though the assaying facilities were present, they remained in disuse because of apprehensions of loss of income felt by farmers.

Commission agents are the pet whipping boys for agricultural economists searching for efficiency and unified prices. However, these “middle-men” provide real and substantive services such as credit facilities and crop loans to farmers in a timely manner. The farmers’ dependence on arhatiyas is mutually beneficial to a degree but may not be without elements of rent extraction. Like all things in life, we hit a grey area even in agricultural marketing.

The experience of Karnataka has a few pointers. It succeeded to the extent that an independent body outside the government (ReMSL) tasked with unification generated sufficient revenues and created a positive momentum. However, in the absence of an involvement of all stakeholders the gains are slow and minimal.

Reforms that rely only on technical solutions may not give the desired effect. If implementing unification within a state is a slow affair with frequent stoppages, one can only imagine the difficulties that unification can cause for an inter-state reform measure.

The writer is an IAS officer and a graduate student (MPA/ID) at the Harvard Kennedy School, US. Views are personal

Gujarat: Tobacco farmers stare at unsold crop worth Rs 3000 crore

Tobacco farmers in state claim to be staring at Rs 3000 crore of unsold crops lying at home which are in danger of being destroyed by the ensuing monsoons in Gujarat.

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Staring at a loss of crop worth of Rs 3000 crores after bidi, cigarette, gutkha producers stopped production under new norms; the apex industry bodies

representing close to 4.5 lakh Gujarat's tobacco farmer and 1.5 lakh Gujarat micro retailers selling tobacco products, came together on Friday to demand the roll back of the 85 per cent of mandatory pictorial warning rule on tobacco products.

Tobacco farmers in state claim to be staring at Rs 3000 crore of unsold crops lying at home which are in danger of being destroyed by the ensuing monsoons in Gujarat.

Recalling PM Modi rolling back the 12.5 per cent VAT on raw tobacco in 2007 during his stint as CM, officials from the Gujarat Tobacco Merchants Association and Ahmedabad & Vadodara Paan Bidi Vikreta Association appealed to PM Modi to take a moderate and balanced stand on the issue by quashing the 85 per cent warning rule on all tobacco products levied by the Central government since April 1.

“Around 8 years back, when Narendra Modi was CM, he had waived a VAT on raw tobacco after he heard our appeal and understood plight of tobacco farmers here.

Tobacco farming in Gujarat is a 150 year old traditional crop and the government encourage us by flagging off the Central Tobacco Research Institute in 1947 to bring better yield through research and we have benefitted from it. We have never been discouraged by the government to stop tobacco farming.

But now bidi manufacturers have shut operations claiming the increase of pictorial warnings from 40 per cent on one side to 85 per cent across the packet leaves them with just 15 per cent space that is insufficient to mention their brand.

This directly affects us our ready crop worth Rs 3000-3500 crores which is lying in farmer's homes in Gujarat and may be destroyed as monsoon arrives, if the issue is not resolved by then,” said Gujarat Tobacco Merchant Association (GTMA) President Bhikhubhai N Patel.

While Gujarat produces 48 per cent of India's tobacco, tobacco farming is done in districts in Anand, Kheda, Vadodara, Panchmahal, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts. Patel pointed out that the area under tobacco sowing

has increased from 120 lakh hectares in 2014-15 to 150 lakh hectares in 2015-16.

“The central government had set up a committee in both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to wean farmers off tobacco and help them grow other crops, but no such efforts have been taken for tobacco farmers in Gujarat,” Patel added.

Tobacco farmers at a press meet on Friday pointed out that the tobacco industry may be faced with shortage of stock by October due to industry closure and that smuggling of foreign brands may be on the rise.

“All leading manufacturers of bidi, cigarettes have stopped manufacturing owing to the new directive of putting 85 per cent warning rule on packets. Smuggling will increase if tobacco product manufacturers are not allowed to print dates and brand on the packets,” said Makarand Patel, Chairman of Vadodara Pan Beedi Vikreta Association, who also averred that the business of 1.5 lakh paan, bidi , cigarette retailers in state is also dwindling.

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Punjab not keen on online system connecting mandis



At the onset of the scheme, 21 mandis in eight states have been connected, but Punjab, the main foodgrain-producing state, so far has not thought about it despite a communique from the Union agriculture ministry (HT File Photo)

Punjab is not keen on being a part of the e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) platform, an online system launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, connecting mandis across the state for sale of agricultural produce.

At the onset of the scheme, 21 mandis in eight states have been connected, but Punjab, the main foodgrain-producing state, so far has not thought about it despite a communique from the Union agriculture ministry.

The neighbouring Haryana that has a similar cropping pattern has accepted the scheme connecting mandis in Karnal and Ellenabad to the portal.

In the long run, e-NAM entails linking of Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) in the country. The APMCs control mandis in the state. Punjab has 151 APMCs of which the majority has a seasonal business during wheat and paddy harvests.

Discussion on issue

A formal discussion on the issue is expected to take place in a meeting chaired by chief minister Parkash Singh Badal on Saturday, but according to agriculture minister Tota Singh, “Punjab has nothing to do with it.”

The eight states that have opted for the scheme so far are Gujarat, Telangana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

Of these states, so far only 21 mandis have been connected to the newly launched portal for sale of agricultural produce. Besides, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Chandigarh have agreed to be part of this and offered to connect 344 mandis to the portal.

Punjab Mandi Board vice-chairman Ravinder Singh Cheema told HT that wheat and paddy comprised 95% of the crops grown in the state, which are covered under the minimum support price, so the scheme did not suit Punjab.

The board maintains 1,800 mandis in the state and monitors procurement of wheat and paddy in rabi and kharif crops, respectively. Cheema said the

state farmers would not benefit from the scheme and in case the government wanted to help farmers all mandis in the country were to be connected to the portal, which would entail a huge expenditure.

He said, “There is not much enthusiasm for the scheme as only 21 mandis have been hooked to the portal, with each state offering to connect only two to three mandis.”

According to Tota Singh, the portal will be useful to the state only when it grows commercially viable crops such as vegetables and fruits. “Why would a farmer whose produce is procured by government agencies try to sell it online?” he asked.

Whitefly-stung Bathinda admn tough on cotton seed sellers from Gujarat



Many seed dealers from outside the state sold spurious cotton seeds, prone to pest attack, to gullible farmers last year. (HT File Photo)

Reacting to the reports on seed dealers from Gujarat illegally operating in Bathinda, deputy commissioner Basant Garg has directed the agriculture and the police department to take action against such elements.

It must be mentioned that many seed dealers from outside the state sold spurious cotton seeds, prone to pest attack, to gullible farmers last year.

Garg said they were holding regular meetings with seed dealers from time to time in order to ensure that only recommended varieties of seeds were being

provided to farmers this year. “Many of the dealers, especially from Gujarat are publicising duplicate seeds among farmers and it cannot be tolerated at any cost,” Garg said.

He added that the administration was making all possible efforts to ensure proper cotton crop and yield this year. “The Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) and agriculture department experts are creating awareness among farmers. We have taken steps to eliminate whitefly before the cotton crop seeds is sowed, for which an exhaustive plan has been drawn,” he informed.

Meanwhile, chief agriculture officer Nachhattar Singh Aulakh said the farmers were being asked to sow only 38 varieties seeds, which have been recommended by the PAU. “Pamphlets have been distributed among the farmers, besides training camps at villages, to make them aware about the recommended seeds and pesticides,” he said.

He added that some people were falsely selling seeds, claiming it to be whitefly-resistant. “During regular inspections, it was found that some farmers are buying non-recommended varieties, which are more vulnerable to pest attack and can cause huge damage to the crop and the farmers may end up suffering losses like last year,” he said.

9 Uttarakhand districts declared drought affected

More than 74,000 hectares of agricultural land in the nine hill districts of Uttarakhand, which produces half of state’s crop yield, is estimated to be drought-hit, a recent study by the government has revealed.

The drought assessment report by the state agriculture department has found that more than 50% of farmland in the nine hill districts of the state is drought-hit.

The report has been sent to the government to work out a compensation plan for farmers, said Ranbir Singh, additional chief secretary of agriculture.

“According to the drought assessment report almost 50% of farmland in the hills is drought-hit. Most of the assessed drought-hit locations fall in hill districts,” he said.

“The report has been sent to the state government and the state disaster management department for further action.”

Officials said the drought is the result of 71% deficit post winter rainfall in 2015, 46% deficit winter rain in the months of January and February this year and almost 20% rain deficit in the pre-monsoon months of March, April and May.

Besides the nine hill districts, Dehradun, Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar constitute more than two-thirds of total 7.8 lakh hectares of agricultural land in the state.

Chief secretary Shatrughna Singh said that work is on to prepare a compensation package plan for farmers in the drought-hit areas. “The drought assessment report has been readied and efforts are on to work out a compensation package plan,” he said.

“Once the compensation plan is ready it will be sent to the governor for his approval,” the chief secretary said, adding that farmers in drought-hit areas will be duly compensated for their crop loss.

India sizzles as temperatures cross 40°C mark



In this April 12, 2016 photo, a woman along with her son walks to get water from a communal tube well at Raichi Wadi village, 120 kilometers (75 miles) north-east of Mumbai, India. Decades of groundwater abuse, populist water policies and poor monsoons have turned vast swathes of central and western India into a dust bowl. (AP Photo)

It is just the middle of April but vast tracts of India are reeling under the scorching heat, with temperatures zipping past the 40 degree Celsius mark, triggering a crippling water shortage.

From Rajasthan to the Gangetic plains of West Bengal and from Punjab to Tamil Nadu, most regions have been declared facing a 'heat wave' by the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Rising temperatures have already killed over 100 people.

“Most of the weather stations in this region have temperature recorded over 40 degree Celsius,” the IMD said in an advisory.

The unusually-hot summer comes on the back of two successive droughts that have ravaged farm incomes and pushed thousands of farmers to suicide. The IMD has predicted an 'above average' monsoon this year.

But the heat has already sparked fierce wars over water in cities ranging from Ranchi to Nagpur. Authorities are rationing water, banning car-wash services and employing tankers but warn the situation may get out of hand if the mercury soars in May.

The future, too, appears bleak with the IMD predicting an increase in the heat wave intensity. A government report earlier this week said temperatures in central India could shoot up to 44.5 degree Celsius.

Water levels in major reservoirs — the source for 70% of India's hydro electricity generated — have dipped to 22% of the total storage capacity, the lowest in a decade.

The only beneficiary of the searing sun appears to be the hospitality industry, as bookings have soared in tourist destinations in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

“So far, we have got 10-20% higher bookings than in April last year,” said Sandeep Sahni, president of the Uttarakhand Hotel Association.

In Telangana that has seen the maximum heat-related deaths, the government said summer vacations will begin from April 16 instead of 23. The government also banned labourers from working between 11am and 3pm at construction sites.

The IMD forecast that temperatures will touch 45 degree Celsius in the weekend after Hyderabad and Nizamabad recorded 44 degree Celsius on Friday.

In neighbouring Odisha, where 31 heat-wave deaths were reported, normal life was thrown out of gear with at least 14 urban centres crossing 40 degree Celsius for the past 10 days.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Hybrid wheat on Syngenta's pipeline for Indian market



syngenta

Swiss crop protection products and seeds giant Syngenta has a pipeline of products it plans to launch in India, including hybrid wheat, on which it is currently working.

“We are going to launch a huge number of new products, in the medium term, specifically for the Indian market. In the seed space, we are working on hybrid wheat, which we will also bring into India,” John Ramsay, CEO of Syngenta International AG, told *BusinessLine*.

The company, which is the only one globally to have hybrid barley, and currently also has rice, corn and vegetables in its hybrid seed portfolio, plans to launch the hybrid wheat first in western Europe, and then bring it to India by 2020.

Supply to be affected

Pointing out that (fulfilling) world demand for food was going to be dependent on small holders, regions like Asia and Africa – where the level of productivity was low – would impact world food supply. Hybrid wheat could clearly increase productivity by two to three times, he said.

“From a technological point of view, (developing hybrid) wheat is a master challenge because the plant is self pollinated, but we have achieved a breakthrough,” Ramsay said.

The investment on research and developing a new seed was typically around \$200 million, he added. For Syngenta, while globally the crop protection products account for around 70 per cent of its turnover, seed business in India is larger, at nearly 40 per cent of total revenues.

“While globally we are growing at a rate of 4 per cent, our India business is growing at more than double that rate,” Ramsay said.

Elaborating on the good growth plan (GGP) initiative Ramsay quipped, “We are now being listened to. NGOs and organisations previously had blinkers,” and added that an audit on these was being conducted by an independent company.

Introduced by Syngenta in September 2013, the GGP is built on six main pillars that include – helping increase average productivity of major crops by 20 per cent without using more land, water or inputs; improving fertility of 10 million hectares of farmland on the brink of degradation; enhancing biodiversity on five million hectares; and enabling 20 million smallholders increase productivity by 50 per cent. In India, under this programme, a network of 44 reference farms and 141 benchmark farms, in 14 States, have been set up to focus on raising productivity of five key crops – rice, cotton, corn, tomato and soybean.

Educational initiative

To educate farmers on farming techniques and solutions for specific crops in India, Syngenta has just launched its first Syngenta Learning Centre for farmers at Ahmednagar, in Maharashtra. The company has 25 such centres across the country, and will add 29 more during 2016, including four in Maharashtra.

“We will have over 100 such learning centres over the next three to five years,” said Bipin Solanki, Territory head (South Asia) of Syngenta.

Tea surges at Kochi auctions

The market for Nilgiri broken and whole leaf appreciated by at least ₹10-20. Fannings from the same origin dearer by ₹5-10. According to auctioneers Forbest, Ewart & Figgis, better medium broken and tippy grades were firm to dealer. Secondary broken moved up following quality, while Fannings from the same origin was dearer. Of the quantity of 1,23,500 kg on offer in sale no 15, active participation of CIS and traditional exporters in these particular varieties. The demand fair in CTC leaf and the quantity on offer was 93,500 kg.

Tea leaf prices spurt at Kochi auctions

Prices of leaf varieties spurted at Kochi auctions with orthodox grades witnessing a strong demand.

The market for Nilgiri broken and whole leaf was appreciated by longer margin of ₹10 to ₹20 and sometimes more following quality. Fannings from the same origin was also dearer by ₹5 to ₹10.

According to auctioneers Forbest, Ewart & Figgis, better medium broken and tippy grades were firm to dealer. Secondary broken also moved up following quality, while Fannings from the same origin was dearer.

Of the quantity of 123,500 kg on offer in sale no 15, there was active participation of CIS and traditional exporters in these particular varieties. The demand was fair in CTC leaf and the quantity on offer was 93,500 kg.

However, improved arrivals and active vendor participation has not helped boost the prices of several dust varieties.

The market for good liquoring which came under the selection of AVT barely remained steady, while others were lower by ₹3 to ₹5. The quantity on offer in CTC grades in sale no 15 was 10,75,000 kg. Though there was active participation of exporters, the upcountry demand was subdued.

Nevertheless, the primary and secondary in orthodox grades was steady to firm and sometimes dearer. The quantity on offer was 16,500 kg.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties fetched ₹102-146, mediums quoted ₹95-123 and plain grades stood at ₹95-103.

In dust varieties, Pasuparai FD quoted the best prices of ₹151 followed by Kallayar SRD at ₹148. In leaf grades, Havukal FOP came to the top position quoting ₹351 followed by Chamraj FOP-Sup (green tea) at ₹338.

M&M sees silver lining in monsoon forecast



PRAVIN SHAH, Chief Executive, Automotive Division, M&M

Above-normal rains will boost demand, especially in rural markets, says Automotive Division CEO Pravin Shah

The IMD forecast of above-normal monsoon has drummed up hopes of revival of rural demand for the auto industry.

Speaking to Bloomberg India TV, Mahindra & Mahindra's Chief Executive for Automotive Division, Pravin Shah, said sales may outperform SIAM's projection of 8-10 per cent growth in FY17 if the monsoon projections turn into reality.

The IMD has predicted above-normal rainfall for the first time since 1999, after two years of below-normal monsoon. How does it impact your company?

The projection of normal monsoon and better-than-1999 projection surely gives us a good feeling. It is going to help the auto industry, especially the rural market, where we have been facing a substantial drought-like situation over the past two years. With the normal monsoon projection, we expect economic activity to move faster and grow. So far as M&M is concerned, our presence is also good in the rural areas. With the portfolio that we have, it will surely help improve the volumes and we expect to see good growth going forward as economic activity improves with the monsoon forecast. The auto industry body (SIAM, or Society for Indian Automobile Manufacturers) has forecast just 8-10 per cent growth for FY17. I am sure that if the IMD forecast becomes a reality, the outlook for the auto industry can be re-looked.

In M&M's tractor volumes, there is growth of almost 20 per cent year-on-year as on March 2016. However, from FY11 to FY16, the volumes have shrunk from 6 lakh units to 4.95 lakh. What is the kind of upswing you expect if the monsoons are as good as forecast? What is the growth you expect for FY17?

I do not directly look after the tractor business. If the IMD forecast becomes a reality, in the first quarter (April-June) we expect around 10 per cent growth. And if the monsoon is normal, the spread across India is normal, I am sure the tractor industry along with small commercial vehicles — which are going through troubled times for three years now — will start seeing positive growth.

If you talk about agri-business, M&M has been expanding beyond the agri equipment segment. What is the kind of expansion you are looking at in that space?

I will not go into the specifics of it. We have set up an agri company and we have our own expansion plans. With positivity in the overall economy and arrival of monsoon, surely we should be able to execute our growth plans in the agri space.

A lot of peers are coming up with new launches in the SUV segment. So there is a lot of competition. What is your market share in the SUV as well as compact SUV segment?

You are right that competition has increased in the SUV space. And we welcome that. Talking about M&M, we continue to be a market leader in the industry. We enjoy 40 per cent market share and I am happy to say that we have revitalised and added new products, both in the traditional SUV and compact SUV space. We have added Mahindra KUV300 and KUV100 over the past six months. KUV100 was launched in January. The addition of these two products has helped us increase our market share for the year ended March 2016. Everything looks positive, including the forecast of 7.6 per cent GDP growth, inflation under control and interest rates softening. With a wider product portfolio and availability of finance, we hope to see better times going forward.

What type of impact will the recent policy changes like imposition of infra cess and ban of diesel vehicles have on auto sales?

While the auto industry has started seeing some sort of recovery, the levy of infra cess of 1-4 per cent is a cause of concern. I am sure it will get absorbed in the price. It will have some dampening impact. Going forward, as and when GST comes in, all extra levies are subsumed into a single rate and that will help the auto industry.

North-west, central India bracing for heat wave

Heat wave conditions being felt mainly in eastern India are forecast to spread to north-west India and adjoining central India over the next four to five days.

An India Met Department outlook said that maximum (day) temperatures may rise by up to 3 degree-Celsius over these regions, and by up to 2 degree-Celsius over west India, Telangana, and Rayalaseema regions.

Heat wave

During the 24 hours ending Friday morning, Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal witnessed heat wave conditions, even as rain and thunderstorms lashed areas to their immediate east.

Rain-struck areas included hills of West Bengal, and the entire North-East.

Thundershowers were also reported from parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Met update said.

Meanwhile, an outlook from the US Climate Prediction Centre said parts of North-East India will receive heavy-to-very-heavy rainfall, marked by lightning and thunderstorms, during the next two weeks.

The violent weather will be concentrated more over parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur during the ongoing week (April 14 to 20).

Rain deficit

The week that follows, that is April 21-27, will see thunderstorms flare up over Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram, and across the international border to Bangladesh.

The US agency is of the view that along with the North-East, parts of the South Peninsula (especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu) may witness thundershowers during the latter week.

This should come as a relief to the two southern-most States, which have received deficient to scanty rain thus far during the spring-summer season from March 1.

Tamil Nadu has a deficit of 76 per cent while Kerala is slightly better off with a deficit of 42 per cent.

These two Met subdivisions joined a list of 15 others with deficits that ranged somewhere from 21 per cent to 92 per cent.

Strangely, Madhya Maharashtra and Marathwada, the two subdivisions facing massive shortage of drinking water, have been found to be in the 'excess shower' category.

Palm oil imports rise 5.34% in March on low global prices

India's palm oil imports rose by 5.34 per cent to 6,42,562 tonnes during March 2016 compared to the previous month on account of sluggish global prices, industry body Solvent Extractors Association said today.

India purchased 6,09,939 tonnes of palm oil in February this year. Palm oils make up for 65 per cent of the country's total vegetable oil imports. The annual oil demand is around 17-18 million tonnes and 60 per cent of this is met through imports.

“The alarming increase in RBD palmolein imports is seriously hurting the domestic refining industry. ...This situation has arisen due to the fact that currently the landed cost of RBD palmolein (finished product) is lesser than crude palm oil (raw material),” the association said in a statement.

“The domestic refining industry is facing severe crisis of under utilisation of capacity and is on the verge of closure and it is justified to ask for an increase the import duty on landed refined vegetable oils from 7.5 per cent to 15 per cent,” it said.

Among palm oil products, import of refined palm oil (RBD Palmolein) rose to 2,08,376 tonnes in March 2016 from 1,77,806 tonnes in the previous month, it said. In March 2015, RBD Palmolein imports stood at 51,576 tonnes.

The shipments of crude palm oil (CPO) increased marginally to 4,28,856 tonnes in March from 4,23,135 tonnes in the previous month of 2016, while the import of crude palm kernel oil (CPKO) declined to 5,330 tonnes from 8,998 tonnes in the said period.

Among soft oils, import of soyabean oil fell to 3,21,975 tonnes in March from 3,80,121 tonnes in the previous month, but sunflower oil shipments rose to 1,84,162 tonnes from 87,028 tonnes, while rapeseed oil shipments were 26,863 tonnes in the said period.

The country's total vegetable oil imports increased by 12 per cent to 11,89,765 tonnes in March this year from 10,62,781 tonnes in the year—ago period.

As of March-end, there was over 23.10 lakh tonnes of stock at ports and in pipelines, which can meet the demand for 42 days. The country's monthly requirement is 1.65 million tonnes.

India imports palm oil mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia and a small quantity of crude soft oils, including soyabean oil from Latin America. Sunflower oil is imported from Ukraine and Russia.

Business Standard

India is drying out, study claims

'An increase in temperature by 2 degree Celsius decreases the grain yield by 15% to 17%,' CEO of Skymet said

The persistent moisture deficit conditions, increase in hot days and day-night temperature is "drying India" and causing Latur-like water crisis, a latest study jointly conducted by Skymet Weather Service and ASSOCHAM claimed on Friday.

"Today nine states are reeling under drought. India has seen two back to back droughts. India is drying out. The overall temperature has been increasing while the all India monsoon has been decreasing from 1960 onward," the paper 'Managing Climate Risk in Agriculture' stated.

Skymet, India's independent weather forecasting service along with the India Meteorological Department has however predicted normal rainfall this year. But the onset of these rains is still far away.

The prediction of good rains was based on the pattern changes evident with drop in 'El Nino', a climatic phenomenon which is the warm phase of the cycle of warm and cold temperatures in the Pacific Ocean that also impacts the monsoon. A high El Nino has a negative effect in terms of the weather, agriculture and economics.

"There is an increase in the mean annual air temperature in many regions of the country," the report added.

The report claimed that the prominent increase has been observed in the number of hot days, day and night temperatures from 1951 to 2013.

At present several parts of the country are facing water crisis, leading to distress in the rural landscape.

The report states that the climate change's severe impact on Indian agriculture is "undoing a lot of the achievements of the Green Revolution".

"Fluctuating weather patterns are increasingly manifesting themselves in stronger and more formidable ways. The recent Chennai deluge, El Nino induced back to back droughts and heat records setting new standards every year - all of these point bigger calamities in the future unless we treat climate change as a serious threat to the environment and to humanity," Jatin Singh, CEO of Skymet said.

The report pointed out the drastic effects of climate change on the yield of crop like rice.

"An increase in temperature by 2 degree Celsius decreases the grain yield by 15% to 17%," Singh said.

"It is an alarming situation because the paddy and wheat production in Northeast India has already been stagnating or even declining. Short-season crops (vegetables and fruits) are the worst affected by changes, particularly during critical periods of their growth," the report adds.

New health warning rule chokes tobacco farmers in Gujarat

Farmers worry about Rs 3,000 crore of unsold stock lying with them

The government's mandate on health warning on 85 per cent of tobacco product packs has left tobacco farmers high and dry. In Gujarat alone, farmers are fearing huge financial losses at a time when season has peaked, due to manufacturers ceasing tobacco purchases from farmers due to the new mandate.

With about 48 per cent share, Gujarat is the largest tobacco producer in India but has been witnessing around Rs 3,000 crore of unsold tobacco with farmers currently. If slack demand continues, the financial condition of farmers in Gujarat could worsen.

"The tobacco farmers and retailers of Gujarat are facing an unprecedented threat because of the policy shock of 85 per cent warnings on beedis and chewing tobacco, which has led to overnight closure of the tobacco industry in India. This may create financial crunch for farmers and it will disturb their social and economical arrangements," said Bhikhubhai Patel, president, Gujarat Tobacco Merchants Association.

There are 450,000 farmers engaged in tobacco cultivation in Gujarat, whose entire families are dependent on tobacco for their livelihoods. Tobacco is cultivated on 150,000 hectare of farm land in Gujarat, with annual production of 360 million kg of tobacco produce. In value terms this amounts to approx Rs 3,000 crore in monetary value for Gujarat tobacco farmers.

April is the peak selling time, however, due to the industry closure, manufacturers have suspended tobacco buying, resulting in almost 100 per cent of tobacco produce lying unsold with farmers.

"These crops are stocked in the open at farmer homes as there are no proper storage facilities. With monsoon expected to arrive soon, the entire crop is under threat of getting damaged, killing the annual earnings prospects for Gujarat farmers unexpectedly," said Patel.

The state has more than 150,000 micro-retailers, traders and panwallas, selling tobacco products across the state. Their livelihood primarily depend on selling of tobacco products. Sale of other confectionary and supplementary products stocked by these micro retailers is also totally dependent on the success of retailing of tobacco products.

Raju Lalwani who represents Ahmedabad Paan Beedi Vikreta Association said, "The micro tobacco retailers of Gujarat are in panic mode because of the threat to their livelihoods. With tobacco production having stopped, it will be hard for small retailers to sustain their businesses."

Lack of storage hitting farmers: Kisan Morcha chief

While onion farmers are lamenting crash in prices, Bharatiya Kisan Morcha state president Bansilal Gurjar said on Friday that the problems is not of bumper crop, but storage.

"Onions are grown both in Rabi and Kharif seasons. The yield from both harvests arrives in the market in summer months. There is a massive supply, but no place for storage." Gurjar said if both the Union and state governments want to double the income of farmers one of the basic facilities that needs to be developed is storage warehouses. "The farmer never gains from a bumper crop. Only those who can store the present crop and wait for prices to increase will gain from it. Prevailing crisis will remain for the next two to three months and we will see more onions hitting the market and rates going down," said the farmer leader who is also an onion producer. He explained that rates may have fallen sharply this year with the best quality onions selling at Rs 650 per quintal, but the crisis of excess onions is usual during this time every year. "Most of our farmers cannot afford to spend on storage. They sell their product at whatever price is offered to them," he explained.

"Onions selling at abysmally low prices of 50 paise per kg and 70 paise per kg have been knocked down by their substandard quality. When the best quality is available at Rs 6.5 per kg who would buy small stained variety? And when no one is buying it obviously the prices are falling drastically," he said.

Bumper onion crop has farmers in tears

In August last year, people were crying for onions that sold at Rs 80 to Rs 100 per kg, but today the same onion is being sold at meagre Re 1 for 5 kg at the wholesale agricultural market in Mandsaur. Thanks to bumper crop with an average yield of 70-80 quintal per acre.

"On Wednesday, small onions in Neemuch mandi sold between Rs 20 and Rs 30 per quintal, which translates into 20 to 30 paise per kg. Better quality

bigger onions are going for Rs 300 to Rs 650 per quintal," said Bhartendra Singh Chundawat, an onion farmer from Amlikheda village in Neemuch district. "Onion seeds cost Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 per kg and an acre of land requires 4 kg of seeds. Add to this labour, pesticide, chemical sprays, and cutting. During harvesting a labourer charges Rs 150 per day. Overall we spend Rs 25,000 per acre to grow onions, but the market price today is devastating," he said.

According to Bhartendra Singh, the prices have fallen drastically because of a bumper crop this year. But farmers don't seem to be benefitting from the high yield. "When there is no supply in the market, onions sell for Rs 80 a kg. Now that there is a bumper crop, the supply far exceeds the present market demand," he added.

Ratlam district mandi is getting an average 5,000 to 8,000 sacks of onions every day. A sack contains 50 kg of the vegetable. Mandsaur is getting an average 2,000 to 3,000 sacks while Neemuch gets an average of 3,000 to 4,000 sacks of the product daily. Speaking to TOI, two licenced traders in the Mandsaur mandi, Narendra Jain and Jethanand Hotwani, said onions sold for Rs 40 per kg or at Rs 4000 per quintal during the corresponding period last year.

"The crop from Madhya Pradesh has a market in Nasik, Malegaon, Hyderabad and Delhi. But this time Maharashtra too has had a bumper onion yield and there is no demand for onions from there," Narendra said. "Traders are expecting some demand from West Bengal and Bihar. But the order for supply will come only if they have exhausted the supplies from their local mandis," said Hotwani.

Senior journalist in Mandsaur, Ghamshyam Balwal, who has been following the onion story said, "Farmers are bringing onions in huge quantities, but they don't know what to do with it. The prices are low and therefore selling would mean a huge loss. Storage is a problem and taking it back to the village would mean spending on additional transportation and adding further to cost of production. Some farmers have dumped their onions at the mandi and left. There are others who are not bringing their crops to the market. They are feeding it to the cattle in the village."

Tobacco crop of 3,000 cr lying unsold in state

round 4.5 lakh tobacco farmers of the state are staring at Rs3,000 crore of unsold crop lying at homes. According to Gujarat Tobacco Merchants Association (GTMA), the bidi and cigarette manufacturers are not procuring tobacco as they have shut their factories from April 1 claiming ambiguity in the government's order to print warning images on 85% of the display area of tobacco packs.

GTMA president Bhikhu Bhai Patel said, "April is the peak time for tobacco farmers to sell their crops to manufacturers. Because of industry closure, and the manufacturers having suspended tobacco buying, 100% of tobacco produce is lying unsold at the farmers' homes."

Patel further said, "These crops are stocked in the open as there are no proper storage facilities. The entire crop is under threat of getting damaged, killing the annual earnings prospects for Gujarat farmers unexpectedly."

According to GTMA, tobacco is cultivated on 1,50,000 hectare of farm land in Gujarat, with annual production of 360 million kg (36 crore kg). In value terms, this amounts to approximately Rs3,000 crore. Tobacco farmers of Gujarat have 48% of India's farm land under tobacco cultivation. "These farmers are facing an unprecedented threat to their livelihoods because of the continuous closure of the production by tobacco product manufacturers," Patel added.

Gujarat also has more than 1.5 lakh micro-retailers, traders and paan-walas, selling tobacco products across the state who are likely to be affected due to unsold crop.

GTMA has also appealed to the Indian tobacco manufacturers to resume production at the earliest, as a shortage of supply will make cigarettes and other tobacco products expensive in the short term, and make a permanent damage to the whole chain of business.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Punjab denies misuse of food-procurement funds



Punjab government today said there was no disappearance of foodgrains from godowns in the state and all stocks procured over the years have been duly accounted for and handed over to FCI.

The Punjab state government issued a response to ET's on Friday regarding banks having to make provisions against loans to fund its food-procurement programme. Edited excerpts:

ON BACKDROP TO FOOD CREDIT OPERATIONS: It is essential to understand the backdrop in which the food credit operations are carried out by the states, including Punjab, towards procurement of food-grains (wheat and paddy) for the central pool.

The central government, through FCI (Food Corporation of India), carries out procurement activities to create a buffer stock of food grains and for distribution to the economically weaker sections. Purchase at MSP, transportation, labour, handling charges, storage, maintenance of stocks, etc. is carried out in a very short span of time. Punjab has traditionally supplied 40% of total stocks and is by far the largest contributor to the Central Pool.

ON THE 'GAP' THAT HAS ARISEN: It has been sought to be highlighted that food stocks of Punjab have 'disappeared' and that there is a gap between the available food stocks in the state and the amount it owes the banks.

The said assertion is wholly incorrect, as food-grains procured over the years have been duly accounted for and handed over to the FCI, through well-documented transactions, and the same are duly audited. It is clarified that the 'gap' has arisen over the years on account of the difference between actual costs and reimbursements made by the GoI (government of India)/FCI pertaining to interest, transportation, incidental charges, etc., which are based solely on the "provisional cost sheets", as and when prepared by them. Further, as the state avails huge cash credit loans from commercial banks to fund the procurement, non-reimbursement of actuals leads to ballooning of the interest component, which is being compounded on a monthly basis by the lending bank. These payments are released by FCI directly to the bank without recourse to the state, after receipt of stocks and as per the specification fixed by GoI.

ON CLAIM SUBMISSION: For procurement purposes, the state, on the basis of procurement targets fixed by DFPD, has over the years been authorised cash credit limit by RBI. The claims are submitted by the state government, post-procurement and accepted by the FCI based on "provisional cost sheets".

The provisional cost sheets are made final only after submission of claims by the food agencies, and the differential paid to the state agencies/state government after finalisation. Prior to 2003-4, all procurement expenses used to be reimbursed to state agencies, but from 2004 onwards, these procurement expenses are based on the 'principles' as determined by the GoI.

ON DISCUSSION WITH CENTRAL GOVERNMENT: The matter regarding the outstandings/receivables pertaining to food credit account of the state is already under discussion with GoI. Funds availed by the State government on account of food credit limits have been utilised for food procurement operations, in the national interest. There has been no misutilisation of funds, and as explained... above, the differential amount is on account of difference between claims and amounts received.

Nabard records highest ever business level of Rs 13,509 crore in Karnataka



National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development has recorded the highest ever business level of Rs 13,509 crore in 2015-16, the bank said.

BENGALURU: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development has recorded the highest ever business level of Rs 13,509 crore in 2015-16, the bank said today.

The long-term refinance disbursements from Nabard to banks for financing agriculture and allied activities touched a new high at Rs 6,766.90 crore in the state- a record growth of 60 per cent over previous year, it said.

Long-term refinance disbursements to Cooperatives in Karnataka at Rs 1519.14 crore was the highest by any State in the country and Rs 1748.46 crore to Regional Rural Banks was second highest, Nabard said in a statement.

Short-term refinance for crop loans was disbursed to the tune of Rs 5,205.21 crore at a concessional rate of 4.5 per cent per annum to Cooperatives, Regional Rural Banks and Primary Agriculture Credit Societies through Commercial banks, it said.

Nabard also released a total loan assistance of Rs 761.82 crore to the government of Karnataka and State Corporations for development of rural and warehouse infrastructure during 2015-16, it added.

Above normal monsoon may help increase production of rice, oilseeds and pulses



With above normal monsoon rainfall expected in 2016, the country is likely to get bumper production of rice.

PUNE: With above normal monsoon rainfall expected in 2016, the country is likely to get bumper production of rice, see increase in production of oilseeds and pulses and set stage for excellent rabi production. However, consumers will have to pay hefty price for at another five to six months for pulses till the next harvest hits markets and for sugar, currently priced at Rs 45/kg in retail, as good monsoon will not help cut the expected sugar production deficit in 2016-17.

N Chattopadhyay, Deputy Director General Meteorology, India Meteorology Department said, "The overall framework is very positive now. We can see a bumper production of rice this year."

Thanks to record prices, farmers are expected to substantially increase the area under pulses. "We want to promote tur in a big way," said B Venkateswarlu, vice chancellor, Vasantnao Naik Marathwada Krishi Vidyapeeth.

"Even if the monsoon is delayed till the third week of June in Marathwada, it may not affect cotton and soyabean much. This year, we want to give a loud message for planting desi cotton, which gave yields comparable to Bt cotton due to drought conditions," he said.

The oil industry is hopeful of cutting down the imports of vegetable oils. "We expect production of all the oilseeds to increase in next kharif, which will help in checking the rising edible oil imports," said BV Mehta, executive director, Solvent Extractors Association of India.

In case of soyabean, lower per acre production during last two years, may be a dampener for farmers, thinks Davish Jain, president, Soyabean Processors Association (SOPA). "However, good bean prices may still attract the farmers to soyabean," said Jain.

Although IMD has said that the spatial and temporal distribution of monsoon will be good, meaning that there will be rain in every month, some agri-scientists say that we have to take it with a pinch of salt. "If rains are delayed in June, it can adversely affect the coarse cereals. However, farmers are now less interested in these crops," said head of a government institute.

Impact of excess rainfall in the later half of monsoon:

The IMD in its forecast has said that it expects heavy rainfall in the later part of monsoon, which can lead to increase in incidence of white fly and pink boll worm on cotton in Maharashtra and Telengana. Last year, pink boll worm was detected in Maharashtra, but it did not grow much as the crop duration was short due to drought. Rains in September/October can prolong the crop till December/January.

During last few years, farmers had been avoiding moong and urad as the trend of getting rains in September damaged the crops. However this year, due to very good price, it will be worth taking the risk of sowing moong and urad, say agriculture scientists.

Heavy rainfall during later stage can cause some damage to soyabean. However, the SOPA thinks that there could be only limited damage as the crop is sturdy.

Trade and government expects the area under cotton, an import fibre as well as oilseed crop, to remain stable or get a slight dip. "We expect the cotton acreage to remain stable at 118 lakh hectare. Slight reduction in acreage may happen if onset of monsoon is delayed," said Keshav Kranthi, director, Central Institute of Cotton Research, Nagpur.