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‘Focus on developing high yielding varieties of small millets’

Stressing on the importance of millets in improving human health condition, scientists and agricultural researchers asserted that developing small millets, based on a climatic approach, could increase their production.

Speaking during the valedictory session of the three-day annual group meeting of All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on small millets, at the Regional Agricultural Research Station (RARS), here on Tuesday, participants discussed on a whole range of issues such as crop production, management and protection. “Research must be focused on developing new high yielding varieties in small millets. As they are climate resilient, research must be focused on time of sowing, spacing, cropping systems, fertilizer and nutrient management etc.,” they added.

In addition to this, the researchers also remarked that developing processing units for millets could develop entrepreneurship and rural employment among women. They also stressed on popularising production technologies in small millets among farmers. RARS Associate Director of Research Dr. T.C.M. Naidu, SV University Professor D.V.R. Saigopal and several others took part.

All India Coordinated Research Project’s annual

meeting ends

Another reason to eat chocolate

Eating dark chocolate might help people sleep better

Chocoholics, rejoice! Eating dark chocolates may help you sleep better at night as they contain a vital nutrient which helps to regulate the body clock, a new study has claimed.

Magnesium, present in many foods such as dark chocolate, nuts, and green leafy vegetables, helps cells to cope in the body's circadian rhythm, researchers from the University of Edinburgh and University of Cambridge in the UK said.

Circadian rhythm or internal clock is responsible for different body functions like sleeping, waking and temperature, 'Tech Times' reported.

"Internal clocks are fundamental to all living things. They influence many aspects of health and disease in our own bodies, but equally in crop plants and micro—organisms," said Gerben Van Ooijen from the University of Edinburgh.

Researchers worked on three biological organisms — fungi, algae and human cells.

Using molecular analysis, they found levels of magnesium that oscillates as the cells undergo the 24—hour clock. This 24—hour rise and fall oscillation is important to sustain the cell's energy for the whole day.

The presence of magnesium in cells also contributes to its metabolism or the efficiency of cells to convert nutrients into energy within the day. Magnesium also controls the burning of energy whenever the cells biologically need it, researchers said.

The findings may help in the development of chronotherapy or the treatment depending on the body's circadian rhythm and the improvement of various crops that can be harvested in an extended season, they said.

"The new discovery could lead to a whole range of benefits spanning human health to agricultural productivity," said John O'Neill from University of Cambridge.PTI

Drought-hit farmers seek fodder for free

Farmers reeling under drought conditions have requested the State government to supply fodder to them for free.

At an interaction with Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda at Umrani village in Chikkodi taluk on Tuesday, they wanted to know if the

government could supply fodder for free at a time when it was giving free rice under the Anna Bhagya scheme to BPL families.



Minister for Industries R.V. Deshpande and Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda interacting with a farmer in Jodaratti village of Chikkodi taluk on Tuesday.—PHOTO: P.K. BADIGER

Mr. Gowda said that the government was procuring fodder at Rs.6 per kg and the transportation cost was Rs. 2 per kg. “Yet, we are supplying it at Rs.3 per kg. However, looking into the plight of farmers, the government can consider supplying it at Re.1 per kg,” the Minister said.

Mr. Gowda was on a tour of select villages in Chikkodi and parts of Athani and Raibag taluks to understand the problems faced by farmers. He heads a Cabinet sub-committee that looks into the drought relief work taken up by the government. He was later joined by Minister for Industries R.V. Deshpande. The interaction programme was attended by 139 beneficiaries of the Krishi Bhagya scheme.

At Jodarahatti, the Ministers visited the field of Pavadi Bheemappa Patil where ‘Jalamruta’ scheme has been implemented under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The team also visited a ‘goshala’ in Shirur village of Athani taluk.

Call for production of quality crop seeds

Trilochan Mohapatra, director general of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, has called for a sustainable seed development programme for qualitative improvement and crop productivity enhancement.

He was speaking at the inauguration of the 31st annual group meeting of the All India Coordinated Research Project in Seed Production at Angamaly on Tuesday.

He said that though the progress made in seed research was commendable, some lacunae in the system needed to be addressed.

“I am impressed by the fact that seed production in the country is sufficient to meet the requirement at large.

Breeder seeds

“Yet, it would be foolhardy to ignore the failure to produce sufficient quantity of breeder seeds in some crops”, Mr. Mohaptra was quoted as saying in a press release issued here.

“We are duty-bound to increase pulse production during this International Year of Pulses, and hence a special drive to enhance breeder seed production of crops in this category needed to be taken up”, he said.

Seed certification

He also stressed the need to expedite seed certification and registration procedure.

Director of research at the Kerala University of Agriculture Sajan Kurien welcomed the gathering.

Associate director (seeds) V. S. Devadas, proposed a vote of thanks.

Sustainable seed development programme needed for qualitative improvement.

Farmers get agriculture machinery under subsidy scheme

K.C. Narayana Gowda, MLA, K.R. Pet, has suggested that farmers go in for integrated and chemical-free farming to generate good income.

Mr. Gowda was addressing farmers at the Department of Agriculture in K.R. Pet on Tuesday, after distributing different kinds of agriculture machinery and equipment under the agriculture subsidy scheme.

Farmers should adopt integrated farming methods to be able to enhance productivity, Mr. Gowda said.

The MLA distributed power-tillers, rotavators and other farm machinery worth several lakhs of rupees to beneficiaries.

Zilla panchayat members Devaraju, Gayatri, H.T. Manju and Ramadas, taluk panchayat members Janakiram, Deepashree, Shantha, Indira and Venkatesh, taluk agricultural officer Shivaraj and others were present at the programme.

Multipurpose fishing vessel launched

Sagar Harita, the multi purpose fishing vessel developed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) was launched here on Monday.

Trilochan Mohapatra, the Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), inaugurated the launch ceremony. The 19.75-metre-long vessel was built under the project, Green Fishing Systems for the Tropical Seas.

Dr. Mohapatra, who called for responsible harvest of natural resources, suggested that the status of each potential resource be appraised in the context of threat to diversity, climate changes and economic value.

Joykrushna Jena, Deputy Director General (Fisheries Science), ICAR, presided over the function.

C.N. Ravishankar, Director, CIFT; Shekhar Mital, chairman and managing director of Goa Shipyard; Leena Nair, chairperson, Marine Products Export Development Authority, Kochi; K. Gopakumar, former deputy director general (Fisheries), ICAR; and Chhabilendra Roul, secretary (ICAR) spoke.

The vessel was launched by Kalpana Mohapatra at NIPHATT Jetty, Kochi.

Team to go to Delhi seeking early release of funds

Rs. 1,416 crore has been sought from Centre to take up drought relief works

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has said that the government has sought Rs. 1,416 crore from the Union government for taking up drought relief works in the State.

Speaking to presspersons after chairing a drought review meeting after touring some parts of Vijayapura district here on Monday, he said that soon, a delegation led by Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda, will visit Delhi seeking an early release of funds.

“We have apprised the Union government of drought situation in the State and we are trying to get funds as early as possible to take up relief works,” he said. However, he said that the State government has adequate funds to take up emergency works, including supplying drinking water and fodder.

Earlier, chairing the meeting, he said that he would soon convene a meeting of top-level officials on reviewing the status of Multi Village Scheme for supplying drinking water to rural areas.

Mr. Siddaramaiah was replying to several MLAs of the district who said that the ambitious scheme was not being implemented properly.

The Chief Minister said that he would hold a special meeting to find out the status of the scheme and the hurdles in implementing it.

He, however, said that as most of the components of the scheme were being implemented in Vijayapura district, more focus and additional funds would be given for the speedy completion of the project.

During the meeting, he directed the Revenue Officials to take control of private borewells by paying a consolidated amount for supplying water to parched villages.

The Chief Minister also directed the officials to make sure that adequate quantity of fodder is stocked and also prevent illegal transport of fodder to other States.

The Chief Minister directed Deputy Commissioner D. Randeep to initiate works to remove silt in tanks in the district and complete the job before monsoon.

“This is the right time to remove silt as most of the water sources have gone dry. Remove silt from them to enable storage of more water during monsoon,” he said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Randeep, who made a power point presentation on the drought in the district, said that the district needs at least Rs. 11.50 crore to take up emergency works, to which the Chief Minister agreed.

AICRP workshop

Trilochan Mohapatra, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), will inaugurate the annual group meeting of All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) – National Seed Project (Crops) in Nedumbassery on Tuesday. More than 180 delegates will participate in the three-day workshop.

Govt. yet to pay farmers for procured wheat

As wheat harvesting gathers pace in Punjab, the delay in payment by government agencies has left farmers fuming and given the Opposition fresh ammunition to target the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-BJP government.

Even though procurement had started across grain markets (mandis) since April 1, farmers are still waiting for payments for the sold produce. This, even after the government assurance that dues would be paid within 48 hours of procurement.

“The government has not paid even a single rupee so far. Farmers are already in distress due to the previous season’s crop failure and were banking on the wheat crop...But delay in payment is only adding to their misery,” Nirbhay Singh, president of the Kirti Kisan Union’s Moga unit told *The Hindu* .

The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), meanwhile, have sought to capitalise on the farmers' grievances. Both the Opposition parties have accused the government of being indifferent to farmers and adopting an anti-farmer approach.

Punjab Congress Committee president Capt. Amarinder Singh told *The Hindu* : "The Akali government has always failed to deliver when it comes to procurement of wheat or rice. Grains are lying in markets for the last 10 days but government has not been able to make payments."

He said following the allegation of irregularities in stocks' maintenance to the tune of Rs. 12,000 crore it will be difficult for the government to get the first instalment of Rs. 20,000 crore credit limit (CCL) for wheat purchase.

"We have constituted a high-level committee of senior leaders to monitor the wheat procurement process in the State. The committee, during the next 20 days, will monitor the procurement process at the over 500 mandis across the State," he said.

Only States can declare drought: Centre to SC

Reiterating that the onus is entirely on the States to declare a drought, the Centre on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that it has released over Rs. 19,000 crore to States under the MNREGA scheme to handle the crisis.

In a hearing before a Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur and N.V. Ramana, Additional Solicitor General P.S. Narasimha said the duty of the Centre was to provide immediate relief to the States once the latter exercises its authority to declare drought.

Mr. Narasimha said it was for the States concerned to explain the delay in declaring drought and not on the Centre to shoulder that burden in the Supreme Court.

The Centre centred his response to this on the federal structure of governance in which a democratically elected State government should take on the responsibility of analysing the ground situation in its drought-hit areas, sounding the alarm and implementing relief works if necessary.

He said that the provisions of the Disaster Management Act cannot be applied to all events of tragedy or loss.

On the issue of restructuring of crop loans to farmers, Mr. Narasimha said farmers suffering from the drought are entitled to get their loans restructured in order to reschedule their payments.

He submitted that to prevent leakages in the MGNREGA scheme, the government has introduced a system for electronic transfer of wages directly to the beneficiaries in their bank account in 11 States.

The hearing also saw The court express its dissatisfaction at the reply filed by Gujarat government and directed it to file a detailed affidavit containing rainfall data.

In the previous hearing on the PIL filed by NGO Swaraj Abhiyan to declare drought as a national emergency, the court had slammed the Gujarat and Haryana governments for “hazy” presentation of facts and outdated charts on rainfall data. Recently, the desert State of Rajasthan and 256 villages in Gujarat had declared drought.

The PIL had listed Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Haryana and Chhattisgarh as drought-hit.

It had requested the court to examine the rainfall data in these States for the purpose of declaring drought-affected areas, districts and taluks. It asked the court to intervene to find out about the implementation of the National Food Security Act of 2013 and the availability of food grains , rice, dal, edible oil, eggs and milk for children, etc, in these areas.

‘Centre to provide immediate relief to the States once the latter exercises its authority to declare drought’

After taxis, look out for online farm machinery aggregators

Soon, farmers can hire equipment using their mobile phones

Karnataka farmers will soon be able to hire farm machinery using their mobile phones, just like urban residents book taxis. This online aggregation

method for farm machinery is to help tackle shortage of labour and to ensure optimum use of equipment owned by farmers.

Farm machinery owned by some farmers can be made readily available on rent to those who do not own them, especially in the wake of mechanisation becoming a key factor that can reduce cost of labour, says T.N. Prakash Kammaradi, chairman of the Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission, which is working on this innovative system.

Survey

To begin with, the commission did a survey of the major farm machinery available with farmers in the State. “Once the system is ready, we want those farmers who are willing to rent out their machinery to register with the online aggregation system. We are also in consultation with a few startups to make the best possible system that will suit the requirements of different regions,” Mr. Kammaradi says.

Referring to a study taken up by the commission, Mr. Kammaradi says labour accounts for 38 to 40 per cent of the total production cost for most of the prominent crops. On the other hand, farm mechanisation for certain crops, including ragi, has shown that it is possible to increase revenues by reducing production cost.

While it is not economically feasible for small farmers to own tractors or harvesters, big farmers who own them do not need them round the clock. At the same time, big farmers are keen on renting out their costly machinery. “We want to provide a forum to link those who have farm equipment with those who want to use them. We also want to enrol local drivers under the scheme as their services are required to handle the machinery,” he says.

Mr. Kammaradi hopes that this system will encourage rich farmers to buy farm machinery and register it for hire as an investment option. This would help fight shortage of farm equipment, he feels.

Studies commissioned

In a bid to have an in-depth understanding of the issue, the commission has also enlisted the University of Agricultural Sciences-Bengaluru to assess the requirement of different farm machinery by farmers, while the UAS-Raichur

has been commissioned to study the pros and cons of custom-hiring of farm machinery.

Flower plants withering



Acute scarcity of water has resulted in ornamental flower plants withering away near Pulivalam in Tiruchi district.— Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

The acute heat wave the district has been experiencing for the past one month has caused a serious setback to flower growers in and around Pulivalam near Thuraiyur.

A farmer T. Banupriya said the flowers needed adequate water for irrigation. But since the water level in the open well had depleted following the sharp rise in the mercury level, an entire area of flowers raised on about one acre had withered away.

“There is no use in further irrigating the fields although I had incurred an expenditure of Rs. 20,00 for raising the kendai poo,” she said.

In all, the farmer had raised flowers on about five acres incurring an expenditure up to Rs.50,000. She said she had raised the crop pinning hopes on availability of water in the open well. “But, the storage level had registered a sudden dip during the current summer,” she said.

Oil palm cultivation feasible in 2.60 lakh hectares in State

Oil palm cultivation has become a testing ground for implementing the public-private participation module in the propagation of horticulture crops in the State.

For achieving an integrated oil palm development, sources told *The Hindu* here recently that the responsibility of raising nurseries, area expansion, distribution of inputs, procurement of fresh fruit bunches and the establishment of processing mills has been entrusted to private partners. Now, five entrepreneurs are operating in the State.

Karnataka has been identified as one of potential areas for oil palm cultivation in the country and as per one of the estimates, oil palm cultivation can be taken up successfully in 2.60 lakh hectares in the State.

As oil palm is known to be a water guzzler, the command areas of the Cauvery, the Bhadra, the Krishna the Tungabhadra, the Malaprabha and the Ghataprabha have been identified for propagating oil palm cultivation with assured returns.

At present, oil palm cultivation is being taken up in 11,000 hectares of land with an annual production of oil palm fresh fruit bunches of 14,500 tonnes. The annual production of crude palm oil is 2,497 tonnes.

The sources said that under the Oil Palm Development Programme, a well organised market facility to buy back the produce from farmers has been set up. Oil palm entrepreneurs who have been given specific areas of operation have been entrusted with the responsibility of procuring fresh fruit bunches from farmers at a price fixed by the government.

Prices of oil palm have been decided based on scientific formula approved by the Price Fixation Committee, of which oil palm farmers, oil palm entrepreneurs are members and the Principal Secretary of the Horticulture Department is the Chairman. This year, the price of fresh fruit bunches has been fixed at Rs. 5,291 per tonne and payment is made to the bank accounts of farmers once a month.

To encourage farmers to take up oil palm cultivation, the State government has provided an input assistance of Rs. 16,000 per hectare in the form of

inorganic fertilizers for four years and planting material subsidy of Rs. 8,000 per hectare. Subsidies are extended for the purchase of various implements to adopt drip irrigation, inter cropping drilling borewell, water harvesting structures and diesel pumpsets.

At present, oil

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Rubber prices soar as supply falls

Farmers want Rubber Board to assess production potential



Farmers want the Rubber Board to make a fresh assessment of the country's capacity for natural rubber production in the wake of a shortage of local produce in the midst of a price improvement.

The price of the commodity has risen about 40 per cent between February and April. The spurt comes after a long slump though farmers say it may be temporary, considering a ban on import that was in effect till the end of March.

Assessment

Sources say the demand for an assessment of production capacity, by both small- and large-scale farms, came up at a high-level meeting of the board on Tuesday.

The benchmark RSS-4 grade closed at Rs.133 a kg at Kottayam on Tuesday. The average price slumped to Rs.93.55 a kg in February, continuing a trend starting January 2015.

Rubber price fell from Rs.137.44 a kg in February 2015 to Rs.102.79 a kg in December. The slump continued in January 2016 with the price at Rs.97.80. But March 2016 saw an upward trend, the average price for the month being Rs.108.12 a kg.

The price continued to rise steadily in April, the month opening RSS-4 at Rs.115 a kg. However, veteran trader N. Radhakrishnan advises patience before jumping into conclusions. He says shortage of material is the key issue, but the price of crude oil has to be factored in.

The Rubber Board estimates that India produced 5.63 lakh tonnes of natural rubber during last financial year against a demand for about 9.86 lakh tonnes. Imports stood at 4.54 lakh tonnes. However, farmers are learnt to have disputed the figures pointing out that India produced 9.13 lakh tonnes of the commodity during 2012-13 against a demand for 9.43 lakh tonnes.

Availability

Rajiv Budhraj, director general, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association, says despite the price rising about 40 per cent, availability of NR has emerged as a serious issue.

Mohinder Gupta, president, All India Rubber Industries Association, says that volatility disrupted the planning process, especially at small rubber units. MSMEs signed long-term contracts and volatility would hit profitability.

Siby Monippally, representing farmers, says the price rise has been triggered by a shortage of rubber in the market.

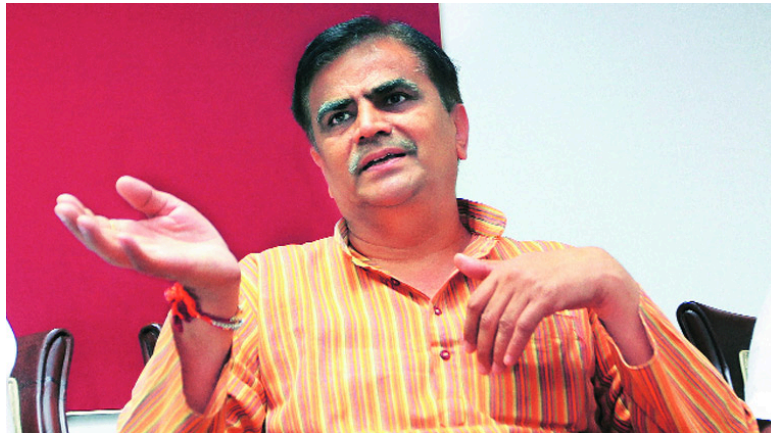
There is no tapping. Even if farmers want to tap rubber, it is not possible because of the heat wave like condition, he said.

The supply situation in the international market is similar, with Indonesia and Thailand facing similar shortages, he added.



Pradhan Manthri Fasal Beema Yojana: Haryana wants own company to handle insurance scheme

While the Haryana government has notified the scheme for the state, it is working on the modalities.



Haryana agriculture minister O P Dhankar

The Haryana government has sought approval from the Centre to set up its own corporation for implementation of the new crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojna (PMFBY). Instead of depending on insurance companies, the state government wanted its own set up to provide compensation to farmers under the scheme.

The Union Cabinet had approved the new crop insurance scheme in January this year and it will come into affect from the coming kharif season. Under

the scheme, the premium to be paid by farmers has been brought down considerably to only 2 per cent for khariff and 1.5 per cent for rabi crops. While the Haryana government has notified the scheme for the state, it is working on the modalities.

Haryana Agriculture Minister O P Dhankar said that they have sought permission from the centre to set up their own corporation for implementation of the scheme.

“The Centre is giving Rs 300 crore for the scheme. Haryana has made provision of Rs 300 crore in the budget for the same. Instead of depositing all this money with insurance companies, we could set up our own company. This will also ensure that the farmers do not face problems in getting compensation in case of crop damage,” he said.

Dhankar added that talks would also be held with insurance companies for the implementation of the scheme. The modalities will be worked out once a discussion is held. He said that the aim is to encourage farmers to take insurance which they are reluctant to.

As per the 2011 Census, of around 16.7 lakh farming families in Haryana, around 2.14 lakh families were covered by Modified National Agriculture Insurance Scheme up to kharif 2013. This was the last crop for which the government notified the insurance scheme.

The farmers complain about having to pay the premium even when they were not being adequately compensated when the crop failed. Farmers have faced successive crop failures in the state. The Haryana government paid Rs 1,092 crore compensation for damage to wheat and mustard crop last year. An amount of Rs 967 crore was announced for damage to cotton crop due to whitefly pest.

The compensation was restricted to an area of five acres. A special girdawari is also being done in some villages to assess damage to wheat crop this year following hailstorm and rains. The government has emphasised that the farmers should switch over to insuring their crops rather than seeking compensation for damage.

Drought on lips, polls in mind as CM Akhilesh Yadav, minister visit Bundelkhand

Last week, CM had directed installation of an additional 666 handpumps in the seven drought-hit districts of Bundelkhand, just a day after he allocated Rs 867.87 crore for farmers in parched areas of the state.



The region witnesses drought-like conditions nearly every year. Archive photo

WITH ASSEMBLY elections scheduled in Uttar Pradesh next year, the Samajwadi Party government in state has started focusing on Bundelkhand — the region facing severe water crisis and where drought-like conditions occur every year.

On Tuesday, Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav reached Lalitpur district in the region where he visited as many as six villages and took stock of the water crisis and arrangements made by the concerned departments to tackle the same. The CM's visit comes just two weeks after his two-day tour to Mahoba and Chitrakoot districts where he had announced development works worth Rs 200 crore.

Last week, CM had directed installation of an additional 666 handpumps in the seven drought-hit districts of Bundelkhand, just a day after he allocated Rs 867.87 crore for farmers in parched areas of the state.

Meanwhile, UP Agriculture Minister Vinod Kumar alias Pandit Singh, too, has reached Banda district where he visited some villages promising help. On Wednesday, Pandit Singh will tour Hamirpur district in the region where he will interact with farmers.

Also, from Wednesday onwards, 47 senior officials of agriculture department, including Principal Secretary, will be visiting each of 47 blocks of seven districts of Bundelkhand. Pandit Singh is scheduled to launch a new scheme where about 2,000 farmers from different blocks of region would be given about Rs 10 crore subsidy for construction of ponds in their respective farms.

Under the scheme, called 'Khet Talab Yojana', state government has offered to pay half the amount to construct a pond in the agriculture fields. The estimated cost to dig a pond is about Rs 1.05 lakh.

"While Chief Minister was in Lalitpur and I was in Banda, I have sent all senior officers and advisers to different districts of the region to visit villages and interact with farmers, take their applications and check whether they are getting the benefits of various schemes," Pandit Singh told the Indian Express. On his visit to Hamirpur due on Wednesday, the minister confirmed that he will give away subsidy to 2,000 farmers under the "Khet Talab Yojana".

"Our aim is that construction of one pond will help in alleviating water crisis in at least one hectare of its adjoining area. Moreover, to ensure that there is no pilferage of funds, we will directly send about Rs 50,000 subsidy to the bank account of each beneficiary," he added.

Mukesh Kumar Srivastava, Director Agriculture, who would be in Jalaun district of Bundelkhand on Wednesday, said, "In the past, big ponds were constructed for community purpose but this time it has been thought to engage farmers for construction of ponds on their personal farm land. The ponds will be 20 metre long, 22 metre wide and 3 metre deep".

A senior officer, however, the construction of these ponds would not be of immediate help to the farmers, who will have to wait for the rains to fill them up. Meanwhile, In Lalitpur, Akhilesh accused the Centre of turning a blind eye to drought-hit Bundelkhand and said his government will make a separate provision in the budget for the region if needed. "No one can make

allegations of bias against our government in distributing relief to the affected people. The government is distributing food grains from state funds. We are trying to help the people here without any contribution from Centre,” he said.

Akhilesh said the state government is distributing packets of food grain, pulses, potatoes, oil, milk powder, salt and sugar. He also inaugurated and laid foundation stone of as many as 12 development projects worth Rs 91 crore, which mainly included road projects.

He also gave away relief packages to 1,500 beneficiaries, apart from giving 53 laptops to merit holder students. Meanwhile, District Magistrate of Lalitpur, Rupesh Kumar informed that CM stopped at about six villages to ask locals about their problems.

On getting complaints, he ordered inquiry at some places, and also directed the DM to give Lohia Awas to members of ‘Sahariya’ tribe in Garauli and Sehpur villages.

Pune: Climate experts seek revision of rules to use rainwater for industries

According to statistics, the MIDC has about 233 industrial complexes spread over 1,30,000 acres all over the state.



Experts say industries are permitted to have rainwater harvesting systems but are not allowed to use them, and the rule should be reversed in view of the drought situation in the state. In times of water level depletion in dams

and groundwater tables, experts have asked for a revision of the industrial policy on rainwater harvesting.

While industries are allowed rainwater harvesting, they use Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) water for their needs. Experts have called for a change in this policy as these industries are seeking tanker water services from MIDC instead of using the harvested water.

According to statistics, the MIDC has about 233 industrial complexes spread over 1,30,000 acres all over the state. Rainwater harvesting expert Colonel SG Dalvi from the climate reality project says that it is ironical that industries are permitted to have rainwater harvesting systems but are not allowed to use the harvested rain water.

■ MIDC land holding: 1,30,000 acre	■ Total rainwater potential of MIDC land: 5,72,000 million litres
■ Average rainfall in the state: 1,300 mm	■ This rainwater is sufficient to provide around 255 days of daily water to the industry
■ Rainwater potential: 4.4 million litres per acre	

“This is a short-sighted policy. While generating revenue, it is adding to the water shortage in the rest of the state. By selling water to the industries, MIDC earns around Rs 500 crore annually,” Dalvi says. MIDC provides water to its complexes using water tankers where required. The corporation provides approximately 2,240 million litres of water per day.

Pune’s Hinjewadi IT Park Phase 1 and 2 has a total land holding of approximately 440 acres. The annual rainwater potential, using Pune’s average figures of 770 mm, is about 1,100 million litres. This potential, if used judiciously, would make large amounts of water available for agriculture and domestic use.

At the same time, implementing rainwater harvesting schemes on such large areas would help improve groundwater levels. This would also make huge amounts of water available to the agriculture and domestic sector. It would also help reduce the carbon footprint, says another expert on the issue.

Due to water shortage across the country and no environment friendly water policy, industries are facing water cuts and this is going to affect industrial output, which would in turn affect jobs generation and economy growth.

Dalvi and other experts working in the field say that it is very strange that we have failed to tap rainwater potential for our benefits. Since last year, the state government has made funds available for farm ponds in the agriculture sector, which consumes around 70 per cent of fresh water available. Farm pond is a type of rainwater harvesting method.

MIDC officials, on their part, have said that they have to check the rules on the issue.

Maharashtra: No new sugar mills in Marathwada for 5 years

Of the 202 sugar mills in Maharashtra, 40 per cent are in Marathwada region. Maharashtra accounts for 32 per cent of the total sugar production in the country.

The Maharashtra government is set to enforce a five-year ban on sanctioning new sugar mills in the drought-hit Marathwada region, which is facing a severe drinking water crisis.

At a core committee meeting of cabinet ministers led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, it was decided to ban new sugar mills in Marathwada, which comprises eight districts — Aurangabad, Jalna, Beed, Parbhani, Latur, Hingoli, Osmanabad and Nanded.

The government's decision is in line with the recommendations of the Madhav Chitale committee, which was set up when the Congress-NCP government was in power. The panel had pointed out that sugarcane requires a large amount of water to cultivate.

Of the 202 sugar mills in Maharashtra, 40 per cent are in Marathwada region. Maharashtra accounts for 32 per cent of the total sugar production in the country.

“It is virtually not possible to sanction new sugar mills for the next five years in Marathwada region,” state Revenue and Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse said.

In another decision meant to save water, the government plans to make drip irrigation compulsory for all sugar mills across the state. Data from the ministry of agriculture shows that only 20-25 per cent sugar mills have implemented drip irrigation.

A majority of the sugar mills draw water from dams. But the dilemma for the government, officials said, is that sugarcane growers seek higher subsidy to implement drip irrigation. The government is now seeking the Israel government's expertise and trying to make drip irrigation a less expensive process.

"There cannot be any justification for allowing so many sugar mills in Marathwada. As a uniform rule, the government should ensure that any district with less than 700 mm rainfall should not be allowed sugarcane cultivation," Chitale had said.

Former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan, too, had suggested that permission to set up sugar mills should not be given in drought-hit regions. Fadnavis also emphasised on a re-look at crop patterns according to soil health and water availability in each region, to ensure that huge investments put in by farmers are commensurate with the yield.

Osmanabad district collector Prashant Narnaware said, "In my district, where the average rainfall is less than 450 mm, the 'Beyond Cane' campaign has worked to the farmers' advantage. Out of 48,000 hectares, 23,000 hectares will not grow sugarcane. The farmers are going for pulses which require less water, floriculture and horticulture with guidance from the agriculture ministry."

No rebound in sight for rubber plantation owners



Sector continues to reel under price slump; growers abandon production for other crops; Rubber Board cuts back on support

The natural rubber crisis, which has taken the steam out of Kerala's once-lucrative rubber plantation industry, has more to it than is apparent.

Growers are facing an unprecedented crisis due to a steady decline in price and production, which fell to 5.63 lakh tonnes in FY-16. The unremunerative prices have forced farmers to stop harvesting the crop and even abandon tapping.

The growers' community complains that the Rubber Board, which is looked upon as a source of solace for farmers reeling under the price crash, is hardly taking any efforts for their benefit. Instead, the Board is said to be going for austerity measures, including cancellation of plantation visits, due to a cash crunch.

The reduced budgetary allocation for FY-17 has forced the Board to take such extreme steps, as the Union Government had earmarked only ₹132 crore against last year's disbursal of ₹202 crore.

From this allocation, the Board has to meet salaries, other expenses, rent for several regional offices as well as disbursal of the plantation subsidy of ₹35-40 crore, pending for the last two financial years.

Tightening the belt

With the imposition of austerity measures from April, over 200 regional and representative offices have been told to reduce their monthly rent by at least 50 per cent or shift to smaller offices. The lack of funds has even restricted the Board from paying the Travelling Allowance of field officers.

Highly placed sources in the Board told *BusinessLine* that a request to raise the budgetary allocation to ₹250 crore has not received a positive response. Given this situation, it was decided not to invite applications from small growers for a subsidy this year. Small growers are the mainstay of natural rubber production in Kerala, contributing 85 per cent of the total of 5.63 lakh tonnes in FY-16.

“When the Board has nothing to offer as subsidies, there is no point in giving small growers any farming advice on fields, as it will invite their wrath for denying legitimate monetary benefits for the last two consecutive years,” a source said.

R&D at a standstill

The Rubber Research Institute of India has been hit hardest by the cost cutting measures. All research-related activities, including development of high-yield clones, crop protection methods, manuring and tissue culture, have been suspended.

However, bringing some cheer to the cash-trapped rubber sector, prices spurted to ₹133 per kg on Monday, for the RSS 4 grade. Market sources attribute the price increase to an upward trend in crude prices, and the supply crunch of natural rubber in India and other rubber producing countries, with production touching an abysmal low in the last three months. According to experts, both crude and rubber prices have a tendency to move in tandem.

Hitting out against the austerity measures, PC Cyriac, the former Rubber Board Chairman, said that governments will always ask for a reduction in expenses but serving officers needed to be practical and reduce costs without sacrificing the major functions of the department. Measures such as cancellation of field visits, shutting down of offices etc will make the

organisation inactive and prevent officers from discharging their legitimate duty, he said.

Still no top brass

According to stakeholders, there has not been any real move by the Government to appoint a full-time Chairman, with the post lying vacant since 2014. Similarly, the posts of Secretary and Production Commissioner are also lying unoccupied.

A price slump similar to the one occurring now took place between 1997-2001. Industry watchers say there will be difficulties but it is not wise to discard a crop such as rubber because the price is not attractive for the time being.

Given this situation, stakeholders have urged the Board to come out with an awareness campaigns and stop farmers from deserting rubber for other crops.

Delayed blossom showers, rising mercury rob coffee crop of aroma



The unusually high temperatures and the delay in arrival of pre-monsoon or blossom showers could shrink the robusta coffee crop for the 2016-17 season, starting October.

Growers in the key regions of Coorg and Chikmagalur are concerned over the delay in pre-monsoon showers, crucial for blossoming of the coffee floral buds, and fear that it could impact robusta output by up to a fourth.

Blossom showers and subsequent backing showers are crucial for a good crop. Traditionally, the robusta and arabica areas should receive pre-monsoon showers by March 15 and April 15, respectively, for a good blossom.

“The blossom shower has been very sporadic and scanty this year and it is definitely going to affect the crop, both robusta and arabica,” said Baba PS Bedi, Chairman of the Karnataka Planters’ Association.

“Small growers, who cannot afford to take up sprinkler irrigation, are going to be hit hard,” Bedi said, adding that the planters’ association will soon urge the State government to take up cloud seeding to create artificial rain in the key growing regions.

Water crisis

Though most of the robusta area is irrigated, with growers deploying sprinklers to irrigate their estates without waiting for the blossom showers, the lack of sufficient water storage this year has turned out to be a cause for concern.

Two back-to-back droughts triggered by successive deficient monsoons have created water stress thereby affecting the availability for irrigation, Bedi added.

“The delay in blossom showers and the prevailing unusually high temperatures across all the growing regions is a real cause of worry. It will have a significant impact on the crop loss, but it is too early to quantify the impact,” said Y Raghuramulu, Director of the Balehonnur-based Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI).

The Coffee Board is expected to take up crop assessment sometime in mid-May.

In addition, the depleting shade pattern in some areas is aggravating the problem this year, Raghuramulu added.

“The situation is terrible in South Coorg. With temperatures ruling 2-3 degrees higher than normal, there is a fear of coffee plants dying in some areas,” said N Bose Mandanna, a planter in Suntikoppa, near Madikeri. About 30 per cent of the robusta area is impacted by the delayed rainfall, he added.

“The overall situation is not comfortable. Though it has rained in some pockets, the quantum of rainfall is not sufficient. The water stress and high temperatures will affect the blossom, thereby impacting the crop,” said Nishant Gurjer, a planter in Chikmagalur.

Plants under pressure

Another factor that could affect the output this year is stressed out plants. “In the last two years, we have been picking some good crop. As a result, the plants are relatively stressed and the output could be impacted,” Gurjer added.

The Coffee Board has estimated the 2015-16 crop’s output at 3.5 lakh tonnes, a 7 per cent increase over the previous year’s 3.27 lakh tonnes.

Trade body dispels fears over volatile cotton prices



Recent volatility in cotton prices has kept the mill sector on an edge for some time now. But industry insiders urge its members “not to panic.”

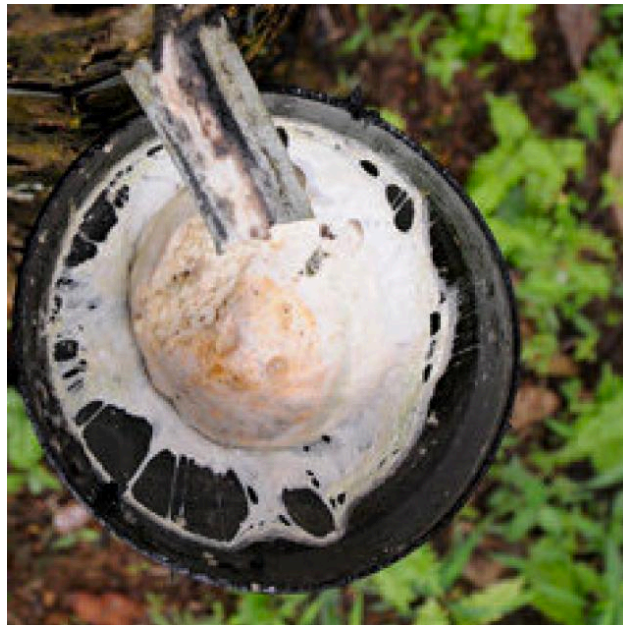
Stating that the price of the fibre has been on an uptrend due to sentiments in the international market, the President of Indian Cotton Federation (formerly

South India Cotton Association) and Managing Director of Rajaratna Mills J Thulasidharan, said the arrivals so far has only been around 265-270 lakh bales (of 170 kg), accounting for roughly around 75 per cent of production.

“Farmers are still holding 25 per cent in anticipation of higher prices. Mills need not panic as yarn demand is showing signs of pick-up and the yarn prices have started to look up. This, coupled with the IMD’s prediction of a favourable monsoon, should improve the market sentiments,” he said.

Industry insiders say that the quality of the cotton, particularly from Northern region has been pretty bad this year. “The level of intentional adulteration is high,” the source said, adding, “mills that were hitherto sourcing the fibre from Gujarat have resorted to Telangana as also import from the African countries.”

Spot rubber stays flat



Spot rubber finished almost unchanged on Tuesday. RSS 4 quoted steady at ₹133 a kg, according to traders.

The grade improved to ₹133 (132) and ₹130 (₹129) respectively, according to the Rubber Board and dealers.

RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to ₹114.61 (₹113.84) at Bangkok. April futures closed at ₹188.5 (₹114.17) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (₹/kg): RSS-4: 133(133); RSS-5: 131 (131); Ungraded: 125 (125); ISNR 20: 124 (124) and Latex (60% drc): 106.75 (105.50).

Tea prices rise at Coonoor sales



For the third consecutive week, following lower supplies, average prices rose at Coonoor Tea Trade Association auctions.

At Sale No: 15, average prices rose marginally to ₹94.93 from previous week's ₹94.80 a kg. In all, 92 per cent of the offer was sold. In the CTC Dust tea auction, Homedale Estate's Red Dust, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped when TRP Tea and Commodities bought it for ₹216.

It was also the highest price in the entire CTC market. Vigneshwar Speciality Pekoe Dust, auctioned by Paramount Tea Marketing, came second when TRP Tea and Commodities bought it for ₹200. In the CTC Leaf tea auction, Homedale Estate's Broken Orange Pekoe Fannings, auctioned by Global Tea Brokers, topped fetching ₹200.

These were the only three grades which fetched ₹200 and more this week. In the orthodox market, Kodanad topped at ₹245 a kg followed by Havukal ₹237, Kairbetta ₹227 and Chamraj ₹220.

The sweet stench behind the drought in Maharashtra



In one of the driest regions of the country, water-hungry cash crops deplete dams while citizens are left high and dry

In a scene straight out of a dystopian science fiction novel, a train carrying half a million litres of water arrived in the Indian city of Latur this week, greeted by people carrying garlands and bouquets. The ‘water express’ is part of a series of measures designed to provide emergency relief to the drought-hit Marathwada region of Maharashtra state. Dams that supply water to several districts in the area have run completely dry in recent weeks, prompting the complete shut down of public water supply, closure of hospitals, commandeering of borewells and even water-related deaths.

The district collector denies that the current situation constitutes a crisis, but it hasn’t prevented the administration from enforcing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in the area, preventing the assembly of more than five people near water distribution points.

However, the drought in Marathwada is hardly a surprise. After a less than stellar monsoon last year, it has been clear for months that water supply in the three major dams that supply Latur would not last until the next spell of showers. With climate change increasing the frequency of erratic weather patterns, the state of Maharashtra has lurched blindly from one disaster to another. According to a 2008 World Bank report, a drought in 2003 and a flood in 2005 together absorbed more of the state’s budget than the entire planned expenditure on irrigation, agriculture and rural development over the previous six years.

Research indicates that the occurrence of such extreme events is expected to rise and yet the current situation in Latur is clear evidence that monetary imperatives, rather than environmental concerns are driving the state's water usage policy. Despite 73 per cent of its land area being classified as semi-arid, Maharashtra is among the largest producers in the country of two water intensive cash crops – sugarcane and cotton. By the government's own statistics, 2,450 litres of water is required to produce 1 kg of sugar in the state against 990 litres in Uttar Pradesh. Cotton has an even higher cost - 1kg consumes on average 22,500 litres of water, according to the Water Footprint Network.

Sugarcane in particular is closely tied to politics in Maharashtra. Some of the most prominent leaders in the state, including former Chief Ministers Vilasrao Deshmukh and Ashok Chavan, deputy CMs Ajit Pawar and Vijaysingh Patil and a number of other ministers, MLAs and MPs all either own or indirectly control sugar mills and co-operatives. This not only makes it impossible to reduce the cultivation of this water-hungry crop, but allows for unchecked expansion through state sponsored procurement programs and aid.

The chronically loss-making sugar industry received an interest-free loan package of ₹6000 crore last year – the latest in a long line of similar bailouts offered by governments cutting across party lines.

The Centre is currently looking to increase the amount of ethanol blended in petrol to 10%. This has led the food department to order the major sugar-producing states, including Maharashtra, to nearly double their current production of ethanol, which is produced from sugarcane. The panel which originally proposed the idea was headed by Sharad Pawar, another politician with close ties to the sugar lobby who has been accused of involvement in multiple scams relating to the sugar industry.

With politicians fanning powerful headwinds in the direction of the sugar industry, plummeting water tables have taken the back seat as the six major sugar producing districts of Maharashtra added 38 new sugar mills between 2009-10 and 2014-15, with production going from 710 lakh metric tonnes to 1051 lakh metric tonnes. Cotton production has also grown significantly – output is 35 per cent higher now than it was in 2004-05.

The Maharashtra State Action Plan on Climate Change acknowledges the deleterious effect of cash crops on the state's water resources, but stops short of suggesting the reduction of their cultivation. This is resulting in a situation where one of the driest regions of India exports billions of litres of water every year in the form of cash crops to other parts of India and even several countries around the world. Meanwhile, its citizens continue to wait for another miracle to arrive on rails to quench their thirst.

Refiners hike imported oil prices



Edible oils ruled firm tracking firm futures despite need-based thin volume. Local refineries increased their rates for palmolein-soya refined oil by ₹5/10 kg, while indigenous edible oils gained ₹2-5 on back of firm reports from producing centres.

Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹610, super palmolein ₹621, soyabean refined oil ₹655. Ruchi's rates: palmolein ₹603, soyabean refined oil ₹640 and sunflower refined oil ₹750. Allana traded palmolein ₹610, soya refined oil ₹655 and sunflower refined oil ₹755.

At Rajkot, groundnut oil *Telia* tin was up at ₹1,710 (1,700) and loose (10 kg) jumped to ₹1,100 (1,090).

Coconut oil rises with copra



Prices of coconut oil increased at Erode markets on Tuesday due to rising copra prices. “ Copra was sold at ₹5,350-5,500 a quintal and the edible copra was sold at ₹6,500.

Buyers/oil mills procured the same to produce more quantity,” said RM Palanisamy, a trader.

He said within the last few days more than 300 tonnes of copra was sold and also the price of the coconuts were decreasing Coconut oil fetched ₹1,210-30 for a 15-kg loose pack.

Many coconut oil crushers were waiting for fresh demand from North India.

Business Standard

All agriculture subsidies will be transferred directly to farmers: Prof Sudhir Panwar

Interview with UP Planning Commission Member



Agriculture is the mainstay of Uttar Pradesh's economy and the largest employer in the state. The Akhilesh Yadav government had declared the last two financial years as 'kisan varsh' to emphasise its focus on the agricultural sector, its schemes to improve the condition of farmers and its goal of making farming more lucrative. UP Planning Commission Member **Prof Sudhir Panwar** discusses the way forward in agriculture, in an interview with *Virendra Singh Rawat*. Edited excerpts:

Uttar Pradesh has been facing deficit monsoons over the last two years. How has this impacted the state's agricultural sector?

A major part of the state suffered due to sub-optimal monsoon rains and consequent drought and drought-like situation for two consecutive years along with unseasonal rain and hailstorms during the last rabi season. It affected farmers' income and productivity to a large extent. The gross state domestic product for agriculture was in the red (-1.8 per cent) in 2014-15.

The state government took several measures to help farmers like doubling of relief amount, subsidised seeds and enhanced work opportunities for landless labour in drought-affected areas. The Kamdhenu Yojna played a big

role in insulating farmers' incomes from drought and weather disturbances.

The central government aims to double farmers' incomes by 2022. In this context, where does the UP farm sector figure and how well- or ill-prepared is the state's farm infrastructure?

I do not think that the measures announced by National Democratic Alliance government in the central budget will double farmers' income. The budgetary provision for irrigation and soil health cards are aimed at increasing productivity, but income is an outcome of production and market value.

Doubling of income in five years would require an annual growth rate of over 12 per cent for five continuous years, which is difficult to achieve and sustain. Agricultural prices are determined by Minimum Support Price (MSP) policies and the market.

The NDA government checked inflation through suppression of commodity prices and rural wages, and increased MSP nominally - just 3.2 per cent in the last two years. The prices of domestic produce like sugar, rice, vegetables and fruits plunged and resulted in lower margins to farmers. The price stabilisation fund was used mainly for protecting consumers, not farmers.

Are credit flows to the farm sector in UP over the last four to five years adequate, or are there still areas of weakness that warrant attention?

UP being a big state and the largest producer of many commodities, is well-equipped to take advantage of schemes announced by the Centre. In the past also, the performance of the state agriculture department in centrally sponsored schemes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and others had been good.

The credit flow and penetration of institutional credit in UP is quite satisfactory. The Institutional Finance Directorate in UP is coordinating well with banks on different activities. The cooperative bank expansion and its credit policies helped farmers to a large extent.

The weak area is the agro-processing industry. However, the state government has now formulated an attractive agro-processing industry

policy, which is gaining momentum. In Sikandrabad (Bulandshahr), the state-of-the-art Sunshine Agri-Processing hub with 16,000 tonnes capacity, which was commissioned by Agricultural Production Commissioner (APC) Pravir Kumar, is an example of the friendly policies of the state.

The domestic sugarcane sector has been facing multiple challenges, and UP is the largest sugarcane producer among states. What is the way forward for the sector, such that all stakeholders - farmers, sugar mills and consumers - receive the best deal?

Sugarcane is the principal cash crop in UP, amounting to Rs 26,000 crore. Due to unilateral acceptance of the Rangarajan Commission recommendations by the central government and excess sugarcane production, cane farmers and the sugar industry are under stress.

When sugar prices had fallen to Rs 2,400 per quintal last year, the state government bailed out the industry and farmers through a package of Rs 2,800 crore. The situation is better this year and the government is determined to pay farmers the State Advised Price (SAP), which is high in comparison to other large producing states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The Centre still holds the key, since market intervention in sugar prices is required so that prices are maintained at the level where farmers get fair if not remunerative prices.

The domestic sugar industry can cope through diversification and the state and central governments may extend help. Due to adoption of new varieties and technology at farmers' end, the productivity and sugar recovery has been increased considerably. In several areas it has touched 12.5-13 per cent.

Could you throw some light on the flow of funds to the agricultural sector during the incumbent regime in UP and how this compares with the previous Mayawati dispensation?

The declaration of two consecutive years as 'kisan varsh' (farmer years) shows the priority of the Akhilesh Yadav government towards farmers. In its first year, the regime had made irrigation free, waived cooperative loans of farmers, initiated the Kamdhenu scheme, framed and implemented new agriculture policies, etc. In 2015, when drought occurred, the state

government doubled the relief amount despite the meagre assistance of Rs 2,800 crore from the Centre.

Recently, the chief minister had announced an innovative scheme to provide ration packets to the Antyodaya families of Bundelkhand containing 'Deshi ghee', edible oil and milk powder, along with other food items.

The budgetary allocation for agriculture sector is beyond comparison to previous governments and even other states in the country. The allocations exceed 50 per cent of the total outlays.

After a long time, there is a state government which is not pursuing a symbolic agenda for any caste or creed. The programmes and policies are for the benefit of the general population.

What more can UP's farmers expect from the government in terms of credit flow, improvement in farm infrastructure, marketing support, new farm schemes and subsidies in 2016-17?

This year, we have planned to transfer all agriculture subsidies directly to farmers' accounts. The thrust area for this year is diversification, processing facilities, marketing network and extension services.

The Chandra Shekhar Azad University, Kanpur, in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute, is working on potato-growing areas and horticulture. The perfume industry will get a new thrust with the collaboration of French institutions.

Besides, the government will provide financial assistance to agriculture graduates in setting up agri-junction, which will serve as an interface between farmers and best practices in agriculture, including input supply and advisories.

The agriculture department engaged Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur alumni in preparation of an e-platform for digitisation of all the farmers' needs on one platform.

How has the UP Planning Commission been contributing to the progress of the state's agricultural landscape?

The state Planning Commission is an advisory body to the government. Since the chief minister is its chairman, there are ample opportunities to raise issues pertaining to the rural sector. Because of my farming background, he has provided me with an opportunity to put farmers' perspective in the highest policy advisory body.

Agriculture in stress, manufacturing holds promise: FM Arun Jaitley

Jaitley said that the country has embarked on an ambitious programme to create jobs in manufacturing for millions of its citizens



With Indian agriculture remaining a worrisome sector and services doing rather well, it is manufacturing that can create the quantum of jobs needed to accommodate urban migration and help the country grow faster, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has said.

"As a share of our GDP, the manufacturing sector over the years has shrunk to around 15%. Our services sector is fairly robust, grows annually at around 9-10% and is expanding rapidly. It is not a sector that seriously worries us," he said.

"Agriculture obviously is the most worrisome sector of the Indian economy. With just 15% contribution to the GDP, you have around 55% of the

population in agriculture. That's where really the stress in the Indian economy is," the minister told the Asian Society here.

"Over the next few decades, we need to have a very large section of population – underemployed in agriculture – getting out of agriculture and getting absorbed in other segments. Obviously, manufacturing is where large jobs are," he said.

"I don't think this is an opportunity we can afford to miss," he added.

Outlining the "Make in India" initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the reason behind such focus on manufacturing and the steps being taken towards the goal, Jaitley said that this was the area that could help India transform into a developed nation.

"That's why the concentration and every policy initiative we have been taking in this regard has been in the direction of strengthening the economy, and more particularly, on impacting on our manufacturing sector itself," he said in his 40-minute speech.

Nonetheless, he said, there has been a significant transformation in India in the past few years.

"What was being referred to as 'policy paralysis', is now referred to as the 'bright spot'," he said, alluding to the description India has been accorded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), meetings of which Jaitley had attended in Washington before arriving here.

"I've belief given the global standards in a slowed environment, India is doing significantly well. But given our own standards and expectations – of being able to grow faster, eradicate poverty and transform into a developed country – we probably can do a little better," he said.

Under the Make in India initiative, launched in 2014, Jaitley said that the country has embarked on an ambitious programme to create jobs for millions of its citizens, who together comprise the world's second-largest population of nearly 1.3 billion people.

He said that infrastructure development was central to such a plan and cited the examples of highways, where as many as 233 projects were underway

with a target of 30 kilometre per day, and investments in airports to operationalise a couple of hundred of them of World War II vintage.

On the global economy, Jaitley expressed his concern over the "firewalls" countries have created amid slow recovery, with little signs as to how soon the situation would improve.

"If you were to ask me 'how's the global situation', I think it's grim and worrisome. What will be the state of play a year or two years from now, I don't think anybody has been able for sure to hazard even a significant guess," he said.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Concert to raise funds for farmers

Devmudraa a movement school in Aurangabad will host a cultural fund-raising concert on April 30, at Tapadiya Natya Mandir to help drought-hit farmers.

This three hour concert will feature classical dances and folk dances of Maharashtra by more than 30 artistes. Besides Aurangabad, the concert will be put up in various cities including Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad.

" As Devmudraa is a member of International Dance Council, UNESCO, and April 29 is International Dance Day, we aim to celebrate this day by doing our bit for our farmers. Our aim is to bring dance close to everyone and also use the arts for a cause", said V Soumyasri, director of the school.

"We propose to provide monetary support to the distressed farmers and their families with this fund raising event comprising of three dance drama productions, selected pieces from each have been woven into one cultural program, initially in Aurangabad and then in Pune, Mumbai, Hyderabad and other cities in the coming months", she said.

This show has been performed 12 times since its premiere in the year 2012 in Aurangabad, Latur, Hyderabad, Chennai and Indore. And the third one Maharang will be a colourful ensemble of Maharashtras folklore including

songs and dance, an authentic mix of folk arts, a tribute to the people of the state and its culture.

"For quite some time, Devmudraa has been concerned about the fact that the arts being regarded as elitist and accessible only to a privileged few. We believe there is a correlation between the shrinking audiences for the arts and an increase in the disconnect between the artist and community. We see ourselves not just as an arts organization but also as a community outreach and development institute", added Soumyasri.

Machine helps farmers make money from agro waste

In a boost to produce green fuel in the form of briquettes with the help of agro waste, city-based briquette manufacturer Balaji Bio Coal Energy has developed an uprooter machine.

After the firm introduced the concept in the city and nearby villages for free, farmers are able to save their efforts and at the same time generate twice the revenue they used to generate earlier by selling to the same firm.

Among the 170 farmers who are being benefited by the machine is Sunil Shrikhande (47) from Mohpa, Nagpur district. Three years back, Shrikhande used to burn the agro waste generated on his 10-acre farm. He was then told that he can make 1,000 for every ton of agro waste by supplying it to briquette manufacturing units.

But after deducting labour charges and transportation costs, Shrikhande was left with barely 200. It wasn't worth it.

The farmer got back to burning the waste. But the next year, when he was introduced to the uprooter machine, he again found supplying agro waste viable. "I just have to make my land available.

A contractor enters with his tractor, uproots all the waste, loads it all in his vehicle and gives me the money on the spot," he said, adding that he doesn't have to spend an extra penny now.

Balaji Bio Coal Energy co-owner Ankit Jalan said, "Through this concept, the factory was able to generate 35,000 tonnes this year itself. It has reached places like Katol, Patansaongi, Saoner etc."

Apart from letting farmers generate extra revenue, the concept has also developed self-employment for some villagers. These people act as contractors to whom the firm provides the machine for free.

"All they do is attach it to their tractor, collect the agro waste and earn money by selling the raw material to our factory. Until now, seven such machines costing 1.50 lakh each has been distributed to the contractors for free," said Manish Kadu, another co-owner.

"Paying for the transport himself, the contractor reaches the factory. He sells the agro waste to us at 2,000 a tonne," said Kadu.

The idea started from Kadu's own farm who realized that uprooting the agro waste and supplying it to the factory takes away a lot of manpower and efforts. "If it is taking away so much from a farmer, why would he want to get involved?" he said.

He said that he then thought of developing a mechanism which easily uproots the agro waste. Initially his machine used to cut the stem 2 inches above the ground but the latest version plucks the same stem from the root, with the happy side effect of ploughing the field for the farmer automatically.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Govt urges industry to boost ethanol output; assures purchase

Chairing a meeting of Indian Federation of Green Energy, the minister said ethanol could be a game changer as it is economically viable and environment-friendly.

NEW DELHI: Urging the industry to boost ethanol production, the government has said it is ready to purchase the entire output.

The development comes in the wake of the government making compulsory blending 10 per cent ethanol with petrol.

"Government is ready to purchase the entire quantity of ethanol produced by the industry. It could think of ways for economically viable production of ethanol," Union Road Transport, Highways and Shipping Minister Nitin Gadkari told ethanol producers.



Chairing a meeting of Indian Federation of Green Energy, the minister said ethanol could be a game changer as it is economically viable and environment-friendly.

He said the industry could find ways and means for boosting the production through molasses, bagass, corn or other means and the government was ready to buy the entire produce.

Citing the example of flex-fuel cars in Brazil, Gadkari said India was also on the way to promote such vehicles as this could minimise pollution.

"Under Ethanol Blending programme (EBP), the central government has scaled up blending targets from 5 per cent to 10 per cent to promote blending of ethanol with petrol and its use as alternative fuel," the government has said last year.

It has said the production cost of ethanol produced through C-heavy route from molasses is Rs 36.2 per litre.

The production of ethanol is linked to the production of molasses which is a byproduct during the production of sugar.

Parliament was recently informed that the government is also providing soft loans of up to 40 per cent of the project cost to sugar mills for setting up ethanol projects.

To augment supplies of ethanol to oil marketing companies (OMCs) under EBP, the policy for procurement of ethanol has been modified to smoothen the entire ethanol supply chain to provide remunerative price of ethanol.

Government to check pulse prices through imports, release of buffer stocks



The consumer affairs ministry has now asked the state governments to project their demands for pulses so that timely release from buffer stocks can be ensured.

NEW DELHI: The government has stepped up efforts to avoid surge in prices of pulses this year. Till now total imports and domestic procurement of pulses have increased by around 1.6 million tonnes.

While another 16,000-17,000 tonnes are likely to reach Indian ports in the next two months for which contracts have been signed, the government has floated tenders for importing one more tranche of 10,000 tonnes.

The consumer affairs ministry has now asked the state governments to project their demands for pulses so that timely release from buffer stocks can be ensured.

"While private players have procured one more million tonnes of pulses this year — from 4.5 million tonnes last year to 5.5 million tonnes this year —

we have procured 50,000 tonnes from domestic market. Import of 25,000 tonnes by government agencies has been contracted," said a consumer affairs ministry official.

Already the state governments have been empowered to impose stock limits on pulses and enforce them to ensure availability and check hoarding.

These steps are being taken as the latest WPI shows that the prices of pulses have remained steep with inflation at about over 34% than last year.

On Monday, the average retail price of arhar across the country was Rs 140 per kg while urad was selling at Rs120 a kg. Prices of masoor and chana dal have increased marginally in the past one month.

In Delhi, prices of urad, arhar, masoor and gram have jumped significantly. While urad dal price has increased by Rs 28 per kg in the last one month, arhar, masoor and gram prices have gone up by Rs 15, Rs 7 and Rs 7 respectively.

Times View

India is the world's largest consumer and importer of pulses and they remain for most Indians the primary source of protein. Given their significance, it is really shocking that per capita output and availability of pulses today is even lower than at the time of Independence and that the country remains so dependent on imports to meet a large part of its requirement of pulses. Government policy needs to treat pulses as top priority given its importance in the Indian diet, particularly for vegetarians.

It's a drought when it comes to funds too

Long term trends show that relief and compensation after natural calamities which is primarily the responsibility of state govts, has been eating up an increasing share of state govt budgets.

Relief and compensation for farmers and laborers in 10 drought stricken states has become embroiled in an unseemly game of pass-the-buck as cash-strapped state governments are demanding funds to the tune of nearly Rs

42,000 crore from the central government which has - so far - coughed up just about a third of that, nearly Rs 13,000 crore.



This appears to be standard practice: in the previous year, 2014-15 which was also a drought year, the five affected states had demanded nearly Rs 18,000 crore while the Centre had doled out Rs 3350 crore.

Long term trends show that relief and compensation after natural calamities which is primarily the responsibility of state governments, has been eating up an increasing share of state government budgets. For all states put together, such spending has increased by over three times in the past 15 years, with some states prone to droughts and floods having to spend even more. In 2001-02, the states spent Rs 5,012 crore on providing relief to people from natural calamities but this had zoomed up to Rs 20,220 crore in 2014-15.

The Center's share, which is in addition to this, comes from the National Disaster Relief Fund, which was mandated by the 13th Finance Commission to have Rs. 33,581 crore for 2010-2015. Subsequently, the 14th Finance Commission increased this to Rs 61,219 crore for 2015-20. The Center also contributes to the State Disaster Relief Funds.

Since less than a quarter of the cropped area in India is covered under any kind of insurance and also because the sum insured is a fraction of the cost of produce, any weather calamity like drought or hailstorms can spell ruin for farmers.

For the financial year 2015-16, states had budgeted only Rs 13,240 cr for relief from natural calamities.

This is likely to be exceeded by a considerable amount in view of the drought that is spread across 251 districts of the country. With winter rains failing in many parts the drought has further intensified. Karnataka government has already declared 12 districts as drought affected for the rabi (winter) season which were part of the 27 drought districts for the preceding kharif (summer) season.

So, why is there such a big discrepancy between the states' demands and the center's approvals? Central government officials say that an inter-ministerial team visits the drought affected area of each state and makes an assessment which is the basis of approval for relief funds. State government officials unhappy with the huge difference say that their assessments are more rooted in reality and the Center always has a tendency to undercut their claims.

The Modi government had lowered the minimum damage limit from 50 per cent to 33 per cent for farmers to become eligible for compensation and it has also increased the rate of compensation from Rs.9000 to Rs.13,500 per hectare with a cap of two hectares.

But reports from most states say that even the increased amounts are not sufficient owing to the much sharper increase in costs of fertilisers, seeds, pesticides and other inputs.

Transport, labour shortage hits lifting of wheat in Punjab, Haryana mandis

CHANDIGARH: State procurement agencies are struggling to lift wheat from the mandis in Punjab and Haryana due to shortage of transport and labour following a spike in arrival. This has sparked concern among farmers who are waiting to sell off their produce to start the kharif season.

"This year the procurement period has shrunk to 10-15 days from 20-25 days in the past as the late maturity of crop has caused jump in arrival of the grain," SS Prasad, Haryana's additional chief secretary-food and supplies told ET.

Prasad blamed the Centre's rule not to hire trucks that are more than 10 years old for part of the problem. However, he said, "The procurement process is likely to streamline in coming days."

Apart from the Food Corporation of India, state agencies including Food and Supplies Department, HAFED, Haryana Agro Industries Corporation and Haryana Warehousing Corporation are engaged in procurement of food grains.

In Punjab, the state agencies Pungrain, Markfed, PUNSUP, Punjab State Warehousing Corporation and Punjab Agro Food Grains Corporation procure grain for the public distribution system.

High level of mechanisation, especially use of combine harvesters, has also resulted in glut in arrival of wheat in the market, Satwant Singh Johal, managing director of Pungrain said. "This year the wheat crop is expected to be more than the last year but logging in some areas has curtailed possibility of bumper output," he said.

Despite scanty rains in rabi season, the cereal bowl states of Punjab and Haryana are likely to provide more wheat for the public distribution system than they did last year. Wheat harvesting is likely to pick up by the next week in Punjab and Haryana, which provided 104.44 lakh tonnes and 67.78 lakh tonnes wheat respectively in 2015-16 rabi season.

"The quality of grain is expected to be better than that last year as temperature had dropped during the final stage of maturity," said Indu Sharma, former head of the Directorate of Wheat and Barley Research.

In case of rice, the two states provided 20% more rice to Food Corporation of India till April 7 compared to that a year ago. While Punjab provided 139.56 lakh tonnes of rice, Haryana's tally stood at 43.44 lakh tonnes in the FCI's total procurement of 321 lakh tonnes.

The wheat acreage this season has been normal, covering 35 lakh hectares and 25 lakh hectares in Punjab and Haryana respectively.

Working to resolve Punjab foodgrain issue, says MoS, Finance Jayant Sinha



According to reports, foodgrain procured by the Punjab government worth Rs 20,000 crore is missing from the state godowns.

MUMBAI: Government is working with regulators, banks and other agencies to resolve the issue of missing foodgrain stocks in Punjab, Minister of State for Finance Jayant Sinha said today.

"We are working with the regulators as well as the banks and various other government agencies to ensure the matter with respect to the food stocks in Punjab is satisfactorily resolved," Sinha told reporters here.

He did not specify the underlying value of the missing foodgrain or if the problem exists in other states as well.

Sinha said the government will investigate the case and come out with the actual position in a few days.

According to reports, foodgrain procured by the Punjab government worth Rs 20,000 crore is missing from the state godowns.

However, the Punjab government denies the reports and has said all stocks procured over the years have been duly accounted for.

Some 30-odd banks, led by SBI, had extended loans of Rs 12,000 crore to the state for its foodgrain procurement programme.

The Reserve Bank has asked the lenders to set aside money as provisions for non-performing assets. Loans to state government are considered sovereign, and therefore banks say there is no need to set aside money.

Banks are already treading on thin ice with RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan ordering banks to clean their books by next March. This had led to banks making massive provisions in the December quarter, which is expected to continue in the fourth quarter of 2015-16 as well.

Reports said lenders have threatened to stop lending to Punjab, a primarily agrarian state, in the new season if the issue remains unresolved.

Out of the Rs 1 trillion worth food credit, around 40 per cent (Rs 40,000 crore) are lent to Punjab alone, which means that the state procures 40 per cent of the overall food procurement on behalf of the FCI/Centre.

Tata Trusts, JISL collaborate for sustainable agri-business



The collaboration between Tata Trusts and JISL is aimed at strengthening the field and market based livelihood of farmers, according to a release issued here.

MUMBAI: Tata Trusts and Jain Irrigation SystemsBSE 1.31 % (JISL) have signed an agreement to work towards improving agriculture extension, agribusiness and research and development systems in multiple geographies across the country.

The collaboration between Tata Trusts and JISL is aimed at strengthening the field and market based livelihood of farmers, according to a release issued here.

Under the MoU both the organisations will collaborate to develop end-to-end value chains for agricultural products, converge best agricultural technologies to scale up precision farming systems, improve irrigation efficiencies through micro irrigation, improve availability of water through collective irrigation systems and promote ecologically and economically sustainable farming.

"Through this partnership we aim to make a difference in rural India by introduction of innovative and sustainable agricultural practises through community based organisations. These interventions we hope would enhance prosperity and bring about irreversible change in the quality of lives in the communities," Tata Trusts Chairman Ratan Tata said.

The collaboration will also be for popularising high-tech plant production technologies like tissue culture for Banana and pomegranate, and high density plantations for oranges, mango and guava, increasing use of modern technologies in agriculture among others.

"We are very pleased to join hands with Tata Trusts to pursue path breaking and value enhancing solutions and initiatives which are expected to result in better prosperity for small and marginal farmers across our country. This partnership between two like-minded entities shall create much needed development in agrarian sector," Jain Irrigation Systems Managing Director and CEO Anil Jain said.