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Pig rearing checks migration from Pachamalai

A boon to the landless agricultural workers



GREEN SHOOTS:A landless agricultural labourer rearing pigs, under the Integrated Tribal Development Project at Pachamalai in Tiruchi disitric.—
PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

A special vocational programme to promote pig rearing has come as a boon for the landless agricultural workers belonging to the Irula community living on the interior and isolated hamlets in Pachamalai.

Migration of people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and Irula community has been a major challenge leading to various socio-economic problems. The programme being implemented under the Integrated Tribal Development Programme of the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development seeks to check this trend.

These agricultural workers, till a couple of years ago, relied on the farm work available in Kerala. But due to the implementation of the Integrated Tribal Development Programme a couple of years ago, migration has come down.

Thuravathy, one of the women beneficiaries near Top Sengattupatti, says she was given three female and one male pigs so that she could eke out a livelihood without any economic setback.

“It is only after I got these pigs that I could admit my son R. Rajkumar into a nearby school,” she says, indicating that due to exodus, she could not admit her son into any school in Kerala.

Possessing pigs is a matter of pride for the people belonging to these communities in the Pachamalai hills. “People present pigs as their family gift during domestic festivals or community gathering,” says S. Suresh Kumar,

Assistant General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The hills is spread over two revenue districts of Tiruchi and Salem and the programme is being implemented simultaneously in both the districts.

As many as 41 beneficiaries — 25 in the Tiruchi district and 16 in the Salem district — have been identified under the scheme for rearing pigs. Free feed is also supplied for ensuring proper rearing of pigs, says Mr. Kumar.

Sugarcane is hero and villain in Beed



Declining income: Many sugar factories have closed down in Beed district of Maharashtra.— Photo: Vivek Bendre

Kishan Kaka Yadav shrugs his shoulders, put his safety gear on, and steps into a building. Memories from 30 years ago come rushing back as he enters the defunct sugarcane factory which had its first run in 1979. His eyes light up when he sees the central unit, which comprised clanking baskets that once moved at high speed to turn molasses into sugar crystals. “There was no sight better than that of millions of tiny shining crystals tumbling out of here,” he reminisces.

At its peak, the Kada Sahkari Sakhar Karkhana (KSSK), in the drought-hit Ashti taluka of Beed district, produced 3,03,169 tonnes of sugar in 1981-82. From then on, it kept falling, to touch 3,000 tonnes on the last day of production in 2014. The factory shut down because of falling production and rising debts.

The KSSK was taken over from Bhimrao Dhonde, BJP legislator from Ashti, by cooperative banks of Aurangabad and was later attached by the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation on November 11, 2015, for non-payment of arrears.

Nearly 10 sugar factories in Marathwada, of them five in Beed district, have shut down due to bad debts and falling production in the wake of poor

monsoon. Of the 76 factories across Maharashtra, 30 have shut shop while production has crashed from about 20 lakh tonnes a couple of years ago to just 3.5 lakh tonnes last year. The debate around sugarcane rages on in Marathwada, more fiercely now with the State government's decision to ban licensing of new factories.

“This is a welcome move by the government. This crop is not in the interest of farmers in Marathwada even though they have made a good living out of it. I believe that this drought in Marathwada is man-made and sugarcane alone has played a 70-per cent part,” India's waterman and Ramon Magsaysay award winner Rajendra Singh told *The Hindu* .

Sugarcane continues to divide the academic discourse as well. Agriculture experts and agro-scientists who blame sugarcane for the current water crisis in Marathwada claim the cash crop guzzles up to three crore litres an acre of water annually. Those in favour, peg this number at 1.5 crore litres with the flow irrigation technique and nearly half of that with micro irrigation methods. Those criticising claim soyabean and chickpea only uses less than 50 lakh litres.

“I want to ask those who are against sugarcane as to what is the scientific source of their information. A picture is being painted that growing sugarcane is a crime, without appreciating that lives of hundreds of farmers have improved over the years,” said B.B. Thombare, chairman of Natural Sugar and Allied Limited at Osmanabad. Having carried out an experiment on a 50-acre plot in Latur between 2007-2008, the mill managed a yield of 110 tonnes of cane an acre with just 7 ft furrow and water utilisation of 1.5 crore litres on an average annually.

Unperturbed by the criticism of cane, the farmer in the water-sufficient areas around canals and river basins here still swears by the reliability and dependability of the crop, while those in the parched interiors who have already suffered one or more crop loss sound a note of caution. “With enough water from the Godavari basin, my cane yield touched 40 tonnes per acre last year. So far, I haven't felt the need for installing drip irrigation,” says Sadashiv Ramesh of Georai taluka in Beed.

There are those who criticise the “preferential” treatment sugarcane has received from the government over the years.

“The flow and sources of water in Marathwada were all tamed and manipulated for the benefit of the powerful sugar lobby over the years,” says Tukaram Yelale, producer and exporter of fruits and grapes and chairman of Krishi Vikas Export, Latur.

While some farmers swear by the crop, others blame it for the drought

How to keep animals cool

The departments of agriculture and animal husbandry have issued a set of directives on how domestic animals need to be protected from the heat as mercury levels soar.

The Animal Husbandry Department has been providing treatment to several farm animals in Kannur, Kozhikode and Punalur after they were found to be suffering from heat exhaustion.

Lack of summer showers and non-availability of green grass pose a threat to the life of cattle.

Cattle and dogs are the worst affected in heat.

Farm animals should not be used in the sun for long hours and they should not be allowed to roam free for long. There should not be any drastic change in the daily diet of animals.

Animals should be provided water in large quantities and should be tethered under the shade. Vitamins and minerals should be included in the feed, the official release said.

Modi to honour bureaucrats for implementing schemes

Prime Minister's policy is in stark contrast to that of Delhi Chief Minister

Two days after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned civil servants to shape up or ship out, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be giving out awards to bureaucrats for implementing government programmes.

Mr. Kejriwal had said, in an address at the Delhi Secretariat to mark the State government's celebrations of Civil Services Day, that the bureaucracy would have to follow the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) agenda and "if someone has a problem they can get themselves transferred or resign."

Mr. Modi has decided to follow a different tack, according to officials close to him.

"Awards will be given out to a dozen or so district magistrates from across the country on Civil Services Day on Thursday," said an official in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Some unlikely places find mention in the list of award-winning districts drawn up by the PMO for implementing the NDA government's flagship programmes.

Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir which has seen 100% implementation of the Swachh Vidyalaya scheme (construction of toilets in schools) and Mulayam Singh Yadav's Lok Sabha constituency of Azamgarh which registered maximum enrolment in the Jan Dhan Yojana figure in the awards list.

Out of a huge list of around 70 districts, a dozen or so have been selected for the awards. "Other names include West Sikkim, where there has been total elimination of open defecation, Balrampur in Chhattisgarh, and Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh for the soil card scheme for farmers," said a senior official in the government.

Anantpur in Andhra Pradesh, again for Swachh Vidyalaya, Churu in Rajasthan for Swachh Grameen (clean village) campaign are also part of this list.

Informed sources said the Civil Services Day will be the unofficial flagging off of the NDA's second anniversary celebrations, with the theme "Badlaav" or change. "The theme for the celebrations will be the cumulative changes of the last year that have resulted in some transformation in various parts of the country. No big bang announcements, but changes brought about by change in governance attitudes," said a source. Presentations for an official theme for the celebrations is being sought from advertising agencies by a Group of Ministers (GoM) formed for the purpose, "but Badlaav will be the overarching catchline" they said.

Govt., industry to help farmers ease jute shortage

Govt., industry to help farmers ease jute shortage

The government and the jute sector have set out on a programme aimed at handholding farmers to increase the supply of raw jute. The Centre unveiled the 'Jute I-CARE' project through the National Jute Board and the Jute Corporation of India to improve agronomical practices in 2015. As many as 8,000 hectares were covered in this jute year while 25,000 hectares will be covered the next year. The programme comes at a time when many farmers are exiting cultivation of the 'golden' fibre due to poor returns resulting in raw material shortage. Mr. Manish Poddar, Chairman of the Indian Jute Mills Association, said that 15 jute mills are set to adopt villages in Nadia district.

Hotter, longer, deadlier summers

As climate change gathers pace, policy intervention is required across three sectors — health, water and power

India's romance with seasons has been well known since the times of Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara*. But it is now under strain because of global climate change.

Climate change is expected to cause an increase in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves. For India, 2015 was the third hottest year on record (since 1901) and the heat claimed over 2,000 lives. This year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued warnings for northwest and central India (Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, eastern Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand) about heatwaves happening sooner than in previous years. Further, government schools have been shut down in Kolkata, parts of West Bengal, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh on account of heatwaves.

Adverse health outcomes (hospitalisations or death) are a complex interaction of frequency, duration and intensity of a heatwave and population-level factors, which include acclimatisation to the temperature profile of certain geography, poverty, lack of shelter, pre-existing disease, age (children or elderly) and access to health facilities. In addition to heat stroke, extreme temperatures can exacerbate pre-existing cardiovascular and respiratory illness.

The days ahead

A joint study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar found that about 345 districts in India (700 million people) are following a trajectory where average temperatures are likely to rise more than 2°C by the end of the century. The same study also finds that over the next three decades, India may experience increase in annual mean air temperatures of 1°C-1.5°C and substantial increases in night-time temperatures. Higher night-time temperatures are correlated with increased incidence of heat-related illness.

Findings from the first Global Climate Change Risk Assessment (a joint study by CEEW, Harvard University, Tsinghua University and the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office) highlight that hotter summers make it extremely unsafe for citizens, especially labourers, to undertake heavy outdoor work. Of course, there remain associated impacts such as higher risks of crop failure. Concomitant consequences of farmer financial distress, poverty traps and, in extreme cases, suicides cannot be overstated.

Adaptation measures

If hotter, longer and deadlier summers are to be the new normal under a changing climate, proactive adaptation measures are required. This implies policy intervention and coordination across three sectors — health, water and power.

First, scale up heat-health warning systems (HHWS). At their core, such warning systems include providing weather forecasts in advance, issuing warnings to people, providing readiness of emergency response systems, and preparing doctors and health facilities to handle a sudden influx of patients. Warnings facilitate people in taking appropriate actions against heat-related harm. Though the IMD does issue heat warnings, often the coordination with emergency response systems and health facilities is missing.

Globally, studies show that implementing HHWS results in fewer deaths. The most quoted example is that of France where 4,400 deaths were avoided due to HHWS during the 2006 heatwave. Closer home, Ahmedabad, Nagpur and Odisha have made pioneering efforts in this direction. These systems need to be expanded to other cities across the country.

Second, expedite the rollout of the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health that was launched last year. Preventing temperature-related morbidity and mortality could be a key programme under this mission.

Third, ensure an adequate supply of water. Dehydration is a key outcome of heat exposure which can cascade into life-threatening conditions and ultimately death. Timely access to drinking water can help mitigate this escalation. In areas where heat extremes coincide with water scarcity, the risk of heat-related illness remains highest. Areas like Latur, Osmanabad and Beed, which are already experiencing acute water shortages, could face large casualties if hit by heatwaves. Water is also required for electricity production that helps provide access to cooler environments through use of fans and air conditioners. Therefore, strategic planning in the water sector is of paramount importance to protect human lives.

Fourth, provide reliable electricity for adequate duration. Access to cool environments remains the mainstay of preventing heat stress. Use of fans, air conditioners or functioning of medical centres is contingent upon electricity supply. Further, many communities depend on electricity to draw groundwater for drinking. This requires planning to meet peak loads in summer, when power outages are most common. In rural areas, where electricity access is a challenge, supplementing power supply of primary health centres with solar-based systems

should be undertaken. Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Tripura have already deployed such systems.

Finding policy alignment and coordination across these sectors remains a daunting, yet much needed exercise. The romance of the seasons may be lost in the years to come. Lives need not be.

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Though the IMD issues heat warnings, the coordination with emergency response systems is often missing

Evolve mechanism for smooth wheat procurement: Badal

In order to efficaciously monitor the smooth procurement of wheat at the ground level across the State, Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Wednesday asked all the Deputy Commissioners to evolve a three tier mechanism for successful completion of this entire operation.

Disclosing this here, a spokesman of the Chief Minister's Office said that Mr Badal had directed the DCs to ensure overall supervision of the procurement process in their concerned districts by randomly visiting the grain markets.

Likewise, he had asked the Deputy Commissioners to depute Sub Divisional Magistrates of their respective districts to personally visit the grain markets in their concerned Sub Divisions to monitor the ongoing procurement operation. In the same manner in smaller or village level mandis, the Tehsildars/Naib Tehsildars have been asked to supervise the operations so as to ensure that farmers were not subjected to any sort of harassment.

As per this three tier mechanism these officers would personally visit the grain markets under their jurisdiction for monitoring the progress of ongoing wheat procurement on the daily basis so that the task could be accomplished in a hassle free, quick and smooth manner, he said.

The Chief Minister had asked the DCs to direct the officers to ensure that the farmers do not have to face any hardship or inconvenience for the sale of their produce in the mandis.

Reiterating the firm commitment of the state government to lift every single grain of the farmers from the market during the ongoing procurement season, the Chief Minister said that the personal visit by these officers in grain markets

would facilitate the farmers in selling their harvest without any sort of undue harassment besides reposing trust and confidence amongst the farmers.

“Every officer must be made accountable for the smooth procurement operations in grain markets under his jurisdiction so that farmers do not face any sort of problem in selling their harvest,” he added.

- PTI

Deputy Commissioners

told to evolve a

three-tier

checking system

Govts. should work for farmers: Sharad Pawar

Shivaji statues installed in Chikkodi town

Nationalist Congress Party president and the former Union Minister for Agriculture Sharad Pawar has said that the governments in Karnataka and Maharashtra should not work against farmers, but protect them from drought.

Addressing a gathering after unveiling two life-size statues of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji here on Wednesday, he said that the residents of Karnataka and Maharashtra were reeling under drought conditions.

“It is marked by shortage of drinking water and fodder. In such a situation, the governments are expected to rise to the occasion and provide relief and succour to the people,” Mr. Pawar said.

He said that when the two neighbouring States were facing a common problem, they need to help each other.

Mr. Pawar claimed that his party would work in the interests of farmers and prevail upon the government in Maharashtra to release more water from the Koyana Dam and other reservoirs into the Krishna to mitigate the drinking water shortage in lower riparian districts of north Karnataka.

The NCP leader was felicitated in view of his 75th birthday celebrations. He paid tributes to Shivaji and said that the Maratha warrior’s administration was committed to the development and welfare of farmers. However, Mr. Pawar wondered why two statues of Shivaji should be installed in one town, when

there were options to install statues of other great personalities such as Shahu Maharaj, B.R. Ambedkar or Basaveshwar.

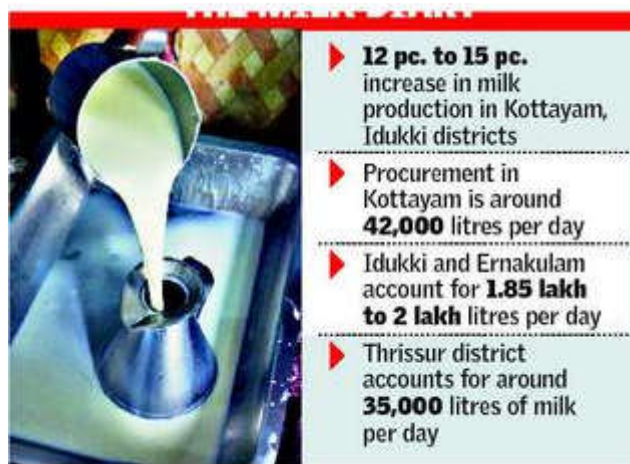
Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who inaugurated the Shivaji garden, where one of the statues has been installed, also paid tributes to Shivaji. He said that there was a valuable and cultural historical link between Karnataka and Shivaji, as his father Shahu Maharaj was a subedar in Bengaluru. He died at Channagiri of Shivamogga district.

Mr. Siddaramaiah criticised those playing politics by exploiting linguistic sentiments and called upon the people to reject such elements. The function was organised under the auspices of the Sri Chhatrapati Shivaji Puttali Anavaran Samiti headed by B.R. Yadav. Large and Medium-Scale Industries Minister R.V. Deshpande, Small-Scale Industries Minister Satish L. Jarkiholi, Prakash B. Hukkeri, and Prabhakar Kore, MPs, former Ministers S.R. More and P.G.R. Sindhia and the former Minister from Maharashtra Patangrao Kadam were present. Sculptors Suresh Madalgikar and Balraj Madalgikar from Aurangabad, who made the 9.25-ft tall bronze metal statues, were felicitated in appreciation of their work.

Meanwhile, responding to the request of Mr. Hukkeri, Mr. Siddaramaiah promised that the Department of Tourism would consider sanctioning Rs.2 crore for construction a Yatri Nivas in Chikkodi town in the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji.

Milk flow up by 15% this summer

Slump in cash crop prices drives farmers to dairying



The slump in the price of rubber and cardamom appears to have compelled farmers in Kottayam and Idukki districts to recoup some of their losses through dairying.

As a result, milk production is up 12 to 15 per cent this season and the usual annual summer shortage has shrunk considerably, say sources in the Kerala Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (Milma).

The collection of milk by dairy societies in Kottayam district has gone up around 15 per cent this season compared to last year, said a Milma official.

Rise in milk collection in Idukki and Kottayam together is an average 12 per cent, said the official pointing out that the fall in the price of cash crops could be the key reason behind the development.

Farmers are taking better care of their animals and also increasing the number of heads, the official added.

Though the dry months of March, April and May see a dip in production, the story has been different this season, thanks largely to the better milk collection in Kottayam and Idukki districts, which are part of the Central zone of the dairy cooperative comprising also Ernakulam and Thrissur districts.

Chairman of Ernakulam Regional Cooperative Milk Producers' Union P.A. Balan said the farmers have also been bolstered by the payment of substantial incentives this year.

Between November and April, a total of Rs.11 crore has been paid to the farmers in incentives in addition to the normal milk prices.

Deadline

Though the deadline for payment of the incentives is April, the window of time may be extended to May considering the response from the farmers.

A senior Milma official also said that dairying had been made attractive with farmers realising that there was a steady market for the produce when compared to other produce like natural rubber and cardamom.

“We are ploughing back the profits,” he said underlining the positive response from the dairy farmers.

Market intervention

The large network had resulted in effective market intervention by the milk cooperative whereas in the case of commodities like rubber and cardamom, government support system had failed to reach the farmers in time, he added.

Though there are around 3 lakh dairy farmers registered in the Ernakulam region, around 50,000 farmers bring milk to the societies twice daily.

Milk production in the region has averaged 2.68 lakh litres per day and it is now down to about 2.55 lakh litres now. The gap is marginal, the Milma official added.

Procurement in Kottayam district stands around 42,000 litres per day.

Sharp fall in use of chemical fertilizers



There has been a considerable fall in the use of synthetic fertilizers during the last financial year compared with the previous year, observed the delegates at a meeting of the Fertilizer Association of India, Southern Region, here on Wednesday.

The meeting, which was held at the Fertilizers and Chemicals Travancore's Ambalamedu campus here, observed that poor rainfall in some of the States could be one of the reasons for the fall in the use of fertilizers.

The meeting of the officials from the Fertilizer Association also took stock of the market situation in South India as a whole, said a press release issued here.

The participants expressed the view that the fall in the price of commodities such as natural rubber had also resulted in lower fertilizer consumption levels.

Director general of the Fertilizer Association, Satheesh Chander, who inaugurated the meeting, said that the synthetic fertilizer industry in the country was facing a crisis-like situation. Most of the fertilizer companies were in trouble owing to various factors. However, urea production in the country had gone up to 24.5 million tonnes during the last financial year from the previous level of 22 million tonnes.

He said that the price of urea was much lower in the country when compared with other fertilizers.

This was one of the reasons for the crisis-like situation, he said.

Chairman and managing director of FACT and FAI Southern Region chairman, Jaiveer Srivastava, presided over the meeting. A.B. Khare, chairman and managing director of Madras Fertilizers, and Customs Commissioner K. N. Raghavan offered felicitations, the press release said. Y. V. N. Moorthy, FAI regional executive, made the preliminary introductions.

R. Satheesh, a young farmer from Palakkad, was honoured at the meeting. Mr. Srivastava was re-elected the southern region chairman of FAI at the meeting.

‘The synthetic fertilizer industry in the country is facing a crisis-like situation’

‘Show tobacco growers a viable alternative’

Biannual meet of Framework Convention on Tobacco Control should involve main stakeholders: Antonio Abrunhosa



International Tobacco Growers’ Association Chief Executive Antonio Abrunhosa addressing the media in Ongole on Wednesday. —Photo: Kommuri Srinivas

Ahead of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) biannual meeting in New Delhi in November, International Tobacco Growers’ Association Chief Executive Antonio Abrunhosa on Wednesday urged the global policy-makers to involve farmers, the main stakeholders, in the deliberations.

Mobilising the tobacco growers from across Prakasam district for a meeting to articulate their concerns, he said that the draft proposals should first be released well in advance to ensure a wider debate on the entire gamut of issues involved,

including livelihood of 30 million tobacco growers across the globe, which was now at stake.

The global leaders should come out with policy measures to help farmers diversify into economically viable alternative crops and realise that harsher regulations would be counter-productive, he added.

“We are not against reasonable regulations, which can be imposed after discussing their implications on our lives. It is unfortunate that the health officials unilaterally took decisions on issues concerning other ministries too without realising that they can be addressed well by experts in the respective fields,” he said.

Adverse impact

The larger pictorial warning on cigarette packs adversely impacted farmers, farm labourers, traders, and also the State and national exchequer, said Federation of All India Farmers’ Associations (FAIFA) general secretary P.S. Murali Babu.

“Cigarette packets will become virtually unbranded, giving a boost to illegal and smuggled cigarettes, thus reducing the demand for legal cigarettes and affecting the livelihood of 2.60 crore farmers and farm labourers in the country,” he added.

The contraband cigarettes accounted for 1/5th of the legal cigarette industry and caused a loss of Rs.9,000 crore revenue to the government and the problem would get aggravated further because of 85 per cent graphical health warning on cigarette packs, he explained.

The U.S., China and Japan, which accounted for more than half of tobacco consumption in the world, did not have pictorial warnings, the FAIFA functionary said, adding that the average warning size was only 20 per cent in the tobacco growing countries, including Brazil, Malawai, and Zimbabwe, while the average warning size across the globe was around 31 per cent.

He appealed to the Centre to continue with the warning size of 40 per cent.

Barren lands put to use in drought-hit Pavagada



In the drought-hit areas of Pavagada taluk in Tamakuru, farmers are putting their barren lands to some use by leasing them out for installation of solar panels. A 2,000-MW solar park is coming up on 11,000 acres of land here covering five villages (Thirumani, Valluru, Balasamudra, Rayacherlu and Kyataganacherlu).

As on April 20, a total of 1,200 farmers have signed agreements with the State government to lease out 8,100 acres. Five acres of land is required to generate 1 MW of power — this means 10,000 acres will be needed to generate 2,000 MW. Out of the 11,000 acres, 10,000 acres will be used to generate power, and the remaining will be used to build sub-stations and offices.

Nagabhushan Reddy, State president of the Rashtriya Kisan Sangha and a resident of Kyataganacherlu village in Pavagada taluk, has leased out his 16 acres after suffering huge crop losses due to deficient and untimely rain and crop diseases. “Instead of suffering losses, at least we get some money to bear the expenses of the family,” he said.

They get Rs.21,000 per acre per year as lease. The farmers want this raised to Rs. 40,000 to benefit small and marginal farmers.

Cotton season: Agriculture department starts drive against whitefly amid staff crunch

A majority of these vacant posts lie in the cotton belt of Malwa, including Bathinda, Sri Muktsar Sahib and Mansa.



Whiteflies had damaged cotton crops last season. Gurmeet Singh EVEN AS the state agricultural department has started its drive to control the whitefly pest that inflicted extensive damage to the cotton crop last season, shortage of staff in across Punjab is making their job difficult.

As per the latest data from the agriculture department, 575 of the total 938 posts of Agricultural Development Officers (ADOs) are lying vacant across Punjab, with the state having no immediate plan to start the recruitment process. A majority of these vacant posts lie in the cotton belt of Malwa, including Bathinda, Sri Muktsar Sahib and Mansa.

While farmers had blamed spurious pesticides for the whitefly attack, Agriculture Minister Tota Singh and Punjab Agricultural University vice-chancellor BS Dhillon blamed the farmers for not being aware of the methods to be followed to save their crops. ADOs are field officers who are responsible for interacting with farmers at the ground level and pass on their queries to higher authorities

They educate them about the right agricultural practices, provide them with samples of pesticides and fertilisers for testing, visit villages to keep an eye on the crop and press the alert button if symptoms of a disease are found.

With the sowing season staring at their face, the agriculture department has started transferring ADOs from Ludhiana and Amritsar (where posts are filled) to the cotton belt of Malwa.

The officials, however, have been told that their transfers will be valid only till the cotton harvesting season, which ends in October.

As many as 73 out of 223 sanctioned posts of Agriculture Officers (AOs) are also lying vacant across the state. As per the latest data collected by The Indian Express from the agriculture department, 31 out of 49 posts of ADOs in Bathinda are vacant. The situation is worse in Mansa where only 4 posts have been filled against 28 sanctioned.

In Muktsar, only 5 posts have been filled against 25 sanctioned posts. In Sangrur, out of the 35 sanctioned posts, 27 are lying vacant while in Fatehgarh Sahib 21 out of 26 posts are vacant. In Moga, 21 posts are vacant out of the 33 sanctioned posts. Speaking to The Indian Express, one of the ADOs said, “There is a separate marketing wing in our department which has 138 sanctioned posts.

It is unbelievable that a state like Punjab, which is the bread basket of India, has 90 vacant posts in the marketing department which is responsible for educating farmers. They are also responsible for touring mandis and see that there is no discrepancy in procurement. This department exists only in papers as those 40 employed men are diverted to other works due to acute shortage.”

Withdrawing the lifeline

At a time of extreme rural distress, the Centre is violating the basic provisions of the employment guarantee act



If not now, when should the MGNREGA be taken seriously?

We are currently in the midst of an unprecedented early drought that is already affecting at least 10 states. Even if the met department's optimistic prediction of a better-than-normal monsoon comes to pass, it will be at least two months before there is much relief in most rural areas of the country.

Meanwhile, for at least 300 million rural people, in one-third of the gram panchayats in the country, the situation is really dire. Shortage of essential drinking water is only one of many problems; the water scarcity has also affected crops and fodder for animals, and has cut down on both farmers' livelihood and wage incomes of rural labourers. This rural distress is not only a humanitarian disaster, it also drags down the entire economy because of the dip in rural demand.

In drought situations, public works programmes become not just desirable but absolutely necessary, simply to provide a minimum lifeline to people living in these areas and also to keep the rural economy going.

This was understood even by the British colonial administration, which introduced drought relief programmes that were essentially public works that ensured some wage employment and therefore survival of people in affected areas.

In contemporary India, such extra programmes are no longer thought to be necessary because we already have the MGNREGA, now a decade old, which should provide an automatic buffer in such situations. The act — passed unanimously by both Houses of Parliament — promises 100 days of employment to every rural household in a year.

It is designed to be demand-driven, which means that the government must provide work within 15 days of it being demanded (or pay some compensation for the delay) by those willing to work at the minimum wage. Failure to get such work is supposed to attract a further compensation of half the wages, at least in the law.

Clearly, if this programme were functioning properly, the increased demand for work driven by drought conditions would be met by an increase in public works programmes that would provide work at minimum wages, thereby easing the local conditions and providing some incomes to those very badly hit.

The works themselves could be designed to help in managing the drought and reducing the possibility of future droughts. Indeed, the Central government has recognised all this, by increasing the promised days of employment from 100 to 150 per household in drought-affected states.

But all this obviously requires that the money for such public action is available. This, too, is essentially promised by the law, which makes it incumbent on the government to provide such employment and, therefore, makes the budgetary resources to be provided for the programme by the Central government supposedly the outcome of such demand.

But what is occurring is actually a clear violation of the law, as the Central government has repeatedly capped the spending on the MGNREGA to its own arbitrary allocation and simply refused or delayed the funds transfer to the states. This, in turn, has meant that even in severe drought conditions, state governments simply do not have the resources to fulfil their legal obligations to provide enough employment to those desperate for some work and wages.

The current situation shows just how cynical and irresponsible the government is being. Spending on the programme was down to only 0.26 per cent of the GDP in 2015-16, compared to 0.6 per cent at its peak, and it provided only around 30 days of employment on average, instead of the promised 100 days.

This was not because of lack of demand — rather, the Central government simply refused to pass on money to state governments that were asking for it, leading to huge unpaid dues of Rs 12,590 crore. Pressure from the Supreme Court has finally forced the Centre to release this amount after much delay, but this still does not provide any funds for the new spending that is more required than ever.

Ten drought-affected states were among those facing deficits, which made a complete mockery of the decision to allow 150 days of work rather than 100. If the drought-affected states were actually to provide 150 days of work, this would have amounted to an additional spending of around Rs 15,500 crore. This explains why only 7 per cent of households in drought-affected states were actually able to access 150 days of work.

Even worse, the Central government on its own has slashed the labour budget proposed by the states. It continues to ignore the need to pay the minimum wages in each state, despite court strictures. And now it is refusing to pay the material costs that are overdue, arguing that the states should find funds for those. So it is completely disregarding the basic provisions of the law at a time when it is sorely needed.

As a result, delays in wage payments continue. Workers in many states will now be paid for work done in the previous financial year, several months later. Only 1.5 per cent of the compensation for delay that is legally due to them has been paid.

Now rural people are once again forced into backbreaking work in the intense heat in the hope of eventually receiving some part of the payment that is due to them, and even such work is inadequate to meet their pressing needs, and well below the promised 100 days.

If not now, when should the MGNREGA be taken seriously? What will it take to make this Central government recognise its own legal obligations and at least mitigate the current massive rural distress?

Punjab wheat procurement crisis: Caught in the crossfire

As banks freeze lending to Punjab government, payments of over Rs 8,000 crore to farmers held up.



Wheat brought by farmers being cleaned at Khanna mandi in Punjab. (Express Photo: Gurmeet Singh)

The current wheat marketing season has witnessed something that has never happened before, at least in recent memory, in Punjab.

Since the start of the current rabi marketing season from April 1, farmers in the ‘granary of India’ have brought over 61 lakh tonnes (lt) of wheat to its various mandis, of which nearly 57 lt has been procured by government agencies.

But they haven’t got the payment for much of this crop — worth almost Rs 8,700 crore at the minimum support price of Rs 1,525 per quintal — that should ordinarily have come within 48 hours of procurement.

Many farmers have been waiting for the past 20 days to be paid even after selling their crop. This is unprecedented for a state, boasting of a well-oiled and time-tested system of foodgrain procurement and payment to farmers through arhtiyas or commission agents in mandis.

The government agencies, in a bid to contain farmers' anger ahead of state Assembly elections due in less than a year, are now simply procuring the grain landing in the mandis. The idea here is to not make farmers wait endlessly in the scorching heat for selling their crop. But that's hardly consolation for not being able to get the payment itself.

"I brought my crop to the mandi on April 1 and the procurement was done within two days. But no payment has been made for it. The arhtiya, through whom I had sold, has paid a small amount and has asked me to wait for a few days for the full payment.

But three weeks have passed and there is no sign of it," complained Ajit Singh, a farmer near Chamkaur Sahib in Ropar district. His predicament is shared by Joginder Singh of Kangniwal village in Jalandhar district: "I sold my wheat in the Jalandhar mandi on April 8 and have been making the rounds of the arhtiyas, who say that they will pay me when the government pays them.

I have kept my daughter's engagement on hold only because of not receiving the payment".

They are not alone, though. The scene is no different in Khanna, which is home to what is believed to be Asia's largest wholesale grain mandi. Surjit Singh from Poowa, Amarjeet Singh from Mandi Kalan and Avtar Singh from Bhamadi — all villages in Ludhiana district — together sold over 200 quintals of wheat on April 10, 13 and April 18, respectively.

They are now awaiting payment from Kamaljeet Gill, the arhtiya in Khanna through whom they sold. "There was no Baisakhi for us this time.

We were at the mandi that day (April 13), thinking the arhtiya would give us some money. But when he himself has not got anything, what can he give?" remarked Amarjeet Singh.

This situation — in an already volatile state where farmers have suffered from a crash in basmati paddy prices and whitefly pest damage to the cotton crop within the past one year — is the outcome of a freeze in lending to the state government by public sector banks.

Punjab had sought a cash credit limit of Rs 20,094 crore for wheat procurement operations, which the banks had, however, refused to sanction. This followed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) directing them to provide for potential losses in food credit extended to the Punjab government.

A significant quantity of grain stocks, against which this money had been lent in the past, was said to have simply ‘disappeared’, an allegation that the state has denied. Caught in the crossfire between the banks, the RBI, the state government and the Centre — which has been a mute spectator so far — are the 12 lakh-odd farmers of Punjab.

“Why do farmers have to pay for the wrongdoings of the government? Where will we go?” asked Ajit Singh. Under the existing system, the Food Corporation of India and state agencies like the Punjab Grains Procurement Corporation, Punjab State Civil Supplies Corporation, Markfed and Punjab State Warehousing Corporation procure grain through the arhtiyas, who raise the bills against their purchases. The arhtiyas are issued bulk cheques, which they then deposit and pay farmers in cash.

All this is contingent, in turn, on the government agencies having access to cash credit lines from banks. It is not the farmers alone, though, who are at the receiving end. The arhtiyas who have pending bills are currently not paying even the labourers in the mandis.

“We, too, aren’t getting any money for loading, unloading and cleaning the grain, apart from filling and stitching of bags,” observed Charan Singh, president of the Khanna Mandi Labour Union. Mandi labourers are paid at the rate of Rs 14.03 for every 50-kg bag.

In the last 2015-16 season, Punjab contributed 103.44 lt of the total 280.88 lt of wheat procured for the Central pool. For the current season, procurement from the state is expected at 120-125 lt. Of this quantity, around half has already been procured, even as farmers are yet to receive payments.

Some farmers have even started taking their crop to the mandis in Haryana. Haryana, last year, procured 67.78 lt of wheat, which may well be surpassed this time because of distress flows from Punjab.

On Monday, the Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, urging Centre’s intervention, following which the cash credit freeze is claimed to have ended.

“About Rs 17,500 crore of credit limit has been sanctioned by banks, which should reach arhtiya accounts in a couple of days. Hopefully, by around April 25-26, farmers should also get their money”, noted Vijay Kalra, president of the Federation of Arhtiya Association, Punjab. Sukhdev Singh Kokri Kalan, general

secretary of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan), warned of a massive agitation by farmers if payments are not received within the next 2-3days

Efforts on to cover more farmers under crop insurance: CM Devendra Fadnavis



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis

A meeting of Pradhan Mantri Bima Yojna, chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, was held on Wednesday to enhance crop insurance cover for farmers in the state. At the meeting, the chief minister urged financial institutions and bank officials to ensure the scheme reaches the needy and brings relief to farmers, officials said.

Earlier, Bank of Hyderabad donated Rs one crore to the state government towards the CM Relief Fund for the ongoing Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan.

A Class III student from R N Podar School in the city collected Rs 25,000 and donated to it to the chief minister. Fadnavis said, "I am extremely touched."

Tackling Maharashtra drought: Water conservation, environmental preservation to be linked

'Till now, through multiple schemes across various departments, almost Rs 18,000 crore have been spent,' said Fadnavis.

IN A bid to tackle drought effectively, the Maharashtra government has planned to link its water conservation projects with environmental preservation.

Elaborating on the plan, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "The long-term measures to root out drought and farmer suicides in the state would require

environmental preservation.” Fadnavis plans to hold talks with Union minister for Environment and Forests Prakash Javadekar on the issue.

Maintaining that the government has adequately loosened its purse strings to tackle drought, he said, “Till now, through multiple schemes across various departments, almost Rs 18,000 crore have been spent.”

Besides taking a scientific approach to soil treatment and embarking upon a mammoth tree plantation drive, the CM said he has roped in experts from the agro-sector

THE HINDU BusinessLine

BGII still effective against other bollworms: MMBL

No threat to cottonseed availability, claims the company

Mahyco Monsanto Biotech Limited (MMBL) has said that its agri biotech technology Bollgard II continues to provide effective control of American Bollworm and Spotted Bollworm.

“While Pink Bollworm shows resistance, the technology continues to provide effective control of the two other bollworms,” an MMBL spokesperson claimed.

Citing internal studies, he said there was resistance to the Cry2Ab protein, a key component of BGII. “It has been proliferated by improper insect resistance management practices, absence of refuge crop (sowing of seeds other than that of BGII) and spread of illegal seeds in some areas,” he said.

The firm argued that resistance was a natural, evolutionary process.

The spokesperson was responding to a report in this newspaper on Tuesday that noted that the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments had urged the Centre to revoke the patent on Bollgard II since the Pink Bollworm had developed resistance to the technology.

No shortage of seeds

The firm asserted that there was no shortage of hybrid Bt cotton seeds for the upcoming kharif season.

“Data available with us indicate that over nine crore packets (of 450 gm each) of cottonseed are available as against the average demand of 4.5 crore packets in the season,” it said, referring to fears expressed by the Agriculture Ministers of the two States on the likely shortage of seeds.

On the issue of termination of licence agreements, the firm said it had licensed the BG technology to over 45 seed companies.

Termination notices

“The bilateral sub-licensing agreements with these companies have existed for more than a decade and a large majority of these continue to honour their contracts,” he said.

He alleged that a few firms refused to pay the mutually agreed trait fee since July 2015 though they had collected it from farmers.

“Collectively, they owe MMB over 165 crore. Consequent to Nuziveedu Seeds and its group firms refusing to honour the contracts, we were compelled to terminate the licences in November 2015,” he said.

“With MMB consenting to allow NSL and its group firms to continue to sell the seed in kharif 2016 in accordance with the Delhi High Court’s order, farmers will continue to have additional choice of cottonseed brands,” he said.

Growing problems of Bengal’s farm sector



Small potatoes From about 13,000 kg an acre earlier, the yield this year is down to 7,000 kg, say potato farmers. File photo shows farmers sorting potatoes in Hooghly district

Farmers complain of poor cold storage and irrigation facilities; scant pricing support

Mohammed Anwar Hussain is a third generation mango farmer and trader in Malda. He hasn't seen any intervention of any government in the 50 years he has spent in the mango orchards.

He produces many varieties of the famous Malda mangoes, but often finds it difficult to send them even to nearby States due to lack of processing.

“Be it the Congress, or the Left Front or the Trinamool Congress governments — all of them gave us promises of better facilities such as cold storages. We are yet to see one in our area,” said Hussain, who grows about 100 tonnes of mangoes in a season.

Lost potential

There are a number of families in the area who make a living from mango cultivation.

“There is so much potential for agro-based industries in this area of the State.

“But the Trinamool government has taken a stand against farmers and against development,” said Mausam Noor, the area MP.

The Left Front has made the “agrarian distress” a key political issue in the ongoing campaign.

Farmer suicides

“West Bengal has witnessed a number of farmer suicides during the last five years. Tobacco, paddy, potato and silk farmers are under severe distress due to the collapse of the government mechanism in the agriculture sector,” said Amol Haldar, leader of Kisan Sabha.

“This government broke the procurement infrastructure. Middlemen are controlling the sector now,” he added.

West Bengal Food Processing Minister Krishnendu Narayan Chowdhury, however, refutes such criticisms, claiming them to be politically motivated ones.

“These are politically motivated statements. We have launched several multipurpose cold storages in the last five years in the area. A food park was opened in Jangipur. A state-of-the art food and horticulture research and development centre is functioning in Malda.

“Markets opened in each block to save farmers from middlemen,” he said.

Farmers, however, are as unhappy with the Trinamool government as with its predecessor Left government.

“During the Left Front regime, pendency of money from rice mills was very high and the delay was for six to eight months.

“Now we get money from rice mills in two-three months if any of the Trinamool leaders in the locality recommend our case. But we will have to give them commission,” said Manik, a rice farmer in Murshidabad district.

He further complains that the government has done little to improve irrigation facilities.

“We did not get water from Damodar Valley Corporation this year. We used to get approximately 13,000 kg of potatoes from an acre. This year the yield has been reduced to 7,000 kg,” said Raj, a potato farmer in the district.

Raj added that jute farming is also in crisis as the government stopped procurement and the minimum support price is not sufficient.

Slower growth

Left-wing economist Prasenjit Bose points out that since 1992-93, agricultural growth in West Bengal has slowed to an annual average of around 3 per cent, which is just slightly higher than the all-India average.

“During the tenure of the last Left Frong government, ie between 2006-07 and 2010-11, agricultural growth came down to 2.45 per cent.

“Irrespective of what the government claims, between 2011-12 and 2012-13, agricultural growth has slowed down further to 2.2 per cent. There is a steady slow down in agriculture in the last few years, which continued under the TMC-led government,” Bose said.

“Collapse of procurement worsened the situation. The Centre and State government have reduced spending in the rural sector,” he added.

Castor declines on poor offtake



As demand continues to decline, castor seed price moved down at physical market. Following the spot, castor seed prices decreased on the futures market as well on profit booking.

About 70,000 bags arrived in Gujarat and prices decreased by 3 to 605-625 per 20 kg. At Saurashtra, about 4,800 bags arrived and prices were off 15 to 590-640 per 20 kg.

On the Rajkot Commodity Exchange (RCX), castor June contract declined 13 to 3,268 a quintal. RCX spot castor seed was down by 20 to 3,125 a quintal. Castor oil moved down by 10 to 630 per 10 kg. *Our Correspondent*

Dry spell shrivels mangosteen, durian crops

Severe drought conditions have hit the mangosteen and durian crop this year in Kerala.

The protracted dry spell has led to falling of tender fruit and this phenomenon was accelerated with untimely summer showers. Thus there is an estimated 30-40 per cent drop in production of mangosteen in the growing region on the banks of rivers Pampa and Manimala in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, T Thomas, a botanist and professor told *BusinessLine*. "In fact, there was good flowering but the severe dry spell has spoiled it," he said.

Meanwhile, in Chalakudy area in Thrissur district, where it is widely grown, a good percentage of the tender fruit fell during the dry spell. However, a couple

of summer showers recently have helped the fruits improve, Shibu Joshua, a grower-cum-trader, said.

Trade estimates have put this year's production at around 400 tonnes.

Rising demand

At the same time, Thomas said, increasing demand every year — especially from the metros and cities, probably based on its reported health benefits and remunerative prices — has prompted several farmers in Kerala, Tamil Nadu (Nagercoil, Thenkasi) and Karnataka (mainly Mangaluru) to take up planting of the 'Queen of the fruit', Mangosteen.

Some farmers cultivating rubber in the low lying areas of southern Kerala have shifted to mangosteen as such land is suitable for its cultivation, adds Thomas.

Durian down

He said the Durian fruit could not withstand the hot weather and all the tender fruits have fallen down, resulting in a 100 per cent loss.

He said consumers may have to pay higher prices because of the short supply and the benefit of higher prices would go to intermediaries through whom the trade takes place.

Joshua Daniel, a major planter of mangosteen, based in Konni, said that he had planted 2,000 three-year-old saplings in 2014. The total gestation period is eight years and it would continue yielding for over a century, he added.

The main markets are Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai and traders in Kerala are catering to the demand in these metros, he said. Initially, the price will be at around 400 a kg, and as availability increases it may drop to 150 a kg, said Daniel.

Harvesting normally starts in March and lasts till August, said Thomas. It is a very slow-growing tropical evergreen tree, with height ranging from 20 to 82 feet.

Drought in Maha may hit sugar production by 10% this year



Drought conditions in Maharashtra may hit the domestic sugar production in the sugar year 2016, which is estimated to decline by 10 per cent at around 25.5 million metric tonnes, rating agency ICRA has said.

“We estimate domestic sugar production at around 25.5 million metric tonnes (MT) during the sugar year (SY) 2016, a decline of 10 per cent over the previous year. This was mainly driven by a drought in the largest sugar producing state Maharashtra,” ICRA said in a statement here today.

Lower sugar production along with exports of around 2 million MT is likely to bring down the closing stocks to around 7.6 million MT in sugar year 2016 from around 9.5 million MT in SY2015, it said.

“The decline in sugar stocks is positive and has resulted in an improvement in domestic sugar realisations since August last year.

“With effective cane prices after accounting for duties and state-level subsidies for SY2016 largely remaining unchanged over the previous year, the increase in sugar realisations is expected to improve the contribution margins for sugar in this year,” it said.

These factors, together with the higher recovery rates, are expected to drive a significant improvement in profitability for sugar mills based in Uttar Pradesh (UP), ICRA Senior Vice-President Sabyasachi Majumdar said.

Profitability improvement is likely to be moderate for mills based in Maharashtra and Karnataka. This apart, profitability is also likely to be supported by improved realisations for by-products, Majumdar said.

Although sugar mills will have to sell sugar at the modest global prices prevailing, ICRA expects export-linked subsidies for the current sugar year and the resulting modest increase in domestic sugar realisations to offset the losses from export sales to a large extent.

Quality lends colour to turmeric

Spot turmeric prices at Erode markets increased despite a rise in number of bags arrived for sale.

“Traders were quoting higher price for the quality turmeric and were buying to supply locally. We are still waiting for upcountry orders,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. On Wednesday, 11,000 bags arrived for sale and 65 per cent was sold. Some stockists also purchased the commodity.

The finger turmeric was up by 100 a quintal in the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, while that of the root variety remained stable. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger turmeric was sold at 8,429-9,295 a quintal, the root variety 8,212-8,891. Of the arrival of 2,785 bags, 1,520 were sold.

Kadambot Siddique named ambassador for International Year of Pulses

Indian researcher and professor, Kadambot Siddique, was named Ambassador for the International Year of Pulses in the Asia-Pacific region at a ceremony in Marrakesh on Tuesday.

Siddique is a leading scientist in the field of legumes and currently serves as a professor of agriculture and chair and director of the Institute of Agriculture at the University of Western Australia.

As Ambassador for the International Year, Siddique will work to raise awareness on the important contribution of pulses to food security and their positive impact on health and the environment, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said in a statement.

Besides encouraging new connections throughout the food chain to better use pulse-based proteins in our food and address trade challenges, Siddique is also tasked with seeking out opportunities for dialogue on these nutritional legumes and efforts to ensure more people have access to information on pulses.

Siddique's research includes papers on the adaptation of crops to the dryland environment and traits that allow crops to cope with various stresses. He is credited with contributing to Australia's ascent to become one of the world's leading pulse exporters and for strengthening the chickpea industry in particular.

Siddique is an International Fellow of the Indian Society of Plant Physiology, a Foreign Fellow of the Indian National Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a fellow of the Australian Agriculture Institute.

Siddique's designation took place during the opening of the 2016 International Conference on Pulses for Health, Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture in Drylands. About 300 leading agricultural scientists, policy-makers, donors and representatives of private sector organisations are attending the Marrakesh conference to deliberate and address the challenges facing developing countries in the production of pulses and the widening gap between supply and demand.

The UN has declared 2016 the International Year of Pulses. India is the largest producer, consumer and importer of pulses in the world.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Yavatmal MSEDCL provides over 10,000 connections for agriculture pumps

The Yavatmal office of state-run power distribution company MSEDCL has succeeded in providing over 10,000 electric connections to agriculture pumps in the district during 2015-16, said MSEDCL superintending engineer Vijay Bhatkar at a review meeting held in the local Bachat Bhavan on Wednesday.

District guardian minister Sanjay Rathod presided over the meeting which was attended by divisional commissioner Dnyaneshwar Rajurkar, district collector Sachindra Pratap Singh, ZP president Aarti Fuphate and others.

The pending cases for the year were pegged at 7,162. However, MSEDCL not only completed the figure but also cleared the previous pending cases and crossed the 10,000-mark as far as number of connections was concerned.

Yavatmal is the epicentre of farmers' suicides and the main cause agrarian crisis that is often the result of lack of irrigation.

The break-up of irrigation pump connections in the year 2015-16 is: Kalamb (9415), Babhulgaon (739), Kelapur (430), Ralegaon (501), Ghatanji (880), Wani (496), Maregaon (474), Pusad (874), Mahagaon (705), Umarkhed (553), Dhanki (556), Darwha (827), Digras (676), Ner (511), Arni (513), Zari (412), Yavatmal Rural (471) and Yavatmal city (20) respectively. The total comes to 10,053 new electric supply connections to the irrigation pumps of the farmers.

The figure is the highest in the last four years. Rathod, the minister, instructed MSEDCL officers to complete the applications (new and old) before June next so that the freshers would be given connections instantly thereafter.

Farmers in Lucknow hit by early onset of summers

With drought continuing to hit the normal lives of the people all across the nation, farmers near Uttar Pradesh's capital city are left with nothing but to weep as they just look at the sky, hoping the rains would soon arrive and bring life back into their fields.

With thousands of litres of water being used to ensure a dust-free makeshift helipad for Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, farmers in Lucknow have been hit hard by an early onset of summer which has damaged their crops.

One of the farmers in Kakori District, distressed with the severe water scarcity in the region, says that the entire village is under a dry spell.

"12-14 tube wells are present in the village but there is no water. All our crops have damaged," he told ANI.

Another farmer in Bakshi Ka Talab area of the city says that his entire brinjal crop has been damaged due to shortage of water.

"We can't do anything without water. Due to shortage, entire brinjal crop is damaged," he tells with tears in his eyes.

Searing heat has disrupted the normal life, not only in Lucknow but Varanasi as well where temperature has hovered close to 44 degrees Celsius.

Akhilesh Yadav had last week directed installation of additional 666 hand-pumps in the seven drought-hit districts of Bundelkhand region.

Earlier, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister had allocated Rs 867.87 crore for farmers in parched areas of the state.

The Bundelkhand region is home to 18.3 million people as per 2011 census and is blighted with drought and unseasonable rains that has destroyed standing winter crops.

In the last few years, several farmers lacking money for seeds and water for irrigation have committed suicide. (ANI)

Start turmeric cultivation on small scale: PAU tells farmers

The agronomy experts of Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) have advised the farmers to start commercial cultivation of turmeric only on small scale, for gaining experience in production as well as marketing of the produce.

According to Thakar Singh, head of the department of agronomy, turmeric, commonly known as 'haldi,' offers a good scope for diversification of cereal based cropping system. He added that It is largely used in diversified forms such as a condiment, colouring agent, curry powder and for flavorings. "Besides, it is also used in drug and cosmetic industries, he said, adding that the turmeric can be grown and processed easily for household purpose" Agronomy head said.

Another expert, Amandeep Singh Brar said, "As the consumption of turmeric is limited in each house, large-scale cultivation of turmeric can cause glut in the market and may lower the prices." Before going for commercial cultivation of turmeric, knowledge about its processing should be gained and market avenues should be explored, he advised. The turmeric cultivation in the state will be helpful in meeting its own demand as well as boosting the country's export, he observed.

The experts have also cautioned the farmers against the cultivation of white turmeric, which is not useful for making dried ginger (sund). "Many times, farmers cultivate white turmeric by considering it as dried ginger (sund). Sometimes, people also sell the seed of white turmeric as dried ginger (sund)," they observed. The experts have urged the farmers not to sow white turmeric.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

RBI authorises credit of Rs 17,523 crore for wheat procurement



Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his prompt personal intervention in the matter.

CHANDIGARH: The Reserve Bank today issued authorisation of cash credit limit (CCL) of Rs 17,523 crore towards first installment for the procurement of 90 lakh tonnes of wheat this rabi season by the Punjab government.

The RBI would issue another authorisation for the second installment shortly, a release issued by the Chief Minister's Office said here this evening.

Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his prompt personal intervention in the matter, the release said.

Badal, along with State's Food and Civil Supplies Minister Adesh Partap Singh Kairon, had called on Modi at New Delhi on Monday to urge him for the immediate clearance of CCL.

Late Rabi crop may be spoiled by heat wave; intense heat may disturb pollination

Scientists said in a temperature range of 22-31degrees, the growth rate of paddy increases linearly. But higher temperature adversely affects growth and productivity.

KOLKATA: Agricultural scientists have raised concern over the continuing heat wave in eastern India, saying the high tempratures can harm

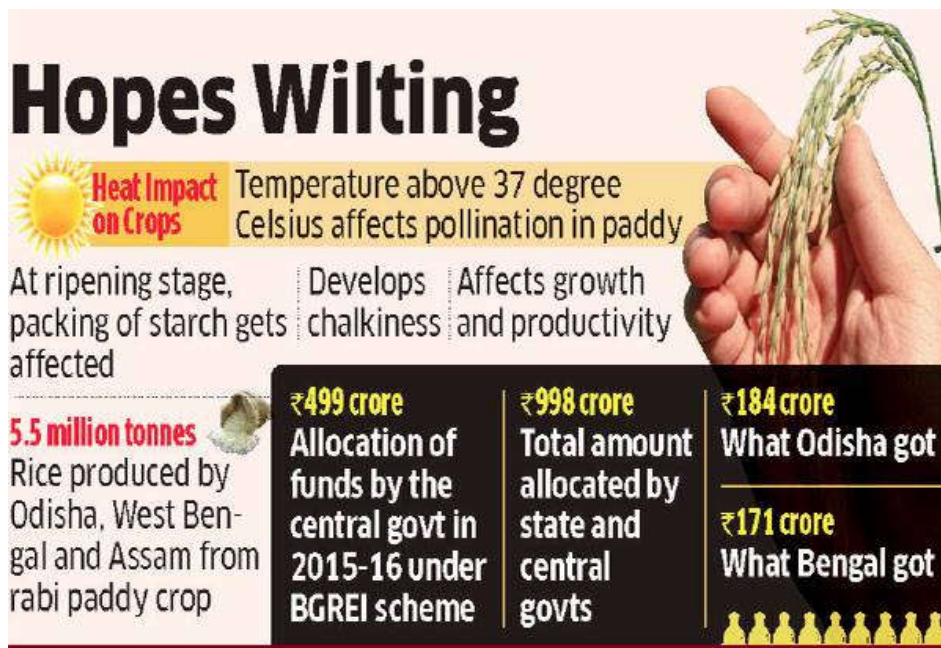
the late rabi or 'boro' paddy crop in West Bengal and Odisha, the country's two major rice producing states.

Boro paddy is usually sown in November and harvested in May. "High temperature affects the pollination stage of the paddy crop," said Dr AK Nayak, director at Cuttack, Odisha-based ICAR National Rice Research Institute.

"In early rabi paddy variety, pollination is over. Maybe in some cases in late variety, paddy pollination may get disturbed due to the high temperature. If the temperature is above 37 degree during pollination, then the process gets affected."

Nayak said at the ripening stage, if temperature is high 'packing of starch' in the grain gets affected and it develops chalkiness. "In simple words, productivity may not be affected but quality suffers," he said.

Scientists said in a temperature range of 22-31degrees, the growth rate of paddy increases linearly. But higher temperature adversely affects growth and productivity.



Odisha, West Bengal and parts of Assam produce 5.5 million tonne of rice from the rabi paddy crop. Besides the high temperature, these rice producing states are also worried over the availability of funds under the Bringing Green Revolution to Eastern India (BGREI) initiative. BGREI, a scheme introduced by the previous UPA government, aims at increasing rice and wheat production in eastern India.

The scheme covers seven states — Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, eastern UP and West Bengal. "All the seven states are ready with their plan. The central government has to approve our plans and allocate funds. We hope that funds come before the beginning of the kharif season," a senior official with the West Bengal agriculture department said.

Punjab CM Parkash Singh Badal asks officials to evolve mechanism for wheat procurement

A spokesman of the Chief Minister's Office said that Badal had directed the DCs to ensure overall supervision of the procurement process in their concerned districts by randomly visiting the grain markets.

CHANDIGARH: In order to efficaciously monitor the smooth procurement of wheat at the ground level across the state, Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal today asked all the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) to evolve a three tier mechanism for successful completion of this entire operation.

Disclosing this here, a spokesman of the Chief Minister's Office said that Badal had directed the DCs to ensure overall supervision of the procurement process in their concerned districts by randomly visiting the grain markets.

Likewise, he had asked the Deputy Commissioners to depute Sub Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) of their respective districts to personally visit the grain markets in their concerned Sub Divisions to monitor the ongoing procurement operation.

In the same manner in smaller or village level mandis, the Tehsildars/Naib Tehsildars have been asked to supervise the operations so as to ensure that farmers were not subjected to any sort of harassment.

As per this three tier mechanism these officers would personally visit the grain markets under their jurisdiction for monitoring the progress of ongoing wheat procurement on the daily basis so that this gigantic task could be accomplished in a hassle free, quick and smooth manner, he said.

These officers have been asked to make all out efforts to ensure smooth and prompt procurement of Wheat on one hand so as to facilitate the farmers, he said.

The Chief Minister had asked the DCs to direct the officers to ensure that the farmers do not have to face any hardship or inconvenience for the sale of their produce in the mandis.

Reiterating the firm commitment of the state government to lift every single grain of the farmers from the market during the ongoing procurement season, the Chief Minister said that the personal visit by these officers in grain markets would facilitate the farmers in selling their harvest without any sort of undue harassment besides reposing trust and confidence amongst the farmers.

Badal said that these officers should make personal interventions for ensuring that the procurement of the wheat was done in a smooth and effective manner.

"Every officer must be made accountable for the smooth procurement operations in grain markets under his jurisdiction so that farmers do not face any sort of problem in selling their harvest," he added.

Government okays transfer of land to Acharya NG Ranga Agriculture University

The government today approved transfer of 21.93 acres of land to the Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad.

NEW DELHI: The government today approved transfer of 21.93 acres of land to the Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad, for developing a permanent campus of its agriculture college at Rajahmundry.

The university had established a new agriculture college at Rajahmundry in East Godavari district in 2008-09. But the college is temporarily running from rented accommodation of local Arts and Science College (SKVT College).



"The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi today gave its approval for transfer of 21.93 acres belonging to the Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI), Rajahmundry, to the Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad, on a long lease basis for 50 years for establishment of an agriculture college at Rajahmundry," an official statement said.

The university had established a new agriculture college at Rajahmundry in East Godavari district during the academic year 2008-09 to train agricultural graduates for acquiring advanced agricultural knowledge associated with the Godavari delta.

"At present, the agricultural college is temporarily running from rented accommodation of local Arts and Science College (SKVT College). After transfer of the land, the college would be able to develop its own permanent campus," the statement said.

The establishment of a new agriculture college at Rajahmundry would certainly go a long way in development of agricultural research and education in the Godavari delta and also help the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) fulfill one of its mandates, including education research and extension.

Take strict action against pulse hoarding: Centre to states

Although retail prices of pulses have cooled from the last year's level of Rs 200 per kg, rates of lentils are still ruling high at Rs 83-177 per kg range in most parts of the country.

NEW DELHI: The Centre today said it is monitoring prices of pulses and has asked state governments to take strict action against traders hoarding pulses.



Although retail prices of pulses have cooled from the last year's level of Rs 200 per kg, rates of lentils are still ruling high at Rs 83-177 per kg range in most parts of the country.

Pulse prices are under pressure due to fall in the domestic production in the wake of back-to-back drought.

"We are monitoring it (pulse prices). State governments have been told to act strictly against hoarders," Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters said after the Cabinet meeting.

The previous government had "not done much work" in pulse area and the NDA government has now made schemes to encourage cultivation of pulses, he said.

As per data maintained with the consumer affairs ministry, urad is available today at Rs 177 per kg, tur Rs 163, moong Rs 123, masoor Rs 105 and gram Rs 83.

Last month, urad cost Rs 172, tur Rs 160, moong Rs 122, masoor Rs 98 and gram Rs 74 per kg in most retail markets, the data showed.

The government has been taking several measures to boost domestic supply of pulses and check price rise. It has created a stock of 50,000 tonnes of pulses and state governments have been asked to place their demand for timely release of stock for retail distribution.

Pulse supply is being improved via imports by both government and private agencies. Private trade purchased 5.5 million tonnes of pulses in 2015-16, up by one million tonne from the previous year. The government contracted to import 25,000 tonnes during the said period.

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

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

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

Tea planters apprehending very low second flush yield



After shattered output of high value first flush, now tea planters in northern WB are apprehending equally pathetic yield from second flush too.

SILIGURI: After shattered output of high value first flush, now tea planters in northern West Bengal are apprehending equally pathetic yield from second flush too. Prolonged dry spell and heavy pest attack have become major concern for those involved in the labour intensive tea industry.

"Dry weather has ruined our high value first flush during February-March. Volumewise, first flush contributes 20% to total 300 million kg total output of Terai, Doars and Darjeeling tea belt. But its value contribution is over 35%," said K. K. Mintry, Chairman of TeraiBSE 4.39 % Indian Planters' Association

"Now the second flush is also under doubt. Beginning from Mid May to Mid June, second flush also contributes around 20 % to annual yield. But, compared to first flush, it is more durable and thus very important for financial health of any garden," said veteran Planter M. P. Bansal.

Not only organized big gardens, same apprehension was also echoed by B. G. Chakroborty, President of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Grower's Association (CISTA). The Confederation has over 10,000 member tea farmers in this region.

As per meteorological statistics, after prolonged dry spell, the Sub Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim region has just started receiving rainfall. For 1st March to 13th April, it was 135mm, 30% above normal for the period. But cumulative rainfall is still not adequate. Moreover, the temperature is hovering at around 5 degree Celsius higher than normal level.

According senior Tea Scientist D. Bargohain, too dry soil and air badly affect both quality and quantity of output. As an additional crisis, "Prevailing heat wave is causing high rate of pest proliferation. Pests like Looper, Red-Spider or Halopeltis are causing irreversible damage to not only flush but bushes too. But we cannot use many strong pesticides because of regulations of Tea Board. Our pest control expense has become double as approved compounds are highly expensive," said Bansal.

However, as a silver lining, "Beside forecast of scattered rainfall for next weeks in this region, we expect near normal pre monsoon rainfall in entire sub Himalayan region. That should give relief to the plantation sector," said experts in Meteorological department.