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THE HINDU

Haryana launches scheme for farmers

With a view to creating effective backward linkages and empower farmers, the Haryana government has implemented a scheme for grant-in-aid for setting up of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) in rural areas.

A notification to this effect has been issued recently by the Industries and Commerce Department.

The scheme aims at creation of effective backward linkages and empowerment of farmers, an official release said here on Thursday.

Value addition

This could be achieved by value addition of produce, provision of processing and preservation facilities at village level to help the farmers to enhance shelf life of perishable produce, resulting in better remunerative prices for their agricultural produce, it said.

A piece of land measuring one to two acres would be required for setting up of these PPCs and CCs.

Processing facilities

Under this, processing facilities would be provided at the farm level, which may include facilities for weighing, cleaning, sorting, grading, packing, pre-cooling, Controlled Atmosphere (CA) or Modified Atmosphere (MA), cold storage and dry warehouses.

Facility of mobile pre-cooling trucks or vans which may be suitable for transportation of perishable agricultural and horticultural produce, dairy, meat, poultry and fish would also be provided as per requirement. Value addition and processing of fruits and vegetables, using local produce as raw material, would also be carried out. PTI

Award for Himachal for implementing Soil Health Card scheme

Himachal Pradesh has bagged another National Award in Agriculture sector for 2015-16 as Hamirpur district has been selected for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration.

The award is given for excellent implementation of Soil Health Card Scheme, Upma Chowdhary, Additional Chief Secretary (Agriculture) said.

The Soil Health Card Scheme is one of the four schemes- three others being Swachh Bharat, Gramin Swachh Vidyalaya and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana - identified by the Union Government to be awarded under Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration, she said.

Only two districts, Hamirpur in Himachal and Balrampur in Chhattisgarh, have been given award for implementation of this scheme and Himachal bagged the first position among the Hilly and northern States.

The award was presented by Prime Minister in New Delhi on Thursday and carries a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh. The State was recently awarded the national-level 'Krishi Karman Award' for increase in total foodgrains production for the year 2014-15 in Category II States.-PTI

Govt.'s intervention may bring down price of pulses



Upswing is due to mismatch between demand and supply.

Even as the Centre has taken steps to check soaring prices of pulses, it could take another fortnight before prices cool down in the retail market.

Agriculture experts and trade analysts told *The Hindu* that the Union government's steps are likely to bring down the prices, but they could again go up in the coming months due to mismatch between demand and supply.

A day after the Centre asked State governments to take strict action against traders hoarding pulses, prices of a few including urad and arhar fell by up to Rs. 300 per quintal at the wholesale pulses market in Delhi on Thursday.

Retail prices have dropped from last year's level of Rs. 200 per kg. However, in most parts of the country the average prices, primarily of arhar and urad, are still ruling high, at Rs. 150-165 per kg.

“Prices will come down gradually after the government's intervention and consumers could reap the benefit in the next fortnight, but the larger question for the government is to address this problem in the long run. They [government] should come up with a strategy for 5 or 10 years to resolve this recurring price rise,” said Gurcharan Arora, president, Punjab Pulses and Grains Association, pointing out that the supply had gone down as traders are importing less following curbs on stock limits, one of the reasons for prices going up.

In 2014-15 India produced 17.2 million tonnes of pulses as against 19.78 million tonnes in 2013-14. In 2015-16 output is expected to be 17.33 million tonnes against a demand of 23.66 million tonnes. To bridge this gap of about 6 million tonnes, the country is relying on imports.

“Pulses prices have been witnessing an upward trend. They may drop a bit in the days to come as demand usually falls in summer...but in the long run prices will stay firm,” said Suresh Mantri, a Mumbai-based agri-commodities analyst.

Notably, inflation in pulses has been registering double digit increase since January 2015.

Prices of pulses saw an average rise of 29.6 per cent during 2015-16.

More opt for coconut farming

Despite the fluctuations in the prices of coconut at periodic intervals, the acreage under the crop has been interestingly on a rise in the district for the past many years. From 51,748 hectares registered during 2011-12 financial year, the area coverage of coconut in the district has risen to 53,660 ha in 2012-13 fiscal and to 56,404 ha in 2013-14 fiscal.

The acreage stood at 56,807.8 ha by 2015. In the price front, the farmers are now getting on an average of only about Rs.6 to Rs.7 for a nut against Rs. 12 obtained for a harvested nut.

The price realisation of copra too has been dwindling for quite sometime. “More and more farmers are still opting for coconut is because of the reality that the raising of the crop needed lesser labour as well as maintenance works like removal of weeds, pulverisation of soil and in situ ploughing vis-a-vis many seasonal/annual crops.

“Considering these aspects, many farmers are thinking on the lines that even if the prices fall a bit they can attain sustainable income without facing any operational losses for a long period due to its perennial nature”, pointed out P. Santhanakrishnan, a coconut farmer who had earlier served as Joint Director of Agriculture in Tirupur.

Many farmers have now started floating consortium to market both raw coconut and value-added products tapping the prospects outside the State and the country.

S. Selvaraj, who had floated a coconut farmers’ producer company in 2015 as a joint initiative with many hundreds of fellow farmers from Udumalpet and Madathukulam areas, feels that attractive incentives given through Coconut Development Board specifically for area expansion was also contributing to the enhancement of the acreage.

Referral lab for agri produce in the pipeline

The Central government is contemplating setting up a referral laboratory which tests chemical residues in agricultural produce and enable farmers export the same to Europe and American markets.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, member, Agricultural and Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA), S. Jayapal Reddy said the proposals were sent from the State Agricultural University to set up the lab in Mahabubabad Agricultural Research Centre, Malyal. Another lab that analyses and issues certificates to organic and inorganic produce would also be coming up.

Efforts were on to set up a comprehensive Export Package House in the district that helps farmers store, pack, and export their produce to world markets directly. Mr. Jayapal Reddy said the Union Ministry of Commerce was in favour of setting up such centres. It was also offering 90 per cent subsidy to State governments and 40 per cent subsidy to farmers with big holdings if they come forward to set up their own laboratories.

“The Punjab government and farmers got subsidy to the tune of Rs. 200 crore from the Centre. Such initiative is required from the Telangana government as well,” he opined. The State government could send proposals or encourage the farmers to apply for subsidy, he said.

Due to lack of awareness and proper publicity, local farmers and governments were not utilising the schemes offered by the APEDA and other wings of the Central government.

He explained that though several proposals were brought to the notice of the State government, it was not forthcoming to submit the required proposals. An exclusive research and export facility for green chilly was proposed at Warangal vegetable market, which was pending with the state government, he said.

The APEDA has asked the State Agriculture University to prepare proposals and apply for infrastructure projects to benefit from the Central government scheme.

New model developed to predict monsoon

The onset and withdrawal of the monsoon can be forecast much earlier than with previous methods



DARK CLOUDS: Holding out hope for farmers

A team of Swiss scientists has developed a novel prediction approach that can forecast Indian monsoon's yearly onset and withdrawal significantly earlier than using previously available methods. Based on a network analysis of regional weather data, the team from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the University of Zurich will soon propose this approach to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

The summer rains are of vital importance for millions of farmers feeding the subcontinent's population.

“We can predict the beginning of the Indian monsoon two weeks earlier and the end of it even six weeks earlier than before — which is quite a breakthrough given that for the farmers, every day counts,” said lead researcher Veronika Stolbova from PIK and University of Zurich.

“We found that in north Pakistan and the Eastern Ghats, a mountain range close to the Indian Ocean, changes of temperatures and humidity mark a critical

transition to monsoon,” Stolbova explained. Conventionally, the focus was always on Kerala.

The scientists tested their method with historical monsoon data. It gives correct predictions for onset in more than 70 per cent and for withdrawal in more than 80 per cent of the considered years.

In addition, the new scheme notably improves the forecasting of monsoon timing during years affected by the global weather phenomenon El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), particularly in its La Nina phase. This phenomenon significantly alters monsoon timing and decreases the prediction accuracy of existing methods. The major innovation, the authors say, is to combine the network analysis with the subtle statistical analyses of the early warning signals for the monsoon onset and withdrawal.

Global warming due to greenhouse-gas emissions already affects the Indian monsoon and — if unabated — is expected to do even more so in the future.IANS

Customised management proposed for cattle in summer



Dairy farmers are compelled to dispose of their cows owing to lack of potable water.

At a time when there is enormous rise in temperature in the State, dairy cattle require customised management measures, T.P. Sethumadhavan, Director of

Entrepreneurship, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU), has said.

Addressing an interactive programme organised by the varsity to sensitise the farming community on the steps to be adopted during extreme summer, at Padinjarethara here on Thursday, Dr. Sethumadhavan said customised management measures would help farmers maintain milk production.

“Animals need to be supplemented with green fodder or fish liver oil, along with mineral mixtures, to address Vitamin A deficiency during summer,” he said. Precision feeding and management measures must be adopted to maintain optimum production, he added.

“Scientific housing and milking management measures should be practised to prevent mastitis. Keeping cattle in highly-ventilated bedded sheds or under the shade of trees after frequent showers will reduce heat stress. There are reports that dairy farmers are compelled to dispose of their cows owing to lack of potable water. But animals should not be made to drink from stagnant ponds,” Dr. Sethumadhavan warned.

Considering that dairying is an enterprise where water requirement was high as compared to other livestock ventures, the varsity has developed an automatic thermo control system based on temperature humidity index recently to address the issue, and the technology will be transferred to the farming community soon, Dr. P.T. Sooraj, Assistant professor and head of cattle breeding farm, Thumboormuzhy, who developed the system, said. More than 150 farmers attended the programme.

Animals should be supplemented with green fodder or fish liver oil, along with mineral mixtures, to address Vitamin A deficiency.

T.P. Sethumadhavan,

Director of Entrepreneurship,

KVASU

Summer takes its toll on animal health

Animal Husbandry dept. steps up disease surveillance; vaccination drive planned against FMD

With large parts of the State sweltering in the summer heat, the government is stepping up surveillance to prevent the outbreak of animal diseases during the season.

The animal disease surveillance wing has been directed to be vigilant against diseases affecting cattle and poultry. The Animal Husbandry Department is gearing up for a mass vaccination drive against foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in dairy animals.

ADVISORY

Mass vaccination drive against foot-and-mouth disease

- Surge in number of animals brought for treatment of heatstroke
- More cases from Kannur, Kozhikode, Punalur

Symptoms

- ➔ Protruding eyeballs, drooling, fits

Stocks for veterinary hospitals

- Medicines, vitamins, minerals

▪ Vaccination drive for poultry

Vigil against anthrax

Tip for farmers

- Keep animals in the shade
- Provide adequate water
- Use wet sacks to drape dairy animals
- Supplement feed with vitamins, minerals

Focus on Ranikhet disease, duck plague

“The extreme summer heat this year had forced us to postpone the campaign. But in view of the rare cases reported from a few locations, we have decided to launch the campaign from April 25,” Director, Animal Husbandry, S. Chandrankutty told *The Hindu*. “Field-level officials have been instructed to carry out the vaccination in the early hours of the day to avoid heat stress for the men and animals.”

With the mercury level rising across the State, veterinary hospitals in the State have reported a surge in the number of animals brought for treatment of heat stroke and other ailments.

The maximum number of cases has been reported from Kannur, Kozhikode, and Punalur.

“Cows and dogs are more susceptible to heat stroke. Symptoms include protruding eyeballs, drooling and fits,” said Dr. Chandrankutty. “Veterinary hospitals have been provided with stocks of medicines, vitamins, and minerals and steps have been taken to address the shortage of IV fluids.”

“Animals become more susceptible to diseases during the summer when the heat takes a toll on their health,” said L. Ravikumar, retired veterinary officer.

The disease surveillance wing has also been asked to be vigilant against anthrax in the light of sporadic cases. Officials have been told to focus on areas that have been susceptible in the past.

Another mass vaccination drive for poultry will be taken up shortly under the Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD) programme.

The campaign would focus on Ranikhet disease and duck plague, the two killer diseases with the potential to wreak havoc. The Animal Husbandry Department has issued an advisory to farmers asking them to keep animals in the shade and provide adequate drinking water. They have been advised to use wet sacks to drape dairy animals during the daytime and supplement feed with vitamins and minerals.

Declare drought national calamity: NHRC petition

Maharashtra Regional Congress Committee secretary Shehzad Poonawala on Thursday petitioned the National Human Rights Commission, demanding that drought be declared a national calamity, a full loan waiver for drought-affected farmers, and immediate release of Rs 40,000 crore to drought-hit states under MNREGA.

Referring to controversies over BJP Minister Pankaja Munde taking a selfie, water being used at helipads for BJP ministers' visits, and the State not taking a stand on shifting IPL matches out before the Bombay High Court, the petition accused the BJP-led government at the Centre and in Maharashtra of taking a non-serious approach towards drought.

CCL for wheat procurement a routine affair: Amarinder

Punjab Congress chief Amarinder Singh on Thursday said getting Cash Credit Limit (CCL) for wheat procurement is a routine affair which "had to come to the state in any case" and asked Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal "what was so celebratory about it".

"The way you have gone into frenzied jubilations over a routine affair like release of the CCL is a sad reflection of the state of affairs you are presiding over," he said while reacting to Mr. Badal's criticism of the opposition leaders over the alleged wheat scam.

The Reserve Bank has issued authorisation of Cash Credit Limit of Rs 17,523 crore towards first instalment for procurement of 90 lakh tonnes of wheat this rabi season by Punjab government.

Capt. Singh also told Mr. Badal that instead of feeling “anguished” over the “genuine and justified” criticism by opposition, he should feel anguished over suicide by farmers because of debt and distress.

Taking a jibe at Mr. Badal’s reported “feeling of anguish” comment, he said: “Better shed your tears for those thousands of farmers who lost their lives in distress and despair, thanks to your callous negligence and indifference than wail and whine over our criticism for your failures.”

The State Congress chief, in a statement here, also said that mere release of Rs 17,000 crore CCL does not wipe out the “Rs 12,000 crore wheat scandal that has taken place under his nose.”

“Release of CCL in no way means a clean chit to you and you still stand guilty of cheating and robbing the farmers of Rs 12,000 crore for which you will be held answerable sooner than later,” Capt. Singh said. PTI

Banana turns king of fruit in Srikakulam

Thanks to marriage ‘muhurtams’, there is unprecedented demand for it



Making hay:Banana sourced from East Godavari district being unloaded at Karajada on the outskirts of Srikakulam. —Photo: Basheer

Banana has suddenly turned into an important fruit in the district, thanks to unprecedented demand during marriage and house-warming ceremonies.

As there are no ‘muhurtams’ for marriage and other auspicious occasions between April 27 and July 25, hundreds of marriages are being performed in the district this month. Cashing in on the demand, the middlemen have jacked up the prices of banana in the market. A bunch of bananas is sold between Rs.400 and Rs.550, depending upon the quality. During off-season, each bunch is sold for Rs.180. With huge demand for the fruit now, the traders are sourcing it from Ravulapalem in East Godavari district.

The traders say that they have to make profits only during the current season as there would be no buyers once the marriage season is over. “Trades in Ravulapalem have also increased the prices suddenly, forcing us to sell the fruit at abnormal rates. Marriage parties are paying the extra amount as they have no other option,” said K. Rajarao, a trader of Karajada market located near Narasannapeta.

During off-season, there is no need to source banana from East Godavari, as it is a major crop in Srikakulam district. The fruit is grown in places like Narasannapeta, Amadalavalasa, Tekkali, and Nandigama.

The crop harvested in these places has a good market in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. In fact, banana prices have hit a five-year low in Srikakulam district with sales dipping during ‘Ashadham’ and ‘Adhika Ashadam’ (June-July 2015) when people tend not to perform auspicious events. During Godavari Pushkarams the prices of banana hit rock bottom.

Summer crops raised

With water level touching below 54 feet in Mettur Dam, the farmers of surrounding areas have raised various summer cash crops in the dry water spread area.

This time, the water release from the dam was stopped by the last week of February after the completion of Mahamaham festival in Kumbakonam town.

Since then, a meagre quantity of water is being released from the dam for meeting the drinking water needs of the delta districts.

The farmers of Pannavadi, Moolakkadu, Setthukuli, and Kootaiyur have raised tharpoosani fruits, ellu, ground nut, cholam, and hybrid variety drumstick.

Asia’s biggest mango market loses sheen

While market conditions hit farmers, ban on ‘secret handshake’ system and use of carbide hits merchants

The Nunna Mango Market here is said to be the biggest mango market in Asia with consignments accounting for 2000 metric tonnes being dispatched to different metros daily.

Mango farmers from Krishna, West Godavari and even Khammam district (now in Telangana) bring the king of fruits to the Nunna market to get a better price. But this year, both farmers and merchants seem unhappy with recent trends.

During the season, merchants came from all the major metros in the country and purchased fruit, mostly Banginepalli, Totapuri and the locally popular variety, Chinna Rasalu, in auctions.



Once purchased, the fruit was packed in bamboo baskets (plastic crates are being used now) and sent in trucks to Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, where there was considerable demand for it. The raw mango was ripened en route with carbide being sprinkled in the fruit baskets.

Unfortunately conditions at the market turned adverse to the farmers over time. The merchants who were from other states evolved a “secret handshake” system to keep the farmers in the dark in the so-called open auction. With the traders exploiting the farmers, several of them preferred to sell of their produce at the garden itself. Some farmers, who became debt ridden, initiated the trend of taking advances. In this system, the farmers have no say about the price. The merchant and farmer decide a price and some advance is paid even before the flowering stage. When the crop is ready, the merchant harvests the fruit and pays rest of the amount. So the entire profit went to the merchant.

While things began getting sour for the farmers from a few years ago, the business turned bitter for the merchants with the government banning the use of carbide and the secret handshake system just last year.

There is nothing open in the secret handshake auction system. Two merchants bid for the fruit, but the bids and counter bids are known only to the merchants. At the end of the auction, the farmers are simply told the price they would pay for the fruit.

At the behest of Water Resources Minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao, the secret handshake auction system was banned. This year, the officials announced zero tolerance to carbide.

A Delhi-based merchant, who preferred anonymity, said if fruits were ripened before transportation, they would be damaged while in transit. Losses would be

heavy if fruit was ripened after transportation. Carbide ripening was crucial for the mango export business.

Mango farmer C.T. Srinivasa Rao, who waged a battle against the secret handshake auction system, ironically sold his fruit while it was on the trees this season. “It is a losing battle. The merchants still have the upper hand. And the government does not seem to be interested in doing any thing. The maximum commission that a merchant should charge was 4 per cent, but the traders were taking up to 11 per cent.

The secret handshake auctions still continue on the sleigh,” he lamented. Marketing department supervisor Venkateswara Rao said another reason for the merchants staying away was the poor arrivals. A little over 2,000 tonnes had been received and shipped from the market in 15 days after the season began on April 6, he said.

For bargadars, land is now labour lost



In West Bengal, land reform and a democratic system of panchayats triggered the highest agricultural growth in India in the 1980s. — File photo: Ashoke Chakrabarty

A systematic attempt is being made in several West Bengal districts to evict sharecroppers from land, despite the legal protection

At Jamirarah village, Srikanta Hansda points to two double-storey houses in the shadow of which his home — a rough mud dwelling with an asbestos clerestory roof — squats: “Those are the homes of the Ghosh family. They own Annapurna Bhandar, a well-known grocery store in Medinipur city — and they own a lot of land in these parts. They are very rich.”

After a pause, he continues, “At Kumarpura, on the other side of the road, they are trying to ‘reclaim’ land that was given to poor peasants during the CPI(M) era.”

Mr. Hansda, himself a beneficiary of land reforms during the Left rule, says, “Some people don’t have *pattas* (title deeds) and the Trinamool Congress, ever since it came to power, has been grabbing such land back for its supporters.” The Ghoshes, he says, have gone to court as the original owners of the land.

This is election time, the ruling Trinamool Congress’s squads are on a campaign, and, at Kumarpura, no one wants to speak openly about it, though they acknowledge that attempts are on to evict some of them from land they have been tilling for decades as sharecroppers.

Operation Barga, the land reform movement introduced by the erstwhile Left Front government in 1978, had recorded the names of sharecroppers (*bargadars*), giving them legal protection against eviction by the landlords and entitling them to a share of the produce. It was also made an inheritable right. Simultaneously, surplus land was redistributed. In the process, agricultural production grew, and the lives of those living on the margins improved substantially.

The Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims benefited the most and consequently, became supporters of the CPI(M), something that the Trinamool wishes to change.

At Bogchori, in the Keshpur Assembly constituency, the scene of many bloody battles between the Left and the Trinamool, it is evening. The unbearable heat of the day has receded. Here, I find a group of Trinamool activists.

When I tentatively raise the issue of the “reversal” of land reforms, they are unabashedly frank. Samit Bhattacharjee, upapradhan of Amraguchi village, says, “The CPI(M) gave land to its supporters. Now those people are returning land on their own.” His friend Sadhan Chandra Maity is even less politically correct. “The CPI(M) took away my land, using the administration at that time. As soon as the government changed, I asked the squatters to give it back — when they refused, I forcibly got it back. Now those people have left the village.” But aren’t these people the poorest of the poor? Mr. Maity shrugs and says: “But it is my land.”

These are not isolated cases.

Soon after the Mamata Banerjee government came to power in 2011, the CPI(M) State committee noted in a statement: “[T]here have been systematic attacks on the *bargadars* and marginal farmers ... The land the tillers earned through decades of struggle has been recaptured in many places by the erstwhile landowners and their agent, the Trinamool. By a conservative estimate of the Kishan Sabha, over the past two-and-a-half months, land of 527 farmers, measuring 1,000 acres, has been snatched away ... 4,700 patta-owners have been evicted from 2,700 acres of land and 3,710 *bargadars* have been evicted from 1,587 acres, while 14,025 persons have been evicted from legally acquired land ... The police and the administration are openly siding with the evictors.”

Today, that number is possibly larger, with this correspondent hearing of similar cases in at least four other districts — South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Birbhum and Bardhaman.



Textile technology will open up new opportunities in agro-industry: CM Devendra Fadnavis

The innovations can be adapted to meet the challenges in critical sectors including defence, aviation, agriculture, irrigation and road construction.



Fadnavis was speaking at the inauguration of the TechnoTex 2016 conclave in Mumbai.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis Thursday said that textile technology is likely to open up new avenues in multi-sectors generating both investments and employment opportunities.

The innovations can be adapted to meet the challenges in critical sectors including defence, aviation, agriculture, irrigation and road construction.

He was speaking at the inauguration of the TechnoTex 2016 conclave in Mumbai, organised by the state government in partnership with FICCI, many foreign delegations and companies displayed innovations promising to make inroads in sectors from agro-industries to road constructions.

The delegations included Germany, Taiwan, Spain, United Kingdom, Russia and Belgium. The state, which is reeling under severe drought, can maximize agro-textile technology for water management and regulate agriculture practices for higher and better harvest, he observed.

While the state is giving higher priority to the textile industries, it is also exploring avenues to incorporate research in textile technology to boost trade and create new value chains, albeit with greater partnership with private players.

Whether it is bullet-proof vests used by security personnel, specifically designed uniforms for soldiers on the borders or shed nets of farmers to regulate the heat and radiation, textile technology has become inevitable. The state, which accounts for at least 30 per cent of the cotton cultivation in the country, can play a significant role to tap innovations to integrate it with its textile parks which are coming up in nine districts across Vidarbha and Marathwada.

**Marathwada: NCP chief defends cane, says drought due to lack of rains
Says a scientific study is on to address all concerns regarding cane cultivation in the water-stressed**

At a special meeting of the chairmen and managing directors of sugar mills held in Pune on Thursday, Pawar said Marathwada had been cultivating cane for the last 20 years.

NCP supremo and former Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar refused to link the increase in area under cane cultivation in Marathwada to the ongoing water crisis in the region. Pawar said the severe water crisis was a result of continuous failure of monsoon for the last two-three years.

At a special meeting of the chairmen and managing directors of sugar mills held in Pune on Thursday, Pawar said Marathwada had been cultivating cane for the last 20 years.



“We never had any complaints of drought. This year’s drought is due to the failure of rains, and not due to cane,” he said.

His comments come at a time when the increase in area under water-guzzling sugarcane in parched Marathwada is being singled out by environmentalists and water experts for the crisis in the region.

A few days ago, Revenue and Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse had come down heavily on the sugar mills in Marathwada and said the government would not allow any new mill to come up in the region in the next five years. Last year, Khadse had opined that mills in Marathwada should not be allowed to go for crushing as it could lead to water crisis.

Bihar polls add to Punjab’s grain woes

Farmers of the state say that the markets are flooding with the produce but as there isn’t many to help lift the harvest in the markets, there is hardly any space for new arrivals.



Wheat meant to be transported in Jalandhar market. Express photo

Punjab is facing an acute shortage of manpower. The reason – panchayat elections are on in Bihar and hence, there are fewer people around to help market the harvested wheat.

Farmers of the state say that the markets are flooding with the produce but as there isn't many to help lift the harvest in the markets, there is hardly any space for new arrivals.

“We have been waiting to keep our produce in the market since morning. We have around 1150 quintals wheat,” said Surinder Singh, a farmer in Jalandhar grain market.

Same was the view of farmers Jaswinder Singh from Randhawa Masanda village who had waited for over 10 hours to keep his crop in mandi at a proper place. “I have been looking for labour since morning.

But no one was available to unload my crop and then I asked a local labour, He charged a higher rate, but then left the work mid-way saying he could not do this work,” said Satnam Singh, another farmer. Some of the farmers were off to railway stations to fetch labour arriving from UP and Bihar.

“Punjab needs around 2 lakh workers during the procurement season. But now we are working with just 40 per cent of this. Labour from Bihar is missing owing to Panchayat elections there,” said Ravinder Singh Cheema, vice-chairman of Punjab Mandi Board (PMB).

“Local labour from Punjab frown at this work even at higher rates.” “Till date over 50 per cent of the procured crop are lying in the markets in the Malwa region. Markets are left with no space to keep the crop,” said Cheema while adding that they are worried about the weather too as in some markets in Moga, Firozpur and Guru Harsahaye, witnessed heavy rain a couple of days ago.

Till date, around 70 lakh metric tonnes wheat had arrived in around 140 big grain markets and 1,800 sub-centres. Out of this, over 60 lakh metric tonne have already been procured by the government agencies, but over 40 LMT has been lying in the mandies as there is hardly any labour to load it

Grain of truth

Punjab's wheat payment crisis strengthens the case for direct transfers in MSP operations.



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

For a state whose farmers have already suffered from crashing basmati paddy prices and damage to their cotton crop from whitefly pest attacks, the current payment crisis in wheat couldn't have come at a worse time.

Government agencies have so far procured over 6.5 million tonnes (mt) of wheat from Punjab in the new marketing season from April 1. But farmers haven't got the payment for this wheat, which would be worth over Rs 9,900 crore at the minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 1,525 per quintal.

The reason: Non-availability of working capital from banks for funding procurement. The banks have cited a mismatch in accounts for previous years — monies lent for procurement, they say, are not backed up by actual grain stocks with state agencies — for refusal to sanction fresh cash credit limits.

The Punjab government, in turn, has denied the allegation of “missing stocks”.

Caught in the crossfire have been the state's farmers, who are awaiting payments that would ordinarily have come within 48 hours of procurement.

Banks may well be justified in demanding settlement of previous years' accounts and reconciling stock discrepancies, if any.

An RBI directive asking them to provide for any potential losses on food loans may also have prompted their action. But should this have been the time for it,

just when the wheat crop harvested by farmers is being procured? A politically explosive situation has seemingly been averted for now.

The Centre's intervention — possibly guided by assembly elections due next March — has led to the release of a cash credit installment of Rs 17,523 crore to cover procurement of up to nine mt, as against the targeted 11 mt from the state.

The Centre has also constituted a committee to look into the reconciliation of stocks, which should, hopefully, settle the dispute.

The Punjab wheat payment crisis, however, also raises the larger question of the very need for physical procurement, stocking and distribution of grain on the scale done now.

These operations entail an economic cost of over Rs 23 per kg for wheat, which then gets sold at Rs 2/kg under the National Food Security Act. That makes the system inherently leaky and prone to “missing stocks”, whether in Punjab or elsewhere. When technology today enables farmers to be paid the difference between MSP and the market price directly into their Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts, why have such a complex system of handling some 30 mt of wheat and 48 mt of paddy annually?

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Drought spiral: Sugar output falls, prices of pulses may remain high



India's sugar and cotton output is showing signs of falling for the first time in five years and insufficient pulses production could keep prices high. (HT File Photo)

India's sugar and cotton output is showing signs of falling for the first time in five years and insufficient pulses production could keep prices high, early estimates showed in the midst of a crippling drought across a vast swathe of the country.

However, the country will still have a surplus of cereals despite back-to-back drought trimming overall foodgrains output from normal-year levels.

Sugar output is projected to fall between 8% and 10%. India is the world's second-largest producer of the sweetener and also the biggest consumer. Cotton production has already dipped 10%, figures for April show.

Sugar output has been hit the hardest in Maharashtra and Karnataka, two states worst-affected by drought. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, over 35 million farmers grow cane, making up 7% of the rural population.

A 14% deficient monsoon has caused a severe drought in 256 of the country's 640 districts, or about 40% of the country, stoking a challenging rural distress for the Modi government.

The agriculture ministry expects a slightly higher pulses output of 17.33 million tonnes in 2015-16, compared with the previous year's 17.15 million tonnes, but it is still short of the 27 million tonnes needed. The gap is mostly met through costly imports, which keep prices high.

In February, retail pulses prices rose 37%, in contrast to wholesale prices falling for the 17th month in a row in March. Contradicting the government's projections, Ajay Saraf, an analyst with the firm ComTrade, said: "We expect pulses output to be lower than last year's."

The food ministry had asked states to submit their expected pulses demand. On Thursday, the government decided to distribute 10,000 tonnes to states from a 55-lakh tonne newly-created reserve, anticipating shortages. The government has also asked state authorities to monitor price movements.

Estimates of the Indian Sugar Mills' Association show output between October last year and April 15 stood at 24.3 million tonne, about 2 million tonne short than the 26.4 million tonne during the previous year's corresponding period. ICRA, an investment firm, foresees a steeper sugar shortfall of 10% in 2016, the firm said in a review.

In 2015-16, the country's cotton output stood at 34.1 million bales of cotton (of 170kg each), against 38.2 million bales, according to data from the Cotton Association of India.

A fresh take on food: Farm-to-table is the new gourmet in Delhi



Hotel Pullman, Aerocity is practising farm-to-fork production of food at their restaurant Pluck.

It can't get better than this for health-conscious gourmands! City chefs have sped up their efforts to popularise farm-to-fork gourmet. This practise involves production of seasonal ingredients at farms, without any chemicals or pesticides, and bringing diners fresh produce infused with local flavours.

“With the rise in the usage of synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers in farming, the produce is no longer healthy for consumption. To tackle this , a lot of emphasis is being laid on organic farming.

We are going back to the organic way of growing and using produce to provide our diners with a healthier meal,” says Chef Ajay Anand, Hotel Pullman, Aerocity.

After practising the concept in France, the chef introduced farm-to-table gourmet at the hotel's restaurant - Pluck.

“I learned the farm-to-table concept in France when I worked for Michelin starred Chef Georges Blanc. His idea of making his own kitchen garden influenced me. We offer the freshest ingredients in our seasonal menu that is fused with local flavours.

We pick up the ingredients just before dishing out a meal. The satisfaction of cooking and serving what you have grown yourself is unmatched,” he says.

Their menu boasts of Scallop Carpaccio with Truffle and Cauliflower; Parmesan Burnt Garlic with Oat Meal Streusel roll over Melba; Quinoa Broccoli Cake; Roasted Cod Candied Orange with Lentil Stew; Madeira Jus and Burnt Butter and Matcha; Green Tea Custard with Preserved Lychee and Jasmine Rice.



Another eatery in the city practising this trend is Caara Café, Kasturba Gandhi Marg. “We believe in bringing cooking back to its origins.

We take vegetables from our own chemical-free farms, plan menus around the seasons and create dishes that celebrate this produce. Fast food is so removed from fresh produce with the evolution of preservatives and additives.

This is what we want to change. We have Superfood Salad (that has rocket, beetroot, pumpkin, pumpkin seeds, raisins, pomegranate, broccoli and feta); Tomato, Mozzarella and Pesto Panini; Watermelon, Feta, Basil Salad with Balsamic Vignette, Zucchini Linguine with Pesto and Crushed Peanuts.

We keep changing the ingredients to try and use as much of our own-grown veggies.

Our new menu will have Spinach, Kale and Tomato Shakshouka; Mini Focaccia with Cherry, Tomato, Zucchini and Beans,” says Ambika Seth, co-owner.



Chef Nishant Choubey, Dusit Devarana, says gourmands love the idea of having their meals made of fresh, chemical-free ingredients. “Farm -to-table is a very interesting and evolving concept.

Today, customers don’t just want to eat food that is just delicious or well-presented. They want something which is fresh and rich in nutrients. All our ingredients are locally grown in our farm. We want all our diners to taste these ingredients in their just-picked glory.

I foresee that the concept of health bars, first-press juices, protein shakes and other high fibre food is really going to takeover in the future,” he says. You can try Organic Khichdi with Spiced Tofu and Salsify; steamed farmed Fish with Lime and Chilli; Organic Beetroot Salad with Quinoa, Poached Plum and Toasted Sesame and Andaman Tuna with Wasabi and Yuzu at the resort in Samalkha, NH-8.

The farm-to-table concept has gone online, too. InnerChef lets you order fresh food with just a click of your mouse.

“We are actively pursuing farm-to-fork strategy across five cities (Delhi NCR, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad). Our idea is to develop a network of local farms across India and source our fruits and vegetables directly from the local farms.

In fact ,we are launching a new salad soon for which we are sourcing from a Delhi-based farm,” says Rajesh Sawhney, co-founder of the online platform.

7 out of 11 major irrigation dams in Maharashtra have no water



Seven major irrigation dams of Marathwada have ‘zero’ per cent water stock.
File Photo

The 75 minor irrigation dams in Marathwada have just four per cent water stock,

Out of 11 major irrigation dams in the drought-hit Maharashtra, seven have no water left in them, official figures revealed.

According to the latest Water Resources Department data for the week ending April 15, only three per cent of water stock is available in all the 814 major, medium and minor irrigation projects in parched Marathwada region.

The seven major irrigation dams of Marathwada where water stock is ‘zero’ per cent are — Jayakwadi, Purna Siddheshwar, Majalgaon, Manjra, Lower Terna, Mannar and Sina Kolegaon — located in Aurangabad, Parbhani, Beed, Nanded and Osmanabad districts.

Besides, Purna Yeldari dam in the region has a water stock of two per cent, Upper Penganga 10 per cent, Vishnupuri seven per cent and Lower Dudhana has 18 per cent, the data showed.

The 75 minor irrigation dams in Marathwada have just four per cent water stock, while 728 minor irrigation projects are left with paltry three per cent.

Battling the acute water scarcity in various parts of the state, the department has deployed 4,356 tankers across Maharashtra to supply drinking water.

Out of these, 52 tankers are deployed in Konkan, 831 in Nashik, 303 in Pune, 3,032 in Aurangabad, 131 in Amravati and seven in Nagpur division.

Meanwhile, after nine trips by a 10-wagon water train, a 50-wagon water train, christened 'Jaldoot', carrying 25 lakh litres water yesterday reached worst-hit Latur.

According to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, so far, 70 lakh litres has been delivered by train to Latur.

The train came as a big relief for Latur citizens who have been struggling to get drinking water.

Scorching summer of discontent for poultry trade



Broiler chicks drinking water at a poultry farm in Ranga Reddy district, Telangana. The 50,000-crore Indian poultry sector is under pressure as oppressive heat and unprecedented drought impacts its prospects.

Heat, rising feed costs crush farmers

The oppressive heat of the early summer, and the prevailing drought-like conditions, are taking a huge toll on the poultry industry.

With groundwater sources drying up, and the price of feed going up by over 50 per cent, the cost of production has shot up for poultry farmers in the southern States, without a matching rise in the prices at which they sell poultry products.

“Summer has set in early this year, and borewells have dried up in some regions,” Subba Raju, Vice-President of the National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC), told *BusinessLine*.

Layer birds suffer

Consequently, he noted, the price of maize has gone up to 1,500 from 1,100 a quintal. “The cost of other feed varieties too has gone up.”

Moreover, Raju said, “the oppressive heat is killing the birds. We are losing 10-15 per cent of our birds to high temperatures.”

Fearing higher mortality rates, poultry farmers have cut down replacement of birds by 25 per cent — “in order to save on feed costs,” Raju said.

This is a common phenomenon in the summer, noted G B Sundarajan of the Suguna group. “We witness less production and less body weight.”

However, the months of May and June, when the demand for poultry products typically improves, still offered some hope, he added.

With Telangana reeling under extreme heat conditions, the demand for poultry products from Tamil Nadu is on the rise, but prices are virtually flat. The wholesale price of eggs is 3.50 apiece, against 3.45 in March.

According to the NECC, the daily egg production in the Namakkal zone, which is an egg production hub, had fallen to 303.05 lakh in 2015-16 fiscal from 313.56 lakh in 2014-15.

Broiler prices up

The saving grace for the industry is that broiler prices are marginally up, at 81/kg from 76/kg in March, on the back of an increased demand for animal protein. Prices are expected to rise further, with a 45-day ban on deep sea fishing on the east coast taking effect from April 15.

Still, all this is poor compensation for an industry where the margins are under enormous pressure.

Faced with water shortage and high feed prices, poultry farms in the region have taken to selling layer birds as young as 65 weeks old, against the normal egg-laying span of 72-78 weeks.

EC-sheds

The near-drought conditions and the losses have accentuated the need for environmentally controlled poultry sheds, which come with an advanced climate control system and automated feeding and watering mechanisms.

“Of the 1,000 layer farms in Namakkal, only a handful have installed environmentally controlled sheds,” a farm owner pointed out. He attributed this to inadequate awareness among poultry farmers and the high investment cost involved.

The heat is well and truly on for the poultry industry.

Cashew exports plummet 20% in 2015-16

Cashew shipments from the country slipped by 20 per cent in 2015-16 while imports of raw cashew nuts saw a substantial increase during the last fiscal year.

Total shipments stood at 94,150 tonnes, worth 4,850.39 crore, with a unit value of 515.17/kg against 1,18,820 tonnes, valued at 5,431.30 crore, at a unit value of 457.10.

Meanwhile, imports of raw cashew nuts rose to 9,49,322 tonnes worth 8,473.60 crore against 9,32,224 tonnes valued at 6,569.52 crore. The average unit value was at 89.26/kg in 2015-16 against 70.47 the previous fiscal.

Multiple factors

Attributing the fall in exports mainly to non-receipt of parity price for kernel, Sundaran Prabha, Chairman, Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI), told *BusinessLine* that the high Raw Cashew Nut (RCN) prices, coupled with the closure of around 80 per cent of the factories in Kerala following a hike in wages, has also contributed to this phenomenon.

He said the increase in imports of raw nuts is because of trading in RCN in the country and shipping out for processing in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, imports of kernels have risen to 2,477 tonnes valued at 109.25 crore from 957 tonnes valued at 30.22 crore in 2014-15.

However, exports of Cashew Nut Shell Liquid and Cardanol have moved up last fiscal on low unit value to 11,447 tonnes valued at 55.96 crore from 10,938 tonnes valued at 55.81 crore. The unit value was at 48.88 a kg against 51.03 in 2014-15, CEPCI sources said.

According to trade sources, during the first week of April business was done for W240 at \$3.90-4 and W320 at \$3.70-3.80 per lb (FoB) for April, May and June shipments. Not much business was reported in other grades.

Last week, the price levels for W240 were \$3.95-4.10; W320: \$3.75-3.95; W450: \$3.60-3.75; SW320: \$3.50-3.65; Splits: \$3.20-3.35; Pieces: \$3.05-3.15 per lb (FoB).

“Even though there were more enquiries the activities were limited”, Pankaj N Sampat, a Mumbai-based dealer, told *BusinessLine*.

Rising again

RCN prices started moving down by end February, he said. With the introduction of import duty on RCN in India, people were expecting further softening. Surprisingly, RCN prices started moving up again from mid-March.

For instance, Ivory Coast (IVC) which has the largest crop in Africa and had gone below \$1,300 a tonne has moved up to \$1,500 — recording an increase of nearly 15 per cent in one month. Whereas, IVC RCN was traded in the range of \$1,150-1,300 in 2015.

Following the increase in RCN prices, the kernel market, which has been steady for a very long time, started moving up. Prices have been going up by a few cents every week from mid-March. Due to the delay in crop arrivals and reduced buying by Indian processors, kernel availability will be reduced.

This expectation, coupled with some delays in February and March shipments from Vietnam, induced buyers from the US and EU to come in and pick up all offers for nearby shipments.

Monsoon onset, withdrawal: German scientists claim success on advance forecasts

Emerging new research has found that the Indian monsoon's onset and withdrawal can be forecasted significantly earlier than previously possible.

A team of German scientists has developed a novel prediction method based on a network analysis of regional weather data. It will propose this approach to the Indian Meteorological Department.

Information about monsoon timing is key for farmers to determine when to carry out the sowing. Crops such as rice, soyabean and cotton are normally grown during the June to September season.

Accurate forecasting

Future climate change will likely affect monsoon stability and hence makes accurate forecasting even more relevant, say scientists from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the University of Zurich.

Even a slight deviation of the monsoon can lead to droughts or floods, causing damages. Also, the length of the monsoon is relevant for planning hydro power generation since the rains are necessary to fill dams and reservoirs.

“We can now predict the beginning of the monsoon two weeks earlier, and the end of it even six weeks earlier than before,” says Veronika Stolbova, lead-author of the study to be published in the *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Breakthrough find

This is quite a breakthrough, given that for the farmers every day counts, Stolbova said.

Conventionally, the focus has been on the geography of Kerala on the southern tip of India, in terms of being the gateway for the South-West monsoon.

But Stolbova's team found that the regions of North Pakistan and the Eastern Ghats too count themselves in thanks to changes locally of temperatures and humidity which mark a critical transition to monsoon.

The team tested its method with historical monsoon data. It gave correct predictions for onset in more than 70 per cent and for withdrawal in more than 80 per cent of the considered years.

The main advantage of the proposed approach is that it improves the time horizon of the prediction compared to the methods currently used in India.

La Nina phase

The new scheme notably improves the forecasting of monsoon timing during years affected by the El Nino-La Nina, particularly in the La Nina phase.

This phenomenon has been found to significantly alter monsoon timing and decrease prediction accuracy in existing methods.

Global warming due to mankind's greenhouse-gas emissions from burning fossil fuels already affects the Indian monsoon and, if unabated, is expected to do even more so in the future.

“We’re seeing this in our data, and other research also points in this direction,” says project-lead Jurgen Kurths.

“The timing of the monsoon, on which the livelihoods of many million people depend, is likely becoming more erratic. This makes early and accurate forecasting ever more crucial.”

Centre to release 10,000 tonnes of pulses from buffer stock to check price rise

To control the spike in prices of pulses, the Centre has decided to release 10,000 tonnes of the staple, mainly tur and urad, from the buffer stock to ensure its availability at reasonable prices.

The decision comes days after the Wholesale Prices Index reported close to 35 per cent rise in the prices of pulses.

The Centre is also initiating procurement of rabi pulses with the target to procure around one lakh tonnes of chana and masur to build the buffer stocks further, a Food Ministry release said on Thursday.

In addition, to moderate price volatility in the forward market and discourage speculation, market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India has decided to implement various regulatory measures on chana contracts, which include increase in the margin requirement.

State governments have also been requested to avail the benefit of buffer stocks to manage prices as also send in their requirements immediately to ensure timely allocation of stock, the Ministry said, adding that States had already been empowered to impose stock limits on the pulses to ensure easy availability.

During the kharif marketing season in 2015-16, government agencies procured about 50,000 tonnes of pulses from farmers and contracted 25,000 tonnes for import, the release said. Private traders imported a total of 55 lakh tonnes in 2015-16, according to official figures.

Using network analysis to time India's monsoon



The Indian monsoon's yearly onset and withdrawal can now be forecast significantly earlier than previously possible, thanks to a novel prediction method developed by scientists, a breakthrough that may help maximise the subcontinent's food and hydro-power supplies.

The method is based on a network analysis of regional weather data, and the researchers will propose this approach to the India Meteorological Department.

The heavy summer rains are of vital importance for millions of farmers feeding the subcontinent's population.

Future climate change will likely affect monsoon stability and hence makes accurate forecasting even more relevant.

“We can predict the beginning of the Indian monsoon two weeks earlier, and the end of it even six weeks earlier than before — which is quite a breakthrough, given that for the farmers every day counts,” said Veronika Stolbova from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) in Germany, the lead-author of the study.

“We found that in North Pakistan and the Eastern Ghats changes of temperatures and humidity mark a critical transition to monsoon,” said Stolbova. Conventionally, the focus has been on the Kerala region on the southern tip of India.

Rainfall timing is key for growing rice, but also for generating hydro power, researchers said.

Information about monsoon timing is key for Indian farmers to determine when to carry out the sowing. Crops such as rice, soyabean and cotton are normally grown during the June to September monsoon rainy season.

Even a slight deviation of the monsoon can lead to droughts or floods, causing damages. Also, the length of the monsoon is relevant for planning hydro power generation since the rains are necessary to fill the dams and reservoirs.

The scientists tested their method with historical monsoon data. It gives correct predictions for onset in more than 70 per cent and for withdrawal in more than 80 per cent of the considered years.

The study was published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters.

Business Standard

Agriculture, business loans contribute most to retail debt delinquencies

Overall retail loans increased by 17 per cent in 2015, says Equifax's InOverall retail loans increased by 17% in 2015, says Equifax's India Consumer Credit Trends
Trends India Consumer Credit Trends

Overall retail lending delinquencies (90 days overdue) stood at 1.52 per cent for

the entire portfolio at the end of 2015, according to the Equifax's India Consumer Credit Trends. Of the retail loans, agriculture and business loans contributed the most to the delinquencies, with a share of 2.64 per cent and 3.23 per cent respectively, said the report.

Overall retail loans increased by 17 per cent in 2015. While public sector and cooperative banks saw a drop in market share, private banks, housing finance companies and non-banking finance companies saw an increase.

Public sector banks saw a drop in market share due to lower growth in agriculture and gold loans. On the other hand non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) gained due to increase in auto, business and consumer loans.

A break-up of delinquent loans based on the kind of loans showed that mortgage loans had the lowest delinquency rate at 0.56 per cent. Agriculture and business loans accounted for 33 per cent of the delinquent portfolio, though they had a share of only 17 per cent of the total retail loan portfolio.

“Business loans are increasing in share to total retail loans, but delinquency is also higher. However, the higher interest rate compensates for the delinquencies,” said Manish Sinha, Equifax India Country Leader.

Public sector banks accounted for 63 per cent of the total delinquent portfolio as of year-end 2015 mainly contributed by agriculture and business loans. This was followed by NBFCs at 16 per cent. “NBFCs in the recent past have done more lending in commercial vehicle, auto and business loans and all three have higher delinquencies than the national average,” said Sinha.

On a geographical basis, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh and Telangana saw the highest growth in retail loans.

Odisha had the highest delinquency, driven by higher agriculture and business loans at 7.15 per cent and 8.55 per cent respectively.

The state also saw a high rate of mortgage delinquencies at 1.33 per cent compared to the industry average.

NHRC asks govt for farmer relief details

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the state government to submit the details of compensation paid to the farmers, whose crops were damaged by a polluting factory in Koraput district, within six weeks.

The commission passed the order on April 12 while hearing a petition filed by campaigner Subash Mohapatra.

In 2014, 49 farmers of Ranipur and its neighbouring villages in the district lost their crops after Bilt Graphic Paper Products Ltd released waste water into their fields, alleged the petition filed on August 18, 2014.

On March 4, 2015, the rights panel had sought an action taken report from the state government. Special secretary, forest and environment department, submitted a report on May 13 last year, stating that the farmers would be compensated suitably.

Later, the government submitted a report about payment of compensation to the affected farmers. However, the NHRC found discrepancy in the process as only 31 farmers were paid compensation.

The report revealed that requisite action had been taken by the authorities concerned and compensation paid to the farmers in accordance with the damages. "In the letter dated May 8, 49 farmers are said to have been provided compensation whereas the annexure mentions only 31 names," the rights panel said.

The NHRC further directed the government to submit details of compensation paid to the remaining 18 farmers along with proof of payment.

The petitioner demanded that the state government should come clean on policies on crop loss and damages caused by the corporates. "The industrial houses should respect the environmental norms as mere compensation does not help the affected farmers. The government should take stringent action against companies found guilty," said Mohapatra.

The industries and business houses, running their ventures in the state, should respect United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights, he added.

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)

Punjab proposes changes in crop insurance scheme

Punjab deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal said they had submitted a proposal to the Centre to amend the National Crop Insurance Scheme, as a few of its clauses were not suitable to the interests of the state's farmers.

The deputy CM said union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal had also raised the issue with the concerned quarters at the Centre. "The provision like 75% rainfall deficit to avail the insurance benefit is against the interests of farmers of the state," he said.

In a new initiative, the Punjab government has opened automated driving test tracks in 22 district headquarters and 10 sub-divisions, aimed at issuing new driving licences instantly.

Union minister for food processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal disclosed this on Thursday after inaugurating the automated driving test track of Mansa at Malakpur Khiala village. With the opening of this facility, all procedures of making a driving licence will be brought under one roof and will be issued within 30 minutes of a successful driving test.

PCMSA docs to stage sit-in

Bathinda: The Punjab Civil Medical Services Association (PCMSA) has decided to stage a sit-in outside office of health services director on May 3 alleging that dep artment was apathetic to the demands of government doctors.

In a press release issued on Thursday, PCMSA said despite many requests and memorandums, the health authorities had failed to solve their issues. PCMSA chief patron Dr Ranjit Singh Butter and president Dr Gagandeep Singh said that they had met the top government officials repeatedly over these demands but to no avail.

"We had requested the health officials to implement full pay scale for newly-appointed doctors, restarting non-practising allowance (NPA) ," he said.

Govt to release 10,000 tonnes of pulses from buffer stock



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

NEW DELHI: The government will release 10,000 tonnes of pulses from its buffer stocks to boost supply in the domestic market and check any price rise.

The Centre has also directed state governments to keep a close watch on the prices and to take stringent action against hoarding of the commodity.

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

"The Centre has decided to release 10,000 tonnes pulses mainly tur and urad from buffer stock to ensure their availability at reasonable prices," an official statement said.

The Centre asked the state governments to avail this benefit and utilise the available stocks for managing the prices of pulses in their respective state.

It has asked states to project their demand of pulses immediately to ensure timely allocation from the buffer stock.

A buffer stock of 50,000 tonnes has been created to deal with any price rise.

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

Meanwhile, the Centre has already empowered the states to impose stock limits on the pulses to ensure easy availability.

The government agencies have made procurement of about 50,000 tonnes of pulses from farmers during the Kharif Marketing season 2015-16 and has contracted 25,000 tonnes of pulses for import.

The government is also initiating procurement of rabi pulses and has targeted to procure around 1,00,000 tonnes of chana and masoor to build the buffer stocks further.

"SEBI has decided to implement various regulatory measures on Chana contracts which include increase in the margin requirement to discourage speculation and to moderate the price volatility in forward market," the statement said.

In order to encourage pulses production, the government has already increased MSP for pulses, by Rs 275 per quintal for tur and urad, and by Rs 250 per quintal for moong.

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

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

Indian rubber output falls to the lowest in around two decades

Natural rubber production fell 12.7 per cent to 563,000 tonnes, while consumption eased 3.3 per cent to 987,540 tonnes in the year ended March 31.

KOCHI: Declining trend in the prices in the last couple of years has pushed natural rubber production in the country to the lowest level in nearly two decades at 563000 tonnes in 2015-16 as per the data released by the Rubber Board. The last time the production fell below this was in 1996-97, when it had touched 549425 tonnes.

The output was 645,000 tonnes in the previous year. It has dropped by 13 % in a year. However, the degree of fall is less, compared to 2014-15, when it fell by 17%. Except for one year of 2009-10, the rubber production in the country had been growing steadily. It had peaked to 913700 tonnes in 2012-13.



The rubber consumption too dipped by 3 % to 987,540 tonnes from the peak level of 1020910 tonnes a year ago. The consumption is showing a slide after a long time. In 2014-15, the rubber consumption had grown 4% though production fell.

The sharp drop in production in the face of just 3% dip in consumption has entailed more imports. Predictably, rubber imports have touched a new high of 454303 tonnes for the year 2015-16.

During fiscal 2016, the rubber prices had plummeted by as much as 27% from the beginning of the year before recovering. The prices plunged to the lowest in nine years at Rs 91 per kg in February before recovering. By the end of March, 2016, the prices had risen to Rs 115 per kg.