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Push for disease-resistant organic fruits

Horticulture experts to discuss issue at a symposium from today

To promote organic cultivation of fruits, plant breeders are now focussing on developing disease-resistant fruit varieties which can be grown without using pesticides.

Even as efforts are on to develop various cultivation practices to reduce pest attack, scientists now feel that developing varieties which are resistant to major diseases will go a long way in promoting organic cultivation.

About 120 plant breeders and horticulturalists from across the country are deliberating on issues related to development of disease-resistant varieties of fruits, among other things, at a symposium on ‘Fruit breeding in tropics and sub-tropics: an Indian perspective’ being jointly organised by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), in association with various agencies, from April 27 to 29. IIHR Director M.R. Dinesh told *The Hindu* that organic fruits were not just healthier, but would also fetch additional income to farmers, especially in the export market. The symposium would look at conservation of indigenous fruit varieties.

Heat dashes hopes of Kerala farmers

The simmering heat has taken a toll on not only the quantity and quality of drinking water but also dented the hopes of farmers, especially banana cultivators, with the withering of standing crops in around 134.84 hectares.

As the city faces a “40 per cent deficit in summer rain” and an “above normal temperature,” crop loss has been reported from Edava, Venganoor, Thiruvallam, Vellarada, Kattakada, Uzhamalakkal, Ulloor, Tholikkode, Poovachal, Perumbazhathoor, Nagaroor, Athiannoor, Kilimanoor, Attingal, Kazhakuttam, Pothencode, Kulathoor, Maranalloor, Vizhinjam, Vellanad and Chenkal.

Field visits by Agriculture Department officials revealed substantial damage to crops of banana, pepper, rubber and vegetables. Principal Agriculture Officer V. Subha said crops on 134.84 hectares withered due to the prolonged dry spell and unprecedented rise in mercury level. More than 2.5 lakh banana plants wilted completely.

“Only 10 per cent of the farmers who have lost the crops have enrolled for insurance scheme,” Ms. Subha said.

Apple mela from tomorrow

As many as 22,000 tonnes of apples of 10 varieties will be available at the four-day Indo-China Apples and Pears Mela-2016 that will commence here on April 28.

Organised by the Horticultural Producers Cooperative Marketing and Processing Society Ltd., in association with the Department of Horticulture and Indo-China Economic and Cultural Council, the exhibition will be held near the Lalbagh Glass House. The exhibition will be inaugurated by Minister for Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Shamanur Shivashankarappa at 11.30 a.m.

Monsoon could help revive agriculture sector

The economy is expected to grow over eight per cent this fiscal with the forecast of an above-normal monsoon raising hopes of the agriculture sector’s revival after two successive drought years, said Niti Aayog vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya.

“The economic growth rate will be more than eight per cent during the current fiscal. There is a forecast of above-normal monsoon this fiscal,” Mr. Panagariya said after delivering a lecture organised by the Central Vigilance Commission here on Tuesday.

He said the economic growth in the current fiscal could be even higher in view of policy and monetary interventions by the government and the Reserve Bank, which would ultimately push the sluggish industrial growth.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had also expressed hope that good rains would propel India's economic growth to 8.5 per cent during the current fiscal, higher than the Central Statistics Office advance estimates of 7.6 per cent for 2015-16.

Earlier this month, the Indian Meteorological Department forecast an above-normal monsoon during kharif season, raising hopes of buoyancy in the economy this fiscal.

According to IMD, there are 94 per cent chances of country receiving "normal to above normal" rainfall, while there is only 1 per cent probability of "deficient" rainfall. Agriculture, which contributes 15 per cent to India's GDP and employs about 60 per cent of the country's population, is heavily dependent on monsoon as only 40 per cent of the cultivable area is under irrigation. The interest regime is also conducive to economic growth now, as the Reserve Bank has cut the key interest rate by 0.25 per cent and introduced a host of measures to smoothen liquidity supply. The repo rate, at which RBI lends to the financial system, has come down to 6.5 per cent. This will also push economic activities. — PTI

Good monsoon is expected to propel India's economic growth during the current fiscal

Paddy cultivation in full swing on Pachamalai



BETTER PROSPECTS: Tribal farmers use fields for thrashing paddy in the absence of thrashingfloor at Pachamalai. (Above) Workers

transplanting paddy in a field at Ottampattipudhurin Tiruchi.— Photos: B.Velankanni Raj



ADT- 43 variety cultivated on about 1,000 acres

: Paddy cultivation at a series of clusters on Pachamalai involves a peculiar phenomenon. While paddy is generally raised during the north-east monsoon (October to January) period, tribal farmers of Pachamalai raise the paddy crop during the fag-end of the monsoon.

It is ADT- 43 variety, local farmers term it as ‘Super Ponni,’ which is widely cultivated on an area of about 1,000 acres spread over different clusters in the hills.

Farmers said the variety was suitable for the gradient lands on the hills.

“Water should not be stagnant in fields as stagnation leads to decay of the crop,” the farmers said.

T. Ponnusamy, a farmer of Top Sengattupatti, said paddy cultivation was not a commercial activity for the farmers but it was raised for personal consumption. The duration of the crop was about 115 days and the average yield per acre was about 35 bags of 60 kg each.

Agriculture Department officials said that paddy cultivation has been brisk for the past few weeks not only on the hills but also at the foot of Pachamalai.

Farmers with small land-holdings cultivated the variety and the department recommended ADT-43 which can be raised on the slopes.

Paddy farmers were spread over different villages on the hills indicating that paddy was not a major crop. Tribal farmers largely relied on tapioca as it fetched adequate returns. However, the Agriculture Department supplied adequate fertiliser and seeds to the farmers.

A visit to about 20 villages on the hills revealed that paddy cultivation was a mixed bag in these clusters. While a section of farmers was transplanting nurseries, harvest of the ADT 43 was brisk in other areas.

Farmers said the cultivation depended on the availability of water realised during the monsoon.

While farmers in the upper reaches of the hills, who could adequately realise storm water, had raised the crop during 'Thai' pattam, close to 'Pongal' festival, farmers in the downstream, who could harvest water belatedly, were transplanting nurseries.

Farmers, who had completed harvest, complained of their difficulty in thrashing the paddy due to the absence of thrashing floor.

"We use paddy fields during the post-harvest period for thrashing the paddy," says one of the farmers, Nallathangal.

S. Suresh Kumar, Assistant General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, said that the NABARD had been setting up thrashing floors in rural areas as part of infrastructure development.

As far as Pachamalai was concerned, there was not adequate vacant land which could be converted into thrashing floor. Further, the fields were scattered all over the hills.

However, the possibility of setting up the thrashing floor would be studied in course of time, official source told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

Encourage ryots to take up organic farming: Collector

Collector D. Ronald Rose has directed the officials to encourage farmers to take up organic farming.

Presiding over a review meeting held here on Tuesday, Mr. Ronald said that organic farming would help not only farmers but also consumers. “The training was already imparted for agriculture officers by Krishi Vignana Kendra in organic farming. In turn, they have to train farmers and we have to cover at least 100 hectares from each mandal without fail,” said Mr. Ronald.

Informing that the farmers need to be identified by the department, the Collector said that the training for them should commence from May 15 and farmers need to be encouraged to go for soyabean and red gram instead of cotton.

Assistant Collector Krishna Aditya, Joint Director (Agriculture) Ms Madhavi Latha, Joint Director (Animal Husbandry) Dr Lakshma Reddy among others attended the meeting.

Lime farming the in-thing in western delta

Low water requirement and high returns a major attraction

: Large swathes of Krishna Western Delta are being swept by a silent horticultural revolution and lime has become the new flavour of the season.

Farmers of Krishna Western Delta have never shied away from experimenting with cropping patterns. After initiating a maize revolution to tide over the water scarcity conditions, farmers have now switched to lime farming in a big way to overcome the problems of water scarcity, shortage of labour and high cost of fertilizers.

Farmers have opted for Lime which is a safe bet due to higher yield and better price even during the off season. Lime plantations are spread over 6,000 acres in KWD and the acreage has been steadily increasing.

“Cultivation of lime is giving us good returns. If the rates are about Rs.1,600-Rs.1,800 per bag during the start of season, even in off season we

get a rate of Rs.800-Rs.900. The availability of Lime seedlings at nurseries in Vejudla is also one of the factors helping us. Some of us are even opting for contract farming, where we get a sapling and also one spell of watering,” said Ch. Venkat Reddy, a farmer from Valiveru.

Lime has become the new flavour for a variety of reasons. Being a non-water intensive plant, it does not require much farm labour. Even the cost of fertiliser is less when compared to other crops.

Intercropping

The advantage with lime is, farmers would have the option of intercropping and some of them have opted for vegetable crops in the intervening period.

But the flip side of the story is most farmers have been cheated by middle men during the trading. A long pending demand of farmers to bring in electronic weighing machine has not been heeded so far.

Complaints of corruption reek at the Agricultural Market Yard in Tenali where farmers complained that they were forced to pay a commission of 10 per cent and further denied any transaction slip.

“The Agricultural Marketing Department had not even bothered to implement the orders of District Consumer Forum to put in place electronic weighing machine,” said an agitated farmer Kothapalli Satyam.

FDI in farm sector jumps to Rs. 553 crores in Apr-Feb FY16

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture sector increased to Rs. 553.14 crore during the first eleven months of 2015-16, the government said today.

“The FDI inflow from April 2015 to February 2016 is Rs. 553.14 crore,” Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya said in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

This is much higher than Rs. 365.31 crore in the entire 2014-15 fiscal, as per the data placed before the Lower House.

FDI in farm sector stood at Rs. 559.66 crore in 2013-14 and Rs. 875.90 crore in 2012-13, the data showed.

FDI is permitted up to 100 per cent under automatic route in specified activities of agriculture and allied activities.

Also, 100 per cent FDI is allowed in plantation sector namely tea, coffee, rubber, cardamom, palm oil tree and olive oil tree.

Vet varsity to help farmers combat fodder scarcity



Cheaper alternative: Students and workers preparing fortified fodder on the KVAFSU campus in Bidar.

Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University (KVAFSU) is working on a project to help farmers combat fodder scarcity during drought and summer months.

Farmers find it difficult to rear cattle and sheep as green grass is not available round the year. Only big farmers manage to buy oil cakes and other nutritious fodder for the dry months. Small farmers or landless cattle rearers let their animals go around the village to graze shrubs or eat food waste. Bidar-based KVAFSU wants to help such farmers by introducing alternative fodder products.

“We are focusing on bringing out fodder products that are cheaper, can be preserved without refrigeration for a year, and can be prepared in the farmer’s backyard,” C. Renuka Prasad, Vice-Chancellor, said.

The project involves two major components, research and standardisation, and training farmers, he said.

One method that has been perfected is making feed bricks using farm waste and nutritional binding materials such as jaggery, molasses and gram flour. “In districts such as Bidar where cash crops like sugarcane are grown on a large scale, a lot of farm waste is generated during harvest season. Stem and tops of sugarcane is left in the field and set on fire before the next sowing. We will train farmers in feed-brick making,” he said.

Researchers in the Department of Nutrition T. Thirumalesh and Ramachandra Sangam are leading the other three projects of developing alternative fodder. Of these, trials on developing fortified fodder using sugarcane bagasse and banana waste are completed and the methods have been standardised. A pilot on using multiple farm waste to generate fodder pellets is in the final stages.

“Fortified fodder lasts for months and costs a portion of the fodder that can be bought in the market,” said Prof. Thirumalesh.

“These are simple techniques that can be replicated by farmers with minimal training and at low cost. They will be widely publicised,” said Prof. Sangam.

Production of milk, quality take a hit

Decline in quantity: While the KMF procured an average 60.5 lakh litres of milk a day in April 2015, the procurement has come down to about 58 lakh litres a day this April.

Procurement in the State has fallen by 2 lakh litres a day compared to April 2015

High temperature across the State has affected milk production, with Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) reporting reduced milk procurement in April. Not only production but even the quality of milk has been affected by the heat.

While the KMF procured an average 60.5 lakh litres of milk a day in April 2015, the procurement has come down to about 58 lakh litres a day this April.



With temperature ranging between 37 degrees Celsius and 42 degrees Celsius in major milk producing districts, including Kolar, Mandya, Bengaluru and Mysuru, production has been affected and fat content in the milk has declined, KMF chairman P. Nagaraju told *The Hindu* .

“We should also calculate the decline in terms of negative growth. On an average, we are growing around 15 per cent, and ideally, we should have had procurement in range of 65 to 67 lakh litres a day. However, the procurement is now down to around 58 lakh,” he added. The mixed breeds of HF and jersey cows tend to be affected because of the heat and it reflects on the quality and quantum of milk produced during summer, he said, and added that the heat had been particularly harsh in the past few weeks.

Meanwhile, the federation is also looking at reducing the price of the cattle feed it manufactures and sells to farmers, and a decision will be taken at the board meeting.

Incidentally, last year, the KMF struggled to handle a glut situation when procurement touched 75 lakh litres a day, against the demand of about 46 litres. Most of the excess milk had to be converted to skimmed milk powder.

Farmers suffer as yield comes down

“Adult cattle require at least 15 kg of green fodder every day, and green grass is an important component to get good yield from cows,” said Mahadevamma of Bhootana Hosuru in Mandya district who has two cows. According to her, she was supplying around 30 litres of milk a day till February. Now, the cows are yielding 25 litres a day.

The story of P. Naveen Kumar of Pathakote village in Srinivasapur taluk of Kolar district is no different from that of Ms. Mahdevamma’s. “I used to supply about 20 litres of milk a day to the society. But now it has come down to 10 litres,” he said. “The condition of many other small dairy farmers here is similar,” he said.

Green fodder shortage

As the temperature has been rising, rural households dependent on dairy farming for livelihood are increasingly seeing their income coming down, with yield and quality of milk on the decline. Shortage of green fodder and water has affected the fortunes of dairy farmers in the State, especially in the districts of Kolar, Chickballapur and Mandya.

While the milk production has come down, the heat has affected the quality of milk. Collection centres are receiving milk that do not conform to the solids-not-fat (SNF) standards, which in turn has been affecting the income of farmers. Officials in Kolar-Chickballapur Milk Union Ltd. admitted that there has been a decline in the quality of milk supplied by the farmers to the union through cooperative societies, and about 25 per cent of the total milk procured fall in this category.

“Small farmers have been badly affected by the soaring temperature. Those who were unable to feed green fodder can get only half the quantity of milk they used to get under normal conditions,” said P.R. Suryanarayan, district unit president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha.

Kadaluru Ramakrishna, chairman of Mandya Milk Manufacturers Union Ltd., said, “Scarcity of green fodder, which was easily available till February, is the primary reason for the drop in procurement.”

Collecting honey to improve their lot

Apiculture is one of the vocations thrown open to 30 tribal farmers of Pachamalai



A group of farmers demonstrating the honey collection kit at Pachamalai.—
Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

The Integrated Tribal Development Programme being implemented by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in Pachamalai, about 90 km from here, has been ensuring economic uplift of poor landless labourers.

A number of vocations have been introduced for their benefit as per their needs, interest and taste. Many tribal persons have responded positively. Apiculture is one of the vocations thrown open to them and as many as 30 labourers have been identified for the beekeeping activity.

Three honey collection boxes and a grant of Rs.10,000 have been given to each beneficiary. The boxes were purchased at Madurai and training was imparted to them. The first harvest of honey was realised about a week ago by the landless labourers. There has been a growing demand for quality honey being collected on the Pachamalai,” says S. Murugesan, Programme Manager of The Hand in Hand, a non-governmental organisation, implementing the scheme on the hills.

S. Lingeswararn, Agriculture Officer and P. Pazhanisamy, Assistant Agriculture Officer, said that the tribal beneficiaries would harvest one litre (an average). The maiden harvest needed more time – up to 45 days but it needed just 20 to 25 days for the second and subsequent harvest, said M. Mani, community organiser, referring to the more time needed by bees to identify and settle down at the boxes for depositing the honey. The price per litre stood at Rs.800.

Based on the success of the apiculture, a large number of labourers would be trained in this vocation in course of time. The scheme is being implemented in 30 villages spread over the Salem and Tiruchi revenue districts.

They explained the procedure to be followed for harvesting the honey. “A day-long training was organised in which the beneficiaries were advised to the dos and don’ts of the vocation. Normally, the boxes should be opened for harvest under diffused sunlight.

“Any attempt to open the box during broad daylight will result in the scattering of the honey and harmful effects as the insects will start biting,” they said.

The beneficiaries said they were confident of realising adequate profit through the vocation. They had to keep extra care to protect the boxes from rodent menace. Raju, one of the beneficiary, said the bees collected the honey within a radius of two km from his house.

Underutilised fruits despite high demand

‘Fruit crops of the future’, such as rambutan, longan, litchi, avocado, dragon fruit, and velvet apple, which have pharmaceutical and nutraceutical values, are underutilised in the country. The symposium will focus on promoting these crops by creating awareness among farmers on their export potential. An exhibition of prominent fruits, including the underutilised ones and those varieties developed by the IIHR, is also being held for the benefit of farmers.

Everything can wait, not Indian mangoes: Envoy



Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Cho Hyun has said that he would resolve the mango import issue with India at the time of negotiations for upgrading the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

“All else can wait but not Indian mangoes,” said the South Korean envoy. “The national fruit of India, Mango, how much I enjoy that, are not imported into Korea after attempts some seven years ago,” said Mr. Hyun, speaking at the Observer Research Foundation on Tuesday.

“I am going to resolve this issue at the time of the negotiations for upgrading CEPA,” he said.

Terming the CEPA between the two countries “not a solid ground for take-off”, Mr. Hyun said that the countries were going to launch negotiations for upgrading it in June.

A drought of action



Safeguard: “It is arguable that the PDS is even more important than MGNREGS as a tool of drought relief.” In Beed district in Maharashtra.

India has a lasting infrastructure of public support that can, in principle, be expanded in drought years to provide relief. But business as usual seems to be the motto

Droughts in India used to be times of frantic relief activity. Large-scale public works were organised, often employing more than 1,00,000 workers in a single district. Food distribution was arranged for destitute persons who were unable to work.

Arrangements were also made for debt relief, cattle camps, water supply and more. The drought relief system was best developed in the western States of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, but the basic framework was much the same elsewhere even if its implementation often fell short.

This year, nothing like the same sense of urgency can be observed, despite 256 districts being declared drought-affected. To some extent, of course, people’s ability to withstand drought on their own has increased: incomes have risen, the rural economy is more diversified, and water supply facilities have improved.

Also, a semblance of social security system has emerged in rural India, with permanent income support measures such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), the Public Distribution

System (PDS), midday meals and social security pensions. This also reduces people's dependence on special relief measures in drought years.

None of this, however, obviates the need for active intervention in a drought situation. Despite rapid economic growth and some entitlements, the rural poor in India continue to live in conditions of appalling deprivation and insecurity.

And in some respects, notably water scarcity, the impact of drought may be worse than before. Recent reports from Bundelkhand and elsewhere confirm that without emergency support, drought continues to plunge millions of people into intolerable hardship.

To some extent, the nature of the required interventions has changed. The simplest way of preventing starvation in a drought situation today is to intensify the permanent income support measures mentioned earlier, for instance by expanding employment under MGNREGS, providing special food rations under the PDS, and arranging for improved school meals. That may not be enough, but it would be a good start.

The MGNREGS funds crunch

There are, however, no sign of this happening. According to official data, the MGNREGS generated 230 crore person-days of work in 2015-16. This essentially restored MGNREGS employment generation to the level it had reached before crashing to 166 crore person-days in 2014-15, when a new government took charge at the Centre.

However, the Finance Minister had not provided for this recovery. The result was a mountain of arrears at the end of 2015-16 — more than Rs.12,000 crore. Yet the Finance Minister continued the unspoken policy (initiated by the previous government) of keeping the MGNREGS budget more or less constant in money terms year after year.

If last year's employment level is to be maintained this year, the Central government would need to spend at least Rs. 50,000 crore, rising to more than Rs. 60,000 crore if arrears are to be cleared — a legal obligation since MGNREGS workers have a right to payment within 15 days. Yet the allocation for MGNREGS in this year's Budget is only Rs. 38,500 crore.

Unless the Central government accepts the need for a large injection of funds, MGNREGS employment is all set to contract again, or wage payments will be postponed — both would be a disaster in a drought year as well as a violation of people’s entitlements under the law.

Slipping up on food security

It is arguable that the PDS is even more important than MGNREGS as a tool of drought relief. Monthly food rations under the PDS are more regular and predictable than MGNREGS work.

They also cover a much larger fraction of the rural population — 75 per cent under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). A well-managed PDS is a major safeguard against hunger and starvation.

It is no accident that the worst reports of food deprivation come from Uttar Pradesh, which is nowhere near implementing the NFSA. No Indian State has more to gain than U.P. from the NFSA.

Before the Act came into force, barely one-fourth of the rural population in U.P. benefited from the PDS under the “below poverty line” (BPL) category. The rest received nothing as the “above poverty line” (APL) quota was routinely sold in the open market by corrupt middlemen.

Further, even BPL cards were often in the wrong hands. The NFSA is a chance for the government of U.P. to clean up this mess and cover 80 per cent of the rural population under an improved PDS, as many of the poorer States have already done to a large extent.

Unfortunately, recent reports on the status of the NFSA in U.P. are most alarming.

Rapid investigations conducted recently in Moradabad, Rae Bareli and Lucknow districts (the last one just 23 km from the State Assembly) all came to the same conclusion: NFSA ration cards are yet to be distributed, many people are not even aware of the Act, and the same flawed system continues much as before.

So much for Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav's upbeat statement (made twice, on record, on April 7, 2016) that "we have implemented the Right to Food Act".

One wonders whether he knows that elections are coming up next year in U.P., and whether he thinks that this is the way to win them. Opposition parties, it seems, are equally blind to the situation.

In other States, the status of the NFSA varies a great deal, from dismal (e.g. in Rajasthan) to reasonably promising (in many of the eastern States). Alas, these developments are receiving very little attention.

Few issues are more important at this time than the successful roll-out of the NFSA, yet it seems to be off the Central government's radar.

The Finance Minister's recent Budget speech, for instance, did not make a single reference to it, or for that matter to nutrition in general. In fact, the Central government (led by the Prime Minister's Office) is making things worse by pushing for Aadhaar-based biometric authentication of PDS beneficiaries.

This wholly inappropriate technology has already caused havoc in Rajasthan, and is all set to disrupt the PDS across the country if the Central government has its way.

For the first time, India has a lasting infrastructure of public support that can, in principle, be expanded in drought years to prevent hunger and starvation. Business as usual, however, seems to be the motto.

The price is paid by millions of people who are not just exposed to intense hardship but also losing valuable human and physical capital, condemning them to further poverty in the future.

Jean Drèze is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University.

Maharashtra dams built to serve sugar industry, not farmers: Radha Mohan Singh

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh claimed now the government has decided to provide the funds to the states "within 24 hours" of the budget being cleared.



MAHA WATER CRISIS: Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh attacking erstwhile Congress-led governments alleging that dams were built in Maharashtra to serve the sugar industry and not the farmers. (Source: Express Photo by Javed Raja)

A question in Lok Sabha on drought on Tuesday led to a war of words between the treasury and opposition benches, with Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh attacking erstwhile Congress-led governments alleging that dams were built in Maharashtra to serve the sugar industry and not the farmers.

When Singh was replying to a supplementary by a Shiv Sena member during Question Hour on whether government will extend relief to the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra for drought, some Congress members asked whether the relief would be extended.

An agitated Singh shot back, telling Congress members to have the “patience and courage” to listen to his reply. He alleged that dams were constructed in Maharashtra to serve the interests of the sugar industry and not the farmers.

“I demand a discussion on Maharashtra drought so that facts can come to light,” he said. There was another round of heated exchange when the Minister said, in an apparent reference to UPA rule, that for the past several years, states were getting funds for MNREGA scheme very late, often in the months of July-August.

He claimed now the government has decided to provide the funds to the states “within 24 hours” of the budget being cleared. Responding to a question on investment needed to complete irrigation-related projects, he said 89 such projects are pending for the past 20 years. Now, the government has decided to complete some of them, he added.

Now, Punjab wants to import ‘better’ Gir bull semen from Brazil

Dairy farmers blast govt move, call it ridiculous



The Brazilian Gir; The Indian Gir. (Express Photo)

Following the 10-day tour by Punjab officials to Brazil to study its indigenous cow breed ‘Gir’, the state government has now decided to import

high quality Gir bull semen from the South American country. The move has, however, come under severe criticism from dairy farmers.

A six-member delegation, including two dairy farmers, had gone to Brazil on the directions of Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal. The government has been focussing on improving and promoting indigenous breeds in Punjab.

Punjab's dairy farmers, however, blasted the government's latest move.

“This is ridiculous. They are misleading the dairy farmers already trapped in debt,” said Daljit Singh, president of Progressive Dairy Farmers Association, the largest association of dairy farmers in Punjab.

“First CM Parkash Singh Badal asked us to adopt Holstein Friesians (HF) cross breeds. We did so and now we have attained such expertise that farmers from Gujarat are coming to Punjab to buy them. The cows give 6,000 litres of milk per lactation compared to 2,000-2,500 litres of indigenous breeds like Sahiwal and even Gir.

Now, when it is time for farmers to earn profits from HF, government is trying to lure them with other subsidies. CM is now on an entirely different track of promoting indigenous cattle. Even then, they had failed to improve our own Sahiwal and are now running after Gir.”

Farmers also claimed that Gujarat itself had high quality Gir cows and what's more, it is native to that state too.

The focus of the Brazil tour was on Indian indigenous breeds including Gir, Tharpakar and Kankrej whose germplasm were imported by Brazil decades ago. It is now claimed that Brazil had achieved greater success with the breeds with higher milk yield and better animal health.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Dr H S Sandha, director animal husbandry Punjab, said, “We visited various dairy farms in Brazil and noticed that they had fewer animals but larger grazing areas.

Their milk productivity of Gir cattle is double than ours. So, we have decided to import high quality Gir bulls semen from Brazil. We will be working on improving Gir breed here and propagating it among farmers.”

Gir is neither suitable for Punjab nor better than Sahiwal but if at all government wants to experiment, Gujarat should be the first stop not Brazil, said Sukhdev Singh, director of Progressive Dairy Farmers Solutions from Mohali.

“The claim that Gir in Brazil is giving 45 to 55 litres of milk a day is false. It is only the elite animals that will come close to giving such figures. Else, the Gir gives only 18 to 22 litres, which is even less than our Sahiwal.

But if at all the government wanted to experiment, it should get semen from Gujarat. That is from where Brazil took and developed it. It will be extremely stupid if Punjab goes to Brazil, not Gujarat for Gir semen,” he added.

Maharashtra govt reaches out, announces new legislation to control prices of pulses, more sops for farmers

Reaching out to the middle class, the Cabinet adopted a draft legislation aimed at regulating and capping prices of pulses, which have witnessed a spike in recent days.



The Cabinet approved a Rs 5,000-crore loan restructuring plan for farmers whose kharif crops were ravaged by drought in 2015-16.

In what is being seen as an attempt to blunt the Opposition's plan of projecting unrest among certain sections as signs of the government's dipping popularity, the ruling BJP in Maharashtra unveiled several populist measures on Wednesday.

Reaching out to the middle class, the Cabinet adopted a draft legislation aimed at regulating and capping prices of pulses, which have witnessed a spike in recent days.

Further, with the Opposition targeting it over its failure to rein in farm distress triggered by drought, the government doled out fresh sops for the farm sector.

The Cabinet approved a Rs 5,000-crore loan restructuring plan for farmers whose kharif crops were ravaged by drought in 2015-16.

Cooperatives Minister Chandrakant Patil said that 48.41 lakh farmers had availed loans totalling Rs 29,680 crore from lending institutions for kharif cultivation in 15-16.

“It has now been found that farmers in 27,609 drought-hit villages have run into loan arrears worth Rs 5,000 crore. These farmers would not have been eligible for availing a new loan in ‘16-17 unless the arrears were paid off.

So the Cabinet decided to restructure the repayment schedule for these loans, which will now be spread over five years.

The state will bear the whole interest amount due in the first year for such loans, whereas for the remaining four years, 50 per cent of the interest will be paid by the state,” Patil said.

Simultaneously, the government also advanced loan repayment schedule for the Rs 3,503-crore loans availed by 5.33 lakh farmers in 2014-15, which were similarly reconstructed last year.

Despite the state's tight financial position, the government has also decided to approach the Reserve Bank of India to restructure loans worth Rs 2,439 crore, availed by farmers in 2012-13 and 2014-15.

Meanwhile, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Girish Bapat claimed that Maharashtra was the country's first state to adopt a price control mechanism for pulses.

Following the Cabinet nod, Bapat said the draft legislation would be sent to the Centre for Presidential assent. "Once the assent comes, a notification for its implementation would be brought out. Rules of business will be readied before that," he said.

The Devendra Fadnavis government had come under criticism when tur dal prices shot up to Rs 200 per kg last October. With drought adversely impacting production of pulses this year too, there has been a hike in retail tur dal prices recently.

Bapat said the draft legislation would apply to the sale of tur dal, black gram, green gram, lentils, beans, etc, across the state. But the capping rate would vary for different areas, since transportation costs and local factors would have to be taken into account, he said.

Bapat also said the cap will be different for producers of pulses and for those involved in its trade.

"The government would fix the prices taking into account the availability of pulses, demand and supply, among other factors," he said. Rates once fixed will be applicable for a maximum of six months.

To control an artificial spike in prices, the draft legislation makes it mandatory for producers and dealers to record sale by providing authentic receipts to the buyers.

Bapat also said that the government was mulling a plan of asking producers and traders to display the maximum retail price on the sale product itself, but said this was challenging as dal was often sold loose.

Provisions of penalising and imprisonment of up to one year for those violating norms have been made, Bapat said. Senior government sources, however, conceded that till the Act is implemented, the government will have to rely on inspection drives to check hoarding and improve supplies as its main tool to control prices.

“Instructions have been issued to district collectorates and the District Supply Officers (DSOs) to be vigilant and check hoarding of pulses,” a senior official said.

Stocking limits imposed for tur dal by the Centre are in force till September 30, 2016. Bapat also informed that discussion was on in the state and the Centre over the feasibility of announcing fixed remunerative prices for tur dal.

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government has written to the Centre for allotment of 2.12 lakh quintal of tur dal purchased by the Food Corporation of India and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited from farmers in Maharashtra for buffer stock.

Punjab’s First Kisan Vikas Chamber in Mohali: Soon, a platform for farmers to interact with experts from different fields

To be established on the lines of the Commerce and Industries Chamber, the kisan chamber will offer farmers the latest updates on farming techniques.



THE PUNJAB government will set up Kisan Vikas Chamber, first of its kind in the state, in the city. Two acres of land has been allotted for the chamber and the state government has sanctioned Rs 20 crore for its construction.

To be established on the lines of the Commerce and Industries Chamber, the kisan chamber will offer farmers the latest updates on farming techniques.

Sources in the district administration say that Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal will lay foundation stone of the chamber on April 30. The chamber will address problems of the farmers and facilitate their meeting with experts who will update them about the latest farming techniques.

The building of the chamber, sources say, will have an auditorium for conducting seminars by experts. It will also have small committee rooms for discussions by small groups of experts and farmers from all the allied sectors like poultry, piggery, dairy and beekeeping.

Apart from this, the building will have a library, a canteen and rooms for routine office work. Kulwant Singh, who was instrumental in getting the ambitious project approved, says that they have been making efforts to set up the chamber for long and now finally the state government has allotted the land and grant which will make their dream a reality.

A progressive farmer from Hoshiarpur district, Kulwant Singh says that they have been working for long in the areas where the farmers have been committing suicide.

They felt the need for setting up a chamber where the farmers could be sensitised to crop diversification and modern techniques in farming. He says that the Kisan Vikas Chamber will work on the lines of chambers meant for industry where experts will be invited for lectures on issues concerning farming.

The chairman of the Punjab Farmer's Commission, Dr G S Kalkat, has been appointed as patron of the chamber. "We are going to set up the chamber. It will be beneficial for the farmers of the state," says Dr Kalkat.

21L drought-hit farmers in Maha to get time to repay loans

In a move that may provide relief to 21 lakh debt-ridden farmers tackling severe drought, the state government on Tuesday decided to restructure the crop loans taken by farmers in 26,670 drought-hit villages in Maharashtra.

While the government said it would restructure loans amounting to Rs11,000 crore, sources said the claim might be contentious.

Restructuring a loan involves extending the duration of repayment, which, in this case, will be extended from one year to five years.

This will give the farmers, especially who had taken heavy loans last year and the due date for which is May 30, time extending up to five years.

It will also ensure banks don't turn away the farmers by terming them 'ineligible', when they apply for fresh crop loans for the sowing season starting in June.

According to government estimates, the loans to be restructured include last year's crop loans amounting to Rs5,000 crore and Rs3,503 crore loans taken for the 2014 kharif sowing season.

The government also plans to ask the Reserve Bank of India to restructure Rs2,438 crore worth of outstanding loans taken by 4.4 lakh farmers from drought-hit villages in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

The state plans to pay Rs1,272 crore over the next five years as interest on last year's loans, while it will pay Rs300 crore as interest towards loans taken in 2014.

It hasn't yet drawn up an estimate of how much the restructuring of loans taken in 2012-13 and 2013-14 loans would cost the exchequer.

The state hopes the move, along with the good monsoon predicted this year, will help stem the agrarian crisis and kickstart the rural agriculture-based economy.

Chandrakant Patil, state cooperation minister, said, “Being held ineligible for a loan jeopardises a farmer’s chance of being able to cultivate crops for the coming sowing season.

The government will cover loans borrowed from nationalized and district co-operative banks last year and some part of the loans borrowed in 2014 too.

As the drought has reduced the spending power of farmers, they would have defaulted on the loans. The restructuring will help them take fresh loans this year.”

The state government will pay the first installment of these loans this year at 12% interest and will pay 6% interest from the second year, with an equal amount to be paid by the farmer.

Patil said the state was positive of waiving off farm loans, but not yet. “This issue has been constantly discussed and the CM has clarified that such a step didn’t help in stemming suicides in the past.

We need to make the farmer self-reliant. We will waive off loans but only after putting the farmer in a better position,” he said.

The immediate impact will be felt by drought-hit farmers who had taken heavy loans last year, with the government extending the duration of the repayment period, about to end by May 30, by five years.

This would give farmers more time to make the repayment, as large sections of farmers have suffered crop losses due to the paucity of rainfall in these areas.

More importantly, this would ensure that banks don’t turn away these farmers from fresh crop loans for the sowing season starting in June.

“This will cover loans borrowed from nationalized and district co-operative banks last year and some part of the loans borrowed in 2014 as well.

Since the drought has reduced the spending power of farmers, they would have defaulted on these loans. Hence, this restructuring will help them take fresh loans this year,” he said.

The State government will pay the first installment of these loans this year at 12 per cent interest and from the second year onwards, will pay 6 per cent interest with an equal amount to be paid by the farmer.

Patil also said that the State government was positive of waiving off farmer loans, but not yet.

“This issue has been constantly discussed and the CM has clarified that such a step didn’t help in stemming suicides. Hence, we need to make the farmer self-reliant by being able to be independent enough to borrow again.

We will waive off loans but only after enabling the farmer better,” he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

‘El Nino in final phase, monsoon-friendly La Nina likely to set in by September’

The monster 2015-16 El Nino may be entering its last stages, and its alter ego La Nina may begin to establish by September, according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

The agency sees a 50 per cent chance of La Nina emerging in the East Equatorial Pacific, prompting it to go into ‘La Nina watch’ mode.

Threshold ‘Nina’

Six of eight international climate models suggest that the tropical Pacific Ocean will return to ‘neutral’ levels during May. Of them, seven indicate that La Nina thresholds may emerge by September.

This is despite individual model outlooks showing a large spread between neutral and La Nina scenarios, the Australian agency said. The emerging snippets of information with regard to changing dynamics in the Equatorial Pacific are good news for the Indian monsoon.

La Nina has been associated with a successful Indian monsoon though with exceptions; they do not strictly have a direct cause-effect relationship.

Overall build-up in India towards May/June as evidenced in the sustained heating of the land also suggests that the ground is being prepared for a good monsoon this year.

Performance guarantee

Because, despite all its devastating impact on lives and livelihoods, the searing heat and the heat waves during April, May and June play a big role in the guaranteed performance of the monsoon.

The extent to which the plains heat up determines how far the atmospheric pressure can climb down over North India, setting up an ideal gradient from the South-West (around Kerala). The moisture-laden monsoon winds ride this pressure gradient to blow in with full force into the land and drain down its moisture in the form of heavy rain.

An outlook by India Met Department on Tuesday suggested that the ‘top heat’ driven by heat waves to severe heat waves may begin to shift to North-West India from this weekend itself. This does not mean any respite for East India, which may witness mercury peaking to new highs in the days to come.

During the 24 hours ending on Tuesday morning, Titlagarh in Odisha, the hottest place for days together, saw the maximum temperature climb down to 46 deg Celsius from 48.5 deg Celsius the previous day.

Heating of West

The India Met forecast said that dust storms may continue to hold down mercury over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on Tuesday.

But heat wave conditions are forecast to develop from Wednesday over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh along with Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana and Rayalaseema.

According to the US National Centre for Environmental Prediction, heating may extend to Rajasthan during the week ending May 4 with the extreme developing to the North-West of the State.

Maharashtra Cabinet approves draft Bill regulating pulse prices

In order to control exorbitant prices of pulses such as pigeon pea and bengal gram in Maharashtra, the State government on Tuesday decided to make changes in the law, which will enable it to set the prices at the retail level.

Traders and retailers who will sell the pulses above the fixed prices will face prosecution, which will include a prison term and fine. The imprisonment could range from three to 12 months.

According to a press statement issued by the Chief Minister's office, a decision to amend the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 was taken at a meeting of the State Cabinet.

Pricing strategy

The price control would be applicable for whole and broken pulses.

The State government will work out differential pricing strategy for areas falling under metropolitan, district and taluk areas.

The State government will soon approach the Centre for getting various clearances before promulgating the law, the statement said. Reacting to the development, Chairman, Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC), Latur, Lalit Shah said that fixing of prices by the State government will impact the income of the farmers.

May hit farmers

“ If selling prices are controlled then the prices at which the traders buy pulses from farmers will dip. Ideally, the farmers should receive some subsidy for cultivating pulses, so that they sell their produce at a lower rate,” he said.

The prices in Latur APMC are the market barometer for pulses across the country.

Its importance can be gauged by the fact that even the Prime Minister's Office monitors the price movement in the APMC.

A senior Maharashtra government official said that the prices of imported pulses will also be controlled by the State government.

It will be compulsory for retailers to issue a receipt to the consumers so that prices above the fixed rate could be caught immediately.

Pulses in bear grip



Pulse seeds and pulses in Indore mandis continued to trade lower with chana (kanta) being quoted at ₹5,625-50 a quintal, while chana (desi) ruled at ₹5,550.

Chana dal (average) was at ₹6,800-6,900, chana dal (medium) at ₹7,000-7,100, while chana dal (bold) ruled at ₹7,200-7,400.

Amid subdued demand and buying dollar chana traded low with its prices in Indore mandis at ₹8,500-9,200 a quintal.

Arrival was recorded at 3,500 bags. In container, dollar chana (42/44 count) traded at ₹11,500; 44/46 count at ₹10,000; 58/60 count at ₹9,000, while dollar chana (60/62 count) ruled at ₹8,900.

Business Standard

FDI in farm sector jumps to Rs 553 crore in April-February FY16

This is much higher than Rs 365.31 crore in the entire 2014-15 fiscal, according to the data placed before the Lower House



Foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture sector increased to Rs 553.14 crore during the first eleven months of 2015-16, the government said on Tuesday.

"The FDI inflow from April 2015 to February 2016 is Rs 553.14 crore," Minister of State for Agriculture Mohanbhai Kundariya said in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

This is much higher than Rs 365.31 crore in the entire 2014-15 fiscal, according to the data placed before the Lower House.

FDI in farm sector stood at Rs 559.66 crore in 2013-14 and Rs 875.90 crore in 2012-13, the data showed.

FDI is permitted up to 100% under automatic route in specified activities of agriculture and allied activities. Also, 100% FDI is allowed in plantation sector namely tea, coffee, rubber, cardamom, palm oil tree and olive oil tree.

Maharashtra dams built to serve sugar industry, not farmers : Agriculture minister

He claimed now the govt has decided to provide funds to states 'within 24 hours' of budget being cleared



Water is stored in a well after Central Railway water train arrived at drought affected Latur district, Maharashtra

A question in Lok Sabha on drought Tuesday led to a war of words between the treasury and opposition benches, with Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh attacking erstwhile Congress-led governments alleging that dams were built in Maharashtra to serve the sugar industry and not the farmers.

When Singh was replying to a supplementary by a Shiv Sena member during Question Hour on whether government will extend relief to the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra for drought, some Congress members asked whether the relief would be extended.

An agitated Singh shot back, telling Congress members to have the "patience and courage" to listen to his reply.

He alleged that dams were constructed in Maharashtra to serve the interests of the sugar industry and not the farmers.

"I demand a discussion on Maharashtra drought so that facts can come to light," he said.

There was another round of heated exchange when the Minister said, in an apparent reference to UPA rule, that for the past several years, states were getting funds for MNREGA scheme very late, often in the months of July-August.

He claimed now the government has decided to provide the funds to the states "within 24 hours" of the budget being cleared.

Responding to a question on investment needed to complete irrigation-related projects, he said 89 such projects are pending for the past 20 years. Now, the government has decided to complete some of them, he added.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

5-day management development programme starts at Punjab Agricultural University

A five-day Management Development Programme on "Strategies for Enhancing the Performance of Research Managers of Punjab Agricultural University (PAU)" began in the University on Tuesday.

The Heads of various departments of PAU are participating in the programme, jointly organized by the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM), Hyderabad and Education Technology Cell, PAU.

On the first day, the Programme Director, RVS Rao delivered a talk on "Leadership Effectiveness" while the former director of National Research Centre on Seed Spices (Ajmer), MM Anwer spoke on "Motivation" and "Leadership in Research."

In her inaugural remarks, the chief Gguest, Neelam Grewal, dean, postgraduate studies, said, "This programme is a good source of knowledge in the domain of management."

The main aim of conducting this programme on the PAU campus is to give uniform treatment to the agricultural scientists and improve their managerial and leadership skills, enabling them to compete in national and international arenas, she stated.

In his talk on "Motivation," Anwer threw light on determinants of behavior in terms of physical, social, cultural and organizational. He explained Maslow's model of needs arranged in a hierarchal way - esteem, social, safety and physiological.

Dwelling on the needs of different classes, he told that physical needs comprise food, thirst, sleep and health whereas safety needs comprise security, safety, protection, comfort and peace.

The social needs refer to acceptance, group participation and feeling of belonging while self-needs refer to recognition, prestige, confidence, leadership, competence and success, he added. The self-actualization needs refer to self-fulfillment of potential, intellectual curiosity and fulfillment, he said.

Bareilly farmer cultivates saffron crop but finds no buyer

After seven months of dedication and hard work, a farmer in Narsua Bahrpura village under Baheri tehsil of Bareilly district managed to produce saffron crop here in spite of unfavourable climate and topography.

Though the crop is ready, he has not been able to find a single buyer as the quality of the crop, according to experts, is not as good as that from Kashmir.

"Believing that a saffron crop will give a high return, I decided to sow it in my field. I got the idea after I read about Jalaluddin Khan, another farmer in an Aligarh village, who cultivated the same crop.

Jalaluddin had got the American hybrid seeds from a friend whose relative had got it from Kashmir," said Israil Khan (47) who purchased 100 grams of American hybrid seeds of saffron for Rs 5,000 from Jalaluddin.

Though Israil knew that there is huge difference in the climates and topography of Kashmir and Baheri, he decided to accept the challenge and cultivate saffron. He bought the seeds in the first week of October last year and sowed them around mid-October.

"As the crop needs less water and insects caused no damage to it, I spend another Rs 2,000 in producing the crop. However, the heavy rains of February damaged a lot of the harvest. I had cultivated saffron for the first time and didn't know rain would affect it like this," said Israil who is now left with only 3kg of saffron.

While the product from Kashmir costs Rs 7-8 lakh per kg, the American hybrid is priced at Rs 1 lakh per kg. "My saffron yield is ready but there is no taker for it. I approached a few persons but they refused to buy it because it is difficult for people to accept that it is original saffron grown here," said a disappointed Israil.

"Even Jalaluddin has been unable to sell his crop last year and this time for the same reason. I do not know who to approach or what to do now," he added.

However, an agriculture expert who saw Israil's produce said that there is a difference in quality with that from Kashmir. "The quality is not as good as that from Kashmir. One gram of Kasmiri saffron is equivalent to 10gram cultivated in Baheri. It is cultivated under hot sub-tropical conditions up to an altitude of 2,000m, but it is best when grown at 1,600-1,800 m altitude," said Kewal Anand, professor in agronomy department at GB Pant University, who tested Israil's crop.

"If Israil had sowed it before October, the quality would have been better. The plant should have sunlight while flowering but his crop was exposed to rain in February," he added.

Siddaramaiah puts crop loss during rabi season at 7K cr

The state government has sought Rs 1,416 crore from the Centre to compensate the farmers of Karnataka for the loss of crop during the rabi season, chief minister Siddaramaiah told reporters here on Tuesday. Though Siddaramaiah said he is not sure when the fund will be released, it is learnt that the Centre has agreed in principle to release Rs 723 crore.

Siddaramaiah said that farmers of the state suffered crop loss to the extent of Rs 7,000 crore during Rabi. He said that the crop loss in Kharif season was Rs 16,000 crore and the state had asked the Centre to provide Rs 3,800 crore as assistance to pay compensation to farmers. However, the Centre after much delay sanctioned Rs 1,460 crore, the CM said.

He informed that the funds sanctioned by the Centre have been fully utilized judiciously. The state government has released funds for supply of drinking water, prevention of migration of people and opening fodder banks, the CM said. Expressing satisfaction over the drought relief work taken up by officials, he said the district administration, zilla panchayat and other departments have been instructed to work round-the-clock to ensure proper supply of drinking water and other relief measures.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Long pending tea workers wage issue is brewing up as a major crisis



The long pending issue may culminate into a major crisis for the whole industry, a pillar for the economy of hilly and foothills region in northern part of the state.

SILIGURI: Submerged under the doldrums of ongoing long and multiphase election process in West Bengal, a major problem is brewing up there over the wage issue for around 7 lakh tea workers. The long pending issue may culminate into a major crisis for the whole industry, a pillar for the economy of hilly and foothills region in northern part of the state.

Several round of meetings during last two years, tug of war between West Bengal government and trade Unions like INTUC or CITU or intervention of central Commerce Minister, nothing could bring in any acceptable solution so far for over 7 lakh tea workers. Finally the issue got submerged under ongoing election process in the state.

As per the system prevailing since 1977, tea workers receive daily wage negotiated once in three years term. The last term ended on 31st March 2014 beginning new negotiation in February 2014.

But barring few trade unions like INTTUC of Bengal's ruling party TMC, almost all trade Unions demanded a change in the whole wage system. They started demanding wage structure as per Minimum Wage Act instead of negotiable wage.

Following initial one year long reluctance and nine rounds of meetings, finally State Government issued a notice in February 2015 forming a special committee comprising of representatives from planters, workers and Government. The committee was made responsible to propose a new wage structure and other modalities as per Minimum Wage Act.

But, "Nothing practically has come out of the committee in one year. Moreover, all seem to have completely forgotten the matter since the election has been declared. The workers are gradually getting restless and that is not illegitimate," said Saman Pathak, Darjeeling District CITU Secretary and front liner in joint forum.

"Due to the tussle between workers and Government, planters are now cornered from both sides. Any hasty and populist settlement, accepted by the government, will come as unjustified financial overload for us. On the other side, delay in settlement may ignite aggressive workers movement. That will also hamper our business," said veteran planters.

Wheat procurement sees 3-fold jump to 14.58 million tonnes so far



The government's wheat purchase has increased nearly three-fold to 14.58 million tonnes so far in the 2016-17 marketing year starting this month, Parliament was informed today.

NEW DELHI: The government's wheat purchase has increased nearly three-fold to 14.58 million tonnes so far in the 2016-17 marketing year starting this month, Parliament was informed today.

Wheat procurement was 5 million tonnes in the year-ago. Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies undertake wheat procurement at the support price.

The government has kept a wheat procurement target of 30.5 MT for the current year, as against actual procurement of 28.08 MT in the last year.

"The procurement as on April 21 was 14.58 million tonnes, which shows an increase of 9.70 million tonnes over the previous year," Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

As per the trend, there may be adequate wheat procurement this year to meet the requirement under various welfare schemes including National Food Security Act (NFSA), he said.

Early arrival of good quality wheat crop has boosted procurement, a Food Ministry official said separately.

Under NFSA, wheat requirement is around 27 MT for Public Distribution System and other welfare schemes. So far, 33 states have rolled out NFSA.

Replying to a query on procurement of others crops, Paswan said: "The government is not considering expansion of procurement of any other crop at minimum support price on the lines of wheat and paddy procurement."

To ensure there is uninterrupted procurement, the minister in a separate reply said the government has released a subsidy of Rs 25,834 crore to FCI as on April 22 for buying grains and to ensure its supply through ration shops.

Although wheat marketing year runs from April-March, the bulk of procurement is done in the first three months.

As per the second advance estimate of the Agriculture Ministry, wheat production is expected to be higher at 93.82 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), as against 86.53 million tonnes in the last year.

As on April 1, FCI had foodgrain stock of 36.69 MT as against the actual requirement of 21.04 MT.

FDI in farm sector jumps to Rs 553 crore in April-February FY16



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Aries Agro sets new math, eyes up to 20% sales growth in FY17



The company, which also makes nutritional products for plants and animals, has set a long-term target of doubling revenue in the next four years.

MUMBAI: Micro-nutrient manufacturer Aries AgroBSE 3.25 % is buckling up for a revenue growth of up to 20 per cent at Rs 300 crore in 2016-17, pinning its hopes on new product pipeline and a rising market share, a senior company executive said.

"It was a very difficult last year and we expect flat growth in revenue at Rs 250 crore compared with the previous financial year.

But, for FY17, on the back of good monsoon forecast and new product offerings, we expect up to 20 per cent growth in revenue, which will be Rs 275-300 crore," Aries Agro Executive Director Rahul Mirchandani told PTI here.

The company, which also makes nutritional products for plants and animals, has set a long-term target of doubling revenue in the next four years.

It has a product range of 65 brands, which come with all 16 plant nutrients for 107 crops and are currently used by 9 million farmers across 1,99,000 villages in India and 12 other countries across the world.

According to Mirchandani, Aries Agro has three products in the works for this year, which include a soil nutrient, a product for fruits and vegetable growers and one for aqua culture.

"As we have enough manufacturing capacity, we are planning to enhance it in the existing units by 20 per cent to meet market demand," he added.

The company has five manufacturing facilities in India and two units in the UAE that cater to export markets.

Brazil and New Zealand serve as two of its biggest export destinations.

Recently, the company kicked off a 'flash sale and booking bazaar' at the Bombay Stock Exchange, where over 400 dealers and distributors got together for the annual business conference and placed Rs 201.78-crore orders for 65 brand products.

Dealers from 26 states were present.

"This kind of flash sale is only seen in the e-commerce space. We wanted to start a new trend in the agribusiness. We have had two consecutive years of drought and with the news from the Met Department of a normal rainfall this year, this flash sale is symbolic of a new beginning for the agribusiness sector. We reached Rs 100 crore in just under 15 minutes," Mirchandani said.

Aries Agro, whose overseas business makes up 24 per cent of the total consolidated group revenue, is planning to consolidate its existing market share and cast the net wide.