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THE HINDU

Seed supply for kharif to start from May 15

Farmers in Andhra Pradesh can hope for hassle free supply of seeds for various crops this Kharif season as the Agriculture department has already procured four lakh quintals for distribution from May 15.

Agriculture Department Director K. Dhanunjaya Reddy said here on Wednesday that in anticipation of good monsoon based on IMD predictions, the Kharif plan had been readied.

As good rains are predicted from July onwards, the department made arrangements early this year to procure seed directly from farmers. Earlier they used to procure from the market after inviting tenders.

The requirement of seed during Kharif is estimated at 8.9 lakh quintals and of this 6.23 lakh quintals is of groundnut, 2.2 lakh quintals of paddy and the remaining is for pulses and other crops, he said.

The department has already procured four lakh quintals of seed and 7.5 lakh tonnes of fertilizer has also been stocked. Arrangements have also been made to supply micro nutrients in saturation mode from May 15 onwards on 50 per cent subsidy. An action plan for every village was being prepared for the Kharif, he added.

50th convocation of University of Agricultural Sciences on April 30

UAS-B Vice-Chancellor Dr. H. Shivanna told presspersons here on Wednesday that as many as 922 students would receive various degrees during the golden jubilee convocation of the varsity. This includes 584 bachelor's degrees, 245 master degrees and 93 doctoral degrees.



Former ISRO chairman Dr. K. Kasturirangan will address the convocation. Renowned space scientist and former ISRO chairman Dr. K. Kasturirangan will address the 50th convocation of the University of Agricultural Sciences-Bengaluru (UAS-B) to be held here on Saturday (April 30).

A total of 114 gold medals would also be awarded to meritorious students on the occasion.

Governor Vajubhai Vala and Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda will also participate in the convocation.

In the present academic year, UAS-B had admitted 661 students for degree courses, 267 students for post-graduate courses and 108 students for doctoral degree courses, besides 52 students for diploma courses. He said that the university has awarded degrees to about 35,000 candidates since its inception in 1964.

Listing the achievements of the university, UAS-B Director of Education Dr. D.P. Kumar said that the university stands second among all the agriculture universities in the country in terms of the number of students who have cleared the junior research fellowship programmes — which was an indication of educational excellence.

Similarly, University of Agricultural Sciences-Bengaluru's Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at Tubagere in Doddaballapura taluk, had received the award for being the country's best KVK, Mr. Kumar added.

State to host Agri Science Congress in February 2017

For the first time, Karnataka will host the All India Agricultural Science Congress in February 2017.

University of Agricultural Sciences-Bengaluru (UAS-B) Vice-chancellor Dr. H. Shivanna told presspersons here on Wednesday that the varsity will host the four-day event, which is the 13th Congress, being organised by the National Academy of Agricultural Science from February 14 next year.

In the wake of the country reeling under unprecedented drought, the proposed Congress has been themed on "Climate Smart Agriculture," he said.

Foreign delegates

In addition to renowned agricultural scientists from across the country, their counterparts from other nations too would attend the meet.

The meeting would deliberate on the way forward for the country's agriculture with respect to facing the issues related to climate, he said.

Agricultural scientists from China, Japan, Germany, Australia, Indonesia and the countries in the neighbourhood would be invited to attend the Congress, Vice-chancellor Dr. H. Shivanna said.

‘Short winter triggered scorching summer’

As the State is sweltering under record high temperatures, weather experts blamed the “short winter” in 2015 for the scorching summer this time. They, however, said that temperatures may not rise further.

“Generally, the State has winter from November to January. But this time, because of the failure of north-east monsoon, we felt the winter only for 20 to 25 days. If temperatures had reduced drastically with a three-month winter season, it would have taken some time for it to reach the sweltering level in summer,” explained agro-meteorologist and University of Agricultural Sciences-Bengaluru Registrar M.B. Raje Gowda, who also heads the All India Co-ordinated Research Project on Agro-meteorology.

“In that case, temperature level would not have reached this high due to the commencement of rain by then. But the short winter meant that summer had begun much early,” said Dr. Gowda. He pointed out that Bengaluru recorded a low temperature of only around 12 degrees Celsius during the last winter, as against the normal trend of 8 to 9 degrees Celsius.

The phenomenon of short-winter and early summer, induced by the failure of north-east monsoon, reduced the moisture level in both the atmosphere as well as the soil. Generally, there is a natural phenomenon of reduction of temperatures as and when they reach a record high due to the formation of convection clouds, which are spread over a short distance. However, such a phenomenon requires moisture from the atmosphere or soil for the formation of clouds. But the shortage of moisture level resulted in the State losing rain in March, he explained.

Some solace

The only solace now is that the formation of convection clouds has begun in different parts due to very high temperatures. An analysis of this indicates that though the temperature has touched a record high, it is unlikely to

increase further as there will be small amount of rains here and there, Dr. Gowda said.

Also, the low pressure area created due to high temperatures is bound to increase rainfall in the ensuing monsoon season, he said.

Farmers donate fodder

Farmers in Devapur village in Surpur taluk have donated around 16 to 18 tonnes of fodder to those who are hit by drought. They will be transported in 20 tractors by the taluk administration.

Arun Kumar Kulkarni, tahasildar of Surpur, appreciated the move. He told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that the fodder was kept at the agricultural produce and marketing committee yard in Surpur. They would be delivered based on the instructions by the district administration.

“People should come forward and help the others when they are suffering from fodder shortage,” a farmer said.

Crops wither in summer heat

Capital district registers a 40% deficit in summer rain

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

As the district 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.

2.5 lakh banana plants

Field visits by Agriculture Department officials revealed substantial damage to banana, pepper, rubber and vegetables.

Principal Agriculture Officer V. Subha said crops on 134.84 hectares of land withered due to the prolonged dry spell and unprecedented rise in mercury level.

More than 2.5 lakh banana plants wilted completely.

“This seems to be one of the worst summers. We are still in the middle of the summer and if the mercury level fails to come down and rain continues to elude, the damage will be more. We are still collecting details from field officers. A detailed report will be sent to the government for further action,” she said.

“Only 10 per cent of the farmers who have lost the crops has enrolled for the insurance scheme,” she said. In 2014, standing crops on over 69 hectares were damaged due to summer heat, she added.

Substantial damage to banana, pepper, rubber, vegetables

Atmospheric conditions not conducive to summer rain

Discussion on agricultural marketing

MYRA School of Business has organised a round-table discussion on ‘Changing structure of agricultural marketing in Karnataka’ on Saturday at 10.30 a.m.

The importance of agricultural sector is unanimously accepted but no one can deny the fact that this sector is highly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of nature.

A press release said that this sector was also exposed to the weaknesses of the agricultural marketing system. While the government had rolled out many programmes to improve yield levels, it recognised the need for creating a competitive market structure, the organisers said.

T.N. Prakash Kammardi, Chairman, Karnataka Agricultural Prices Commission, will inaugurate the event.

Manoj Rajan, Additional Secretary, State government, MD and CEO, ReMSL, will set the tone of the event with his keynote address.

S. Bisaliah, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences and former chairman, Karnataka Agricultural Prices Commission will preside. H.S. Gopala Rao, former director, Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore, Prof. V.K. Natraj, former director, Madras Institute of Development studies, and IDS, Mysuru, and P.G. Chengappa, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, will take part.

The event has

been organised

by MYRA School

of Business on Saturday

‘Zero’ crop loss in drought-hit Haveri

CM fumes over data; suspends 20 district officials

The rainfall deficit in Haveri district was 29 per cent during kharif season and 26 per cent during rabi season in the current fiscal. Yet, the crop loss in six of the seven taluks in the district is “zero”, if official figures are to go by.

Did some miracle take place in these taluks, which ensured zero per cent crop loss? No, it was the height of official apathy that resulted in presenting such a picture to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during his visit to the district.



In the review meeting chaired by him, this data not only shocked but also angered the Chief Minister. The report said that there was no crop loss in six out of the seven taluks, barring Savanur.

A livid Chief Minister said: “You people are playing with the lives of farmers with such negligence. This mistake can’t be forgiven.” He immediately ordered for suspension of around 20 district officials, including the Joint Director of Agriculture, Deputy Director of Horticulture and six tahsildars.

The issue also resulted in the Chief Minister issuing a direction to the Chief Secretary to issue a notice to Deputy Commissioner of the district Ramandeep Chowdhary.

Sources said that although a few elected representatives met the Chief Minister soon after the review meeting and pleaded with him to pardon the officials, Mr. Siddaramaiah reportedly told them that it was “not a pardonable mistake.”

Avoid feeding poultry during day time

With the sky expected to remain slightly cloudy and dry for the next two days, poultry farmers are asked to avoid feeding during day time. Feed should be provided early morning, and late evening.

A press release from Agromet Field Unit of Veterinary College and Research Institute and Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai said that the maximum and minimum temperature will respectively be 40 degree Celsius (104 degree Fahrenheit) and 29 degree Celsius (84.2 degree Fahrenheit). The wind speed will be around 6 km an hour, mostly from southwest direction.

Since the summer continues to prevail with high temperature and heat stress and heat stroke remain high in poultry production, egg weight and egg shell qualities are the big challenges.

Hence poultry farmers are asked to maintain feed intake at 100 gm to 105 gram a day to sustain egg production and also avoid accumulation of hot drinking water in the pipeline.

Farmers were asked to add Vitamin C in water and supplement sodium bicarbonate, electrolytes, minerals and amino acids, the release added.

Officials at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra here said that flower production in neem will be high due to the prevailing hot summer.

Hence, rearing of bees will give additional income from honey. Also, this can be used for about 30 per cent increase in yield of horticulture crops due to pollination by bees, they added.

Solve discrepancies in egg procurement

Poultry farmers in the district said that they are facing huge loss due to increase in categorisation of eggs based on the size from three to eight categories.

About 3.2 crore eggs are produced in the Namakkal Zone everyday by over 850-odd poultry farmers.

Eggs produced here are sent to Kerala and across the country besides exporting to other countries.

Also, eggs are supplied to noon meal centres and Anganwadi centres in the State.

Currently, eggs are brought by the traders based on three sizes, small, medium and large size.

The purchase price for each category differs. But farmers said that eggs are categorized into eight categories by the traders in the last four months.

Correct sized eggs are procured at 10 paise to 20 paise lesser than the big size eggs and sold as big size eggs in the market, said P. Selvaraj, chairman, NECC, Namakkal Zone.

Heat

He said that due to prevailing intense heat, even the big size eggs are produced as correct size.

The chairman said that continuing the business with heavy loss is not possible and hence a decision has to be taken to sort out the issue.

A meeting was proposed to be held at 11 a.m. at Costal Residency on Tiruchengode Road on May 1 in which poultry farmers would be participating, he added.

‘Initiate steps on setting up of IT park’

Minister for Animal Husbandry and Agriculture A. Manju has instructed officials to initiate steps for the establishment of an Information Technology (IT) park in the district.

Presiding over a review meeting on sericulture and animal husbandry in the district on Wednesday Mr. Manju said, the government has already announced that it would establish an IT park that would aid in the development of sericulture. He instructed officials to draft a proposal identifying 16 acres land, on which to begin construction works at an estimate of Rs.10 crore. He called upon the officials to encourage farmers to implement government schemes to make people economically self-reliant. He also asked the officials to take steps to purchase fodder and supply it to drought affected areas for livestock immediately.

Mr. Manju said that a meeting would be called within a week to discuss the re-opening of Government Silk Factories across the State.

India may become net importer of sugar as drought parches fields



TRIGGERING RALLY: The global supply deficit is going to rise with the Indian shortfall.

Drought has severely affected cane plantations in Maharashtra

India is likely to become a net importer of sugar in 2016-17 as back-to-back drought years dry irrigation channels and ravage cane fields, with output in the country's biggest producing state seen dropping over 40 per cent.

That would mark the first time the nation has been a net importer of the sweetener in four years, with the switch likely to support global prices that have already been rising this year.

It would also give rival producers such as Pakistan, Thailand and Brazil the chance to boost shipments from their ports.

“India will need to import next year due to a production shortfall,” Ashok Jain, President of the Bombay Sugar Merchants Association (BSMA), told *Reuters*.

“Drought has severely affected cane plantations in Maharashtra. The government should stop exports now to reduce import requirements in the next season.”

The El Nino weather phenomenon, which brings dry conditions to many regions, has stoked the worst drought in decades in some parts of India, with thousands of small-scale sugar cane growers in Maharashtra State failing to cultivate crops for the next marketing year, starting October.

“Even for drinking water we are relying on water tankers. It wasn't possible for anyone from our village to cultivate cane,” said Baban Swami, a farmer standing in a parched field in the Latur district of Maharashtra, around 500 km southeast of Mumbai. That could help push overall output below consumption for the first time in seven years.

“Next year, Maharashtra's production could drop below 5 million tonnes. This may pull down the total output to 22.5 million tonnes,” said B. B. Thombre, President of the Western India Sugar Mills Association. Next season's local consumption is pegged at around 26 million tonnes.

The world's biggest sugar consumer is set to churn out 25.7 million tonnes in the current season, with Maharashtra contributing 8.5 million tonnes. Indian mills are contracted to export nearly 1.5 million tonnes this season.

"I think there is a possibility we could see imports to India next year," said Tracey Allen, a commodity analyst at Rabobank in London.

Indian imports have in the past boosted global sugar prices, traders said.

"The global supply deficit is going to rise with the Indian shortfall. This could trigger a rally, although a lot depends on how much sugar India needs to import," said a Singapore-based dealer with a global trading firm.

He declined to be identified as he was not authorised to speak with media.

Meanwhile, analysts were divided over whether India would cut its 40-per cent import duty on raw sugar.

Some said mills would ask for the tax to remain unchanged so domestic prices would rise further, while others said the food ministry could push for a duty-cut to relieve inflationary pressures.

"Duty free imports are required to arrest price rises," the BSMA President said.

Pre-monsoon rains submerge North-East

Flood affected victims shift to safer places using local boats at Kothari village in Nagaon district of Assam.

While many parts of India faces an acute drought, parts of Northeast India are submerged due to pre-monsoon rains.

Over the last two weeks, incessant rainfall in a few states in the northeast has resulted in flood and extensive damage of crops. Close to 1 lakh people have been affected by flood in Assam alone on Monday.

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been reported to be worst hit by rain.



Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has released this data:

Dates	Number of people affected
April 24	86,907
April 25	92,729
April 26	8,552

The worst rain affected districts are Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Charaideo, Cachar, Lakhimpur and Tinsukia.

Two persons in Dibrugarj and Cachar district have been reported missing.

“National and State Disaster Response Force (NDRF and SDRF) are appearing in field to help rescue people in distress. We are also coordinating with neighbouring states to learn about the everyday situation,” said Tripaljoyti Mazumdar, project officer at ASDMA.

Train services in Silchar-Lumding-Guwahati line are seriously affected since past two days due to landslide at four places between Lumding and Badarpur. Besides, nearly 5,000 hectares of crop land inundated by flood water on Monday and about 13,000 hectares of crop land reported under water on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, about 80 families have been affected in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang (38), Namsai and Deomali (42) districts.

“Rain has subsided since yesterday although parts of Changlang and Deomali districts remain worst affected by flood. People have been shifted to safer locations and relief materials have been provided,” said Arunachal Pradesh Disaster Management Authority. [Read more](#)

Among the other states, parts of Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura have received rainfall and hailstorm.

Last September, Assam floods affected lives of 7.3 lakh people in nearly 1,600 villages. Nearly 50 people were reported dead.

Although rainfall and flood are common in northeast, such pre-monsoon flood is a rare occurrence.

IMD warns of heatwave conditions in the State

Emergency response mechanisms were alerted across Kerala on Wednesday following a midday warning issued by the India Meteorology Department (IMD) that heatwave conditions are likely to prevail at isolated places in the State on April 27 and 28.

The State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) issued an advisory to the State Police Chief, Director General of Fire and Rescue Services, Labour Commissioner, Director of Health Services, and District Collectors recommending precautionary measures to be adopted.

The advisory called for alert messages to be issued to hospitals, ambulance networks, anganwadis, public health centres, and workplaces in the wake of the severe weather warning. Water and ORS are to be stocked at these places and labourers are to be exempted from working in the open sunlight from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. to avoid sunstroke or sunburn. All workplaces, hospitals, anganwadis, and PHCs have been asked to ensure cool drinking water and ORS packets to handle any contingency and directions issued to rush victims of sunstroke to the nearest hospital for further care. The public have been urged to avoid travel in open sunlight between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. The warning is likely to be extended till April 30.

Heatwave conditions occur when the maximum temperature of a station reaches 40 degrees Celsius for the plains and 30 degrees Celsius for hilly regions or the maximum temperature departure from normal is 4.5 to 6.4 degrees Celsius.

All-time record

Palakkad registered an all-time record maximum temperature of 41.9 degrees Celsius in the 24 hours till 8.30 a.m. on Wednesday, the highest in Kerala. The previous record of 41.8 degrees Celsius was registered on April 15 and 22, 1987.

Temperature

reaches 29-year

high; Palakkad registers 41.9 degrees Celsius.

Double whammy: From Rs 55 to Rs 7.5 per kg, onion growers feel the heat

Prices of the bulb crash even in the midst of an unprecedented drought in Maharashtra.



Vishwanath Nagare, a farmer from a village near Lasalgaon, with his stored rabi onion crop. (Express Photo: Partha Sarathi Biswas)

It's roughly a month since Vishwanath Nagare harvested his rabi onion crop, but he is yet to take it to the market.

“Prices are now just Rs 800 per quintal. I won't sell until they at least cross Rs 1,000”, says this farmer from Sarole Thadi, a village in Nashik district's Niphad taluka just about 18 km Lasalgaon that houses India's largest wholesale onion market.

Last year, Nagare, who grows onion in one out of his total five-acre holding, realised an average rate of Rs 1,300 per quintal.

But he could sell only six tonnes, as the crop itself suffered damage from unseasonal rains in March. This time, he has produced 11 tonnes, but prices are lower: “If they don’t improve soon, I will lose money yet again”.

There are many farmers like Nagare, who are unable to fathom the wild fluctuation in onion prices over the last year and more.

Between April and September, the average modal price — the rate at which the maximum number of trades happen — in Lasalgaon soared from Rs 1,093 to Rs 4,130 per quintal. For a brief period, during the third week of August, they even hit Rs 5,000-5,000/quintal levels.

That was, of course, the time when pyaaz was all over the newspapers and TV channels. The price spiral was partly a result of India’s onion output dropping to 189.28 lakh tonnes (lt) in 2014-15, from the preceding year’s 194.02 lt, and also average monthly exports of over one lt per month during January-July 2015.

But since December — with the arrival of the 2015-16 kharif and late-kharif crops — prices have been on a downward slope, falling below Rs 1,000 per quintal by early February.

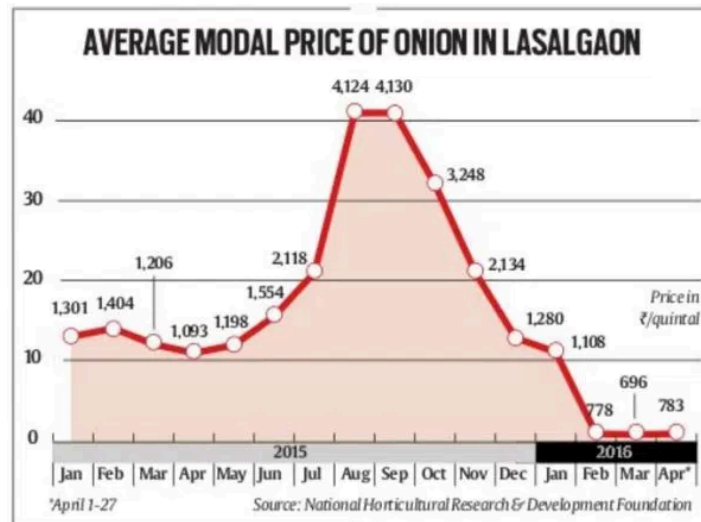
The new rabi onion crop hitting the market after harvesting during March-May has taken prices even lower; they fell to Rs 600 per quintal levels in mid-March, before recovering a tad thereafter.

The resultant distress to farmers is hardly making headlines. What farmers here are unable to comprehend is how prices have crashed, that too in the midst of a drought of the kind Maharashtra is currently seeing.

Rabi onion area in the state, in fact, has dipped to around 1,90,000 hectares this year, as against over 3,42,000 hectares in 2014-15.

According to Nanasaheb Patil, chairman of Lasalgaon’s agriculture produce market committee, the decline would have steeper but for some extra area being sown under the crop in Ahmednagar and Aurangabad.

“Towards November-end, water from the Gangapur dam in Nashik was released for Marathwada. As this water passed through Ahmednagar and Aurangabad, farmers along the canal uprooted their ratoon sugarcane and planted onion in its place,” he points out.



The sugar commissionerate’s data shows a 40 per cent acreage reduction under ratoon cane — which grows from the stubble of the harvested plant crop — this time in Maharashtra.

Kashinath Sanap from Baktarpur village of Ahmednagar’s Kopergaon taluka is among those who decided to divert four acres of his cane area to onion. “There was no water to sustain a 12-month ratoon cane crop.

So, I went for rabi onion”, he says. But he, too, is disappointed that the crop is selling in Kopergaon at below Rs 700 per quintal. Patil believes that the Lasalgaon market is now witnessing a heavy influx of onions from Ahmednagar and Aurangabad — which is also the reason for prices plunging.

“These farmers, unlike the ones in the traditional onion belt of Nashik, Pune and Dhule, have no facilities for on-field storage. So, they have no option but sell at the earliest,” he notes.

Farmers in the main onion belt have the capacity to hold back their crop a little longer. But even they, Patil admits, cannot expect prices to go up much, especially with onion acreages in other states like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan rising significantly.

The Nashik-based National Horticultural Research & Development Foundation (NHRDF) has estimated this year’s rabi onion crop to be 15-20 per cent higher, with overall production for 2015-16 pegged at 203 lt. Rabi onions have longer shelf life and are amenable to storage.

NHRDF has projected that around 45 lt of rabi onions would be stored by farmers and traders in the current marketing season due to availability of good quality bulbs.

This is more than the 40 lt from last year’s rain and hail-damaged crop. Farmers in Nashik, Pune and Dhule alone have constructed storage capacities aggregating some 14 lt.

Such on-farm structures, typically of 25-30 tonnes capacity and costing a couple of lakhs, have been built through special subsidies from NABARD and the state agriculture department.

But farmers’ hopes of making money from stored onions, this time, have been dashed by crashing prices, for which they largely blame the Centre’s move to impose minimum export price (MEP) restrictions on onion.

During the price surge in August, the MEP was hiked to \$700 per tonne, putting a virtual halt on shipments. As domestic prices went into free fall, the MEP was eventually scrapped on December 23. But for farmers, who were harvesting their kharif onions, it was too late.

Omprakash Raka, a trader-cum-exporter from Nashik, recalls that till about 6-7 years back, NAFED used to have monthly meetings with all concerned stakeholders to take regular stock of the onion supply position.

“These interactions allowed informed decisions, including that on MEP, to be taken. But that practice has been replaced by fixing of MEPs in an ad hoc manner,” he claims.

The main beneficiaries of India’s MEP restrictions have been exporters in China, Egypt and Pakistan. They have all reported good crops this year, even as India is struggling to regain its lost market share from these players.

The Centre has now directed NAFED and other state agencies to procure 15,000 tonnes. NAFED is expected to start procurement from April 18, with the Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board and others to wade in towards May.

This, it is hoped, would help push up realisations above Rs 1,000 per quintal. But unlike last year, the chances of any price spiral seem remote. While that may be good news for urban consumers, for Maharashtra’s farmers this would translate into yet another cycle of losses.

Santosh Gorade from Takli village in Niphad taluka has stored around 6.5 tonnes of his produce in anticipation of higher prices. He sums up the situation best:

“Temperatures here have already crossed 40 degrees Celsius. If they continue at this level, the bulbs will start rotting, forcing us to go for distress sale. There was no acche din for us last year and we don’t see it this season as well”.

Maharashtra govt seeks World Bank aid for drought mitigation

The multiple projects for better agriculture and irrigation practices, using advanced technology and knowledge sharing, would stretch from 2016 to 2022.

The Maharashtra government Wednesday mooted a Rs 4,000 crore proposal to the World Bank (WB) for drought mitigation. The proposal comprises projects related to advanced technology sharing and agriculture practices along with challenges of climate change.

WB country head Onnu Ruhi was present at the Maharashtra Disaster Management Authority (MDMA) meeting chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai.

The multiple projects for better agriculture and irrigation practices, using advanced technology and knowledge sharing, would stretch from 2016 to 2022.

It will be executed across 3,000 villages of the worst drought hit regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha. The state government also approved the State Disaster Management Plan and Policy with an objective to strengthen the programme and take it forward.

Guidelines for providing better relief to the affected persons was also stressed.

Emphasis was on “Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan” at the meeting. While seeking aid for ongoing programmes, he said, “This is one project which would bring great results post monsoon.

Apart from creating water storage and increasing irrigation potential, it would lead to higher production of crops.” The chief minister acknowledged, “We need to increase use of technology to herald greater change with larger impact and we are working hard on that.

We have approved SDMP plan and policy and decided to strengthen the system and take forward this programme.” He said, “I am thankful to WB for extending cooperation in tough times of drought and confident that it will consider this proposal positively and our roadmap for drought mitigation will set an example for the nation.”

At the meeting, it was unanimously accepted that drought is not confined to a few states or India. It was seen across the world including developed nations, which were also facing problems.

Whether it is the United States or Australia, climate change and its impact on agriculture is being debated. Fadnavis said, “This is the most appropriate time for change and contributions of experts are commendable.”

hindustantimes

Doubts over Maha Rs11,000-cr crop loan repayment claim



Restructuring means converting short-term one-year loans to medium-term loans, where the repayment duration is extended to five years. (HT File)

Mumbai: A day after the state government said it would give drought-hit farmers more time to repay crop loans, cracks are already emerging about how the government will restructure loans worth Rs11,000 crore.

Restructuring means converting short-term one-year loans to medium-term loans, where the repayment duration is extended to five years.

While political parties and agricultural experts welcomed the move, doubts persist about how it will be implemented, and several experts have pointed to how the figures could be exaggerated.

On Tuesday, the state cabinet approved restructuring crop loans worth Rs10,941 crore in the 26,670 drought-hit villages across the state. The move was meant to ensure farmers get more time to clear debt and are still eligible to get fresh credit this year.

Of the total amount, the government estimated last year's crop loans alone would be worth Rs5,000 crore while another Rs3,503 crore of loans from the 2014 Kharif sowing season will also be restructured.

In addition, the government has decided to ask for the Reserve Bank of India permission to restructure Rs2,438 crore worth of outstanding loans that have been taken by 4.4 lakh farmer from these villages in 2012-13 and 2013-14. But these figures are contentious.

To begin with, the government does not have an exact figure of how much crop loans farmers in these drought-hit villages took in the Kharif sowing season last year. Cooperative minister Chandrakant Patil admitted to this, saying the Rs5,000 crore was only an estimate.

The Congress has pointed out how the government had, last year itself, issued a Government Resolution (GR) restructuring 2014's crop loans worth Rs3,503 crore. Announcing it afresh, the party claimed, was just the government's way of repackaging a decision and claiming credit for it afresh.

“The other problem with restructuring 2014’s loans is more than 50% of the farmers had already repaid loans last year, when the decision was taken. The government promised to give them the benefit last year, but this hasn’t happened so far,” said Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant.

Another point of contention is the government’s plan to restructure Rs2,438 crore worth of loans from 2012-13 and 2013-14. The problem with this plan, critics say, is it will require the Reserve Bank of India’s permission, and the government has yet to send a proposal.

Beyond the politics of it, there are doubts over just how beneficial the move will be for the farmer.

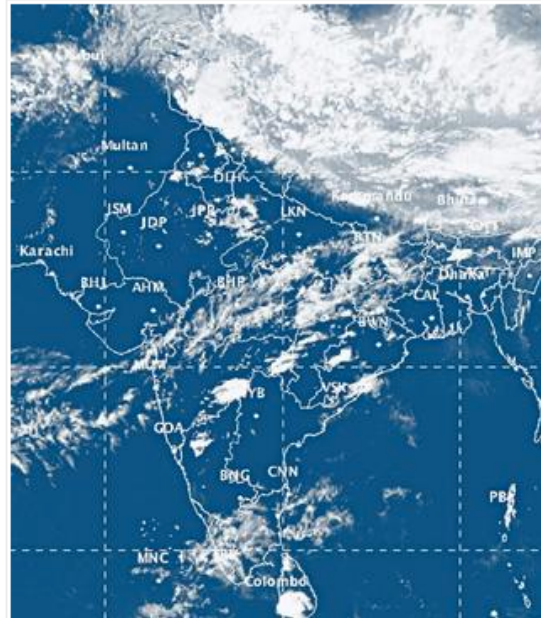
Leading farm activist Vijay Jawandia said the move, though welcome, may backfire.

“By restructuring loans from 2014 and 2015, what might happen is the farmer will, next year, suddenly have an avalanche of loan repayment to make. This might not be such a desirable situation,” he said. There are serious doubts over whether banks, at the ground level, would pay heed to the government’s instructions, Jawandia said.

Agriculture researcher **Ajay Dandekar** said the move was welcome, but half-hearted.

“Ideally, the government should have waived off loans completely and looked at pricing of farm products. Unless the farmer gets the right price for his produce, how is he ever going to be in a position to pay these loans back?”

Kerala gets first heat wave warning on blazing El Nino trail



Kerala has been served with what is said to be its first ever heat wave warning as the ‘hot weather season’ blazes on the trail of a monster 2015 El Nino.

The local Met office here has issued the extreme heat alert for isolated places of the State for both Wednesday and Thursday.

Record heat

Wednesday saw Palakkad in the North Kerala set an all-time record of 42 deg Celsius in maximum day temperatures. The district is a traditional hotspot in the State along with Punalur towards the South.

But the mercury may have peaked out in the State, according to K Santhosh, Director, Met Office, Thiruvananthapuram.

“Temperatures are forecast to climb down from now, especially after April 29, when thundershowers activity in the State is expected to pick up,” he told *BusinessLine*.

The ensuing wet spell will grow even more in intensity from May 2 onwards with helpful atmospheric features developing in tandem.

Shower activity

The US Climate Prediction Centre also agrees with this outlook and sees thundershowers spreading out over South Kerala and adjoining Tamil Nadu from May 3.

Spill-over rain is indicated for further areas to the North in Kerala and even parts of Coastal Karnataka during the week starting as on date, the US agency said.

The week will also see thundershowers converge over the hills and adjoining plains of North-West India with localised heavy rain over parts of Himachal Pradesh and adjoining Punjab.

Parts of Rajasthan, Delhi, Chandigarh, and West Uttar Pradesh may also witness passing thundershowers, according to this forecast.

Gangetic West Bengal in the East will be another region to watch out for summer showers while the ongoing activity in the adjoining North-Eastern states may quieten down during the week.

Spread-out likely

The US National Centre for Environmental Prediction sees thundershowers spreading out to more areas in interior Peninsula, including the drought-hit Karnataka, Telangana and Coastal Andhra Pradesh during April 27 to May 5.

The following week (May 5 to 13) may witness a further intensification of thundershower activity over Kerala, followed by South Interior Karnataka and the rest of the Peninsula including Tamil Nadu.

But meteorologists would not hazard a guess on what material impact the thundershowers could bring about for some of the worst drought-hit regions of Peninsular India.

The fact that seasonal thundershowers have been delayed in Kerala (normally they begin around April 21) is widely thought would have a deleterious effect on the timing of the onset of the South-West monsoon.

It is likely to be delayed by up to 10 days this year beyond the June-1 normal, according to eminent monsoon researcher and former Met director PV Joseph.

Spot pepper rules steady

The spot pepper prices remained unchanged at previous level despite good demand amid squeezed supply.

There were no sellers below Rs700 a kg today, trade sources told Business Line.

Exporters were showing interest to buy either to push up the prices or to meet their overseas commitments for Malabar made earlier, they said.

Besides, severe drought conditions prevailing in Vietnam and here this year and a resultant crop fall next year is also pointed out as reason for the increased buying interest and the current supply squeeze.

Today on the terminal market 11 tonnes of pepper of which 9 tonnes from the high ranges and 2 tonnes from the plains were traded at Rs. 700 a kg and Rs695 a kg respectively.

Out side the terminal market 20 tonnes of exchange released pepper were traded at Rs705 a kg.

Spot prices remained unchanged at Rs68,500 (ungarbled) and Rs71,500 (garbled) a quintal in spite of the fact that no sellers were forthcoming below Rs700 a kg, market sources said.

May, June and July contracts went up by Rs1,000 a quintal to close at Rs71,000, 70,000 and 69,000 a quintal on the IPSTA.

Indian export prices were at \$11,000 a tonne cf for Europe and \$11,250 a tonne cf for USA. e.o.m

55 lakh tonnes of pulses imported

As part of efforts to check rise in pulse prices, India imported 55.1 lakh tonnes of lentil valued at \$3,690.3 million in April-February of 2015-16, Parliament was informed today.

The country had imported 45.8 lakh tonnes of pulses valued at \$2,786.1 million in 2014-15 and 36.4 lakh tonnes at \$2,119.3 million in 2013-14, according to a written reply to the Rajya Sabha by Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

“To augment domestic availability and stabilise prices of pulses, the government imported 5,000 tonnes of tur through MMTC in 2015-16. For buffer stock of pulses, MMTC has already contracted for import of 13,500 tonnes of tur and 12,500 tonnes of urad,” Sitharaman said.

Downtrend in pulses continues

Downtrend in pulse seeds continued today on sluggish demand with tur (Maharashtra) further declining to ₹8,800 a quintal (₹9,000), while tur (Madhya Pradesh) slipped to ₹8,200- 8,300 (down ₹200).

Tur dal traded lower on decline in spot tur with tur dal (sawa no.) being quoted at ₹13,000-₹13,100, tur dal (full) at ₹13,700-9, while tur marka quoted at ₹14,200-300 a quintal.

Pressure of arrival of new moong in local mandis pounded its prices by ₹500 with moong (bold) today declining to ₹6,500-6,600 a quintal, while moong (medium) quoted at ₹6,000.



Moong dal traded lower on sluggish demand and steep fall in moong prices with moong dal (medium) today being quoted at ₹7,500- 8,000, moong dal (bold) ruled at ₹8,000-8,500.

while moong mongar quoted at ₹9,000-Rs 9,500 a quintal respectively.

Urad (bold) in local mandis quoted at ₹11,500, while urad (medium) ruled at ₹10,000-10,500.

Urad dal ruled steady with urad dal (medium) today being quoted at ₹12,500-13,000, urad dal (bold) ruled at 13,500-14,000, while urad mongar was quoted at ₹7,500-18,000 a quintal respectively.

States get more teeth to rein in sugar prices



Centre imposes curbs on stock holding by dealers to clamp down on hoarding

To check the sharp rise in sugar prices, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal to enable States and Central agencies to impose stock holding limits on dealers.

An official release said: “The government has taken stock of the availability of sugar and different factors contributing to rise in market prices of sugar across the country.”

This government’s latest move will empower State and Central agencies impose stock limits and regulate supply, distribution, storage and trade of sugar to bring down its prices to a reasonable level by curbing unscrupulous trading, it added.

Sugar prices at the retail level have been rising since late last year after a dip in production. By early this month, it had crossed ₹40 per kg.

Earlier this month, the Centre had asked States to impose stock holding limits under the Essential Commodities Act.

“Keeping in view the sugar price trend, we have asked the State governments as a precautionary measure to impose stock holding limits on traders to check hoarding,” Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had said at the time.

Even as it moved on sugar, the Cabinet meeting, however, did not take up a key proposal to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in marketing of food products produced and manufactured in India.

Though the proposal, announced in Budget 2016 with a view to lifting agriculture productivity and boost the domestic industry, was listed on the agenda, sources said it was not taken up.

₹3,000-cr investment in BORL

By another decision, the Cabinet approved a higher investment of up to ₹3,000 crore by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) in Bharat Oman Refineries Ltd (BORL).

The fund infusion will help BORL improve its balance sheet; its net worth has eroded. “The measure will also enhance the availability of petroleum products in the northern and central parts of the country,” said the release.

Farm land for solar power

The Cabinet also approved the utilisation of 400 hectares of farmland at the Central State Farm in Sri Ganganagar (Rajasthan) for setting up a 200 MW solar power plant.

In another decision aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation in the financial sector, the Union Cabinet gave ex-post facto approval to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and the Insurance Authority of the

United Arab Emirates. “The MoU provides for enhanced cooperation between the two authorities in the field of insurance supervision by providing a framework for cooperation such as channels of communication,” said the release, adding that it was signed in February.

The Cabinet also approved the signing of an MoU between India and Papua New Guinea on cooperation in healthcare and medical science.

Tea output in Nilgiris dips 25%

Dry weather is taking its toll on tea production in the Nilgiris, the largest tea growing district in South India.

Tea companies in the Nilgiris have informed the Tea Board that their production last month had fallen by 25 per cent, compared to March 2015.

They have said their production has fallen to 1.01 million kg (mkg) from 1.26 mkg in March 2015. The five-year mean production for March was 1.25 mkg. The cumulative production in the first quarter of current calendar has fallen to 2.84 mkg from 2.91 mkg.

This marked a decline of 2.41 per cent. The five-year mean for quarter Jan-Mar is still higher at 2.98 mkg.

The district did not receive any downpour in March. Cumulative rainfall in the first quarter in the different agro-climatic zones was also scanty and far less as compared to last year.

Business Standard

Monsoon forecast lifts India Inc hopes

Companies, analysts expect 8-10% top line growth, 12-15% growth in net profit



The forecast of an above-normal monsoon has buoyed hopes for a demand revival in the Indian economy and the mood in many corporate boardrooms is upbeat.

Industry and analysts foresee a broad-based demand recovery that will push top line growth of Indian companies to 8-10 per cent in 2016-17, which is twice the three-four per cent growth rate estimated for the previous year. Net profit growth is likely to clock 12-15 per cent as well.

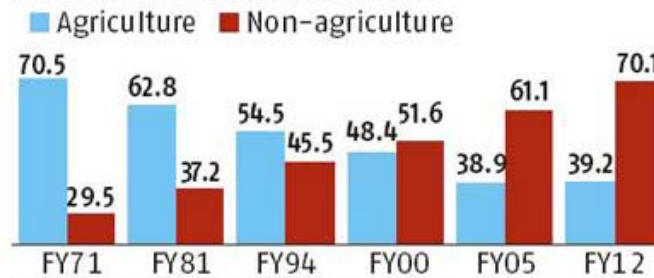
Recent data from market research agency IMRB show household consumption of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) in rural areas grew 5.4 per cent in 2015 while urban household FMCG consumption clocked 2.9 per cent growth.

Ajay Srinivasan, director, CRISIL Research, said, “Timely, adequate, and well-distributed rainfall will fuel a recovery in demand in consumer goods. Two-wheelers, tractors, FMCG, and consumer durables, which have a significant proportion of demand accruing from rural areas, will be the biggest beneficiaries.”

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast monsoon rainfall will be 106 per cent of the long-period average (LPA) and a 94 per cent probability exists that it will be “normal to excess”.

BOUNTIFUL RETURNS

SHARE OF AGRICULTURE AND NON-AGRICULTURE IN RURAL NDP



Source: CSO and India Ratings and Research

RURAL CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE BREAK-UP (%)



NDP: Net domestic product;
Sources: NSSO and India Ratings and Research

Media reports suggest that car companies like Maruti Suzuki have gone back to the drawing board to redo sales projections for the year.

“The industry has outlined a growth rate of 6-7 per cent for 2016-17. We are confident of double-digit growth in the year,” a company spokesperson says.

Adds Wilfried Aulbur, head of automotive Asia at Roland Berger, “For some companies like Maruti Suzuki, the rural market has become crucial. From three per cent of overall volumes the percentage of rural sales has grown to 30-35 per cent.”

Says Srinivasan of CRISIL Research, “We foresee demand for two-wheelers growing by 8-10 per cent in 2016-17 compared to three per cent growth in the previous year. Domestic tractor sales will also likely grow by 8-10 per cent after two consecutive years of declines.”

“While growth has been muted in the recent past, we are buoyant about the potential of the FMCG sector and we continue to invest in 65 projects across businesses with an outlay of Rs 25,000 crore,” says an ITC spokesperson.

Consumer durables player LG Electronics is upbeat after good summer sales. A company spokesperson says, “With a good monsoon projection we expect this sentiment to further boost sales.”

Rohit Mathur, president, fans, Usha International, says, “There is a lot of pent-up demand in the market. Looks like that demand has started trickling in now.”

Sameer Deshmukh, an analyst with Reliance Securities, says while there is pent-up demand for consumer durables, rural FMCG sales growth has now matured.

The share of rural sales has grown to around 45 per cent of total FMCG sales. In comparison, around 25 per cent of consumer durables sales come from rural areas, says the Boston Consulting Group.

Says Srinivasan, “Net profit growth is expected to accelerate and be in the range of 12-15 per cent owing to higher top line growth, improvement in margins, subdued working capital needs and lower interest costs.”

Dekhmukh adds double-digit revenue growth is possible on pricing growth with commodity prices firming up.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Farmers should go for green manuring: Punjab Agricultural University

The Department of Extension Education of Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) organized a training programme on improving soil health through green manuring in the village Rattowal.

The programme was held under the guidance of Jaswinder Singh Bhalla, professor and head, Department of Extension Education.

Welcoming the farmers, Dr Dharminder Singh, assistant extension specialist urged them to make best use of their fallow lands after the harvest of wheat crop till transplanting of paddy, keeping in view their available resources.

RS Gill, extension specialist (Soil Science), apprised the farmers of the benefits of green manuring in rice-wheat cropping system.

He also shared the information about different crops which can be cultivated for the purpose of green manuring such as summer moong, dhaincha, cowpea etc. Pankaj Kumar, assistant extension specialist, stressed upon the cultivation of PAU recommended paddy varieties.

AP to cut Bt cotton crop area

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday announced its plans to reduce the Bt cotton crop area from 6.7 to 4.5 lakh hectares after the crop developed pink bollworm pest.

The state agriculture department will take up a massive campaign to create awareness among farmers against sowing Bt cotton in red and light soil

regions. Officials have suggested alternative crops to stop the pink bollworm pest from spreading.

Agriculture commissioner R Dhananjaya Reddy said crop samples sent to Nagpur-based Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR) in November last year confirmed that pink bollworm has developed resistance to Bt cotton.

The pest damaged 30 per cent of the crop across the state causing heavy losses to farmers.

"We strongly advise farmers in light and red soil regions not to go for Bt cotton. They should choose pulses and millets," he said. Only 4.5 lakh hectares of land in AP is suitable for cotton cultivation.

Soil in Kurnool, north coastal Andhra and major parts of Anantapur district is not suitable for Bt cotton cultivation. Only areas with black soil are suitable for cotton crop. He suggested that farmers should pick the crop within 120 to 150 days.

There is a high risk of spread of pink bollworm pest if the crop is harvested after 150 days.

The government's decision also comes in the wake of falling prices of cotton in the open market. "Earlier, farmers used to get profit from cotton crop. The situation has changed now," he said. Dhananjaya however, denied any plan to adopt indigenously-developed cotton seeds for now.

Incidentally, Telangana too, has suggested that farmers bring down their cotton crop area to overcome the pest spread.

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

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

NEW DELHI: 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.