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THE HINDU

‘Krishi Bhagya scheme helping farmers’

The scheme has been a huge success in many rain-fed areas of the district



Checking progress: Minister of State for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda visiting a farm near K. Byadarahalli in Channarayapatna taluk on Thursday.— Photo: Prakash Hassan

Minister for Agriculture Krishna Byre Gowda, on Thursday, visited the farms of those benefited by the Krishi Bhagya scheme to find out how the scheme had helped them. Under the scheme, the farmers receive funds to maintain agricultural ponds and buy pump sets.

Mr. Byre Gowda, speaking to presspersons after visiting K. Byadarahalli in Channaryapatna said the Krishi Bhagya scheme had been beneficial to the farmers in rain-fed areas. “Nearly 75 per cent of farmers in the State are dependent on rains. We are providing them with financial assistance to maintain agricultural ponds in their farms under the scheme,” he said.

The scheme was introduced in the last financial year and 87,000 agricultural ponds have been planned so far. The construction of 65,000 of these has been completed. The remaining will be completed soon.

The government will be spending about Rs. 700 crore for this purpose.

“The State government has taken up this programme for the benefit of farmers in rain-fed areas. We provide polythene sheets, pump set pipes and drip irrigation units at subsidised prices. If four farmers form a group and decide to have to an agriculture pond on their farms, we will provide them with pump sets free of cost,” he said.

With regard to Hassan district, Rs. 11 crore had been spent to construct 2,000 ponds. Of these, the construction of 1,755 has already been completed, he added.

The Minister also visited the Agriculture College at Karekere village. MLAs K.M. Shivalinge Gowda and H.D. Revanna also met the Minister on the occasion and discussed the pending works of the department in their respective constituencies.

The construction

of 65,000 agricultural ponds has been completed so far

Silk reeling units in Kuppam at crossroads

The silk reeling unit, supported by the government, on the premises of the Sericulture Department at Kuppam, is struggling to register the projected target, with farmers unwilling to supply cocoons, and showing a tilt towards middlemen working for private units in neighbouring Karnataka.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu prompted the setting up of a the private reeling unit with government support in Kuppam in August 2015,

with an objective to cater to the requirement of sericulture farmers in Gudupalle, Shantipuram and Kuppam mandals.

A couple of months after the unit was commissioned, the automatic reeling machine developed technical snags leading to a fall in silk production. The farmers coming to the unit with cocoon stocks were disappointed with the unit organisers taking small quantities from them, this in turn forcing them to take the stocks to Karnataka through middlemen, incurring extra expenditure.

With farmers gradually losing interest in the Kuppam reeling unit, it began to feel the pinch. As against the requirement of 700 kg cocoons per day, the unit is hardly getting 300 kg now. About 150 workers here are not being able to receive regular payments following a steep fall in production. Taking advantage of this, the middlemen are exploiting the farmers, by offering throwaway prices, but not showing in reality, coupled with delayed payments.

Additional unit

In order to gain the confidence of the farmers again, and to procure maximum stocks, an additional unit, with new machinery was proposed, and it is going to be set up in the coming months, according to sericulture official in Kuppam, Mr. Sivasankar Gowd. At present, the Kuppam region has about 500 sericulture farmers, producing some of the finest cocoon varieties — Bivoltin, Swarnandhra and Gold — to the tune of 80 tonnes involving a business of Rs. 2.5 crore per month.

Fall in production works to the advantage of middlemen

Vegetable prices shoot up



The price of vegetables has shot up in both the Uzhavar Santhais and open markets in the district in the last few days thanks to steep fall in the arrival of the same.

With mercury mercilessly soaring high in the last couple of weeks, the farm activities have been badly hit in the villages. This has affected the production of particularly vegetables in the local farms.

Due to this, there has been a steep fall in the arrival of vegetables particularly to the 11 uzhavar santhais in the district.

The santhai sources said that the local tomato season has already come to an end and local tomatoes are not at all arriving in the santhais. At present farmers are bringing the tomatoes procured from Rayakottai, and Krishnagiri to the uzhavar santhais.

The price of tomatoes which remained at Rs. 15 a kg last week, has risen to Rs. 26 in the uzhavar santhais and Rs. 30 in the open markets.

Similarly the price of brinjal has gone up from Rs. 10 – Rs. 14 last week to Rs. 18 in uzhavar santhais and Rs. 25 in the open markets.

The small onion season has also come to an end. The onion arriving at the santhais are from areas such as Udumalpet, and Mysore.

The small onion was selling at Rs. 20 – Rs. 25 a kg last week, and it has gone up to Rs. 32 a kg in the uzhar santhais and Rs. 35 in the open markets. The season of drumsticks is also over.

There is a fall in the arrival of Bengaluru beans too, due to which its price has shot up to Rs. 70 a kg from Rs. 50, uzhar santhai sources said.

With mercury continue to soar high, there is no hope of improvement in the arrival of local vegetables to the uzhar santhais. Hence the price of vegetables is expected to increase further in the days to come, causing much anxiety to both the farmers and consumers.

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.

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 withered due to the prolonged dry spell and rise in mercury level.

‘Allow field testing of genetically modified crops’

Criticising the moratorium on field tests for genetically modified (GM) crops eminent agricultural scientist Dr. M. Mahadevappa, here on Thursday, opined that such a move was detrimental for the farming sector. “If the field trials of GM crops were encouraged, scientists would have come out with drought-resistant varieties by now,” he said. He was speaking at the inauguration of a State-level seminar on farmers’ suicides organised by Mysore University’s Post-Graduation Centre Hemangotri.

“There used to be strong opposition towards releasing Bt cotton in India. Finally, Bt cotton was released in 2002. In eight years, India became the second largest cotton producer in the world. Before the introduction of Bt cotton, we were in the fifth position. This is the advantage of advanced technology,” he said.

Scientists at UAS Dharwad have cultivated Bt brinjal, but have not yet received permission to conduct field trials. They have been waiting for approval to conduct a field trial of Bt brinjal since February 2012. “If they were allowed to conduct trials, by now, the scientists would have come out with drought-resistant varieties of various crops, proving to be of great help to farmers,” he said.

Dr. Mahadevappa, who is also former Vice-Chancellor of UAS Dharwad, took a dig at the emphasis on organic farming. “Agriculture is nothing but organic farming. Along with it, we have to adopt new technologies to get a better yield. Nowadays, some people are getting undue publicity in the name of organic farming,” he said.

Further, he said, before the green revolution in the country, food production was only 45 lakh tonnes. “If the production had not increased, it would have been difficult to get even one meal a week,” he stressed.

Dr. Mahadevappa recommended the setting up of Special Agriculture Zones, besides Special Economic Zones with agro-based industries for the

betterment of the farming sector. “We fall behind when it comes to accepting advanced technology. This has been one of the main reasons our farmers are facing so many problems,” he said.


If the field trials of GM crops were encouraged, by now, scientists would have come out with drought-resistant varieties

Dr. M. Mahadevappa

agricultural scientist

Milk procurement on the rise

With drought continuing for the second year in a row, Karimnagar farmers have shifted to dairy units as an alternative source of income

DAIRYING IN DAYS OF DROUGHT		
Karimnagar dairy milk procurement per day: 1.5 lakh litres	Sales: 1.10 lakh per day	Curd sales: 35,000 litres per day
Buttermilk sales: 55,000 sachets per day	Last year, Karimnagar Dairy procured 1.14 lakh litres of milk per day.	This year, the milk procurement is 1.5 lakh litres per day.
 This is an increase of 36,000 litres per day over the last year.		
Farmers have shifted to dairy units as an alternative source of income, and are deriving benefits for the same	Due to this, cattle troughs have been constructed to quench thirst of animals	

The Karimnagar Milk Producer Company Limited – Karimnagar Dairy – is upbeat over the steady increase of milk procurement despite prevailing drought conditions.

The farmers have taken up dairy as an alternative source of income in the district due to draught.

Last year, the milk procurement of Karimnagar Dairy was 1.14 lakh litres per day. This year, the milk procurement reached 1.5 lakh litres per day with an increase of 36,000 litres over the last year.

With drought continuing for the second year in a row, the farmers have shifted to dairy units as an alternative source of income, and are deriving benefits from the same.

Incidentally, the Karimnagar Dairy management had also encouraged farmers to go in for dairy units, and provided them financial assistance for their dairy as well as loans from banks.

During the one year period, Karimnagar Dairy had inducted 5,150 milching animals by providing financial assistance of Rs. 10.79 crore, with 7.85 crore financed by other banks.

The farmers purchased each milching animal at a cost of Rs. 40,000 and had also repaid the loans within a year's period.

Expressing satisfaction over farmers taking up dairy in large numbers, Karimnagar Dairy chairman Ch. Rajeshwara Rao said that they had provided all assistance to the farmers who took up dairy units this season.

“We provided about 300 metric tonnes of fodder seed on subsidy, gave Rs. 2,000 as incentive to farmers who cultivated green fodder in at least 10 guntas of land, and also supplied cattle feed at Rs. 100 less per quintal at Rs. 1400 per quintal against the normal rate of Rs. 1,500,” he said.

In case there is a death of cattle, the Karimnagar Dairy also provided compensation of Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 7,000 and loan of Rs. 30,000 for purchasing a new animal, he added.

“We are very happy for motivating farmers to go in for dairy units during drought, which has assured them a monthly income,” he said.

Bidar farmers to get help in growing banana

Scientists of the National Research Centre for Banana (NRCB) in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, will help farmers in Bidar and Kalaburagi in cultivating banana. They will work through the Bidar-based College of Horticulture.

Resource persons will train farmers in cultivation methods, protection of crops from pests and insects, and post-harvest technologies and provide seedlings and other inputs. Farmers will also be exposed to the market for fresh fruits and fruit-based products. NRCB will organise demonstrations in the fields of progressive farmers and organise lectures on the COH premises in Bidar.

As a first step towards this long-time association, a team led by the centre director B. Padmanabhan visited COH on Wednesday and interacted with farmers, teachers and students, and inspected the post-harvest laboratory, library, and the farms and greenhouses.

V. Kumar, scientist, said Bidar's climate was suited for horticulture crops and encouraged farmers to try various types of banana. It is best to start cultivation on a small area and increase gradually, he said. He asked farmers to study the market and consult experts before taking up any new crop.

R. Thangavelu, scientist, said that the market for Kamalapur red banana would grow further as consumers were slowly realising its health benefits.

Mr. Padmanabhan pointed out that one of the mandates of the centre was to train farmers in advanced farming methods and to introduce the crop to non-traditional areas. He said the geology and climate of Bidar-Kalaburgi was well suited for the crop. Temperatures ranging from 25 to 35 degrees are optimal for banana. Wind speeds below 40 km per hour will protect the crops from falling.

Mr. Padmanabhan said that Lok Sabha member Bhagwant Khuba initiated the interaction process by writing a letter to the ICAR and the banana research institute. “The MP wanted us to inspect the area to see if banana could be grown here and to train farmers if possible,” he said.

V. Kumar, K.J. Jayabhaskaran, and R. Thangavelu were the other members of the team.

Ready market

Suraj Patil, a farmer from Kamalapur, asked farmers to pick banana over sugarcane as the former had a ready market, promised assured yields and “frees you from the clutches of the sugar factories.”

S.S. Baragimath, Deputy Director of Horticulture, said banana farms added upto 2,000 hectares in Bidar district. The area can be increased gradually, once farmers realise the benefits, he said. He pointed out that farmers could double their cultivable area by opting for drip irrigation, and increase productivity by 20-30 per cent. He said banana needed 15-20 litres of water per day per plant, slightly higher than that needed for sugarcane. But bananas had a large market potential as they could be sold anywhere, round the year.

Govt. to launch drought relief ops

Kasaragod, Kollam, and Palakad districts worst-affected

The government has decided to launch drought relief operations across the State. A high-level meeting convened by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy here on Thursday decided to seek the consent of the Election Commission to take up relief operations to tackle the drinking water scarcity in parched districts.

The government has written to the Centre, seeking relaxation in the conditions laid down for the declaration of a drought in the State. An ex gratia assistance of Rs.4,00,000 has been announced for the families of the

victims of sunstroke and the government would bear the medical expenses of those undergoing treatment. Free ration would be provided for sunstroke-affected workers.

The meeting was informed that Kasaragod, Kollam, and Palakkad districts were the worst affected by the drought. Revenue Minister Adoor Prakash said crop loss had been reported from 1,038 hectares. Affected farmers would be compensated and funds would be allotted for protection of cattle from the heat.

It was decided to set up reverse osmosis plants in Kasaragod to overcome the problem of saline intrusion into water sources. Rigs and geologists from six districts would be deployed to dig more tube wells. Additional Chief Secretary V.J. Kurian has been entrusted with coordinating the drought relief operations in the district.

Officials told the meeting that water from the Thenmala dam was being supplied to Kollam town, Panmana and neighbouring areas.

Charging canals

They said the canals leading to Kollam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts would be charged using water from the Thenmala dam. The Malampuzha dam in Palakkad district would be used exclusively for drinking water supply.

District Collectors were directed to utilise the funds (Rs.13 crore) allotted for drinking water supply. The Minister said more funds would be released if the situation warranted additional expenses.

The meeting resolved to install capacitors to resolve the voltage problem at pumping stations of the Kerala Water Authority. More tanker lorries would be pressed into service and boats would be deployed for the purpose in Kuttanad.

Two new plant species found in Western Ghats



Zingiber sabuanum and *Habenaria sahyadrica* .



Scientists working at Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala's Centre for Medicinal Plants Research (CMPR) have discovered two new species of medicinal plants from the Western Ghats.

The research team led by K.M. Prabhukumar and Indira Balachandran discovered a new *Habenaria* species during their floristic explorations in the shola forests on the Elival hills of the Muthikulam forest area in Palakkad. The same team discovered a new *Zingiber* species from the Dhoni region of Palakkad.

Naming the ginger species as *Zingiber sabuanum* after renowned taxonomist Mamiyil Sabu, Dr. Prabhukumar said the plant with purple flowers with beautiful white dots and lines on it was unique to the Western Ghats. He said *Zingiber sabuanum* would bloom in June-July.

Alfred Joe, researcher at the Department of Botany, Calicut University, too was part of the team which discovered the ginger species.

Dr. Prabhu Kumar and team named the other plant *Habenaria sahyadrica* .

P.B. Sreekumar, scientist at Kerala Forest Research Institute, played a key role in the discovery of *Habenaria sahyadrica* . This orchid species was identified with the help of Hong Kong-based taxonomist Pankaj Kumar. “We named this orchid plant after the Sahyadris (the Western Ghats), considering the variety of flora that it contains,” said Dr. Prabhu Kumar.

A rare bloom

It was a rare bloom.

A peculiar odour emanating from the garden of A. Balakrishnan at Kovai Thirunagar made him, and his neighbours as well, search for its source.

They found a wild elephant foot yam flower.

“I am very happy that it has grown in my garden. It is something we have never seen,” he said. What was more surprising to Mr. Balakrishnan was that he had not raised the plant.

M. Kannan, professor and head of the Department of Floriculture and Landscaping at Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, says: “It is an edible tuber crop. This is a very rare flower, and it blooms only once in three or four years.”

The elephant foot yam grows up to a height of 1.25 m.

The plant resembles an umbrella when the flower blooms. The plant is perennial and is generally found in the damp areas of the forests, says Mr. Kannan.



Over 60% farmers have no access to bank loans: CM Devendra Fadnavis

Says banks need to reach out to small, marginal farmers.

He also urged the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to expedite the process of funds for agro-irrigation projects.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday urged national and commercial banks to evolve a mechanism to expand their crop-loan lending to reach out to a larger number of farmers with small and marginal land holdings, with an aim to transform the farm sector and make farmers self-reliant.

He also urged the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to expedite the process of funds for agro-irrigation projects.

Saying that the government’s policy reforms to restructure loans had helped bring 7 lakh farmers in the credit net, Fadnavis, speaking at the annual kharif

meeting here, said, “I must admit the numbers should be at least three times more in the coming years.”

The government has already cut interest rate on loans from 12 per cent to 6 per cent coupled with extending the repayment period from three to five years. Moreover, farmers don't have to pay interest in the first year for which the government stood as the guarantor.

At the meeting, Fadnavis expressed concern over 60 per cent farmers failing to avail the institutional credit loans. The biggest challenge for the government and financial institutions is to reach out to these farmers who have no access to bank loans.

As a result, they are forced to depend on money lenders, who further push them into the debt trap.

“The RBI's concern that banks cannot be coerced into giving loans is understandable. ...banks are bound to be governed by norms of loan recovery. Yet, I believe national and commercial banks should reconsider loans to farmers beyond obligation or duty.

The urgency to enhance loans to small farmers instead of concentrating on big and wealthy farmers needs to be adjusted through course corrections,” Fadnavis said.

“Let us not look at loan allocation to farmers as an obligation. While there are issues related to loan recovery, overall, statistics show bank loans to the agro-sector have increased every year. But it does not commensurate with more farmers availing the loans.

Which means, a handful of big farmers are getting bigger loans,” he said. While asserting that the state had already allocated more than Rs 18,000 crore to tackle the farm crisis in drought-hit Marathwada and Vidarbha, he said, “There is no paucity of funds.”

Referring to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)'s prediction of early monsoons, he said, "The 1.33 lakh works under the Jalyukta Shivar will give good results, even in moderate rains."

The government has urged district officials to speed up the Jalyukta Shivar works in the next one-and-half months. The IMD has predicted monsoons in the state by June 10.



Maharashtra govt will soon declare 938 more villages drought-affected

The state government will declare 938 more villages drought-affected in the coming days. These are villages in which rabi crops (those sown in winter) have been ruined.

The government has already said that 28,762 of the state's 40,559 villages have been hit by the drought, including 1,053 that grow rabi crops. The addition of the 938 will take the total number of drought-affected villages to 29,700, including 1,991 that grow rabi crops.

According to a source in the government, the 938 villages are in Solapur and Ahmednagar districts. Crops that are grown during the monsoon season are called kharif crops while those grown during the winter season (October-March) are called rabi crops.

Revenue minister Eknath Khadse said on Thursday that villages with rabi crops have also been affected by the drought this time, and that based on fresh reports from districts, more villages will be declared drought-affected soon. He, however, did not disclose exactly how many.

The state government also reviewed preparations for the kharif season at a meeting chaired by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday.

After the meeting, Khadse said that this year, crops will be sown on around 1.50 lakh hectares of land and that the government expects a total crop production of around 1.62 lakh metric tonnes.

The government has started its preparations as the meteorological department has forecast an early monsoon this year.

Khadse also reacted to remarks by NCP chief Sharad Pawar, who defended the planting of water-guzzling sugarcane despite the drought. Pawar had said on Wednesday that though sugarcane is in the spotlight because of the drought, the crop has sustained and transformed the entire rural economy.

Khadse said Pawar must be speaking from experience, but added that in such a situation, planning and water management is a must.

“No one can deny the fact that if sugar mills in drought-hit Latur, Beed and Osmanabad had used water sparingly, the state government would have had to deploy fewer tankers,” Khadse said.

Currently, 3,351 villages across Maharashtra have no sources of drinking water and are being supplied water by 4,356 tankers, according to data released by the relief and rehabilitation department last week.

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

Crop insurance scheme not to be limited by Budget

Banks and insurance companies roped in to popularise scheme, says Agriculture Ministry

The Prime Minister’s Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) — the Centre’s flagship scheme to mitigate farmers’ distress due to crop loss – will not be restricted by the amount sanctioned in this year’s budget. The agriculture ministry has

told States that if required, the Centre would increase funding through revised allocation to match their contributions to the scheme.



“The PMFBY represents a paradigm shift in crop insurance. The idea behind the scheme is to cover as many farmers as possible. We have informed States that we are willing to go beyond the budgeted ₹5,500 crore for this year if there is a need,” an agriculture ministry official told *BusinessLine*.

Funding for the crop insurance scheme is to be shared by the Centre and States equally.

Premium rate

Under the PMFBY – which provides insurance coverage in the event of failure of crops as a result of natural calamities, pests and diseases – farmers have to pay a premium of 2 per cent of the sum insured for the Kharif crop and 1.5 per cent for the Rabi crop. For commercial and horticulture crops, the premium to be paid is 5 per cent.

State governments are in the process of floating tenders for selecting insurance companies for the scheme, scheduled to kick off from June this year.

“There may be a situation that the need for Central funding goes beyond the allocated ₹5,500 crore, as all out efforts are being made to popularise the scheme and get poor farmers into the fold,” the official said. The Centre has already asked banks to ensure that all farmers who take loans get covered under the scheme by deducting their premiums.

“We have asked insurance companies to open offices in all districts to reach poor farmers who do not take loans,” the official said.

Earlier this month, the Centre held meetings in every district of the country in ‘Krishi Vigyan Kendras’ in every district to spread word about the scheme. “Since agriculture is in the domain of States, we have also asked them to do their bit in spreading word,” the official said.

No cap on subsidy

Another reason why the premium burden that would fall on the Centre and States would be larger than the earlier scheme is the fact that there is no cap on the subsidy.

“Earlier there was a cap on the premium beyond which the government would not compensate. This scheme does not have any such cap, and is thus very beneficial for drought-prone or calamity-prone areas where the premium rates are higher than other areas,” the official added.

Parag Milk Foods set to export cheese to Russia

With Russia agreeing to import cheese from India after relaxing conditions, private dairy players in India have an ocean of opportunity to sell cheese in the Russian market. According to industry players, opening of cheese exports would boost cheese production in India and also fetch better prices for milk.

It is learnt that the Union Commerce Ministry has finalised the proposed protocol drafted by Russia and signed the same.

“Russia’s annual cheese demand is estimated at 200,000 tonnes. After the signing of the draft protocol by the Centre, cheese exports to Russia can start anytime,” said Devendra Shah, Chairman of Pune-based Parag Milk Foods.

Shah believed that in order to meet the growing need for making cheese, demand for milk will also rise. Notably, India’s largest milk cooperative, the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF), had earlier expressed a possibility of price rise in liquid milk in the near future. The price rise is mainly attributed to the rising input costs for farmers.

The opening of exports to Russia is also expected to lift the international cheese prices, which currently rule in the range of \$3,000-3,200 per tonne. Currently, only 60,000-70,000 tonnes of cheese are exported through the official channel to Russia, informed Parag Milk officials.

India’s total cheese capacity is estimated at 32,000 tonnes per annum. Parag Milk Foods has about 40 tonnes per day or about 14,000 tonnes per annum of installed cheese capacity.

To boost agri output, irrigation projects to be fast tracked

The Centre is finalising the contours of the long-term irrigation fund in order to meet Budget commitments for rural India and bolster farm sector productivity.

The move comes in the backdrop of nearly 260 districts being declared drought hit. “After two consecutive years of poor monsoons, it is necessary to protect the rural sector and ensure there is no further impact on agricultural productivity. Rural demand is already weak and it has to be boosted to enhance overall economic growth,” said a senior government official.

The Finance Ministry is understood to have initiated discussions on the proposed long term irrigation fund that will have a corpus of ₹20,000 crore.

To be administered by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the fund will provide financing to irrigation projects identified by the Ministry of Rural Development.

Funds

While funds will initially be allocated by the Centre to the corpus, it may also have to be borrowed from the market later.

Underlining the need for developing infrastructure for irrigation, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said in the Union Budget, "Irrigation is a critical input for increasing agriculture production and productivity. Out of 141 million hectares of net cultivated area in the country, only 46 per cent is covered under irrigation."

The Minister, who had also announced a slew of measures for crop insurance, Soil Health Card Scheme as well as a Unified Agriculture Marketing Scheme, has also held a meeting with the Rural Development Ministry on the status of the implementation of Budget proposals.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to double farmers' incomes by 2022, while Jaitley is hoping that good rains and farm sector productivity will take growth to over 8 per cent this fiscal.

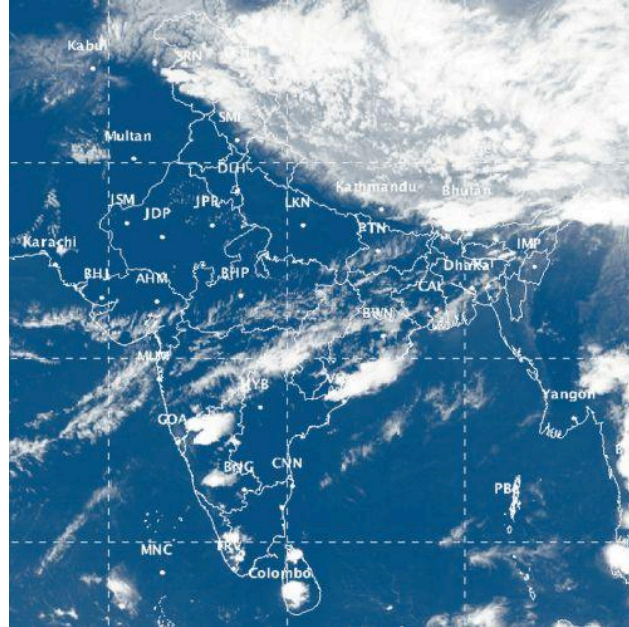
The Budget has allocated ₹35,984 crore for agriculture and farmers' welfare in 2016-17.

Heat wave relents in Kerala, scorches eastern parts

Thunderstorms likely over North Eastern States and snow in J&K

The heat wave alert having been lifted, Palakkad in Kerala saw mercury relenting somewhat to 41.6 degree Celsius on Thursday from 42 degree Celsius the previous day.

This is still 5.7 degree Celsius above the normal for this district in the north-eastern parts of the State, which is buffeted by dry easterlies to northeasterlies from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.



The expectation is that the mercury will drop further , and thundershowers will break out over parts of Kerala during the weekend.

In other parts , like Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal and isolated places over Bihar, Jharkhand and interior Karnataka, heat wave conditions prevailed.

During the 24 hours ending on Thursday, thunderstorms lashed Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand as a western disturbance checked in at the border. Thunderstorms also broke out over some of the heat wave-hit regions in Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Odisha in the East, Kerala in the South, and the north-eastern States.

The highest temperature of 45 degree Celsius during the period was recorded at Bankura in Gangetic West Bengal and Wardha in Vidarbha, to either side of Odisha, which has been witnessing the most heat in the plains during the past week .

India Meteorological Department has now forecast that temperatures will start building up over North-West India during the next two-three days.

Associated build-up of clouds has put a cap on the heating in this region; but that is now expected to change, the Met said in its outlook.

But even this heating phase will be short-lived; it is likely to be interrupted by a fresh western disturbance scheduled to roll in across the border and impact weather both in the hills and adjoining plains.

Thunderstorms accompanied by squall/hail are likely over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura and heavy rain at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh.

Tea plantations hit as Nilgiris goes without rain

The Nilgiris district is facing a spell of dry weather, affecting tea plantations and vegetable cultivation. High temperature and low humidity increased evaporation in the soil, thereby reducing its moisture content. No agro-climatic zone in the Nilgiris received any rain last month.

Even the cumulative rainfall in the first quarter of 2016 was scanty compared to the same period of 2015, and the decennial (10-year) average for the period, meteorological sources told *BusinessLine*.

From January to March, Kotagiri received the highest cumulative rainfall of 3.7 cm (Jan-March 2015: 15.4 cm; decennial: 16.9 cm), followed by Coonoor 3.2 cm (27.3 cm; 18.6 cm), Kullakamby 2.8 cm (12.1 cm; 15.7 cm), Kundah 0.4 cm (20.6 cm; 13.2 cm) and Ooty 0.3 cm (16.3 cm; 6.2 cm).

Drinking water scarcity is growing acute day by day. “In Coonoor, municipality is supplying water through taps in different areas only once in 7 to 15 days. If this is the situation in April, we wonder what would happen next month when summer conditions peak and tourist inflow increases”, said R Subramanian, Convener, Federation of Service Organisations.

“The Centre’s only answer is that a project has been drawn to bring water to Coonoor from Emerald Dam. This dam is situated several kilometres away and the project has not progressed into any mentionable extent to bring water to the town in near future”, he said.

Centre puts 2016-17 sugar output at 24 million tonnes, sees no shortage

The country has a carryover stock of 9 million tonnes of sugar, which would be sufficient to meet domestic demand, the Food Ministry has said.

“Notwithstanding any shortfall in sugar production during the 2016-17 sugar season (estimated 23-24 million tonnes), the total availability in India (30-31 million tonnes) would be sufficient to meet domestic consumption. There is, therefore, likely to be no shortage of domestically produced sugar in India,” read an official statement.

In the current sugar season, the production of sugar has been estimated at about 25.3 million tonnes, while domestic consumption is estimated at about 25.5 million tonnes. With exports being low at about 1.5 million tonnes, the stock position at the close of the current sugar season (September 2016) will stand at 7.3 million tonnes, which will be carried forward for the next sugar season 2016-17, it added.

Sugar futures contracts fell on the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, following the Centre’s approval for imposition of stockholding limits on sugar to rein in spiralling prices of the commodity, analysts said. The Centre has brought sugar within the purview of stock limits in order to check the inflationary tendencies in the sweetener and to reduce hoarding by wholesalers and retailers, who were anticipating a price rise due to lower on year output.

Drought may impact coconut production; rise in oil exports likely to keep prices firm

The prevailing drought condition is likely to affect the domestic coconut production, which is expected to fall by five per cent this year.

According to the statistical survey of the Coconut Development Board, the estimated figure of production in 2015-16 crop year (July-June) would be 19,444 million nuts against 20,440 million nuts production in 2014-15.

The actual decline in production presumes to be much more with mercury levels rising.

With the onset of summer and oppressive heat, there will be higher demand for tender coconut. However, the Board is bullish on the commodity market for coconut oil and copra, which is reviving up in the last few days witnessing an increase in prices.

According to Board officials, the scenario is expected to continue as the arrival of coconut and coconut products is low in the major coconut markets. With the international price of coconut oil ruling higher than the domestic price, there is hardly any scope for import of these products. While the average monthly international price (cif, Rotterdam), for March was \$145, the domestic price (Kochi market) ruled at \$127 per quintal.

Further, the export of coconut oil and desiccated coconut is showing an increase from the beginning of this year, the officials said, adding that all these factors are indicating a positive influence on coconut oil prices.

Thalath Mahmood, President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association, admitted that there was some buoyancy in the coconut oil market in the last few weeks, with the prices rose to ₹300 per quintal.

However, there was a fall of ₹100 this week in the absence of a firm corporate demand. Increase in local demand also led to price rise.

Jeera gains on short supply



Jeera prices moved up on the back of tight supply at the producing regions. Moreover, good export demand also pushed up prices on Thursday.

Traders said that lower arrivals due to abnormally high-temperature fuelled the uptrend since the last couple of days.

With this, demand for export rose in recent times and the market expected more export enquiries on reports of good quality jeera production.

About 20,000 bags of jeera arrived in Unjha mandi of Gujarat and price increased by ₹40 to ₹2,800-3,350 per 20 kg.

At Rajkot APMC, 1,300 bags of jeera arrived and price gained by ₹50 to ₹2,900-3,300 per 20 kg. According to data from the Dept of Commerce, export of jeera during first 11 month of 2015-16 (Apr-Jan) was 71,983 tonnes, compared to 1.37 lakh tonnes exported last year.

Mustard oil rules steady



Despite weak arrival, sluggish demand and decline in soy oil prices have kept mustard oil prices steady, with prices in Indore mandis being quoted at ₹760, while it ruled at ₹750 in Neemuch and ₹770 in Moorena, on Thursday.

Compared to last week, mustard oil is ruling ₹10 up in mandis across Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan too, mustard oil ruled firm on subdued demand with prices in Kota and Ganga Nagar being quoted at ₹765 each (up ₹5 from last week), and at ₹780 in Jaipur (up ₹5 from last week).

Business Standard

Efficiency of water usage in agriculture & development possibilities in Mandsaur

“We need to revive the Shivana river cleaning project. The project has been dormant for years,” Mandsaur MLA, Yashpal Singh Sisodiya, urged.

Endorsing his call, Sudhir Gupta, Member of Parliament, Mandsaur, asked India Water Partnership and Shivana Area Water partnership to extend a helping hand.

Swatantra Kumar Singh, district collector, said, "The efficient use of water should be taken up as a mission by local citizens to improve the district economy."

NS Sipani, chairman, Shivana Area Water Partnership volunteered to promote, encourage and educate farmers in the efficient use of water. "We will impart regular training to farmers through demonstration and workshops," he said.

Veena Khanduri, executive secretary, India Water Partnership, stressed on 'Water Budgeting'. "We need to



(left to right): Sudhir Kumar (lead bank manager), Dr Veena Khanduri (Executive Secretary, India Water Partnership), NS Sipani (Chairman, Shivana Area Water Partnership), Prahlad Bandhwar (Head, Mandsaur Municipal Council), Sudhir Gupta (Member of Parliament), Yashpal Sisodiya (Member of Legislative Assembly) and Swatantra Kumar Singh (district collector) at Business Standard Smart Business in Mandsaur on April 23, 2016, in association with Shivana Area Water Partnership, Mandsaur (Madhya Pradesh)

At the Business Standard Smart Business panel discussion on 'Efficiency of water usage in agriculture & development possibilities in Mandsaur' organised in association with Shivana Area Water Partnership and India Water Partnership, the panellists pledged to revive the Shivana river cleaning project and promote the efficient usage of water.

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Veena Khanduri, executive secretary, India Water Partnership, stressed on 'Water Budgeting'. "We need to educate people about water budgeting so that efficient use of water can be promoted," she said.

Manoj Kumar Sharma, Superintendent of Police, Mandsaur, called for including training on water conservation in the school curriculum.

Prahlad Bandhwar, head, Municipal Council, stressed on creating more water bodies like stop dams, ponds etc. to restrict pollution in Shivana river.

Sudhir Kumar, district lead bank manager, dwelt upon supports and facilities available under the 'Start-up India, Stand-up India' campaign.

Meghmani receives EPA nod to use permethrin in agriculture in US

With amendment in label registration of permethrin, Meghmani Organics will be able to market this product to major agrochemical formulators in the US

Meghmani Organics Ltd (MOL), a manufacturer of pigments and agrochemicals, has received amendment in label to its permethrin technical 95.5% registration in the US for agriculture use from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Meghmani Organics acquired a permethrin technical 95.5% label registration in 2007 from BASF Sparks Llc to market its pesticide product.

Before the new amendment of label for agriculture use, MOL was allowed to sell the product with the EPA recommended usages, viz, indoor non-food areas, outdoors for use as a termicide, use on non-commercial turf & ornamentals (plants), wood treatment, outdoor non-food uses, outside building surfaces and premises, agricultural structures, and treatment of livestock & pet.

With the amendment in label registration, MOL can now use permethrin technical 95.5% in agricultural crops, domestic farm animals, mosquito and other usages.

"With amendment in label registration of permethrin, we will be able to embark on marketing activities to sell our product for agriculture use to major formulators and distributors in the US.

This strategy will not only increase our market penetration in the US, but also improve the product's profitability in the longer term," said Ankit Patel, head - agro marketing, Meghmani.

The total market for permethrin technical for agriculture and non-agriculture use in the US is close to 1500 tonnes. US contributed about 11 percent of

MOL's sagrochemical export sales in the FY ended March 31, 2016. The present market share of Meghmani in permethrin technical market is about 300 tonnes per annum and the company expects to add another 200 tonnes of sales with additions into the label.

As a result of amendment in label, Meghmani will earn additional revenue of about Rs 25 crore in FY2016-17 from the US market.

Smallest coffee crop in 19 years to fuel market rally

Output will decline at least 30 per cent in the harvesting season starting from October



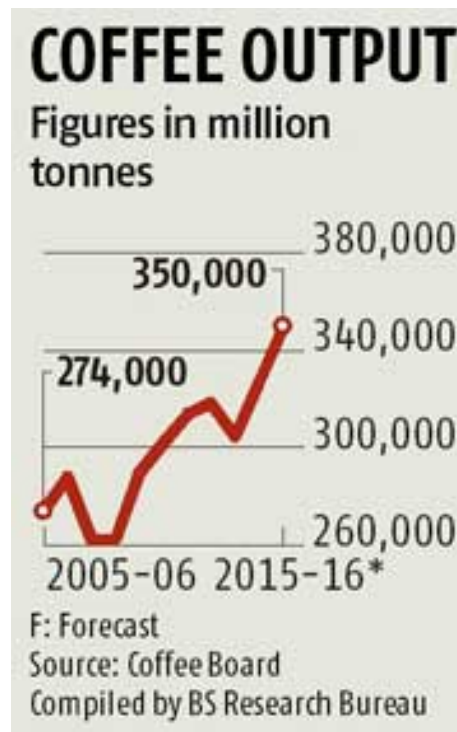
Coffee production in India is set to tumble to a 19-year low as dry weather wilts plantations in Asia's third-largest grower.

Output will decline at least 30 per cent in the harvesting season starting from October 1, compared with a record 350,000 tons a year earlier, according to Nishant Gurjer, a member and past chairman of the Karnataka Planters Association.

That would mean a crop of 245,000 tons, the lowest since 1997-98, according to state-run Coffee Board data.

A smaller harvest will cut Indian exports, supporting arabica prices that entered a bull market last month amid concern that global supply will continue to shrink on El Niño-induced crop losses in South America and Southeast Asia.

Shipments from India, which exports more than 70 per cent of its production, may fall in 2016-17 from a year earlier, Gurjer said.



"Blossoming has not been very good because rains have been quite a failure," Gurjer said. "It's not a very comforting scenario.

It will be minimum of 30 per cent drop in production. Could be more, could be less depending on how the weather pans out in a week to 15 days."

Bull market

Prices of arabica beans, favoured by Starbucks Corp., entered a bull market on ICE Futures U.S. in New York last month as adverse weather from El

Nino threatened to shrink output in Brazil and Colombia, the top producers. The contract for delivery in July closed at \$1.215 a pound on Wednesday.

Robusta futures in London, headed for the third monthly gain in the longest rally since April 2014, settled at \$1,573 a ton on Wednesday.

India produces mainly robusta coffee, which needs a lot of water. Robusta production may drop by at least 25 per cent to 30 per cent while high temperatures are threatening arabica with white stem borer disease outbreak, Gurjer said.

"Where there is no irrigation robusta has been damaged, and I would say quite badly," Anil Kumar Bhandari, president of India Coffee Trust and a former member of the state-run Coffee Board. "There will be damage to arabica because of the intense heat."

According to the meteorological department, Karnataka, the biggest coffee producing state, received 52 per cent below-average rainfall between March 1 and April 20.

Showers were 51 per cent below average in Kerala, while the shortfall was 81 per cent in Tamil Nadu, department data show. India's coffee exports climbed 13 per cent to 319,734 tons in 12 months ended March 31 from a year earlier, the board said on April 1.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

North Gujarat farmers demand water for standing crops

With the summers having set in many villages across North Gujarat a sheer desperation for water is now beginning to be seen.

In Dehgam taluka alone there are 20 villages where farmers have begun to feel the pinch.

This is because for the past two weeks there is practically no water in the Narmada canal and even the ground water has gone several feet lower because of excessive withdrawal last year.

In a representation to the Ahmedabad collector farmers have now requested that some Narmada water be diverted into Vahedari, Meshwo and Vaheda rivulets so that farmers can atleast save some of the standing crops.

"But we are helpless. We just have water for drinking in the Narmada canal, which is our priority as of now during the summer months," says a senior Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam limited official.

By March 31 the state government had banned withdrawal of water for irrigation purposes from the main canal. There is just 22 per cent water left in 220 water reservoirs of Gujarat.

The eight municipal corporations too have been asked to reduce water consumption by at least 20 per cent. While the villages the state government supplies 40 litres , per person per day , in cities this figure peaks to 187 litres to 220 litres per person per day.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Inclement weather condition affecting tea production in Assam

Several tea growing areas have reported flooding in tea estates. Tea leafs were severely affected by the hailstorm which occurred on several days.

GUWAHATI: Incessant rainfall accompanied by hailstorm has severely

affected tea bushes in Assam, India's largest tea producer, and planters are worried that this will affect production of premium variety second flush tea.



Second flush tea accounts for 20% of the total tea production, and commands a premium in the domestic and international markets. In upper Assam, some tea estates were flooded following the heavy rains.

Assam has already recorded 125% of its normal rainfall, 25% above normal, during the current pre-monsoon period.

"Several tea growing areas have reported flooding in tea estates. Tea leaves were severely affected by the hailstorm which occurred on several days.

There was continuous downpour for two to three weeks in April this year," secretary of Tea Association of India, Guwahati, Dipanjal Deka, told ET. The second flush production is from May end to July.

"The production of second flush tea will definitely get affected this year," said Deka.

All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (AASSTGA) vice president Karuna Mahanta said, "At present, green leaf production is low. Even prices of green leaf are on the lower side."

India's production in the year 2014 was 1207.31 million kgs, of which Assam's production was 610.97 million kgs. In 2015, India accounted for 1191m kgs of tea production, and Assam roughly produced 614.57m kgs.

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.