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THE HINDU

VC interacts with farm fresh outlet customers



K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, on Sunday visiting a farm fresh vegetable outlet at Srirangam in Tiruchi on Sunday.— Photo: M. Srinath

K. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, on Sunday suggested the Department of Cooperatives to issue identity cards to regular consumers of farm fresh outlets.

Visiting a farm fresh outlet in Thiruvadi street in Srirangam accompanied by K.C. Ravichandran, Joint Registrar of Cooperatives, he said farm fresh outlets had received good support from the people.

It ensured them to get fresh vegetables at cheaper rates. It would maintain the vegetable prices in the market under check.

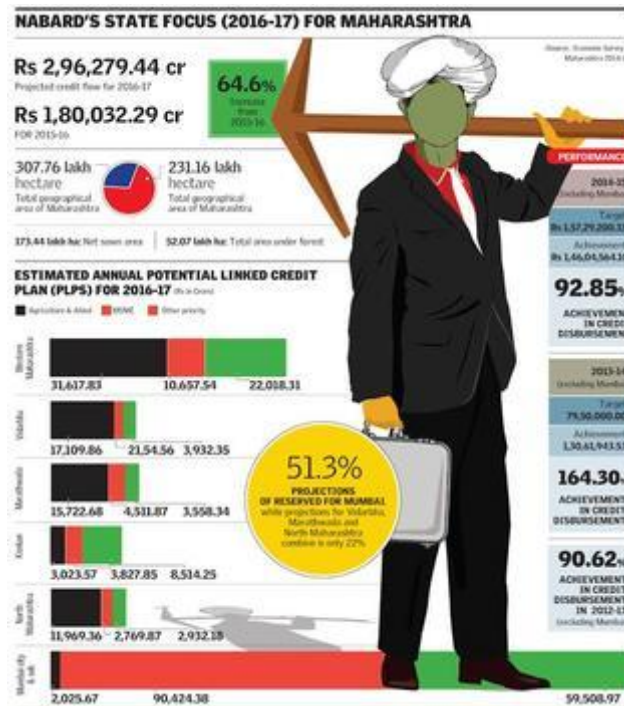
Since the outlets had received good patronage among the customers, it was important for creating a data bank of customers. They should be given identity cards so as to establish a rapport with them.

He said special discount could be offered to the customers.

It would keep the customers' base intact.

Earlier, he interacted with the customers and received the feedback on farm fresh outlets.

Nabard thinks Mumbai needs 50% of agri loans



The fact that a megapolis, and not the drought-affected areas of Maharashtra, is the biggest beneficiary, has angered many

Bristling with glass towers and commercial districts, Mumbai is unquestionably the financial capital of India. The most greenery an average Mumbaikar can hope to grow is a few herbs in window flower-pots.

Which is why it seems strange that the city will be the biggest beneficiary of agriculture loans, as projected by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) for the fiscal year 2016-17.

The State Focus Report for 2016-17, released by Nabard last week, allocated 51.3 per cent (of Rs 2,96,279.44 crore) of its total potential-linked credit plan (PLP) to Mumbai City and Suburbs.

Set up by an act of Indian Parliament in 1982, Nabard's corporate mission is to 'Promote sustainable and equitable agriculture and rural prosperity

through effective credit support, related services, institution development and other innovative initiatives.’

Nabard's report will be used by the Bank of Maharashtra, the convener of state-level banker’s committee, to devise the state's credit plan. Simply put: decisions on loan disbursements will be based on the Nabard report’s projections.

The report emphasises that it is the poor and vulnerable groups that should have access to safe, easy and affordable credit and other financial services “in disadvantaged areas.”

It also notes that easy credit to lagging sectors is a precondition to accelerate growth and reduce income disparities and poverty.

How does this explain the focus on Mumbai?

Dr US Saha, Chief General Manager, Nabard-Maharashtra, explained that the projections are not only for crop loans, but include total priority-sector lending. Dr Saha accepted that Nabard’s primary focus should always remain on agriculture and agreed that Mumbai does not have agriculture. but the city does, he says, have “a number of MSMEs [micro, small and medium enterprises], food and agro-processing units, housing and social infrastructure projects. If you exclude Mumbai’s projections from total estimated credit plan, the amount planned for areas affected by agrarian distress will be seen to be evenly distributed.”

Rural activists are not amused. “Does the focus report follow Nabard’s real mandate?” asked Vijay Jawandhia, farmers’ leader from Vidarbha. “We propose investment where we need development. Are there any special projections for drought-affected areas? The projections should be to provide incentives to set up agro-industries in less developed regions such as Marathwada and Vidarbha. Repeated neglect is increasing the already existing backlog of these regions. Instead we are again focusing on Mumbai, that already has enough money.” Mr Jawandhia added that loans allotted to industries in Mumbai will be under the agriculture loan label, which carries a number of benefits, like lower interest rates.

The disparity in projected loan shares goes beyond Mumbai. As per the report, after excluding the funds projected for Mumbai, estimates of PLPs

for Marathwada and Vidarbha are just 16.48 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. Western Maharashtra, comparatively wealthier, and a region which has not faced drought and of farmers' suicides, gets 44 per cent.

While industry and service sectors are estimated to be contributing 88.7 per cent of state's total domestic product, agriculture and allied sector contributes only 11.3 per cent.

‘Explore research issues in agri-credit’



RBI Deputy Governor S.S. Mundra interacting with students at ICFAI University.—Photo: by arrangement

ICFAI Business School (IBS) hosted the first Banking Research Conference in collaboration with the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics where S.S. Mundra, Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank of India called upon the researchers to explore research issues in the areas of Agri-credit, credit to MSMEs and corporate leverage. He said the RBI was also engaged in research areas such as asset quality, capital adequacy, risk management and other related areas of banking. Emphasising the need for policy-oriented research, Mr. Mundra called for analysing how formal finance has impacted on productivity in agriculture and priority sector.

The MSMEs that account for 45 per cent of GDP and 40 per cent of exports need to be studied in terms of effectiveness of formal credit. Under the new priority sector lending, a target of 7.5 per cent of net bank credit has been stipulated for banks to support the government's new initiative of MUDRA bank for developing and refinancing micro-enterprises and micro-finance units, he said.

Prof. Mahender Reddy, the Vice-Chancellor of IFHE University emphasised the key role of the banking sector to achieve India's growth potential. He observed that the Indian banking sector was faced with several challenges like the mushrooming of NPAs more particularly in PSBs and the ineptness of Indian banks in the rapid and effective transmission of monetary policy.

Around forty research papers were presented at the conference by the delegates from leading institutions such as Gokhale Institute, NIBM, Pune, and other institutions.

Professionals from various banks and research scholars from various research centres participated in the conference.

Modi to address farmer rally at Bargarh on Feb. 21

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a massive farmer rally in Bargarh, which witnessed more farmer suicides than any other districts of Odisha in 2015, on February 21 next.

Bargarh will be Mr. Modi's second stopover in his four farmer rallies planned in the month of February. Last year, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had held 'save farmer march' and 'farmer rally' respectively in Bargarh.

"Modiji will be complimented for his pro-farmer policies. During last 19 months, the NDA government has come out with a series of welfare schemes for farmers. From soil health cards to skilling farmers and from increasing irrigated areas to formulating agricultural insurance scheme, the present government has taken a number of steps for farmer welfare," said Arun Singh, national general secretary, addressing a press conference on Sunday.

Pro-farmer schemes

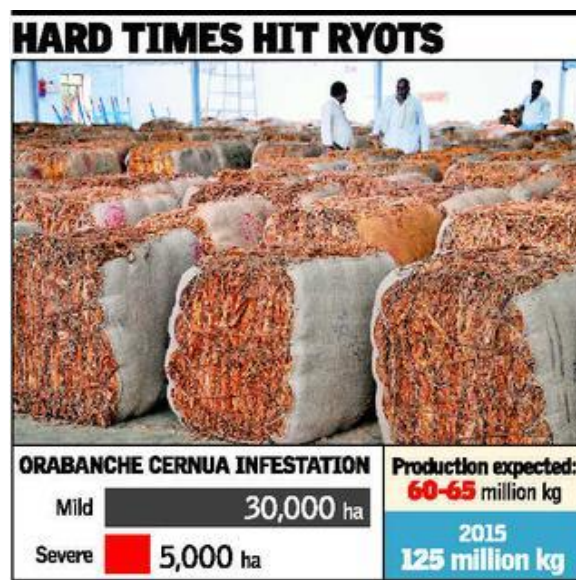
Mr. Singh said Modiji had directed opening of separate educational television channel for farmer – Kissan TV and Mobile App for farmers to know about all government schemes. "Now, under new insurance scheme farmers will have to pay very low premium amount and the insurance benefit will be directly credited to their accounts online," he said.

The State BJP has already started preparation for mobilising farmers from all parts of the State to western Odisha town of Baragarh. Prime Minister would directly interact with many farmer leaders.

In Odisha, according to government estimate, 150 farmers had committed suicide in later half of 2015. But unofficial estimates say more than 200 farmers had ended their lives anticipating complete loss of crop due to drought. After coming under much criticism from opposition political parties, on November 19 last Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had announced Rs. 35000 crore agricultural development package for drought-hit western Odisha districts.

Mixed bag of fortunes likely for tobacco growers

Parasitic weed Orabanche cernua may hit productivity this year



It is going to be a mixed bag of fortunes this year for tobacco growers, who had a worst cropping season last year.

Tobacco curings began on a promising note after Sankranti. The bright grade tobacco variety accounted for a majority of the crop that was taken up for curing, according to the Indian Tobacco Association.

“Around four to five million kg of tobacco had been taken up for curing in 5,000 of the 20,000 barns in operation. Almost the entire crop happens to be

bright grade, which fetches a premium price in the market,” ITA sources said.

However, the parasitic weed, *Orabanche Cernua*, that had invaded 60 per cent of fields, is expected to hit productivity this year at a time when the Tobacco Board has cut down the crop size by 52 million kg, rues farmers who are trying all means to deal with the debilitating effect on the crop.

“The growers, as a result, will not be able to produce the crop to the optimum curing capacity to take advantage of the scale of production per barn,” observed Virginia Tobacco Growers Welfare Association president Ch. Sessaiah.

Meanwhile, taking cudgels for the distraught growers, YSRC Whip in Parliament Y.V. Subba Reddy urged Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharam and Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh to direct scientists from the Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) to visit the fields and suggest ways to control the parasitic weed. “We are worried that crop production may dip to less than 25 quintals per barn as against 32 quintals permitted by the Tobacco Board,” said Ongole II Ryots president V.V. Prasad.

Meanwhile, farmers have resorted to ‘light flood irrigation’ in areas where water facility is available to prevent the spread of *Orabanche Cernua*. “By irrigating the crop, the impact of the parasitic weed could be controlled to a certain extent. But this will affect the crop quality, N. Chimpriya, a farmer from Vellampalli.

Orabanche Cernua infestation is severe in over 5,000 hectares in Podili and Tangutur regions and mild in another 30,000 hectares in the traditional tobacco growing areas of Southern Black Soil (SBS) and Southern Light Soil (SLS). In the present situation, the production may fall to 60 to 65 million kg in the traditional tobacco growing areas as against last year’s production of 125 million kg.

Bypassing the Tobacco Board, some private firms had started making purchases by offering a higher price of Rs. 130 per kg, complained a group of farmers coming under the Ongole II Auction platform and warned that they would resort to agitation if the authorities failed to act fast.

The relatively well-regulated tobacco sector has witnessed the worst-ever crisis since the glut leading to declaration of crop holiday in the year 2000. A spate of farm suicides had forced Ms. Sitharaman to visit Prakasam district in September last year and help growers liquidate their accumulated stocks by offering a compensation price of Rs. 20 for low-grade tobacco, which had been rejected by traders.

Insect light trap, a hit among farmers

One light trap is enough to control most of the insects that may attack crops



A farm official explaining the insect light trap to a farmer at Thammanaickenpatti in Karur district.— Photo: A.Muralitharan

Insect light trap, one of the effective tools of pest management, is becoming popular among farmers.

Though the farmers have generally been giving importance to controlling pest attack by applying pesticides, not many have known that insects can be effectively controlled by trapping them with lights. However, the farmers have started using the light trap method to control insects. Many of cereal crops such as sorghum, rice and maize and vegetable crops such as tomato and brinjal attract insects and pests. Horticultural crops and pulse crops also attract insects.

Agricultural officials and researchers say that one light trap was enough for controlling most of the insects that might attack the crop. It can be used from the stage of planting to harvest. As per the method, the traps should be

placed at a centre of field for three hours between 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., as insects are active mainly during this period.

J. Draviam, Senior Scientist and Head, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Karur, told *The Hindu* that light trap was a vital tool to trap both the sexes of insects. It could reduce the carryover pest population substantially. Many farmers in Karur district had started placing light traps to kill insects.

P. Baskar, a farmer at Thammanaickenpatti, said that he had raised bitter guard, onion, brinjal and a few other horticultural crops in his field. He had brought his field under the light trap system. He could say that his field was almost insect-free thanks to the light trap.

He said he had bought the light for Rs.1500. It was a cheap and effective method to control insects.

Cotton auctioned for Rs. 4 crore

Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 4 crore at the Konganapuram branch of the Tiruchengode Agricultural Producers Marketing Cooperative Society held on Saturday.

While DCH variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,800 and Rs. 6,300 per bag, surabi variety fetched between Rs. 5,800 and Rs. 6,360 per bag.

Cotton farmers from Edappadi, Mettur, Sankagiri, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Tiruvannamalai brought about 20,000 bags of cotton and they were auctioned for Rs. 4 crore.

More than 2 lakh hectares brought under cultivation in Salem

Crops	Area (In hectares)	Production (In tonnes)
Paddy	18,151	89,317
Millets	81,358	4.32 lakh
Pulses	64,466	50,283
Oil seeds	25,204	52,963
Cotton	12,276	48,674

Various crops have been raised in about 2.07 lakh hectares in the district during the current farm season till December 31 last year.

The district managed to achieve production of food products to the tune of 5.71 lakh tonnes by December end against the target of 6.54 lakh tonnes.

Under the 'Kar' paddy season, 585 hectares have been covered, against a target of 4,500 hectares. Samba has been raised in 17,566 hectares against a target of 22,500 hectares and the district managed production of 86,636 tonnes of samba paddy.

Millets have been raised on 81,358 hectares – Choram 38,543 hectares, kambu 1,632 hectares, raghi 6,694 hectares, makka choram 32,424 hectares and other millets 2,065 hectares and 4.32 lakh tonnes of millets have been produced. About 64,466 hectares have been brought under pulses cultivation and 50,283 tonnes of production has been achieved.

A total of 25,204 hectares have been brought under oilseeds – groundnut 21,633 hectares, sesame seeds 2,596 hectares, castor 837 hectares, soya beans 116 hectares and sunflower 22 hectares.

The other major field crops such as cotton at present stood on 12,276 hectares and sugarcane on 6,070 hectares.

C. Rajendran, Joint Director of Agriculture in-charge, speaking at the farmers' grievances day meeting here recently said that the farm activities covered 2.10 lakh hectares during the same season last year.

The State Government has fixed a food production target of 6.54 lakh metric tonnes for the current year (2015-16). During the year 2014-15, the district achieved food production of 6.384 tonnes against a target of 6.840 tonnes.

The agriculture department has already distributed 403.9 tonnes of quality paddy seeds, 33.4 tonnes of millet seeds, 232 tonnes of pulses, 91.2 tonnes of oil seeds and 1.7 tonnes of cotton seeds to farmers.

Fertilizers

The district was having adequate stock of fertilizers. The department distributed 31,250 tonnes of urea, 12,325 tonnes of TAP, 14,310 tonnes of

potash and 25,375 tonnes of mixed fertilizers. The department was having a stock of 24,150 tonnes of fertilizers for distribution to the farmers at any time.

Sri Lanka keen on tie-up to promote indigenous medicine

Seeks collaboration in research, skill development, inputs for mutual benefit



: Sri Lanka’s Health Minister Rejith Senarathne has called for a tie-up between his country and the Government of Kerala in promoting indigenous systems of medicine.

Addressing the inaugural of the five-day Global Ayurveda Festival here on Sunday, Mr. Senarathne said it was important to strengthen and modernise these systems of medicine instead of relying only on modern medicine.

Pointing out Kerala’s strengths in promoting and sustaining Ayurveda, he called for collaboration in research, skill development, ensuring adequacy of raw materials and in expert inputs for mutual benefit.

“I would like to work with the political leadership of Kerala for a long-standing partnership in this area,” he said.

Kerala Minister for Agriculture K.P. Monahan called for concerted efforts to change the mindset among the people and make them aware of the benefits of Ayurveda.

“Kerala was the hub of Ayurveda, and there were times when even every blade of grass in the backyard was seen to have medicinal property.

Unfortunately, plants with such properties had been replaced with decorative orchids. It was time to turn things around so that Ayurveda got its due place.'

Former envoy to the United Nations Dilip Sinha; organising chairman of the festival P.V Madhavankutty Varier; Member of Parliament M.K. Raghavan; Mayor V.K.C. Mammad Koya; and former Union Minister of State for Railways O . Rajagopal; were among those who stressed the need for documenting the efficacy of Ayurveda and promoting it as an effective area of medical science. Leader of the Opposition V.S. Achuthanandan inaugurated an exhibition of various Ayurvedic forms of treatment and medicines. The festival, organised by various Ayurveda institutions, health centres and organisations, opened with a fervent call to propagate the efficacy of this system of medicine and even make it the first choice of medicine globally. Apart from those within the country, delegates have come from Sri Lanka, Russia and some South-East Asian countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi would address the festival on February 2.

Mumbai may get lion's share of Nabard loans

Is Mumbai's requirement of agri-loan more compared to Marathwada or Vidarbha or North Maharashtra? A State Focus Paper for the next financial year prepared by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) answers the question in the affirmative.

The region-wise annual Potential Linked Credit Plans (PLPs) of Nabard has allocated 51.3 per cent of its total projected credit flow to Mumbai city and suburbs.

It means: almost half of the estimated loan amount meant for agriculture, rural development and agro businesses is to be disbursed in India's financial capital.

Marathwada and Vidarbha regions have been reeling from three consecutive years of drought. In 2015, Maharashtra saw the highest number of suicides (3,228) by farmers since 2000. But the PLP projections for these two regions are 8 per cent and 7.8 per cent, for North Maharashtra it is 6 per cent, and for Konkan region it is 5.2 per cent.

With more than half of the PLP projections reserved for Mumbai, Western Maharashtra is estimated to be the second highest recipient of loans.

While Nabard officials claim that the inclusion of other sectors such as Micro, Small, Medium industries, food processing units and housing in priority sector has led to the increase of projected loan amount for Mumbai, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, at the launch program last week of the status report in Sahyadri state guest house, asked them to ensure flow of money to the districts affected by farmers' suicides.

“Agriculture sector is fighting with a number of problems. Banks must focus more on these districts to strengthen the economy,” he said.

India has potential to grow faster at 8-9 per cent, says Arun Jaitley



Economies the world over are doing badly because of the plummeting oil and commodity prices but the slump “suits us because we are net buyers of these” and is an advantage that can help the Government in its efforts to “put our house in order, says the Finance Minister

The target will not be very difficult or impossible for India to achieve.

inance Minister Arun Jaitley has stressed that structural reforms addressing infrastructure, irrigation, farm productivity and manufacturing can help boost growth by about 1-1.5 percentage points.

India has the potential to grow at between eight and nine per cent, Mr. Jaitley said while addressing delegates at a global business summit.

A higher economic growth can end poverty and with the benefit of the slump in global oil and commodity prices and good monsoons, which hopefully are better than the last two years, the target will not be very difficult or impossible for India to achieve.

The upcoming Budget will not resort to “populism” and will focus on structural reforms, he said. “The Budget has to weigh the areas of weaknesses where investments are required... therefore, I have to pitch in that direction,” Mr. Jaitley said.

“At the end of the day, what is it that you are asking for is to get that cutting edge that you must grow at 1-1.5 per cent faster than what you are doing today... We all know that our potential is right there.”

India is one of the few economies in the world that survived crises in 2001, 2008 and 2015 and, “when a country grows over 7.5 per cent, we stand out and we feel happy about this...however, he also said that 7 per cent growth isn't India's optimum growth rate...we have a lot going for us... we should be able to achieve eight per cent growth.”

The global situation, he said, is an opportunity for India to grow at a better pace.

“If we show we have the appetite for reforms, the investments will flow in.” the finance minister said. Economies the world over are doing badly because of the plummeting oil and commodity prices but the slump “suits us because we are net buyers of these” and it is an advantage that can help the government in its efforts to “put our house in order”. Though economists, industry and other experts are sharply divided on their views on whether a deviation from the government's committed path of fiscal consolidation will benefit the economy, the decision must also factor in the tax buoyancy and the available resources, he said.

Responding to a question on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks on Friday about the difference in attitudes of experts towards subsidies aimed at the poor and the tax sops for the corporate sector, the finance minister clarified that the country needs both a strong corporate as well as a sound

agriculture sector. “India needs sound policies to help both these sectors and not put them in conflict with each other.”

“The government is for rationalisation of subsidies, not for its abolition. It is not against subsidies, but will focus on targeted subsidies. Subsidies must be entitled to people who need them,” he said.

He also expressed hope that the Congress will “see reason” and help the government pass, in the Budget Session of the Parliament beginning next month, the constitution amendment bill meant for the roll out of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Bill.

“A law like this which impacts taxation structure of India being passed by consensus is our preference, otherwise it can be put to vote...if there is a discussion on a particular idea in the Bill, I am willing to discuss with them... certainly, we can’t bound future generations to a flawed legislation.” He said he had reached out to the Congress and can’t see why it should have a rethink on the Bill being the author of the reform in the first place. “It is the important reform of UPA... I have to give credit to them... if the author turns against his own script, what do I make of it.”

Workshop on bonsai trees



Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre is conducting a workshop on making a bonsai tree and flower arrangement on January 3 and 4 respectively. For details, call 044 - 2626 3484. Time 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. Venue: No.U-30, 10{+t}{+h}Street, Anna Nagar

Crop loss: Rs. 4.29 crore disbursed to farmers

Ultra scan equipment in allveterinary hospitals sought



A farmers' representative raising a point at the grievances day meeting in Salem on Friday.—Photo: E. Lakshmi Narayanan

Compensation to the tune of Rs. 4.29 crore has been disbursed to 12,466 farmers whose crops suffered damages during the recent downpour experienced by the district.

Special teams comprising officials of agriculture, horticulture, revenue and cooperation departments inspected the damaged crops and submitted a report to the government. Based on the recommendation, the government sanctioned Rs. 4.31 crore as compensation, of which Rs. 4.29 crore had already been disbursed to the affected farmers. The amount had already been deposited in the bank accounts of the farmers, V. Sampath, Collector, said while speaking at the farmers' grievances day meeting here on Friday.

Many farmers' representatives including V. R. Rajamanikkam, a progressive farmer of Veeranam, P.R. Samikannu of Periyeri, and Thiagarajan of Arasanatham complained that the crop damage assessment was not done properly and many affected farmers have been left out.

The Collector and C. Rajendran, Joint Director of Agriculture in-charge, said that another round of assessment of damaged crop was done by the official teams and the government will be sanctioning the compensation soon. Mr. Rajendran said that special initiative was taken to ensure that all the affected farmers are positively covered. Mr. Samikannu said that Periyeri Lake in the tail-end of the Kariakovil and Aanaimaduvu dams was a very old lake. The water released from both the dams into River Vasishtanadhi was yet to reach Periyeri due to encroachments and presence of seemai karuvelam trees.

C. Vaiyapuri, president, United Farmers Association – Tamil Nadu, said that the High Court and the Supreme Court has ordered the speedy removal of encroachments of water bodies. Despite the above direction, encroachments continue in the Manivanthan Lake, he complained.

A PWD official explained that a team had already inspected the lake and the Revenue Department has been approached for the removal of encroachments. Proposal has also been submitted to the Revenue Department for removing the seemai karuvelam trees. The Collector directed the revenue and PWD officials to take a survey of encroachments in the water bodies. Kannaiyan of Tirumanur said that the Centre has sanctioned huge funds for implementing programmes for the farmers belonging to ST community under the Farmers Protection Scheme. He pleaded with the district administration to ensure that the allotted funds are used for the implementation of the programmes, without retuning it to the government.

Sundaram, a cane farmer of Vaiyappamalai, thanked the Chief Minister for including a piece of red cane in the package of gifts to the people during the Pongal festival.

This enabled the farmers in getting reasonable price for the cane.

A.R. Shanmugam, of Panamarathupatti, pleaded for the commissioning of ultra scan equipment in all the veterinary hospitals in the district and also 108 ambulance service for shifting the affected cattle. The regional joint director of animal husbandry said that ultra scans, each costing about Rs. 7.5 lakh, have been commissioned in six veterinary hospitals in the district, including Salem, Attur and Omalur. Three more hospitals will get this facility soon. N. Perumal, of Puliankurichi, said that many ration cards have got damaged and the farmers are made to run from one office to another for getting duplicate cards. An official from the Civil Supplies Department replied that all applications for the duplicate cards have been cleared.

Students develop low-cost weed removal tool

An indigenously multi-purpose weed removal tool has been designed and developed by the students of the Prakasham Engineering College, Kandukur, to suit Indian farmers who face shortage of skilled manpower.

They were guided by Prof. M. Lakshman Rao.

Now, farmers are using chemical sprayers for removing weed in their fields which is leading to spread of diseases, particularly kidney and urine-related problems.

Prof. Rao said that weed removal tool developed by these students removes weed up to five inches in the field. This tool that has been examined in several fields successfully removed weed and also showed its ability to plough deep. It ploughs the field vertically as well as inclined.

The tool is portable and easy to carry and handle. Moreover, it is affordable by the farmers and it can also plant vegetable leaves thus reducing maintenance cost of farm fields, labour cost.

“The tool is designed on the basis of the Lever rule 1 Engineering Mechanics subject and costs just Rs. 1,500,” Prof. Rao explains.

In proper conditions, a single person with this tool can cover one to two acres in a day, while doing any cultivation work and it can be managed by a single person irrespective of gender.

The student team that developed the tool, include Karthik, Siva Krishana, Lakshminarayana – all third year B. Tech (Mechanical) students and Prasanthi second year mechanical student.

Agro industries to check migration from Srikakulam



4.3 lakh people have migrated from Srikakulam district so far in search of green pastures.— PHOTO: BASHEER

The State government which is worried with the large scale migration of labourers, farmers and youngsters from Srikakulam district has come out

with a new action plan for the promotion of multi zone and agro-based industries in all the three divisions of the district.

Srikakulam has a population of around 25.6 lakh and around 4.3 lakh people have migrated so far in search of green pastures. The figure is expected to cross 5 lakh this year with the migration of low-income group farmers is on the rise, according to officials. Many of them are opting for Tamil Nadu as they get more wages and food at affordable cost in Amma canteens where each meal is served at Rs.13 only. Others are looking for livelihood options in places such as Bengaluru, New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and other cities.

The locals are strongly objecting the thermal plants and pharmaceutical companies, fearing pollution and other problems. In this background, the government has allowed proposals selectively for establishment of industries in the district to curb migration. It has planned to encourage establishment of 6,274 small and medium industries with an estimated outlay of Rs. 460 crore. As many as seven major companies have come forward to set up units in the district. They have already signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with the government during the Partnership Summit held recently in Visakhapatnam. According to an official report, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories will invest Rs.184 crore and Vizianagaram Foods Company will set up an industry at Rs.142 crore. Trimex Sands Private Limited planned to invest Rs. 4,500 crore and Nagarjuna Construction Company (NCC) will invest Rs. 150 crore in a mega food park in Sompeta region.

“People will not leave the district if they are assured of proper income here. Elderly persons and children have become victims with the migration of middle-aged people and youngsters. Now, those can look after them easily,” said P. Rambabu, a social worker.

Investments galore

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories to invest Rs.184 cr. in the district

Vizianagaram Foods Company to set up industry at Rs.142 crore

Trimex Sands Pvt. Limited to invest Rs. 4,500 crore

Nagarjuna Construction Company to invest Rs. 150 crore in a mega food park in Sompeta

Mud crab, seabass hatchery to come up in Guntur district

Fisheries Department, NFDB, MPEDA to set up the first of its kind hatchery



Farmers are raising mud crabs in about 2,000 hectares in mangrove forests in Gilakaladindi village in Krishna district.

Here is some good news for aqua farmers in the state. The State and the Central governments are establishing a mud crab and seabass hatchery at international standards at Adavi village in Guntur district.

The first of its kind hatchery would be set up in ten acres land in Suryalanka, with Rs. 20 crore. The project is being set up jointly by Fisheries Department, National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Aquaculture (RGCA), a research wing of MPEDA.

The hatchery can supply quality fish and mud crab seed to about 7,000 hectares in Coastal Andhra Pradesh. The seed development (hatchery) will boost seabass and mud crab production and step up exports from the state, said Guntur district Deputy Director of Fisheries M. Balaram Murthy.

“Seabass is having great demand in the international market, and is most sought after variety in domestic market too. But, farmers are finding it tough to get virus free seed in the market and are depending on the neighbouring states,” Mr. Balaram said.

MPEDA Deputy Director (Aquaculture) S. Kandan said a Detail Project Report (DPR) would be submitted to the government with world class standards. RGCA, which was running fish, shrimp and mud crab hatcheries at different states in the country, will extend technical support for the new project, he said.

“As there was huge potential for increasing crab production in Andhra Pradesh, MPEDA chairman Leena Nair and RGCA officials held discussions with Fisheries and Dairy Development Commissioner Ram Shankar Naik for setting up the hatchery in AP,” said Mr. Kandan.

Farmers used to import mud crab seed from Sirkali in Tamil Nadu, by spending crores of rupees, and most of the seed die in transportation. Once the new hatchery at Suryalanka is completed, farmers can get fine quality seed at lesser price with minimum transportation cost, the MPEDA official said.

“Crabs are being exported to Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and other countries from Andhra Pradesh. Farmers are raising mud crabs in about 2,000 hectares in mangrove forests in Gilakaladindi village in Krishna district. Farmers are getting about Rs. 450 to Rs. 500 per kg mud crab in the local market, and the price is almost double in the international market,” said Mr. Kandan.

National Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture (NaCSA) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) K. Shanmukha Rao said that mangrove forests in some thousands of hectares have been identified for mud crab cultivation along the coast in Andhra Pradesh.

“The new hatchery will help aqua farmers to take up culture in the mangrove forests,” the CEO said.

It will boost production and set up exports, says fisheries official

Stop import of edible oil, plead farmers

Federation of Tamil Nadu Agriculturists' Associations has appealed to both the Union and State Governments to stop the import of cooking/edible oil and instead promote the oils extracted from indigenously grown crops.

C. Nallasamy, secretary of the federation, told reporters the country had been importing 1.44 crore tonnes of cooking/edible oil per annum and the same was disbursed at subsidised rates.

According to him, the projections indicate that the cooking oil imports will be increasing by around 11 per cent this annum. “Instead of subsidising an imported product, the government should take steps to promote distribution of oils made from coconut, groundnut and gingelly, through public distribution system and other sales avenues”, he said. This was essential to sustain the acreage under various crops. The federation also called for increasing support prices already fixed for various crops.

Grievances redress meeting

The Forest Department will be conducting a special monthly grievances redress meeting to reduce man-animal conflicts and protect the interest of farmers living close to the reserve forests and in the conflict areas. It will be conducted at the office of the range officer of Periyanaickenpalayam Range on the third Friday.

Industrialists seek grants to set up CETPs; farmers critical

Knitwear sector manufacturers have requested the Union Government to release Rs. 200 crore as special grants to ease the financial stress faced by them to set up Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) and also sought funds to modernise the effluent treatment plants.

The entrepreneurs, in their recent representations, also stressed on the need for 100 per cent government subsidy to set up processing parks to treat the industrial effluents and discharge the treated effluents into the sea.

However, the farming community was highly critical about the pleas and feels that the government should not help the industry as the units in Tirupur have been increasing the profits consistently.

“The government should not pay a single paisa to the dyeing units as Courts, while dealing with the farmers’ case against the Tirupur dyers for polluting River Noyyal which resulted in closure of all dyeing units in 2011, had observed that ‘polluters pay’”, P. Sankaranarayan, an activist hailing from agrarian community in the region, said.

Zero liquid discharge

Activists like Mr. Sankaranarayan said that that despite the initial closure of units and subsequent court directions to ensure zero liquid discharge, hundreds of units including members of CETPs, were caught in the last five years for continued discharge of effluents into the open.

Flower and fruit show begins in Sirsi

Floriculture can bring subsidiary income to farmers, Nagesh Raikar, Uttara Kannada Zilla Panchayat Deputy Secretary, has said. He was inaugurating a three-day flower and fruit exhibition that began here on Saturday.

Youth could take up floriculture and there were many government schemes to help them, he said.

H.R. Naik, general manager, Spice Board, Hubballi; and Assistant Commissioner Nagendra Honnalli were present.

Conserving ponds as water resources

125 ponds in Kannur to be renovated under Amruthakalasang project

The district administration has identified 125 ponds to be renovated this financial year. The proposal is being taken up under the Amruthakalasang project for revival and renovation of the ponds as water bodies.

The Rs.1-crore project is expected to save scores of ponds in the district from neglect. The ponds proposed to be renovated include those attached to places of worship.

Operation Anantha

The proposal has come close on the heels of the project for reviving three major ponds in the Kannur municipal area under Operation Anantha. The Rs.3-crore project announced by Chief Secretary Jiji Thomson last year is under way. The ponds being revived and refurbished under the project are Chettyarkulam, Anakulam and Valiyakulam.

When contacted, District Collector P. Bala Kiran told *The Hindu* that while the project under Operation Anantha envisaged total reconstruction of the

three big ponds that have been left in a state of disuse for decades, the work proposed under Amruthakalasangam is for cleaning the ponds that are already in use.

Estimates submitted

Out of the 125 ponds identified, estimates for the works in 72 ponds have been submitted for administrative sanction. The estimates for the remaining ponds will be submitted soon, he said adding that 56 works are already in the stage of calling for tenders.

Though the project is mooted as a pre-monsoon programme for cleaning up the ponds in the district, the objective of the proposal is to conserve them as rich water resources, especially those attached to places of worship. While the ponds serve as a water bodies for children to learn swimming, in many places the water is also used for irrigation purposed by local farmers.

KVASU, NDDB to jointly promote innovative projects

The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Anand, will join hands to launch innovative projects in the State.

A meeting of senior officials of both the institutions held at Anand in Gujarat recently had decided to launch innovative projects in the areas of productivity enhancement, entrepreneurship, veterinary services, knowledge transfer, call centre, nutritional interventions, and cow comfort, T.P. Sethumadhavan, Director of Entrepreneurship, KVASU, told *The Hindu* .

'Milkobike' is a unique entrepreneurship programme to be launched in the State to minimise the scarcity of people in milking and to promote entrepreneurship in milking. "It is an innovative venture in which the milking machine will be connected to a motorbike and the person who is operating the machine will be termed as milking technician. The machine can facilitate milking knowledge transfer and milk recording. Initially, as many as 100 units will be launched in the State. Each unit has to cover 20 to 25 house holds a day," Dr. Sethumadhavan said.

Indian Dairy Machinery company, a subsidiary of the NDDB, was in the final stage of launching a cost effective milking machine for Kerala, T. Nandakumar, chairman, NDDB, said.

Dairy school

The varsity will establish a dairy school at Pookode with the technical support of NDDDB to promote dairy entrepreneurship projects, Dr. Sethumadhavan said. The project is envisaged to provide three-month training programme for dairy farmers in the initial phase.

Apart from this, a south zone foot-and-mouth disease control workshop would be organised in the State to streamline disease control activities.

Precision farming

The KVASU will collaborate with the ration balancing system of NDDDB and will integrate with precision farming and nutritional interventions for improving production and productivity.

As part of career development, graduates in the State would get an opportunity for appropriate training/internships from NDDDB.

A team from NDDDB would visit KVASU campus and identify areas of mutual collaboration, he added.

Milkobike is a unique programme to promote entrepreneurship in milking.

Kufos drive to conserve local fish species



Ornamental fish Miss Kerala will be covered under Kufos' project to conserve the local fish species.

Aimed at conserving the local fresh water fishes such as snake heads, climbing perches, cat fishes, large barbs and ornamental varieties like Miss Kerala, Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies will popularise the diversified aquaculture practices for the species.

Efforts are on under the aegis of the Prof. Alikunhi Chair for Sustainable Aquacultural Systems in Kufos to promote the farming of the local fishes, which are facing threat of extinction, said a communication from the university here on Sunday.

The Prof. Alikunhi Chair has adopted strategies for conserving these local species by developing standardised breeding protocols for those with commercial value. The aim is to reduce fishing pressure on wild stock by popularising the species-specific breeding techniques among the farmers.

As part of familiarising the farmers with artificial breeding and seed production techniques of these species, the Chair will organise a national workshop on 'Recent Advancements in the Breeding and Seed Production Techniques of Native Fishes' at Kufos on February 8 and 9.

Experts from the Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (CIFA), Bhubaneswar; College of Fisheries Mangalore, Madras University; and Kerala University Fisheries Department will speak at the workshop, which targets fish farmers, researchers and students.

Postgraduate students, fish farmers, teachers and researchers can apply to join the national seminar. For details: profalikunhichair@kufos.ac.in . Details may be had from 9048106657.

First farm fresh outlet in Katpadi taluk a hit

Witnesses an average sales of Rs. 16,000 to Rs. 18,000 every day

The district's first farm fresh outlet at Gandhi Nagar, Katpadi taluk, has been witnessing average sales of Rs. 16,000 to Rs. 18,000 everyday, according to the officials. It was inaugurated by the Chief Minister via video conferencing on January 11.

Most of the vegetables were being procured from farmers here, while vegetables such as carrot and beans were being bought from Hosur.

Officials said the response for the outlet has been good as the vegetables were sold at a cheaper price when compared to Nethaji market, local shops and 'uzhavar sandhai.'

Beauty contest for cattle near Pollachi

500 animals participated in the event which was judged by cattle experts, veterinarians



Cattle taking part in the contest at the festival at Samathur near Pollachi on Saturday.

Dozens of Kangeyam Mayilai (white), Kangeyam Sevalai (brown) and Kangeyam Kaari (black) bulls and cows, apart from Rajasthan's Kangraj breed, Punjab's Sahiwal, Gir from Gujarat, Vechur from Kerala, Umbalachery from Thanjavur and Murrah Buffalo from Delhi attracted hundreds of farmers and the public on the second day of the Kongunadu Kazhnadai Thiruvizha.

Three-day show

Horses, varieties of goats and dwarf breed or miniature cattle such as cows, goats and buffaloes were among the nearly 700 cattle on display at the three-day cattle show organised by Vanavarayar Foundation at Samathur near Pollachi on Saturday.

The highlight of the events on Saturday was the beauty contest for bulls, cows and calves from breeds that originated from Kongu region.

A team of cattle experts and veterinarians judged the event in which about 500 animals participated. The animals were judged based on various parameters.

Good patronage

The organiser of the event, Shankar Vanavarayar, said that the second edition of the event had got good patronage from people. The show will conclude on Sunday.

Despite cases in green tribunal, govt. to go ahead with capital plans

Determined to shift the Darbar by June, the State government is going ahead with its plans to construct a temporary capital, despite the fact that cases are pending in the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The government has even floated tenders.

The State government claims that it has got all the environmental clearance. But former IAS officer E.A.S. Sarma challenged the environmental clearance (EC) issued by the State Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) in the NGT.

The case will come up for hearing in the first week of February. As a case is pending in the NGT, the Capital Region Development Authority is likely to wait until the cases are brought to a logical conclusion. The CRDA authorities are already facing a contempt case.

Says Sravan Kumar, counsel for NGT petitioner Pandalaneni Srimannnarayana: “The SEIAA is not competent to issue the EC as township alone is not involved in it. Eco-sensitive zones, industry, flood-prone areas, etc., are also part of the 217 sq km identified for the capital project.

The EC is not valid now as the government made many changes to the master plan. If there is any amendment to the plan, the government has to obtain a fresh EC, he argues.

Contempt notice

The NGT issued a contempt notice to the CRDA for levelling the ground in the capital city area just before the foundation stone laying ceremony in October last. The tribunal ordered that no construction activity, including levelling of the ground, should be taken up without EC.

The CRDA claimed that the farmers themselves levelled the ground. The government hasn't made the environmental impact assessment (EIA)

conducted by the Tata. The CRDA is yet to provide a copy of it to Mr. Sarma, who sought a copy under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

“After waiting for one month eight days, the authority said that hard copy would be provided if Rs. 2,000 was paid and CD if Rs. 50 was paid. My contention is that the authority is supposed to provide it free of cost for making me to wait for such long time. Anyhow, I am sending Rs. 50 for the CD,” he said.

Terming the government’s move contempt of the NGT, Mr. Srimannarayana said: “The matter will be brought to the notice of the tribunal.” The officials were providing information to the court and the public in a deceitful manner, he claimed.

Vegetable prices come down in city



Prices of costly vegetables come down by half across the city

Vegetable prices have come down in the past 10 days.

The rains in December last and dip in temperature this winter have brought down the prices of costly vegetables such as broad beans and carrots by half across the city because of an increase in production. Koyambedu wholesale market, Chennai’s hub of perishable goods, gets nearly 550 loads of vegetables from neighbouring States daily.

R. Jamuna, a resident of Nolambur, said: “I am adding more green and seasonal vegetables to the menu. Until a few weeks ago, many vegetables, such as broad beans and carrots, were priced at over Rs.70 a kg.”

MORE NUTRIENTS ON THE PLATE

**Wholesale price in Koyambedu market*

Last year's rainfall is attributed to be one of the reasons for the drop in prices of vegetables in Chennai, which depends on supplies from the neighbouring States

in Rs/Kg



Prices have come down in the retail markets of the city too. A scene at M.K.B.Nagar market on Sunday.

— PHOTO: B. JYOTHI RAMALINGAM

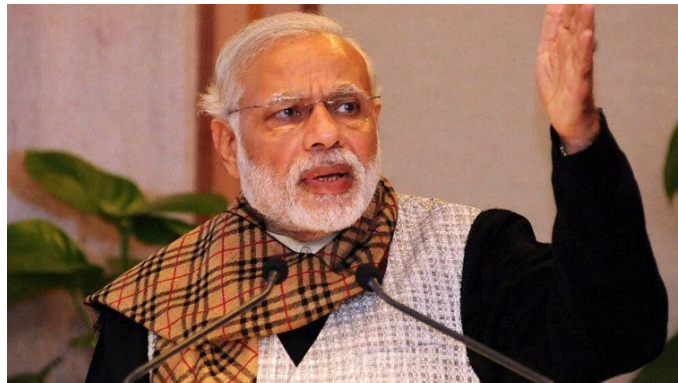
Vegetables	December	January
Broadbeans	30	15
Carrot	35	20
Potato	16	12
Onion	25	15
Beans	45	30
Brinjal	20	10-15
Ladies Finger	30	15
Drumstick	90	70
Green Peas	100	50
Tomato	25	10

While retail traders in smaller markets are glad that more customers are visiting their shops, wholesalers in Koyambedu note that sales have not picked up much as other neighbouring places like Tiruttani get produce from local areas. S. Chandran, a wholesale merchant, said the prices have dropped by 10 per cent this winter compared to last year because of sufficient water in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. “Many retailers from other places such as Tindivanam, Sulurpet, Arakkonam, Puducherry and Chengalpet usually source vegetables from Koyambedu. They do not frequent market now as they get produce from local areas for the past few days,” he said.

Retailers like P. Sundarraj of MKB Nagar say there has been an increase in the number of customers by at least 40 per cent ever since the cost dropped a week ago. “Many people are buying vegetables like carrots, beans, peas and broad beans as they are much cheaper now,” he said. The prices may remain stable till March. Several vegetables such as cabbage, radish, onion and tomato are priced within Rs. 30 a kg after many months. Drumstick is perhaps among the few costly vegetables, sold for Rs.80 per kg.

Mann Ki Baat — PM Modi on crop insurance: ‘Target 50% farmers in 2 yrs’

On Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed his first Mann ki Baat of 2016.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Source: PTI Photo)

In his first “Mann Ki Baat” address of 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pitched for efforts to spread awareness about the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme) to enable at least 50 per cent of the country’s farmers to join it in the next couple of years. The scheme, which was cleared by the Cabinet recently, aims to substantially bring down the premium rates paid by farmers to avail insurance cover against crop loss on account of natural calamities.

“Crop insurance has been discussed for so many years. But not more than 20-25 per cent farmers have been able to connect with it and become its beneficiaries...Can we take a pledge that we connect at least 50 per cent of the farmers with this scheme in two years? I need your help in this. Because if a farmer joins the scheme, he will get huge help during a natural calamity,” said the PM.

Under the new scheme, farmers will have to pay uniform premium of two per cent for all Kharif crops and 1.5 per cent for all Rabi crops. For annual commercial and horticultural crops, farmers will have to pay a premium of five per cent. The remaining share of the premium, as in previous schemes,

will continue to be borne equally by the Centre and the respective state governments.

“In our country, a lot is said in the name of farmers. I don’t want to get involved in that debate. But farmers face a major crisis. During a natural calamity, their entire effort goes waste. His one year goes waste. To give him security, only one thing comes to mind and that is crop insurance. In 2016, the central government has given a big gift to the farmers — Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. This scheme has been brought not for the purpose that it should be praised or the PM should be hailed,” said Modi.

The PM said the scheme was getting enormous response as it was extensive, simple and technology-based. “Attention has been paid that technology is used to fast-track the process so that there is no delay in getting the insurance claim,” he said, adding that the scheme will help the farmers even if something happens to the crop even 15 days after harvest.

The scheme, which will become functional from the forthcoming Kharif season, has been viewed as a major policy outreach towards farmers by the government.

Here’s what the prime minister said during his radio show on Sunday:

* Reiterating Sadar Patel’s vision about Khadi, PM Modi said that Khadi has become the symbol and identity of India. He also urged various government and public departments to promote Khadi Gramudyog Yojna.

* Modi spoke of the International Solar Alliance and said that people from various parts of India were writing to him about how ‘Solar Charkhas’ have made an impact in their lives. “The experiment of associating spinning wheel with solar energy has been a success,” he said.

* Applauding the Haryana government, he thanked the government for their efforts in saving the girl child. “I want to express my gratitude to Haryana, as there has been a rapid increase in birth rate of girl child in the state.”

* He also highlighted various aspects of the recent crop insurance scheme introduced for farmers. PM Modi said he believes the only way to provide relief to distressed farmers is through a successful and effective crop insurance scheme.

* Moving ahead with his Swachh Bharat initiative, the prime minister said that people must ensure cleaning and maintenance of statues and idols, Modi said that people are very enthusiastic about any statue being unveiled, but forget their responsibilities in keeping them clean.

* Congratulating Indians on the success of 'Start-up India' campaign, the prime minister expressed his joy about the scale of participation and support that the campaign received. He also highlighted that the initiative is not restricted to just IT industries, but opportunities are 'endless'.

* PM Modi spoke of his recent trip to Sikkim, and how the state has made India proud by becoming the first fully organic state in the country. Referring to two young entrepreneurs working in Sikkim on an agriculture start-up, PM Modi said, it is a great way of linking agriculture to the start-up India campaign.

* As the country gears up for the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam, PM Modi said it is an honour and privilege for India to host such a prestigious event. "It is a very important development for a country like India. India has had a golden maritime history," he said.

* Prime Minister Modi linked 'Saundarya' (beautification) to 'Swachhata' (cleanliness). Modi applauded various initiatives by citizens and civic groups for the beautification of many railway stations across the country.

* Modi ended his speech by mentioning the upcoming South Asian Games to be held in Guwahati, Assam. He said that the upcoming event will strengthen ties among all SAARC nations.

Maharashtra wastes 30% fruits, 40% vegetables: Report

Despite being the leading state in agro-industry, Maharashtra appears way below in investment in the processing sector by international standards

At a time when farmers are reeling under severe farm crisis due to severe drought, a NABARD report suggests 40 per cent vegetables and 30 per cent fruits go waste due to lack of agro-processing infrastructure in Maharashtra. As a result, the farmers often have to bear with poor returns as both vegetables and fruits are perishable commodities.

Expressing serious concerns to tap greater investment in agro-processing sector, the report reveals, “Less than 1.2 per cent of fruits and vegetables are processed. Out of the total yield, 60 percent vegetables and 70 per cent fruits are consumed fresh. The huge wastage of vegetables and fruits has a great potential if it is channelised in the processing industry.”

The state’s present processing capacity of fruits and vegetable is one lakh metric tonnes (MT). Despite being the leading state in agro-industry, by international standards, Maharashtra appears way below in investment in the processing sector. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who was handed over the NABARD report has urged the agriculture, horticulture, industrial and finance departments to prepare a comprehensive plan to effectively tackle the shortcoming in the processing sector.

At the Make in India Week starting in Mumbai from February 13, state government will also try to rope in private investors in the food and horticulture processing industry. Highly placed sources in the government revealed, “There are MNCs keen on partnership to open up new gates in the food processing sector. However, state government with the help of the Centre, will have to make huge investments to upgrade its basic infrastructure by creating mammoth cold storages which are easily linked to the farms in remote villages across the state.” Some districts which have made mark for processing units include Pune, Kolhapur, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Jalgaon, Latur, Sindhudurg. .

A senior secretary argued, “The concept of processing raw agro produce was never on the government’s agenda for the last several decades. Gradually, we have realised not only to check the huge wastage but also to turn into a profit making sector.”

The main crops / fruits available for primary and secondary processing are soyabean, cashew, mango, wheat, rice, jowar, pomegranate. Maharashtra agro-industries are in the sectors of sugar, cotton, rice mills, poultry, flour mills, edible oil, milk processing units.

The chief minister reckons that promotion of processing sector would help in giving boost to small and medium scale units. However, public -private partnership to tap higher investments can work to create sustainable value chains by creating more food parks complete with all infrastructure under one umbrella.

NABARD report emphasises, “The world agriculture trade is shifting towards processed foods and agro processing holds the key for sustainable growth.” It emphasised, “ Maharashtra which is leading state in agro-industry, has tremendous potential for a much higher value addition through processing.” The state produces average 145 lakh MT of food grains, 50 lakh MT of oil seeds, 769 lakh MT sugarcane and 88 lakh bales of cotton. The report suggests ,”Fruit pulp, juice and concentrated units, winery, pickles, rice mill, flour mills, Dal mills, soyabean oil extraction and refining units, can be set up in MIDC industrial areas. The report urges the government to involve private sector in agriculture marketing. Moreover, it talks of sustained supply of quality power and water. There is a concern as 75 per cent of farmers rely on informal credit at very high interest rate which leads of increase in cost of production and affects competitiveness. Therefore, it has recommended banks to focus on value chain financing for overall development. The banks should provide working capital to the units, suggested the report.

Onion prices hit rock bottom across Maharashtra

This year, the state has seen a record sowing of onion on over 3 lakh hectares; productivity is also supposed to be record-breaking



Lasalgaon, Asia’s largest onion market, has seen a steady fall in the prices in the last few days. Express

OVER A month after the central government decided to slash the minimum export price (MEP) of onion to zero, prices of the bulb have started hitting rock bottom across major market yards in the state. Increased arrival and limited avenues for sales has pushed the prices down. Market watchers say it would continue to remain so for the next fortnight or so.

On Saturday, the modal price fetched by the bulb at the Lasalgaon market – the largest onion market in the state – was Rs 1100 per quintal. A total of 20,940 quintals of onions arrived at the market. A year ago on January 30, 2015, the modal price at Lasalgaon was Rs 1375 per quintal and 16,269 quintals arrived at the market.

Manmad, another major onion market in Nashik district, saw 12,000 quintals of onions arriving and the modal price of the commodity was Rs 950 per quintal. The market at Manmad a year back had seen 11,472 quintals of onions arrive and the modal price of the bulb was Rs 1275 per quintal. In accordance with the trend at the wholesale markets, the retail markets have also seen a price correction of onion.

Vishnu Salve, president of the Pimpri Vegetable Market, said the price of onion over the last few weeks had been between Rs 10-15 per kg. “The arrival has increased, so prices have fallen,” he said.

The dip in the prices of onion comes at a time when the arrival of the late kharif crop is in full swing across market committees in the state and the country. Harvested between December and January, the late kharif crop feeds the market till the arrival of the rabi onion in March – April. This year, the state has seen a record sowing of onion on over 3 lakh hectares and the productivity is also supposed to be record breaking.

Last month, the central government had decided to reduce the Minimum Export Price (MEP) of onions to zero to stop the price slide. December had seen the MEP being corrected twice before that. The central government had reduced the MEP to \$400.

However, the price slide now shows that slashing of MEP to 0 has no effect on the market. Nanasaheb Patil, chairman of the Lasalgaon Market committee, said that the government’s decision came too late. “There were reports of record sowing and a bumper crop was expected. MEP should have been reduced right at the start of the season. With arrival slated to remain high over the next fortnight, we do not expect any price rise in the markets,” he said. Patil also said that the size of area of sowing rabi onions had increased. In Ahmednagar, Patil said, many farmers had decided to grow onions instead of cane. “Water being a scarce commodity, onion cultivation has more appeal for farmers than cane. The summer crop of onion would be good this time,” he said.

Crop insurance scheme crucial for farmers' welfare: PM Modi

Modi said he needs the "maximum help" from people about spreading awareness regarding the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme which was launched earlier this month.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation through his first radio broadcast of the year on January 31. (Express photo by Pramod Adhikari) Highlighting benefits of the just-announced Crop Insurance Scheme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday said awareness about it should be spread across the country so that at least 50 per cent of the farmers join it within two years.

In his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat', he also pitched for continued efforts to popularise Khadi and awareness to save girl child, mentioned about the recently launched 'Start-Up India' programme and talked about the upcoming International Fleet Review to be held in Visakhapatnam.

Modi said he needs the "maximum help" from people about spreading awareness regarding the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme which was launched earlier this month.

"In our country, a lot is said in the name of farmers. I don't want to get involved in that debate. But farmers face a major crisis. In natural calamity, their entire effort goes waste. His one year goes waste. To give him security, only one thing comes to mind and that is crop insurance," he said in this year's first edition of the monthly radio programme.

“In (the New Year) 2016, the central government has given a big gift to the farmers — Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme. This scheme has been brought not for the purpose that it should be praised or the Prime Minister should be hailed,” he said.

The Prime Minister said that for so many years, there has been a talk regarding crop insurance but “not more than 20-25 per cent” of the country’s farmers had been able to benefit from such schemes.

“Can we take a pledge that we should connect at least 50 per cent of the farmers to this scheme in two years? I need this help from you. Because if a farmer joins the scheme, he will get huge help during a natural calamity,” he said.

Modi said this time, the scheme has got “wide acceptability because it has been made quite extensive and easy and involves use of technology. Not only this. If something happens to the crop within 15 days after harvest, even then help is assured.”

Usage of technology will ensure speedy assessment and disbursement of compensation, he said.

“The biggest thing is that the rate of premium has been kept so low which nobody would have imagined. The rate of premium for Kharif crop has been kept 2 per cent while for Rabi crop it is one-and-a-half per cent.

“Now tell me, if any farmer is deprived of the benefits of this scheme, will he not suffer loss? I want the awareness about this scheme to spread,” he said.

The Prime Minister also referred to the ‘Start-Up India’ scheme rolled out on January 16 and said it had infused new energy among the youth.

He said there was a wrong notion earlier that the initiative is limited to the sophisticated area of Information Technology and now it has become clear that there are enormous opportunities under this programme in all kinds of sectors and areas, including farming.

In this regard, he gave some examples of StartUp in farming sector in Sikkim which was recently declared an Organic State. He invited more examples of StartUp initiatives.

In his nearly 30-minute radio broadcast, Modi also talked about cleanliness and beautification efforts being made in the country as also the upcoming South Asian games to be held in Guwahati and board examinations for Class X and XII.

Referring to efforts to beautify places like railway stations, bus stands, temples, mosques, churches, besides keeping them clean, he asked people to send photos to him displaying this endeavour.

He also appealed to the people to keep statues clean as a mark of respect to departed leaders.

Modi also underlined the importance of duty of citizens along with their rights.

He referred to the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi which was yesterday and said people should every year observe a two-minute silence at 11 AM in the memory of the country's martyrs.

Talking about popularising of Khadi regarding which he had issued an appeal in his first 'Mann Ki Baat' programme in October 2014, the Prime Minister said more and more youths are now using Khadi products.

He, once again, asked people to have at least one set of Khadi clothing as part of their wardrobe.

With regard to the International Fleet Review being held from February 4 to 8 in Visakhapatnam, Modi said naval assets several countries across the world will participate in the event being hosted by India.

He said the event is of major significance and importance in the maritime history.

While talking about the upcoming board examinations, Modi asked the students to appear without tension or anxiety.

He asked the successful students of last year to send their examples to him so that he could publicise them and the students appearing now could learn how to appear without tension.

He said people can listen to the 'Mann Ki Baat' episodes again by giving a missed call to the number 8190881908.

FII's pull out 11,126 crore in Jan; highest in 8 yrs

Decline in commodity and crude oil prices have raised concerns over growth in China and global growth rate.

The year 2016 started on a weak note for the Indian equity markets and they fell in line with the global markets primarily driven by outflow from foreign institutional investors. The FII's pulled out a net of Rs 11,126 crore from Indian equities during the month – the biggest outflow in the first month of the year since seen in January 2008 – following which, the benchmark Sensex at the Bombay Stock Exchange fell 4.8 per cent to close at 24,870.

The outflow of funds that picked pace in December 2015 in anticipation of the rate hike decision by the Federal Reserve in the US, gained momentum in January following a sharp fall in Chinese markets and further decline in crude oil prices. Decline in commodity and crude oil prices have raised concerns over growth in China and global growth rate.

While markets across the world remained under stress during the month, Indian market was among the ones that fell the least. The Sensex fell 4.8 per cent even as the Shanghai Composite in China fell 22.6 per cent during the month and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong fell 10.2 per cent. The other big losers include Dax in Germany and Nikkei in Japan as they fell 8.8 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively.

The fall in markets however was seen as investment opportunity by domestic investors and the domestic institutional investors invested a net of Rs 12,874 crore during the month. Experts say that DII investment in January provided the counterbalance to FII outflow thereby arresting the fall at bourses in India.

While India Inc continued to deliver weak revenue growth for the quarter ended December 2015, market analysts say that a revival in earnings growth will provide the push to the Indian markets going forward.

The FII sentiment though remained weak and the opening month of the year was the worst in last eight years. It was in January 2008 that the outflow was more than that seen in January this year as they pulled out a net of Rs 13,035 crore in January 2008.

The outflow from FIIs also resulted into weakness in rupee that fell below the 68 mark against the dollar during the month. It however closed at 67.78 against the dollar on January 29.

hindustantimes

Odisha govt has no surplus land for 4.5 lakh landless poor



Odisha enacted the land ceiling act in 1974, acquiring surplus plots of big landowners to redistribute it among the landless. (HT File photo)

Odisha has almost no land left for the landless poor — nearly 4.50 lakh families in all.

The government has more or less exhausted all ceiling surplus land at its disposal after distributing them to more than 1.40 lakh landless families in the state, mostly from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, reveals a response to questions filed under the right to information act by this reporter. “A total of 1,57,415 acres of ceiling surplus land have been distributed to landless so far in all 30 districts of Odisha. Available ceiling surplus land for distribution is 91.55 acres,” said S Mohapatra, the public information officer with the state’s revenue board.

He said more than 10,000 acres of such land are locked in litigation of which 2,300 acres are considered unfit for agriculture and 6,300 acres are kept aside for miscellaneous reasons.

Odisha enacted the land ceiling act in 1974, acquiring surplus plots of big landowners with an aim to redistribute it among the landless.

It was regarded a revolutionary step as land distribution in Odisha was extremely skewed at the time of Independence with 53% of plots were held by just 7% landowners. Policy-makers felt ceiling on landholding was urgent to deliver justice and economic empowerment to the poor.

But, over the years, landless people in Kendrapara district got just 234 acres while 23,841 acres, the highest, were distributed in Rayagada district. Land distributed to families in backward Maoist-affected tribal districts like Malkangiri and Kandhamal was also quite low at 289 acres and 506 acres respectively.

State land reforms commissioner NK Sundaray said the government has distributed whatever ceiling surplus land it had collected over the years. “The state has 96% achievement in distributing land to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, which is among the best in the country.”

But a large chunk of beneficiaries have not been able to make use of the land because of lack of actual physical possession and unsuitability of the land for cultivation.

“I got the record of right for a two-acre land in 1985 but have not been able to cultivate because the land is still in the possession of the previous landlord. The matter is now pending in court,” said Budek Sabara, a tribal from Bargarh district.

Revenue officials said the act was implemented in the right spirit for a few years after its enactment but lost steam thereafter. “The implementation process for ceiling surplus land is almost dead for the past two decades,” said a senior official.

Besides, after the government focused on industrial development, giving land for business houses became a priority.

PM calls for raising awareness of crop insurance scheme



Prime Minister Narendra Modi says he needs the “maximum help” from people about spreading awareness regarding the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme which was launched earlier this month.

In ‘Mann Ki Baat’, Modi also touches upon Start-up India and popularising khadi

NEW DELHI, JAN 31:

With rural distress looming large, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for linking at least 50 per cent of the country’s farmers in the next two-three years with the newly announced crop insurance scheme.

In 2016’s first ‘Mann Ki Baat’ monthly radio broadcast on Sunday to the nation, Modi touched upon varying topics such as raising awareness about the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the potential of the Start-up India scheme, popularising Khadi and the International Fleet Review to be soon held in Visakhapatnam.

He also announced that ‘Mann Ki Baat’ would soon be available on mobile phones in various regional languages as well.

“The crop insurance scheme has been made so easy with technological inputs. Now, help will be given even if something happens within 15 days of harvest,” he said, seeking public help to raise awareness about the scheme.

Modi said the biggest offer in this ‘gift’ to farmers was that the premium rate had been kept “so low”. The rate for Kharif crop has been kept at 2 per cent, while for Rabi crop it is 1.5 per cent, he said, adding “If any farmer is deprived of these benefits, will he not suffer losses?”

Start-ups

Referring to the Start-Up India scheme announced on January 16, Modi recounted that “lakhs of people registered for the programme though not everyone could participate”, saying that the programme helped in clearing the air over the general perception that start-ups meant “very sophisticated and IT-related businesses”.

“IT-related start-ups are only a small part of this scheme,” he said, adding that the possibilities, and requirements were immense, citing the example of two youths in the Northeast who were working on start-ups related to herbal and organic farming and were involved in global marketing of their produce.

Khadi goes solar

In remembrance of Mahatma Gandhi’s death anniversary on January 30, the Prime Minister talked about the “emotional’ identity that Khadi held in Indian minds. He said connecting ‘charkhas’ to solar energy as part of technology upgradation had been successful in raising the production of Khadi fabric and improving its quality.

Fleet review

The Prime Minister said it was a matter of pride that India was hosting the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam from February 4-8. “The whole world will be arriving here as our guests.... It is an attempt to synergise our military power with that of the world,” he said, adding that warships and naval ships from several countries will be docking on Indian shores.

(This article was published on January 31, 2016)

When El Nino played pied piper



Most agri commodities were dancing to the tune of this anomalous weather phenomenon in 2015

There are many patterns that affect global weather, but in the last couple of years El Nino has hogged the headlines because of its impact on agriculture the world over.

El Nino is a weather system that emerges due to the warming of sea surface temperatures. Warm waters off the eastern coast of South America increase sea surface temperatures (SST) and lead to diversion of moist winds from the Indian Ocean towards the eastern coast of South America. Typically, this leads to heavy showers over South America and droughts in Oceania and Asia.

However, timing also plays a major role in El Nino's impact. In the context of Indian weather, an El Nino during June usually results in below-normal rains across India, while El Nino in September leads to heavy rainfall in the Southern Peninsula and drier weather over North India. In India, 60 per cent of all droughts in the last 130 years have been El Nino-induced. The impact on monsoons also depends on the magnitude of the El Nino event. El Nino is classified as weak, moderate, strong and very strong, based on the degree of the temperature anomaly.

The last two years in India were drought years. While 2014 saw above-normal temperature, it was not branded as an El Nino year. But the globally strong El Nino during 2015 followed an already bad season in terms of moisture stress. As a result, the south-west monsoon in 2015 ended with a

14 per cent deficit. As many as 10 states have declared drought, due to a below-normal monsoon. The unusual rainfall pattern which caused floods over Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan during July-mid-August, on the other hand, led to excessive vegetative growth of soyabean and pulses and also led to the outbreak of the yellow mosaic virus. Meanwhile, dry and humid weather over the cotton-growing regions of North India was accompanied by white fly attacks.

The production of pulses, oilseeds, grains and cotton was worst-hit due to the erratic monsoon. No rainfall from mid-August followed by above-normal temperatures resulted in lower production for many agri crops. The lack of soil moisture has impacted the rabi sowing activity too in the case of wheat, gram and mustard. The rabi crop requires cold weather during the cropping season, but has been facing unusually warm weather this year. This could pose a threat to rabi crop yields.

Looking forward into 2016, historical data for more than 200 years suggest that El Nino only lasts for a maximum of two years.

The Australian Bureau of Climate has already predicted cooling of temperatures over tropical Pacific. The eastern tropical Pacific sub-surface has cooled by up to 3 degrees since late November, say weather trackers. Other climate models predict that the El Nino phenomenon will decay and return to neutral from the second quarter of 2016. A normal monsoon or even a weak La Nina event is likely in 2016.

Continue to plunge

There were reports that the temperature anomaly for the three-month period from August to October 2015 was the second-warmest on record, and the impact of this weather anomaly was felt throughout the world. Surprisingly, though, the prices of agricultural commodities continued to plunge to multi-year lows throughout calendar 2015! Commodity prices were obviously dancing to a fusion of weather and tunes.

Whether it turns out to be another El Nino year or not, one more year of adverse weather for Indian agriculture could play havoc with the farm economy as most of the excess stocks (particularly of grains, oilseeds, cotton, sugar, and spices) may get depleted by the end of September 2016.

In that case, not just pulses and edible oils, but many more agri-commodities will be left to the mercy of El Nino and global price volatility.

The author is Vice President, Research - Agri Value Chain, Edelweiss Group

(This article was published on January 31, 2016)

Oil falls as Asia economies slow, prospect of crude output cut dims



The data from China and South Korea are the latest indicators of an accelerating slowdown in Asia's biggest economies.

SINGAPORE, FEB 1:

Oil prices dropped early on Monday after China and South Korea posted surprisingly weak economic data and on worries the prospect of a coordinated production cut by leading crude exporters seemed remote.

Front-month Brent crude was trading at \$35.54 per barrel at 0157 GMT, down 45 cents, or 1.25 per cent, from the last close. U.S. West Texas Intermediate was down 35 cents at \$33.27 a barrel.

Activity in China's manufacturing sector contracted at its fastest pace in almost three-and-a-half years in January, missing market expectations.

The official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) stood at 49.4 in January, compared with the previous month's reading of 49.7 and below the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction on a monthly basis. It is the weakest index reading since August 2012, and analysts polled by Reuters had predicted a reading of 49.6.

In South Korea, exports posted an 18.5 per cent year-on-year drop to \$36.7 billion, down to levels last seen at the height of the global financial crisis in 2009.

The data from China and South Korea are the latest indicators of an accelerating slowdown in Asia's biggest economies.

At the same time, the prospects of a coordinated cut in production by leading exporters like the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia seem difficult to realise due to differences between these producers.

Also, OPEC-member Iran, which last month was allowed to fully return to markets after years of sanctions, is not willing to participate in any cuts.

"The lack of political will may hinder prospects for a deal," ANZ bank said. In part because of Iran's return, OPEC oil production has jumped to 32.60 million barrels per day, its highest in years, adding to a global glut that is seeing over 1 million barrels of crude produced every day in excess of demand, pulling down prices around 70 per cent since mid-2014.

Because of the oversupply, analysts at BMI Research said on Monday that it had reduced its oil price outlook: "We have downgraded our 2016 Brent forecast to \$40 per barrel from \$42.5 previously."

Its expectation for WTI was to average \$39.50 per barrel this year.

"Counteracting oil's upside momentum in 2016 will be the weakness of the Chinese yuan, lingering concerns over global economic growth and the well-stocked inventories of crude and fuels," BMI said, adding that a gradual price rise was expected in the second half of the year.

(This article was published on February 1, 2016)

Business Standard

PM wants 50% farmers to join insurance scheme in two years

PM Modi asked for 'maximum help' in his talk on 'Mann ki Baat' to create awareness about scheme in the country



Highlighting benefits of the just-announced crop insurance scheme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said awareness about it should be spread across the country so that at least 50 per cent of the farmers join it within two years.

In his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat', he also pitched for continued efforts to popularise Khadi and awareness to save girl child, mentioned about the recently launched 'Startup India' programme and talked about the upcoming International Fleet Review to be held in Visakhapatnam.

Modi said he needs "maximum help" from people about spreading awareness regarding the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme which was launched earlier this month.

"In our country, a lot is said in the name of farmers. I don't want to get involved in that debate. But farmers face a major crisis. In natural calamity, their entire effort goes waste. His one year goes waste. To give him security, only one thing comes to mind and that is crop insurance," he said in this year's first edition of the monthly radio programme.

"In 2016, the central government has given a big gift to the farmers — the Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme. This scheme has been brought not

for the purpose that it should be praised or the Prime Minister should be hailed," he said.

The prime minister said that for so many years, there has been a talk regarding crop insurance but "not more than 20-25 per cent" of the country's farmers had been able to benefit from such schemes.

"Can we take a pledge that we should connect at least 50 per cent of the farmers to this scheme in two years? I need this help from you. Because if a farmer joins the scheme, he will get huge help during a natural calamity," he said. He said this time, the scheme has got "wide acceptability because it has been made quite extensive and easy and involves use of technology.

Not only this. If something happens to the crop within 15 days after harvest, even then help is assured."

Usage of technology will ensure speedy assessment and disbursement of compensation, he said.

"The biggest thing is that the rate of premium has been kept so low which nobody would have imagined. The rate of premium for Kharif crop has been kept two per cent while for Rabi crop it is one-and-a-half per cent.

"Now tell me, if any farmer is deprived of the benefits of this scheme, will he not suffer loss? I want the awareness about this scheme to spread," he said.

The prime minister also referred to the 'Startup India' scheme rolled out on January 16 and said it had infused new energy among the youth.

He said there was a wrong notion earlier that the initiative is limited to the sophisticated area of Information Technology and now it has become clear that there are enormous opportunities under this programme in all kinds of sectors and areas, including farming.

In this regard, he gave some examples of Startup in farming sector in Sikkim which was recently declared an Organic State. He invited more examples of Startup initiatives.

In his nearly 30-minute radio broadcast, Modi also talked about cleanliness and beautification efforts being made in the country as also the upcoming South Asian games to be held in Guwahati and board examinations for Class X and XII.

Referring to efforts to beautify places like railway stations, bus stands, temples, mosques, churches, besides keeping them clean, he asked people to send photos to him displaying this endeavour.

He also appealed to the people to keep statues clean as a mark of respect to departed leaders.

Modi also underlined the importance of duty of citizens along with their rights.

He referred to the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi which was yesterday and said people should every year observe a two-minute silence at 11 AM in the memory of the country's martyrs.

Talking about popularising of Khadi regarding which he had issued an appeal in his first 'Mann Ki Baat' programme in October 2014, the Prime Minister said more and more youths are now using Khadi products.

He, once again, asked people to have at least one set of Khadi clothing as part of their wardrobe. With regard to the International Fleet Review being held from February 4 to 8 in Visakhapatnam, Modi said naval assets several countries across the world will participate in the event being hosted by India. He said the event is of major significance and importance in the maritime history. While talking about the upcoming board examinations, Modi asked the students to appear without tension or anxiety.

He asked the successful students of last year to send their examples to him so that he could publicise them and the students appearing now could learn how to appear without tension.

He said people can listen to the 'Mann Ki Baat' episodes again by giving a missed call to the number 8190881908.

Mann ki Baat: PM's focus on Khadi, start-ups as job creators

Modi urges people's support to ensure at least 50% of country's farmers subscribe to PM's crop insurance scheme

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann ki Baat', today talked about how his campaign of 'Start-Up India' and his appeal for increased use of [Khadi](#) would generate opportunities and jobs. As part of his government's continued push towards farmer-friendly policies, Modi sought help from people at large to ensure that at least 50 per cent of all farmers in the country should subscribe to the PM's crop insurance scheme.

In what was his first 'Mann ki Baat' of 2016, the PM's focus was clearly on showcasing his government's farmer and youth friendly policies. He said the youth of the country surprised him by their enthusiastic participation to his 'Start Up India' campaign, launched in early January. Modi said just as he has taken to talk about his cleanliness campaign in his radio broadcasts, he would henceforth also speak equally about the 'Start Up India' campaign. "The Start Up event has broken the myth that it is only about IT (Information Technology). IT is just a small part of it. 'Start ups' will unleash a multitude of opportunities," he said, recounting 'start-ups' that have come up in diverse fields.

The PM said his appeal for encouraging the use of Khadi by government departments is all set to create 18 lakh man days of work. He said Khadi could give employment to millions, particularly farmers. "Earlier, Khadi was used by government departments but this changed over the years leading to unemployment among Khadi weavers," the PM said. He said now several government departments, like the Indian Navy and Indian Railways have encouraged the use of Khadi that would lead to potentially more work.

The PM quoted from the writings of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on how the welfare of the farmers of India was in Khadi. "Bapu (Gandhi) espoused the cause of the farmers. I have also stressed on use of technology in the making of Khadi. Khadi has become a symbol...even the youth are now attracted to the fabric. Khadi is carving its place in the market," he said.

Modi said people across the country paid their respects to Mahatma Gandhi and other martyrs by observing silence for two minutes at 11am on Saturday, the martyrdom day of the father of the nation. "But there might be several who didn't. It (observing the two minute silence) should become part of our national culture. It should become the responsibility of each of us.

Such efforts strengthen the sense of nationhood," he said.

He also explained the advantages of the PM's crop insurance scheme. He said the rate of premium was a mere 1.5 per cent for [Rabi](#) and 2 per cent for [Kharif](#) crops and how farmers would benefit if their crop is damaged because of any natural calamity. He said much is said in the name of farmers, but his government launched the crop insurance scheme.

The PM lauded the state governments of Haryana and Gujarat for celebrating the Republic Day by asking the most educated woman of their villages to hoist the national flag in village schools. He said the poor sex ratio of Haryana has been a matter of concern, but the heartening bit was that attitudes towards the girl child were changing, more girl children were taking birth in that state. Modi said he had raised the issue of Haryana's abysmal sex ratio during his public rallies in the state. "I accomplished this in Haryana, despite officials cautioning me about the negative atmosphere in the state on this issue," he said.

He also said the campaign to beautify railway stations by wall paintings, which in many instances depict local art traditions, is welcome. The PM said why only railway stations, such art with the help of common people should beautify hospitals, schools, temples, churches and mosques.

Sunita Narain: Insure farmers, ensure their future

The question is how insurance will work for the poor, who have little collateral but face the highest risk

In Jammu, litchi was flowering-much earlier and out of season. This is because winter had not come and it was warmer than usual. But now as the chill has set in, the flowers are falling and there will be no fruit this summer, fear horticulturists. In Bihar, standing wheat crops were hit last fortnight by unseasonal hail and bitter cold that came after days of warmer-than-usual temperatures.

I saw this situation first-hand in the Mewat districts of Haryana, where farmers told me they had been suffering for the past three cropping seasons. They were broke as each time they planted crops there was some unseasonal devastation that took a crippling toll. In the summer of 2015, for instance, they had planted rice and first rains were delayed. They begged and

borrowed to run expensive diesel-fuelled tube wells (electricity for agriculture is supposedly assured but it goes off when farmers need it most). Finally, paddy was ready. But then came a night of apocalyptic rain-it rained over 250 mm in five hours, this is a district where average annual rainfall is 500-600 mm. When I visited the village, not even two hours from Delhi, fields were flooded, crops were destroyed and there was deep despair in the eyes of every farmer I met.

Let's leave for the moment the questions-very real and urgent-why these extreme weather events are happening in our world with greater frequency and intensity. Let's discuss instead what we need to do.

First, we need to know that these events are breaking our world. Today, we read more about Snowzilla-the massive snowstorm that has hit the eastern coast of the US-than the hailstorms and freak rain events that are livelihood spoilers in our country. These events have to make news, even if the people who are devastated are not the consuming middle classes. Because if we bury this distress by simply not hearing about it, then we will never understand the magnitude of the catastrophe that is on us.

Second, we need insurance for an increasingly climate-vulnerable world. The question is how insurance will work for the poor, who have little collateral but face the highest risk. Last week, the Union Cabinet cleared a new crop insurance policy called Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), which will replace the existing national agricultural insurance scheme. My colleagues, who have studied the state of agricultural insurance in India in their report, "Lived Anomaly: how to enable farmers in India to cope with extreme weather events", find that it is a step ahead in addressing some concerns. But there is a long way to go to design a universal insurance scheme, which can be an effective safety net for farmers.

The key problem is estimating the crop damage and then pay for the claim without fuss and delay. In PMFBY the insurance unit is now a village, as against the revenue administrative unit of a block in the previous scheme. A block covers a large area with sub-regional variations in weather events. Therefore, if it rains heavily in a few villages but not across the block, then farmers would not be able to claim damage without evidence to show this anomaly. This, when weather stations to record such an anomaly remain grossly inadequate.

The system of verifying claims also remains a problem. State governments are expected to conduct crop-cutting experiments to estimate what would be the actual yield and, thus, estimate the loss. These experiments are often poorly done and do not give real value of the produce. Then, when the claim is filed, the assessment is done by the patwari, the lowest revenue official in the district who is expected to visit and estimate damage. The tales of corruption in this process are legion, as farmers will tell you how the patwari did not visit or processed claims for people who did not lose crop or simply denied the claim.

The answer will lie in the use of new technologies-remote-sensing to mobile-based image-capturing systems. The new insurance policy talks about the use of mobile phone to improve yield data and timeliness of processing claims. But the question will be how this can happen and how fast.

The question also is: who is really the subject of insurance? Is it the farmer or is it the banker? Today crop insurance is mandatory for all farmers who take a bank loan under the Kisan Credit Card. The insurance policy is a package deal, and in most cases farmers do not even have the requisite information about what it entails. Not only is the insurance premium deducted as an additional charge to the loan, but even when the claim is processed and paid, it is the bank that has the first right on it. All this has to be worked out. Insurance coverage has to be universal and payouts enough to cover losses.

This is one product design that should capture our imagination. This is the true challenge before our climate-risked world.

Commodity picks

Jeera prices in Unjha are at Rs 14,180 a quintal

JEERA

Jeera prices in Unjha are at Rs 14,180 a quintal. Prices are expected to move towards Rs 13,900 a quintal in the coming week, following higher sowing and an excellent crop condition in Gujarat.



WHEAT



Wheat prices in Delhi market are trading at Rs 1,708 a quintal but are expected to trade higher towards Rs 1,730 a quintal in the next couple of weeks on lower stocks across the value chain and subdued sowing progress.

Prerana Desai,

Vice-president, research, agri value chain, Edelweiss Integrated Commodity Management

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Union Minister Harsh Vardhan urges farmers to adopt improved technologies

The Minister said that scientists should standardize the ayurvedic drugs so that their use can be increased in health care of the poor people.

NEW DELHI: Union Minister Harsh Vardhan today urged farmers and entrepreneurs to adopt improved technologies for cultivation of better varieties of medicinal and aromatic plants to raise their income.



Speaking at a Kisan Mela (farmers' fair) organized at CSIR-Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants CSIR-CIMAP in Lucknow, he said this would also help in production of quality raw material demanded by user industries.

Stating that medicinal and aromatic plants are the "valuable green wealth" of the country, he said these should be sustainably used for creating livelihood opportunities of poor people residing in rural areas.

Vardhan, who is Union Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, said that there are immense possibilities for promotion and production of medicinal and aromatic plants and industries by startups.

He called upon the scientists to develop improved technologies for conservation and cultivation of these plants keeping in view the changing climatic conditions and limited as well as diminishing agriculture resources.

Vardhan said that today people are inclined towards the use of drugs and cosmetics made from natural resources as the ill-effects have been reported from the use of synthetic drugs world over.

It is also necessary to make initiatives to improve trust of the people towards herbal drugs, he added.

The Minister said that scientists should standardize the ayurvedic drugs so that their use can be increased in health care of the poor people.

Others who attended the event included Naveen Chandra Bajpei, Deputy Chairman, State Planning Commission, UP, Praveer Kumar, Agriculture Production Commissioner, UP, Sudeep Kumar, Head Planning and Performance Division of CSIR and R A Vishwakarma, Director, CSIR-IIIM, according to a release.

About 4000 farmers and entrepreneurs from UP, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Odisha and others states of the country participated in the Mela, the release added.

Prime Minister Modi wants 50% farmers to join Crop Insurance Scheme in 2 years



Centre unveils Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme

NEW DELHI: Highlighting benefits of the just-announced Crop Insurance Scheme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today said awareness about it should be spread across the country so that at least 50 per cent of the farmers join it within two years.

In his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat', he also pitched for continued efforts to popularise Khadi and awareness to save the girl child, mentioned about the recently launched 'Start-Up India' programme and talked about the upcoming International Fleet Review to be held in

Visakhapatnam.

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"In our country, a lot is said in the name of farmers. I don't want to get involved in that debate. But farmers face a major crisis. In natural calamity, their entire effort goes waste. His one year goes waste. To give him security, only one thing comes to mind and that is crop insurance," he said in this year's first edition of the monthly radio programme.

"In (the New Year) 2016, the central government has given a big gift to the farmers -- Pradhan Mantri Crop Insurance Scheme. This scheme has been brought not for the purpose that it should be praised or the Prime Minister should be hailed," he said.

The Prime Minister said that for so many years, there has been talk regarding crop insurance but "not more than 20-25 per cent" of the country's farmers had been able to benefit from such schemes.

"Can we take a pledge that we should connect at least 50 per cent of the farmers to this scheme in two years? I need this help from you. Because if a farmer joins the scheme, he will get huge help during a natural calamity," he said.

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