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THE HINDU

Minister lays stone for Agriculture Extension Centre

The State government has sanctioned an integrated agriculture extension centre for Viralimalai to be constructed at an expenditure of Rs.1.50 crore.

It will accommodate the offices of Agriculture, Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering, and Agri Business departments.

The plinth area will be 3,816 square feet for the ground floor and 1,586 square feet for the first floor.

C. Vijaya Baskar, Minister for Agriculture, laid the foundation for the centre at a function held at Viralimalai on Monday.

He said that an exclusive godown for inputs would be built at an expenditure of Rs. 32.61 lakh to stock seeds and fertilisers.

Under single roof

The objective of the integrated centre, he said, was to ensure services by various agriculture-related departments under single roof so that farmers, vegetable growers, sugarcane cultivators, and big farmers adopting mechanisation, would benefit.

S. Ganesh, District Collector, presided over the function.

Later, Mr. Vijaya Baskar, inspected the site chosen for the construction of the taluk office for Viralimalai. He inspected the newly-constructed bus stand which is to be declared open shortly.

Gujarat budget focusses on rural areas, social sectors

In its budget for 2016-17 presented in the Assembly on Tuesday, the Gujarat government has focussed on rural areas and social sectors in the backdrop of

rural distress that led to the ruling BJP's drubbing in the district and block panchayats elections held in November 2015.

The annual plan size has been fixed at Rs. 85,557.78 crore out of which Rs. 40,285.52 crore have been allocated for social services such as primary health, education, drinking water, housing, nutrition, employment, women and child development and etc.

Presenting the budget, Finance Minister Saurabh Patel stressed that Rs. 14,294.2 crore for irrigation and flood control and Rs 5,940.08 crore for agriculture have been allocated to create irrigation potential in arid areas.

Rs. 40,285.52 crore has been allocated for social services such as primary health & education

Sunny days hint at early arrival of spring in Kashmir

Even as night temperature at a few places in Kashmir continued to stay below the freezing point, the Valley on Tuesday witnessed a bright sunny day, giving a feel of early arrival of spring which usually starts by March-end.

The sprouting of plants and blooming of some flower varieties, the signs of spring in Kashmir, have started at least one month ahead of the natural process due to favourable temperature.

However, the development has led to concern among farmers and environmentalists who fear that it could be an effect of climate change.

Apart from occasional snowfall ranging from moderate to heavy in the high altitude areas of the Valley, the plains including summer capital Srinagar virtually witnessed a snow-less winter, much to the concern of farming community, especially the orchardists.

“It is a cause of concern. Kashmir might face water scarcity during summer which can affect the agriculture output in the coming farming season,” an agriculture department official said.

The farmers are concerned as the below average snowfall and rains is expected to have an impact on the farming activities in the coming months.

Besides, the early blooming might result in shortfall in the produce as the fruit yielding flowers are weak and cannot survive in case hit by inclement weather.

“I have not seen such a dry winter in many years now. It does not augur well for the farmers of Kashmir,” said Mohammad Akbar, a farmer from Kanihama in Budgam.

The summer capital Srinagar experienced brief spells of snowfall on two occasions in the past two months but there was no accumulation of snow.

- PTI

Bugs, a recipe for success

It may seem unappealing and even unbelievable, but the insects added to the flour are pushing up the demand for this French artisanal pasta



PROTEIN-RICH:Director of the factory "L'Atelier a pates" ("The pasta shop") Stephanie Richard holds two pasta packages made with spelt flour and insects flour (locusts or crickets) in Thiefosse, eastern France.PHOTO: AFP

An artisanal pasta-maker in northeastern France is struggling to meet demand after adding a crunchy, protein-rich ingredient to the noodles: insects.

"The name of the ingredient may be a **turnoff**, but it's really delicious, especially with game meat," smiles Alain Limon as he spreads cricket-flavoured fusilli on a drying rack.

Limon, 52, is the only employee at the Atelier a Pates (Pasta Workshop) in Thieffosse, northeastern France.

His boss Stephanie Richard began her homemade pasta business in 2012, and is now hiring again thanks to the success of her latest creations made from insect flour.

"The insect is the protein of the future," Richard says. "It's protein of high quality that is well digested by the body."

In fact, a 2013 report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) noted the "huge potential" of insects, for feeding not only people but also **livestock**.

Insects are already a common food in many developing countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania.

Some European cheeses also contain or use insects, like France's mimolette, whose grey crust is the result of cheese mites intentionally introduced to add flavour, or the Sardinian casu marzu, which contains live insect **larvae**.

'Kind of nutty'

For Richard's unique pastas, she uses **pulverised** crickets and grasshoppers, sometimes mixing the two, and sometimes mixing ground **cepes** with cricket flour.

"There's a kind of nutty taste thanks to the cepes, making it taste more like whole wheat pasta," Richard says. She was developing a high-protein pasta for athletes when an insect distributor in eastern Lyon contacted her.

Sold on the idea, she began producing pasta made from insect flour in time for the December holidays, and around 500 packages flew off her shelves.

"The product **piqued** the curiosity and had great success," says Richard, who is also a part-time French teacher. Whole eggs are added to a mixture of seven per cent insect flour to 93 per cent organic spelt wheat flour, producing a brownish pasta that is shaped into radiatori, fusilli, spaghetti and penne. At first Richard made plain fresh egg pasta before diversifying her production while keeping it strictly within the culinary traditions of the Lorraine region, using wild garlic, nettles and safran, for example. All of her ingredients were from Lorraine except durum semolina, which Richard says is **incompatible** with the climate.

Four years on with the addition of insect flour to the mix, "it's working so well that we will soon be able to hire a second person," Richard says, proud of her weekly production now at some 400 kilos (880 pounds).

And she does not plan to stop there: she is working on a new recipe using Maroilles cheese from northern France, and plans to start making stuffed pastas.

At a little over six euros (\$6.60) for a 250 gramme (about half a pound) package, insect flour pastas are more expensive than standard kinds, but Richard notes that they can replace meat for vegetarians -- or for people who prefer crickets. "People with iron or magnesium deficiencies will also eat these products," she says. AFP

Movement to promote millet cultivation



What started off as a mission to advocate millet cultivation in just five villages a dozen years ago has now reached over 40 villages. But, K.

Saraswathi, secretary of Sabala, an NGO that aims to empower women and redefine natural resource management, says that she wants to start a new movement that doubles the present count.

Perhaps, it is her undying love for millets and dedication to get an assured market for farmers produce made her win the top spot in ‘One MP-One Idea’ contest with a cash award of Rs.1.25 lakh.

Out of 112 participants who made their way to the Central government scheme contest from across the globe, nine got selected and Ms. Saraswathi’s concept of ‘Making food sovereignty villages through millet cultivation-providing healthy foods to consumers’ has now turned into cynosure of all eyes. “With the declining trend in agricultural production, the idea is to regain the lost glory of farm sector. After a 10-day long intensive research and constant interaction with farmers along with NGO representatives, I have floated the idea of setting up processing units to convert millets into ready to consume products and introduce them into public distribution system through my presentation,” she explains.

When asked about how she plans to spend the award money, she said: “I like to use Rs.1.25 lakh as revolving fund for Arogya Millets Producers Company Limited (farmers’ federation), an arm of Sabala.”

The rise in investment costs and lack of dry land agriculture is pushing farmers to consider alternative means of livelihood. Farmers play a crucial role in catering to the country’s food security goals. “However, they have been a neglected lot. Through our extensive advocacy on millet cultivation we would like to reach out to as many as possible and make a difference in their lives.

From establishing market linkage for farmers to getting assured market for their produce, catering to urban consumers directly to organising workshops and millet food festivals in rural areas, we have tied up with Millet Network of India to step up our campaigning for cost-effective millet cultivation,” she adds.

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K. Saraswathi Secretary, Sabala

President spotlights welfare programmes

In his address to the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament on Tuesday, President Pranab Mukherjee dwelt on the government's programmes, especially those aimed at financial inclusion and the agricultural sector, including the recently launched Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana.

“My government has recently launched the farmer-friendly Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana, with the biggest-ever government's contribution to crop insurance, and with the lowest-ever premium rates for farmers. It has many firsts to its credit like national coverage of post-harvest losses due to inundation and unseasonal rains, no capping on subsidy and use of technology for early and accurate settlement of claims. Assistance to farmers affected by natural calamities has been increased by 50 per cent and eligibility norms have been relaxed,” he said.

The President said amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act to make it more stringent were on the anvil.

“While on the one hand, my government has taken measures to eliminate the scope for corruption, on the other, it has been unsparing in punishing those who are found guilty of corruption. Stringent amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act are also on the anvil to address the perceived gaps in the anti-corruption law,” he said.

Inorganic practices degraded The Nilgiris

Degradation of The Nilgiris mountain communities in the areas of health, economy, education, environment and socio cultural front was due to inorganic practices over the last three decades.

It was important to declare The Nilgiris as an organic district said former director, Tamil Nadu Institute of Urban Studies, Coimbatore, P. Kanagasabapathi at a seminar on “The Driving Forces and the process of Development in the Mountain Communities of the Nilgiris,” organised by The Nilgiris Education and Research Foundation (NEAR) Foundation, in Udhagamandalam recently.

He urged mountain communities to cultivate traditional crops like minor millets, county wheat, buckwheat, greens and vegetable to sustain health and food security for the next generation.

Mr. Kanagasabapathi said that community based development is sustainable development. Vice-Chancellor of University and Institute of Advance Research at Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat, Guna Magesan said that there had to be viable opportunities for the uplift of the mountain communities in the district.

First genome code of peanut cracked

This will help in cultivating better peanut varieties with enhanced pod, oil yield and greater disease resistance

In a scientific breakthrough that promises accelerated gene discovery and development of improved peanut (also known as groundnut) cultivars, researchers have completed high quality sequencing of the ancestral genomes of the crop. This will lead to better peanut varieties with enhanced pod and oil yield, greater disease resistance, drought and heat tolerance and oil quality.

The breakthrough was made by researchers of The International Peanut Genome Initiative (IPGI) led by the University of Georgia in the US (UGA) and published online in “Nature Genetics (<http://www.nature.com/ng/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/ng.3517.html>)”— the leading high impact factor journal in the area of genetics, genomics, and biotechnology on February 22.

The peanut that is grown by farmers today is the result of hybridisation between these two wild species.

“It’s almost as if we had travelled back in time and sampled the same plant that gave rise to cultivated peanuts from the gardens of these ancient people,” said David Bertioli, IPGI plant geneticist of the Universidade de Brasília, who is the lead author of the paper and works at the University of Georgia.

The IPGI, is a multi-national group of crop geneticists working in cooperation for several years with 39 scientists from 26 organisations in six

countries, including the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). It was involved in project planning, a release said here on Tuesday.

‘Coconut point’ to sell neera-based products



Black sugar made from coconut neera has already found a market in Indonesia.

Coconut growers from Udumalpet, Gudimangalam, and Madathukulam, who have recently formed a farmers collective, are all set to open a ‘coconut point’ very shortly in the district to market a wide range of value-added products under a common brand.

Black sugar, one of the value-added products made from coconut neera, has recently made its way to Indonesian markets.

“We have identified the place for the 'coconut point' at Udumalpet. Half of the initial expenditure to set up the facility is met from the corpus created by the farmers’ consortium. The remaining amount is given as financial assistance from Coconut Development Board,” said S. Selvaraj, president of the farmers collective, Udumalpet Coconut Farmers’ Producer Company.

The ‘coconut point’ will sell black sugar, honey, biscuits, jaggery, all made from coconut neera, soap and oil under the common brand of ‘Snehalaya.’ “Our aim is to penetrate local markets for the products through this sales point,” said Mr. Selvaraj. Regarding exports, Mr. Selvaraj said that the

company was able to cater to orders for raw coconuts from Middle East nations.

“So far, we have exported 56 tonnes of raw coconuts. We are expecting to get more orders,” he added.

Training programme

: The Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM) will conduct a training programme on ‘Water management in plantation and organic spice farming’ as part of the National Plantation Corp Development Project. Interested farmers in Kozhikode district, unemployed women, Kudumbasree workers can call 0495-2531867 or 9495308522 for more information.

Minister inaugurates new research complex of KUFOS

The State government and the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS) would make joint efforts to tackle the problems faced by the fisheries sector, said Fisheries Minister K. Babu here on Tuesday after inaugurating the newly built research complex of the university.

He said the marine fishery wealth was decreasing, and indigenous aquatic species in inland water bodies in the State were gradually disappearing.

The livelihood of fisherfolk residing in the coastal areas was under threat and the fisheries department would formulate effective strategies to tackle the issues, he said.

He also said that the Fisheries Department would utilize the technologies and scientific support extended by KUFOS. Developing diversified aquaculture practices to increase inland fishery production was another area the government would turn its attention to.

Farmer-friendly farming practices and low-cost feeds would be developed to attract people to fish farming, he added.

Vice-chancellor of the university B. Madhusoodana Kurup presided over the function. He said the research activities under various research centres at the university would be strengthened with the establishment of the new complex.

The Minister said the Fisheries Department would utilize the technologies and scientific support extended by KUFOS

Enhancing awareness of food safety

Officials demonstrate how food items are adulterated



FOR BETTER HEALTH:Collector S. Natarajan at the Food Safety Workshop organised at Ramanathapuram Collectorate on Tuesday. District Designated Officer M. Jagadish Chandra Bose is seen.— Photo: L. Balachandar

The district wing of Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department organised a training-cum-workshop to enhance awareness of food safety from manufacturing to distribution to storage to consumer points among stakeholders.

Inaugurating the one-day programme held at the Collectorate here on Tuesday, Collector S. Natarajan said that the event aimed at sensitising food manufacturers, distributors and stockists to the need for providing safe, unadulterated and quality food to the consumers.

He said that after the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 came into force in August 2011 throughout the country, repealing the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, the State government set up Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration Department and implemented the new Act, making it mandatory for the food business operators to obtain licence.

To ensure food safety and standards of food items, food laboratories had been set up across the State, he said, and appealed to the manufacturers, hoteliers and traders to ensure that the consumers got safe and quality food items.

M. Jagadish Chandra Bose, District Designated Officer, Food Safety Wing, in his address, detailed the provisions of the Act and dwelt upon the duties and responsibilities of the food business operators to provide safe and quality food items and prevent spread of food-borne diseases.

He exhorted the food business operators to adopt good manufacturing practices and advised the representatives of trade bodies and chambers of commerce to play the role of watchdog in the larger interest of consumers.

The workshop was an eye-opener to the consumers as the officials demonstrated how various food items such as pepper, 'vadagam', candies and cakes were subjected to colouring and adulteration. "I have decided to avoid drinking tea after seeing the demonstration of how tea dust was coloured and adulterated," S. Ramesh, a consumer, said.

A cross section of the consumers who attended the workshop said that it was unbelievable that even fruits such as watermelon and pomegranates were coloured with artificial substances, adopting injection method.

Gujarat Budget 2016-17: Spotlight on youth, farmers

Proposes to open up 66,000 govt jobs; annual plan outlay Rs 85,557.78 cr; CM hails it as concrete step for overall development, Cong calls it ‘jugglery of figures’.

The Gujarat government on Tuesday presented its annual Budget for the financial year 2016-17 with the overall size of Rs 1,51,852 crore. With an annual plan outlay of Rs 85,557.78 crore, the proposed Budget has a clear focus on two disgruntled sections of the BJP’s political vote bank — youth and farmers. The Budget’s priorities seem to be defined looking at the 2017 Assembly elections as it emphasises on wooing these two sections. The proposed Budget enlarges the scope of Mukhyamantri Yuva Swavalamban Yojana (MYSY), which was announced following Patidar reservation stir, allocating Rs 2,500 crore for roads mainly in rural areas. It also proposes opening up 66,000 government jobs in the current year, which Finance Minister Saurabh Patel said, was being done “for the first time since the foundation of the state (in 1960)”.

In the recently-concluded local body elections, Gujarat BJP faced a severe setback mainly in district panchayats and taluka panchayats, which is seen as a fallout of the Patidar quota stir. To calm the community, seen as wealthy and progressive in Gujarat, the state government had announced MYSY, offering financial assistance to the economically weaker sections of the society. The annual family income cap to avail the scheme has been increased from Rs 4.5 lakh to Rs 6 lakh. Also, the qualification percentile to avail the benefit of the scheme has been decreased from 90 to 80.

Finance Minister Patel also floated the “Smart village” project, allocating Rs 185 crore to cover around 300 villages in the first year. “We aim to make villages of Gujarat self-reliant, clean and healthy, crime free, disease free, samras (with co-opted gram panchayats) and economically empowered,” said Patel. The villages will be selected through independent and transparent competition. Every Smart village will be provided special assistance by the state government. Under this scheme, there will be scope to include extra villages adopted through people’s participation. The government has

provided Rs 6,729.42 crore under plan and non-plan for panchayat, rural housing and rural development department. The 66,000 jobs that the Gujarat government announced to open up in a single year will be in the education, police, health, revenue and forest departments. The FM also announced that apart from these government jobs, there were plans to hold recruitment in grant-in-aid institutes and public sector enterprises.

To woo the farming community, special emphasis has been given on irrigation and flood management in the Budget plan. Patel said that irrigation and flood management comprised 16.7 per cent of the total plan size. Also, special provision of Rs 25 crore has been announced for a Drainage Master Plan for districts like Banaskantha, Patan, Kutch, Surendranagar, Ahmedabad and Mehsana.

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The agriculture and allied services sector also forms around 7 per cent of the total plan size of the Budget. For farmers, a number of provisions have been announced, like loans at 1 per cent interest rate for Kharif crops, with the upper limit of Rs 3 lakh. The Budget has the provision of Rs 375 crore for this which is claimed to benefit 38 lakh farmers in the state.

The provision of Rs 228.50 crore has been made for precautionary stocking of fertiliser through Gujarat Agro Industries Corporation to preempt chronic shortage of fertiliser at the time of intense demand. Also, with an objective to protect farmers from agricultural risks and provide them support for crop loss during natural calamity, provision of Rs 495.67 crore has been made under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, announced recently by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Under infrastructure, the Budget has announced Mukhyamantri Gram Sadak Yojana to augment and strengthen road network in rural areas. The project targets 18,000 villages and 16,245 hamlets of the state. "The state government has identified works to the tune of Rs 10,000 over the next three years for which Rs 2,500 crore has been planned under the scheme in the current year," Patel said in his Budget speech.

CM Anandiben Patel Tuesday hailed the state Budget as a concrete step by

her government for overall development. She said it will bring paradigm shift in the lives of tribals, rural people, women and the youth, according an official release. Opposition Congress, on the other hand, termed it “jugglery of figures”. Leader of opposition in the Assembly Shankersinh Vaghela said it offered no solution for price-rise and measures for job creation. with pti inputs

(With PTI inputs)

Rs 14,294 cr for irrigation, flood control Gandhinagar: Irrigation and flood management comprised 16.7 percent of the total plan size, Rs 14,294 crore, of the 2016-17 Budget. This assumes importance since Gujarat is facing general Assembly elections in 2017 and availability of water for both drinking and agriculture is of paramount importance. Finance Minister Saurabh Patel has proposed to provide Rs 9,050 crore for the Sardar Sarovar Yojana. A provision of Rs 163 crore has been made for installing the radial gates and other ancillary works which are under progress in this project. The government has altered the implementation of Sardar Sarovar Yojana by preferring Under Ground Pipeline over construction of sub-minor canals. The budget has provision of Rs 2,021 crore for laying UGPL covering around 12,500-km to provide irrigation to 5 lakh hectares of land in 64 talukas. To assist farmers in increasing their income by adopting drip irrigation, Rs 765 crore has been proposed to be provided to them. A provision of Rs 919 crore has been made to increase irrigation facility for tribal farmers. For increasing the water storage capacity, it has been planned to deepen 470 small check-dams, 270 big check-dams and 850 ponds and repair check-dams. Also, there is planning for undertaking desilting of reservoirs. The Budget has total provision of Rs 329 crore for this. It has provision of Rs 498 crore to improve existing canal network benefiting 1 lakh hectare of irrigated land.

Eating almonds daily can boost your overall health

The researchers suggested replacing salty and processed snacks with almonds.

The parents were instructed to eat 42.52g of almonds each day and the children were encouraged to eat 14.17g of almonds. (Source: Thinkstock Images)

Eating moderate amount of almonds daily right from childhood days can drastically improve health later in life, a study has found. “If a parent is able to incorporate almonds or different healthy snacks into a child’s diet, it’s more likely that the child will choose those snacks later on in life,” said lead researcher Alyssa Burns from University of Florida.



To reach the conclusion, researchers studied the effect that the addition of almonds can have on a person’s diet quality. For a 14-week study, data was collected from 28 pairs of parents and children.

The parents were instructed to eat 42.52g of almonds each day and the children were encouraged to eat 14.17g of almonds or an equivalent amount of almond butter each day. The findings, published in the Journal of Nutrition Research, showed that after the almond intervention, the average “Healthy Eating Index” score for parents and children increased.

The results suggest that wholefood approaches, like adding almonds to one’s diet, may be an achievable way to improve overall public health. “Adding a variety of fruits, vegetables and nuts to your diet can improve your overall diet quality,” Burns added, suggesting parents and children to replace salty and processed snacks with almonds.

What’s the row robbing basmati of its aroma?

The aromatic, long-grain basmati, the so-called “scented pearl” and “queen of all rice”, is in a legal tangle.

The court has issued notices and posted the matter for hearing in April. The aromatic, long-grain basmati, the so-called “scented pearl” and “queen of all rice”, is in a legal tangle. Madhya Pradesh recently challenged in

Madras High Court the February 5 order of the Chennai-based Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) that approved Geographical Indications (GI) tag for basmati grown in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, J&K, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, but not in MP. The court has issued notices and posted the matter for hearing in April.



So, what is the big deal about Geographical Indications?

The Geographical Indications of Goods, according to the Chennai-based GI Registry, “are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product”. A GI label “conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness attributable (to the product’s) origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country”. A GI tag for agricultural, natural or manufactured goods commands a premium in the international market — e.g. Darjeeling tea, Kanchipuram silk sari and Kolhapuri chappal.

What is the dispute about basmati? In 2008, when Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA), a wing of the Union Commerce Ministry, moved the GI Registry for granting the tag to basmati grown in six districts, MP objected, staking claim to the tag. On October 31, 2013, the assistant registrar of the GI Registry ruled in MP’s favour. APEDA moved IPAB, the appellate body. On February 5, IPAB allowed APEDA’s appeal, but asked the GI Registry to consider MP’s claim afresh by giving both sides a reasonable opportunity to submit fresh evidence, and pass an order within six months. On what grounds is APEDA opposing MP’s inclusion? APEDA says MP is not situated in the Indo-Gangetic plain. It has called the assistant registrar’s order “erroneous”, and insisted that the evidence submitted by MP was based on improper verification, and illegible and unreadable documents. It has argued that the assistant registrar failed to distinguish between commercial cultivation,

research and breeding activities, that temperature was not the sole determining factor, and that agri-climatic conditions were influenced by humidity, day-length, etc. And on what grounds is Madhya Pradesh seeking a GI tag? It has submitted gazetteers from British times to make the case that it has grown basmati for decades, and that climatic conditions in the state are as favourable as in other states. MP says the districts of Morena, Bhind, Gwalior, Sheopur, Datia, Shivpuri, Guna, Vidisha, Raisen, Sehore, Hoshangabad, Jabalpur and Narsingpur grow basmati. The oldest recorded reference to basmati, incidentally, is from 1766, in Waris Shah’s immortal Heer Ranjha — a claim made by basmati growers in Lahore on the basis of that reference was, however, rejected. How big is the basmati export market? In 2014-15, basmati exports were recorded at Rs 27,598 crores. Farmers are a huge constituency in MP, and it is not surprising that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has called the order “injustice”.

hindustantimes

Moga farmer doubles potato earning with bed technique



Jagmohan Singh harvesting potato at Jai Singh Wala village in Moga on Friday. (HT PHOTO)

Contrary to other farmers’ claims of harvesting less yield of potato during this season due to extreme cold, a progressive farmer of Jai Singh Wala village claimed to have harvested a better crop this time using a bed plantation technique at his farm.

Jagmohan Singh, also sarpanch of the village, who is growing potato on 83 acres of land, has successfully doubled his earning using some innovative farming tips.

“Normally one-acre farm gives around 100 to 125 quintals of potato yield to the farmers using the ridge plantation method, but with this bed plantation method, I am successfully procuring 170 quintals of potato per acre,” Jagmohan said.

SHIFTING FROM RIDGE TO BED PLANTATION

Jagmohan said that earlier they had adopted the 36-inch bed technique in which they used to sow two rows of potatoes and used the traditional furrow irrigation method to irrigate the crop from both sides.

In the 36-inch bed plantation, it takes 32-35 half-quintal seed bags for an acre, which produces a yield of 135 quintals per acre.

“In a new experiment, I have broadened the ridge from 36 inches to 72 inches and switched to the sprinkler irrigation method,” said Jagmohan, who has been cultivating potatoes with this new technique for last two years.

In the 72-inch bed, the farmer, who has to specially extend the breadth of his tractor to make it run on a broadened bed, is now sowing five rows of potato on a single bed resulting in increase of yield to 170 quintals per acre with mere 40-45 half-quintal bags of seed giving a profit of Rs 1 lakh per acre.

While, the ridge plantation method could only give you a maximum profit of Rs 40,000 per acre, as that consumes extra electricity for water and needs extra fertilisers and pesticides.

BENEFITS OF BED PLANTATION TECH

Jaswinder Singh Brar, agriculture development officer (ADO), said that the bed plantation technique not only helps to increase the yield of the crop, but it is very helpful for a healthy crop as well.

“It increases water using efficiency of the crop, helps in absorbing nutrients and smoothens the aeration facility of the crop which ultimately gives good results,” he said.

Experts said that the furrow irrigation method not only wastes water, but a flood of water becomes hindrance for the crop to absorb nutrients.

“In this bed method, I use only 15 kg urea in an acre while other farmers spray quintals of urea in one acre which increases nitrogen in the crop which is unhealthy for the consumer,” Jagmohan said.

PADDY STRAW AS FERTILISER

The farmer has also stopped the practise of burning straw, left after harvesting of paddy crop and is using it as fertiliser in his farms, which is also contributing to produce a good crop.

“I have imported a straw-chopper mulcher from Italy, which helps to shred the straw in bits, which is then ploughed into the soil for decomposition and helps to make micro-flora and microorganisms in the soil to make it healthy,” Jagmohan said.

OTHER CROPS

ADO Jaswinder said that farmers could also sow other crops, including wheat, all type of vegetables, sunflowers, maize and sugarcane using the bed plantation technique.

“Sowing a crop on beds could reduce the usage of irrigation by 40% and will be helpful in saving water,” he added



Scientists crack groundnut genome

Possibility of improved varieties with higher yields, disease resistance

Scientists have cracked the genome of the protein and oil rich peanut, opening avenues for agriculture researchers to come out with better varieties. Led by the University of Georgia (the US) researchers, a team at International Peanut Genome Initiative (IPGI) completed sequencing of the ancestral genomes of peanut (also called groundnut).

The crop is grown in an extent of about 25.70 million hectares, with an estimated production of 42 million tonnes. To map the peanut's genome structure, IPGI researchers sequenced the two ancestral parents, because together they represent the cultivated peanut.



This promises accelerated gene discovery and development of improved peanut with enhanced pod and oil yield, greater disease resistance, drought and heat tolerance and oil quality. The new peanut genome sequence will be available to researchers and plant breeders across the globe to aid in the breeding of more productive peanut varieties.

This research will also help peanut farmers to tackle the emerging challenges of climate change better. The genome map can also be used to harness genetic diversity by broadening the genetic base of cultivated peanut gene pool.

“The researchers traced the roots of the original wild genomes of *Arachis duranensis* (V14167, A-genome ancestor) and *A. ipaensis* (K30076, B-genome ancestor) to a wild plant from Bolivia, which is considered to be a living relic of the prehistoric origins of the cultivated peanut species,” ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics) has said in a statement on Tuesday.

Comparisons of the DNA sequences of one of the wild species and the cultivated peanut showed that they are almost exactly the same; in fact, they are 99.96 per cent identical. It's an unprecedented similarity.

“It's almost as if we had travelled back in time and sampled the same plant that gave rise to cultivated peanuts from the gardens of these ancient

people,” David Bertioli, IPGI plant geneticist and who works at the University of Georgia, said.

The IPGI, is a multi-national group of crop geneticists working in cooperation for several years with 39 scientists from 26 organisations in six countries the Hyderabad-based ICRISAT.

ICRISAT was involved in project planning, defining the strategy and also contributed to data analysis for the discovery.

“Rich in protein and edible oil, peanut is central to the financial and nutritional well-being of millions of farmers and consumers across the semi-arid tropics of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,” ICRISAT Director General David Bergvinson said in the statement.

The dying tea gardens of North Bengal



Optimistic Thuiya Oraon (left) and Kishore Singh, guards at the factory of closed Lankapara tea garden in North Bengal, are still on duty without remuneration ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

How the GP Goenka-controlled Duncan group brewed losses in an era of tea price revival

When Thuiya Oraon and Kishore Singh joined the Lankapara Tea estate on the banks of the Bangri river, bordering the blue hills of Bhutan, as security guards, the garden was producing up to 2 million kg (mkg) of tea, with yields far in excess of the regional average.

That was in the early 1980s, when tea fetched super-normal profits, courtesy Russian buying.

The good times stretched up to 1990s when GP Goenka's Duncan Goenka Group emerged as a major player in the North Bengal tea industry, controlling as many as 14 quality gardens.

The list includes two Darjeeling estates and two 'project gardens', operating outside the purview of the Plantation Labour Act, in the plains.

Fall of an empire

All that is history now. The group flagship Duncan Industries Ltd was declared sick in 2006. The Darjeeling gardens were virtually sold out.

And beginning March-April 2015, the group unofficially closed down all 12 gardens in the plains of North Bengal, throwing the lives 19,500 permanent workers and just as many casual workers off-gear, with wages and salaries and statutory dues remaining unpaid.

Lankapara was one of the first estates to be shut down. Soon six more neighbouring Duncan gardens (Birpara, Hantapara, Dumchipara, Tulsipara), located within 15 km of Birpara on NH-31D, were closed.

On January 28, the Tea Board decided to take over management control of the seven gardens near Birpara invoking clause 16(E) of the Tea Act, 1953. The takeover will not be smooth, given that the ownership rests with Goenka, who has gone to court.

The fate of three more estates (Kilcott, Nagasuree and Bagracott) and two project gardens (Madarihat and Terai Land) is undecided.

Angry locals recently wrested control of the 250-hectare Madarihat project, where Duncan had acquired farming rights in compromise of the Land Ceiling Act, with the promise of jobs to erstwhile landholders.

Gross mismanagement

But what triggered the downfall of Duncan, that too in the face of a systemic recovery in tea prices since 2007?

Group chairman GP Goenka refused to respond to queries. But former managers of the group estates point out that the group practically stopped re-

investing throughout the past decade; consequently yields fell, and the business turned unviable.

The problem, they say, began with the dip in tea prices between 2000 and 2006. Cash-strapped Duncan could not weather this crisis.

It started cutting corners by restricting use of agri-inputs, re-plantation and others to meet the cash shortfall.

The result was catastrophic. Between 2005 and 2015, tea production came down to nearly half in most of the estates, with the average age of bushes crossing 50 years against 35 in the best of the gardens in the region.

According to one former employee, parts of land in some gardens, like Lankapara, became unsuitable for plantation as the company failed to prevent dolomite seepage from river water.

Despair vs hope

Lankapara is today a dying garden – unkempt tea bushes that missed many a round of pruning, vanishing shed trees that keep the tea leaves juicy and aromatic.

Most of the able-bodied men have joined the list of migratory workers in other States. Singh's son is a seasonal labourer in Kerala. Many women have left for Delhi to work as housemaids.

Those left behind, mostly children and the elderly, collect boulders from the dry riverbed of the Bangri. A heap of them fetches ₹100.

But that's not an easy task as quarrying has left few stones behind. "There are not many stones to collect," says 15-year-old Tora Lohar, a former casual labourer from 'Line No 20'. Lohar is planning to go to Delhi to try and make a living.

In the tea world, a dead garden is rarely revived. But Oraon and Singh are not ready to give in to despair. They have taken the task of securing the safety of the plant and machinery, voluntarily.

Someone told them that their '*malik*' (owner) will be back soon and so they are out here to protect the property for him. Ask them why they were giving free labour, and pat comes the reply: "It's our temple."

Bearish cues drag edible oils

Activities in edible oils market remained thin tracking weak futures amid slack demand. Malaysian palm oil futures closed lower on fourth consecutive day on the back of sluggish exports. On the Bombay Commodity Exchange, barring groundnut oil which rose by ₹5/10 kg, all other edible oils lost ₹2-5. Vikram global commodities quoted Malaysian super palmolein at ₹561. Liberty's rates: palmolein ₹540-541, super palmolein ₹559-561 and soyabean refined oil ₹625. Ruchi traded palmolein for ₹525-530, soyabean refined oil ₹611 and sunflower refined oil ₹765. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 935 (930), soya ref. 611 (615), sunflower exp. ref. 685 (690), sunflower ref. 765 (765), rapeseed ref. oil 790 (790), rapeseed exp. ref. 760 (760) cottonseed ref. 600 (602) and palmolein 518 (520).

FSSAI raids: Kochi tea traders clarify over quality

Tea Trade Association of Cochin has clarified that the valuation of teas in the auction centre was done by industry experts and the trade was regulated by the Tea Board of India.

The quality aspects of teas offered at the auctions are well assured and the export quantities for the previous period will substantiate the value offered through auctions.

The Association's clarification comes in the wake of the recent raids carried out by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on adulterated tea dealers in the State and confiscating several adulterated quantities.

According to JK Thomas, the association Chairman, the teas auctioned through the centre were confirmed by the sellers and in accordance prescribed under FSSAI and by the Tea Board-approved brokers before offering it in the auctions.

The Association urged the public to abstain from approaching tea dealers who are offering teas at comparatively very low price, which is practically not possible for any estate to produce under the current circumstances.

It also requested traders, retailers and consumers to demand a bill with the suppliers' VAT and FSSAI license number while purchasing the commodity, considering the rise in adulterated products from neighbouring States.

Turmeric slips by ₹650/quintal



Spot turmeric prices decreased on Tuesday for want of upcountry demand. “Also, arrivals increased to 5,000 bags of which only 60 per cent was sold. All the 1,050 bags of new turmeric were sold,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association. The finger turmeric lost ₹600 a quintal and the root variety ₹950. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger turmeric was sold at ₹7,906-9,869 a quintal; the root variety ₹7,300-9,199. Of the arrival of 1,798 bags, 980 were sold.

Business Standard

Modi's mega krishi mela may be replicated nationally

The fair is expected to be attended by over 100,000 farmers from across the country



In a move purportedly to resurrect its falling image in rural India, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government is planning a mega farmers' fair in Delhi to propagate its pro-farmer policies.

The fair, expected to be attended by 100,000 farmers, is planned on the lines of similar fairs held in Gujarat when Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) was the chief minister of the state. It could be held sometime before Holi, which falls on March 22.

According to officials, the event is likely to be attended by ministers from all farms-related departments. Invites would also be sent to all chief ministers, they added.

MODI'S MEGA PLANS

- Centre plans mega farmers' fair sometime in March this year
- The fair is expected to be attended by over 100,000 farmers from across the country
- Over 500 stalls are expected to be put up
- The fair aims to bring together farmers, companies, scientists, consumers, input-providers and policymakers under one platform

- The fair is expected to be preceded by a series of panel discussions and seminars on major agriculture-related flagship programmes of the Modi government and their impact
- The overall farm growth in the first two years of the Modi government has been a dismal 0.45 per cent lower than the average population growth due to consecutive droughts and low farm-gate prices

During his stint as Gujarat CM, Modi used to organise a highly successful [Krishi Mahotsav](#) every year, from 2005 onwards.

Earlier, the fairs used to be single-day affairs. Later, their scale and duration expanded. In annual presentations made to then Planning Commission, Modi, as chief minister of Gujarat, had claimed the [kisan melas](#) helped the state in achieving impressive growth in [agriculture](#) and allied activities.

He had said Gujarat's total agricultural production (including [animal husbandry](#) and horticultural) rose from Rs 18,104 crore in 2002-03 to Rs 49,036 crore in 2007-08, thanks to the fair. The fair had similarly helped raise the state's milk production, he had said. It also helped in bridging the distance between agriculture scientists and farmers.

“Something similar is being planned on a national scale wherein agriculture scientists and others will apprise the farmers of the Centre's initiatives for them,” said an official.

The fair is expected to be inaugurated by Modi. Officials said in the run-up to the mega farmer's fair in Delhi, the agriculture ministry would hold seminars and discussions on all the agriculture-related flagship programmes of the Modi government — soil health card, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Fasal Bima Yojana, blue revolution, etc.

The fair is expected to be organised at Indian Agriculture Research Institute grounds and could have 500 stalls, reflecting the entire gamut of agriculture value-chain and input providers including seed manufacturers, and fertiliser and farm equipment manufacturers right up to the food processing sector.

India's agriculture and allied sector grew at an unimpressive 0.45 per cent in the first two years of the [NDA](#) government, which was lower than the average population growth of 1.3-1.4 per cent because of consecutive droughts and record drop in produce prices.

According to experts, poor farm growth and steady population growth mean per-capita income is falling in rural areas. Around 55 per cent of India's population inhabits rural areas.

Sources say senior officials from the agriculture department have been entrusted with working out all the details of this mega fair. Former agriculture minister Sharad Pawar, too, during his last days in office, had organised a farmers' fair (Krishi Basant) in Nagpur in 2014.

The fair, held over a period of five days, was inaugurated by President [Pranab Mukherjee](#) and attended by a large number of farmers, foreign delegates, scientists, students and exhibitors. Around 80 Indian Council of Agricultural Research institutes and 30 Krishi Vigyan Kendras from across the country participated in the fair.

Sugar industry representatives meet Jaitley, Rajan on their woes

The debt burden of the sugar sector has risen four times from Rs 11,000 crore in March 2008 to more than Rs 40,300 crore in March 2015



Ahead of the Union Budget, the sugar industry in a series of meetings with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan demanded that long-term financial viability of the sector be ensured and a scheme to restructure outstanding loans be announced.

The representatives asked the government to adopt a report of the Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices (CACP) that recommended that the industry pay a price derived based on a revenue sharing formula and if this was lower than the fair and remunerative price (FRP), the difference be transferred directly to farmers' bank accounts.

A scheme on similar lines was adopted this year, where the Centre transferred Rs 4.50 per quintal directly to farmers. The sector wants this scheme to be made permanent in a more structured manner.

Representatives claimed despite improvement in prices and steps taken by the Centre, the sector has not come out of the woods. The sector's debt burden rose four times to around Rs 40,300 crore in March 2015, from Rs 11,000 crore in March 2008.

"We have requested the finance minister and RBI governor to allow the sector permission to restructure loans under the 5:25 flexible structure, currently available for core industries and infrastructure sectors," Tarun Sawhney, president of Indian Sugar Mills Association, said.

The Centre can fund the shortfall from a stabilisation fund, which can be financed by raising cess on excise duty to Rs 200 a quintal or Rs 2 a kg. At present, the Centre levies a cess of Rs 125 a quintal or Rs 1.25 a kg.

"This would be levied only if prices are below a certain threshold limit. If prices stay firm, the cess is not levied," Abinash Verma, ISMA director general, said.

Sawhney said any move to raise the cess by Rs 0.75 a kg won't push up prices as almost 70 per cent of India's annual consumption comes from the industrial sector.

Verma said the Centre would earn Rs 4,500 crore a year if the cess is raised to Rs 200 per quintal.

Of this, the total outgo on bridging the gap between FRP and revenue-fixed price would be lower.

He said a sub-category could be created under the Sugar Development Fund for the price stabilisation fund in which this amount could be deposited.

Focus on farming

Many good ideas for agricultural reform should be in the Budget

Shoring up the rural economy that has been crippled because of two successive droughts is clearly a major focus of the upcoming Budget. This is imperative also to revive rural demand for goods and services to stimulate overall economic growth. But how Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will seek to achieve this feat is hard to predict, though what he should try to do is fairly apparent. Considering that the prime need is to enhance farmers' earnings to alleviate their distress, the Budget needs to come out with measures collectively aimed at bolstering farm productivity, reducing costs, facilitating easier access to institutional finance, reforming agricultural marketing - and, most significantly, generating more employment, particularly in the non-farm rural sector. Besides, due attention needs to be paid to critical areas that range from natural resources like land and water to policies governing agricultural pricing and domestic as well as external trade of farm goods. Moreover, reform of farm subsidies is urgently needed; some non-productive subsidies should be converted into productive investments. Also important is to promote farm mechanisation to improve precision of farm operations for more efficient use of inputs. In view of the increased frequency of climate change-driven extreme weather events, measures are needed to mitigate the vulnerability of agriculture to these shocks by enabling it to adapt to altered weather patterns and enhancing drought resilience through expansion of irrigation, particularly micro-irrigation. Greater investment is needed to expand rural infrastructure.

Some useful inputs and ideas have been generated during the finance minister's pre-Budget meetings with farm sector representatives and in the recent reports of expert groups for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the NITI Aayog. The report of the RBI's committee on financial inclusion has pointed out that farm production is not commensurate with the credit flow - a sizeable Rs 8.4 lakh crore in 2014-15. Nor does this credit reach where it is needed the most. It also drew attention to the fact that much of the

institutional credit is disbursed as short-term crop loans, thus neglecting the need for long-term credit for investment in productivity-boosting measures. This issue needs to be suitably addressed in the Budget.

The NITI Aayog's task force on agriculture, meanwhile, made some well thought-out suggestions to raise agricultural productivity and make farming remunerative. These include helping farmers upgrade their seeds more frequently and decanalising urea imports with the subsidy going directly to farmers' bank accounts. More importantly, it has suggested an entirely novel method of ensuring returns to growers through a "price deficiency payment mechanism". This system involves fixing floor prices for different crops based on their average market prices in the previous three years, and compensating the growers for any shortfall in realising these rates. The present procurement-based system of providing minimum support prices has remained confined to a handful of crops in a few states; the new system seems capable of covering all major crops across the country. Thus, the farm sector agenda before the finance minister is truly extensive. The Budget must make a start on these far-reaching reforms.

Setting up e-platform to provide best prices to farmers: Prez

Mukherjee said the government has taken several steps for welfare of farmers



President Pranab Mukherjee addressing during a award function of Infosys Prizes for the Year 2015 in New Delhi on Saturday.PTI Photo

Government is setting up a national online agriculture market platform to connect 585 regulated wholesale markets to ensure fair remunerative prices

for the farmers, President [Pranab Mukherjee](#) said today.

Addressing the joint sitting of Parliament, he said 'Kisaano ki Samridhhi', the well-being of farmers, is vital to India's prosperity.

"To provide the best market price to farmers, the unified National Agriculture Market is working towards setting up a common e-market platform to connect 585 regulated wholesale markets, thereby making India, One Food Zone, One Country, One Market.

"This will immensely benefit our farmers in getting fair and remunerative prices. Targeted policy interventions in the last year have brought down sugar cane arrears from over Rs 21,000 crore to Rs 1,800 crore," President said.

Mukherjee said the government has taken several steps for welfare of farmers, like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna, which is the biggest ever government contribution to crop insurance with the lowest ever premium rates for farmers.

He said soil health cards will be issued to 14 crore farm holdings by March 2017.

To promote organic farming, the President said Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojna is being implemented under which 8,000 clusters have been developed so far.

The government, he said, has also launched Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojna, New Urea Policy and several steps were being taken to usher in "second green revolution" for the eastern states.

Mukherjee further said the food processing fund has been operationalised with a view to provide affordable credit to designated food parks.

"In the last 10 months, five new Mega Food Parks have been operationalised. Under the Cold Chain Scheme, 33 projects have been made operational during the last 18 months," he said.

He said Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission has also been launched

for 300 rural growth clusters for developing skills and local entrepreneurship and providing infrastructure amenities.

Government's responsibility to remove poverty: President Mukherjee

He said govt has launched three new social security and pension schemes



President [Pranab Mukherjee](#) on Tuesday said removing poverty and destitution from India was the "sacred responsibility" of the Indian government.

"Removing poverty and destitution is our most sacred responsibility. My government has launched three new social security and [pension](#) schemes and focused on the welfare of poors, [farmers](#) and jobs for the youth," said Mukherjee.

"My government is placed in making this goal possible through financial inclusion and social security," he added.

Mukherjee was addressing the parliamentarians of both the houses -- Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha -- in a joint sitting ahead of the commencement of the budget session.

He said: "The development philosophy of the government was 'Sabka saath, Sabka vikas'. My government in particular is focussed on 'Garibon Ki Unnati', 'Kisano Ki Samridhi' and 'Yuvaon Ka Rozgar'".

He said that the government was for the welfare of the farmers, who were a vital part for the nation's prosperity.

"Well being of farmers is vital to the nation's prosperity," Mukherjee said.

Nashik yet to get land for proposed agriculture market

Nashik: The proposed agriculture market terminal in Nashik is yet to gather momentum as the state cabinet continues to sit on the proposal of land allotment for the purpose.

Around 100 acres have already been identified at Sayyad Pimpri, near Nashik, and the proposal to allot land for the proposed market is pending with the state cabinet. It is likely to be approved in a week or two.

The central government had approved the agri terminal market project for Nashik, Mumbai and Nagpur in Maharashtra in 2010, but the proposed project in Nashik is gathering dust for lack of land, which has to be approved by the state government. The project estimated to cost at Rs 60 crore is to be set up on public private partnership (PPP).

Local MP Hemant Godse said, "Around 100 acres have been identified at Sayyad Pimpri, near Nashik for the proposed agriculture terminal market. The proposal is with the state cabinet, which is expected to give its nod on the project in a week or two. Apart from Nashik, the agriculture market terminals are also coming up in Nagpur and Mumbai. While land has already been allotted to both Nagpur and Mumbai, the same is yet to be done for Nashik." He added, "We are already pursuing the issue with the revenue and finance department of the state."

This proposed market terminal will help farmers get direct access to domestic and international market. The market will have cleaning, grading and packing facilities. The agricultural produce, sold by farmers, will be sent to other cities. Moreover, the terminal will also have other facilities like an auction hall, cold storages, handling mechanics, banking services and export facilities centres.

The market will have a capacity to handle about 1,000 metric tonnes of agricultural commodities, fruits and vegetables per day.

Objectives of agriculture terminal market

Reducing post harvest losses due to present marketing system

Linking the farmers directly to the markets and provide more alternatives to sell their produce and reduce the number of intermediaries

Using modern technologies in the marketing system and establish a cold chain with the help of private players

Brining transparency in the market transactions

Promoting export of horticultural produce

Promoting processing in the state

Terminal Market would be built, owned and operated by the selected Private Enterprise (PE) through Competitive Bidding process

PE includes individuals, Group of Farmers/Growers/Consumers, Partnership/ Proprietary firms, Companies, Marketing Boards, Corporations, Co-operatives, Producer Organizations and Self Help Groups. The PE could also be a consortium of entrepreneurs from, inter-alia, agri-business, cold chain, logistics, warehousing, agri-infrastructure and related background.

Cashew plantations in district hit by rain shortage, farmers fear price dip

Visakhapatnam: Cashew, which is grown as a mixed crop across 1.2 lakh acres of land in the district including the Agency belt, has been one of the mainstays of the farmers in the region. However, this year, cashew is likely to disappoint the farming community due to various reasons and ryots are already speculating that even if there is a price hike per bag this time, the loss of crop acreage will still put them in the red.

Last year, each bag was sold for Rs 8,000. P Srinivasa Rao, a senior retired field scientist who still assists the district administration, said, "Late blooming is an issue that bothers farmers a lot. Whenever there is an extended cold season with heavy dew, the trees bloom later than usual.

Usually, cashew should be in full bloom by the month of February. This time, it has not happened chiefly because of an extended cold season. We are expecting the trees to bloom properly after the first week of March and, hopefully, they will flower to their potential."

But farmers are worried that even if the trees bloom properly, if the market is already flooded with cashew from elsewhere, the prices will fall instead of going up. C Kami Naidu, a farmer from Ramannapalem village in Makkavaripalem mandal, said, "Just because the trees bloom late does not mean that the farmers and those who take the crop on lease will make a killing. It all depends on how the markets function. Once the market is flooded with cashew from down south, the prices will fall and we may not be able to make the money we think we can. For that matter, prices could even crash."

Keeping a close watch on the situation, the horticulture department officials have advised the farmers to wait and watch and hoping that there will be no crop loss as far as cashew is concerned.

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Workshop on kharif crops begins at Pau

LUTHIANA: "Proper spray and proper pesticides are vital for the control of whitefly menace," said Baldev Singh Dhillon, vice-chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) while inaugurating the two-day "Research and Extension Specialists' Workshop for Kharif Crops" in the University on Tuesday.

The Directorate of Extension Education, PAU has organized the workshop wherein chief agriculture officers, Agriculture Development Officers and Agriculture Officers from the State Department of Agriculture; scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Farm Advisory Service Centres; and deans, directors and faculty from PAU are participating.

Referring to the contemporary agriculture challenges, Dhillon said along with water concerns, issues like deteriorating soil health, climate change, unfavorable weather conditions and insect-pest and disease management in various crops also call for special focus of the farm experts. Conservation of natural resources is the need of the hour, he emphasized, while calling upon the agriculture officers and the scientists to promote the use of resource conservation technologies among the farmers. He also informed about the newly developed early maturing rice varieties PR 125 and PR 126. Stating that open discussion was must to address the farm issues, he suggested ways for the agriculture development of the state.

Gurdial Singh, Director of Agriculture, Punjab said, "Punjab has witnessed the ever highest paddy production of 180 lakh tonnes this year." He attributed the credit to the consolidated efforts of the farmers, scientists, agriculture officers and the Punjab government. Expressing concern over the rising farmers' suicides, he asked the experts to find out ways to reduce farm expenses and increase agriculture profits. He also asked PAU to suggest suitable crop insurance scheme for the state farmers. Pointing out that youth was losing interest in farming, he called upon the officers and the scientists to adopt at least one village school to motivate students to opt for agriculture.

Singh also stressed on the experts to create awareness on whitefly control through CD. Elaborating, he said that Punjab aims at increasing area under maize, moong and groundnut for diversification.

Highlighting the research priorities, R K Gumber, Additional Director of Research (crop improvement), said that PAU was conducting timely surveillance to control yellow rust disease of wheat in Punjab. He mentioned that a CD, on whitefly management, has already been prepared by the PAU and can be a milestone achievement, if distributed among the farmers. He also disclosed that PAU was giving guidance to the ADOs and AOs to curb whitefly menace.

Shariq Majeed/TNN

Ludhiana: "Proper spray and proper pesticides are vital for the control of whitefly menace," said Baldev Singh Dhillon, Vice-Chancellor, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) while inaugurating the two-day "Research and Extension Specialists' Workshop for Kharif Crops" in the University on

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Bengaluru excise zone crops high revenue

BENGALURU: The Central Excise - Bengaluru has declared itself as the highest cropper in collecting service tax during 2015-16.

As per the department's calculations, the service tax collection by the department has reached Rs12,119 crore for 10 month period between April 2015 and January 2016 showing a 38 % growth compared to during the same period last fiscal which was set at Rs 8810 crore. "Even the collection of Rs 7658 crore of central excise revenue was 26 % more than last fiscal which amounted to Rs 6064 crore.

Official figures of central excise revenue totally turned out for the whole revenue year 2014-15 came upto Rs 7467 crore and the total service tax revenue came upto Rs 11,000 crore during 2014-15. "We have set a target of Rs 13,7000 for service tx collection for 2015-16," an official said on the eve of Central Excise day.

The department has plans to award diligent taxpayers of service tax and also to facilitate the some of the employees in the department for performing their duties with high integrity and sincerity.

Summer onion crop trickles in at 900/quintal

Nashik: The arrival of fresh summer crop has commenced at the country's largest wholesale onion market at Lasalgaon Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) but in a very less quantity. The Lasalgaon APMC recorded arrival of around 100 quintals of fresh summer onions on Monday from the total arrivals of 15,000 quintals.

The regular arrival of the summer crop is expected to begin from the second half of March. At present, the onions arriving in the market are of late kharif crop. The summer crop usually gets good prices as compared with the kharif crop due to its longer shelf life.

Meanwhile, the average wholesale onion price of kharif crop was recorded at Rs 751 per quintal on Monday at Lasalgaon, with minimum and maximum prices of Rs 400 and Rs 952 a quintal, respectively. On the contrary, the average wholesale summer onion prices were recorded at Rs

905 per quintal on Saturday, with minimum and maximum prices of Rs 661 and Rs 1,081 per quintal, respectively.

Sources in the APMC said, "At present, the onions arriving in the market is the kharif crop, while the arrival of summer crop has begun, but in a very low quantity. Just 50-100 quintals of the total 15,000 quintals that arrived today were the summer crop. The average wholesale onion prices have declined to the level of Rs 751 per quintal due rise in supply as compared to demand."

The arrivals in other states like Gujarat have also increased and they are supplying to North India regions. As a result, the demand from North India for Lasalgaon's onions have declined causing decline in price, sources added. The regular arrival of summer crop is expected to begin by the third or fourth week of March.

The kharif and late kharif onions have a shelf life of 25 days and they rot thereafter. Hence, farmers have no option but sell the commodity at prevailing market rates. On the contrary, the summer crop has a shelf life of six-seven months and farmers prefer storing summer onions with a hope of getting better prices to their commodities. They bring their stored produce to the market as per their requirement.

Due to the longer shelf life, the summer crop gets good rates as compared to that of kharif crop. While kharif crop is auctioned at an average price of Rs 750 per quintal, summer crop is auctioned at an average price of Rs 905 per quintal. But considering the onion production cost of Rs 1,000 per quintal, the farmers are still incurring losses.

According to farmers, the central government should start procuring kharif crop onions under the Price Stability Funds (PSF) to prevent losses they are incurring in the market at present.


State polls ahead, govt panel to keep eye on key commodities

DELHI: Ahead of state polls in five states, the Modi government has constituted a committee of senior officers drawn from intelligence agencies and state police to keep a close watch on the movement of essential commodities in the domestic and international markets.

On Tuesday, Cabinet secretary P K Sinha took a review meeting on prices of such commodities and directed all these agencies to enforce stock limits of pulses, in particular arhar and urad. He also reviewed the progress of work undertaken by the panel in their last two meetings and has tasked it to bring violators to book.

The panel has been constituted in the consumer affairs ministry which has been closely coordinating with the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), the IB, the income tax department, the ED, the commerce ministry and state police to deal with cartelisation, hoarding and black-marketing.

A senior officer said the Centre has initiated these measures to avoid any sudden spike in prices. During the Bihar polls last year, prices of pulses had risen abnormally becoming a major political issue that contributed to NDA's poor show.

ZERO TOLERANCE	
<p>Members in panel against cartelisation, hoarding & black-marketing State police, IB, ED, I-T, DGFT, Customs & consumer affairs ministry</p> <p>Focus Coordination, sharing of info & integrated action</p> <p>Main concern Sharp fluctuation in prices of pulses, onion & potato</p>	
	
<p>WHY DAL CRISIS?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Production is 18 million tonnes against demand of 23 million tonnes 2 India has better arhar productivity than world average, but overall production is less 3 80% of world's pulses produced in India, little scope to increase import 	<p>SOLUTIONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Incentivise farmers to grow more pulses, assure 100% procurement 2 Import to reduce demand-supply gap 3 Enforcement: States invoke Section 3 of Essential Commodities Act, fix MRP 4 Improve distribution network through PDS

The DRI has provided a list of major traders involved in import and export of pulses and other commodities for the panel to analyse and for stricter enforcement against cartelisation, hoarding and black-marketing, particularly pulses, onion and potatoes. The Centre has also suggested that states fix the margin of profit for traders since in the past there have been huge gaps between wholesale and retail prices.

A source said the panel was formed after the PMO and the Cabinet secretariat asked the consumer affairs ministry to take proactive action against hoarders and black-marketeers. Since the enforcement involved

states as well, consumer affairs secretary C Vishwanath mooted bringing all departments on one platform for sharing information and concerted action against speculators and manipulators.

TOI had first reported on January 26 how the IB had alerted the Centre about major importers of pulses hoarding masoor in huge quantity to control prices when there is a shortage.

Paytm plans to launch e-commerce platform for luxury goods

NEW DELHI: Paytm could soon be foraying into the luxury space by launching an online and mobile e-commerce platform exclusively for luxury products, sources familiar with the development told ET.

The Alibaba-backed digital payments and e-commerce company has roped in marquee luxury brands like Gucci, Fendi, Furla and Burberry for its mobile luxury platform Anasa and is courting more brands, they said.

A Paytm spokesperson, however, categorically stated that the company is not planning to enter the luxury space right now.

Sources said Paytm is referring to Anasa as a first of its kind luxury mall on mobile which can provide "the right environment and market positioning to showcase luxury brands" to high net worth individuals or HNIs.

Sources said the company is currently reaching out to Indian retailers of luxury brands for Anasa. While a few luxury brands operate through joint venture arrangements in India, most have marketing and distribution agreements with Indian retailers.

While ecommerce has been booming in India, online luxury buying is still at a nascent stage given challenges like validating authenticity of brands and the ticket size of transactions.

Last year, Snapdeal acquired premium and luxury fashion website Exclusively.com that retails creations of Indian designers such as Manish Malhotra, Tarun Tahiliani, Rohit Bal, JJ Valaya, and Ritu Kumar. Other portals that sell luxury brands in India include Darveys and RocknShop.

According to Euromonitor International, the Indian luxury goods market is expected to more than double in five years to Rs 390 billion by 2020 from Rs 163 billion in 2015, growing 19 per cent year on year.

Paytm currently sells products under various categories like mobiles and accessories, electronics, men's fashion, women's fashion, baby kids and toys, home and kitchen on its website.

Currently, it has more than 100 million users and targets to expand its user base to 500 million by 2020.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Cotton prices to remain stable till rains



Traders, exporters and ginnerers expect a gradual but limited rise in prices of cotton during the second half of the cotton year, till the rain sets in.

PUNE: Cotton prices are likely to remain range bound till the monsoon sets in. Traders, exporters and ginnerers expect a gradual but limited rise in prices during the second half of the cotton year. Indian investors had turned away from the commodity last year.

According to the agriculture ministry, domestic prices have been lower than overseas prices since October 2014.

"As per the traders' estimate, 45 lakh bales are still in the hands of traders and ginners. We expect prices to go up by maximum 10% till September 2016," said a senior executive of a multinational export house, requesting not to be named. "However, the trend can reverse if the monsoon is good," he said.

Pradeep Jain, a ginner from north Maharashtra said, "Cotton prices will remain rangebound in the next three months." Major domestic mandis in India saw an increase in prices in January compared to that a year ago, but since then prices have remained stable. "After March, prices may go up slightly due to domestic consumption.

Millers are now not doing covering till October, preferring to live hand to mouth," said BS Rajpal, managing director of Manjeet Cotton. "However the rise will be limited because the demand for cotton cloth has reduced, while there is no supply shortage," he said. India's total cotton exports declined 48% in 2014-15 over that in 2013-14, as per the data with the agriculture ministry.

Potato prices may shoot up 50-65% by April-May



Potato prices may shoot up as much as 50-65% by April-May to Rs 18-20 per kg owing to an expected fall in production in West Bengal.

KOLKATA: Potato prices may shoot up as much as 50-65% by April-May to Rs 18-20 per kg owing to an expected fall in production in West Bengal, which is said to have brought in speculators into play, raising the spectre of a spurt in food inflation. Wholesale prices have gone up 40% in the past two weeks at Delhi's Azadpur Mandi, one of the biggest vegetable markets in the country.

"While a fortnight ago the price of a kilogram of potato was hovering around Rs 3-5 per kg, it has now risen to Rs 5-7 per kg. There's a lot of speculation in the market right now," said Rajinder Sharma, general secretary of the Azadpur Potato and Onion Merchants Association, attributing it to the fears of a fall in output in West Bengal. The output in the state is expected to dip to about 108 lakh tonnes in 2016.

"The late blight disease has also affected the crop. Initially, it was estimated that nearly 15% of the total crop area of 4.25 lakh hectares has been affected. But finally the impact will be around 5-6% on production," said Patit Paban De, member, West Bengal Cold Storage Association.

The production of the tuber in Agra in Uttar Pradesh has been less than that last year, while it has been more than last year's in some other parts of the state.

Normal monsoon likely after a gap of two years



It has given rise to hopes that the country may be able to reduce its dependence on imports for maize, pulses and wheat, among other commodities.

PUNE: India is likely to enjoy a normal monsoon this year, a senior weather scientist has said, raising hopes that the country may be able to reduce its dependence on imports for maize, pulses and wheat, among other commodities, after two years of below-average rainfall.

The scientist, who works with the India Meteorological Department, spoke on condition of anonymity since the department usually issues its monsoon forecast in April.

According to Indian weather forecast models, the El Nino phenomenon, which was responsible for last year's drought, is expected to turn neutral during the monsoon season. El Nino entails an increase in sea surface temperatures in central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. Indian scientists have ruled out the possibility of La Nina conditions, refuting the forecast by some global agencies. La Nina conditions normally lead to higher rainfall in India during the monsoon season.

The IMD had correctly forecast a drought in 2015. However, from this year it has decided to drop the word 'drought' from its official long-range forecast. Besides, its forecast will be done at the sub-divisional level.

Two consecutive droughts had led to a drastic reduction in stocks of important commodities and forced India to import maize after a gap of 16 years while private millers started importing wheat from last year. The government has already started the process to import pulses this year, after turning to the overseas markets in 2015.

Setting up e-platform to provide best prices to farmers: President Pranab Mukherjee

Addressing the joint sitting of Parliament, he said 'Kisaano ki Samridhhi', the well-being of farmers, is vital to India's prosperity.

NEW DELHI: Government is setting up a national online agriculture market platform to connect 585 regulated wholesale markets to ensure fair remunerative prices for the farmers, President Pranab Mukherjee said today.

Addressing the joint sitting of Parliament, he said 'Kisaano ki Samridhhi', the well-being of farmers, is vital to India's prosperity.

"To provide the best market price to farmers, the unified National Agriculture Market is working towards setting up a common e-market platform to connect 585 regulated wholesale markets, thereby making India, One Food Zone, One Country, One Market.



"This will immensely benefit our farmers in getting fair and remunerative prices. Targeted policy interventions in the last year have brought down sugar cane arrears from over Rs 21,000 crore to Rs 1,800 crore," President said.

Mukherjee said the government has taken several steps for welfare of farmers, like Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna, which is the biggest ever government contribution to crop insurance with the lowest ever premium rates for farmers.

He said soil health cards will be issued to 14 crore farm holdings by March 2017.

To promote organic farming, the President said Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojna is being implemented under which 8,000 clusters have been developed so far.

The government, he said, has also launched Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojna, New Urea Policy and several steps were being take to usher in "second green revolution' for the eastern states.

Mukherjee further said the food processing fund has been operationalised with a view to provide affordable credit to designated food parks.

"In the last 10 months, five new Mega Food Parks have been operationalised. Under the Cold Chain Scheme, 33 projects have been made operational during the last 18 months," he said.

He said Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission has also been launched for 300 rural growth clusters for developing skills and local entrepreneurship and providing infrastructure amenities.