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THE HINDU

Kharif sowing picks up as monsoon sets in

Still lags behind compared to last year

With monsoon rain covering most parts of the country, the summer (kharif) crop sowing has gained momentum, even as it lags behind so far compared to the corresponding period last year due to delayed onset of the southwest monsoon.

The latest government data on Friday showed that across the country kharif crops have been planted on 215.87 lakh hectare till now as against 279.27 lakh hectare in the corresponding period last year.

Catching up with the pace, paddy has been sown in 47.77 lakh hectares in the current season marginally higher than 47.62 lakh hectare recorded in the 2015-16 season. The acreage under pulses is still down compared to last year for the same period at 19.85 lakh hectare. Last season pulses were planted in 22.25 lakh hectare till the same time.

Sowing of cereals down

The sowing of coarse cereals is down as well at 37.15 lakh hectare against 43.72 lakh hectare last year, while the total oilseeds have been sown lesser at 28.71 lakh hectare compared to 54.24 lakh hectare last year.

The cotton acreage is down to nearly half this season at 30.59 lakh hectare against 60.16 lakh hectare last year in the corresponding period.

Sugarcane, meanwhile continues to see an increase in acreage and has been planted in 44.38 lakh hectare against 43.68 lakh hectare last year.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), conditions are favourable for further advancement of the monsoon in some parts of east Rajasthan, remaining parts of Himachal, Uttarakhand, West Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and most parts of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi in the next two days.

‘Progressing well’

“The monsoon is progressing well. There’s nothing to worry and in the coming days the sowing will pick up further. Paddy transplanting has gained momentum in the northern States of Punjab and Haryana. Reports from the southern and eastern States about rice acreage is encouraging while sowing of pulses will also gain momentum this week,” K.K. Singh, chief of the IMD’s agricultural meteorology said.

However, the planting of seeds lags when compared to the corresponding period last year

Award

Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Papparapatty here has bagged the Best Krishi Vigyan Kendra Award for 2015 from Tamil Nadu Agricultural

University recently. According to a KVK release, the award was conferred on it in recognition to its work on farm trials, front line demonstrations and training through funding of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi and under various schemes operated by the allied state departments.

‘Despite drought, TN has done well in agriculture’



Agriculture Minister R. Doraikkannu handing over certificate to a faculty for long, blemish-less service at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University's 46th

Foundation Day and Open and Distance Learning Graduation Day celebrations in the city on Friday.

Tamil Nadu has done well in agriculture notwithstanding the fact that monsoon has been bad and neighbouring states had not shared water, said Agriculture Minister R. Doraikkannu at the 46th Foundation Day of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University here on Friday.

By launching the Second Green Revolution programme, the State Government had helped introduce four new paddy varieties in the past five years and the minor millet and pulses production cross 100 metric tonne mark and in 2014-15 the 130 metric tonne mark.

It was in recognition of those achievements that the Central Government had conferred the Krishi Karman award not once or twice but thrice in the recent past.

The government had also established centres of excellence for minor millets in Tiruvannamalai, for grapes in Theni, for food processing in Chettinad and recently started a horticulture college for women in Srirangam.

Mr. Doraikkannu also said that the government in the last academic year had established an agriculture college each in Tiruvannamalai, in Thanjavur and Kudumiyanmalai in Pudukottai districts. It had also given Rs. 1,430 crore to the University in the last five years for research and development.

At the function, also held to celebrate the Open and Distance Learning Graduation Day, the Minister honoured the University's faculty, scientists and researchers for their blemish-less service and contribution in introduction of new technology.

Vice-Chancellor K. Ramasamy said that the government had introduced many schemes and one of those was to enhance farm learning through three new colleges and centres of excellence.

For transforming farmers into farm graduates, the University offered B.F.Tech programme as well.

Deputy Speaker 'Pollachi' V. Jayaraman and Coimbatore North MLA P.R.G. Arunkumar spoke at the function. University Registrar C.R. Anandakumar welcomed the gathering.

Director, Research, M. Maheswaran proposed the vote of thanks.

Agriculture for Nutrition Grand Challenge entries open

K.P. Knowledge Park implementing USAID programme

Entries are being invited for the Agriculture for Nutrition Grand Challenge, a programme to identify Indian innovative solutions in agri-food sector that can be adapted in select African and South Asian countries.

The call for proposals will remain open until August 31. Interested applicants should register on the programme's website (www.gc-agn.org) and apply via an online form.

On Friday, US Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director to India Jonathan Addleton and IKP Knowledge Park Chairman and CEO Deepanwita Chattopadhyay launched the call for proposals.

The Challenge is part of the USAID-supported 'Feed the future (FTF) India innovations for improved nutrition' programme, implemented by the IKP.

Briefing presspersons, Ms. Chattopadhyay said that the IKP would identify Indian innovations in the agri-food sector that show measurable impact in improving the nutritional status of the poor and malnourished populations.

The short-listed innovations would be funded, developed and adapted in FTF countries in Africa and South Asia.

Each finalist will receive a funding of up to Rs.1.2 crore as well as mentorship support for a period of two years. On the criteria, she said that the innovation should have been piloted in India and proven. The IKP is a not-for-profit science park and incubator with nearly 16 years of experience in technology innovation and entrepreneurship development.

Mr. Addleton said "India is a laboratory for innovations. Sharing and transfer of these innovations globally in partnership with the public and private sector for

sustained food security gains has been the focus of the USAID’s food security and climate resilience programmes.”

Agriculture census begins

The 10th agricultural census began in the district on Friday, with officials collecting information from the residence of Kochi Mayor Soumini Jain.

Details of possession of holdings and their owners will be collected in the first stage, followed by collection of information on crops, fertilisers, and irrigation methods. A coordination committee headed by the District Collector is coordinating the exercise.

Experts predict more freak weather



With climate change posing new challenges, Kerala may have to contend with freak weather phenomena like the gustnado that wreaked havoc in Poruvazhy village, Kollam on June 10, according to disaster management experts.

An investigation conducted by the State Emergency Operations Centre into the extent of damage caused by the gustnado revealed that over 55 houses and 10 hectares of agricultural land were damaged by the fierce gust of wind triggered by convective clouds. Five of the houses were damaged beyond the possibility of repair.

The short burst of wind reaching a speed of 180 km/h uprooted 150 trees including jack fruit, teak and jungle jack (anjili) and flattened banana groves. The worst damage was confined to an area two km long and 500 m wide. A sacred grove also bore the brunt of the gustnado.

A localised vortex, the gustnado is a rotating column of air in contact with the ground but not extending from a thunderstorm cloud. It lasts only a few seconds to minutes. According to Sekhar L. Kuriakose, Head (Scientist), SEOC, a similar phenomenon was reported from Thrikkunnappuzha in Alappuzha district in October 2014.

Revenue Minister E. Chandrasekhar had visited the disaster site on June 16 to take stock of the situation and assess the damage.

Prefabricated houses

Based on the SEOC report, the Revenue Department has decided to provide prefabricated houses for the families whose dwellings were completely destroyed by the gustnado. The prefab houses would be procured from the National Games village at Menankulam here.

The government would foot the expense for rehabilitation from the State Disaster Response Fund and the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund. The farmers would also be compensated for crop loss and steps taken to restore the green cover.

The investigation team found that tiled roofs of houses in rural areas were easily blown away by strong winds.

“We have made a strong recommendation to ensure that roofs are secured firmly to the structure to prevent them from being blown away. Government engineers could provide technical advice to construction workers to ensure that it becomes a standard procedure,” says Mr.Sekhar. The SEOC has also proposed the constitution of a disaster response force at the panchayat level to tackle the impact of extreme weather events.

Paddy farmers a worried lot

Regulations on purchase of paddy seed are coming in the way of farming operations in Kuttanad. Small farmers have to use seeds prepared by the State government agency to be eligible for subsidy on seeds.

Farmers had resented the rule and represented the matter to the government. The authorities had agreed to waive the rule. But the farmers are forced to follow the same route as officials have reportedly not received an order from their superiors.

Eligibility norms

Paddy farmers owning less than 2.5 acres have been compelled to purchase seeds readied by the Kerala State Seeds Development Corporation under the prevailing norms. The ryots contend that it is the freedom of the farmer to source the seeds and a condition should not be imposed on them in regard to the selection.

“The seeds available from the National Seed Corporation as well as seeds from Karnataka have been found to be superior. Farmers look for quality and the selection of good seed is important for getting higher yield,” says Kuttanad Vikasana Samithy executive director Father Thomas Peelianikkal.

A restriction on the use of quality seed is not in the best interests of paddy farming. The germination power of the seeds available from the KSSDC has been found to be comparatively less, he said.

Government’s promise

The LDF government has promised to remove the restriction on the area of land, introduced in April this year, but the officials at the grassroots level are denying the subsidy to the farmer as they haven’t received any order.

Delay in implementing the decision will lead to delayed sowing operations, affecting the very prospects of paddy farming in Kuttanad.

Small farmers have to use seeds prepared by the government agency to be eligible for subsidy on seeds.

People flock to jackfruit festival

It was organised by the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station



Delicious delicacies: People purchasing products made of jackfruit at the State-level Jackfruit Festival in Udupi on Friday.

The fragrance of jackfruits and the aroma of jackfruit snacks wafted in the air at the two-day State-level Jackfruit Festival organised by the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station and other organisations, which began at Rajangana here on Friday.

A large number of people flocked to the stalls put up at the venue. These stalls sold a variety of jackfruits, jackfruit saplings and jackfruit snacks.

Ravikumar, a jackfruit grower from Tubagere village from Bengaluru Rural district, had brought different varieties of jackfruits such as ‘chandra halasu’, ‘rudrakshi halasu’ and ‘ekadashi halasu’. People flocked to his stall to taste these sweet varieties and to purchase them.

“You cannot get the kind of sweetness that jackfruits grown in our region give. The quality and taste is unique. There is good demand for our jackfruits here,” he said.

Mr. Ravikumar also sells jackfruit saplings in his village. “There is great demand for the saplings also,” he said even as he plucked jackfruit flakes and offered it to the visitors.

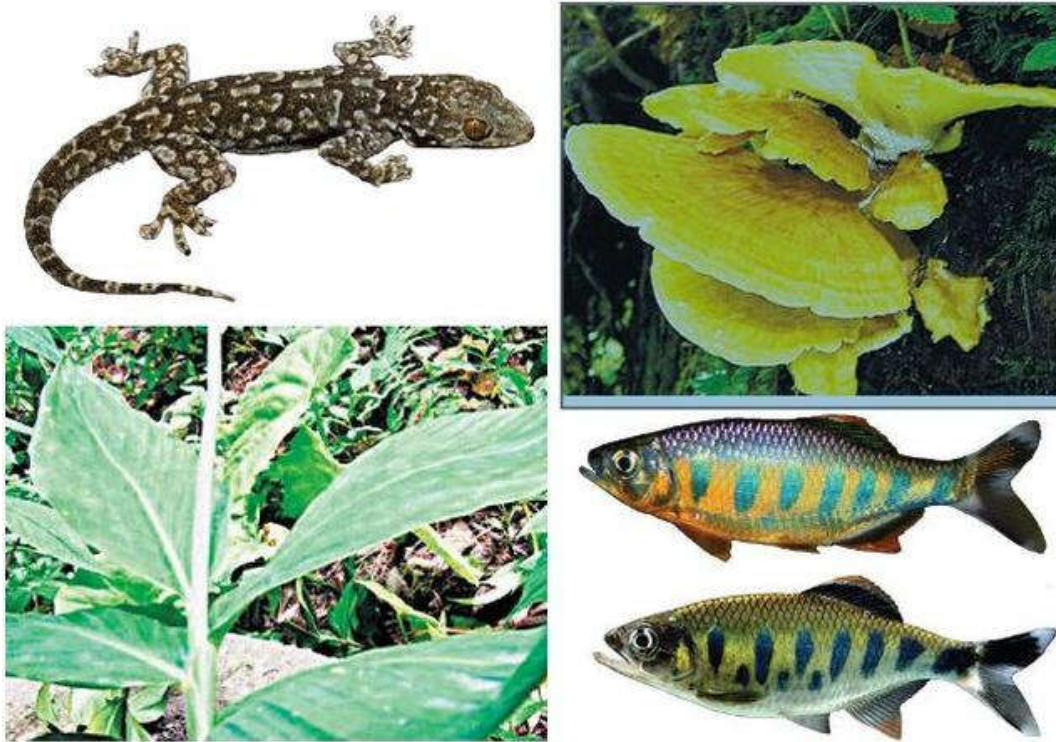
Shyamprasad Bhat, who grows a variety of jackfruit saplings such as honey jackfruit, all season jackfruit, ‘matam’ from Kerala, ‘chandra’, ‘samrudhi’, ‘uttama’ and ‘rudraskhi’ at his nursery at Cherkady village in Udupi district, had put up a stall at the venue.

The gum-less jackfruit flakes kept in front of his stall were a big hit. They were slightly white in colour but sweet. “I had brought 100 saplings. But all of them have got sold out. I never expected this kind of demand,” he said. Two stalls selling jackfruit snacks also did brisk business. The items on offer were jackfruit ‘happala’, ‘sandige’, ‘kadabu’, ‘mambala’, ‘halwa’, ‘shira’, cakes and a variety of jackfruit ‘podis’. Shankar, an entrepreneur from Sanoor village, was himself frying the ‘podis’. But the plates of ‘podis’ flew off the counter as soon as they were fried because of the high demand for them.

A busy Mr. Shankar said that he gave importance to this business of preparation of jackfruit snacks from May to October when the supply of jackfruit was plentiful. “I have priced all items at Rs. 10 per plate to attract as many people,” he said.

Gururaj Balthillaya, an expert in grafting rare cultivars of jackfruit, said that jackfruit festivals helped the jackfruit growers and other farmers to know the potential of jackfruit and their varieties. “Jackfruit saplings from Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam can be grown here. Some of these saplings give fruits off-season also. Tender jack, bread fruit and jackfruits fetch good price off-season. Tender jack can be used for preparation of curries, ‘bonda,’ and dummy meat,” he said.

India's thriving biodiversity: 445 new species added in 2015



SHARING THE PLANET: (Clockwise from top left) *Hemidactylus yajurvedi*, *Bondarzewia zonata*, *Barilius ardens* and *Zingiber bipinianum*. Photo: ZSI/BSI

The most discoveries were made in the Eastern Himalaya region, which accounts for 19 per cent of the total discoveries.

Four species of reptiles, six species of amphibians, 26 species of fishes, three species of wild ginger and three of figs are among the 445 species new to science identified in India in 2015. The figure includes 262 animal species and 183 plant species.

Some of the notable additions to the list of animals include a rock gecko (*Hemidactylus yajurvedi*) found in Kanker Chhattishgarh, a new frog species (*Fejervarya gomantaki*) from the Western Ghats, and a shiny new species of fish (*Barilius ardens*), also from the Western Ghats.

Among the plants, a new species of ginger *Zingiber bipinianum* has been found in the South Garo hills of Meghalaya, and a species of mushroom (*Bondarzewia zonata*) has been collected from north Sikkim at an altitude of 2,829 m.

Scientists of the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) are delighted that all regions in the country have recorded new species while those from the Zoological Society

of India (ZSI) are excited that more than 15 per cent of the new species are higher vertebrates.

The most discoveries were made in the Eastern Himalaya region, which accounts for 19 per cent of the total discoveries followed by the Western Ghats (18 per cent) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands at about 15 per cent, BSI director Paramjit Singh said.

ZSI Director Kailash Chandra said the new discoveries reflect the faunal-diversity potential of ecosystems in India. The country is home to 97,514 species of animals.

The report on animal and plant discoveries of 2015 was released on Friday by Union Minister of State for Environment Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar at an event to mark the conclusion of the centenary celebrations of ZSI.

Another important publication — a report on the collection of 4,669 species across 197 genera by taxonomists and scientists of ZSI in the past 100 years — was also released on the occasion.

Lauding the efforts of taxonomists, Mr. Javadekar said no country can progress without the development of pure sciences.

The Minister urged the scientists to reach out to students of Class IX and X to inspire them to take up taxonomy.

Mr. Javadekar announced the setting up of two new regional centres of ZSI at Bhuj in Gujarat and Gangtok in Sikkim.

At present, the ZSI has 16 regional centres.

Income Tax department to PM Modi: Let's begin taxing agricultural income

Agricultural income claims of over Rs 1 crore under scrutiny, suspected route for unaccounted money



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

The government may consider taxing agricultural income, beginning with a proposal to target farmers with non-agricultural income above a certain threshold. This was one of the specific suggestions made by tax officers to Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a two-day conference of tax administrators, Rajasva Gyan Sangam, last month. It has been pitched as a low-hanging fruit that could potentially bolster ongoing efforts to widen the country's taxpayer base.

“Tax officials made a specific suggestion that the government should consider taxing agricultural income, not fully but partially. It was said that people having

a regular income alongside agricultural income above a certain threshold can be brought under the tax net,” a government official said. The suggestion was made in the course of the Prime Minister’s session at the event.

There are about 25 crore taxpaying households in India, of which 15 crore households are designated as agriculturalists and the remaining 10 crore are non-agriculturalists, according to estimates produced by Minister of State for Finance Jayant Sinha at a briefing after the PM’s session at the Rajasva Gyan Sangam.

At present, agricultural income is used for determination of the tax rate while computing tax liability for an individual if the net agricultural income exceeds Rs 5,000 and total income, excluding net agricultural income, exceeds Rs 2.5 lakh in a year. The tax on agricultural income is, however, later deducted from the total tax to be paid by the individual as agricultural income is exempt from tax. Any decision to tax agricultural income by the Centre will require an amendment to the Constitution.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has been looking closely at agricultural income claims of over Rs 1 crore by assesseees in their tax returns in view of a PIL filed in the Patna High Court, which had raised concerns about agricultural income being used as the route for unaccounted money. Over 2,300 cases showing agriculture income of over Rs 1 crore have been detected by the Income Tax Department in the last nine assessment years.

In the other suggestions to the Prime Minister at the conference, tax officials expressed concerns regarding levy of cesses and surcharges by the Centre, which even though are proposed to be ad-hoc in nature initially, but end up being permanent.

“The tax officers suggested that levy of cesses and surcharges should be temporary. It was suggested that taxpayers as well as states, which do not get any share of cesses and surcharges from the Centre are complaining about the various cesses, so they should be levied only for a defined period of time. Otherwise, the tax rate, in effect, becomes much higher than the maximum rate of 30 per cent and that does not reflect well on the country’s taxation system,” another government official said.

Tax officials had also suggested providing some incentive to taxpayers to file their tax return, with one of the examples of incentives being an insurance cover. For first-time taxpayers, incentive of accidental insurance could be given by the government, while for regular taxpayers, a life insurance cover could be provided as an incentive to file their returns regularly.

A holiday of around a year from scrutinising and verifying I-T returns was suggested by some tax officials in order to spend more time learning the details of a host of e-initiatives being implemented by the tax department.

Suggestions were also made regarding improvement in infrastructure of office spaces along with request by the tax officials to the PM to include an appeal to fellow citizens to pay their taxes honestly in his Independence Day speech this year.

Prime Minister Modi, addressing the inaugural session of the conference, asked tax officers to build a “bridge of trust” with assesseees to achieve collection targets without coercion. He asked officials to increase the taxpayer base significantly, by leveraging instruments such as the government’s ‘Give it Up’ initiative for consumers to voluntarily give up LPG subsidy. This was the first time that the two revenue boards, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), held a simultaneous conference.

Chandigarh: With 3,000 varieties of fruit on display, Mela to open tomorrow

The two-day Mango Mela is being jointly organised by Haryana Tourism with the state Horticulture Department.

AS MANY as 3,000 varieties of mangoes will be showcased at the 25th edition of Mango Festival, which will begin at Pinjore Gardens from July 2.

The two-day Mango Mela is being jointly organised by Haryana Tourism with the state Horticulture Department. It is set to witness participation of a number of mango growers from Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and

Uttarakhand. Prominent commercial mango varieties which will compete at the mela include Dasherri, Chausa, Langra, Amarpali, Bombay Green (Malda), Ratol, Malika and Ramkela (a pickle variety).

The event will be inaugurated by Haryana Tourism Minister Ram Bilas Sharma, Minister of State for Agriculture Bikram Singh Yadav, Chief Parliamentary Secretary (Tourism and Hospitality) Seema Trikha, and Kalka MLA Latika Sharma will be present on the occasion.

Speaking during a press conference, Haryana Tourism Corporation managing director Sameer Pal said that the main objective behind organising the festival is to encourage growers to adopt the latest practices to increase mango production and quality, so that they may get maximum return from their produce by tapping domestic and international market.

Counted among major cultural events of the region, the 25th Mango Mela will include various competitions for school students, cultural performances, a crafts bazaar and a multi-cuisine food court.

A sound, sight and light show will be held at 6.30 pm on July 2 on the life of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, commemorating the 300th year of martyrdom of the great Sikh general. Renowned Punjabi Sufi singer Satinder Sartaaj will perform on July 3 (Sunday) from 6.30 pm onwards.

The receipt of entries of mangoes and mango products will start from 7 am onwards on July 2. Various competitions for students like solo dance, rangoli, face painting and mango eating (open for all) will start from 10 am.

A seminar on mango cultivation technology will be held at 9.30 am on the second day, followed by competitions for students like group dance and drawing.

There will be performances by artistes from North Zone Cultural Centre, Patiala.

As part of corporate social responsibility initiative, the Haryana Tourism has invited differently abled students to visit the Mango Mela on July 2 and senior

citizens from registered senior citizen societies of Panchkula and Chandigarh on July 3. They will be allowed free entry and also served complimentary lunch. The crafts bazaar will showcase handlooms and handicrafts by craftspersons/weavers from Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Rajasthan.

Fields of prosperity

FDI in food retail has the potential to give the much needed push to agriculture



The decision is a strong endorsement of the sustainability of the market-driven approach in improving the food supply chain efficiency as well as increasing farm incomes.

The Union Government's decision to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in food retail is a bold move. It is also a historic move, one that will contribute towards enabling higher rural incomes, sprucing up farm infrastructure, and creating world class last mile distribution and retail infrastructure in the country. The decision is a strong endorsement of the sustainability of the market-driven approach in improving the food supply chain efficiency as well as increasing farm incomes.

Over the past two decades, India has rapidly transitioned from a low value to a high value agricultural economy. Two-thirds of the country's agricultural and

allied produce today consists of perishables like milk, horticultural produce, fishery, poultry and meat.

However, the value capture for the farmer is still sub-optimal. Increased processing coupled with a robust distribution and retail chain will bring in much-needed technology infusion, result in capital deployment and lead to infrastructure creation for fully leveraging value addition in perishable commodities.

This is, of course, true for secondary and tertiary processed food products. But increasing processing will also enable farmers to realise a higher value for fresh farm produce, which will be a sizable portion of retail trade.

The announcement assumes much significance in view of the fact that only 10 per cent of perishables in the country undergo processing today — in fact, the figure for fruits and vegetables is an abysmal 2 per cent.

Besides giving a boost to food processing, FDI in retail is going to incentivise creation of back-end infrastructure, reduce wastage, control food inflation, create employment opportunities and increase farm incomes.

The move also complements the government's aggressive promotion of large-scale food parks and cold chain infrastructure in the country's rural interiors.

The announcement is also in consonance with the government's larger move to make the farm supply chain an efficient, transparent and robust one.

It has to be seen together with the National Agri Market initiative. The initiative has the potential to create the world's largest integrated spot market for agricultural produce with the advantages of significantly enlarged market access for the farmer.

FDI in food retail has the potential to leverage 'Make in India' and 'Produce in India' themes for the larger benefit of the farmer. It will enable the small farmer to leverage IT and e-commerce for market access and provide economies of scale to the smallest among them. There are already instances where back end

farm production and front end consumer activity have combined to enhance efficiency in the overall agricultural value chain.

The landmark announcement, in a sense, completes a trilogy that holds the key to government's intent to shore up the agricultural value chain. A strong back end (National Agri Market), a vibrant middle (Make in India) will now acquire a robust front end — FDI in retail. This will help create a world class integrated agricultural supply chain infrastructure in the country and in turn boost the Indian farmer's income.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Monsoon rampage: US agency sees landslide threat for UP, Bihar, Sikkim



The aftermath People clear debris at a landslide site near the Badrinath Road following heavy rain in Uttarakhand's Garhwal region

Over 30 people are believed to have died in Friday's cloudburst in Uttarakhand

Friday's cloudburst over Uttarakhand, which is believed to have led to the deaths of over 30 people, could just be a sample of what is to come during the rest of the week, according to the US Climate Prediction Centre.

The US agency has indicated the possibility of floods/landslides for the eastern parts of the Himalayas in east Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (bordering Nepal), Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh during this period.

No respite

There will not be any respite for the adjoining plains either as the monsoon gets active over all of East India, covering Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, east Madhya Pradesh, Gangetic West Bengal, south Gujarat, Konkan-Mumbai-Goa and coastal Karnataka during the week to July 6.

The emerging wet spell may wallop the rest (the plains) of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar with a western limb extending into Delhi, Haryana and Punjab, too.

This phase will be masterminded by a low-pressure area over the North-west Bay of Bengal, which is expected to enter land across the Odisha coast and make its way towards Rajasthan.

It will bring pouring rain all the way in, and on Friday the India Met Department assessed conditions as favourable for the monsoon to announce its arrival over more parts of North-West India.

The forecast

Over the next two days, the rains are expected to enter more parts of east Rajasthan, the remaining parts of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, most parts of Punjab and Haryana, all of Chandigarh and Delhi and even parts of West Rajasthan.

During the 24 hours ending Friday morning, heavy rainfall with isolated cases of extreme rainfall was reported from Konkan-Goa; heavy rainfall was reported

in isolated places over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

Sustained precipitation

The first monsoon month of June may have delivered a rainfall deficit of 11 per cent, but the picture is likely to be different in July, according to the US agency.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts tends to agree with the outlook, predicting a rather heavy monsoon during the first 10 days of this month.

More lows coming

The European agency is of the view that the current 'low' looking to enter land and spearhead the monsoon will be followed by another towards the end of the first week of the month.

A storm tracker featured by the US Climate Prediction Centre suggests that the North Bay of Bengal will remain 'active' through the first 15 days of July, sending in one 'low' after the other into the hinterland.

This would in turn keep the monsoon active variously over the entire northern half of the country, with heavy rains indicated for even Gujarat during a particular phase.

The US Climate Prediction Centre is of the view that the period from July 7-13 could bring heavy rain into Gujarat after a 'low' travels straight to the West across Central India and triggers a flare-up.


Adjoining Mumbai and Konkan would also receive heavy to very rain during this period, the agency said.

Coffee exports up 20% in volume in H1 2016



Strong brew	Jan-June		Calendar
	2016	2015	2015
Permits Issued (tonnes)	208486	173132	306133
Value (\$ million)	475.95	474.97	807.52
Value (₹ crore)	3196.56	2984.06	5157.91
Unit Value (₹/tonne)	153321.83	172357.07	168485.27

Source: Coffee Board



Realisations stay flat on volatile prices

Exports of coffee — both green beans and the instant variety — have jumped by a fifth in volume terms during the first six months of the current calendar year.

However, the volatile prices have impacted realisations, which have been rather flat in dollar terms but saw a marginal increase in rupee terms.

Re-exports

Besides a bigger crop, a steady increase in re-exports has also contributed to the surge in volumes during the period, Coffee Board officials said.

The surge in shipments was largely led by strong demand for varieties such as robusta cherry and arabica parchment, and also the re-export of instant coffees.

Exporters, however, are sceptical about sustaining growth in the year ahead as order bookings have slowed in the recent past. “We expect the second half of calendar 2016 to be slower as orders have dried up,” said Ramesh Rajah, President of the Coffee Exporters Association.

Global factors

Though prices have moved up slightly in recent weeks on concerns over the weather influencing the crop in Brazil, the world’s largest producer, exporters are not sure of benefiting.

“Customers have been asking for a lower price. Also due to the weaker economic conditions in major markets, there's not much of buying interest,” Rajah said.

Exports of Arabica parchment, the premium and mild coffee variety, surged 27 per cent to 29,592 tonnes during the January-June period this year as against 23,319 tonnes in the corresponding last year.

However, the increase in shipments of arabica cherry was marginal at 8,029 tonnes (7,907 tonnes).

Robusta cherry volumes stood at 99,675 tonnes, up 35 per cent over the 73,727 tonnes in the corresponding period last year.

However, robusta parchment volumes fell 23 per cent to 16,310 tonnes (21,170 tonnes). Re-exported coffee volumes surged 26 per cent to 42,137 tonnes against 33,431 tonnes in the year-ago period. After two years of good harvest, Indian coffee is facing an off-year for the 2016-17 season starting October.

Prolonged dry spell coupled with drought like conditions in some regions is seen impacting the crop, especially robustas for 2016-17 season.

The Coffee Board is expected to come out with initial blossom estimates for the 2016-17 crop sometime next week. The Board had estimated the 2015-16 crop at 3.5 lakh tonnes, a seven per cent increase over the previous year's 3.27 lakh tonnes.

Tea exports up 6.31%



India's tea exports in the first four months of current calendar have increased on both volume and value fronts.

According to the Tea Board, a volume of 67.18 million kg (mkg) of tea was exported from January to April against 63.19 mkg in the same months of 2015. This marked a growth of 6.31 per cent.

Interestingly, more volume could be shipped despite a rise in price due to improved demand for Indian teas.

The average price of exported tea rose to 181.82 a kg from 172.24, marking an increase of 5.56 per cent.

Consequently, the overall earnings from exports rose to 1,221.46 crore from 1,088.40 crore, marking a growth of 12.23 per cent.

Of this, North India exported 38.16 mkg (Jan-Apr 2015: 33.81 mkg) of tea valued at 806.01 crore (700.21 crore) with the average price of 211.22 a kg (207.10).

There was slight drop in the volume shipped from South India. South India exported 29.02 mkg (29.38 mkg) of tea valued at 415.45 crore (388.19 crore) with the average price of 143.16 a kg (132.13).

Roller flour mills want import duty on wheat to go



The Kerala Roller Flour Millers Association has requested the Centre to withdraw import duty on wheat, considering the supply shortage of the commodity in the wake of adverse weather conditions.

It is pointed out that the wheat output during the current season will fall short due to severe drought and unseasonal rains in growing areas. Since the shortage is estimated to the order of 5 to 6 million tonnes, it will affect the working of roller flour mills especially in South India, PK Ahammed, the association President said.

According to him, flour mills have no other options but to depend on imports to overcome this huge shortfall. The international wheat price is on the higher side and it is likely to go up further given the reported shortage of wheat output in India.

It may be recalled that the government had earlier allowed wheat imports at zero per cent customs duty. However, in view of the huge stocks at FCI godowns, the authorities imposed customs duty at 10 per cent with effect from August 7, 2015. Subsequently, the rate was increased to 25 per cent from October 19 in the same year because of fall in international prices.

The Association, therefore, urged the ministers of Finance, Commerce and Consumer Affairs to allow wheat imports without any duties from August 1 this year. The imports would not affect the stock of domestic wheat nor the prices, but will help roller flour mills to supply quality products at affordable prices, it said.

USAID, IKP launch program on nutrition challenge

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) and IKP Knowledge Park today launched the first Call for Proposals under the ‘Agriculture for Nutrition Grand Challenge’.

It is part of the USAID-supported “Feed the Future India Innovations for Improved Nutrition” program, implemented by IKP, based in Hyderabad. Under the program, IKP will identify Indian innovations in the agri-food sector that show measurable impact in improving the nutritional status of poor and malnourished populations.

The shortlisted innovations will then be funded, developed, and adapted in select countries in Africa and South Asia. Each finalist will receive a funding of up to Rs. 1.2 crore as well as mentorship support for a period of two years.

The Call for Proposals will remain open until August 31, 2016. Interested applicants should register on the program’s website (www.gc-agn.org) and apply via an online form.

Ambassador Jonathan Addleton, USAID Mission Director to India, and Deepanwita Chattopadhyay, Chairman and CEO, IKP Knowledge Park, launched the program in the presence of over thirty agriculture and nutrition experts and entrepreneurs.

Earlier in her welcome address, Deepanwita Chattopadhyay said, “Through this Call, IKP will help Indian innovators adapt their solutions in other developing countries, thereby expanding the reach of their ventures and impacting many more lives.”

Deepanwita said IKP will also organise road shows and meetings in various cities including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune to ensure greater outreach and attract additional applications.

Kharif sowing takes a beating in June on late monsoon arrival

But July may witness an improvement with rains forecast to be above normal

Sowing of kharif crops took a beating in June with the total sown area declining 23 per cent to 215.87 lakh hectares against 279.27 lakh hectares (lh) last June as the monsoon played truant in the first half of the month.

The 11 per cent rainfall deficit for the month due to the late arrival and slow progress of the monsoon across the country led to a decline in acreage of pulses, coarse cereals, oilseeds, jute and cotton.

Transplantation of paddy, the main kharif cereal crop, picked up in the last week of June and the total acreage at the end of the month stood at 47.77 lh, almost at the same level as last year.

Sowing of cotton took a major hit this kharif, as farmers in Punjab stayed away from planting the fibre crop due to fear of white flies spoiling it. In North India, where kharif cotton planting is already complete, the acreage is down by a third this year.



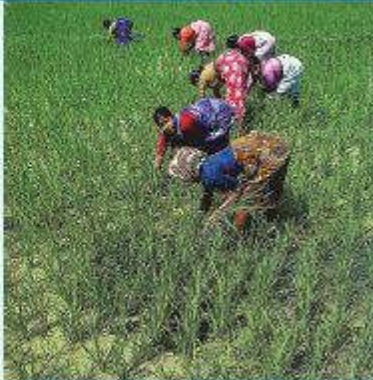
Pulses, oilseeds to the fore

Elsewhere, cotton farmers are seen preferring pulses and oilseeds. The acreage under cotton till June end halved to 30.59 lh compared to 60 lh in the same month last year.

According to data supplied by States, pulses have been sown on 19.85 lh, coarse cereals on 37.15 lh, oilseeds on 28.71 lh and sugarcane on 44.38 lh.

Crop	Area sown	
	2016-17	2015-16
Rice	47.77	47.62
Pulses	19.85	22.25
Coarse Cereals	37.15	43.72
Oilseeds	28.71	54.24
Sugarcane	44.38	43.68
Jute & Mesta	7.43	7.6
Cotton	30.59	60.16

(area in lakh hectares)



With the Met Department predicting above-normal rains over North India during the first week and over Central India during the second week of July, the kharif acreage is expected to improve in the weeks ahead.

As of July 1, 24 of the 36 metrological sub-divisions, accounting for 63 per cent of the country's geographical area, had received normal to excess rains. The other 12 sub-divisions had deficient rains.

Business Standard

Paddy area improves as monsoon active over east India

According to the IMD, June ended with an overall rainfall deficiency of 11 per cent



Sowing of kharif crops, mainly of paddy, improved a bit as the southwest monsoon became active over eastern parts of the country. However, the total acreage remained below last year's level mainly due to a fall in sowing area of cotton, oilseeds and pulses.

In cotton, the area was almost 50 per cent less than last year, as the southwest monsoon remained patchy over Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Haryana.

Officials said there could be some pick-up in the coming days as the southwest monsoon enters western and northern parts of the country in the next few weeks.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), June ended with an overall rainfall deficiency of 11 per cent. Sowing of kharif crops begins with the onset of southwest monsoon from June and harvesting from October.

Data released by the agriculture ministry showed kharif crops were sown on 21.58 million hectare as on Friday, against 27.92 million hectares a year ago.

Paddy, the main kharif crop, was covered on 4.77 million hectares so far this year, marginally higher than 4.76 million hectares in the year-ago period.

Maximum area under paddy was covered in Punjab, followed by Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Assam.

Area sown to coarse cereals was down 15 per cent at 3.71 million hectares against 4.37 million hectares in the said period.

Similarly, pulses acreage was down 11 per cent at 1.98 million hectares against 2.22 million hectares in the said period, out of which the maximum area of 0.7 million hectares were covered in Karnataka.

Even area under oilseeds was down 47 per cent at 2.87 million hectares, when compared to 5.42 million hectares.

The government had announced a significant rise in support price of pulses and oilseeds this year to boost production and reduce the country's dependence on imports.

Among cash crops, cotton planting was down 49 per cent at 3.05 million hectares, against 6.01 million hectares in the year-ago period.

Jute area was down at 0.74 million hectares from 0.76 million hectares, but sugarcane area rose marginally to 4.43 million hectares from 4.36 million hectares.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Monsoon catches up, bolsters rice, pulses planting



The India Meteorology Department said the monsoon will cover these regions by Sunday, which is expected to further accelerate crop planting.

NEW DELHI: Monsoon rainfall continued to lash fields across India, prompting farmers to rapidly plant rice, lentils and other crops as the crucial weather system is maintaining the momentum after a sluggish start.

Rice planting galloped to cover two and a half times the area sown last week, and caught up with last year's level even though sowing of crops began more than two weeks late. Planting of pulses also accelerated rapidly as farmers are lured to the crop due to high prices prevailing in the market. The Monsoon has covered the entire peninsular areas, the eastern states and raced up to the Himalayan northern states including Kashmir.

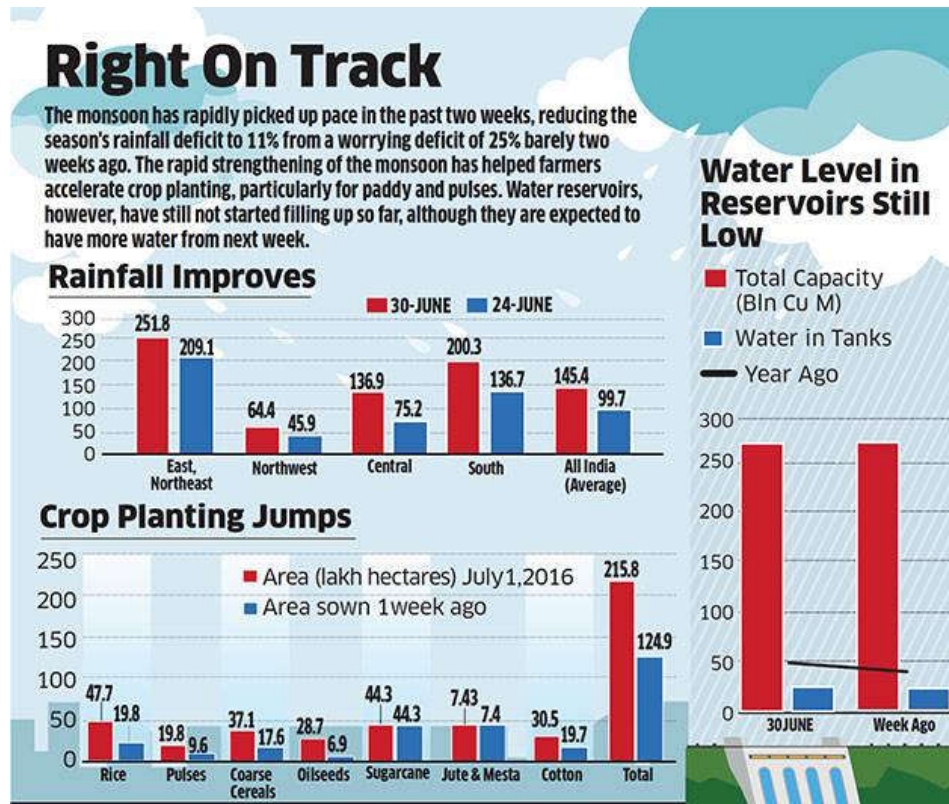
It is now poised to cover the agriculturally crucial states of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

The India Meteorology Department said the monsoon will cover these regions by Sunday, which is expected to further accelerate crop planting. Northern India is likely to get heavier than normal rainfall in the coming week, while the west coast would be pounded with heavy showers for another 10 days.

Central India is expected to see heavy rainfall in the second week of the month, while parts of peninsular India will get subdued rainfall for some days, the weather office said. Southern India has so far received heavy showers, with total rainfall 24% above the 50-year average.

The surge in rainfall in the past 10 days has narrowed the season's rainfall shortfall to 11% from a worrying deficit of 25% in the middle of June. This is expected to fill up water reservoirs, which are still at a very low level.

Water level in 91 major reservoirs is still only 15% of total capacity, about the same as last week but half of the level at the same time last year. Weather scientists and officials say the reservoirs are likely to start showing higher water level from next week.



Northern India has seen heavy pre-monsoon showers, particularly in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, where cloudbursts have disrupted normal life as roads have been blocked by landslides and communication systems have been disrupted in some districts.

The weather office has forecast more heavy rainfall in the region in the next two days. Delhi and nearby areas are also forecast to get heavy rainfall in the next few days.

Climate change warming Asian waters, altering monsoon: Study



Getting the monsoon forecast right is a challenge, thanks to the complex, poorly understood, ways in which South Asia's monsoon rains are influenced by multiple factors

NEW DELHI: Each year as temperatures rise across India, farmers look to the sky and pray for rain.

The all-important monsoon forecast becomes a national priority, with more than 70 per cent of India's 1.25 billion citizens engaged in agriculture and relying on weather predictions to decide when they will sow their seeds and harvest their crops.

But getting the forecast right remains a challenge, thanks to the complex, and still poorly understood, ways in which South Asia's monsoon rains are influenced by everything from atmospheric and ocean temperatures to air quality and global climate trends. Even the amount of ice in Antarctica is suspected to have an impact.

And it's only getting harder to figure out, scientists say, as the monsoon becomes increasingly erratic.

A new study released Friday in the journal *Science Advances* helps clear up a bit of the mystery, by showing that man-made climate change is responsible for most of the change seen in ocean surface temperatures near the equator across Asia, which in turn affect regional rainfall patterns including the Indian monsoon.

By showing that link, the study indicates future ocean warming in the region, which could in turn increase the amount of rainfall during monsoons, strengthen cyclones and increase precipitation over East Asia.

"This has important implications for understanding changes in rainfall patterns for a large, and vulnerable population across Asia," said oceanographer Evan Weller, who led the research team while he was at Pohang University of Science and Technology in South Korea, before recently shifting to Monash University in Australia.

The study looks specifically at a mid-oceanic body called the Indo-Pacific Warm Pool, which holds some of the world's warmest seawaters and spans the western Pacific to the eastern Indian Ocean.

Scientists have long known that India's monsoons are partly influenced by that warm pool. And they've known that the pool has been expanding, and warming, for decades. That expansion and warming have already caused some sea rise around islands in Asia.

It wasn't entirely clear why the pool was changing, until now.

Weller and his team compared data observations with several climate models, and deduced that rising greenhouse gases along with aerosols and other atmospheric pollutants were the dominant cause of the pool's warming and expansion over the past 60 years, though regional climate variations also had some effect.

“This wasn't entirely surprising. We've long suspected climate change to be behind the changes, but no one had yet proven it,” Weller said. What they didn't expect was to find that the western portion of the pool, near India, was expanding more than the eastern part in the Pacific. “We don't really know why. We'll try to figure that out next.”

But one thing is clear: If climate change trends continue, and by most indications they will, forecasters will have to consider the warm pool in their monsoon predictions. And by demonstrating how greenhouse gases are the dominant driver of changes in the warm pool, the team has added another dimension that can help improve climate models.

Asia, in general, could face significant consequences from this trend: more storm activity over East Asia, and stronger South Asian monsoons between June and September.

That sounds like good news for water-scarce India, but probably isn't. Most of that rain would likely fall before the monsoon front reaches land. Already, studies by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology show a declining trend in precipitation over land.

Still, climate modeling is complex, and models still have their biases and limitations. Focusing so specifically on the warm pool may obscure the larger picture, some suggested, especially in the Pacific where there are many other factors at play.

“My only concern is that treating the western Pacific warm pool in isolation provides very limited insight,” said climatologist Michael Mann, director of the Earth System Science Center at Pennsylvania State University. He was not

involved in the study. "One has to view it as part of the larger tropical Pacific coupled ocean-atmosphere system and the dynamics of the El Nino/Southern Oscillation, and how they may change in a changing climate."

Anxious to improve its forecasting, India is investing at least \$43 million through 2017 to buy more powerful computers and better technology that can help specialists make more accurate calculations and models of seasonal weather forecasts. Meanwhile, researchers from across the world are launching one study after another to better understand the many dynamics involved.

"It is not so easy to predict the monsoon," said meteorologist B.P. Yadav, a spokesman for the Indian Meteorological Department. "There is variability from region to region, time to time, and then the rains move in different stages across the land."

Indian meteorologists had announced this year's monsoon would be normal, only to watch the rains make landfall a week late in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and then stall repeatedly on their month-long progression north. At one point, officials urged farmers to wait to sow until they actually saw the raindrops falling from the sky.

But on Friday, when the monsoon was scheduled to hit New Delhi, the sky turned ochre and millions in the long-swelting Indian capital delighted in the on-time relief of rain.

Basmati rice to lose acreage due to fluctuation in price

The expected fluctuation in the price of Basmati rice is likely to see the aromatic long-grain variety lose acreage this kharif season to the common paddy, for which the government offers a minimum support price.

CHANDIGARH: The expected fluctuation in the price of Basmati rice is likely to see the aromatic long-grain variety lose acreage this kharif season to the common paddy, for which the government offers a minimum support price.

Although there's stability in the price of Basmati, the high carryover stock of last year is expected to suppress prices in the coming months. With this in view,

state agriculture departments are not encouraging sowing of basmati in the current season.



After farmers incurred heavy losses in basmati last year, Punjab's agriculture department is planning to reduce the area under the grain this year by 30-35% to 5 lakh hectares. It was 7.83 lakh hectares in the last season.

"We are not encouraging farmers to grow basmati after they failed to get remunerative price in the last season. We are strictly discouraging the 1509 variety. Less acreage is likely to boost income of farmers, unlike in the last year," Jasbir Singh Bains, director of Punjab agriculture, told ET. "Farmers have learnt that there are other profitable crops if prices are not adequate in basmati."

Experts said the possibility that the higher carryover stock of last season can suppress basmati prices in the current season is prompting most farmers to opt for normal paddy.

Although traders and rice millers are expecting a fall in area under basmati this season, they believe the decline will be nominal.

"We are not expecting a fall in area of more than 5-7% under basmati this year," said Rajen Sudershan, executive director of All-India Rice Exporters Association. "Two years ago, prices had jacked to Rs 3,000-4,500 per quintal

due to the global scenario. It has given a wrong impression to farmers," he said. "In the last one year, prices have been affected by low price realisation in basmati exports."

Ashok Sethi, director of Punjab Rice Millers and Exporters Association, said the decline in area will be nominal. "The area will increase once transplantation picks up. It is too early to predict a major shift in basmati cropping," he said.

Haryana, the country's largest producer of basmati, is also likely to witness a fall in area as farmers look for assured MSP in normal rice. "The area under basmati could drop by 7-10% as farmers look for fixed income in normal rice," said officials in Haryana's agriculture department.

"Farmers barely fetched remunerative prices in basmati last year," said Maninder Singh, a Karnal-based farmer who opted for normal rice instead of basmati. Last season, farmers got about Rs 1600-1800 per quintal for basmati—down by more than half from the Rs 3,500 to 4,500 in 2014-15.

To bailout farmers after prices slumped, Haryana's state-owned agencies had bought the 1509 basmati variety in bulk. Out of 6 lakh metric tonnes of PUSA-1509 variety of paddy that had arrived in the mandis of Haryana, the government agencies procured 1.72 lakh metric tonnes.

Selected agricultural innovations to get over Rs 1-crore funding

The 'Agriculture for Nutrition Grand Challenge' is part of the USAID-supported 'Feed the Future India Innovations for Improved Nutrition' programme, implemented by IKP.

HYDERABAD: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) and IKP Knowledge Park today launched a call for proposals under which shortlisted innovations in the agri-food sector will get funding up to Rs 1.2 crore.

The 'Agriculture for Nutrition Grand Challenge' is part of the USAID-supported

'Feed the Future India Innovations for Improved Nutrition' programme, implemented by IKP.



IKP is a premier not-for-profit organisation and incubator in the country with about 16 years of experience in technology innovation and entrepreneurship development.

Under the programme, IKP will identify innovations in the agri-food sector that show measurable impact in improving nutritional status of the poor, IKP Chairman and CEO Deepanwita Chattopadhyay said.

The shortlisted innovations will then be funded, developed and adapted in select countries in Africa and South Asia, she said, adding the challenge is open to all until August 31.

Each finalist will receive a funding of up to Rs 1.2 crore as well as mentorship support for a period of two years, she said. The total amount available is Rs 9.5 crore.

Ambassador Jonathan Addleton, USAID Mission Director to India, said: "India is a laboratory for innovations. Sharing and transfer of these innovations globally in partnership with the public and private sector for sustained food

security gains has been the focus of USAID's food security and climate resilience programmes."

"We are delighted to partner with IKP to identify and nurture the smartest and brightest innovations and hope to once again capitalise them to promote healthy and productive societies globally," Addleton was quoted as saying in a release.

"During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US in early in June, both the US and India announced their commitment to jointly support global food and nutrition security.

"As stated in the US-India joint statement, both India and the US welcome triangular cooperation with African partners, including in areas such as agriculture, and look forward to opportunities to deepen the US-India global development cooperation in Africa, as well as in Asia and beyond," the release added.

Monsoon deficit in June pulls down kharif sowing by 23%



Area sown to kharif crops like pulses has plunged by 23 per cent to 215.87 lakh hectare in 2016-17 season so far because of deficit rains in June.

NEW DELHI: Area sown to kharif crops like pulses has plunged by 23 per cent to 215.87 lakh hectare in 2016-17 season so far because of deficit rains in June.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), June ended up with an overall rainfall deficiency of 11 per cent. But the situation is expected to be better this month.

Sowing of kharif crops begins with the onset of southwest monsoon from June and harvesting from October onwards.

As per the data released by Agriculture Ministry, kharif crops were sown in 215.87 lakh hectare as on today as against 279.27 lakh hectare a year-ago.

Paddy, the main kharif crop, was covered in 47.77 lakh hectares so far this year, marginally higher than 47.62 lakh hectare in the year ago period.

Maximum area under paddy so far was covered in Punjab followed by Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Assam.

Area sown to coarse cereals was down 15 per cent at 37.15 lakh hectare as against 43.72 lakh hectare in the said period.

Similarly, pulses acreage was down by 11 per cent at 19.85 lakh hectare as against 22.25 lakh hectare in the said period, out of which the maximum area of 7.02 lakh hectare was covered in Karnataka.

Even area under oilseeds was down 47 per cent at 28.71 lakh hectare as on today when compared to 54.24 lakh hectare.

The government has announced significant rise in support price of pulses and oilseeds this year to boost production and reduce the country's dependence on imports.

Among cash crops, cotton planting was down 49 per cent at 30.59 lakh hectare so far this season as against 60.16 lakh hectare in the year-ago.

Jute area was also down at 7.43 lakh hectare from 7.60 lakh hectare, but sugarcane area rose marginally to 44.38 lakh hectare from 43.68 lakh hectare in the said period.