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THE HINDU

Exhibition of farm technologies



Officials inspecting the demonstration of a farm equipment in Kathiripatti in Salem.

Exhibition of farm equipment and demonstration of latest farm technologies marked the sugarcane farmers' awareness meeting organised by the Subramania Siva Cooperative Sugar Mills, Harur, in Dharmapuri district in Kathiripatti village in Ayodhyapattanam block on Friday.

The Subramania Siva Cooperative Sugar Mill accounted for about 12,500 acres cane areas in the districts of Salem, Dharmapuri and Tiruvannamalai. Kathiripatti is a major cane supplying village to the factory.

V. Sampath, District Collector, inaugurated the awareness programme and the mini-exhibition of farm equipments brought up by the agricultural engineering department. N. Elango, Joint Director of Agriculture, said that the Subramania Siva Cooperative Sugar Mill provided Rs. 2,919 as cane procurement price per tonne, which was the highest by a sugar factory in the State. Besides, the mill also sanctioned Rs. 100 as transport subsidy to the farmers.

Mr. Elango explained that government provided drip irrigation and micro irrigation subsidy to the cane farmers and called upon them to take advantage of

the same to increase the cane area. The officials inspected the vermin compost unit set up from the subsidy provided by the Agriculture Department. Kavitha, managing director of the Subramaniva Siva Cooperative Sugar Mill, explained the achievements of the mill. Due to the good cane yield, the mill is expected to achieve 100 per cent capacity this season.

Passbooks to be introduced to prevent misuse of seeds

The Department of Agriculture has decided to introduce passbooks for farmers from this kharif season to prevent the misuse of subsidised seeds distributed by the government.

According to officials, they would be distributed among around three lakh farmers. They would have details such as the name of the farmer, and his/her village and details of his farm land.

Next five years

“This book could be used by farmers for the next five years and it will have the details of the seeds they collect from the department. The farmers will have to produce it at the Raita Samparka Kendras to procure seeds,” the officials said.

Claiming that the system would prevent the misuse of subsidised seeds, the officials said that while green colour passbooks were for general farmers, those in yellow colour would be given to farmers belonging to the Scheduled Castes.

Subsidy

“The subsidy is higher for small and marginal farmers and those from the Scheduled Castes while bigger farmers will get the subsidy only for two hectares. Often, it is noticed that in the absence of a proper monitoring system, seeds are being misused by some farmers. The new system will prevent it,” the sources said.

The officials said that the system would prevent shortage of seeds and creation of artificial scarcity or hoarding.

“Last year, there was an unusually high demand for toor seeds which surprised the department. Some farmers were hoarding the seeds that led to artificial scarcity,” the sources said.

Drought brings down credit flow to farm sector

Banks disburse only Rs. 1,074.05 crore, registering achievement of 70.59 p.c.

While banks in the districts have achieved over 200 per cent of the target fixed for credit disbursement to small and medium enterprises, their achievement in the farm sector is far less than the target set during 2015-16 owing to the drought.

Participating in the review meeting of the annual credit plan at the District Level Review Committee (DLRC) of the district-led Vijaya Bank here on Saturday, the bankers said that severe drought for two consecutive years was the reason for less credit flow to the farm sector.

In the annual credit plan for 2015-16, Rs. 1,521.59 crore was earmarked for the farm sector. However, only Rs. 1,074.05 crore was disbursed registering an achievement of 70.59 per cent. The achievement in crop loan disbursement was 68.72 per cent. In 2014-15 also, the progress in credit flow to agriculture sector was only 77.55 per cent.

However, in the SME sector, while the target was Rs. 599.07 crore, total credit of Rs. 1,217.92 crore was extended to the sector.

Good monsoon

Taking into consideration the indications of a good monsoon this year, the officials of the district administration asked the bankers to increase the credit flow to the farming sector this time.

The credit plan for 2015-16 had a total outlay of Rs. 4,019.32 crore and the bankers in the district have achieved 121.52 per cent, with a disbursement of Rs. 4,879.17 crore.

Outlay for 2016-17

Speaking about the credit plan for the year 2016-17, Vijaya Bank Regional Manager Chandrashekhar Yallur said that a credit outlay of Rs. 5,070 crore had been given for the fiscal. "Of it, Rs. 4,193 crore is for priority sector, including Rs. 1,907 crore for farm sector and Rs. 917 crore for SME sector," he said.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Assistant General Manager P. Narendra Babu stressed on the need for focussing more on financial literacy camps for homogenous groups like farmers, students, retired employees and others, especially in rural areas.

Pointing out the drop in the credit-deposit ratio in the district from 70 per cent in 2014-15 to 62 per cent in the last fiscal, he asked the bankers to take requisite steps to increase the ratio.

Focus on crop loans

Assistant General Manager of NABARD Sheela Bhandarkar asked the bankers to focus on crop loans, dairy farming, minor irrigation, and other elements of the agriculture sector, and also on financing solar pump-sets.

Chairing the meeting, Chief Executive Officer of Zilla Panchayat Sushma Godbole asked the bankers to provide accurate statistics to the Lead Bank. Lead Bank District Manager Vijaykumar S.L. and others were present.

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Chandrashekhar Yallur

Regional Manager, Vijaya Bank

Training programme begins today

Directorate of Entrepreneurship and Academic Staff College of Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU), in association with Animal Husbandry department, is organising a three-month training programme for Assistant Directors of Animal Husbandry Department in various centres across the State from Monday.

The training programme includes different sessions on advancements in veterinary science, diagnosis, disease control, production, management and

knowledge transfer, T.P. Sethumadhavan, Director of Entrepreneurship of KVASU, said in a release here.

Apart from the KVASU campuses at Mannuthy and Pookode, the training programme will be held at Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur; Institute of Management, and State Agriculture and Management and Extension training institute, Thiruvananthapuram, Dr. Sethumadhavan added.

Dr. Joseph Mathew, Registrar, KVASU, will inaugurate the programme at the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Auditorium at Mannuthy at 2 p.m.

Programme includes sessions in veterinary science

Seed-vending machine opened



In a bid to boost vegetable cultivation on residential premises and terrace of buildings, a seed-vending machine, the first of its kind in the district, was opened at the Agricultural College at Padenekat at the hands of Revenue Minister E. Chandrasekharan.

The automated machine will facilitate the aspirants get quality seed packets by paying Rs.10 per packet after selecting the seed code.

The function that was held at the college auditorium on Saturday was presided over by M. Rajagopalan, MLA.

Neeleshwaram Municipal Chairman K.P. Jayarajan, college Associate Dean M. Govindan also spoke at the function.

CDB seeks enterprises for value-addition

The Coconut Development Board (CDB), which is implementing various schemes for integrated development of coconut cultivation and coconut industry in the country, is seeking out entrepreneurs to engage in coconut-based industries.

Entrepreneurs can avail themselves of financial support to set up units to produce desiccated coconut, virgin coconut oil, spray-dried coconut milk, flavoured coconut juice, tender coconut water, coconut lassi, coconut chips, coconut chunks, vinegar, activated carbon, shell powder and shell charcoal. The Board said coconut producer companies or producer federations may submit projects to establish units under various schemes. Prospective entrepreneurs may contact technology section of the Board for more details.

The Board (CDB) had, in its 48th meeting of the Project Approval Committee on Technology Mission in the middle of June, had approved 18 projects with a total outlay of Rs. 12.76 crore and financial assistance of Rs. 2.75 crore with annual processing capacity of 493 lakh nuts and 3,300 tonnes of production of shell charcoal.

New officer

Meanwhile, the Board has announced that G.R. Singh assumed charge as chief coconut development officer. He was formerly the director for the market development and information centre of the Board in New Delhi. He is a postgraduate in agriculture and subsequently took a doctoral degree on Globalization of Coconut Industries and Coconut Farmers in North East Region and its evaluation from the Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, Jharkhand.

He joined the CDB in 1985 and has served at various offices in Assam, Karnataka, Bihar and Maharashtra.

Survey on cotton crop in Haryana

Survey of cotton fields for insect-pest incidence in Hisar, Bhiwani, Jind, Fatehabad and Sirsa districts was carried out by a team of scientists of Haryana Agricultural University (HAU), Hisar.

The scientists, who recently carried out the survey, found that incidence of leafhopper has increased in the last fortnight in many areas.

R. S. Jaglan, Professor and Head, Department of Entomology, has advised farmers to be cautious and to monitor cotton crop for whitefly and leafhopper incidence on weekly basis.

He also emphasised that high activity of natural enemy, Chrysoperla, which feed on whitefly and leafhopper, was observed in all the cotton fields.

‘No unnecessary insecticide’

Therefore, farmers should refrain from unnecessary insecticide application in order to conserve this beneficial insect, he said on Sunday.

S. S. Siwach, Director of Research, said that currently prevailing weather conditions are highly favourable for leafhopper multiplication. He added that the leafhopper population on cotton may increase if rain occur frequently and the mean relative humidity remains above 70 per cent. However, the whitefly population is likely to remain at low to moderate level.

In case of long dry spell of 15 days or more, the population of whitefly may increase fast, he pointed out.

He said the present weather conditions are also favourable for build-up of red hairy caterpillar. Therefore, wherever this pest is a problem, particularly in the sandy areas, recommended insecticides may be sprayed for its control, Siwach added.

Cotton area in Punjab and Haryana had been hit last year due to whitefly pest attack.

Timely sowing

Consequently, both the States have been taking measures such as pushing for timely sowing of recommended crop varieties to safeguard this seasons output.

APMC does not have any cold storage units in Hassan district

Experts of agriculture departments of both States have also undertaken training programmes for growers at village levels to apprise them about steps needed to achieve higher output. - PTI

“The incidence of leafhopper has increased in the last fortnight in many areas”

Three procurement centres set up, but no means to store coconuts

APMC does not have any cold storage units in Hassan district



A coconut procurement centre that was started in the APMC yard in Channarayapatna on Sunday.— Photo: Special Arrangement

The Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee, on Sunday, started three coconut procurement centres in Hassan district, but does not have any cold storage units to store them.. The centres were opened in Hassan, Channarayapatna and Gandasi in Arasikere taluk.

The State government had instructed APMCs to open the centres so that the Karnataka State Cooperative Market Federation officer can procure coconuts at a support price of Rs.1,600 per quintal.

But, there is no clarity on how to store the procured coconuts.

“We don’t know where to keep coconuts procured from farmers. We have been told to purchase and keep it in godowns. The fresh coconuts, with no husk, have a short shelf-life. Many coconuts also get broken while handling,” said Rangaswamy, manager of Market Federation.

Fresh coconuts, with no husk, have shelf life of one week maximum.

If they are kept in a freezer, they will last longer. The government has earmarked Rs.1 crore to procure coconuts in the district. Growers of Hassan, Alur, Sakleshpur, Arkalgud and Belur have to bring coconuts to Hassan centre. The centre at Channarayapatna is for growers of Channarayapatna and Holenarasipur taluks. The Gandasi centre is for growers in Arasikere taluk.

All three centres were inaugurated on Sunday, but the actual procurement will begin later this week.

Hassan APMC secretary Lakshme Gowda said, “As per the procedure, only favourable average quality coconuts (FAQ) are procured in the centres. The produces are certified by designated officers deputed by the Horticulture Department.”

A grower can sell a maximum of 30 quintal of coconuts.

They have to bring RTC, an identity card and the crop certificate issued by the competent authorities to sell the produces. The farmers would get the amount transferred to their bank accounts on the day they sell the produces.

Maize price rise casts shadow on poultry units

Steady rise in the price of maize – the prime feed for the poultry birds – in the local market is prompting the poultry farmers to look for alternatives such as importing the feed.

In the last six months, the price of maize went up from Rs. 1,300 to Rs. 1,850 per quintal and is fluctuating. The same is the case with the prices of egg, which is getting dwindled in the local and the export market as well. As a result, the poultry farmers are experiencing higher input costs and meagre returns, thus looking for alternatives to reduce the input cost.

Plea to Minister

“A delegation from the poultry industry called on Union Minister for Commerce Nirmala Sitaraman early this week and sought permission to import five lakh metric tonnes of maize. The Minister responded positively and said that the option of tax waiver on the import will be considered,” says Padala Subba Reddy, president of Anaparthi Poultry Farmers’ Welfare Association and director of the State Veterinary Council.

The poultry farmers from Andhra Pradesh imported five lakh tonnes of maize from Russia in the beginning of this year.

However, the price fluctuation in the local market has been making them exercise the same option again to ensure the survival of their poultry farms.

Of the total five crore birds in 10,000 farms across the State, 1.35 crore birds are in East Godavari district in about 650 farms.

Each bird consumes about 80 gram of feed every day and maize is the most sought-after feed by all the poultries, which is cost-effective as compared to the other feed.

Egg production

With regard to egg production, a major chunk is from East Godavari district, as its share is 1.10 crore eggs of the total 4.25 crore being produced every day.

“Without feeding the birds, how can we expect them to brood?” asks Mr. Reddy.

The price hike in the maize is affecting the district badly, as the feed requirement is higher here when compared to the other districts.

“But, feed is a perennial problem and there is an immediate need to find a long-term solution to this problem.

Otherwise, it is going to be tough for the poultry farmers to continue their units in the future,” he points out.

Training in fodder cultivation techniques

A free one-day training programme on ‘Fodder cultivation techniques’ will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on July 11.

A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, KVK, said that the training would focus on types of fodder that best suits for goat, milch cow and other cattle and also selection of crops based on the soil types and availability of water.

Further, crops that can withstand drought and used as fodder would be explained.

Use of drip irrigation, selection of seeds, space management between crops, applying fertilizers and producing seeds for fodder would be dealt.

Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme.

Interested should register themselves for participating in the training before July 9.

For registration, visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650, the release added.

Also, training on rearing of Japanese Quail and Desi bird rearing techniques would be conducted on July 12 for which interested had to register by July 11.

Monsoon covers nearly entire country, narrows rainfall deficit

The monsoon arrived in India on June 8, a week later than usual, but it is set to cover the entire country on time, the official said.



In 2016, the monsoon is likely to deliver 106 percent rainfall of a long-term average.

Monsoon rains have covered nearly all of India except some parts of the western states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, while the remaining region is likely to be covered this week, said an official with the weather department, who declined to be named.

The monsoon delivers nearly 70 percent of rains that India needs to water farms, and recharge reservoirs and aquifers. Nearly half of India's farmlands, without any irrigation cover, depend on annual June-September rains to grow a number of crops.

“Conditions are favourable for progress of monsoon in remaining parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat. By end of this week monsoon will cover entire India,” the Pune-based official at India Meteorological Department said.

The monsoon arrived in India on June 8, a week later than usual, but it is set to cover the entire country on time, the official said. Normally monsoon covers entire India by mid-July.

Rainfall has picked up in central and northern India in the last few weeks, helping to narrow the rainfall deficit in the current season to 6 percent, sharply down from 18 percent in the first week of June, the official said.

In 2016, the monsoon is likely to deliver 106 percent rainfall of a long-term average.

Although agriculture accounts for about 15 percent of the country’s \$2 trillion economy, about two-thirds of its 1.3 billion people depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

From Plate to Plough: Twenty-five years of tinkering

Agriculture needs a champion in the Union cabinet.



Can the Narendra Modi government take fertiliser sector reforms to their logical conclusion?

July, this year, marks the silver jubilee of economic reforms. It is time to take stock of our major successes and failures.

There is a saying that bad times are often good for policies and good times are bad for policies.

It is well-known that the foreign exchange crisis, with reserves falling to as low as \$1.5 billion, triggered fundamental changes in economic policies in India. Three major policy changes were:

Depreciation of the rupee by more than 40 per cent, liberal trade policies with substantial cuts in import tariffs of industrial products, and de-licensing of a host of industries.

There have been major successes on all three counts. But in this article, I want to focus on the impact of the economic reforms on agriculture.

The first big policy change that was attempted in agriculture pertained to fertiliser: Raising urea price by 40 per cent in order to cut fertiliser subsidy.

That created an uproar, even in the Congress party, forcing a rollback to 30 per cent. Subsequently, a joint parliamentary committee was set up on pricing of fertilisers.

The committee recommended freeing up of potassium and phosphorous fertilisers from subsidies, but also suggested a 10 per cent reduction in urea prices. This set the stage for unbalanced fertiliser use as well as swelling the fertiliser subsidy.

Thereafter, several committees looked into this issue, but none could recommend decontrolling urea prices.

As a result, this sector suffers from large inefficiency, urea is diverted to non-agricultural uses and to neighbouring countries, while the subsidy burden continues to rise.

The fertiliser subsidy in the Union budget for the fiscal year 2017 is about Rs 70,000 crore.

But there are also pending bills of more than Rs 45,000 crore against the fertiliser industry.

The government is trying to increase fertiliser production by pumping in more resources in sick units. That is an inefficient strategy.

Data from Bihar gives us some idea of fertilisers getting diverted to neighbouring countries. In FY 2013, fertiliser consumption in Bihar was about 200 kg/ha, way above the all-India average of 131 kg/ha.

But figures of wheat and rice production are not commensurate with such levels of fertiliser consumption.

Directorate of Economics and Statistics data shows that wheat cultivation in the state required 125 kg of fertiliser per hectare (ha) while paddy consumed 97 kg per ha.

What accounts for such a large difference is anybody's guess. Very likely, much of the fertiliser is going to Nepal.

Can the Narendra Modi government take fertiliser sector reforms to their logical conclusion? The road map is reasonably clear.

It is time to transfer fertiliser subsidy to farmers' bank accounts on per hectare basis, and decontrol the fertiliser sector completely.

This will make the subsidy crop-neutral, help those who want to grow crops other than wheat and rice, and promote organic farming. China has done that already.

Unfortunately, there was no reform package for agriculture as a sector — unlike industry and trade policy.

There was only minor tinkering with agriculture policies, as in the case of fertiliser pricing or opening up exports of rice in 1994.

Two years after opening up of rice exports, India became the second largest exporter of grain in the world.

This encouraged the government to open exports of wheat in 1995. But this caused domestic prices of wheat and rice to rise and led the government to ban wheat and rice export in 1997. The ban continued for almost five years.

These hiccups notwithstanding, India has emerged as the largest exporter of rice in the world.

Between FY 2013 and FY 2015, Indian rice exports amounted to more than 10 million metric tonnes on an average.

This led to major transformation in the rice milling industry. The industry today uses better technology, including sortex machines.

However the biggest gain to agriculture came from the improvement in the terms of trade.

The correction of the over-valued exchange rate of the rupee in 1991 and the slashing of industrial tariffs ended the “implicit taxation” of agriculture from these indirect policies.

Terms of trade for agriculture improved. This resulted in higher private investments in agriculture and agri-GDP grew by 4.8 per cent per annum from FY1993 to FY1997.

But once export controls were back and East Asia was hit by a crisis in 1997, agricultural growth suffered. It has not come back to the 4.8 per cent level.

Agriculture witnessed severe crisis in the first two years of the Modi government.

Agriculture growth collapsed to 0.5 per cent.

This is partly because of back-to-back droughts and falling global agri-prices, but the crisis has also to do with the fact that there is no champion for agriculture in the cabinet.

It is time for the PM to pay attention to this and complete the unfinished agenda of agri-reforms. The government surely needs to go beyond fertilisers and extend reforms to agricultural markets, boost investments and create institutions that research and promote agriculture.

If the PM can increase agri-growth beyond 4 per cent per annum, he is likely to reap rich dividends.

Jalyukta Shivar brings 15 lakh hectares of land under irrigation

The audit report of the total work completed and how much land will get irrigated shows results that surpass the target set by the state government.



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis reviewing the jalyukta shivar project at Lambota village in Latur district. Express file photo

The state government's flagship project "Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan" has brought 15 lakh hectares of land under irrigation in the last 15 months in the drought-hit districts of Marathwada and Vidarbha.

On January 26, 2015, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had launched the "Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan", setting a target of bringing at least 25 lakh hectares of land under irrigation in three phases between 2015 and 2018. Preliminary reports across the drought-hit districts, where the project was undertaken on a mammoth scale, shows that "out of 25 lakh hectares, the work so far has helped bring 15 lakh hectares under irrigation. Thus, showing a 60 per cent achievement in just 15 months".

The audit report of the total work completed and how much land will get irrigated shows results that surpass the target set by the state government.

A highly placed source told The Indian Express, "Almost all 14 drought-hit districts have shown remarkable progress ahead of the target. Good monsoon will help us bring larger irrigation stretches under agriculture, especially in Marathwada and Vidarbha."

Fadnavis has been monitoring its progress almost every week. And every three months, there have been course corrections to expedite work.

When the project was launched, 25,000 villages out of a total of 40,000 villages were shortlisted for the jalyukta shivar in three phases to be completed by 2018.

In the first phase (2015-16), 6,200 villages saw 1.20 lakh projects.

In the second phase, 5,500 villages with 80,000 works were taken up by the state government along with various non-government organisations.

However, gradually, individual village gram panchayats and elected members (MLAs) came forward, suggesting they would prefer to simultaneously take up jalyukta shivar work in their respective villages or districts.

Initially, work related to jalyukta shivar was confined to desilting of rivers and ponds, and reconstruction of small canals, among others.

In March 2016, Fadnavis launched another scheme as part of drought mitigation to supplement the ongoing works called “Magel Tyala Shettal” farm ponds.

A farmer had to apply online for seeking a farm pond for which the government provided Rs 50,000.

Online applications received till now has crossed 1.25 lakh. Four months saw completion of almost 75,000 farm ponds.

At successive review meetings on drought-mitigation plans,

Fadnavis had emphasised on completion of water conservation projects on priority to avail the rainfall in the next three to four months in the drought-hit region.

The emphasis on farm ponds was to facilitate the farmers to cultivate at least one crop even in the worst dry spell.

During his drought tour to Latur, Fadnavis was surprised to see standing crops in the middle of barren land across the village.

When asked what was the secret, a farmer said, “I have a farm pond. The pre-monsoon showers helped us store some water.

And we used it for cultivating the crops.”

As part of assured irrigation, 35,000 wells have been completed. The target is to complete one lakh wells in the next three years.

Dip in June sowing, but IPGA says it won't affect prices of pulses

Absence of rains in June has affected sowing of pulses across the country, with sowing of mung recording the greatest dip.



Data released from the Union Ministry of Agriculture showed that till June 30, 9.29 lakh hectares (lakh Ha) of farmland in the country had seen sowing of tur, while it was 9.37 lakh Ha on June 30, 2015.

Absence of rains in June has affected sowing of pulses across the country, with sowing of mung recording the greatest dip. This, the Indian Pulses and Grains Association (IPGA) has said, will not adversely affect kharif harvest which they say will see a bumper crop for all pulses.

Data released from the Union Ministry of Agriculture showed that till June 30, 9.29 lakh hectares (lakh Ha) of farmland in the country had seen sowing of tur, while it was 9.37 lakh Ha on June 30, 2015. Similarly sowing of urad and mung was estimated to have been done over 4.22 lakh Ha and 4.46 lakh Ha respectively.

Last year sowing of urad and mung was over 4.13 lakh Ha and 6.31 lakh Ha. The decrease in area for Mung was the highest with major mung producing states like Maharashtra reporting the biggest dips. Maharashtra, which is one of the largest pulse growing states, has reported the lowest sowing of all pulses.

Figures show that till June 30, 0.92 lakh Ha had reported sowing for mung which last year it was 2.1 lakh Ha.

Similarly sowing for tur and urad for the current kharif was 0.19 lakh Ha and 2.83 lakh Ha which last season was 1.39 lakh Ha and 4.84 lakh Ha respectively.

Karnataka has on the other hand reported better sowing of almost all pulses this June as compared to the last June.

The state has reported 2.32 lakh Ha, 0.51 lakh Ha and 3.72 lakh Ha under sowing for mung, urad and tur respectively.

The figures stood at 2.16 lakh Ha, 0.55 lakh Ha and 1.47 lakh Ha for June 30 last year.

However, this dip in sowing, Bimal Kothari, vice chairman, IPGA, said would not result in price escalation.

“Monsoon is now in full swing and we are expecting a bumper crop of all pulses being grown in kharif season.

Pulses area cultivated so far is 16.08 vs 20.16 lakh hectare by this time last year (the figures are till 30th June).

However, this figure will see a substantial jump over next 2 weeks as following government advisory (due to delay in monsoon progress) farmers postponed sowing which is now in full swing,” he said.

Kothari also said that they expect a dip of 10-20 per cent in price post January next year and said members of IPGA placed orders for 3 MT of import which is expected to land September onwards.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Progress of rains less than ideal



Low ground water levels have led to sluggish start to sowing of most kharif crops

Pay Commission payouts may be a welcome shower of salary, but monsoon showers matter most for the economy. Why so? The proportion of the country's working population dependent on agriculture was at 38 per cent in 2011-12 — and this, even as the share of agriculture in the Indian economy stood at a modest 15 per cent in 2014-15. With the assurance of irrigation available for less than half of the net sown area, the volume of rainfall, particularly during the monsoon period of June to September, remains vital for irrigating crops.

Even though the non-crop sectors have gained significance in driving the rural economy, the volume of rainfall is key for various activities, including drinking water for the populace and livestock. Moreover, storage levels in reservoirs affect the generation of hydroelectricity.

As a result, the whims of monsoon rain retain a fair bit of influence on the purchasing power of rural India.

Unsteady start

After the distressing deficits of 12 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, in 2014 and 2015, the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast that monsoon rainfall will be 6 per cent higher than the long period average (LPA) in 2016 brought cheer to the farm economy as well as the producers of goods and services catering to the rural sector.

Monsoon has been unsteady in the first month of the season, as cautioned by the IMD.

Overall, the volume of rainfall in June 2016 was 11 per cent below the norm, with some regional variations.

Positive outlook

However, the IMD has projected rainfall over the country to exceed the LPA by 7 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, during July and August 2016, thereby making up for the June deficit.

Precipitation in September 2016 would still need to exceed the LPA by as much as 24 per cent to validate the IMD's forecast for the 2016 monsoon.

The dreaded "El Nino" conditions over the equatorial Pacific Ocean have weakened and the expectation of the more beneficial "La Nina" conditions being established as the monsoon progresses augurs well for heavier rainfall towards the end of the season.

However, the expected temporal distribution in 2016, i.e. a deficit in June followed by excess rainfall in the ensuing three months, particularly in September, is admittedly less than ideal.

This is particularly so in the prevailing scenario of low groundwater and reservoir levels, which have led to a sluggish start to the sowing of most kharif crops.

Heavy rainfall in September, when the crops are closer to maturity, may be somewhat counter-productive for the standing kharif crop.

Contrasting trends

The expected turnaround in the performance of agriculture is likely to reinvigorate rural demand in the second half of this fiscal.

Nevertheless, some selective indicators are likely to see a contrasting trend.

For instance, lower demand for pumping ground water for irrigation would dampen the pace of growth of diesel consumption.

Food inflation is expected to dip as the monsoon progresses, taking a cue from improved kharif acreages, as well as lower prices of perishables following a decline in temperatures, even if their output is not correlated with the monsoon.

A favourable monsoon may also benefit the fiscal health of the Central and State Governments, particularly if demand for work under the MGNREGA eases and less funds are required for activities such as drought relief.

While the monsoon may turn out to be favourable in 2016, a concerted effort is required to reduce the vulnerability to variations in rainfall.

Augmenting the storage of rainwater and reducing run-off; switching to less water-intensive crops; expediently completing pending irrigation projects and adopting more efficient methods of irrigation — these would ease India's dependence on monsoon.

The writer is Senior Economist, ICRA

Fisheries subsidies: India wants WTO to provide relief to small fishermen



Bone of contention: Government subsidies in the form of support for motorisation of fishing boats, fuel rebates and infrastructure support all fall under the targeted subsidies list at the WTO.

Points out that many will starve and lose their livelihood without govt support

Citing the vulnerability of its small-scale fishing fleet and the need to ensure food security, India has demanded special and differential treatment in fishery subsidy disciplines being negotiated at the World Trade Organization (WTO) so that support to small and marginal fishermen gets exempted.

In a recent meeting in Geneva on laying ground rules for negotiation of a global agreement to check over-fishing, New Delhi also insisted that developing countries be given capacity-building assistance to help in implementation.

Fisheries subsidies

“We are not averse to an international agreement to check over-fishing. But, the small subsidies that we provide to our fishermen, many of whom operate on a subsistence level, need to be exempted,” a Commerce Ministry official told *BusinessLine*.

Attempts are on at the WTO to arrive at an agreement on fisheries subsidies so that a pact is sealed at the next meeting of trade ministers in 2017.

Many members have pointed at the United Nations’ new Sustainable Development Goals, which commit governments, by 2020, to prohibiting certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing; elimination of subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and refraining from introducing new subsidies.

Just a drop in the ocean

Overall, marine fish landings in India stood at 3.40 million tonnes in 2015 compared to global marine fishery production of over 83 million tonnes.

The subsidies that India provides its fishing community in the form of support for motorisation of fishing boats, fuel rebates and infrastructure support all fall under the targeted subsidies list at the WTO.

“If we stop supporting our small fishermen, many of them will lose their livelihoods and their families will have to starve. This is a matter of food security for our poor and this is what we are pointing out at the WTO,” the official said.

Global support

South Africa and the African, Caribbean & Pacific group of countries are also with India in their demand for special and differential treatment for developing countries.

But countries such as New Zealand, Iceland, Colombia, Norway and the US are more aggressive and don't want to give away too many concessions, the official added.

New Delhi also said that developing countries should also be given assistance and support for capacity building to modernise and bring in technology for sustainable fishing operations.

Coconut products development

Coconut Development Board is implementing various schemes for integral development of coconut cultivation and coconut industry.

Coconut producer companies and federations may submit project proposals for establishment of copra, coconut oil, neera and value-added products from neera such as cookies, chocolate and sugar.

They may contact technology section of CDB for details. Phone 0484-2376265/2377266/2377267/2376553.

Monsoon deficiency down to 9%: IMD

Agency expects good rainfall in coming months

The overall deficiency in the monsoon has come down to 9 per cent after several parts of the country received a good amount of rainfall.

From June 1 to July 2, the country has received 164.9 mm of rainfall against the normal limit of 180 mm, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said,

adding that the situation is expected to improve as good rainfall is predicted in July, August and September.

But the rainfall deficiency in east and northeast India has risen to 28 per cent as the region has received only 274 mm of rainfall as against the normal limit of 381 mm, the agency said.

According to the IMD, monsoon deficiency in central India is around 12 per cent. Per the department's predictions, other parts of the country are expected to receive good rainfall but the east and northeast and parts of Tamil Nadu are likely to get less precipitation.



Meanwhile, the south-west monsoon has advanced further to the remaining parts of west Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, most parts of Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab and some parts of east Rajasthan. The Northern Limit of the Monsoon has passed through Dwarka, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Bundi, Jaipur, Hissar and Bhatinda.

“Conditions are favourable for further advance of the Southwest Monsoon into some more parts of the north Arabian Sea and Gujarat State, remaining parts of East Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab and some more parts of West Rajasthan during the next 48 hours,” the Met department said in its forecast.

Business Standard

Monsoon covers entire India, barring some parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan

To spread throughout the country in 48-hour



The monsoon rains had covered almost entire India except some part of Gujarat and Rajasthan until Sunday and is expected to cover the remaining parts in 48 hours, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Sunday.

With this, rain deficit has narrowed. The IMD on June 30 had observed 1% of rainfall deficit. The rainfall spread across the country, however, was uneven with a major crop area in Rajasthan and Gujarat continuing to receive lower--normal rainfall till June 30.

“The southwest monsoon has further advanced into some more parts of Gujarat, most parts of east Rajasthan, remaining parts of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi and some parts of Rajasthan. Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into remaining parts of north Arabian

sea, Gujarat and Rajasthan during the next 48 hours,” said the IMD in its report on Monday.

Rainfall during the monsoon season assumes greater significance since around 70% of sowing takes place during this season.

Paddy, soybean along with some other oilseeds are major kharif crops sown during the onset of monsoon, for harvesting in September-October season.

The significance of the monsoon rainfall and its even distribution can be gauged from the fact that most agri and economy related policy decisions are estimated based on the monsoon rainfall and changed according to its actual receipt.

Meanwhile, Sonal Verma, an analyst with Nomura, said: “India’s monsoon season (June-September) has begun on a weak note. So far in June (1-26) rains are currently tracking 16% below the long period average (LPA). Spatial distribution of rains has been uneven, crop sowing is delayed and reservoir levels are worryingly low. Production of pulses, oilseeds, coarse cereals and cotton could be at risk, if rains don’t improve.”

She added even as June rains have disappointed, we are not worried, as July rains matter more (for crop output) and they are forecast to improve. Assuming rains recover in July, we expect kharif (summer crop) production growth to rise to 3.2% y-o-y in 2016 (versus -3.2% in 2015). This, coupled with a weak base, should push up agriculture growth to 3.6% in FY17 from 1.2% in FY16, adding 30 basis points (bps) to headline gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

Region-wise, Central India (30% below normal) and North East India (-24%) have witnessed the highest rain deficiency. Bigger states reporting deficient or scanty rainfall, such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, have a higher share in the production of pulses, oilseeds, coarse cereals and cotton, which could be at risk, if rains don’t improve.

With monsoon rains slow to start, sowing has taken a hit. Total sown area stood at 11.7% of normal sowing area as on June 24, lower than 15.4% in 2015. Reservoir levels (at 15% of the live storage capacity) are at worryingly low levels.

Food price inflation rose sharply in May, but it has moderated in June. Going forward, although good rains are a positive for production, they do not guarantee low food price inflation. Despite that, food price inflation is expected to ease from current levels owing to relatively stable rural wage growth and favourable base effect in Q4 2016, Normura said in a report.

India received deficit monsoon rainfall during the last two seasons, resulting in lower kharif and rabi crops output which ultimately resulted in rising food inflation in the last few months.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Silt can be used by farmers to boost yield, says expert

The water conservation works going across the state are proving doubly beneficial to the cultivators who are taking away large quantity of tank silt 'gaad' as called in local language to be laid in their fields. Restoration of water bodies, reservoirs and ponds is going on at a full fledged pace in rural areas under the Mukhyamantri Jal Swawlamban Abhiyan (MJSA). Villagers are transporting the silt sand accumulating around the water bodies during digging work. Silt is fine granular material derived from rock or soil, it settles at the bottom of standing water bodies as fine sediment. In traditional Indian agricultural methods, silt gathered in village tanks and lakes used to be reapplied to fields to improve soil fertility.

Silt increase soil fertility due to its highly rich carbon, nutrients and animal excreta content. However, the shift away from traditional practices towards chemical fertilizers has meant that many farmers no longer use silt as a type of organic manure. The resulting increase in siltation in tanks and lakes thus reduced their water holding capacities. However with MJSA, both the purpose is being served. On one hand, the restoration works would increase the water holding capacities while on the other the silt being drawn out is benefiting the agricultural community at a larger level.

Jamna, a resident of Madar village has already found encouraging results from the application of tank silt in her little orchard. "We took a load full of silt from the Madar river bed and applied to our farms. The black silty soil is proving good for plants which have taken good height in a short span. It wont require much manure this year it seems," Jamna said. However, excessive application of silt can do harm to plants, warn agriculture scientists.

"Silt has excess clay content and water holding capacity. It promotes water retention and air circulation. The black silt soil is good for cultivation, but too much clay can make soil too stiff for plants to thrive, therefore farmers using silt should ensure proportionate input of sand, silt and clay," suggests Sudhir Verma, an officer of the agriculture department.

District records highest wind speed in 10 yrs, farmers worried

Seasoned farmers are usually unperturbed when speedy winds raise dust storms in and around their agricultural fields in rural Coimbatore. However, they were a concerned lot as the wind velocity touched a peak of 27.9kmph, the highest in Coimbatore in 10 years, around 3pm on Saturday.

"This is perhaps the highest wind velocity recorded in Coimbatore during a non-cyclone period in the past 10 years," said S Panneerselvam, professor and head, Agro Climate Research Centre, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU).

The average wind velocity on Saturday was 20kmph against 17.6 kmph in the corresponding day last year. The wind speed is expected to hover around 23kmph-28 kmph in the days to come, Panneerselvam said.

Weather experts have cautioned that the high wind not only poses a threat of uprooting banana plants and sugarcane crops, but would also dry up moisture in the soil that would in turn affect agriculture. "Flower and fruit drops would be accelerated because of the high wind velocity. We have requested farmers to erect supporting poles for banana plants and sugarcane crops," Panneerselvam said.

He also didn't rule out the possibility of dust storms. "There could be dust storms too," he said adding that there was a possibility of wind carrying clouds away, resulting in irregular rainfall.

Explaining the phenomenon, Panneerselvam said wind usually flows from high pressure to low pressure areas.

"There is a high pressure formation in southwest coast and a low pressure belt in interior Tamil Nadu. The wind speed is determined by variations in pressure.

Higher the pressure, greater the wind speed," he said. The high pressure and low pressure, in turn, are caused by fall or rise in temperature.

Weather experts said the wind starts from Arabian ocean and crosses Kerala to enter Tamil Nadu through Palakkad gap. The moisture laden wind of southwest monsoon travels through western Tamil Nadu to Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

"The average wind velocity in Coimbatore touched a high of 22kmph in 1994.

After that, it is for the first time on Saturday that the city has registered a high average velocity. As for the peak wind velocity, this could be the highest in 10 years," Panneerselvam said.

Farmers, meanwhile, said they would take measures to protect their crops. "I hope that there will not be much damage owing to the wind. We will erect supporting poles to prevent the felling of banana plants," Kandasamy said.

However, there was a positive side to the adverse weather condition. The wind energy production is expected to increase, thanks to the heavy winds which will continue at the same velocity till July second week and subside towards August.

According to sources, over 11,000 wind mills are functioning in the state, particularly at Kayathar in Thoothukudi district, Aralvaimozhi in Kanyakumari district, Kethanur near Palladam in Tirupur district, Andipatti in Theni district and a few areas in Tirunelveli district.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India needs to be proactive on agri-sector, suggests Rabobank



The intricate balance does not only fall into the hands of the private sector, but the government will have to do its part to ensure that there is a robust infrastructure in place.

SINGAPORE: India needs to be more proactive with its agricultural sector development and could learn from other agri-economies like Australia, the chief executive of banking firm Rabobank Singapore said here.

"A well-built infrastructure will help to maintain the country's food security robustness," said Marcel van Doremaele, also a Board Member of the Rice Bowl Index (RBI), which assesses food security robustness in Asia.

He cited Australia as among the leading export-driven agricultural economies with best models of infrastructure, transportation and irrigation systems, and noted that policies and targets laid out by the Indian government are fairly ambitious but not unattainable.

He applauded the target of a 100 per cent electrification of rural areas, improving rural infrastructure, increasing farmer incomes and rural employment, encouraging entrepreneurship, and increasing the number of vulnerable families covered under national health insurance among others.

The intricate balance does not only fall into the hands of the private sector, but the government will have to do its part to ensure that there is a robust infrastructure in place, said van Doremaele in his observation on the Indian agri-sector.

One criticism, though, is that most of the (Indian) government schemes and policies are reactive rather than proactive.

"While improving irrigation and increasing credit are very important, the government also needs to be forward-looking and improve efficiencies in a number of agricultural institutions, modernise the sector, and increase access to agricultural expertise and knowledge," he pointed out.

Despite the time they take to yield actual returns, the policies highlighted in the budget are important and will improve the outlook for India's agricultural sector, van Doremaele said.

According to the RBI 2015 assessment, India's overall food security robustness has been on the general upward trend since 2000, showing progress in improving the robustness of the systems that underpin food security in the country.

But the agricultural sector has been India's worst performing sector in the last few years and is in dire need of reform and investment, he said.

The sector had faced difficult monsoons and contracted 0.2 per cent in financial year 2014-15 and grew only 1.2 per cent last year (2015-16), he said, citing local media reports.

Normal monsoon key to India's continuing recovery: Standard Chartered



"A normal monsoon, after a gap of two years, will likely boost agricultural production and thus rural demand," Standard Chartered said

NEW DELHI: A normal monsoon is critical to India's continuing recovery, as a rise in agricultural growth could add 30-45 bps to GDP growth, says a Standard Chartered report.

According to the global financial services major, domestic factors are likely to shape India's economic growth prospects amid global economic and political uncertainty and hence, performance of monsoon has gained importance in this fiscal year.

"A normal monsoon, after a gap of two years, will likely boost agricultural production and thus rural demand," Standard Chartered said in a research note adding that "a rise in agricultural growth to 3-4 per cent from 1.1 per cent in 2015-16 could add 30-45 bps to GDP growth."

According to the report, monsoon's impact on food inflation would be primarily via pulses as distribution of rainfall in pulse-growing states is uneven.

"Pulses are highly sensitive to rains, as only around 16 per cent of pulse-growing areas have access to irrigation facilities. With pulse inflation sticky at around 34 per cent in the past 12 months, a better monsoon would reduce price pressure in pulses and in turn food inflation," it said.

On the Reserve Bank's policy rate stance, the report said there is a likelihood of another 25 bps rate cut in this fiscal year.

"A faster-than-expected decline in price pressures in food due to a normal monsoon is likely to make room for another 25 bps of rate cuts in 2016-17," the report said.

In the June policy review meet, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan kept interest rates intact, citing rising inflationary pressure, but hinted at a reduction later this year if good monsoon helps ease inflation.

The industry is still hopeful of further rate reduction from the central bank to boost investment.

Govt allows state-run general insurers to sell PM's crop insurance schemes



The PMFBY has replaced the existing two crop insurance schemes -- the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and the Modified NAIS.

MUMBAI: Government has now allowed all the four public sector general insurers to participate in its ambitious farm insurance schemes -- the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and Unified Package Insurance Scheme -- with potential of over \$2.5 billion in premium collection.

The government had kicked off the scheme on June 1 without involving any of the four public sector general insurers, who control almost 50 per cent of the market.

Only 11 private sector players were allowed to participate as they have better experience in crop insurance schemes, an area which state-run companies were almost eschewing so far.

The PMFBY has replaced the existing two crop insurance schemes -- the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and the Modified NAIS.

For Kharif crops, the premium charged would be up to 2 per cent of the sum insured, while for Rabi crops, the premium will be up to 1.5 per cent.

"We have been allowed to participate in these schemes. Now that Kharif crop season has already begun, we will participate in the Rabi season," the country's largest general insurer New India Assurance's Chairman G Srinivasan told PTI.

Its peer National Insurance Company is also gearing up for the scheme.

"We are getting ready to participate in the scheme. We are working with Agricultural Insurance Company (AIC) as they are providing us technical knowhow on the subject," its Chairman and Managing Director Sanath Kumar said.

"I do believe that it will be a profitable venture as it has been priced on the basis of actuarial calculation which will ensure the insurers get the right price for providing cover," he said.

According to Kumar, the states have already floated tenders for the scheme for Kharif season.

"Still, I do believe that we will be able to participate in the forthcoming Rabi crops," he said.

However, a central government official said even for Kharif crops, the state-owned general insurers can provide cover in association with AIC.

The state-run non-life insurers have a massive presence in rural and semi-urban areas compared to their private sector counterparts, which will help increase the reach of PMFBY, he said.

As of now, AIC is the sole state-run company which has been providing the coverage.

Now, all the four state-owned companies will associate with AIC to provide cover under the schemes.

Their participation will also ensure that the scheme benefits both loanee and non-loanee farmers as the premium is quite low.

"We have already crossed the mark of 24-25 per cent of coverage of crop loan and now we are aiming at achieving 40 per cent by the fiscal end," he said.

SBI General Insurance is looking at doubling its crop insurance cover during the current fiscal.

"We have underwritten premium to the tune of Rs 100 crore in the crop insurance segment in the last fiscal and we are looking at doubling our crop insurance cover during the current fiscal thanks to PMFBY," SBI General Insurance Managing Director Pushan Mahapatra said.

Talking about state-run general insurers joining the bandwagon, he said, "More number of players will bring better competition and better risk management practices."

State-run reinsurer GIC Re plans to become the world's second largest agriculture reinsurer due to its participation in PMFBY.

"Our share as reinsurer in PMFBY is already at 30-40 per cent. But we want to make it to above 50 per cent by March so as to become the world's second largest reinsurer," GIC Re Chairperson Alice G Vaidyan said.

Pulses imports may rise to 5 mn tonnes in Apr-Dec: Industry



Chana dal is being sold at Rs 105 per kg, while moong and masoor at Rs 130 and Rs 110 per kg respectively.

NEW DELHI: India is likely to import about 5 million tonnes of pulses during April-December period of this fiscal, largely by private traders, to boost domestic supply and cool retail prices that have reached up to Rs 200 per kg.

India, the world's largest producer, had imported about 4.5 million tonne in the corresponding period of the previous year. The country had imported 5.78 million tonnes in the entire 2015-16 fiscal to meet domestic demand.

"Imports are happening. About 1.2-1.3 million tonnes of pulses have already been imported. Moreover, private traders have contracted for 3 million tonnes of pulses to be shipped between September and December," India Pulses and Grains Association (IPGA) Chairman Pravin Dongre told PTI.

Asked about the landed cost of imported pulses, he said it is Rs 32-33 per kg for yellow peas, Rs 92-93 for tur dal, Rs 105-106 for urad, Rs 65 for masoor and Rs 58-60 for moong.

Importers are selling it to millers and wholesalers at a very less margins, he said.

On overall imports for this fiscal, Dongre said it would depend on monsoon.

"If monsoon is good as projected, domestic production will increase. Then imports will be less in the last quarter of this fiscal," IPGA Vice Chairman Bimal Kothari said.

IPGA said the pulses prices have gone up in domestic market due to fall in production on account of poor and unseasonal rains in two consecutive crop years.

Pulses production fell to 17.06 million tonnes in the 2015-16 crop year (July-June) from 17.15 million tonnes in the previous year. In 2013-14, output was over 19 million tonnes.

As a result, retail prices of pulses have shot up with Tur and urad dals selling at as high as Rs 180 per kg and Rs 198 per kg, respectively, in the retail markets.

Chana dal is being sold at Rs 105 per kg, while moong and masoor at Rs 130 and Rs 110 per kg respectively.

The government recently decided to enhance the buffer stock limit of pulses to 8 lakh tonnes for making market intervention when prices firm up in retail markets. It is also importing pulses to boost domestic supply.

So far, 1.19 lakh tonnes of pulses has been procured from farmers for creating buffer stock and 46,000 tonnes have been contracted for imports.

Government reduces prices of key fertilisers: Ananth Kumar



Terming it as "good news", Kumar said: "On Monday we will be making an official announcement regarding this."

BENGALURU: The government has decided to reduce prices of key fertilisers like Diammonium Phosphate (DAP), Muriate of Potash (MOP) and Nitrogen Phosphate and Potash composition (NPK), Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers Ananth Kumar said today.

"DAP, MOP and NPK fertiliser prices have never come down in last 15 years and it was increasing. Now government of India has decided to reduce the price of all these three fertilisers by about Rs 4,000 per tonne," he said.

Speaking at the BJP's state office bearers meeting here, he said, "It was a long standing demand to reduce the price of DAP, MOP and NPK fertilisers."

"DAP price will be reduced by a minimum of Rs 2,000 per tonne. This means that we will be reducing the price by Rs 100-150 per 50 kg bag. MOP and NPK prices will be reduced by Rs 4,000 per tonne."

Terming it as "good news", Kumar said: "On Monday we will be making an official announcement regarding this."

Wishing for good rains this year after drought in the last two years, he assured the Modi government is working towards providing the best to farmers.

Citing examples of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, among others, the minister said neem-coated urea has ensured there is no shortage of urea across the country.

In Karnataka alone, an additional one lakh metric tonne urea had been supplied, so that farmer's don't face problem during kharif season.

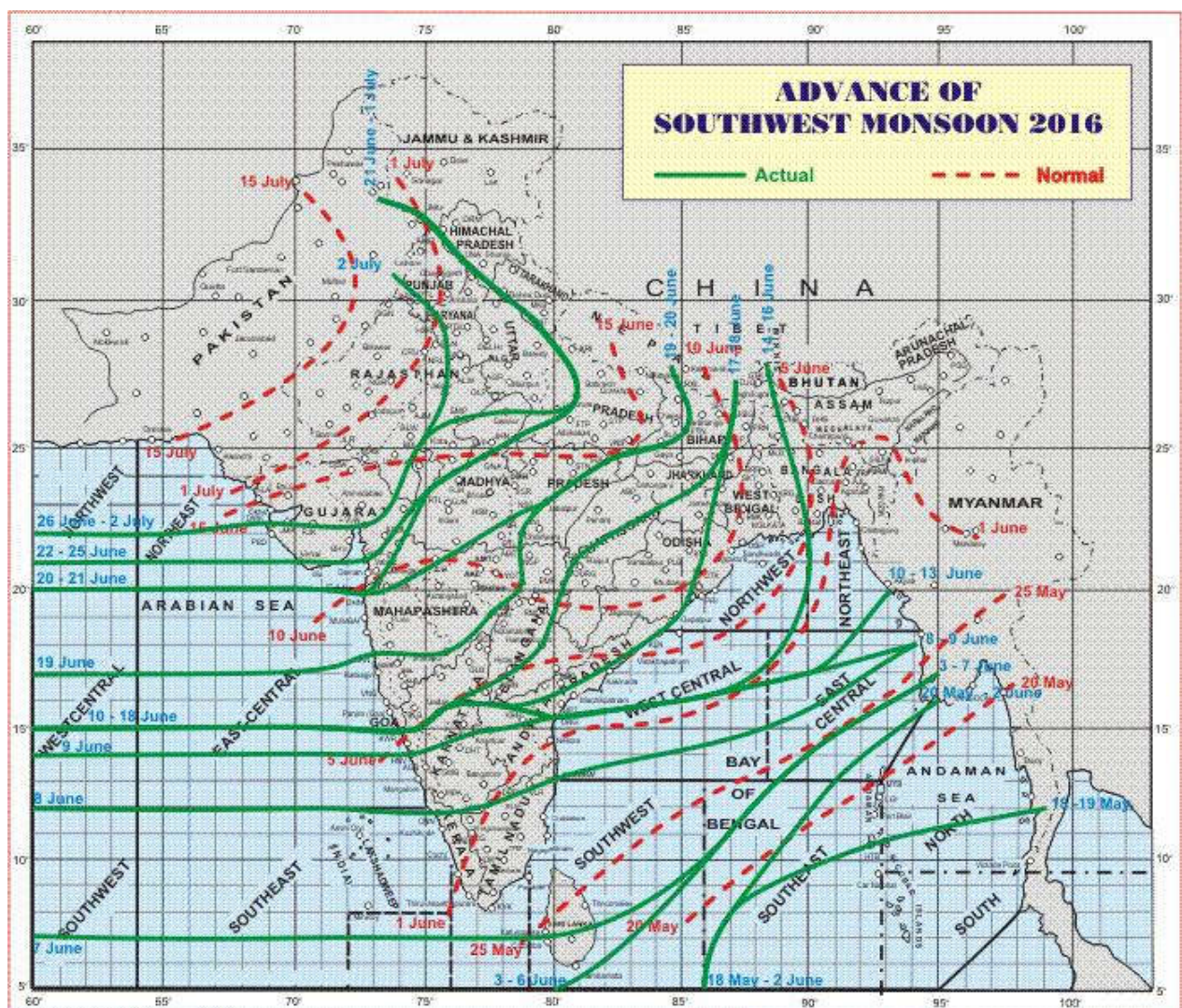
Early monsoon helping farmers plant kharif crops



The monsoon has reached most parts of northern India close to the normal date of July 1 despite a week's delay in its onset in Kerala.

NEW DELHI: Monsoon rains have covered Delhi, Punjab and Haryana along with western Uttar Pradesh, according to the weather office. The monsoon has reached most parts of northern India close to the normal date of July 1 despite a week's delay in its onset in Kerala.

The crucial weather system has intensified in the past two weeks, helping farmers plant kharif crops. With the arrival of the monsoon, rainfall is forecast to be higher than normal in northern India for the next week or so.



Monsoon catches up, bolsters rice, pulses 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.

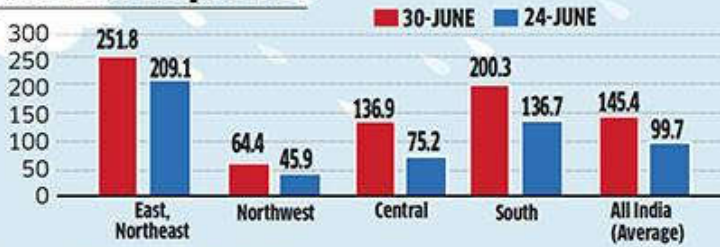
The surge in rainfall in the past 10 days has narrowed the season's rainfall shortfall to 11% from a worrying deficit of 25% in the middle of June. This is expected to fill up water reservoirs, which are still at a very low level.

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.

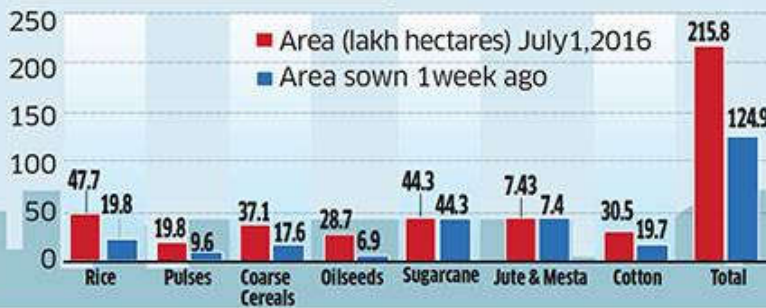
Right On Track

The monsoon has rapidly picked up pace in the past two weeks, reducing the season's rainfall deficit to 11% from a worrying deficit of 25% barely two weeks ago. The rapid strengthening of the monsoon has helped farmers accelerate crop planting, particularly for paddy and pulses. Water reservoirs, however, have still not started filling up so far, although they are expected to have more water from next week.

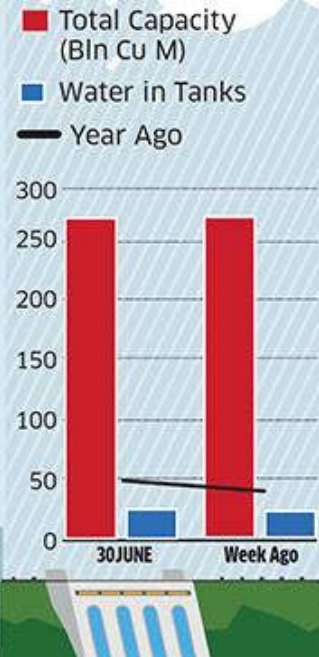
Rainfall Improves



Crop Planting Jumps



Water Level in Reservoirs Still Low



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.