

19.07.2016

THE HINDU

Farmers look for more clarity in new crop insurance scheme

While welcoming the State Government's decision to implement the new crop insurance scheme: Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, farmers in the district say there was a need for more clarity.

Though the new scheme promises calculation of loss at the village level and not at the firka level, the demand of farmers has been for assessment at the level of individual cultivator.

Loss

“The loss is not uniform in an entire village in the event of excessive rain or gale. Also, Agricultural Extension Officer and Revenue Department official who assess the loss do not take into account the entire amount spent for the crop. Such shortcomings need to be addressed,” Logusamy, organising secretary of the district unit of Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam said.

Under the scheme, farmers have to uniformly pay two per cent for kharif crops, 1.5 per cent for all rabi crops, and five per cent in case of annual commercial and horticultural crops.

The balance premium will be paid by the government to provide full insured amount to farmers against crop loss on account of natural calamities. Capping of premium rate has been removed to facilitate farmers to get claim against full sum insured without any reduction.

Plus point

Farmers say the mandatory use of technology under the new scheme for quicker settlement of claims was a vital plus point.

Seed festival seeks to spread millet cultivation

3.5 tonnes of seeds of millets distributed to farmers free of cost

Seeking to popularise millet cultivation and create awareness of the benefits of the fibre-rich nutritious cereal crops, 'Pasumai Vikatan' and Dharani Agro Research and Rural Empowerment (DARE) Foundation have jointly organised a seed festival and distributed free seeds to farmers.

More than 300 farmers from various districts of the State participated in the festival held at an integrated farm at Ettivayal, developed by Dharani Murugesan, a progressive farmer and founder of DARE Foundation. Addressing the festival, Collector S. Natarajan exhorted the farmers to go back to millet cultivation, which was not only cost-effective but was ideally suited for arid districts like Ramanathapuram.

The cereal crops consumed less water and required no fertilisation, he said.

Pointing out that the farmers had almost given up millet cultivation and totally resorted to paddy cultivation, he said farmers could evince interest in raising minor millets, which were rich in dietary fibre and nutritious.

Of late, millets had emerged as the highly preferred stable food by health-conscious people, he said.

He said the agriculture department had a stock of about 6,000 kg of millets, including sorgam (cholam), samai (little millet), varagu (kodo millet) and kudiraivali (banyard millet) in the district, and the farmers could get the seeds and take up millet cultivation.

The climatic and soil conditions would help the farmers in reaping a good harvest.

Presently, millets were cultivated only on about 6,500 hectares of the 1.98 lakh hectares of cultivable land in the district, the Collector said.

Mr. Dharani Murugesan distributed 3.5 tonnes of seeds of millets to the farmers free of cost at the festival. He also proposed to distribute seeds of at least half a dozen traditional paddy varieties such as 'Seeraga samba', 'Mappillai samba' 'Mysore malli' and 'Author kichadi'.

V. Meenakshi, Assistant Professor at Home Science College and Research Institute in Madurai, a constituent college of Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, informed the farmers of de-huller and de-stoning facilities available in all the districts to market quality millets.

Nirmala Kumari from 'Millets Magathuva Maiyam' and V.S. Vellaichamy, PA to Collector (Agriculture), explained the cultivation process of millets and the benefits of value addition.

Scripting a success story with polyhouse method



Achievers: The Phulekar couple inside the polyhouse in their farm. —Photo: Gopichand T.

Amarnath Phulekar from Islampur village in Bidar district has tasted success by growing vegetables in a polyhouse built in his farm.

He has built a polyhouse on a one-acre plot. Mr. Phulekar scouted for a potent market for the red and yellow capsicum that he grows in this unit. He met a vegetable wholesaler in Pune and sold him his stock for an encouraging price of Rs. 100 per kg.

The polyhouse is drip irrigated and has foggers to maintain steady temperature in summer. Fertilizer and insecticides are mostly fed through the drip irrigation channels. The one-acre farm has a team of eight labourers working in two shifts, irrigating the beds, strengthening the plants with sticks and wires and checking

for signs of pest or insect attack. “Vegetables in a polyhouse are like babies in intensive care units. They need constant care,” says Mr. Phulekar.

He plans to produce at least 25 tonnes of the high value vegetable in one year, at an estimated 60 per cent yield and continue selling it at these rates. “If we earn around 25 lakh per year, and spend around 30 per cent of it on cost of cultivation, we can repay the Rs. 40 lakh bank loan and achieve break even in two years,” Mr. Phulekar said. He got a 90 per cent subsidy for building the polyhouse from the Department of Horticulture under the National Horticulture Mission scheme. Mr. Phulekar’s one-acre polyhouse is the biggest project in the district. “We are also promoting 20 other, albeit smaller polyhouses,” says S.M. Baragimath, Deputy Director of Horticulture. The scheme provides 90 per cent subsidy to farmers from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 50 per cent to others.

Mr. Phulekar is a diligent farmer who knows his numbers well. He says the most important principle is to reinvest money obtained from farming into improving crop cultivation practices. “Several times, farmers tend to take out money from farming and use it on family expenses. Such reduced investment cycles will not help farmers,” he says.

Mr. Phulekar plans to put solar panels on the top of an open tank meant to collect from borewells. He is buying hybrid and native breed of cows and buffaloes to set up a mini dairy on his farm. “We will use the slurry as an input for our ‘gobar’ gas plant,” Mr. Phulekar said.

Five years ago, he successfully cultivated bananas on his 20-acre plot and profited from it by ensuring that he got weekly and monthly harvests of various types. What is important, he shares his knowledge of agriculture and advanced farming methods with young farmers who visit his field. He also visits farm fairs organised by agriculture universities and colleges and organises field studies on his farm.

The polyhouse is drip irrigated and has foggers to maintain steady temperature in summer

Apple cultivation supports over 1.7 lakh families: H.P. govt



The government is providing seeds of high yielding varieties and better marketing infrastructure to the growers.

Apple cultivation in Himachal Pradesh has become the mainstay of over 1.7 lakh families in the State as the orchards now cover 1,09,533 hectares, around 49 per cent of the total area under fruit cultivation.

The area under apple cultivation was meager 40 hectares in 1950-51 and 3,025 hectares in 1960-61 but today it counts for 49 per cent of total area under fruit production and 85 per cent of total horticulture produce which has touched 8.19 lakh at present, an official spokesperson said.

The diverse agro-climatic conditions, topographical variations, altitudinal differences coupled with fertile, deep and well drained soils favoured cultivation of temperate to subtropical fruits in the State.

“With sustained efforts of the government, the area under fruit cultivation has increased from 792 hectares in 1950-51 to 2.25 lakh hectares and apple was main crop grown in Shimla, Kullu, Kinnaur, Mandi, Chamba and Sirmour districts and now, even in the tribal Lahaul-Spiti district, people are taking to apple plantation on a large scale.

“Rs 3,500 crore apple economy of the State was not only its backbone but also involved thousands of stakeholders such as transporters, carton manufacturers,

Controlled Atmosphere Store/Cold Chain owners, wholesale fruit dealers, fruit processing unit owners etc. from other states,” the spokesman said.

Apple cultivation is providing gainful employment to millions of people of the region and the living standards of people has improved enormously and the government was providing high yielding varieties of apple and better marketing infrastructure to the growers, he said.

In order to safeguard the interests of the growers against adverse climatic conditions, the state government has introduced several schemes like weather-based Crop Insurance Scheme for protecting the crops of horticulturists from natural vagaries.

A World Bank funded horticulture development project is also being implemented in the State with an outlay of Rs 1,115 crore.

The project spread over a period of seven years would focus on providing new technologies to the horticulturists for increasing their crop productivity and capacities.

To protect fruit crops, especially apple from hailstorm, the government has enhanced the subsidy on anti-hailnets to 80 per cent, the spokesman said. Further, in order to provide better marketing facilities to the farmers, ten market yards and collection centres had been made operational during past 43 months by incurring an expenditure of Rs 27.45 crore, he added. - PTI

Narayanpur reservoir almost full following heavy inflow



Nearly there: The water level in Narayanpur reservoir, in Surpur taluk of Yadgir district, was 491.670 m against the FRL of 492.25 m, at 4.30 p.m. on Monday.— Photo: Ravikumar Naraboli

Following heavy inflow from Almatti dam in Bagalkot district, the Narayanpur reservoir, built across the Krishna in Surpur taluk, was just 0.6 m short of its full reservoir limit (FRL) on Monday evening.

Officials of Krishna Bhagya Jala Nigama Limited (KBJNL), who started releasing heavy amounts of water, sounded the alert advising the Krishna basin villagers not to venture into the river.

According to sources, the water-level in the reservoir at 4.30 p.m. on Monday was 491.670 m against the FRL of 492.25 m.

Meanwhile, there was heavy inflow into the reservoir from Almatti as water was flowing in at the rate of around 1.25 lakh cusecs.

“Water was released from the reservoir at the rate of 25,000 cusecs till 4.30 p.m. on Monday. It will be increased up to one lakh cusecs by night,” Tata Shivan, Executive Engineer of the reservoir, told *The Hindu* on the phone.

Mr. Shivan warned the Krishna basin villagers not to venture into the river until there was some respite from the flowing water.

Rain brings relief

Some parts in the district experienced a good spell of rain from Sunday morning to Monday morning. Farmers, who, owing to moisture shortage, were worried about the withering green gram crop, got some relief by the rain.

According to sources, Hattikuni village recorded the highest rainfall of 16 mm.

Yadgir recorded 3.2 mm rainfall followed by 4 mm in Narayanpur, 2.6 mm in Kodekal and one mm in Gurmitkal.

Seminar for tapioca growers

A seminar for tapioca growers, extension functionaries and stakeholders will be held at Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Sandhiyur on July 21.

A press release from programme coordinator N. Sriram said that the KVK in association with ICAR – Central Tuber Crops Research Institute, Thiruvanthapuram, is conducting the seminar for the growers. A mini-agric exhibition, seminar, demonstrations, presentation and interaction will be part of the seminar. Interested should register with the programme coordinator, KVK at 0427-2422550.

Speed up transferring of agri-tech to land from lab: Agri Min



Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister, Radha Mohan Singh has urged to transfer technologies from the lab to the grassroots level in an effort to double farmers' income. File Photo: Nagara Gopal

He also said allied activities like poultry, fishery and dairy will be the focus area for supplementing the farm income.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh called upon farm scientists to speed up efforts to transfer technologies from the lab to the grassroots level in an effort to double farmers' income in the next five years.

Addressing the 88th Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Singh said, "Our government has targeted doubling farmers' income by 2022. We will focus on not only agriculture but allied sectors to achieve this goal."

Stating that integrated farming is the solution for raising farmers' income, the minister said the government will promote this in 101 ICAR institutes spread across the country and showcase farmers its benefits.

“A family can save up to Rs 3 lakh a year by doing integrated farming,” he said.

Emphasising on the role of technology in raising the farm output, the minister said, “We have to speed up efforts to transfer the technology from lab to land. I urge all scientists and institutes to focus on this and ensure marketing of new products in a big way.”

He also said allied activities like poultry, fishery and dairy will be the focus area for supplementing the farm income.

Three ministers of state for agriculture Parshottam Rupala, S S Ahluwalia and Sudarshan Bhagat, and ICAR Director General Trilochan Mohapatra were present.

These ministers also gave away 2016 ICAR awards in 19 categories to 119 scientists, farmers and journalists.

It may be noted that the award ceremony saw some lack of staff coordination and preparedness, with officials scrambling to find the recipients concerned for their awards



You always have to balance inflation, growth. It has to be done by institutions including RBI: Arun Jaitley

Arun Jaitley was Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha between 2009 and 2014, where he led the BJP's charge against the UPA-II government.



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his office at North Block last week. (Express Photo: Neeraj Priyadarshi)

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was Minister for Commerce and Industry and Law and Justice in the cabinet of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He has, at other times in his career, held charge of the Ministries of Defence, Information and Broadcasting, Disinvestment and Shipping. He was Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha between 2009 and 2014, where he led the BJP's charge against the UPA-II government. He has witnessed the development of the reforms process closely, and is uniquely placed to compare the policies of the two NDA governments on a range of issues.

This is part II of the interview.

For the last 20 years, (CPM leader) Prakash Karat has been saying that there is no qualitative, substantial difference between the economic policies of the BJP and the Congress, particularly on reforms. What is your view? What is the qualitative difference, and the fundamental difference?

I think reforms are extremely important to push up growth rates and, therefore, make sure that you distribute more resources for the benefit of the poor. Poverty alleviation schemes can be sustained by a growing economy, not by a deficit economy. I think the Congress's Rao-Manmohan Singh combination took positive, important steps in 1991, but thereafter the Congress has been always

apologetic. The Congress, I would say, has had a confused identity. Now, to just drive off the point against the Left argument. Almost every large state in India today — I am not talking of the Hill and Northeast states — has become a revenue-surplus state. So, its ability to spend for social justice is much more. There are only three revenue-deficit states in India. Andhra, because of the bifurcation, which will soon become a positive state, and the other two states which are still revenue-deficit are West Bengal and Kerala.



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his office at North Block last week. (Express Photo: Neeraj Priyadarshi)

So, now in 2016, what do reforms signify to you? As you have said, the days of big-bang reforms are over...

Dekhiye mujhe jo reforms signify karta hai, if I look ahead, what will be the natural course over the next one to two decades: global quality infrastructure, more urbanisation, better facilities in rural areas, much larger reduction in poverty rates, underemployed people from agriculture moving to manufacturing and services, and share of manufacturing going up, India trying to occupy the space which could be vacated by China in manufacturing. The real meaning of reforms would be to generate greater wealth and distribute it. Not merely the model from 1947-91, which was, ‘don’t concentrate on increased productivity, just concentrate on redistribution of resources’.

P Chidambaram, in an interview which was part of this series, when asked about reforms under you in the last two years, said, ‘show me one policy paper, only then can I comment’. So, the allegation is that you haven’t come out with the imprint of your or the NDA’s policy on reforms.

I think there could be stronger grounds for criticism. Look at the steps we have taken and compare [them] with the steps taken from 2004 to 2014.

In the same interview, Chidambaram said you were actually continuing povertarianism. The criticism was that after this “suit-boot ki sarkar” jibe, you have become very conscious, and in every interview, Arun Jaitley, and even Prime Minister Modi, speak about inclusion, Jan Dhan, Mudra.

That is the right policy. You see, it is only when you grow faster that you eradicate poverty. Growth is the best antidote to poverty. So, obviously our interest in reforms and higher growth is to remove poverty. I think he (Chidambaram) has understood us correctly.

We have been, in the last two years, passing through a very critical phase. Critical because the global situation is obstructive, not supportive. When the world grows, everybody grows. 2003-09 were positive years of global growth. So, along with the global trend, demand increases, everybody moves up. 2014 onwards, we have been obstructed by global winds. Secondly, we had an inadequate monsoon.

Thirdly, the UPA left behind a legacy of large NPAs and a stressed private sector. Positive in our favour was oil prices, as against these three drawbacks. Now, the first [achievement] was not to get into the global trend, and therefore, these have been the only two years in India’s history — and hopefully there will be more — where we will be the fastest growing economy in the world. And fastest in an adverse environment. Second, this growth is coming on the strength of three factors. Enhanced public investment, foreign direct investment and increased urban demand.

Hopefully, this year’s monsoon will add rural demand to it. Now, these collectively may bring some activism into the private sector in many segments. We are independently trying to tackle the banking issues. Therefore, both at the

level of areas where the economy grows, jobs are created, and also schemes like Mudra have encouraged a huge amount of self-generated employment.

One of the biggest worries is that automation could have an impact on growth, and that robotics, artificial engineering, will impact the manufacturing sector. China is the biggest buyer of robotics.

Automation and technology, it is being argued, will eat into jobs. I think before we jump into that era, it will take some time.

On banking reforms, the criticism is that the pace has been slow.

A huge banking reform is taking place in India right now. The 1969 change had left banks predominantly nationalised. Today, as we look at 2016, you have private sector banks in very large numbers. [They are] growing and [their] performance index is very high.

You have a very large Internet banking [network]. You have payment gateways now. You have these small bank licences, newer licences, which have been given. And therefore, a large part of India's banking has now already travelled beyond those nationalised banks. Even the nationalised banks have now learnt a lesson that they will have to be competitive in addition to their social obligations. Now, this low-cost financial inclusion, the whole world is surprised how we did it. A lot of credit goes to the nationalised banks for this.

Insurance, now you will find your consumer industry demands housing, etc. Banking is needed to support growth. What unfortunately has happened is that a few sectors got stressed because of the global slowdown. Power, steel, and even sugar was stressed in India. Now gradually, the stress is going away in some sectors and the government has played a proactive role there. UPA did not take even one step to remove banking stress. All of this was done by us in the last two years. Be it minimum import price for steel, or the Uday scheme for power. We revived highways. We are launching as many infrastructure projects as we can.

Now, for public sector banks, on the one hand you have to inject capital and on the other, remove factors that cause stress. And this whole policy of merger —

smaller banks merging into larger banks. So there is a huge amount of banking reform which is taking place in India. It is not necessary that every reform has to be confrontationist in nature.

Do you believe in the theory that inflation has to be kept in check all the time?

You always have to balance inflation and growth. You will always need to do that. So if India has a very high rate of inflation, the cost to the common man increases. And thereafter, the rates themselves will go up, because money supply will have to be curtailed, and then that will impact on growth. So the balancing act has to be done by various institutions, including the RBI.

In NDA-I, of which you were a member, a Bill seeking to lower the government's stake to 33 per cent in public sector banks was sought to be introduced. Is privatisation of banks as an option being thought of?

The banking space is completely altered. You have foreign banks, you have private sector banks, you have government banks, you have payment gateways. You have so many options that some of the debatable issues are going into the background. Like the whole debate on nationalisation — good or bad — by the subsequent changes has been overtaken.

Aren't you turning the clock back actually, looking at the decision of the cabinet to revive public sector fertiliser units? Also, the clampdown on hoarding, and some of the other steps that are seen as anti-reform?

You see, you have tried to even make sure that some private parties can enter into those units. After all, you have to be to the extent that the units are there as an asset, their asset is to function. And if there is no private sector coming up at the moment, what do you do?

Do you think that Public Private Partnership or PPP is the way to go?

In infrastructure, the PPP model has to be encouraged. Because in infrastructure, government has to partially or substantially lead the way. There is a very strange dichotomy in the public-private relationship. Ordinarily, the

private sector should lead the economy. But when there is stress, they want the government to take the first step.

Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh left behind a legacy. What is the legacy that you see Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley as leaving behind?

That is something that people will judge.

There has been criticism regarding the decline of institutions and the quality of people manning institutions now. Particularly so after the lead-up to the exit of the RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan. How do you see the relationship between the government and the central bank evolving in this context?

I don't think the government and the RBI have ever had a problem in their relationship. At least that has now been my experience in the last two years. We had a very cordial relationship as far as the two institutions are concerned.

Many people think that Governor Rajan's exit could have been handled better.

I have already said what I had to say on the subject.

Apart from that, how do you see the quality of other institutions?

As far as the financial sector is concerned, we have, if anything, significantly improved the quality of institutions. Now, the banking sector completely... the kind of insistence on the quality of CEOs, the selection process they are going through, the eligibility we have put for having members of the boards, making boards more accountable, there is a significant improvement. In other institutions, there is a problem. There is an issue, I would say. In some of them, there was an erroneous impression that only some Left intellectuals would completely dominate those institutions. The world has changed, and they have to accept that.

There is a feeling that the RSS has a certain view on how economic reforms should be pursued. Do you think they are having an impact on your decision-making? Because they are very vocal about it.

There are various sections of people whom we consult for their views on a subject, but ultimately we decide what is in the best interest of the economy.

You were also Minister in charge of Divestment in the past. The current policy seems to be one of incrementalism rather than privatisation like in NDA-I?

There are two things there. In the last two years, there has been turmoil in the markets. Earlier, a lot of commodity stocks were not doing well. There was no point privatising or divesting some of those things. Now we have asked NITI Aayog to make a list of things that should be privatised. They have done it. It's a part of the agenda. Today we have all the four options. We have divestment, we have privatisation, we have buybacks, we even have asset sales. Don't forget one factor, that we are not allowing any needless controversies in divestment. But we are going ahead with the plan.

What are your thoughts on the GST Bill? Will it happen?

GST was initially proposed by the Congress party in one of Finance Minister P Chidambaram's Budget speeches. Thereafter, Mr Pranab Mukherjee introduced the Bill. They could not build consensus among the states. With some changes in the law, we have been able to bring about a consensus among the states. Almost all states are now supporting it. Virtually every political party is now supporting it. And the numbers in the Rajya Sabha are stacked in favour of the GST. We are in a position to have even the subsequent laws cleared, two of them by Parliament and one by the state legislatures. The Congress has raised some issues, and I have already made the government's stand clear. I am in discussions with them, and I hope the Congress party takes a reasonable position.

IITM workshop on climate change begins today

Advanced School on Earth System modelling to be inaugurated, discussion by MoES secy M Rajeevan.



Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) and the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP, Trieste, Italy) are jointly organising an Advanced School on Earth System Modelling (ESM) programme on July 18, followed by a Workshop on Climate Change and Regional Impact over South Asia on July 28-29, at IITM.

The programme will be inaugurated by the Secretary of Ministry of Earth Sciences, Dr M Rajeevan.

IITM is a research centre of tropical meteorology, regional and global monsoon systems, ocean-atmosphere coupled climate system, physical meteorology and oceanography, atmospheric chemistry and science of climate change.

It is actively involved in modelling, simulation and prediction of global climate and regional monsoons on different time-scales, using fully coupled climate models.

The advanced school on Earth system modelling, the newly developed IITM Earth System Model (IITM ESM) will be the focus of the school and used during the practical sessions. The IITM ESM is expected to contribute climate simulations and projections for the forthcoming Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change Assessment Report 6 (IPCC AR6).

The programme will consist of forenoon sessions with key lectures delivered by experts on fundamental topics in climate science and afternoon sessions devoted to practical training with the IITM ESM.

A workshop will be held on climate change and regional impacts over South Asia climate variability and significant influence on society and natural environments, with consequent impacts on agriculture, water-resources, health, terrestrial and marine ecosystem, energy, industry and various sectors.

There are major uncertainties in understanding climate change and its impacts at regional levels.

The broad objectives of the workshop are to provide an overview of the regional aspects of climate change and impact assessments in the South Asian context, deliberate on gap areas and propose directions for future research work.

Reforms mean empowerment of poor. We have most successful financial inclusion programme: Arun Jaitley

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has witnessed the development of the reforms process closely, and is uniquely placed to compare the policies of the two NDA governments on a range of issues.



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the Indian Express newsroom in New Delhi.
File/ Express Photo/Tashi Tobgyal

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was Minister for Commerce and Industry and Law and Justice in the cabinet of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He has, at other times in his career, held charge of the Ministries of Defence, Information and Broadcasting, Disinvestment and Shipping. He was Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha between 2009 and 2014, where he led the BJP's charge against the UPA-II government. He has witnessed the development of the reforms process closely, and is uniquely placed to compare the policies of the two NDA governments on a range of issues.

25 years after the reforms programme in 1991, how do you look back at events of the time and handling of the BoP crisis?

The challenges from 1947 to 1991 were entirely a Congress creation. One can understand that in the initial years there was a lack of resources, but I am one of those who believes that the '70s and '80s could have been a period of some economic opportunities, but turned out to be wasted decades.

The Congress concentrated on populist slogans and redistribution of existing resources rather than increasing the quantum of resources.

The regulatory mechanism, state controls, preventing private sector energies, was actively supported by the Left. There was also an element of crony capitalism in-built in the licensing regime. Don't allow capital, don't allow too many players in a sector. Take automobiles for example — it was, 'let the people learn to live in an era of shortages', this was the Congress track record from 1947 to 1991.

So what was the situation like in 1991, when the big crisis hit? The way you assess it now?

I think in '91, we were confronted with three basic facts. This Left and regulatory thought had all rejected the applicability of the growth of many Asian economies: Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan.

These are low-population countries, and their model doesn't apply to India. But China had started turning around after rejecting that entire idea which they represented. The buzzword was increasingly going to be — which it did indeed become — that if China can do it, why can't India, because in terms of population, poverty levels, we were closer to them.

The second [fact was that] compared to the rest of the world, India looked exceptionally bad at that time.

The third was the immediate crisis of 1991, the foreign exchange. I think it goes to the credit of the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh combination that they seized this opportunity, not because of the Congress, but in spite of the Congress.

And therefore, when Dr Manmohan Singh says that at times he felt almost isolated, we must respect his word. I think what they really did was taking steps of integrating India with the rest of the world, de-licensing, opening up opportunities for the private sector, permitting people to get raw material from outside, easing of imports, trade barriers being reduced, taxation being brought down, currency being devalued to make it more realistic.

And I think after the initial reforms, Congressism struck back at them. That is what establishes that this was more on account of in spite of the Congress, than because of the Congress. The Congress almost had a guilt complex about what the Rao-Singh combination was doing. I think when it carried over to the United Front (government) the most significant forward movement that took place was further tax rationalisation. That was in the [Chidambaram](#) Budget. That was one more step forward.

Govt has already provided Rs 7,000 crore help to farmers: CM Fadnavis

The funds, coupled with a good monsoon this year, have lead to 80 per cent completion of sowing in the kharif season.

Farmers struggling with drought in the state have already received Rs 7,000 crore in aid from the government, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday. Of the total Rs 4,000 crore set aside for crop losses, Rs 3,500 crore has reached the farmers, the CM said. Similarly, from the Rs 4,200 crore for crop insurance, farmers have received Rs 3,500 crore. The funds, coupled with a good monsoon this year, have lead to 80 per cent completion of sowing in the kharif season, he added.

While stating that farmers have increased the sowing of cereals, specially tur dal, Fadnavis said, “We have proposed a price control policy. I have discussed the proposal with Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan in Delhi. To ensure a check on price hike, we have ensured that the maximum price of tur dal cannot exceed Rs 120 per kg.”

While outlining the progress in his government’s flagship project Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan, the CM said, “The results of the first phase are excellent across 6,000 villages covered. The project will be extended to 5,000 more villages in the second phase.”

Ahead of the monsoon session in which the government is likely to face heat over corruption charges against senior ministers, Fadnavis said there would be no room for compromise on corruption.

“My government is committed to zero tolerance on corruption. There is no question of engaging in any cover-up for any individual in the the government. However, the Opposition should also display responsibility and not make unfounded allegations.”

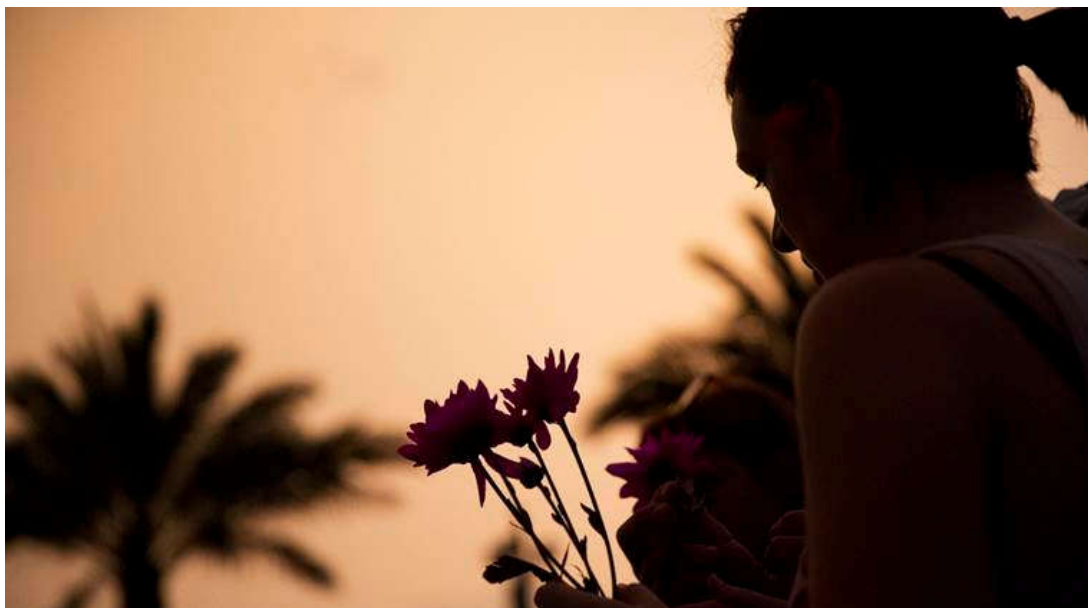
Responding to a question on allegations against women and child development minister Pankaja Munde on the Take Home Ration scheme, Fadnavis said, “The high court order has been referred to the legal department. The court has not objected to the norms and conditions. It has questioned the eligibility criteria and called for a survey. We will put our points in the court.”

The government has decided to bring in 10 new bills, including the controversial amendments in the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC).

Responding to question related to his interaction with minister Pankaja’s Munde on Twitter, Fadnavis quipped, “We well know how to use Twitter.”

There’s more to plant’s flower arrangement than meets the eye

Researchers expect that this likely has an impact for how plants reproduce and they suggest that plants have evolved over time to take advantage of it.



The findings are helping to aid scientists' understanding of how plants can control how their pollen is spread by foraging insects. (Source: AP File Photo)

They may seem to have no other option than to rely entirely on insects, but it turns out, plants have been controlling their reproduction all along!

According to a recent study, plants can maximise their chances of reproduction by taking advantage of how insects move between flowers when they track down nectar.

Scientists from the University of Edinburgh and the University of Calgary found that the way in which plants arrange their flowers affects the flight patterns taken by foraging bees.

Researchers expect that this likely has an impact for how plants reproduce and they suggest that plants have evolved over time to take advantage of it.

Scientists studied the flights of bumble bees as they collected nectar from wild tall larkspur flowers and found that when the plants' flowers were present on only one side of the stem, bees would more often fly vertically between flowers.

By comparison, when a plant had flowers all around its stem, bees would be less likely to fly upwards.

The findings are helping to aid scientists' understanding of how plants can control how their pollen is spread by foraging insects.

They could also inform the development of plant crops with high yields, by enabling scientists to understand how plants can transfer pollen most efficiently. The results may also help explain why about half of all flowering plants produce flowers that can have female or male characteristics at different times. These arrangements may maximise the plants' chances of reproduction.

Lead author Dr Crispin Jordan said: "Plants and their flowers exist in all shapes and sizes, and our finding that the arrangement of flowers can influence how bees forage might go some way to explaining how plants, which rely on other species to spread pollen, can influence their own reproduction."

The study is published in the journal Annals of Botany.

hindustantimes

Financial inclusion necessary for sustainable growth, says Rajan



RBI governor Raghuram Rajan at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj in Hyderabad on Monday. (PTI)

Pitching for financial inclusion, Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan on Monday said the central bank is trying to make it attractive for institutions to offer banking services to everyone, as it is a necessary building block for sustainable growth.

Observing that bankers usually focus on large borrowers with bottomline in mind, the governor said Aadhaar-enabled payment system will go a long way in taking financial services to the underserved.

“After all, should we not give everyone access to the (banking) services we all in this room enjoy?” Rajan said in an interactive session at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.

Stating that imperative for financial inclusion is both, moral as well as one based on economic efficiency, Rajan said if everyone had the tools and resources to better themselves, it would increase output, growth and economic prosperity.

“In the foreseeable future, we will bring formal financial services to every Indian who wants them. Financial inclusion will be an important element in ensuring access and equity - the necessary building blocks for sustainable growth of our country,” he said.

The country has come a long way in the process of financial inclusion, Rajan said, but “still has a way to go”.

“We are steadily moving from mandates, subsidies and reliance on public sector banks for inclusion to creating enabling frameworks that make it attractive for all financial institutions to target the excluded, even while the interests of the excluded are protected through education, competition and regulation,” Rajan added.

Easy payments and cash out would make formal savings more attractive and strengthening the network of banking correspondents, creating a registry of banking correspondents, giving them the ability to take and give cash on behalf of any bank through Aadhaar-enabled payment system would go a long way in reaching financial services to the underserved.

“With expanding cash-in, cash-out points through soon-to- be-launched postal payment bank and telecom affiliated payment banks and making transfers from bank account to bank account easier via mobile through the unified payment interface, we are on the verge of solving the last mile problem,” Rajan said.

Rajan explained economic impediments to greater financial inclusion through the acronym IIT -- information, incentives, and transaction costs.

He said, the banker, especially if he is not from that region, will have difficulty in getting sufficient information to offer financial products to the excluded.

Also, the lender may also not have incentives to lend to the excluded as the legal system does not enforce repayment quickly or cheaply and the borrower does not have any collateral to pledge, he added.

The third impediment, Rajan outlined, was transaction costs. Since the size of transactions by the poor, or by micro farmers or enterprises is small, fixed costs in transacting are relatively high.

“If the time and cost involved in filling up a form and documentation for a client, for instance, is the same for a loan of say Rs 10,000 and Rs 10 lakh, a banker who is conscious of the bottomline would naturally focus on the large client,” Rajan said.

The governor focused on three elements of financial inclusion -- broadening of financial services to those people and enterprises who do not have access to financial services, deepening of financial services and greater financial literacy and consumer protection.

“One of the primary motivations for the country to push financial inclusion is to free the excluded from the clutches of the moneylender,” Rajan said.

A moneylender does not suffer any of the impediments faced by banks in extending credit to underserved, he said as he proposed three public policy approaches to overcome this -- mandates and subventions, transforming institutions, and moving away from credit.

Mandates, Rajan said, are reasonable from a societal perspective, but the banks cannot monetise this benefit, only a government can decide to mandate them.

There are risks emanating from mandates, he said, adding “narrow targeting of mandates to the truly underserved and explicit payment for fulfilling the mandate are necessary so that they are delivered by the most efficient.”

Another approach, he said, could be transforming institutions. He said local financial institutions, with local control and staffed by knowledgeable local people, could be more effective at providing financial services.

The third approach, Rajan said, could be to let credit follow not lead. The government and RBI are doing this by encouraging easing of payments and remittances, on expanding remunerative savings vehicles, or on providing easy-to-obtain insurance against crop failures, he said.

“Savings habit, once inculcated, not only allows the customer to handle the burden of repayment better, it may also lead to better credit allocation,” Rajan said.

He also outlined five issues that arise in managing the process and the RBI was trying to simplify those -- know your customer requirements, encouraging competition to prevent exploitation, ensuring some flexibility and forgiveness in financial arrangements, the need for skilling, encouraging financial literacy and ensuring consumer protection.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Kharif oilseeds sowing up, but imports set to touch new high

Surging vegoil imports	
<i>(in million tonnes)</i>	
2015-16 (Nov-May)	8.59
2014-15 (Nov-Oct)	14.61
2013-14 (Nov-Oct)	11.81
2012-13 (Nov-Oct)	10.68
2011-12 (Nov-Oct)	10.19

On firm ground*		
(in lakh hectares)		
	This Year	Last Year
Ground Nut	27.93	24.33
Soyabean	95.62	95.66
Sunflower	1.04	0.46
Sesamum	4.94	5.76
Nigerseed	0.2	0.19
Castorseed	0.4	0.74
Total Oilseeds	130.12	127.13

*Oilseeds acreage as on July 15

Even as the ongoing kharif sowing trends indicate farmers' growing preference to plant oilseeds, industry experts foresee India's vegetable oil imports touching a new record in the current oil year ending October on rising consumption and a bearish trend in global prices.

Higher prices of oilseeds such as groundnut, soyabean, sesamum and sunflower last year have prompted farmers in the key growing States such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and parts of northern India to turn to oilseeds from other crops such as cotton.

The kharif sowing of oilseeds has risen by about three lakh hectares to 13.01 million hectares from last year's 12.73 million.

Higher consumption

But the higher acreage is not expected to help bring down imports. "Just as the oilseed acreage is rising, we see edible oil consumption also rising in the country. Therefore, even if acreage goes up, it will not reduce imports. We expect imports to remain high even in the coming year," said Ashok Sethia, an edible oil expert from West Bengal.

The apex oil traders' body, Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), too, has given an indication of edible oil imports touching a record high this year. "There will not be any influence of kharif sowing on edible oil imports. Last year we had imported around 14.4 million tonnes of edible oils; this year it is likely to touch 16 million tonnes," said BV Mehta, Executive Director, SEA.

According to trade estimates, India's per capita consumption of edible oils stands at around 14.4 kg per year. However, this consumption has been steadily increasing in the past few years on the increase in population and rising income levels.

Total availability of edible oils in 2014-15 was put at close to 23 million tonnes, of which around 13 million tonnes was imports, while about 9 million tonnes is domestic supplies.

Price realisations

Higher acreage of oilseeds is further attributed to higher price realisation of oilseeds last year. Also, other competing kharif crops such as cotton are facing pest attacks and lower price realisation for farmers.

"Last year, the oilseeds crop was less, therefore prices ruled higher. This prompted farmers to take up oilseeds this kharif over other crops such as cotton," said Sethia, adding that soyabean would be preferred among all other oilseeds as the crop had attractive prices last year.

Notably, groundnut sowing has seen a sharp surge this year as its area has increased from 2.43 million hectares last year to 2.79 million hectares so far this year. Soybean area has remained almost flat at 9.56 million hectares as against last year.

"The rain pattern is such that oilseeds are more preferred over other crops. We expect soyabean acreage to increase because this crop requires less water. Also, soyabean being short-duration crop, farmers can take three crops on the field," said Biren Vakil, a noted commodity expert based in Ahmedabad.

Monsoon wallops hills and plains of N-W, N-E India

The belt of heavy rainfall associated with the monsoon has effectively shifted to the foothills of North India, triggering a sustained wet spell in the region and adjoining plains.

It delivered excess rainfall of 3 per cent for the country as a whole as on Monday. Among the four homogenous regions, East and North-East India alone feature a deficit (-18 per cent).

Surplus rain

Elsewhere, it is in surplus over North-West India (+12 per cent); Central India (+16 per cent); and South Peninsula (+3 per cent).

The Met said in an update that the monsoon was ‘vigorous’ over Uttarakhand during the 24 hours ending on Monday morning.

It was only less virulent over Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, East Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, the hills of Gangetic West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

Parts of East India and the East Coast, including Tamil Nadu and Coastal Andhra Pradesh, may also benefit during the next few days in a pattern associated with a weak phase of the monsoon.

On the West Coast, moderate to heavy showers may lash Coastal Karnataka, Kerala and progressively Konkan-Goa during the next four-five days.

Drying phase

A notable feature from July 16 to July 20 is the drying up of large parts of Central India, which have been receiving heavy to very heavy rain during the preceding five days.

Viewed from that aspect, the respite being heralded is welcome though there is a worry if it would last longer than what is considered ideal.

The Met projections depict a scenario where rains dry up from the West Coast and the dry phase over Central India extending to parts of the adjoining plains of North-West India.

Normal rains should return to Peninsular India, West Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir between July 20 and 30, with very heavy rain over East and North-East India.

Apple cultivation supports over 1.7 lakh families in HP

Apple cultivation in Himachal Pradesh has become the mainstay of over 1.7 lakh families as the orchards now cover 1,09,533 hectares, around 49 per cent of the total area under fruit cultivation.

The area under apple cultivation was 40 hectares in 1950-51 and 3,025 hectares in 1960-61 but today, it accounts for 49 per cent of the total area under fruit production and 85 per cent of total horticulture produce which has touched 8.19 lakh at present, an official spokesperson said.

The diverse agro-climatic conditions, topographical variations, altitudinal differences coupled with fertile, deep and well-drained soil favoured cultivation of temperate to subtropical fruits in the state.

“With sustained efforts of the government, the area under fruit cultivation has increased from 792 hectares in 1950-51 to 2.25 lakh hectares and apple is the main crop grown in Shimla, Kullu, Kinnaur, Mandi, Chamba and Sirmour districts and now, even in the tribal Lahaul-Spiti district, people are taking to apple plantation on a large scale.

Many stakeholders

“The 3,500-crore apple economy was not only the State’s backbone but also involved thousands of stakeholders such as transporters, carton manufacturers,

controlled atmosphere store/cold chain owners, wholesale fruit dealers, fruit processing unit owners etc. from other states,” the spokesman said.

Apple cultivation provides gainful employment to millions of people of the region and the living standards of the people have improved enormously and the government was providing high yielding varieties of apple and better marketing infrastructure to the growers, he said.

World Bank assistance

In order to safeguard the interests of the growers against adverse climatic conditions, the state has introduced several schemes like weather-based crop insurance scheme for protecting the crops of horticulturists from natural vagaries.

A World Bank funded horticulture development project is also being implemented in the state with an outlay of 1,115 crore.

The project, spread over a period of seven years, would focus on providing new technologies to the horticulturists for increasing their crop productivity and capacities.

Higher subsidy

To protect fruit crops, especially apple from hailstorm, the government has enhanced the subsidy on anti-hailnets to 80 per cent, the spokesman said.

Further, in order to provide better marketing facilities to the farmers, ten market yards and collection centres had been made operational during past 43 months by incurring an expenditure of 27.45 crore, he added.

India, US agree to enhance cooperation on hydrocarbons, energy



Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan (file pic)

The Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan and US Secretary for Energy Ernest Moniz have agreed to enhance technical and institutional cooperation specific to hydrocarbons and energy.

The two leaders met in Washington D.C. on Monday and agreed to cooperate on the assessment and reassessment of conventional and unconventional hydrocarbon reserves in India, new technologies of biofuel and development of petroleum storage.

“Over the last decade, several areas of interest for cooperation including technology for production from marginal fields, shale structures, developing gas pipeline networks and improving refinery efficiency have been identified. During the meeting yesterday, the two ministers agreed that there is a need for regular meetings of officials and experts from both sides,” an official statement from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said.

Waterbase to set up shrimp hatcheries



Huge potential Of the total marine exports, shrimp accounts for over 60 per cent, generating revenue of \$2.7 billion during FY15.

The Waterbase Limited, manufacturer of high quality shrimp feed, is setting up hatcheries in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, at an investment of 20 crore. It will be operational by the end of March 2017.

The hatchery can produce 500 million post-larvae or seeds per annum and it will be sold to farmers for growth and harvesting.

Ramakanth V Akula, Chief Executive Officer, told *BusinessLine* that the company's decision to set up a hatchery follows the booming shrimp export industry in the country.

Of the total marine exports, shrimp accounts for over 60 per cent, generating revenue of \$2.7 billion during FY15. This gives the seed industry a huge potential for growth.

Akula said, “India’s seed requirement is five billion. Without the presence of organised players, availability of quality seed has become an issue and this gives us an opportunity to grow.”

Capacity expansion

The company is planning to increase its hatchery capacity of 500 million to match the domestic requirement in the coming years. Merger with Pinnae Feeds Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Karam Chand Thapur Group that owns Waterbase, has leveraged Waterbase’s distribution network, and enabled it to expand to Odisha and West Bengal.

Akula said, “We had capacity constraints and hence couldn’t venture into new markets. This merger has increased Waterbase’s capacity to 1.10 lakh tonnes a year, from 35,000 tonnes.”

Feed is the major revenue generator for the 300-crore Waterbase Limited. The industry accounts for about 5,000 crore and the company has a market share of about 7 per cent. Though the industry is growing, Akula feels the US government’s decision to hike anti-dumping duty will affect Indian exporters. Waterbase recently resumed their export operation and exports to the US and Europe.

Akula said, “The industry is growing at CAGR of 25 per cent, but it dropped last year due to fall in farm gate prices. Farmers reduced the area of cultivation resulting in reduced output.”

Incessant rain and outbreak of diseases in FY2016 too played a role in shrimp exports dip. “But this year, we hope the exports to pick up again,” he added.

Coir Board chief calls for wider use of coir wood

Coir Board Chairman CP Radhakrishnan has appealed to the participants of India International Coir Festival (IICF) 2016 to use coir wood and stop cutting of trees.

Coir composite or coir wood is made using coir fibre bonded with thermosetting adhesive, which is a replacement for wood and plywood. The fibre, considered an agro waste can be effectively used in the making of wood.

This wood can be used for making furniture, in structural application and more effectively during disaster times in construction of portable houses and project offices.

Unlike wood, the density of the coir composite can be varied as per requirement. The high lignin content (43 per cent) makes the product more durable, he said and pointed out that tree felling resulted in harming the atmosphere.

“There is therefore an immediate need to use the alternate material apart from wood and this coir composite can supplement wood in all respects,” he explained, highlighting the benefits of putting the coir fibre to effective use.

On a parting note he added that this renewable raw material could be obtained from the coconut tree every 45 {+t} {+h} day, while keeping the tree intact.

Products made from coir caught the attention of the visitors to the fair.

Business Standard

Mobile helping farmers get compensation for wildlife conflict

WildSeve project has been started by Dr Krithi Karanth

Farmers living near two tiger reserves of Karnataka are getting help in filing compensation claims with the help of a new mobile technology based platform, whenever an incident of wildlife conflict takes place these days.

Bangalore-based eminent conservation Scientist Dr Krithi Karanth has come up with 'WildSeve' project in 284 villages surrounding Bandipur and Nagarhole NationalParks, two of country's premier tiger reserves.

Through the user-friendly mobile technology based platform which integrates a toll-free number, farmers can call to report a wildlife conflict incident.

Dr Karanth said in the last year, the team from Wildlife Conservation Society has already helped file claims in 3,261 incidents of crop and property damage by elephants and other herbivores, 148 cases of livestock predation by big cats and wild dogs, 11 cases of injury and two deaths among human victims of the conflict.

Till date, nearly 1,000 families have either received or are about to receive substantial and fair compensation, she said.

After a farmer reports an incident using the toll-free number, motorcycle-borne trained responders, located strategically in the affected areas, rush and assist families in filing compensation claims, completing all due processes including fair assessment of the damage.

They act as intermediaries between people and government agencies, ensuring transparency.

"WildSeve arose from seven years of my research on understanding the complexities of human-wildlife interactions across India and finding that compensation has a role to play in fostering tolerance towards wildlife. It offers a rare opportunity to help people directly affected by conflict in the hope that they will tolerate their losses and not retaliate against wildlife," the conservationist said.

Previous research by Dr Karanth shows that less than one-third of rural families living around India's wildlife reserves received compensation due to losses caused by wildlife.

India's monsoon rains 11% above average in past week

The June-September monsoon has so far delivered 4% higher rainfall than average



Monsoon rains in India were 11 percent above average in the week ended July 13, the weather office said on Thursday.

The June-September monsoon has so far delivered 4% higher rainfall than average.

The monsoon rains covered the entire country on Wednesday, cheering farmers planting crops such as rice, soybeans, cotton and pulses in the summer sowing season that starts in June.

Two straight drought years in India curbed farm output and incomes but the country is set to receive above average rains this year, the weather office said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Onion farmers earn more by selling directly



Nashik: Reeling under the nine-day-old indefinite strike of traders at the APMC markets, onion farmers have started to sell their produce directly to the consumers.

Satana-based farmer Rajesh Ghuge brought 30 quintals of onions to Nashik and sold it near Untawadi at Rs 12 per kg throughout the day.

There are several such farmers, who have turned to consumers directly, selling their produce at moderate rates of Rs 12 per kg. In the retail market, onions are sold in the range of Rs 15 to Rs 20 per kg. While the farmers are getting better prices for their produce, compared to the prices in APMCs, the consumers also get onions at reasonable rates.

Onion traders are on an indefinite strike from July 9 in protest against the government's decision to delist agricultural produce from APMC Act and also levy commission on traders, instead of farmers. This has farmers in a tight spot as they need the money from their produce for kharif sowing. So, they have started selling onions directly to consumers in Nashik, Thane, Mumbai and Palghar.

Rahul Ghuge, an onion farmer from Satana, said, "I have 200 quintals of summer onions in storage. I needed money for kharif sowing and also for buying fertilisers. Finally, I took 30 quintals in a vehicle and came to Nashik city. I packed onions in bags of 10 kg and sold it at Rs 120 per bag. I didn't have to pay any commission to anyone and the transport cost was Rs 1 per kg. I got a better price than the prices I get in the APMCs."

Ghughe added, "I earned Rs 33,000 after reducing the transportation cost of Rs 3,000. Considering the current wholesale prices, I would have earned only Rs 18,000 for 30 quintals of onion at the APMC market."

Ravi Kapadnis, another onion farmer, said: "Earlier, I was worried since I had 450 quintals of onions in storage yards. Finally, I decided to sell onions directly to consumers. In the past four days, I sold 150 quintals of onions at Rs 12 to Rs 13 a kg. I took onions in vehicles through colonies in cities and sold it directly to consumers. Now I realised, how selling directly to consumers is profitable."

Kapadnis added, "I sold onion at Rs 12 per kg in Nashik and Rs 13 per kg in Thane. After cutting expenses, I got Rs 11 per kg and I had to pay no commission. Consumers also got onions cheaper by around Rs 3 per kg."

July rains help farmers cut sowing deficit



Farmers in the state closed the gap in sowing activities by 70% in the first fortnight of July with rains having arrived in strength. In June, sowing in the state was 80% below the level of 2015, but by Monday, only a 10% gap remained.

Till Monday, sowing had been completed over an area of 46.02 lakh hectares in the state. This was 50.75 lakh hectares last year. During kharif season, sowing of various crops takes place over 86.78 lakh hectares in Gujarat.

Marking a major shift in trend, the land sowed for groundnut went up to 12.91 lakh hectares as against 12.24 lakh hectares last year. Meanwhile, cotton was sown only on 17.60 lakh hectares, against the crop's usual sowing area of 28.21 lakh hectares. In case of groundnut, farmers sowed 92% of the average 13.94 lakh hectares cultivated in Gujarat for the crop, while in case of cotton, only 62.41% of land usually sowed has been used until now. Experts, however, believe that these are initial trends. Farmers have been averse to growing cotton after the Union government failed to assure a support price they found acceptable. Against demands of Rs1,000 per 20kg, the Union government declared only Rs800 per 20 kg, said farmers.

This could be one of the reasons farmers shifting their focus to groundnut. Sowing was highest in Saurashtra with 73.34% of the 38.22 lakh hectares cultivated for kharif crops sown by Monday.

Officials said that south and central Gujarat, along with Kutch, have recorded the least sowing activity.

In central Gujarat, sowing has taken place in only 37.78% of the usual sowing area, followed by south Gujarat (39.15%), north Gujarat (41.35%). Kutch has seen the lowest agricultural activity with sowing limited to only 83,100 hectares.

Farmer uses cot to plough three acres



A farmer ploughs his field. Photo)

When farmers in Maharashtra, particularly in Vidarbha and Marathwada, are ending lives due to crop failure and mounting debts, a farmer from Jalgaon district came up with a brilliant idea to fight adversities.

Hailing from a remote Khadki Budruk village, an illiterate Vitthal Mandole had suffered crop loss last year. Mandole, in his 50s, had no money to buy or hire bullocks to plough his land before rains set in. The tide turned when he came up with a way to use his cot as a plough to till his three-acre farm, just in time before the onset of monsoon. He tied blades at the bottom of two of the legs to cut the earth. He placed a boulder on the edge to maintain weight on the legs holding the blades. And the idea actually worked.

Hailing from a family of farm labourers who work on daily wages, Vitthal decided to tread a different path after working for years for others. To ensure better future for his two children — Santosh and Rahul — he took a farm on lease for 25,000 a year about seven years back. But he didn't have the money to buy a pair of bullocks for tilling. So he would get bullocks on lease. All his family members, including wife Sulabha, would work in the field from early morning till dark as they didn't have money to even pay the labourers.

"We would walk for around 2.5km to reach the farm and work throughout the day. We couldn't even afford a bicycle. Also, we couldn't hire farm labourers as they charged 200 per day," Sulabha said.

The situation started worsening after Vitthal's elder son Santosh was diagnosed with serious ailment some years back. He kept falling sick and had to leave studies after Std X. The doctors told his family that Santosh must undergo a major operation which would cost a lot of money. Left with no other alternative, the distressed farmer took 2 lakh loan from a private moneylender at a high interest rate. "The banks declined to give me loan as I didn't have any property to mortgage. But my son's life was more precious than money," he said.

Poor rains and drought-like conditions only added to Vitthal's woes. The interest on the loan kept multiplying and he could manage a mere two quintals of cotton last year. Vitthal somehow managed to pay the lease amount for the farm. Meanwhile, Sulabha's health too started deteriorating. Subsequently, his younger son Rahul had to leave school to work with him on farm.

"We used to hire bullock at 500 per day. To buy a pair at least 70,000 was needed. Both options were ruled out," he said.

The poor farmer distinctly remembers the day — June 22 — when the idea to use the cot as plough struck him. "I was sitting on the same cot thinking how to come out of trouble. I was disheartened due to the deteriorating health of my elder son and wife, our abject poverty and inability to pay debts to the moneylender," Vitthal said.

"After converting the cot into a plough, I pulled it non-stop till I finished tilling the entire three-acre. It was 8pm when I stopped. Next day, I had severe body ache but I was happy that I finished the work before monsoon. It was extremely hard, but my family relies on me and I had no other alternative," said Vitthal.

The idea not only brought bright relief for Vitthal but also made him a household name in the village. Inspired by his tale, many villagers visited him to learn his new 'technique'.

Shiv Prabha Trust donates bullock pair

After learning about Vitthal's plight, Pune-based Shiv Prabha Charitable Trust donated a pair of bullocks to appreciate his fighting spirit. Young activists, including Vilas Tathod, Avinash Patil, Dhananjay Mishra and Dr Nilesh Patil visited Khadki Budruk village to hand over the pair of bullocks to Vitthal. According to them, Vitthal's story can inspire other farmers to fight adversities.

Farmers want more water from Mettur for kuruvai crop



There is an immediate need to increase water discharge from the Mettur dam to keep the paddy crop alive.

Farmers from Trichy district hope the recent showers during evening hours will be very helpful for their kuruvai paddy crop which has been raised in about 8,500 acres across the district. However, they have appealed to the state government to discharge a minimum of 3,000 cusecs water into the Cauvery from the Mettur reservoir to maintain the ground water table.

Sources from the agriculture department say farmers in Trichy district, particularly those from Musiri, Thottiam, Lalgudi, Thiruverumbur, Manachanallur taluks and Anthanallur and Manikandam unions have brought more area under kuruvai cultivation.

"Farmers from Lalgudi who are raising kuruvai crops in about 2,000 acres are relieved as they have been witnessing moderate rainfall for the past few days. However, how far it would safeguard the crops till harvesting is a big question mark," said N Veerasekaran, coordinator, Ayyan Vaikkal Irrigation Farmers Association.

According to available data, water inflow into the Mettur reservoir from Karnataka dams has gone up from 10,000 cusecs to more than 13,000 cusecs and the water level in the Mettur reservoir was 51 feet on Monday. A total of 2,000 cusecs water has been discharged for drinking water purposes.

"Since all the irrigation canals in the district, particularly in Lalgudi, are almost dry, there is an immediate need to increase water discharge from the Mettur dam that would flow into the canals to sustain the ground water table that is essential to keep the paddy crop alive. The state government should increase the water release to 3,000 cusecs before 'aadi perukku' (aadi monsoon festival)," Veerasekaran said adding that there was a past history of releasing water before full-fledged water release from the reservoir.

Keeping in mind the scarcity of water, the state government recently announced a special package of Rs 54.65 crore to the farming community for the fifth consecutive year to take up kuruvai, said Ayilai Siva Suriyan, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam (affiliated to the CPI).

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Apple cultivation supports over 1.7 lakh families: Himachal Pradesh government



Apple cultivation is providing gainful employment to millions of people of the region and the living standards of people has improved enormously, the spokesman said.

SHIMLA: Apple cultivation in Himachal Pradesh has become the mainstay of over 1.7 lakh families in the state as the orchards now cover 1,09,533 hectares, around 49 per cent of the total area under fruit cultivation.

The area under apple cultivation was meager 40 hectares in 1950-51 and 3,025 hectares in 1960-61 but today it counts for 49 per cent of total area under fruit production and 85 per cent of total horticulture produce which has touched 8.19 lakh at present, an official spokesperson said.

The diverse agro-climatic conditions, topographical variations, altitudinal differences coupled with fertile, deep and well drained soils favoured cultivation of temperate to subtropical fruits in the state.

"With sustained efforts of the government, the area under fruit cultivation has increased from 792 hectares in 1950-51 to 2.25 lakh hectares and apple was main crop grown in Shimla, Kullu, Kinnaur, Mandi, Chamba and Sirmaur districts and now, even in the tribal Lahaul-Spiti district, people are taking to apple plantation on a large scale.

"Rs 3,500 crore apple economy of the state was not only its backbone but also involved thousands of stakeholders such as transporters, carton manufacturers, Controlled Atmosphere Store/Cold Chain owners, wholesale fruit dealers, fruit processing unit owners etc. from other states," the spokesman said.

Apple cultivation is providing gainful employment to millions of people of the region and the living standards of people has improved enormously and the government was providing high yielding varieties of apple and better marketing infrastructure to the growers, he said.

In order to safeguard the interests of the growers against adverse climatic conditions, the state government has introduced several schemes like weather-based Crop Insurance Scheme for protecting the crops of horticulturists from natural vagaries.

A World Bank funded horticulture development project is also being implemented in the state with an outlay of Rs 1,115 crore.

The project spread over a period of seven years would focus on providing new technologies to the horticulturists for increasing their crop productivity and capacities.

To protect fruit crops, especially apple from hailstorm, the government has enhanced the subsidy on anti-hailnets to 80 per cent, the spokesman said.

Further, in order to provide better marketing facilities to the farmers, ten market yards and collection centres had been made operational during past 43 months by incurring an expenditure of Rs 27.45 crore, he added.

Crop planting gathers pace as monsoon advances



Rainfall in northern India was twice of normal, which has given adequate soil moisture without any waterlogging in the fields.

NEW DELHI: Key agricultural areas in northern and central India have received heavy showers this time, preparing the ground for more crop planting and a good kharif harvest after two years of drought.

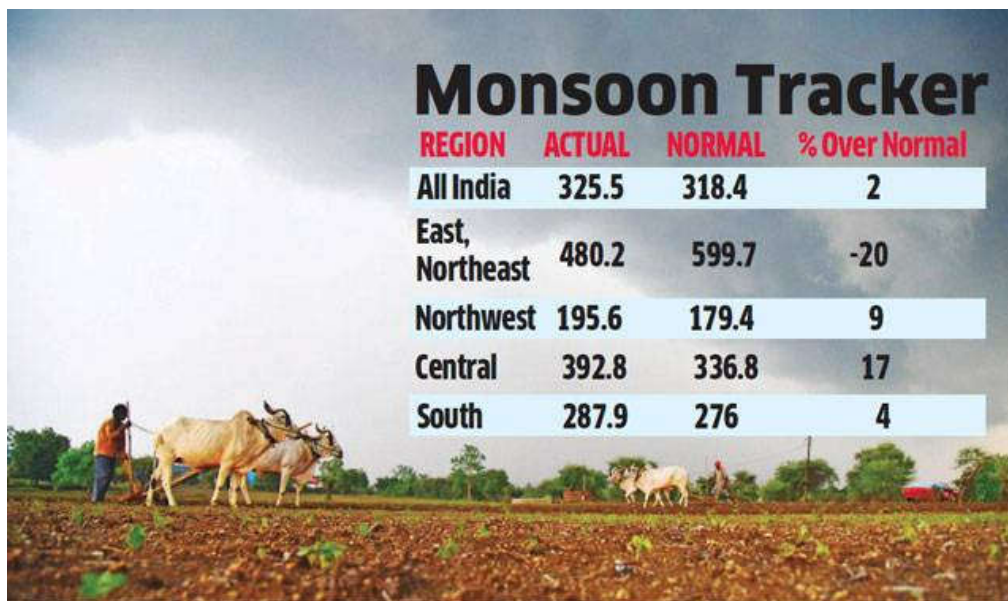
Crop planting has gathered pace in the region after the monsoon rapidly advanced to northern India and covered the entire country last week. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) expects good rainfall to continue this season although there would be a temporary weakening of the monsoon current in central India this week.

Increased rainfall has helped farmers increase sowing of crops by 38% last week, with the biggest increase coming in area under pulses. Pulses acreage jumped 55 per cent in a week, and is now 39 per cent higher than last year despite the late arrival of the monsoon this year.

Good rainfall in the fertile region continued during the weekend with Uttar Pradesh and Haryana getting double the normal rainfall on Saturday and even higher precipitation on Sunday. Total rainfall in northern and northwestern

India this season is 9 per cent above normal, rising rapidly from being 6 per cent above normal on Saturday.

The agricultural meteorology division of the weather office has advised farmers to continue transplanting of paddy in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. In Madhya Pradesh, a key oilseed growing region, it has cautioned farmers that excessive rainfall and waterlogging may hurt the soybean crop in Indore, Ujjain, Satna and Hoshangabad, but on the whole the situation is promising, officials said.



Rainfall in northern India was twice of normal, which has given adequate soil moisture without any waterlogging in the fields. "Every part of northern India has received normal rainfall this season. This is a big improvement over the last two years," a weather scientist said. Traders said that output of pulses is likely to increase significantly, although this may come at the cost of other crops including oilseeds.

Area under soybean cultivation has declined in parts of Madhya Pradesh, a key producer. According to the Soybean Processors Association of India, area under the crop may decrease 8 per cent this year as many farmers have shifted to pulses, maize, red gram, sorghum and paddy because of low productivity of soybean in the last few years and higher returns from pulses after the sharp increase in prices in the last year.