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THE HINDU

African countries woo investors in Coimbatore



S. Narayanan, Vice chairman of CII-Coimbatore Zone, speaking at Africa Seminar Series organised in Coimbatore on Thursday. —Photo: S. Siva Saravanan.

They spoke at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Industry here on Thursday on "Africa Seminar Series – the Land of Unexplored Potential".

Diplomats of seven African countries invited the trade and industry in Coimbatore region to invest in their countries, especially in sectors such as agriculture, textiles, energy, and education.

They spoke at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Industry here on Thursday on “Africa Seminar Series – the Land of Unexplored Potential”.

According to Niankoro Yeah Samake, Ambassador of Mali, Coimbatore is of special interest to Mali because cotton is a major export product for the country and Coimbatore is a hub for textile industry. In February 2017, a trade mission from India will visit Mali to explore opportunities in agriculture business, cotton, mining, healthcare and telecommunications. “Tourism is another sector we are pro-actively opening to investments,” he said. Mohammed Hija, acting

High Commissioner of Tanzania, said entrepreneurs can look at tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, education, and information and communication technology to invest in Tanzania. “Now, we have opened up to investments in solar energy,” he said.

Molalign Asfaw, Minister Counsellor and Charge d’ Affairs, Embassy of Ethiopia, pointed out that Ethiopia has registered double digit growth for more than a decade and over 600 Indian companies have registered in Ethiopia. Of these, 250 have started operations. The country has 12 industrial parks and offers several tax incentives to investors. There are opportunities in agro processing, textiles and apparel industries.

According to Kedisi N. Margaret, Minister Counsellor – Uganda High Commission, location and availability of natural resources are advantages for Uganda. Companies will have 100 per cent ownership of their investments. She urged the participants to visit Uganda as a tourist.

Lubinda Namunda Mwitumwa, Counsellor – Zambia High Commission, said the country is looking for partnerships for investment in solar energy. It is a “land-linked” country and there is huge potential for companies in road development. Agro processing, mining, and value addition to gems are some of the areas with scope for investment.

Meipelo Mogotsi, First Secretary – Economic, Botswana High Commission, said, “We are looking for Foreign Direct Investment and believe India has expertise and simple technologies.” Botswana exports 70 per cent of the diamonds mined there to India. Indian industries can look at investment in agriculture, manufacturing, education and healthcare, apart from diamond cutting and polishing and value addition to leather.

Seewraj Nundlall, Counsellor (Trade and Investment), Mauritius High Commission, said some of the emerging areas that Mauritius was focusing on were ocean economy, financial sector and small and medium-scale enterprises.

S. Narayanan, vice-chairman of CII, Coimbatore Zone, said Coimbatore leads in sectors such as textiles, foundries, and pumpsets and has over 25,000 micro, small and medium-scale enterprises.

Nuts about coconuts



A cup of the finest Photo: Heritage Blend

I currently have three friends who are on the ketogenic diet. They say all kinds of wonderful things about it – apparently, best of all being the fact that they get to live on butter and bacon. You have to admit, the thought of greasily sliding your way into an itchy bikini aided by deep-fried chicken wings is irresistibly seductive.

Besides, I’m fascinated by diets. I carefully wrote down the champagne diet, which was floating around the Internet for a while. Designed to deal with “party season,” it advocates a week of living on nothing but yoghurt and champagne. I got the yoghurt part down perfectly. Unfortunately, I wasn’t invited to enough glittering parties to meet the rest of my dietary requirements.

But let’s not get sidetracked. I pinned down one of the keto guys to get his diet. Breakfast is an omelette cooked in butter. Lunch consists of deep-fried chicken. And for dinner, he eats steak, followed by sugar-free chocolate ice cream.

“I don’t think it is proper keto though,” he sighs sadly. “I just can’t eat enough fat.” Fat? Now there’s a unique problem. We’ve spent most of our lives avoiding fat, and now we’re told to run into its pudgy arms with the enthusiasm of a weepy Bollywood heroine. Since coconut oil is king of the keto circuit, I

suggest bulletproof coffee: coffee whipped with tablespoons of butter, coconut oil and cream. We shudder in unison. I love coconut oil with a passion – but this is too much even for me.

However, I'm in Kerala right now, so it seems appropriate to dive into coconuts this week. In trendy keto fashion, I get my hands on a bowl of freshly grated coconut. Then, since I'm not on a diet, I blend in eggs, sugar, butter, flour and a cup of coconut milk. The result is a refreshingly light, spongy, gently-scented cake. Too lazy to ice it, I generously sprinkle the crusty surface with more shredded coconut. If this doesn't make me a star on Instagram's coconut-obsessed circuit, I don't know what will.

Inspired by the wave of coconut-enthusiasm sweeping the world, there's an impressive range of products available in India now. A far change from the days when that plastic blue Parachute bottle was all we knew. Now, you get multiple variants of oil: virgin, organic, cold-pressed... I'm especially impressed by Calicut-based Elements Fair Organic's version. The company partners with farmers to create a product that not just ticks all the right boxes, but is even sold in stylish, eco-friendly glass jars.

Most commercial coconut oil comes from processing copra, or dried coconut. A friend's mother, who has been making her own oil for years from coconuts grown around her sprawling bungalow, explains how virgin oil is made from coconut milk. It's a laborious process at her house, where every step is done by hand. The result, however, is a delectably fragrant oil, that is delicious in salads and feels fantastic on your skin.

According to the Coconut Development Board (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India), by 2015, Kerala had more than 649000 hectares of land dedicated to coconuts, followed by Karnataka and Tamil Nadu with approximately 515000 and 465000 respectively. There's a twist in the tale. Although Tamil Nadu has fewer hectares of coconuts, it's far more productive than Kerala with 14,873 nuts per hectare, as opposed to Kerala's 7535.

Over the years, production as well as productivity have risen considerably in India. In 1950, we produced 5238 nuts per hectare, and last year, it was 10345, making us the third biggest producer in the world after Indonesia and Philippines.

I get all these numbers off the Coconut Board, which has a website that gives the impression of being a geeky academic in disco mode with its wily blend of flashing lights and austere spreadsheets.

They list a wide range of products, including an admittedly bizarre pineapple coconut milkshake. There's coconut sugar of course. And 'neera,' which is nutritious and bouncing with minerals. The coconut flower syrup, made by cooking down neera, sounds appropriately exotic – till it is eclipsed by tender coconut snowballs made by skilfully slicing away husk till all that is left is a wobbly sphere of goodness. I'd like to end by virtuously saying that no ice cream can top that. But let's be honest: Imagine it filled with champagne.

If anyone ever starts a keto-coconut-champagne diet after this, remember to send me royalties. I'll be sitting by my mailbox. I haven't given up on being invited to those glittering parties – yet.

Treading the organic path

Organic farmer, environmental activist and social commentator Elango Kallanai redefines the relationship between a peasant and his land



SON OF THE SOIL Organic farmer Elango Kallanai Photo: R. Ashok

When Elango Kallanai proposed his plan to take up organic farming in his native village Narasingampatti six years ago, there was none to encourage his venture. Instead, his fellow farmers branded him crazy and brushed aside his

suggestions. Today he is a trendsetter and every farmer in and outside his village looks up to him for viable farm practices.

A research scholar in English, Elango left a lucrative career in IT to turn organic farmer. On 10 acres, he independently developed a profitable organic farming system. "I never romanticised farming. When I took it up, I was aware about the lack of water sources. As a child I had seen 24 water bodies in and around my village but now there are only six. You don't need an expert to tell the reason."

In the initial days, his land was in very bad shape. To enrich the soil he did summer ploughing, sowed greens, re-ploughed and closed it. Then, he planted navadanya grains. It took about five to six months and that was the time power cuts were rampant and he could do nothing for the next 18 months. Everybody in the village commented that he was unfit for agriculture.

"But I studied a lot about the market for organic farm produces," he says.

After the lull, he started with banana plantation. The yield was very low in the first two years. "I was clear I was not producing for the big markets but for the consumers. If you go to open market, they will kill you and decimate your organic interest. So I sent packs of 50 kgs and 100 kgs to my customers in Kochi, Rameswaram and Bangalore charging only retailers' price and not the organic cost."

Elango tasted success with the native banana varieties such as *Rastali*, *Naattu Rastali*, *Naattu pazham*, *Karpoora Valli* and *Naattu Poovan* and gradually overcame one constraint after the other. In the meantime, he also developed interest in sowing native paddy varieties. "Only when I went in search of native paddy varieties, I came to understand how difficult it was. I had been to several farm festivals in places including Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan and returned impressed. I was thrilled to see Chattisgarh and Orissa preserve native paddy varieties. In Chattisgarh, you can find best rice being served in a roadside eatery. I played it safe and selected Mappillai Samba as its yield is not dictated by external factors," he says.

But when it comes to organic products, price factor keeps people away. "It is justified. Being price conscious is not crime but at what cost. It is the price one has to pay for drifting away from traditional practices. One kg of organically grown Karuppu Kavuni rice is selling at Rs.200. The price is because of its

exclusive nature. Demand is also more. But are we paying reasonable price for the effort put in by a farmer?” he asks.

He sees organic farming as a continuous process. “I have achieved 85 per cent of my target. Now I do nothing on enriching the soil, instead concentrate only on the crop. All my nutrients are directed towards the plant. I try to make farmers self-reliant. But most of them depend on bankers, shopkeepers selling fertilisers and machine makers. You should be in better position to understand your farm and should not allow any other to dictate terms. Once you depend on others, you lose the connection with your land,” he says.

Elango is also a television personality and regularly figures in a talk show for a popular satellite channel. His knowledge on varied subjects from farming and anthropology to Siddha medicine and education has made him a sought after speaker.

He regularly writes for Tamil literary magazine Tamizhini and is at present writing a novel on feminism, which he has planned to release next year. “Even today people ask me why I left the city to settle down in village. Rather getting stuck in a city and being nobody, I preferred to go back to the village and be somebody,” he laughs.

I never romanticised farming. When I took it up, I was aware about the lack of water sources.

Insurance scheme for cattle breeders to be launched today

The Haryana government will launch on Friday an insurance scheme, ‘Jokhim Prabandhan Aur Pashudhan Bima Yojana’, for the cattle breeders.

Haryana Agriculture Minister O. P. Dhankar on Thursday said under the scheme insurance cover would be provided for cows, bulls, buffaloes and camel at a premium of Rs 100 and for sheep, goats, pigs at Rs 25 for a period of three years.

The insurance companies would give compensation in case of death of animal.

The scheme is free of cost for cattle breeders belonging to the Scheduled Castes.

He also accused the opposition parties of misleading people regarding the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana', saying when the State government introduced the scheme, the opposition was busy making statements regarding insurance companies which everyone knows that they provide every type of insurance cover. PTI

Farmers' meet held at RARS

Farmers under the Innovative Farmers' Networking Programme, representing various districts of Andhra Pradesh, came together to look back at last year's work and how to improve spreading of farm knowledge, information, and technology in the coming year.

The two-day interaction took place at the District Agricultural Advisory and Transfer of Technology Centre of Regional Agricultural Research Station (RARS) here.

"The farmers with knowledge of all crops grown in their respective areas are selected and one of them will be the coordinator for the district," Director of Extension, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, K. Raja Reddy, told reporters on Thursday.

He will be the team leader and share the information and literature developed by Eruvaka centres and Krishi Vignana Kendras with 30 farmers – 10 each in his village, mandal and district – as a part of the extension programmes of the university.

But interactions revealed that it was scaled up to 120 to 200 farmers.

"It is being implemented since 2012 and the coordinator remains the same so that he continues to improve his knowledge and remains updated," Dr. Raja Reddy said.

TNAU taps solar energy

Aims at motivating farmers to take to non-conventional energy



SUCCESS:Solar power panels set up at the TNAU-Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute, near Tiruchi, has been paying dividends.—
Photo: A.Muralitharan

The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University – Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute at Kumulur near here, has successfully tapped solar energy by generating 572 Watts at its Renewable Energy Park. A total of eight panels have been set up at the park with a capacity of 74 Watts each and the power generated is being utilised for pumping water using mini pump.

The panels just need periodical maintenance and upkeep for its efficiency, said K. Ramaswamy, Dean of the Institute. He said that the panel has been set up with a view to motivating farmers to take to non-conventional energy technique for deriving maximum advantage.

“We have planned to expose the farmers to these non-conventional gadgets,” he said.

This apart, the Institute has taken up a series of experiment in tapping solar energy for street lights. “We have set up 20 solar panels for 20 street lights within the campus,” he added.

Mr. Ramaswamy also said that the Institute accounted for a large number of cattle and a biogas plant has been set up using cow dung. “The fuel energy needed for the canteen is got from biogas,” he said.

The Institute has also taken up research on solar powered device to keep birds away from crops. Whenever a bird comes near the field, the solar panel emits a sound emitted from a pen-drive. “Farmers often complain about the extensive damage to the produce, particularly on the eve of harvest. The device will help keep away birds,” he said.

He said scientists of the Institute have been organising a series of awareness programmes to benefit farmers to utilise the non-conventional energy.

The solar panel was set up as part of ‘students experience programme’ in co-ordination with John Gunasekaran, a faculty member.

Coconut growers hit by drop in prices

Against a production cost of Rs. 12, prevailing market price comes as a blow

Coconut growers in the region are feeling the pinch of price drop as copra procurement too plummeted for want of good price and adequate buyers. They have called upon the governmental agencies to step in and reverse the tide. With Tamil Nadu heading the table in coconut production, the problem has assumed enormous proportions.

“Nearly 95 per cent of the coconut growers in the State are small and marginal farmers. During last year, the selling price of one coconut was between Rs. 12 and Rs. 15 and that helped them to sustain. But in 2016, with the increase in coconut production, in the past five months the purchase price has plummeted to Rs. 6 a nut and that too purchasers are hard to come by,” points out president, Tamil Nadu Coconut Cultivators’ Association A. Palanivel of Peravurani in Thanjavur district. Seen against the production cost of Rs. 12 per nut, the prevailing market price has come as a blow to the producers.

Even as per the Coconut Development Board's findings the cost of producing one coconut works out to Rs. 10 at least, he rues.

Seen in hindsight, the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) must have started procuring copra through the State Government's TANFED since the beginning of 2016 and had that been done, the price of coconut would have been at least Rs. 7.50 and the growers' loss would have come down. Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states are extending subsidy in procurement price but unfortunately Tamil Nadu Government is yet to formulate such a policy. That could be of great help to us growers, Mr. Palanivel pleads with Chief Minister Jayalalithaa adding she could effectively intervene by fixing the support price at Rs. 10 per kilogram of copra. Also, the State Government could purchase and market tender coconuts and that would come in handy to the suffering growers. Besides, the coconut growers pleaded with the governments to increase the copra purchase price to Rs. 100 a kilogram for 2017, up from the current Rs. 59.50 per kilogram to help growers tide over the crisis, the Association has urged in memoranda submitted to the Central and State Governments.

It would be a great relief if the State Government extended additional support price for copra besides the minimum support price as is being done in other states.

It would be prudent for the Agricultural Pries Commission Chairman to conduct the price fixation meeting in Chennai and not in New Delhi as an overwhelming majority of the coconut production was from this region, Mr. Palanivel noted adding it would be in the interest of the Tamil Nadu growers if a State Coconut Development Board is formed.

Protect wetlands, help curb climate change: CM

The government will focus on protection of paddy fields and wetlands in the State as part of a programme to build resilience to climate change, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said.

Inaugurating an orientation programme on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction for Mayors and municipal chairpersons here on Thursday, he said a series of failures in the past had led to the decline of wetlands, causing water scarcity and triggering a crisis in the agriculture sector.

Pointing out that the rising summer heat and erratic rains signalled a dire warning for Kerala, he said paddy output was estimated to drop by 10 per cent for every degree rise in atmospheric temperature. Other crops including rubber, coffee, pepper and cardamom could be expected to show a decline of six per cent. Sea level rise and ocean acidity would lead to a decline in fish stocks.

Mitigation strategies

Observing that the poorer sections were more vulnerable to climate change, he said local bodies could play a key role in equipping urban areas with adaptation and mitigation strategies. He called on urban local bodies to take up tree planting, decentralised solid waste management, rainwater harvesting, protection of water bodies and efficient energy usage.

Water from Gupta LI released for kharif

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy pressed the button releasing water from Gutpa Lift Irrigation Scheme at Ummeda in Nandipet mandal for kharif cultivation on Thursday.

The LI scheme built on the backwaters of the Sri Ram Sagar Project would cater to the irrigation needs of 38,792 acres with 3 tmcf water expected to be released, in Makloor, Nandipet, Armoor, Balkonda, Velpur and Jakranpally mandals till the kharif harvest is over.

Completed in the very first year of Jalayagnam in 2005, earlier water from this LI scheme used to be released after the SRSP got water to its brim.

However, this time, on the demand from farmers the Government decided to give water in the current month itself.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that water was already being supplied from the Ali Sagar LI scheme to 53,793 acres.

Both would run uninterruptedly as there was adequate inflow into the reservoir, he said and added if the Gaikwad reservoir, built with a capacity of 100 tmcf in Maharashtra, was full the SRSP would also get filled. At present there was 33 tmcf water available in it as against its total capacity of 90 tmcf, he said.

Assannagari Jeevan Reddy and Mohammed Shakeel Amer, MLAs of Armoor and Bodhan respectively and engineering authorities were present.

Coconut oil from ashram

The Santhigiri ashram here has started marketing coconut oil, manufactured by the ashram, in 50 gm, 100 gm and 200 gm bottles. The ashram had earlier launched coconut oil in one litre bottle.

Premnath, spokesman, said the ashram had twin objectives in bringing out the product — of helping the coconut farmers and distributing pure coconut oil. Several brands of coconut oil available in the market were adulterated, which posed health hazards to people.

The ashram was procuring coconuts directly from farmers. Coconut oil was being extracted at the Santhigiri Sneha oil mill situated at Chandiroor, the birthplace of Karunakara Guru, the founder of the ashram.

Tobacco auctions conclude

Growers suggest alternative crops in view of the uncertain conditions

Tobacco auctions in Prakasam district, the traditional tobacco growing area, ended on a disappointing note for the farmers on Thursday.

Though the auctions started on an encouraging note with the bright grade variety fetching a high of Rs.150 per kg, the market turned lacklustre thereafter in the wake of cigarette manufacturers' decision to shut shop over the issue of larger pictorial health warning on cigarette packs that came into force from April 1.

Noting that the auctions had been completed in just 112 days, Tobacco Board Executive Director C.S.S. Patnaik, during his interaction with the growers in Ongole II auction platform, said that the board ensured that the market did not fall drastically by holding parleys with domestic and foreign buyers at periodic intervals.

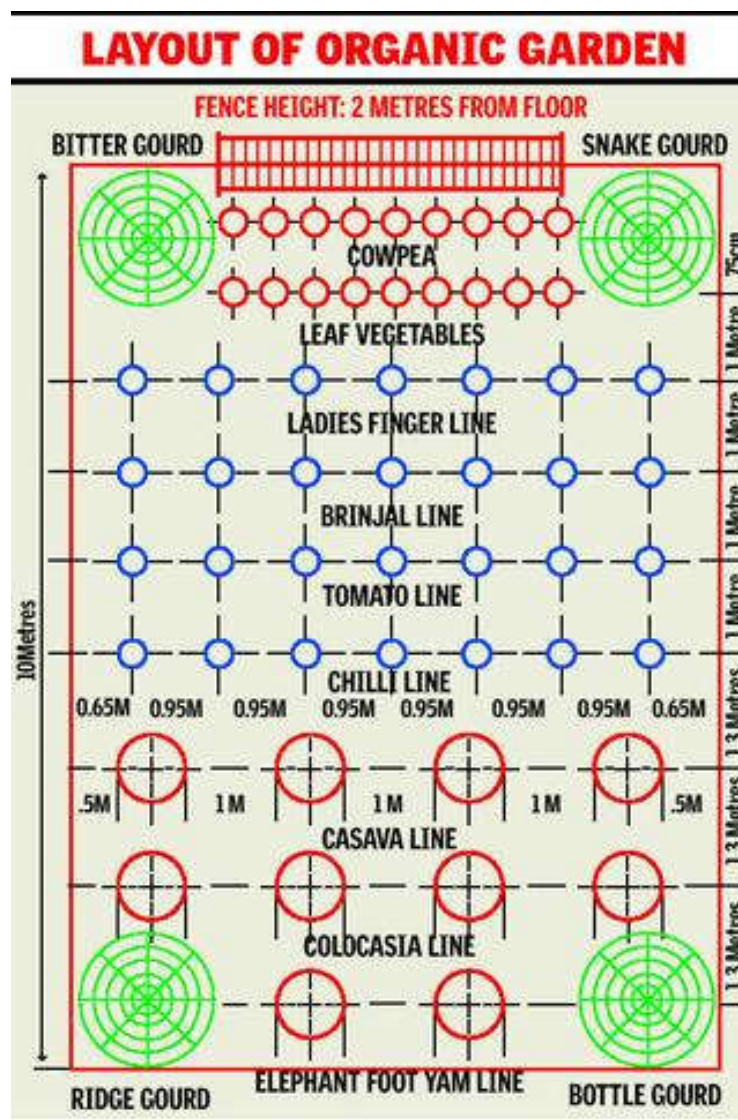
The growers got an average price of Rs.107.35 per kg, marketing 42.60 million kg in the Southern Black Soil (SBS) auction platforms. While their counterparts

marketed 33.39 million kg getting a little better price of Rs.109.10 kg, said SLS Regional Manager G. Ratnasagar.

Alternative crops

He suggested to the growers to go for alternative crops in view of the uncertain market conditions.

Organic vegetable farming to take over the rooftop



Each of the proposed 600-sq.ft. gardens can produce 350 kg to 500 kg of vegetables a year

A group of volunteers and organic vegetable farming enthusiasts have brought out a design to establish 600-sq.ft. organic vegetable gardens on terraces of homes or in backyards. “Each garden will be capable of producing 350 kg to 500 kg of vegetables a year, which are sufficient for a family of five,” said J. Prashant, chairman of Organic Kerala Charitable Trust and principal of Sacred Heart College, Thevara.

Mr. Prashant presented the design and advantages of the 1.5-cent vegetable gardens at a function organised at the college to familiarise students with the potential of vegetable cultivation in houses with space constraints.

Meanwhile, a seminar will be organised on August 2 at the college to mark the International Year of Pulses. There will also be an exhibition of pulses, apart from discussions on the role of pulses in ensuring food security as part of the day-long seminar.

No more growbags

If gardens are set up in backyards, growbags may not be required. The soil in backyards or growbags that can be used on terraces can be made fertile with the help of organic household waste.

“The 600-sq.ft. garden is meant to accommodate beans, vegetable cowpea, cucumber, little gourd, leafy vegetables, chilli, tomato, okra, brinjal, and root crops like elephant foot yam and cassava. Root crops can be cultivated during lean season,” said M.M. Abbas, general secretary of the trust, which works in cooperation with the Thrikkakara Municipal Cooperative Hospital.

Details of the design are available on [http:// www. organickeralacharitabletrust](http://www.organickeralacharitabletrust)

.in/, Mr. Abbas said, adding that space constraints could be overcome to make every family in urban areas self-sufficient in vegetable production. According to him, there are around 60 lakh households in the State with approximately 600 sq.ft. each of terrace area.

In rift with Krishi Bhawan, National Dairy Development Board chief T Nanda Kumar quits

“I have resigned and am relinquishing charge with effect from August 1,” Nanda Kumar, who was appointed by the previous UPA government for a five-year term that would have ended in February 2019, told *The Indian Express*.



T Nanda Kumar

T Nanda Kumar has stepped down as chairman of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), the organisation that spearheaded the Operation Flood programme that made India self-sufficient in milk.

“I have resigned and am relinquishing charge with effect from August 1,” Nanda Kumar, who was appointed by the previous UPA government for a five-year term that would have ended in February 2019, told *The Indian Express*.

He will also cease to be chairman of NDDDB-promoted companies and institutions, including Mother Dairy Fruit and Vegetable Private Ltd, Indian Immunologicals Ltd, IDMC Ltd and Institute of Rural Management, Anand.

While Nanda Kumar cited “personal reasons” for his premature resignation, sources pointed to tensions with the Union Agriculture Ministry “which has always wanted NDDDB to function like a public sector undertaking answerable to Krishi Bhawan”.

This was, in fact, suggested by Nanda Kumar in an internal email addressed to “members of the NDDDB family” announcing his decision: “There comes a time in everyone’s life when one’s value system comes into serious conflict with the external environment. A point of compromise becomes a point of no return. I have reached such a point.”

Nanda Kumar was the first chairman of NDDDB from the IAS. Both his predecessors — Amrita Patel (1998-2014) and Verghese Kurien (1965-1998) — had dairy professional backgrounds.

The NDDDB Act of 1987, providing for its incorporation as “an institution of national importance”, requires the chairman to be “professionally qualified in dairying, animal husbandry, rural economics, rural development, business administration or banking”. It also mandates NDDDB’s head office to be in Anand, Gujarat.

“All these – incorporation through a special Act of Parliament, being headquartered at Anand, and the chairman being professionally qualified – were intended to protect NDDDB’s autonomy and insulate against interference from Krishi Bhawan. That made a lot of difference, especially during the Operation Flood period from 1970 to 1995,” sources said.

Nanda Kumar was selected as chairman mainly keeping in view his role as Secretary in the Food and Agriculture ministries during 2006-11, a period when India successfully negotiated foodgrain production shortfalls against a background of soaring global prices and a bad drought in 2009.

“Familiarity with Krishi Bhawan was, however, seemingly not of much help when it came to dealing with people in the new dispensation. They were not too happy with a person who was, after all, chosen by the previous regime,” sources said.

Nanda Kumar’s major contribution as chairman was to restore the organisation’s harmonious ties with the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) and other dairy cooperatives. This followed a decade-long period of rivalry between the NDDDB-owned Mother Dairy and GCMMF that extended to even marketing of milk in each other’s territories.

The one thing the next NDDDB chairperson may have to, however, come to terms with is the growing significance of private dairies.

Till the mid-1990s, there were hardly any major private players, barring the odd Nestle India or Milkfood Ltd. But that has changed significantly post-Operation Flood, with the NDDDB’s own annual report for 2010-11 admitting that “the capacity created by them (private dairies) in the last 15 years equals that set up by cooperatives over 30 years”.

NDDDB’s mandate, a private dairy industry representative said, would require revision in the light of the new reality. “It was all right in the Operation Flood days to provide financing and techno-managerial consultancy to only cooperatives. But in today’s environment, why should we be denied similar concessional funding, particularly for artificial insemination, veterinary support, fodder development and other back-end activities?” the representative said.

PM Narendra Modi to Niti Aayog: Consider broader goals for agriculture sector

Niti Aayog’s vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya said that the original agenda of the Prime Minister’s meeting was to discuss the think-tank’s approach towards preparing the 15-year Vision Document



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Vice-Chairman of Niti Aayog Arvind Panagariya in New Delhi on Thursday. (Source: PTI)

India's agricultural sector is 28 years behind its time due to lack of necessary reforms, the Niti Aayog highlighted in its meeting on Thursday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is also the chairman of the think-tank.

The Aayog also suggested the government that to make the farm sector up to the mark, a comprehensive reform package would be needed with high involvement from the market, especially considering that the share of the agriculture in the country's gross domestic product was on a downward trend.

A Niti Aayog official said that the Prime Minister instructed Niti Aayog, among other things, to consider broader goals and issues for the agriculture sector. He also asked the body to keep in mind the growing food demand in the country especially considering the implications of an evolving middle class in India.

“The Prime Minister said the focus cannot be on increasing agricultural productivity alone, but should be on the overall development of a vibrant rural economy. He emphasised the importance of the food processing sector, warehouse development, and technology inputs, in this sector,” an official statement said.

Niti Aayog's vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya said that the original agenda of the Prime Minister's meeting was to discuss the think-tank's approach towards preparing the 15-year Vision Document. However, Modi also sought discussion over the work done by the Aayog since its inception 18 months ago.

Modi asked Niti Aayog to prepare a Vision Document that contains a roadmap for India's development for the next 15 years to bring transformational changes, suggesting that the document should lay the foundation of India's growth agenda for the entire 21st century.

He also highlighted the importance of technology as an emerging driver of change over the last three decades, and asserted that this pace of change would not slacken. Panagariya said that in his presentation before the Prime Minister, many of the shortcomings of the erstwhile Nehruvian planning process were highlighted to indicate that the same won't be incorporated in the 15-year Vision Document, or the seven year national development agenda.

According to Panagariya's presentation, these shortcomings, which he has termed as a "detailed account of our mistakes" include the industrial control wherein the past regimes expanded the public sector into areas "that were best left to the private sector", which evolved a socialistic pattern of society.

"Only proper analysis and assessment of proposed policies by experts and specialists can help us anticipate unintended consequences of policies. This is why we are preparing the long term vision and strategy documents and placing them in public domain for extensive discussion is extremely important," Panagariya said through his presentation.

Demand supply gap to push sugar prices up next year: Sharad Pawar

Sharad Pawar asked the industry to be prepared for any government action, including the possibility of import of raw sugar to boost domestic supply and check prices.



“This year, sugar production situation is good. But I don’t see similar situation in the next year. In 2016-17, there will be 3.5-4 million tonnes gap in demand and supply,” Pawar said at the 74th annual convention of the Sugar Technologists’ Association of India. (Source: PTI)

Sugar prices are expected to remain under pressure due to an estimated supply gap of 3.5-4 million tonnes in the next marketing year starting October, former Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said on July 28.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) supremo also asked the industry to be prepared for any government action, including possibility of import of raw sugar to boost domestic supply and check prices.

“This year, sugar production situation is good. But I don’t see similar situation in the next year. In 2016-17, there will be 3.5-4 million tonnes gap in demand and supply,” Pawar said at the 74th annual convention of the Sugar Technologists’ Association of India (STAI).

Sugar rates, which at present are ruling in the range of Rs 34-38/kg, may come under pressure due to a likely gap in supply and demand, he said.

“Next year, with a gap of 3.4 to 4 million tonnes of sugar, there will definitely be an impact on prices and the government will take some steps and the industry should be ready for that,” he noted.

The government has projected sugar output to decline to 23-23.5 million tonnes in 2016-17 marketing year (October-September), as against 25.1 million tonnes in the current year. Meanwhile, industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has pegged sugar output at 23.26 million tonnes for next year.

Pawar said the country's sugar demand is around 25.6 million tonnes and is expected to grow at 3-4 per cent per annum. By 2020, sugar demand is pegged at 30 million tonnes.

Apprehensive about the government's policies to check price rise in sugar, Pawar asked the industry to be prepared for the possibility of sugar imports.

"A suggestion has been made to import raw sugar to bridge the gap. There are other alternatives and I hope the government will take appropriate action," he said.

To curb price rise in sugar, the government has recently imposed 20 per cent export duty on sugar and withdrawn cane production subsidy to the mills.

Expressing concern over low cane productivity and cyclic nature of the crop, Pawar urged the government to take "proactive steps" to promote modern technologies, including genetic engineering to address biotic and abiotic stress.

He also said that a Pune-based institute has developed a transgenic sugarcane plant, and the government should allow field trial of it in restricted areas under the supervision of agriculture universities.

The NCP leader said that Indonesia has developed saline and drought-resistant cane variety and the government should "give a serious thought to this" if the variety has given good results.

Pawar asked the sugar mills to take ethanol blending programme seriously and ensure sufficient supply to the oil marketing companies (OMCs).

"I am informed that distilleries are not able to meet the requirement of OMCs. I think, time has come you take this seriously. There may be some hurdles and this should be sorted out amicably," he advised.

Not only cane crop productivity should be raised, the mills should use modern technologies to reduce cost and make more viable business, he added.

Former President Pratibha Devisingh Patil asked the industry to focus on use of drip irrigation in cane cultivation and also favoured use of GM cane varieties to boost crop yields.

She urged the sugar technologists to work on developing small size machines for use in cane farming while suggesting sugar mills to focus on energy conversion and conservation.

“There is immense scope to improve production both in field and factory, for which technology is the key,” she added.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Rains set to revive over Central, Peninsular India next week



The Indian monsoon is seen taking cues from the South China Sea to engineer a revival that would see rains once again scale up over Central India and the adjoining Peninsular region.

The revival is expected to materialise from next week, an outlook maintained by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts since the past few days said.

Pacific storms

Key to the revival of the monsoon are back-to-back storms/typhoons in the South China Sea, next door to the Bay of Bengal.

Tropical storm *Mirinae* in the basin has already made landfall over Hanoi in Vietnam, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Centre of the US Navy.

Since the storm has been travelling in a west-northwest direction (towards Indo-China and the Bay), this is already sending in a 'pulse' across Myanmar into the Bay waters.

A follow-up typhoon developing in the South China Sea and hitting South-West China should further reinforce the flows headed into the Bay.

According to the European Centre, this would set up the much-awaited low-pressure area in the Bay and revive the monsoon.

Watch for 'Low'

Projections given out by the India Met Department also seem to support this scenario; only, they suggest that the 'low' may gather further strength in the Bay.

The Met sees a full-fledged 'low' in place in the Bay by August 2 (Tuesday), dropping anchor close to Kolkata and the Bangladesh coast and staying put for two more days at the least.

It should pull in the monsoon flows from the Arabian Sea and across Central India and adjoining Peninsular India to signal the return of the rains.

The US Climate Prediction Centre sees Central India, northern parts of the West Coast and West India (including Saurashtra-Kutch and Rajasthan) getting moderate to heavy rains, by turn, until August 9.

The European Centre has already come out with a long-term outlook for August and September predicting normal rain for most parts of the country and above normal for parts of the South Peninsula.

During the 24-hour period that ended on Thursday morning, the monsoon has 'vigorous' or 'active' not only over North-West India but also over parts of Central India and Peninsular India.

An India Met update said the monsoon was 'vigorous' over Jammu and Kashmir and Telangana during this period and 'active' over Uttarakhand, Odisha, East Rajasthan, West Madhya Pradesh, Marathawada, Vidarbha, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, and South Interior Karnataka.

Heavy rain was reported from North-West Rajasthan, West Uttar Pradesh, Vidarbha, Marathawada, the North-Eastern States and Tamil Nadu.

Coir Board bullish on export potential



CP Radhakrishnan, Chairman, Coir Board

Given the export growth rate in value-added products of coir, the crisis-ridden coconut sector can look to the coir segment for additional returns.

Coir Board Chairman CP Radhakrishnan said that the rise in exports of value-added products such as coir geo-textiles and pith in the last fiscal year is a good sign and would promote both the sectors in a big way.

Coir pith exports registered 29 per cent growth in quantity and 58 per cent in value, while coir geo-textiles posted growth of 7 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, in the last fiscal year.

Record turnover

This has helped the Board to achieve a record export turnover of 1,901 crore in the last fiscal year against the target of 1,500 crore. The export growth, despite the slowdown, has facilitated the Board to boost the modernisation drive in line with other traditional industries such as jute and textiles, he told *BusinessLine*.

Thus, the value-addition in coir would be advantageous for coconut-growing States to encourage farmers and focus on husk collection. .

However, he suggested setting up of a proper husk collection mechanism, especially in Kerala, to meet the increasing demand from the coir sector.

Protective fabric

According to the Chairman, coir geo-textiles are getting increased acceptance for usage in mines as a protective fabric capable of controlling soil erosion, in Europe, the US and Japan as well as in mining States in the country.

Coir pith is also widely used in advanced countries as a natural organic plant growing material and for roof gardening and vegetable cultivation. Composite coir pith is a new development in the segment and research activities are going on to improve nutrient content and make it a replacement for urea.

“We are also in talks with National Highway Authorities to use coir geo-textiles in highway construction. The Indian Road Congress has already approved its usage in the construction of rural roads due to its cost savings,” he said.

The Board is in the process of developing high-tech machinery suitable for coir fibre and re-designing existing machines to maintain the quality of the product as part of the modernisation drive.

Given the eco-friendliness of the sector and its capability to provide more rural job opportunities, the Union Government is in favour of modernising the industry.

The Centre is all set to introduce a new subsidy scheme under which if the investor invests 10 crore, the government will extend a subsidy of 2.5 crore.

The Board is also pinning greater hopes on coir wood — another value-added product made from coir fibre — as a replacement to traditional wood. Developed by the Central Institute of Coir Technology, Bengaluru, coir wood will play an important role in the furniture industry.

Nanda Kumar resigns as NDDB Chairman



A file photo of T Nanda Kumar, Chairman, NDDB

Cites discomfort with 'external environment' for quitting three years before term end

Close on heels of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan's announcement that he would demit office in September, another high-profile appointee of the UPA government, T Nanda Kumar, has resigned as Chairman of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), hinting at discomfort with the current "external environment".

A retired 1972-batch IAS officer from the Bihar cadre, Kumar had submitted his resignation on June 29.

It was accepted by the Appointments Committee of Cabinet on Wednesday. Kumar retired from the IAS in 2010.

He was appointed as the Chairman of the Board of NDDB in March 2014 after the exit of Dr Amrita Patel in February 2014. Patel, who had served about 16 years as NDDB head, was the second Chairman of the institution after its founder Dr V Kurien.

Kumar, who had a five-year term ending in 2019, will be relieved on August 1.

Point of no return

In a farewell email sent to NDDB employees last night, he hinted at the reason for his mid-term exit from the apex dairy institution.

"There comes a time in everyone's life when one's value system comes into serious conflict with the external environment. A point of no compromise becomes a point of no return. I have gone through such situations many times before. The dilemma is: should one allow such conflicts to affect an institution?"

"I have always believed that institutions are important, personalities should not matter beyond a point. I have reached such a point," he wrote announcing that

he had submitted his resignation on June 29 and that he had been informed about the acceptance of the “same by the Government”.

Kumar did not respond to a phone call.

Following his resignation, he will also step down from the posts of Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mother Dairy, Indian Immunologicals Ltd., and IDMC Ltd.

Also he will step down from the position of Chairman, Board of Governors, IRMA and Anandalaya Education Society.

Kumar expressed satisfaction over the work done during his tenure, noting that NDDDB had brought most of the Dairy Co-op Federations under a common umbrella to address the problems of farmers while taking care of the concerns of customers.

“The progress under the National Dairy Plan was accelerated to reach levels set by the World Bank. We are now in the process of requesting for an additional loan component,” he wrote.

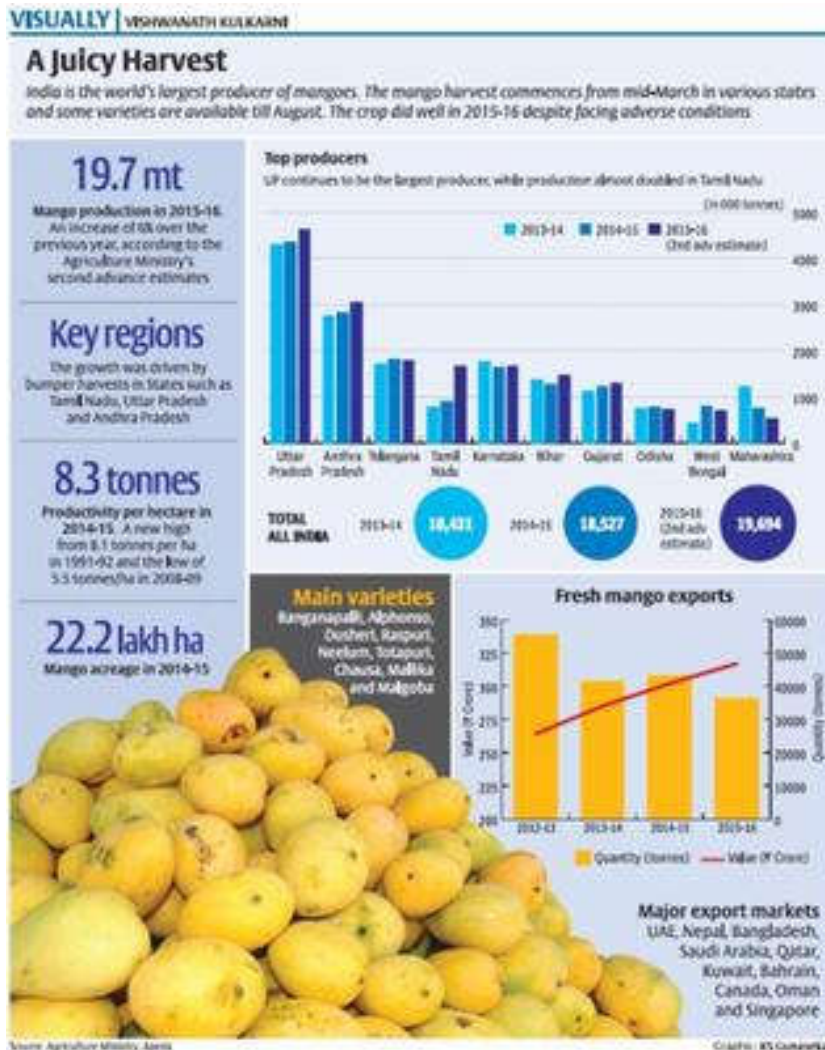
National Dairy Plan

The Centrally-funded NDDDB is currently implementing the ambitious National Dairy Plan of the Central government, which aims to improve the breed of milch animals and thereby increase milk production.

Also, it aims to help provide rural milk producers with greater access to the organised milk-processing sector.

The NDP, to be rolled out in phases, was launched in 2011. It covers 18 major milk producing States of the country, which account for over 90 per cent of the country’s milk production.

A Juicy Harvest



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Organic farming, a viable opportunity for farmers of Kandi region: PAU experts



The Punjab Agricultural University organized a one-day seminar on "Organic Farming: Opportunities and Constraints in Kandi Region of Punjab" at the Regional Research Station, Ballawal Saunkhri, district Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar. The scientists from PAU, Ludhiana; Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) of Kandi region, officers from allied departments and progressive farmers from Kandi area participated in the seminar.

In his address, Manmohanjit Singh, Director, Regional Research Station (RRS), Ballawal Saunkhri emphasized that Kandi area has a large potential for the organic farming. The fertilizer consumption per hectare is very low as compared to rest of the state, he observed. Further, he said that the government of India, under "Parampragat Kheti" scheme, is going to enhance the area under organic farming to 5 lakh acres in the next three years. However, in Punjab, the area under organic farming is only about 2000 acres, he disclosed. Singh urged the

farmers to promote organic farming for higher benefits and to conserve natural resources. He also informed the delegates about various initiatives, taken by the RRS, for the benefit of the farming community in the Kandi region.

S.S. Walia, Senior Agronomist, PAU, discussed various aspects of organic farming and recommendations of PAU for production of quality organic produce.

K.S. Sanga, Senior Entomologist, PAU, highlighted the role of beneficial insects in agriculture. He also urged the farmers to avoid using chemicals and instead promote use of bio control agents in agriculture.

Earlier, D.S. Rana, an economist, RRS, Ballawal Saunkhri welcomed all the delegates, officials and the progressive farmers.

‘Extend deadline for crop insurance’

Vasantrao Naik Shetkari Swawalamban Mission chairman Kishore Tiwari has said he would be moving through chief minister Devendra Fadnavis an urgent plea to the Centre to extend the last date for filing of applications under the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme by at least a month.

July 31 was its deadline but data collected from the 14 distressed districts of Marathwada and Vidarbha as well as the banks show that less than 25% farmers could avail of the insurance.

Tiwari said in a release there was almost a stampede in banks in Marathwada with farmers rushing at the last minute for filing insurance scheme papers. PM crop insurance has newly been introduced and there seems to be a lot of confusion about documents to be submitted.

Besides the 7/12 extract, Aadhaar card copy and certificate from talathi on the exact sowing details are also required to be submitted. But talathis in the region have expressed inability to give such a certificate when approached by farmers.

As per practice in the old weather-based crop insurance scheme, such a certificate was given on inspection of standing crop by middle of August in a kharif season.

"If the deadline is not extended to August 31 for kharif 2016, a large number of farmers would be left out," said Tiwari adding the new scheme was very beneficial for farmers because of increased coverage of risks.

Few takers for Modi's pet crop insurance scheme

Successive droughts, low reservoir levels have resulted in crops faring badly and farmers incurring heavy losses over the past two years in the state, which have in turn led to an unprecedented number of farmer suicides.

Startlingly, even such adverse conditions have failed to rouse the state ryots to take up the NDA government's flagship crop insurance scheme - the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

Commissioner for agriculture, Pandurang B Nayak said, "Of the 78 lakh farmers in Karnataka, only about 2.8 lakh farmers have availed PMFBY so far."

Although crop insurance schemes have existed since 2008, they only managed to cover about 22-23% of the farmers in the country. However, the objective of the new scheme is to ensure that the scheme covers 50% of the community. Good rains have lulled the farmers in the state into a false sense of security, resulting in only around 6% of them availing crop insurance, said agriculture department officials.

The scheme, touted to be a pet project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came into effect this kharif season, starting in June this year, when it replaced the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme.

Dubbed to be one of the most scientific crop insurance schemes, PMFBY proposes a differential premium method, under which a farmer will pay 2% of the sum insured as premium for kharif crops and 1.5% for rabi. The cap for the farmers' premium is 2% for foodgrains and oilseeds, and 5% for horticulture/

cotton crops. The balance premium will be paid by the state and central governments.

This is a departure from other insurance schemes, where farmers had to pay a premium ranging from 4 to 15% to insure crops.

Another advantage that farmers can derive from the scheme is that they are entitled to complete compensation with no reductions. It is hence surprising that a large number of farmers have not lined up for it.

Moreover, the government also stands to benefit from the scheme since the onus on debt servicing in the limiting cases in the past meant huge farm loan waivers, which in turn proved a strain on the budget.

Reluctance on the part of the farmers, along with a lack of awareness, is the reason for the poor response to the scheme in Karnataka, say experts.

"Good monsoon in major parts of the state could be one of the reasons why the farmers are not taking up the scheme. When educated people fail to understand the need for life insurance, how can one expect farmers to seek crop insurance policies and pay a premium for PMFBY," asked KV Ravindra, an insurance company executive.

However, officials say that the scheme has been promoted enthusiastically by Modi himself, who unveiled the policy twice in the state, at Belagavi and Davanagere.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Sharad Pawar sees pressure on sugar prices continuing next year



Sugar rates, which at present are ruling in the range of Rs 34-38/kg, may come under pressure due to a likely gap in supply and demand.

NEW DELHI: Sugar prices are expected to remain under pressure due to an estimated supply gap of 3.5-4 million tonnes in the next marketing year starting October, former Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said today.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) supremo also asked the industry to be prepared for any government action, including possibility of import of raw sugar to boost domestic supply and check prices.

"This year, sugar production situation is good. But I don't see similar situation in the next year. In 2016-17, there will be 3.5-4 million tonnes gap in demand and supply," Pawar said at the 74th annual convention of the Sugar Technologists' Association of India (STAI).

Sugar rates, which at present are ruling in the range of Rs 34-38/kg, may come under pressure due to a likely gap in supply and demand, he said.

"Next year, with a gap of 3.4 to 4 million tonnes of sugar, there will definitely be an impact on prices and the government will take some steps and the industry should be ready for that," he noted.

The government has projected sugar output to decline to 23-23.5 million tonnes in 2016-17 marketing year (October- September), as against 25.1 million tonnes in the current year. Meanwhile, industry body Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) has pegged sugar output at 23.26 million tonnes for next year.

Pawar said the country's sugar demand is around 25.6 million tonnes and is expected to grow at 3-4 per cent per annum. By 2020, sugar demand is pegged at 30 million tonnes.

Apprehensive about the government's policies to check price rise in sugar, Pawar asked the industry to be prepared for the possibility of sugar imports.

"A suggestion has been made to import raw sugar to bridge the gap. There are other alternatives and I hope the government will take appropriate action," he said.

To curb price rise in sugar, the government has recently imposed 20 per cent export duty on sugar and withdrawn cane production subsidy to the mills.

Water levels in dams improve, but still below last year

This year the monsoon is expected to be above normal, following two consecutive years of deficient rainfall.

NEW DELHI: Water levels in 91 major reservoirs in India rose 9% in the past week, as heavy rains lashed their catchment areas, but remained lower compared with those at this time last year and the 10-year average.

These dams together held 59.366 billion cubic metres of water on Thursday, compared with 68.454 bcm at this time last year and the 10-year average of 63.128 bcm, according to data from the Central Water Commission. Last week, the storage was 54.419 bcm.



The India Meteorological Department has predicted strong rains until August 14, which could improve the water situation. Rains in the week to July 27 were 4% below the average for the past 50-years.

In its extended-range forecast, the weather office forecast normal to above-normal rainfall in parts of central and northwest India on several days until mid-August. It also expects above-normal rains in southern India till the end of July and near-normal thereafter. Below-normal rains are likely in eastern India during first week of August.

This year the monsoon is expected to be above normal, following two consecutive years of deficient rainfall.

Higher water levels in the reservoirs improve the prospects of planting crops and generating electricity after the four-month monsoon season ends in September.

The western region — Gujarat and Maharashtra — have more water in their dams this year than in 2015. However, four reservoirs — three of them in Maharashtra — still don't have water.

As many as 28 dams have water that exceeds last year's levels, while 37 have more water than the 10-year average.

The basins of the Ganga, Narmada, Godavari and the west-flowing rivers of southern India recorded better water levels than the 10-year average. The Tapi, Mahi and Sabarmati had normal storage while the Indus, Krishna, Mahanadi and Cauvery basins had deficient storage levels. The situation was "highly deficient" in the Kutch basin.

Steep rise in production cost hits Northern India tea belt



"Beside green leaf production, storage of processed tea has also become difficult to manage due to high relative humidity of air that sometime is going even above 90%," said planters.

SILIGURI: Unprecedented level of rainfall in northern India tea belt is causing steep rise in production cost of the green beverage. Escalated cost of production is apprehended to continue even after the monsoon making things tough for the whole industry.

"Cost of production has already gone up in the tune of at least 15% . We are yet to understand the exact nature and quantum of health damage taken place for the bushes that may impact quality and quantity of output even after monsoon. Managing that health issues will demand extra amount of input cost and may further pull up the production cost even after monsoon," said K K Mintri, Chairman TeraiBSE 4.83 % Indian Planters Association.

As a senior planter from Terai region S Seal explained, "In labour intensive tea industry, workers payment contributes 60 - 70% to the operational expense. Now continuous rain is causing significant downfall in output per worker increasing cost per unit volume of yield. Moreover, to compensate lack of nutrition caused by low Sunshine, extra nutrients are to be sprayed directly on leaf. This also increases production cost."

"Beside green leaf production, storage of processed tea has also become difficult to manage due to high relative humidity of air that sometime is going even above 90%," said planters.

But above all these, "Heavy and continuous rain is making regular medication, pesticide or fertilizer spraying difficult and that's a long term compromise with the health of bushes. In addition, roots are now rotting without proper aeration due to soil oversaturated with water. New roots are also not growing. These will drastically reduce nutrient suction and thus hamper production. Though it may incur cost, scientific and adequate health rejuvenation of bushes will be a must to ensure adequate post monsoon output," said senior tea scientist Dr. S E Kabir.

However, "Tea Industry both in Assam and Bengal is foreseeing grim days ahead, faced as it is with the onslaught of Natural Calamities resulting in lesser crops," said Tea Association of India Secretary General P K Bhattacharjee. Assam and Sub Himalayan West Bengal host around 50% of nation's tea plantation area.