

06.06.2016

THE HINDU

Call to preserve soil health



Farmers taking a pledge to preserve natural and organic farming practices at traditional paddy festival near Tiruthuraipoondi on Sunday.

It is essential to conserve the quality and fertility of soil than increasing the productivity. Only such a resolve could ensure sustainable livelihood based on agriculture, experts said at the 10th national level traditional paddy festival held at Adirangam near here on Sunday.

Speaking at the workshop, Agriculture Officer from Kovilpatti Poochi N. Selvam said that there were 22,292 traditional native paddy strains in the country till some decades back. Almost all of them have been lost due to deplorable chemical farming practices. In our quest for feeding the burgeoning population through increasing productivity, we have lost the wonderful native paddy strains forever. Instead of enriching the soil, it would be better if farmers save the soil fertility than trying to increase productivity.

Natural farming expert Dr. Uma Maheswari of Karaikal said that more diseases were caused by food due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides during the cultivation stage.

Use of organically produced rice and vegetables could play a vital role in ensuring a stress-free life.

Nutrition and dietetics expert M. Menaka of Ethiraj College, Chennai, urged the participants to consume red rice, minor millets, pulses and organically grown vegetables. She noted that maappillai samba rice variety must be consumed before marriage, kavuni variety after marriage, poongaroo rice during pregnancy and child birth while lactating mothers must consume paalkuda vaarai rice.

When the infant grows to be six months old, waaran samba rice variety could be fed while kaattu yaam variety rice greatly helped in joint related disorders, Prof. Menaka said adding people must generally avoid taking wheat and maida products such as parotta.

PWD Superintending Engineer R. Elangovan rued that the society has not concentrated on conserving water bodies. In 67 places across Tamil Nadu, bus stands have been constructed on water bodies. In fact, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court itself was constructed after levelling a huge tank. If the trend continued then water scarcity might become acute in future. Farmers must come forward to preserve water bodies in their interest.

Coordinator Nel Jayaraman, CREATE trust chairman Ponnambalam, project coordinator K. Suresh Kanna made elaborate arrangements for the festival.

All participants took a pledge to preserve organic and natural farming practices besides conserving environment.

New initiative to popularise hybrid pigeonpea

Shobhana K. Pattanayak of the Department of Agriculture Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DoAC&FW), has called on all value chain actors, including farmers, seed companies, private sector, and research organisations, to find a joint solution to resolve all hurdles and issues that are preventing Indian farmers from meeting their demand for hybrid pigeonpea seeds and other pulses.

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) recently hosted a high-level planning meeting chaired by Mr. Pattanayak.

Over forty participants, including farmer representatives, government officials from five States – Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Odisha, and State agricultural universities, came together and started a new initiative to explore ways of making India self-sufficient in the production of pulses, in particular hybrid pigeonpea.

“We want to hear from all the sectors on what is stopping the popularisation of hybrid pigeonpea and what can be done about it. We need to popularise pigeonpea hybrids in major pigeonpea producing States. The solution needs to have all the parties playing a part,” said Mr. Pattanayak.

“In order to meet its ever-growing demand for pulses, India needs to achieve self-sufficiency in pulses,” said Dr. David Bergvinson, director general, ICRISAT.

Delta farmers upbeat about kuruvai paddy prospects



DELIVERING THE PACKAGE:Collector N. Subbaiyan inspecting the mat nursery of kuruvai paddy near Thanjavur on Saturday.— PHOTO: DIPR

Buoyed over positive weather forecast for the south-west monsoon, farmers are hopeful of a good kuruvai harvest this season and their efforts would be supported by the State government’s kuruvai package, say officials in Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts where kuruvai paddy cultivation work has commenced in many places.

Consequent to Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's announcement on kuruvai package to benefit the farmers who go in for the short-term paddy varieties in the delta districts, the administrations have shifted gear to take the message of package benefits to all farmers.

In Thanjavur, Collector N. Subbaiyan toured the fields where kuruvai paddy nurseries have been raised using the mat nursery for machine transplantation under System of Rice Intensification. "This is very useful for farmers in that it is cost effective, less time, water, and labour-consuming, besides being easy to de-weed. Productivity is also high and the State government is promoting the SRI through incentives," said Dr. Subbaiyan after inspecting nurseries at Karambai and Raramuthirakkottai near Ammapettai.

He said it had been planned to take up kuruvai paddy cultivation on 80,625 acres in Thanjavur district.

In Nagapattinam, Collector S. Palanisamy, after a review meeting with Agriculture Department officials, said subsidy for mechanised planting would cover 15,000 acres this kuruvai season.

He directed the extension officials to hold meetings in villages to popularise the kuruvai package among farmers so that the benefits reached all sections.

In Tiruvarur, Collector M. Mathivanan took stock of kuruvai paddy season preparations and said that the three-phase power supply would be provided at least for 12 hours a day.

Special attention would be on the Vennar sub-division where the surface water lacked the quality to raise kuruvai paddy.

Green manure seeds would be supplied free of cost to the farmers and ploughing subsidy of Rs. 500 an acre would also be extended to them, Mr. Mathivanan said.

Solar pumps for farmers to generate energy: CM

10,000 pumps to be provided in the first stage



N. Chandrababu Naidu

The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to introduce solar pumps to enable farmers become producers of power for ensuring all-time supply of water to their farms.

The Government has targeted introduction of 10,000 solar pumps in the next few months in the first phase. The step forms part of the endeavour to provide uninterrupted power supply to agriculture and other sectors.

The State had already embarked upon replacement of 15 lakh conventional agriculture pumps with energy-efficient ones and it was proposing to deploy technology to help farmers to operate the pumps from anywhere using their mobile phones.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who disclosed this in an open letter, said the Government was planning to spend over Rs. 5,000 crore on introduction of technology in the management of power sector.

The Eastern Power Distribution Company Limited had already introduced a project called e-Sarani to ensure that information pertaining to power supply reached consumers on their mobile phones. The Chief Minister explained the difficult situation in which the State had landed with a daily deficit of 22 million units at the time of bifurcation of the State. Six-hour power cut in towns and 12-hour unofficial cut in villages besides power holiday to the industry was the order of the day during the previous Congress regime.

Ever since it assumed charge, the State Government focussed on improving the situation and ensured that the deficits were overcome in less than six months and the State currently had surplus power. “We are in a comfortable position to sell power to other States and we had offered to sell 300 MW of surplus power to neighbouring Telangana,” he said.

The Chief Minister said the belief that power consumption was less in Seemandhra than in Telangana was proved wrong as the per capita consumption in the new State was pegged at 982 units as against 951 units estimated. “How far is it justified to claim that power consumption was less at a time when the utilities were imposing power cuts and declared holiday to industry?” he asked.

Solar power parks

Mr. Naidu said the Government laid equal emphasis on the promotion of non-conventional energy and it was accordingly setting up 40,000 MW solar power parks with the help of the Central Government.

Energy from conventional sources was also being tapped with the NTPC and other power majors setting up their plants in the State.

Agri-extension officers to help ryots in use of pesticides

Once the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC) completes the process of recruitment of 2,000-odd agriculture extension officers, they will decide on the kind and quantum of pesticides necessary for farmers and not the shopkeepers, said Agriculture Minister P. Srinivas Reddy here on Sunday.

In the absence of extension officers, farmers were forced to depend on shopkeepers for everything and the latter were dumping “unsold” stocks on farmers, the Minister said. “There has been a delay of six months in recruitment

due to a course case, but now that the exam has been held, the extension officers will soon be in service,” he said.



Champanioning a cause :Ministers Pocharam Srinivas Reddy and Jogu Ramanna attending the World Environment Day celebrations in Hyderabad on Sunday.- Photo: G. Ramakrishna

“We will have these officers at every mandal and an assistant director at the district level. Only when extension officers sign the requisition based on farmers’ and crop needs, pesticides will be supplied,” he said, deploring the tendency of overuse of pesticides leading to ill-health among people. He also attributed the rise of cancer cases to indiscriminate use of pesticides and said the government was encouraging organic farming extensively.

Mr. Reddy was addressing a gathering at the launch of Telangana Jala Samrakshana Vedika by TRS founding member V. Prakash, water harvesting & recycling expert Ayyappa Masagi and Ch. Ravindra Kumar of ‘Freedom’, a voluntary body involved in de-silting of tanks and development of minor irrigation tanks.

To commemorate the World Environment Day, a brochure explaining the activities of the organisation

(savewater2021@gmail.com , www.deccanwater.com) was unveiled in the presence of Environment and Forest Minister J. Ramanna, Rural Development

Minister J. Krishna Rao, Mayor B. Rammohan, TS Planning Board Vice-Chairman S. Niranjana Reddy, Chevella MP K. Vishveshwar Reddy and others.

“Efficient use of water is as important as harvesting water,” said Mr. Srinivas Reddy and lamented that despite the government spending thousands of crores of rupees on water conservation, the results were not as desired. He wanted the government engineering machinery to ruminates on the methods used to build check dams and other structures to arrest flowing water for better efficiency.

His ministerial colleague Mr. Krishna Rao called for a change in water usage itself. Hailing the work done by Mr. Masagi in Karnataka and AP, the Ministers said his services would be utilised in Telangana too.

Tree-planting drive marks Environment Day fete



Going green: Ports Minister Kadannappally Ramachandran planting a sapling at Government Vocational Higher Secondary School in Kannur to mark the district-level inauguration of the World Environment Day programme organised by the Social Forestry Division in Kannur on Sunday. (on right) Palakkad MP, M.B.Rajesh plants a sapling as part of World Environment Day celebrations at

Kodumbu, Palakkad on Sunday. The programme was organised by the DYFI. — Photos; S. K. Mohan and K.K. Mustafah

People from almost all walks of life joined the World Environment Day celebrations by planting trees and organising awareness programmes of various nature in the district on Sunday.

Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan kicked off the year-long Punarjani programme meant to revive and conserve the Bharatapuzha. Opinion leaders and celebrities from different fields joined the programme held at Tavanur.

Most youth organisations, including DYFI, AIYF, Youth Congress, Muslim Youth League, celebrated the day by planting trees. Minister for Local Administration K.T. Jaleel inaugurated the DYFI programme at Ayinkalam.

Jnanpith laureate M.T. Vasudevan Nair launched Oisca International's selfie-with-my-tree project at Thunchanparamba, Tirur. The Oisca district chapter promotes youngsters to post on Facebook periodic selfies with the trees they planted.

V. Abdurahiman, MLA from Tanur, began his work in the constituency by planting 4,918 trees. He had secured a margin of 4,918 votes in the historic victory he attained over the Indian Union Muslim League in Tanur.

The Haritha Sena corps of KHM Higher Secondary School, Valakkulam, conducted an awareness jatha. Environmentalist Thorappa Mustafa flagged off the jatha, which was accorded reception at Calicut University, Chelari, Chemmad, Padikkal, Kakkad, Venniyur and Kottakkal.

Panakkad Sayed Munawwarali Shihab Thangal felicitated the students.

The green corps of Valakkulam school are planning a two-month-long programme, which will include Monsoon trekking, Njattuvela mela, and green selfie contest.

National Service Scheme volunteers of PMSAMA Higher Secondary School, Kodur, celebrated the day by planting hundreds of trees. Licensed Engineers and Supervisors Federation (LENSFED) planted 101 trees at Thazepalam, Tirur.

Malappuram Municipal chairperson C.H. Jameela inaugurated the celebrations organised by the All Kerala Photographers Association. C. Pramod presided.

Jobs will be created: Minister

Our Staff Reporter writes from Thrissur:

Tourism Minister A.C. Moideen has said that the government is aiming to create job opportunities in the tourism sector.

Addressing the Environmental Day celebrations organised by the District Tourism Department at Vilangan Kunnu, here, on Sunday he said five lakh employment opportunities will be created in the tourism sector in the coming five years. “Environmental protection and tourism development are not the responsibility of the government alone. The government will ensure participation of the general public, organisations and local bodies in it,” he said.

The government is not against development works with private participation, the Minister said. He also inaugurated the Environmental Day celebrations at the collectorate. Speaking after inaugurating the afforestation drive organised by the AITUC at Irinjalakuda as part of Environmental Day celebration, CPI State secretary Kanam Rajendran said the party aimed at sustainable development by empowering the strong relationship between human beings and nature. Addressing another Environmental Day celebration at Mary Immaculate Mission Hospital Engandiyur, Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar said the new generation should cultivate eco-friendly living as a culture. “The pure air and water are the rights of the coming generation. No development is possible by destroying the nature. Not only June 5, every day should be environmental protection day,” he said. Addressing the World Environment Day celebrations, Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) Vice-Chancellor Dr. P.Rajendran said real progress of society encompasses concern for the environment.

Erode, a destination for food processing sector

Thousands of registered food and beverage processing units, leading brands of food products, production of several agricultural products – these factors have all made Erode a destination for food processing sector.

Be it dairy products, masala powders, pastry or traditional snacks, the district has hundreds of units, from small-scale ones to well-known brands.

According to Rasumani, general manager of District Industries Centre, Erode, there are 10,720 registered micro, small and medium-scale enterprises in the food processing sector in the district. There are about 100 large-scale units too, besides several unregistered units.

“Almost 50 per cent of the milk supplied to Bengaluru is from Erode,” says P. Thirumurthy, secretary of Erode District Small-Scale Industries (EDDISIA).

He says, “There is a 25 per cent growth in food industries in Erode over the recent years. The abundance of agricultural products such as coconut, lemon, turmeric, sugarcane and milk, surplus availability of workers, and sufficient water supply attract industrialists to set up processing units here.”

Since the district has these strengths, the association has appealed to the Centre to establish an agro-park as a special economic zone in the district.

One of the well-known food products from Erode is Aavin’s palgova. “Aavin was established in Erode in 1979 to cater to the milk needs of Chennai. Processed milk was transported through road and rail tankers. Currently, Aavin has expanded its market and supplies to local consumers too,” says an official of Aavin. Erode stands third in the State in procurement of milk next to undivided Salem (Salem and Namakkal) and North Arcot districts (Vellore and Tiruvannamalai).

“Erode is an ideal location for business. We never had to import any raw material. We get everything here,” says Raja, who started Milka Wonder Cake in Erode in 1989.

Now the company has its manufacturing units in Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, Salem, and Chennai. “Initially, we baked only bread here. Gradually we started to sell cakes, rusks and biscuits. We sell across the south Indian States and export to the UAE too,” he says.

P. Thirumurthy, managing director of Sakthi Fruits, says, “With industrial experience gained from working for other industries, we began Sakthi Fruits in 1994 as a family venture. Since then, we have grown considerably, offering

jams, sauces, tutti frutties and papaya cube candies. Since Erode has surplus production of papaya, the company plans to expand its product portfolio, especially items made out of papaya.”

(with inputs from Dharsini Kathirvel)

Coconut trees hit by leaf blight disease

The air-borne fungus affects nut yield; incidence high along Palar river bed



Cause of concern: Scientists from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra inspect a field where coconut trees have been affected by the leaf blight disease.— Photo: Special Arrangement

Leaf blight disease has hit coconut trees in various parts of the district, especially in areas located along the Palar riverbed. The disease, according to experts, was air-borne and affected the nut yield in coconut cultivation.

Scientists at the Agricultural Research Station (ARS) and Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Virinjipuram had started to receive information on the leaf blight disease (‘Pestalotiopsis palmarum fungus’) from farmers cultivating coconut crops from the end of April.

“We started to get samples of the affected trees from the first week of May. The disease started to spread when summer began. This is mainly due to change in climate. Leaf blight disease is air-borne and was prevalent in parts of Kerala. It had spread to areas in Coimbatore, Erode and Salem, and has now affected

coconut crops in Vellore,” said M. Pandiyan, professor and head, ARS and KVK, Virinjipuram.

In Vellore district, coconut crop was cultivated on around 22,680 hectares with a production of 4,127 tonnes. Leaf blight disease, which occurred due to change in climate and increased temperature, has been noticed in several parts of the district especially in Jolarpet, Alangayam, Gudiyatham, Anaicut and Palar river basin areas. The scientists have visited about seven to eight affected fields till now.

“The symptoms of the disease are high in fields located in areas along Palar riverbed,” he added.

One of the early symptoms of the disease is appearance of yellowish brown tiny spots on the leaflet. These spots gradually enlarge and turn grey. The peripheral areas of the spot become dark brown.

He added that the patches of spot coalesce to form large brown areas as the disease progresses, and the leaflets appear dried. The symptoms are predominant on the lower fronds. Seedlings and young palms are highly susceptible to leaf blight disease, a press release said.

In a severely-infected tree, the lower fronds dry from the tip and exhibit a charred or burnt appearance. The affected nuts are desiccated, deformed and drop prematurely, resulting in nut yield loss up to 10 to 25 per cent, the release said.

The palms are predisposed to the disease by conditions such as dry weather, excessive nitrogen and water logging. The scientists have advised farmers to remove and burn the severely affected leaves to prevent further spread. The leaf blight disease appears in weak or neglected palms and it was necessary for farmers to ensure normal fertiliser application. KVK has provided guidelines for the management of the disease including root feeding technique to affected farmers.

“We will be providing the necessary advice to agriculture officers during a zone meeting this week. They in turn will inform the farmers,” he added.

Pallickal to give major push to organic farming

Individuals and farmers' organisations begin work in 10 acres of land



In tune with nature: The first yield of cucumber cultivated through poly-house farming at Pallickal.

The Pallickal grama panchayat has decided to give a major push to organic and poly-house farming in the coming days following the rich dividends farmers have made in the recent times by adopting the new farming techniques.

Great support

The panchayat has received encouraging support from farmers and residents associations to promote cultivation of pesticide-free vegetables and adopt different techniques in farming. Pallickal has a number of farmers engaged in organic farming and recently individuals have come forward to take up poly-house farming too.

Individuals and farmers' organisations have started organic farming in around 10 acres of land.

According to Adukkoor Unnikrishnan, president of Pallickal panchayat, there is now a renewed interest in farming. "It is not just farmers who are coming

forward. Residents associations and individuals want to invest in farming. The civic body has decided to cash in on the interest shown by the people by providing them quality vegetable seeds, labour support and organic manure at affordable prices,” he said.

For successful implementation of various farming schemes, women’s clusters had been formed in several places in the panchayat, he added.

On Friday, a farmer in the panchayat got a good yield of cucumber cultivated in 1,000 square metres of poly-house farm.

A first of its kind initiative in the panchayat, the farmer, Mohammed Faizy, a Gulf-returnee, hopes to get a yield of 100 kg of cucumber on alternate days over the next 15 days.

Investment

The farmer has made an investment of Rs.15 lakh.

K. Smitha, Agriculture Officer, Krishi Bhavan, Pallickal, said the farmer would be getting a 75 per cent subsidy for the investment he had made.

“There has been tremendous response from the people here for farming. The organic farming has made big roots in the region and with the latest initiative in poly-house farming we can expect more farming activities,” she said.

Hosur farmers reap rich with poly green technology

K. Venkatasamy Reddy at Chinnabelagondapalli village at Hosur block earns Rs. 4 lakh annually from cut flower production. He received a subsidy of Rs 9.35 lakh under the National Horticulture Mission scheme (2013-2014) for his 2,000 sq. metre poly green house.

He gets a premium price for the flowers (Rs. 150 to Rs. 180 per bunch of 20 flowers) during Valentine’s Day, New Year and Christmas festival and a nominal price of Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 / bunch during the rest of the year.

Mr. Reddy, a pioneer in this poly green house cultivation, motivated nearly 15 farmers in this village to take up cut flower production under poly green houses. As such, an area of 30,000 square metres has been brought under poly green

house cultivation. And, the village is now a cluster for poly green houses, according to S. Raja Mohamed, Joint Director of Horticulture, Krishnagiri.



Agricultural Production Commissioner and Secretary S. Vijayakumar at the poly green house in Chinnabalegondapalli village in Hosur block, Krishnagiri district, on Saturday.

Inspecting cultivation of roses in poly green house and implementation of various horticulture schemes in Hosur block on Saturday, S. Vijayakumar, Agriculture Production Commissioner and Secretary, appreciated farmers, including Mr. Reddy, for producing cut flowers, especially roses, of exportable standards. With conducive agro climatic conditions, Krishnagiri District, considered the hub of poly green houses, has the largest area under mangoes, tomatoes and roses in the State. Horticulture crops are grown on 57,414 hectares and production is to the tune of 4.71 lakh tonnes. In the district, nearly 27 lakh sq.metre area was brought under poly green house cultivation especially in blocks like Hosur, Thally, Kelamangalam and Shoolagiri, Mr. Mohamed said.

Cut flower roses are being exported to countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and United Arab Emirates and a variety of roses are cultivated here.

Aerial seeding to increase green cover

1,000 to 1,500 tonnes of seeds will be used under the programme in the State



Schoolchildren planting a sapling at Gollapudi Market in Vijayawada on Sunday on the occasion of Environment Day. —Photo: Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar

The State government is contemplating aerial seeding from the beginning of the monsoon season to December end, according to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

The Chief Minister took part in the Environment Day celebrations at the Gollapudi Market Yard near here on Sunday.

He planted saplings along with 1,000 school children to mark the occasion.

Mr. Naidu said aerial seeding would increase green cover. As much as 1,000 to 1,500 metric tons of seeds would be used for that in forests. Check dams and trenches would be constructed to conserve rain water. Aerial seeding is a technique of sowing seeds using helicopters and aeroplanes to scatter them. Aerial reforestation, usually done to repopulate forest land, gained currency after some disaster in the 1930s. Mr. Naidu said the government had set a target of planting saplings in every district every month.

As many as 15 crore saplings would be grown in nurseries. Every sapling that was planted would be geo-tagged. It was aimed at ensuring that all saplings that

were planted were protected and necessary precautions for its growth were taken, he said.

Urging the people to take up plantation on a war-footing, the Chief Minister said sapling plantation could be taken up on special occasions like birthdays, wedding days and on other occasions. Focus should be on nurturing them not just planting them.

Irrigation Minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao said the government launched desilting works in 40,000 tanks across the State. The government spent Rs. 2,000 crore to desilt 185 crore cubic metres of soil. The farmers were using it in their fields, he said.

‘Mulugu will soon become seed hub’

Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy said Mulugu would become the seed hub of India.

Speaking to reporters after examining the ongoing construction work at Mulugu, Mr. Srinivas Reddy said the horticulture university would be established soon that would give a fillip to research activity.

“Mulugu will also be transformed into an education hub. Cultivation of vegetables and fruits would be taken up on a large scale with the help of research activity in the university. The construction would be completed before the end of this year,” said Mr. Srinivas Reddy. Haritha Haram OSD Priyanka Varghese, Agriculture University Registrar Pratap, GADA Special Officer Hanumantha Rao, DRDA Project Director Satyanarayana Reddy and others participated in the programme.

Delta farmers upbeat

Good monsoon outlook and special package buoys them

Buoyed over positive weather forecast for the south-west monsoon, farmers are hopeful of a good kuruvai this season and their efforts would be supported by the State government’s kuruvai package, say officials in Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Nagapattinam districts where kuruvai paddy cultivation work has commenced in many places.

Consequent to Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's announcement on kuruvai package to benefit farmers who go in for the short term paddy varieties in the delta districts, the administrations have shifted gear to take the message of package benefits to all sections of farmers.

In Thanjavur, District Collector N. Subbaiyan toured the fields where kuruvai paddy nurseries have been raised using the mat nursery for machine transplantation under the System of Rice Intensification. "This is very useful for farmers in that it is cost effective, less time, water, and labour besides being easy to de-weed. Productivity is also high and the State government is promoting the SRI through incentives such as the farmer-friendly kuruvai package," said Dr. Subbaiyan after inspecting nurseries at Karambai and Raramuthirakkottai near Ammapettai. Dr. Subbaiyan said it had been planned to take up kuruvai paddy cultivation on 80,625 acres in Thanjavur district this season and said planting had been completed on 24,625 acres of land mostly in Kumbakoanm, Tiruvidaimardur, and Papanasam taluks.

In Nagapattinam, District Collector S. Palanisamy after a review meeting with Agriculture Department officials, said subsidy for mechanised planting would cover 15,000 acres this kuruvai season.

Target for kuruvai paddy set at 8,500 acres in Tiruchi

The government has allocated Rs. 88.55 lakh for special package

About 8,500 acres of land is expected to be covered under paddy during the kuruvai season in Tiruchi district this year with farmers supported under the special package announced by the State government.

Given the poor storage in the Mettur reservoir, kuruvai paddy could be raised in only the filter point areas in the district.

The Agriculture Department is gearing up to implement the special kuruvai package announced by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa to help farmers raise the crop. The government has allocated Rs. 88.55 lakh for Tiruchi district for implementing the special package in delta districts.

Apart from three-phase power supply for 12 hours a day, the package envisages distribution of micronutrients, pipes, and other inputs free of cost or at subsidy to farmers in filter point areas.

Farmers would be extended backend subsidy of Rs. 4,000 an acre for mechanised transplantation and preparation of mat nurseries. The amount would be directly credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries. The subsidy would be extended for about 1,500 acres in the district.

Farmers in about 1,500 acres with alkaline and saline fields would be given five kg micro nutrients each estimated at Rs. 170 free of cost. Besides, farmers with such fields would be provided 10 kg zinc sulphate each free to cover an area of about 4,000 acres.

Besides, 50 units of HDPE pipes to irrigate the fields would be provided with full subsidy to farmers in the district, Collector K.S. Palanisamy said after holding a review meeting of officials to discuss the implementation of the package here on Saturday.

Joint Director of Agriculture R. Chandrasekaran participated.

Soon, a separate board for arecanut cultivation

The Karnataka Agriculture Price Commission (APC) has convened a meeting in Bengaluru on June 6 to discuss the formation of a separate board for arecanut cultivation, said chairman Prakash Kammaradi.

A technical committee comprising vice-chancellors of agriculture universities, representatives of arecanut cooperative marketing societies and farmers' organisations was formed to work out the modalities on the formation of the board.

Following the meeting, the commission will submit a proposal to the State government on the formation of the board, Mr. Kammaradi told presspersons here on Saturday.

The formation of a separate board at a national level for arecanut cultivation on the model of the existing boards for coffee, rubber, spices has been a long-standing demand of the farmers.

The chairperson of Indian Institute of Plantation Management and other agriculture experts will be invited for the meeting.

After the APC submits the proposal, the State government will request the Centre to form the board by passing an Act in the Parliament, Mr. Kammaradi explained.

He added that the board would collect information on the area of cultivation of arecanut, the total production, and quantum of imports and would undertake a study and research pest management and value-addition for the produce.

As more than 60 percent of the total area of cultivation of arecanut is in Karnataka, the MPs from the State should also request the Centre to establish the board, he said.

Initial opposition

Replying to a query, he said that initially there was opposition from a section of cooperative societies engaged in the marketing of arecanut towards the formation of the board on the grounds that it would be run by bureaucrats.

The APC has since convinced the cooperative societies that there would be a fair representation of all the stakeholders including farmers, marketing cooperative societies and agriculture experts in the board, he said.

New agriculture research cell opened

Similar centres set up in Bengaluru, Dharwad & Raichur too

The Cost of Cultivation and Market Intelligence Cell (CCMIC) established by Karnataka Agriculture Prices Commission (APC) at University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, commenced functioning on Saturday.

Prakash Kammaradi, Chairman, APC, after inaugurating the CCMIC on the UAHS campus, in Shivamogga on Saturday, said that similar centres are established at University of Agricultural Sciences in Bengaluru, Dharwad, Raichur and at University of Horticultural Sciences, Bagalkot, too.

Last year, the commission had collected information on cost incurred for the cultivation of 17 major crops and had submitted a report to the State government in this regard. The CCMICs have been established with the objective to ensure the collection of the information in an authentic and

scientific manner. Through CCMICs, the APC has planned to collect information on cost incurred for the cultivation of 31 crops in the year 2016-17. A report will soon be submitted to the State government in this regard, Mr. Kammaradi said.



Scientific approach:APC chairman Prakash Kammaradi (second from right) at the inauguration of the Cost of Cultivation and Market Intelligence Cell in Shivamogga on Saturday.— Photo: VAIDYA

The CCMIC will collect information from 40 farmers from each district that comes under the jurisdiction of the university where it functions, on the cost incurred for preparation of land for tilling, purchasing inputs, removal of weeds, irrigation and harvesting. The data would be scientifically processed and a report would be submitted to the State government in this regard, he said.

At present, the minimum support price (MSP) announced by the Central government for many crops, including ragi, is less than the cost of cultivation. The information collected through CCMIC will help the government fix MSP in a scientific manner, he said.

Mr. Kammaradi added that an amount of Rs. 5 lakh has been provided to create necessary infrastructure for the Shivamogga unit of CCMIC and two posts of research assistant have also been sanctioned for it.

In the coming days, the CCMIC would also provide information to the farmers on prevailing trends in the market and help them explore new markets for their produces, he added.

Hanumana Gowda Belagurki, member of the Commission, H.R. Basavarajappa, working president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, M.K. Naik, Director of Research, UAHS, Shivamogga, T.H. Gowda, Director of Extension, and Dean of the university M. Manjunath were present.

Missing the wetlands for the water



UNEASY CALM: “Wetlands are the most imperilled natural ecosystem worldwide.” Black-winged stilts at the Pallikaranai wetland in Chennai. Photo: K. Pichumani

Wetlands need to be reinforced as more than just open sources of water. How they are identified and conserved requires a rethink

The government is all set to change the rules on wetlands. The Draft Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2016, which will replace the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules of 2010, seek to give power to the States

to decide what they must do with their wetlands. This includes deciding which wetlands should be protected and what activities should be allowed or regulated, while making affable calls for ‘sustainability’ and ‘ecosystem services’.

On the face of it, this appears to favour decentralisation and federalism. But the peculiar reality of wetlands shows that local pulls and pressures are not the best determinants for their protection. Both water in liquid form and wetlands in the form of ‘land’ are hotly contested, making wetlands the most imperilled natural ecosystem worldwide. It is imperative that the Draft Wetlands Rules, 2016 (comments for which close today) be looked at with a hard, if not cynical, eye. Three issues are of immediate concern. First, the draft does away with the Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority, which had *suo moto* cognisance of wetlands and their protection. Second, the draft rules contain no ecological criteria for recognising wetlands, such as biodiversity, reefs, mangroves, and wetland complexes. And finally it has deleted sections on the protection of wetlands, and interpretation of harmful activities which require regulation, which found reference in the 2010 rules.

Experiments with water systems

One of the biggest ironies around water is that it comes from rivers and wetlands, yet it is seen as divorced from them. While water is used as a resource or good, public policy does not always grasp that it is part of a natural ecosystem. Efforts at engineering water systems are thus efforts at augmenting water supply rather than strengthening the capacities of ecological systems. There have been many recent attempts at this sort of engineering — Karnataka had dredged its rivers, for instance; other States may follow suit. The Ken and Betwa rivers in Madhya Pradesh are to be interlinked, and we have a history of building dams and barrages to store water. Parliament has already passed a Waterways Act, which will make navigation channels of 111 rivers, by straightening, dredging, and creating barrages.

While these projects require serious ecological consideration, they are usually informed only by the need to ‘use’ water. For instance, river dredging may increase the capacity of a river channel, but can also interfere with underground reservoirs. Over-dredging can destroy these reservoirs. River interlinking changes hydrology and can benefit certain areas from a purely anthropocentric

perspective, but does nothing to augment water supply to other non-target districts. Constructions of barrages have impacts on ecosystems and economies: the commercially important hilsa fish are no longer found in the Padma river after the construction of the Farraka barrage across the Ganges.

In the case of wetlands like ponds, lakes and lagoons, the contestations are more fierce. Who owns the wetland is a common quandary — and what happens to the wetland also depends on this. Asia's largest freshwater oxbow lake, the Kanwar lake in Bihar, has shrunk to one-third of its size due to encroachment, much like Jammu and Kashmir's Dal lake. Water sources like streams, which go into lakes, also get cut off, as is the case of lakes in Bengaluru and streams in the Delhi Ridge. The political pressure to usurp water and wetlands as land is high — and for this reason, States have failed to secure perimeters and catchment areas or notify wetlands.

Why then do the Draft Wetland Rules award full authority to the States? The particularly complex case of wetlands warrants more checks and balances. In the proposed scenario, with an absence of scientific criteria for identifying wetlands, it is imperative to have a second independent functioning authority.

What comprises a wetland is an important question that the Draft Rules leave unanswered. Historically, as wetlands did not earn revenue, they were marked as 'wastelands'. While the Wetland Atlas of India says the country has 1,88,470 inland wetlands, the actual number may be much more: U.P. itself has more than one lakh wetlands, mostly unidentified by the government.

Significantly, the 2010 rules outline criteria for wetland identification including genetic diversity, outstanding natural beauty, wildlife habitats, corals, coral reefs, mangroves, heritage areas, and so on. These criteria would refer to wetlands like Pulicat in Andhra Pradesh which have nearly 200 varieties of fish.

The Ramsar Convention rules are the loftiest form of wetland identification that the world follows. Ramsar has specific criteria for choosing a wetland as a Ramsar site, which distinguishes it as possessing 'international importance'. An important distinguishing marker is that Ramsar wetlands should support significant populations of birds, fish, or other non-avian animals. This means that it is ecological functioning which distinguishes a wetland from, say, a tank,

which is just a source of water. However, man-made tanks or sources of water can also evolve into wetlands. For instance, Kaliveli tank in Tamil Nadu, an important bird area, is fed by a system of tanks and man-made channels forming a large and vibrant landscape. A wetland is more than a source of water, or a means for water storage, though it is often reduced to only that. By removing ecological and other criteria for wetland identification and protection, and the examples of activities that could hamper this physical functioning, the new draft underlines the same malaise which misses the wetlands for the water.

Use and non-use

While the new draft calls for sustainability, this is a difficult concept to enforce, particularly with regard to water. Regulation of activities on a wetland and their “thresholds” are to be left entirely to local or State functionaries. There are insufficient safeguards for the same, with the lack of any law-based scientific criteria or guidance. For instance, it is telling that regulation of activities in the draft rules do not make any obvious connection with existing groundwater legislations because these two aspects are still seen as separate.

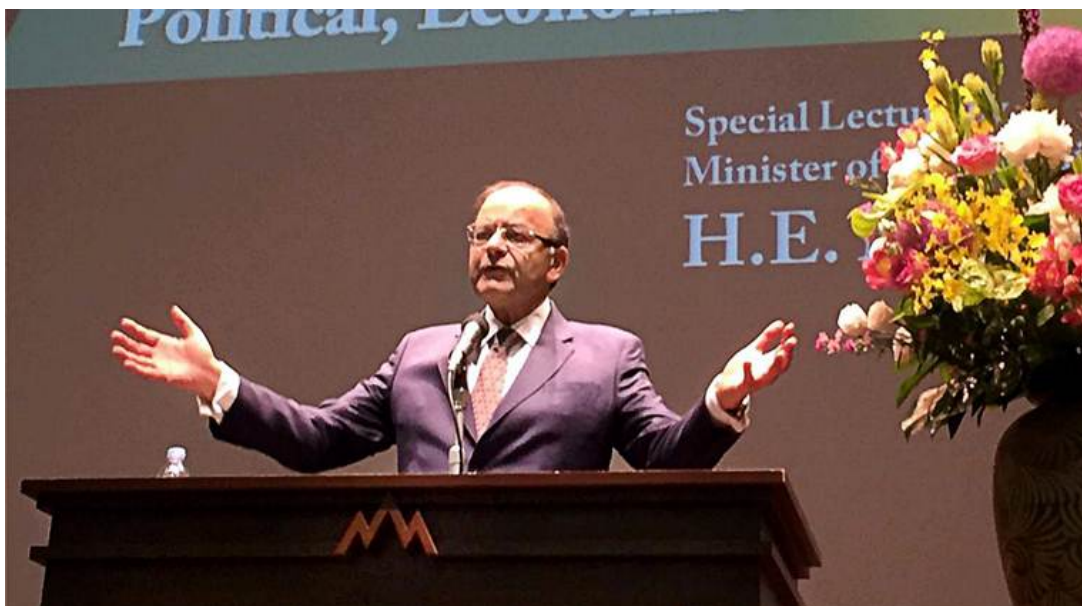
The 2016 Draft Wetland Rules also call for wise use of wetlands. ‘Wise use’ is a concept used by the Ramsar Convention, and is open to interpretation. It could mean optimum use of resources for human purpose. It could mean not using a wetland so that we eventually strengthen future water security. It could also mean just leaving the wetland and its catchment area as is for flood control, carbon sequestration, and water recharge functions.

Finally, in a country which is both water-starved as well as seasonally water-rich, it is not just politics and use that should dictate how wetlands are treated. Sustainability cannot be reached without ecology. Towards this end, our wetland rules need to reinforce wetlands as more than open sources of water, and we need to revise how wetlands should be identified and conserved.

Neha Sinha is with the Bombay Natural History Society. Views expressed are personal.

Arun Jaitley: Loan defaulters cannot be let off easily

The Finance Minister has promised that the government will provide greater capital support to the banks



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley delivers a lecture on “India: Political, Social and Economic Change’ at the Osaka University in Osaka, Japan on Thursday.

(Source: PTI Photo) Amid 10 state-run lenders suffering losses of over Rs 15,000 crore in the March quarter, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has promised greater capital support to banks while warning that defaulters cannot be allowed to “sleep well”, leaving all the worry to bankers.

He also rejected suggestions that huge losses being posted by public sector banks (PSBs) were like “skeletons tumbling out”, saying NPAs were mostly due to business-related losses in certain sectors, rather than due to frauds, and one must “distinguish between chalk and cheese”.

Jaitley, who was on a six-day visit to Japan to attract investments, said the losses were because of provisioning to cover for bad debt and most of the banks including State Bank of India and PNB had good profits at an operational level.

“Look at the balance sheets of these banks. Punjab National Bank operationally had a good profit, SBI had a good profit. It is the provisioning which makes it look like a loss,” the Finance Minister told PTI.

Stating that non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans have always been there, Jaitley said: “I think a transparent balance sheet is the best way of doing business and that’s what the banks are today doing. I am very clear, the government will fully strengthen the banks and fully support the banks where it is needed.”

On measures being taken to empower the banks, he said bankruptcy law is one empowerment while the strategic debt restructuring (SDR) mechanism of RBI is also there.

“What we are doing to several other recovery laws the Securitisation, Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) itself is an empowerment. Therefore, you cannot indefinitely have a situation where people who owe money sleep well and bankers have to worry. I think the people who owe these monies will also have to act,” he said.

Asserting that all NPAs are not bank frauds, he said there may be some improper loans but there were large volumes of loans resulting from business losses or on account of sectoral losses.

“The loans were rightly given, sectors haven’t done well. So to say that these are all skeletons stumbling out (is not correct). A business loss is not a skeleton. A skeleton is something which is done as a scam or a scandal and therefore we must be careful to distinguish between chalk and cheese as far as the banking NPAs are concerned,” he said.

The Finance Minister said once the problem climaxes and the sectoral results start turning over, the situation would change.

Citing the example of PNB, he said the bank last year made a Rs 12,000 crore operational profit, which is not a low level of profit, but it declared loss because of NPA provisioning. “So it is the balance sheet provisioning which has led to that situation.”

These NPA loans were not given recently, Jaitley added.

“These are old loans which relate to sectors which have been under stress. Those sectoral problems have been addressed significantly. In many of those sectors, the balance sheet has started changing and therefore slowly it must relate to the banks itself and reflect on their balance sheet,” he said.

Against the backdrop of mounting bad loans and record losses of public sector banks, Jaitley will hold a quarterly performance review on Monday with the heads of PSBs and Financial Institutions.

He would “review the overall performance of PSBs during the financial year 2015-16 as well as with regard to the flow of credit to agriculture, insurance and MSE sectors among others”, the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

Feeling the pulse

In 2015-16, India imported a record 5.79 million tonnes (mt) of pulses valued at \$ 3.9 billion, with these being even higher at 15.57 mt (\$ 10.49 billion) in the case of edible oils.

The Narendra Modi government has done well to hike the minimum support prices (MSP) of pulses to be grown this kharif season by 7.7-9.2 per cent, over and above the 5.4-6.3 per cent last year.

Besides, the MSPs of kharif oilseeds such as groundnut and soyabean have also been raised by 4.7-6.7 per cent this year. Seen against the mere 3.7 per cent and 4.2 per cent increases granted for paddy in 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively, the signal to farmers is clear:

Grow more crops that India is short in and that also guzzle less water. In 2015-16, India imported a record 5.79 million tonnes (mt) of pulses valued at \$ 3.9 billion, with these being even higher at 15.57 mt (\$ 10.49 billion) in the case of edible oils.

On the other hand, stocks of rice and paddy in government warehouses are now more than twice the required minimum buffer norm. It requires no great

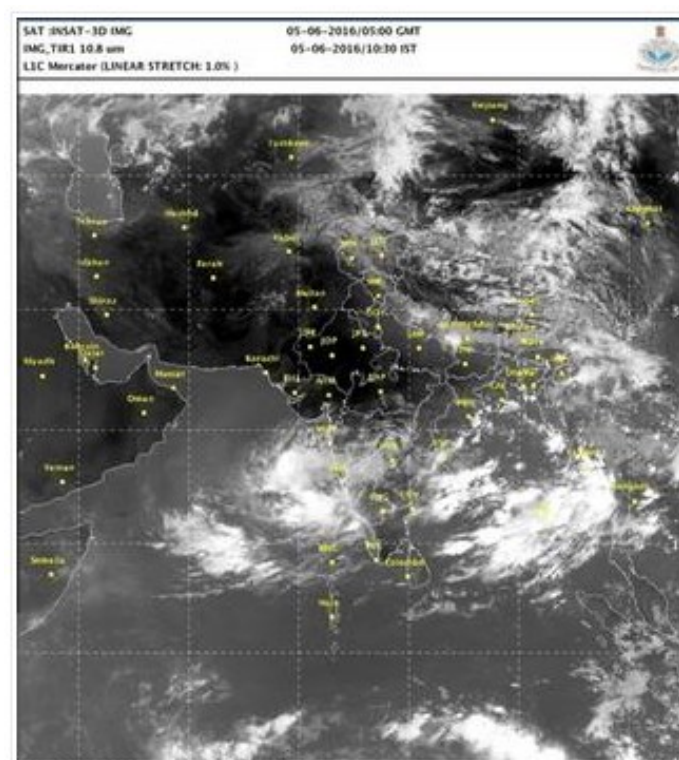
perspicacity to realise the importance of diverting paddy area, especially in high-productivity irrigated belts, to pulses and oilseeds.

One can, in fact, go a step further and argue that the MSP rise should have been more, particularly in pulses where the options for imports are limited compared to palm, soyabean or sunflower oil:

The total global trade in pulses, at around 15 mt, is less than India's production of 18-19 mt in a normal year.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Heavy rain in Kerala as monsoon approaches



Rain or thundershowers are likely for most places over the next four days over Kerala and Lakshadweep.

The Met office has issued a warning for heavy to very heavy rainfall at one or two places in Kerala during the next four days as the onset of the South-West monsoon draws closer.

The onset may be declared either on Tuesday or Wednesday as necessary parameters fall into place one after the other.

Heavy (7-11 cm) to very heavy (12-20 cm) rainfall is most likely to occur at one or two places in Kerala till Monday morning, the Met said.

Strong westerly winds with speed occasionally reaching 45-55 km/hour are likely along and off the coast and over Lakshadweep area until Monday afternoon.

Moist winds

During the 24 hours ending on Sunday morning, rain occurred at most places in Kerala and Lakshadweep. Heavy to very heavy rainfall reports were reported from Vada-kara (16 cm) and Manjeri (7 cm).

A persisting cyclonic circulation over East-central Arabian Sea off Karnataka coast is fanning in moist winds from the sea into the northern coast of Kerala, and hence, the heavier precipitation.

Rain or thundershowers are likely for most places over the next four days over Kerala and Lakshadweep.

In fact, global models say that the rains may scale up all along the West Coast during this week, becoming heavier during the next.

Konkan-Mumbai-south Gujarat could witness heavy to very heavy rain during June 10 to 12, according to the US National Centres for Climate Prediction.

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts agrees, given that the monsoon flows may head northward along the West coast during the second week.

During the first, however, they may target the Kerala-Karnataka coasts, apart from surging through the Gulf of Mannar to enter the Bay of Bengal.

Some models maintain the outlook for these flows to blow into the sails of an existing cyclonic circulation off the Andhra Pradesh coast, helping it to intensify as a likely storm.

This would drive up the rainfall in East India (Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal) as well as the North-East leading to the onset of the Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon.

Prospects turn sour for sugarcane in TN



The three continuous years of stagnant production and price are taking a toll on the sugarcane industry in the State as farmers are reluctant to expand cropping area. Sugar mills too are not keen on encouraging farmers as prevailing sugar prices cannot support a higher price for cane.

According to industry estimates, the sugarcane production for 2016-17 season (October-September) is pegged at about 150 lakh tonnes (lt) with 102 lt in the private sector and about 50 lt with the co-operative sector.

This is marginally higher than the 138 lt in the current 2015-16 season. As of April 2016, the sugar production was 9.9 lt in the current season compared with 2014-15's 9.27 lt.

Ratoon crop

One clear indication of the lack of farmers' enthusiasm is the area of the *ratoon* crop — the off shoot that grows after the standing sugarcane is harvested — is nearly double that of new planting.

Over the last three years, the mills have paid farmers about ₹ 2,300 plus transport cost for a tonne for cane as sugar prices have not supported a higher cane price.

Higher costs

Over the last couple of years sugar prices had dipped to lows that resulted in mills losing money on every tonne of cane crushed. With sugar prices ruling at ₹33/kg, sugar mill representatives say they are at just above breakeven levels.

In the current season, sugarcane harvesting costs had hit a high of about ₹600 a tonne which is more than 25 per cent of what the farmers get for sugarcane. Shortage of local labour resulted in mills bringing farm labourers from Karnataka and Maharashtra, where the sugarcane season ended earlier, they said. With sugar prices continuing at unviable levels, mills are also not keen on providing incentives to farmers to expand sugarcane areas. In earlier years, they have been known to distribute sugarcane *setts* (seedlings) free and providing cash advances.

TN scenario

As things stand, sugar industry in Tamil Nadu does not have much to look forward to in terms of a significantly higher output in the coming season given the current crop status.

However, there is scope for optimism in the 2017-18 sugar season (October-September). By October this year some clarity is expected.

For that, the monsoon should be normal and sugar prices pick up in the wake of an anticipated drop in domestic production, which will pave way for higher cane prices and spark farmers' interest in the crop.

Main monsoon rain belt will cover South, North-East from June 3-9



The South-West monsoon has advanced into more parts of the Bay of Bengal even as heavy piloting showers continued to lash Kerala, Karnataka, Lakshadweep and Coastal Andhra Pradesh.

An India Meteorological Department outlook said that conditions are favourable for the onset of the monsoon over the Kerala coast during the next three to four days.

Weekly distribution

The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts assesses that this could happen on June 7 or 8.

An extended range weather forecast, as per the National Agromet Advisory Service Bulletin, said the main rainfall belt will sit over extreme South India and parts of North-East India from June 3 to 9.

The bulletin is issued jointly by the India Meteorological Department, Indian Council of Agriculture Research, and the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture.

The week that follows (June 10 to 16) will witness an increase in rainfall over the North-eastern States and parts of eastern states and a northward extension of the rain belt along the West Coast.

This would mean that there will be an improvement in rainfall in the second fortnight of June compared to the first.

Cyclonic circulation

Meanwhile, the European Centre said that a cyclonic circulation over the West-central Bay of Bengal off Andhra Pradesh and Odisha appears to be getting an upper hand over a counterpart located over Lakshadweep.

This would help the former commandeer some of the monsoon flows to the East Coast and also bring some rain into Tamil Nadu, South Interior Karnataka and Rayalaseema from June 3-9.

According to the European Centre, normal or above-normal rainfall is likely during the next fortnight (June 3 to 16) over Kerala, Coastal Karnataka, Rayalaseema, Madhya Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu in the South.

A similar forecast has been made for Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura in the East and the North-East.

West coast rain

The rains may progress along the West Coast to Konkan and Goa, Interior Karnataka, Odisha, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and East Uttar Pradesh from June 10 to 16.

Though there has been a delay in the onset of the monsoon over Kerala and Karnataka, bountiful pre-monsoon showers during the previous week have ensured ample soil moisture, facilitating preparations for the sowing of kharif crops.

Palm oil prices to remain steady



Supply is going to be lower through 2016, according to various estimates

Crude palm oil (CPO) is in the news as prices have rallied from a seven-year low of 1,800 ringgits/tonne in August 2015 to 2,793 ringgits/tonne in March. This rally was on account of the foreseen El Nino impact on palm oil production and rise in biodiesel demand in Indonesia.

El Nino caused a reduction in South-East Asian palm oil yield to 3.26 tonnes/hectare in 2016 compared to 3.62 tonnes/hectare in 2015. As a result, the world's palm oil output shrank for the first time in two decades.

Despite this short-term setback, palm oil remains the world's top produced vegetable oil. Indonesia and Malaysia together account for 85 per cent of the global production. Besides its use as edible oil, palm oil is also used by bio-fuel sector for blending. Palm oil prices usually move in tandem with crude oil prices.

This relationship, however, didn't hold in the September 2015-February 2016 period when Brent crude touched its 12-year low at \$26.04/barrel in February 2016. This was due to the drop in supply in this period.

Supply is going to be lower through 2016, according to estimates put out by various organisations. Oil World estimates Malaysian palm oil output to drop to 18.9 million tonnes (MT) in the calendar year 2016 compared to 20 MT in 2015. Indonesian palm oil production is estimated at 32.7 MT compared to 33.4 MT in 2015. Total global production deficit for oil year (November 2015 – October 2016) is expected to be at 1.4 MT compared to a surplus of 2.1 MT for 2014-15.

Bio-diesel mandate

Indonesian biodiesel mandate also supported palm oil market by strengthening its demand. Indonesia's biodiesel demand for the year 2016 is estimated by Oil World at 2.4 MT, which adds over 1 million tonnes to the bio-diesel demand of 2015 (1.4 MT).

The world's biodiesel production is estimated to be about 30.75 MT this year compared to 29.76 MT of 2014-15 with higher production from the US, Argentina, Brazil and Indonesia.

What has checked crude palm oil prices, though, from moving higher to about 3,000 ringgits/tonne a couple of factors, including lower palm oil imports by China, falling crude prices and narrowing down of soyaoil premium over palm oil.

Soyaoil premium over CPO narrowed down to \$67/tonne by April this year from over \$150/tonne in August '15 due to comparatively faster increase in palm oil prices. The trend of the past three years shows that generally, the

spread between soyaoil and CPO prices has remained between \$50/tonne and \$150/tonne with few exceptions. Whenever this spread starts moving towards the zone of \$100-50, soyaoil is preferred more over palm oil and vice-a-versa if the spread is in the zone of \$100-\$150/tonne.

Indian peculiarities

India's per capita consumption of edible oils stands at 16.09 kg i.e. 23 MT/per annum for the country as a whole. However, domestic edible oil production has been hovering in the narrow range of 6-9 MT in the last 15 years. As a result, the import of vegetable oil has trebled due to a consistent rise in demand.

Palm oil import accounted for 66 per cent of total edible oil import in 2014-15. This ratio is likely to have fallen in 2015-16 because of higher imports of soyaoil over relatively costlier palm oil.

India is the world's largest consumer of palm oil with a global share of 20 per cent.

Palm oil demand for 2015-16 oil year is estimated to cross 9 MT, which is three times of the demand in 2005-06. It is preferred more by Indians due to its much cheaper rate and varied use in food industry.

Outlook

If major currencies remain stable vis-à-vis US dollar and crude oil trades below \$50/barrel, palm oil prices are likely to trade steady to higher for the next couple of months supported by Ramadan buying till mid-June, El Nino-led production shortfall and Indonesian biodiesel mandate.

However, things might change in the last quarter of the current oil year with likely positive growth in CPO output. Indonesia is not likely to maintain even 2,00,000 tonnes/month production of bio-diesel. Soyabean crushing in Argentina is expected to run at record levels in May and June as rain-affected beans cannot be stored or exported so will have to be crushed. Supply of soyaoil will be abundant, resulting in demand diversion towards soyaoil. The EU's

reduced consumption of rapeseed oil for biodiesel and China's domestic reserve sales will further put pressure on palm oil.

The writer is VP and Head, Agriculture, Food, and Retail, at Biznomics Consulting.

Business Standard

GDP growth could surpass 8% in FY17: R B Barman

Interview with Chairman, National Statistical Commission



In his first interview since taking over, **R B Barman**, the newly appointed chairperson of National Statistical Commission (NSC), tells *Dilasha Seth* that India's economic growth exceeding the eight per cent mark in 2016-17 is a distinct possibility. This would be backed by agriculture sector growth surpassing the 3-4 per cent rate if monsoon turned out to be well spread as predicted, he adds. Edited excerpts:

India's economy grew 7.6 per cent in 2015-16 and the fourth quarter of the year yielded 7.9 per cent growth rate. What is your growth forecast for 2016-17?

Given the momentum, if the monsoon turns out as predicted with precipitation well spread, the growth in agriculture will well surpass the trend rate of three per cent to about four per cent, as the base effect will contribute at least one per cent more. This is likely to result in a positive income effect on consumption demand and so on.

The downside risk is the possibility of oil price rise and not so favourable global economy impacting consumption, investment and net exports. The contribution of the government sector is likely to improve further through the ongoing investment in infrastructure and other policy measures for attracting foreign capital. On the whole, GDP growth surpassing eight per cent in FY17 is a distinct possibility.

Experts and economists are still coming to terms with the new methodology of the GDP. Many are finding it difficult to corroborate the numbers with the situation on the ground...

The GDP estimation methodology is thoroughly examined by the Advisory Committee on National Accounts under the guidance of some of the best experts. The Committee examines various options and decides on the methodology which is the most suited under a given situation. It is necessary to continue with a methodology for comparability till revision overtakes the earlier method.

As I understand, certain issues have been raised relating to indices being used for deflation of a few items to convert them into constant prices. Work is in progress to construct appropriate indices for the services sector.

WPI (whole-sale price index) and IIP (index of industrial production) are also due for revision of base. NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) will undertake a nation-wide survey to collect relevant data on the services sector in

GDP. We will examine how to take this work forward for the revision of methodology, when due. However, it is not advisable to undertake ad-hoc measures as such actions might compromise the cause of comparability.

Is there scope for further improvement in the GDP methodology, taking into account the suggestions from outside experts and the finance ministry?

Improvement of methodology is an ongoing process. All suggestions will be considered by the committee on merit.

A three-member committee under former NSC chairman Pronab Sen had worked on audit report and found the GDP numbers under the new methodology to be perfect. However, it has flagged discrepancies arising on account of the Annual Survey of Industries numbers. What will be the course correction going forward?

NSC will examine the report when made available and take a view. At this stage, NSC does not have any view on this.

What are the broad issues that the NSC will look into over the next six months to a year?

As set out in the Report of National Statistical Commission headed by C Rangarajan, “The adequacy, credibility and timeliness of the data generated by the statistical system are essential for the purpose of policy formulation and for monitoring the progress of various sectors of the economy.” NSC is constituted as an independent statistical authority to advise the government towards this end. NSC has made significant progress in this direction in the past decade. We look forward to making use of advanced technology to ensure the quality of collected data, data governance and analytics for a multi-dimensional view of processed data to enhance credibility and timeliness. We have a well set system of developing methodology consistent with concepts and definitions set out for international comparability. The feedback from the users is extremely useful in flagging issues for further improvement. NSC will consider these issues for appropriate action involving all stake holders.

There would be visible change in key economic sectors in 2 years: Mehbooba Mufti

Mufti said government is taking major initiatives to turnaround the horticulture sector

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti today said there would be visible change in the state's key economic sectors like horticulture and agriculture during the next two years as the government has made some progressive interventions in both the sectors.

"The government is taking major initiatives to turnaround the horticulture sector with inclusive focus on production, harvesting and marketing of the horticulture produce," the Chief Minister said while interacting with various deputations of fruit growers who called on her today.

Mehbooba said besides introducing high density plants and root stocks imported from Europe to increase productivity, pesticide testing and soil-testing laboratories are being established in various parts of the state to ensure better quantity and quality of fruit.

The Chief Minister said for better marketing facilities, new fruit and vegetable markets are being established at Jablipora in Anantnag, Aglar in Shopian and Prayote in Doda.

She said Kissan Ghar and multi-commodity cold store at Kolkata have also been sanctioned under NABARD.

Mehbooba said out of the 21 satellite fruit and vegetable markets proposed to be developed in the state against the project cost of Rs 118.82 crore, seven markets are already functional in Kashmir and one in Jammu, while the rest are likely to be completed and made functional within next two years.

"Besides, eight apni mandies are also under the process of development in the state," she said.

She said the government is also increasing the capacity of Controlled Atmospheric Stores (CAS) to address shortfall as part of the post harvesting management programme.

Meanwhile, scores of other deputations and individuals called on the Chief Minister at her private office here to bring their grievances, demands and developmental issues into the notice of the government for early redressal, an official spokesman said.

He said the deputations that called on the Chief Minister during the public hearing included delegations of Traders Associations, Fruit Growers Association, Kashmir Pandit Sangharash Samiti, All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee, Artisans Federation Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir Handicapped Association, Houseboat Owners Association and press associations.

Besides, civil society members and hundreds of individuals from across the state also called on the Chief Minister to seek speedy redressal of their grievances and demands including developmental issues, the spokesman said.

The Chief Minister gave a patient hearing to the deputations and individuals and told them that their genuine demands would be given due consideration by the government.

She said the government was alive to the public demands and necessary measures were already afoot to upgrade basic amenities and ensure prompt public service delivery.

Mehbooba said wherever necessary, additional focus would be concentrated to address the people's demands, the spokesman said.

Farmers unhappy over meagre hike in MSP of paddy

The Centre has increased the MSP of paddy by Rs 60 per quintal. With this, the MSP for common variety of paddy is fixed at Rs 1,470 per quintal

Farmers' organisations here have expressed displeasure over the meagre hike in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of paddy this year by the Centre and demanded implementation of recommendations of National Commission on Farmers headed by MS Swaminathan.

The Centre has increased the MSP of paddy by Rs 60 per quintal. With this, the MSP for common variety of paddy is fixed at Rs 1,470 per quintal while that of grade A variety has increased to Rs 1,510.

"The increase belies the expectations of the farming community," said Rabi Rath, president of Odisha Chasi Surakshya Abhiyan, a farmers' body.

"We had demanded to fix the MSP for both paddy varieties at Rs 2,500 per quintal.



Farmers will not benefit with the poor hike in MSP as price of other inputs in agriculture have increased," he said.

Simanchal Nahak, secretary of Rushikulya Raita Mahasabaha, a farmers' organisation in Ganjam district, also demanded that MSP be fixed at Rs 2,500.

"We demand implementation of the recommendations of MS Swaminathan committee for welfare of the farmers," he said.

"The small increase of MSP for paddy shows the anti-farmer attitude of the government," alleged Brundaban Khatei, Ganjam district unit president of All India Kishan Khet Mazdoor Congress.

BJP had promised to provide better Minimum Support Price to the farmers, but it failed to keep its promise, he alleged, and said, "When the Centre has failed to

provide better price to the farmers for their produce, we urged the government to give incentives to the farmers in procurement to compensate their loss."



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture dept uses smartphone as a tool to debug crops

Farmers now have a 'WhatsApp cover' for their crops. To make them aware of the provisions, agriculture department has taken to wall-writing in villages. UP loses at least 20% agriculture production to pests and insects every year. WhatsApp messages and SMSes can help save the crop and bring down annual loss by ensuring quick treatment.

Department of agriculture has launched Participatory Crop Surveillance and Response System, a direct interface between farmers in the state and directorate of agriculture through mobile phones. Farmers, agriculture experts and even aware citizens can drop information about crops affected with pests and insects on two mobile numbers - 9452247111 and 9452257111 which the department has kept specially for receiving complaints related to infected crops.

Those who own a smart phone can lodge complaints and queries using Whatsapp while others may simply send SMS mentioning details like farmer's name, variety of crop, village and district where field is located and, if easily decipherable, the type of infection crop has caught. As soon as details reach department numbers the same would be uploaded on directorate's portal, though manually. "We wish to upgrade it so that in future complaints may be uploaded automatically on portal," said principal secretary, Agriculture, Amit Mohan Prasad.

The district plant protection officer has to solve the grievance uploaded on the portal in 24hours. The progress will be monitored by the high-ups in the directorate. So far, farmers were required to visit the plant protection office personally. The department often receives complaints against officers not cooperating.

The system is accessible to all. In case farmers cannot write SMS or use smartphones, they can take help of others. Farmers are being informed of the system in 'Kharif Goshthi' which is on in villages in the season. The allotted

numbers are being written on walls of plant protection office in districts and in government advertisements.

In UP, all crops get infected by pests and insects. But a quick information and response can help prevent damage. "In case of an contagious infection, officers can rush to the spot and take preventive measures like spraying of insecticides to prevent infection from spreading," said the official.

Over Rs 50,000 farmers from Gujarat buy crop insurance online

Having faced the worst of droughts, farmers in Gujarat have started taking crop insurance seriously with more than 50,000 of them registering for the new crop insurance cover given by Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) via the state portal.

Under the PMFBY launched this year, farmers' premium has been kept at lower ranges, between 1.5%-2% for foodgrains and oilseed crops and up to 5% for horticultural and cotton crops. There is no cap on the premium.

"More than 50,000 farmers have so far enrolled for PMFBY for the 2016-17 kharif season in Gujarat via the state portal on crop insurance," said a senior agriculture ministry official.

Gujarat is the only state at present which is enrolling farmers under the scheme strictly through its e-portal. In other states, including Uttar Pradesh, farmers are being registered by concerned agencies including banks, Primary Agricultural Credit Society (PACS), he said.

"So, the exact number of farmers registered for the scheme, both online and through other ways, would be known later. Once the banks upload the details of insured farmers on the central crop insurance scheme portal, it will be known to all stakeholders," he added. Karnataka government has also prepared its state portal for PMFBY, and it will be launched soon. As of now, 11 states -- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and West Bengal -- and one Union Territory, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, have notified the PMFBY.

Nine new crops by IGKV to be grown for commercial use

Nine new varieties of crops developed by Indira Gandhi Agricultural University (IGKV) Raipur have been notified for commercial use across India.

AN IGKV spokesman said Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at New Delhi has notified varieties of paddy, flax seed, soybean, 'kutki', peas and pulse variety- urad, certifying them as quality seeds .

Badshah Bhog selection-1, Dubraj selection-1, Tarun Bhog Selection-1, Vishnu Bhog Selection-1, Chhattisgarh Zinc Rice-1 (all paddy), Chhattisgarh Flaxseed-1, Chhattisgarh Soyabean-1, Chhattisgarh Kutki-2, Indira Peas-1, and Indira Urad-1 are the varieties proposed for cultivation.

Chief minister Raman Singh, agriculture minister Brijmohan Agrawal and Indira Gandhi Agriculture University vice-chancellor Dr SK Patil congratulated scientists and other staff of genetics and plant breeding, plant molecular biology department and biotechnology department for this achievement.

IGKV officials said the university has developed 22 new varieties of 15 different crops last year. These varieties were approved in the state seed sub-committee meeting.

Later, 22 new varieties were sent for notification to Central Seed Sub-Committee.

Deputy director general (Crop Science) of Indian Agricultural Research Council, New Delhi, Dr JS Sandhu chaired a meeting and notified nine out of 22 varieties for quality seed production.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Temperatures in Madhya Pradesh to surge by 1-1.5 degrees by 2045: Study



Madhya Pradesh is likely to see 1-1.2 degree Celsius rise in temperature by 2045, bringing more droughts that will pose "enormous" pressure on agriculture, water resources, infrastructure and energy sectors, according to a study

AHMEDABAD: Madhya Pradesh is likely to see 1-1.2 degree Celsius rise in temperature by 2045, bringing more droughts that will pose "enormous" pressure on agriculture, water resources, infrastructure and energy sectors, according to a study

The study, "Climate Change in Madhya Pradesh: Indicators , Impacts , and Adaptation," done jointly by faculty member Veemal Mishra of IIT-Gandhinagar and Amit Garg of IIM-Ahmedabad says that with rise in temperatures, the "frequency of severe, extreme, and exceptional droughts" will increase.

"Increased warming under the projected future climate may lead to more frequent, severe, and wide-spread droughts during the monsoons season. The frequency of hot days, hot nights, and heat waves is projected to increase in the state," it says.

Amit said, "This rise in temperature is much beyond the target set by 194 countries as per the Paris Climate Agreement to keep global temperature rise below 2 degree Celsius by the end of the century from pre-industrial level. But here we have temperatures breaching the target much quickly, which is a cause of concern."

"The study shows how India is stuck in a global problem, which is more severe for developing and poor countries as they lack resources to handle it. Madhya Pradesh has not created the problem but will have to suffer severely," he said.

"We can conduct similar study for other states as well. While projected changes under the future climate may vary from one state to another, warming as observed on large scale is prominent and could lead to increased frequency of heat waves, hot days and hot nights in future," said Mishra.

The authors had in December published a similar study covering India, in which they concluded that the country as a whole will experience 1-1.5 degree Celsius increase in temperature by 2045, which could have profound implications for agriculture and crop production.

It said that India would require over \$1 trillion in the next 15 years to adapt to the adverse impacts of the climate change. Rajasthan expects kharif sowing in 1.52 lakh hectare area

After two years of successive deficient rains in the country, the Met department has predicted above normal monsoon this year, which could boost sowing of summer crops.

JAIPUR: Rajasthan government has taken steps to ensure availability of seeds in the kharif season and expects sowing of summer crops over 1.52 lakh hectare area, a state minister said today.

Against the estimated demand of 7.80 lakh quintal seeds, arrangements of 8.56 lakh quintal seeds for crops that included pearl millet, maize and soybean has been made so that there is no lack of seeds at the time of sowing, Rajasthan Agriculture Minister Prabhu Lal Saini said today.



He said that sowing is expected to be in 1.52 lakh hectare this year.

After two years of successive deficient rains in the country, the Met department has predicted above normal monsoon this year, which could boost sowing of summer crops.

Dussehri is suited for a specific kind of soil & micro weather conditions which are best found in Uttar Pradesh



Low-hanging fruit' is a cliché used to describe tasks that are easily achieved — whoever coined it hasn't savoured the Dussehri mango.

*Mujhse poochho, tumhein khabar kya hai Aam ke aage neyshakar kya hai...
(Ask me, for what do you know, A mango is far sweeter than sugarcane...)*

Poet Mirza Ghalib's love for mangoes was legendary, so it isn't surprising that he composed a long narrative poem or masnavi called Dar Sifat-e-Ambaah (On the Attributes of Mangoes) in praise of India's king of fruit. Ghalib's lines were ringing in my ears as I reached the small town of Malihabad, about 30 km from Uttar Pradesh's capital and the historic city of Lucknow.

There are mango groves all around, with long, green, paisleyshaped Dussehris hanging low. It's May-end and the mangoes are still green; in a week or two, they will turn yellow and will be ready to be picked.

Malihabad, along with the neighbouring towns of Mall and Rahimabad, constitutes the hub of Uttar Pradesh's famous Dussehri mangoes, with more than 80% of the country's produce of this variety grown here.

Mango Nation

Uttar Pradesh produces about **45 lakh tonnes of mangoes** annually from around **3.75 lakh hectares of orchards**

17-18% of the mango crop in India comes from UP

The Lucknow-**Malihabad region produces 10 lakh tonnes of Dussehri mangoes** from 20,000-25,000 hectares of orchards

India has **25 lakh hectares of mango orchards with an annual production of 1.85 crore tonnes** of mangoes

Source: Mango Grower Association of India

Insrām Ali, president of the Mango Grower Association of India and owner of 70 acres of mango orchards in Malihabad, rues that Dussehri mangoes have not been able to make much of a dent in global markets. Except for a small market in the Middle East, Dussehri mangoes are yet to be exported overseas and have not reached the large markets of the US or Europe. The Alphonso from the western part of the country has not only become the country's favourite fruit but is also exported to the UK, US and EU nations.

In the 18th century, the Dussehri was the pride of the gardens of the nawabs of Lucknow. But the reason behind this variety not becoming as popular and as prestigious as the Alphonso is lack of support from the Central government, says Ali.

"The government should develop an ecosystem of mango-based industries in this area. These should include juice-making units and packaging plants. Since the region has very poor air connectivity, a mango train to Delhi and Punjab will also be welcome to transport the crop to major domestic markets and also for exports," says Ali. His own orchards are about an hour and a half's drive from his home in Lucknow, along National Highway 24, and Ali and his wife and children often spend weekends in their sprawling farmhouse nestled amid the lush greenery.

Some of the problems that the Dussehri mango faces, says Ali, are a short season of about a month, between the first week of June and the first week of July. That's briefer than most other mango varieties in India, including the Alphonso, which enjoys a two-month long season. "Former agriculture minister Sharad Pawar was a champion of Dussehri mangoes and has visited this region and participated in our promotional events," says Ali.

Ali has often organised day-long events in his orchards to showcase the Dussehri mango, which are attended not just by local mango growers and their families but diplomats and Central and state government representatives as well. "We have showcased the versatility of the fruit and even served mango paranthas and mango spices to our guests. Different raw mango recipes such as pickles and preserves too are a speciality of this region," adds Ali.

Sweet Spot

Owners of the mango orchards in Malihabad show how critical the annual mango harvest is to the community by pointing out that a good crop can often help farmers get their daughters married off; this is a tradition that has endured for centuries, they explain. For two years now, a unique annual agribusiness and ecotourism mango festival is being organised by the Central Institute of Subtropical Horticulture, Mandi Parishad UP, UP Horticulture, UP Tourism and NABARD in Lucknow. However, Pervez Khan, a mango orchard owner in the region, says that both the Uttar Pradesh state government and the Centre should do more to develop the brand as well as the infrastructure.

"We need more of these events, not just here in Lucknow but across India, to promote the Dussehri brand," says Khan, who lives in Malihabad. The third edition of the festival is scheduled for mid-June, with events in Lucknow city as well as in the orchards to showcase the different mangoes from the region — Dussehri, Chausa, Amrapali and some rarer varieties. Folk music and dance as well as mango delicacies such as biryani with aam ki chutney, aam panna and mango kulfi will be on offer.

Khan adds that mango tourism in the Malihabad region, if promoted by the state and the Centre, could provide revenue streams for the local people and help the economy of the region. "Financial support for local entrepreneurs can be explored along with mango tourism," says Khan, adding that most young people from the families who own orchards in the region are moving away from horticulture since returns are low.

The local mandi parishad in Malihabad has been promoting Dussehri and other Uttar Pradesh mango varieties since 2006 by providing subsidies for brand promotion, freight, refrigerated vans and state-of-the-art pack houses in Lucknow and Saharanpur. Mohsin Khan, a third-generation owner of mango orchards in Malihabad, says the parishad can do more: like providing insurance policies for small farmers, especially during the years when winters are severe and production is low; educating farmers on the use of pesticides; and even facilitating tax incentives.

Harish Chand is a contractor at Ram Bagh orchard in Kakori, around 20 km from Malihabad. The orchard is owned by Pratap Singh who lives in Lucknow; Chand lives in the orchard with his family during the season when mangoes ripen and have to be plucked.

"There are 12 bighas of orchards here (roughly 7.5 acres) from which we got around 450 quintals (roughly 45,000 kg) of Dussehri crop last season," says Chand, whose job ends once the mango crates reach the Malihabad mandi.

In the peak season of mid-June last year, prices per crate of Dussehri dropped to Rs 250 and Rs 300 in Malihabad. But Chand is not willing to speculate on which way the market for mangoes will go this year and how low the prices will drop.

It seems like a good year for the Dussehri crop and Chand is hopeful. He agrees to accompany me to a small nearby village called Dussehri — according to the local folklore, the tree on which the first mango grew is located here.

"We call this tree the maika (mother's home) from where seeds of the Dussehri mango spread to Malihabad, the sasural (the in-laws' home), and other towns nearby," says Vikas Yadav, whose family holds the contract for this particular tree and the large orchard nearby. A descendant of the nawab whose family still owns the tree lives in Lucknow but doesn't visit often. Yadav, on the other hand, guards the tree and its fruit all day and even sleeps on a charpoy under it at night.

The Great Graftsman

Haji Kaleemullah Khan is a local celebrity of sorts and has been awarded the Padma Shri for growing 300 new varieties of mangoes through the grafting technique. He is one among the local custodian farmers, many of whom are conserving local mango varieties and helping them reach the plates of connoisseurs. On a torrid May afternoon, the temperature has shot past 40 degree Celsius, but the 60-year-old is sitting on a moulded plastic chair at Abdullah Nursery in Malihabad, amid his beloved mango trees. He takes visitors around and shows off the trees, each of which has many varieties of mangoes hanging from different branches.

He proudly displays sepia-tinted photographs of various celebrities down the ages, including former prime minister Indira Gandhi and President Pranab Mukherjee. "My mango tree at Rashtrapati Bhavan has over 70 varieties of mangoes," says Kaleemullah proudly.

While his extended family owns large orchards nearby, he himself spends most of his time at the nursery, creating new varieties. But Kaleemullah rues the fact that not much effort has been made by either the state or the Central government to promote Dussehri as a brand.

"There are so many political leaders representing this region, but none of them has done anything for our mangoes. The local mandis are ill-equipped to handle the perishable fruit and should be modernised so that Dussehri mangoes can be exported to faraway locations in a more efficient way," he says, adding that the Malihabad belt has been producing top-quality Dussehri for over 300 years but is yet to feature prominently on the global mango map.

The National Horticulture Mission, which was launched as a Centrally sponsored scheme in 2005-06 and later subsumed into the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture in 2014-15, offers subsidies to farmers across Uttar Pradesh to plant Dussehri saplings.

"Dussehri is best suited for a specific kind of soil and micro weather conditions which are best found in Uttar Pradesh," said an official of the mission working in Lucknow who did not want to be named.

But then why does the Dussehri remain a relatively poor cousin of the Alphonso? According to the official, poor air connectivity and a brief season are stumbling blocks to exports. And he points to another deterrent: the sweet taste of the Dussehri, which consumers in the West are apparently not too fond of. If he's right, that's a bitter truth for the mango farmers of Malihabad.