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Govt hikes paddy MSP by Rs. 60 per quintal for 2016-17



The support price of paddy common variety has been raised to Rs. 1,470 per quintal, while Grade A variety paddy has been increased to Rs. 1,510 per quintal for 2016-17. File photo: P.V. Sivakumar

The government on Wednesday hiked the minimum support price (MSP) of paddy by Rs. 60 to Rs. 1,470 per quintal for the 2016-17 kharif season.

A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA).

The Cabinet also approved a substantial increase in the MSP of pulses for the 2016-17 kharif season.

The government had fixed the MSP of common variety paddy at Rs. 1,410 and grade A variety grain at Rs. 1,450 per quintal for 2015-16 kharif (summer) season.

MSP is the rate at which the government buys the grain from farmers. Sowing of kharif crops will begin with the onset of southwest monsoon this month. Paddy is the main crop grown in the season.

“CCEA has approved Rs. 60 per quintal increase in the MSP of paddy for the 2016-17 kharif season,” a source said.

The support price of paddy common variety has been raised to Rs. 1,470 per quintal, while A grade variety paddy has been increased to Rs. 1,510 per quintal for 2016-17, the source said.

The government has increased paddy MSP marginally as the country has sufficient stocks and the price increase covers the cost of production.

Barring pulses and oilseeds, the CCEA has approved the MSP of other crops as per the recommendation of government’s advisory body on farm pricing CACP.

In case of pulses, the sources said the government has hiked MSP substantially for 2016-17 kharif season to boost domestic production and reduce the country’s dependence on imports.

Sources said the CCEA has approved more than Rs. 400 per quintal increase including bonus to enthruse farmers to grow more pulses this year.

Similarly in oilseeds, the sources said the MSP has been increases substantially.

In case of cotton, the CCEA has approved Rs. 60 per quintal jump in MSP of medium staple cotton to Rs. 3,860 for 2016-17 and for long staple cotton to Rs. 4,160 per quintal.

The government is bullish on farm sector growth in 2016-17 fiscal on hopes of better monsoon after two consecutive drought years.

Organic farming: Maneka all praise for State's initiative

Women from Andhra Pradesh told to be a part of 'Dilli Haat'

Following the efforts of the State government to turn Andhra Pradesh into an 'organic farming State', Union Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi has called upon women organic farmers of the State to be part of the 'Women of India Exhibition' of organic products at Dilli Haat.

"Andhra Pradesh is doing remarkably well in the area of organic farming. It is a great example for other States. The mela at Dilli Haat provides a platform for women organic farmers to directly sell their produce," Ms. Maneka Gandhi told women journalists at a recently held workshop at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. "Women from Leh to Kanyakumari and from the northeast parts of Nagaland to Gujarat are represented in the mela, which has given women farmers a platform to display and sell their products directly to the people," the Minister said. She was addressing a workshop of over 250 journalists from 30 states and Union Territories across the country, representing 120 media organisations

The AP government has set a target of bringing 10 lakh hectares under organic farming in the next five years in a bid to eliminate the usage of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

According to official estimates, currently organic farming is being practised in about 5,000 hectares in the State.

Last year in November, the Ministry of Women and Child Development in association with the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare launched the first of its kind Women of India Exhibition with the theme 'Women and organic products' at 'Dilli Haat'.

Women from Andhra Pradesh told to be a part of 'Dilli Haat'

Mechanised transplantation of nurseries begins

Plan to raise paddy on 15,000 acres under the 'kuruvai' package scheme

The 'kuruvai' package scheme being implemented in the district has gone down well with the farmers who have resorted to mechanised transplantation of the short duration variety suitable to the season.

The farmers of Sirkali taluk have been resorting to the mechanised transplantation of paddy nurseries. Villages in and around Tiruvazhi have taken up the transplanting process. The Agriculture Department has made necessary arrangements for supply of fertiliser and other agricultural inputs. The paddy is planned to be raised on 15,000 acres under the package scheme and the subsidy is being credited into the farmers' savings accounts, said Collector S. Palanisamy. He said that Rs. 80 lakh has been allotted towards meeting the expenditure for mechanical transplanting of nurseries. He urged the farmers to set right the deficiency in micro-nutrients. The Agriculture Department would spend Rs. 2.38 lakh to supply micro nutrients. Further, zinc sulphate worth Rs. 8.40 lakh would be distributed to farmers, he said.

J. Sekar, Joint Director of Agriculture, said that the green manure would be cultivated in the Vennar area. A subsidy of Rs. 1,900 an acre would be released to farmers cultivating green manure.

Over 35,000 candidates apply for agriculture courses

A total of 39,000 candidates have applied for the 2,800 undergraduate seats in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for the current academic year and the rank list will be released on June 16, said its vice-chancellor K. Ramasamy here on Saturday.

Speaking at the Agriculture Summit held at PGP College of Agricultural Sciences, organised by The Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry and PGP Group of Educational Institutions, Mr. Ramasamy said that to ensure that agriculture education reaches more students, the State government had started three agricultural colleges and one horticulture college for women in the past four years.

“Of the total 14 TNAU constituent colleges and 19 private agricultural colleges, there are 2,800 seats and 39,000 students have applied for it,” he added.

Promote conservation of nature: Minister

Bird atlas of Alappuzha and Thrissur districts released



Avian diversity: Minister for Agriculture V. S. Sunil Kumar releasing the bird atlas of Alappuzha and Thrissur districts at Mannuthy on Sunday.

Minister for Agriculture V. S. Sunil Kumar has said that construction of structures, which adversely affect quality of air, water and fertile soil cannot be accepted as development.

Inaugurating a two-day national conference on bird watching at the College of Forestry (CoF) under the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), at Mannuthy on Sunday, the Minister said that agriculture was fundamental to the well-being of all living beings and hence real development should promote conservation of nature and its resources.

“I remember the Kole land development project formulated with creative contribution of KAU scientists. It was a model of development through nature conservation with involvement of all stakeholders. We need sensible approach towards conservation of nature. We should revive the paddy mission, which had helped revival of paddy farming in the State,” the Minister said.

He suggested setting up a mechanism to conserve traditional crops and varieties even while new ones are being developed. Involvement of the KAU and close coordination between the University and Department of Agriculture will be ensured in all farm development activities, the Minister said.

KAU Vice-Chancellor Dr. P. Rajendran in his presidential address pointed out that the rich avian diversity in Kerala matches with the plant diversity of the State.

“Topography of our State and rich biodiversity are key elements in avian diversity. Bird count is a critical parameter of biodiversity and bird watching is a topic of contemporary relevance,” he said.

Dr. B.S. Courrie, Principal Chief Conservation Forests, in his keynote address said that the road to greed has destroyed the road to feed and hence there is a struggle to ensure food safety.

“Nature has been kind to humans, but our attempt to harm it has backfired. What we know about birds is much less than what we don't know.

Research has shown that bird music hastens flowering and fruiting. Let's vow to revive and restore the ecosystem,” he said.

The Minister also released the bird atlas of Alappuzha and Thrissur districts.

Cotton area likely to decrease by 20 p.c. in Adilabad

The area under cotton is likely to be reduced by at least 20 per cent in many cotton rich mandals in Adilabad in kharif 2016 if the preliminary trends of sowing are any indication. The Agriculture Department however, is hopeful of about 1 lakh hectares of a total of about 3.4 lakh hectares under cotton being converted to pulses and soyabean.

“The sowing trends available from across the district suggest that the area under pulses like redgram, blackgram and greengram will double. It will be an increase of about 50,000 hectares cumulatively,” pointed out, Adilabad Agriculture Officer (Technical) Shiv Kumar as he went over statistics.

In case of soyabean, the government has disbursed about 60,000 quintals of seed and expects to distribute over 20,000 quintals more in the coming weeks. The total sale of soyabean seed, taking into account the 15,000 quintals sold in open market, comes to 95,000 quintals which will have the 97,000 hectares under soyabean increase drastically.

The shift from cotton to pulses and soyabean is being observed mainly in the mandals of Jainad, Bela, Tamsi, Talamadugu, Bhainsa, Mudhole, Kuntala, Tanur and Kubeer. The mandals in Sirpur Assembly constituency will see a major increase in soyabean area this kharif.

Cotton farmer P. Sanjiv Reddy from Talamadugu mandal head quarter village, a prime cotton growing area in the district, concurs with the Agriculture Department so far as decrease in cotton area is concerned. He says farmers in his mandals are going for redgram as intercrop in cotton.

“Redgram attracted good price in the previous season which is why farmers are going in for it this season too. The number of rows of this pulse as intercrop in cotton will go up as a measure of increased cultivation,” Mr. Reddy pointed out.

The trends from the backward mandals which have a large chunk of its population mired in poverty nevertheless, are contra indicating. The pattern of crop loaning in these mandals, especially in the tribal area says the poor farmers are unable to wriggle out of the compulsion to grow cotton.

“Yes, our loaning so far has been for cotton by and large,” says a senior banker in the advances section of Telangana Grameena Bank as he talks of the trend. “The small farmer cannot afford to draw lower amounts as loans as he needs money for personal consumption too,” he pointed out towards the one factor which defines agriculture in poverty ridden areas.

FDI in food processing: govt. may put conditions for investors

The DIPP may put certain conditions for foreign investors in the Cabinet proposal for allowing FDI in food processing sector.

Officials of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and Food Processing Ministry are discussing mutually agreeable conditions to be included in the proposal, an official said.

The development comes in the wake of Ministry of Food processing asking to put a condition of investing 25 per cent of the foreign inflows for creating agriculture infrastructure in the proposal.

The original proposal sent to the Union Cabinet did not have any condition.

Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal is demanding that foreign players looking to invest in the sector would have to mandatorily invest a portion of their investments in building infrastructure at the farm gate level for the benefit of farmers.

The minister is asking for putting a condition of investing 25 per cent of the foreign inflows for creating agriculture infrastructure.

However, another official said that inclusion of any kind of condition in the proposal may hamper investments in the sector.

As per the original proposal, the DIPP had proposed to allow 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products produced and manufactured in India after approval from the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB).

The government is also likely to permit business-to-consumer online selling of food products produced and manufactured domestically.

The food processing sector has attracted \$5,285.66 million FDI during April 2012 to December 2015 period.

The government had stated that FDI in food processing will benefit farmers, reduce wastage of fruits and vegetables, give impetus to the industry and create vast employment opportunities.

Overall FDI in the country registered a growth of 29 per cent in 2015-16. It stood at \$40 billion in that fiscal.

500 scouts to tackle whitefly in cotton fields of Punjab

As many as 500 scouts ranging have been deployed to conduct survey in cotton fields of Punjab as part of efforts to curb attack of whitefly pest which destroys the fibre crop.

“In a bid to curb the whitefly infestation on the cotton crop, the Punjab Government has mobilized 500 scouts who will survey 1000 villages,” Vice Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University, B. S. Dhillon, said on Saturday.

The scouts will be equipped with the required knowledge and training to curb the spread of the pest.

Scientists and heads from various departments of Punjab Agricultural University, extension specialists, Directors of various Krishi Vigyan Kendras and experts from various other departments will be part of this massive campaign touring the affected villages of Bathinda, Fazilka, Mansa, and Muktsar.

Mr. Dhillon clarified that extensive visits to the affected cotton fields are being regularly conducted after meeting with the State Agriculture Department.

He also appealed to the farmers to consult the PAU experts as soon as they spot four or more white flies on a single leaf.

Mr. Dhillon advised them to monitor the fields regularly and exercise greater caution if the cotton fields are in close proximity to the vegetable fields especially those of brinjal and cucurbits, as white fly flourishes on these vegetables.

He highlighted the need to strictly follow university recommendations while selecting pesticides and sprayers.

Mr. Dhillon said that whitefly did not get eradicated due to a mild winter last year, which is why it has attacked the younger plants. - PTI

Wheat imports may surge to a decade-high

India's wheat imports could surge to a decade high in 2016/17, forcing the country to look at cutting import taxes after back to back droughts has reduced output amid rising demand, a leading consumer products company said.

India may import 5 million tonnes of wheat in 2016/17, while the country's output of the grain could decline by an annual 2.3 percent to about 85 million tonnes, said S. Sivakumar, group head of agri and IT businesses at ITC Ltd.

ITC, a diversified multi-billion dollar group, is one of India's top agri businesses and a leading private wheat buyer.

At five million tonnes, India's wheat imports would be the highest since 6.7 million tonnes arrived in 2006/07 and way above 500,000 tonnes of last year, data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows.

Higher than expected wheat imports by India, the world's second largest producer and consumer of the grain, could boost benchmark wheat prices. India had set a target to produce 94 million tonnes this year.

Traders said that with the likely shortfall in output the government's procurement for supplies to the public distribution system and buffer stocks had fallen below targets this year.

The USDA says India's wheat stocks will drop to 17.2 million tonnes in 2015/16 from a record 24.2 million two years ago.

Wheat procurement by government-run agencies is about 23 million tonnes so far against 28 million tonnes a year ago.

Indian millers have signed deals to import at least five lakh tonnes of French wheat this year for shipment between July and September, trade sources told Reuters. "If government agencies like State Trading Corp and MMTC Ltd start imports, then total imports would be much higher.

Mangrove forest in Masula rich in sea bass seed

In the absence of sufficient supply, aqua farmers rely completely on seed collectors

Lack of sufficient supply of Asian sea bass (*Lates calcarifer*) is enabling fish seed collectors to earn huge profits.

The cost of each Asian sea bass seed being collected from the Machilipatnam mangrove forest was increased from Rs. 2 last week to Rs. 6 on Sunday.

There is huge demand for the Asian sea bass, which is being cultivated extensively across the Krishna district.

The local fisher folk are attributing the presence of huge fish seed in the mangrove forest to the recent weather conditions.

The locals, including schoolchildren, on Sunday ventured into the mangrove forest in search of the fish seed and returned with a handful of catch.



Reaping it rich:A fish seed collector in the Machilipatnam mangrove forest. —
Photo: T. Appala Naidu

Despite huge catch, the collectors were unable to meet the demand from the aqua farmers.

There was speculation among the aqua farmers that the cost of each fish seed would increase up to Rs. 10 in the coming days.

The species is widely distributed in the Southeast Asia, Northern Australia, and Indo West Pacific regions.

“A few hours of labour that is spent on catching the fish seed ensures a profit of at least Rs.1,000. Many of us are able to catch a maximum of 1,000 fish seed in a day,” Podugu Ramu told *The Hindu* .

The fish seed collectors are required to venture into the dense mangrove forest to collect the seed found abundantly in the backwaters.

At present, the Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture, Chennai, and the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Aquaculture are supposed to supply the Asian sea bass seed for the aqua farmers.

High-valued species

However, they are unable to supply the required quantity of seed, leaving the aqua farmers to rely on the Masula seed collectors. It has also been established that the Asian sea bass seed collected from the mangrove forest survives well and the growth rate is considerable.

The Asian sea bass is one of the high-valued fish species that has great demand in the market.

Grievance day meeting

A monthly grievance meeting for farmers will be held at Nanjil Meeting Hall of the collectorate at 11 a.m. on June 23. Collector Sajjansingh R. Chavan would preside over the meeting, said a release.

Delay in renewal of crop loans set to hamper kharif operations

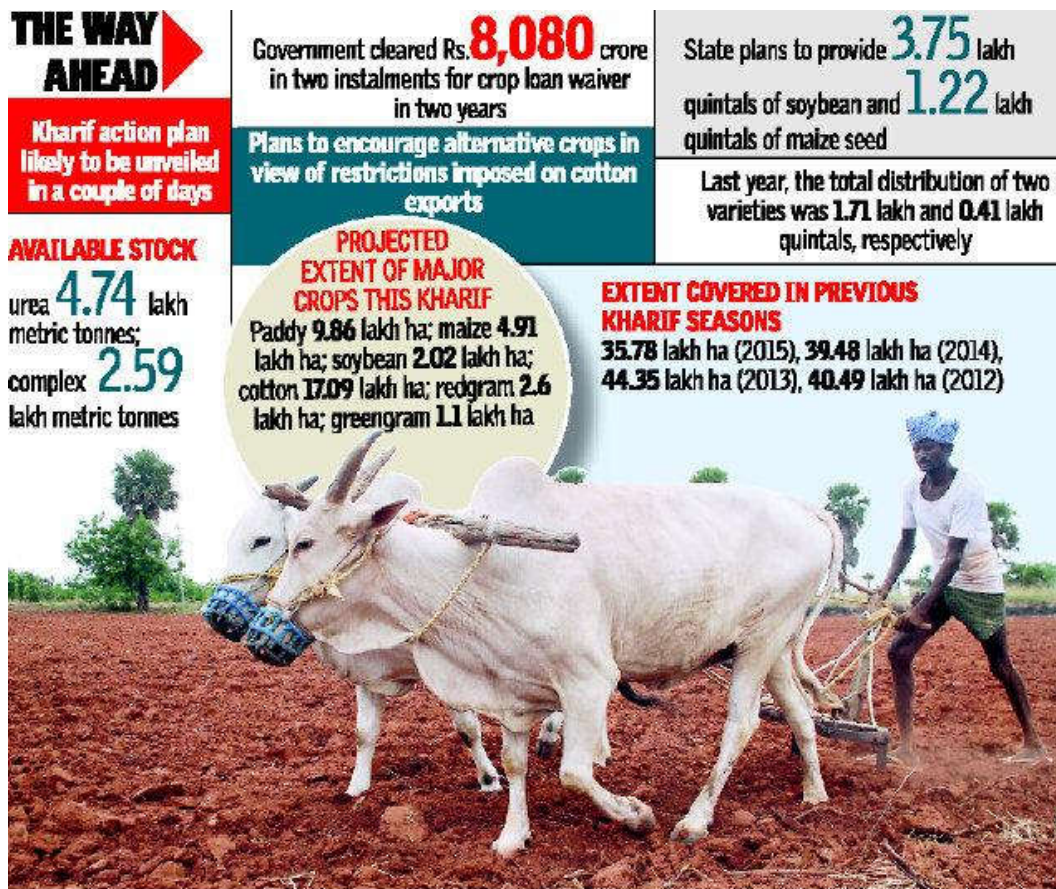
Banks 'reluctant' to renew crop loan accounts until they receive the third instalment of loan waiver amount

The delay in arranging institutional credit by renewing crop loan accounts, particularly those of about 35.3-lakh farmers covered under the crop loan waiver scheme, is likely to undo the preparedness of the State Government in terms of seed and fertilizer for kharif cultivation as the farming activity is about to gallop with the forecast of monsoon entering Telangana in a day or two.

Although the Agriculture Department has not announced its action plan formally for the kharif yet, official sources stated that plans are afoot to cover an extent of 43.43-lakh hectares during the season. "Sufficient quantities of subsidised seed and fertilizer have been positioned at sales points already and farmers in some areas have already purchased about 60,000 quintals of various seed," a senior official told *The Hindu*.

However, the disbursement of institutional credit is yet to gain momentum as the banks are stated to be reluctant to renew crop loans accounts mandatory for

issuance of fresh loan until they receive the third instalment of crop loan waiver amount, since most of the short term agricultural credit accounts with them belonged to those covered under the scheme.



“We have sent the necessary proposal to the government soon after the budget session seeking release of Rs.4,250 crore to banks for adjusting the third instalment of loan waiver. However, we are yet to hear anything on it so far. The government would generally adjust such amounts by looking into its ways and means,” the official explained adding that the banks have renewed crop loan accounts of over 1.25 lakh farmers, who are not covered under waiver.

For record, the State Level Bankers’ Committee has projected Rs.29,101 crore for disbursement as crop loans during 2016-17 including Rs.18,000 crore earmarked for kharif operations. During 2015-16, the banks could lend only Rs.17,492 crore as crop production (short term) loans.

Official sources stated that against the projected requirement of 17.87-lakh metric tonnes of fertilizer required for kharif operations, nearly 8.5-lakh metric tonnes was positioned at stock/sales points already. On subsidised seed, the

sources said 5.45-lakh quintals of various seed was positioned at stock points and another 2.92-lakh quintals was positioned at sales points out of 9.5-lakh quintals planned to be distributed for kharif. Last kharif, farmers have availed over 3.99-lakh quintals of subsidised seed.



Welfare Project in Nandurbar: Crores meant for poor tribals siphoned off

The investigation suggests the irregularities began in 2013.



It has been found that officials involved in the racket submitted bogus field reports and false utilisation certificates (UCs) as a cover-up.

In Maharashtra's Nandurbar district, Central funds to be received by tribal families under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) for construction of dug-wells on farmlands were allegedly siphoned off before any benefit could be passed on to the beneficiaries, an investigation by the state's tribal development department has found.

It has also been found that officials involved in the racket had submitted bogus field reports and false utilisation certificates (UCs) as a cover-up. The Indian Express has a copy of the findings, and also tracked down some victims of this scam.

With activists working in the field of tribal welfare claiming that the practice is not just limited to Nandurbar but spread across the state, Rajagopal Devara, Secretary, Tribal Development, said, “We have issued directives for an FIR to be lodged in this matter. Instructions to check whether similar malpractice has occurred in other districts would also be given.”

Nandurbar is counted as one of the country’s most backward districts. The funds that were siphoned off belong to a Special Central Assistance Scheme for upgrading livelihoods of forest dependent communities given land rights under the FRA.

The investigation suggests the irregularities began in 2013.

On April 24, 2013, the agriculture development officer (ADO) of the Nandurbar Zila Parishad (ZP) wrote to the project officer of the Taloda-based office of the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) seeking release of FRA funds for construction of dug-wells on farmlands in 2010-11 and 2011-12. Records show that the ITDP sanctioned Rs 1.85 crore for 85 targetted beneficiaries on September 19, 2013, based on a technical report by the Groundwater Surveys and Development Agency.

The investigators have now found that these benefits never reached any of the beneficiaries. Ironically, the ZP, which carried out its own investigations in the matter, has reported back claiming that the funds were never deposited in the official account operated by the ADO’s office, even as ITDP’s accounts show that the amount, released through a cheque, was deposited in a private bank and then withdrawn. Officials said the role of the person who collected the cheque at the ADO’s behest was being probed. Also being verified is the role that other officials in the ITDP or the ZP may have played in the scam.

The plot thickened further when a bogus report dated January 21, 2014, purportedly from the ADO, claimed that work under the project was in progress.

Investigators have said a sample of seven places was submitted, claiming that works had been completed at five and was going on in the remaining two.

Records further show the first whiff of the scam came in May 2014, when Suresh Bhamta, who was shown as one of the beneficiaries from Nandurbar's Akkalkuwa taluka, approached ITDP officials for release of the Central funds. "I was stunned when they (the officials) told me that funds for this purpose had already been released and shown as utilised against my name. They could not believe it when I denied that a well had been constructed on my farm," said Bhamta.

Field visits by inspectors from the tribal development department found that the entire status report was bogus. "The benefits had not reached any among those shown as beneficiaries," the then inspector M V Mali told the investigators.

While the ITDP wrote to the ZP about the discrepancy, another report submitted by the ADO on August 20, 2015, claimed that 71 beneficiaries had already received the benefit. A utilisation certificate (UC), which bore signatures of a ZP irrigation engineer and a private consulting engineer certifying completion of work, was also submitted. An inquiry into this submission, too, revealed that all the claims were "untrue". "The signatures on the UC were of the same persons and appear forged," the report claims. Field surveys conducted between March and May this year have further confirmed "the benefits were given on paper only; weren't passed on in reality".

Abhijit Raut, Project Officer, ITDP, confirmed that an FIR would be lodged soon. "There has been corruption and misuse of funds for tribal welfare," he said. While Raut claimed that records showed the funds were released at the instance of the ADO and the tribal development officials might have played no further role, he admitted that a detailed investigation was needed to pin down all those responsible.

Madhukar Kalshetty, Collector, Nandurbar, said, "Strict action will be taken in the case. I've already asked the ZP CEO and Raut to submit reports fixing accountability on officials."

Pratibha Shinde of the Lok Sangharsh Morcha, an tribal rights outfit, said, “Similar instances of tribal funds being siphoned off have come to light in other districts too.” In fact, she claimed to have received complaints of almost a same episode from Jalgaon’s Yawal. “The government must either adopt a system of passing direct benefits to tribal beneficiaries or evolve a much stronger monitoring mechanism to avoid such leaks,” she added.

Bhamta said, “We (tribals) have suffered years of neglect. When land rights were awarded to us, we felt that justice was finally being done. But we have just been scammed again.” Vinod Vesave, another victim of the scam, wondered if he would ever be able to claim the scheme’s benefit.

With field schools, Pune-based trust helps Vadod Tangda farmers to reap benefits

While villages in various parts of Maharashtra are dealing with drought, Vadod Tangda villagers do not have to face the constant struggle for water.



In 2014, WOTR, with the help of the community, began working in the village and introduced soil and water conservation measures. File Photo

Varsha Tangde of Vadod Tangda village in Jalna district eagerly waits for the fortnightly Farmers' Field School, that is being conducted in her village since 2014. It is here that she picked up the improved farming techniques and ways of micro-irrigation, composting and other such water retention methods, a knowledge that she later shared with her farmer husband.

Just like Tangde, there are nearly 100 women in Vadod Tangda, who regularly attend the Farmers' Field School (FFS), one of the activities introduced by the Pune-based Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR). Hence, while villages in various parts of Maharashtra are dealing with drought, Vadod Tangda villagers do not have to face the constant struggle for water.

The project has been carried out by the WOTR in partnership with Hindustan Unilever Foundation, MGNREGA and German agency EED.

In 2014, WOTR, with the help of the community, began working in the village and introduced soil and water conservation measures. Since then, the compartment and farm bunding has been undertaken, CCTs and WATs have been dug, check dams and gabions have been constructed. WOTR adopts the ridge to valley approach, stopping the rain water, allowing it to percolate in the ground and at the same time, increasing the ground water level. Other than this, WOTR equipped the village farmers with several simple but useful methods of farming, for example FFS, Participatory Crop Water Budgeting and Climate Smart Agriculture.

Talking about FFS, Harish Davare, project manager, says "Depending upon the crops, the FFS participants hold meetings. During FFS, farmer field days are organised necessarily at three crop stages – pre-sowing phase, sowing phase, vegetative phase and harvesting phase."

He adds that FFS is organised through five frontline farmers, who in turn have five student farmers each. On an average, each FFS has at least 25 farmers and they adopt the improved agriculture practices in at least 1 acre of their land. Adoption of various improved agriculture practices is achieved.

Speaking about the benefits of FFS, says Tangde, “After adopting methods taught at the FFS, not only has our crop production gone up but our expenses have also reduced.”

Another interesting method adopted by the farmers is Participatory Crop Water Budgeting. Davare says it is a methodology which seeks to understand how much water is available in the village in various forms and from various sources, and what is actually the water requirement of the village during that particular period.

“It also enables us to understand which agricultural practices to follow. The objective is to encourage use of water judiciously, agriculture and livestock with a view to optimising benefits in a context of climate variability, erratic rainfall and possible drought,” he says, adding, that if the tool and methodology is successfully adopted, there could be a considerable reduction in water wastage.

Bhagchand Devchand Gomladu, one of the many farmers who’ve benefited from the work done by WOTR, said, “In the past few drought years, my 60-foot-deep well used to have merely 2-3 feet of water during Rabi; summers were worse. In April 2015, bunding work was carried out in my land. This year in spite of meagre rain, there is 30 feet water in my well.”

Punjab: Agriculture department on toes after whitefly found in Fazilka

A cotton crop affected by whitefly in a field in Muktsar. (Source: Express Photo by Gurmeet Singh)

After widespread damage of cotton crop due to whitefly menace last season, the agriculture department is taking no chances this time.

The pest that was recently spotted in a few pockets of Fazilka district was found to be above economic threshold level (ETL) following which farmers were directed to use pesticide sprays on 10-15 acres of land in which they had sown cotton.

Whitefly has also been noticed in Haryana’s Sirsa that borders Punjab’s Bathinda, Mansa and Muktsar districts.

Punjab officials have already alerted their Haryana counterparts to take necessary steps to check its spread.



Dr Jasbir Singh Bains, Director, Agriculture said: “Whitefly is still below ETL. The problem is not yet alarming but we have taken necessary steps to check its spread.

Significantly, agriculture officials have been touring the fields since the start of sowing season.

The Director further informed that the area that under cotton crop this time has slipped to 2.51 lakh hectares as compared to 3.39 lakh hectares last season.

Elaborating on the reasons behind this, Bains said: “Apart from previous year’s crop loss, farmers have this year shifted to paddy because of release of tubewell connections. In addition to this, many canals like Bhagsar minor, Lambi minor were under repair due to which there was water shortage in a few areas and sowing could not be done.”

He said field officers were keeping a vigil so as not to allow late sowing of cotton crop as it leads to fast growth of whitefly.

He added a monitoring committee comprising Director Agriculture, Director Horticulture, experts from Punjab Agricultural University, and Haryana as its

members has been formed to oversee the cotton crop and check spread of whitefly.

FDI in food processing: Govt may put conditions for foreign investors, says official

However, another official said that inclusion of any kind of condition in the proposal may hamper investments in the sector.

The DIPP may put certain conditions for foreign investors in the Cabinet proposal for allowing FDI in food processing sector.

Officials of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and Food Processing Ministry are discussing mutually agreeable conditions to be included in the proposal, an official said.

The development comes in the wake of Ministry of Food processing asking to put a condition of investing 25 per cent of the foreign inflows for creating agriculture infrastructure in the proposal.

The original proposal sent to the Union Cabinet did not have any condition.

Food Processing Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal is demanding that foreign players looking to invest in the sector would have to mandatorily invest a portion of their investments in building infrastructure at the farm gate level for the benefit of farmers. The minister is asking for putting a condition of investing 25 per cent of the foreign inflows for creating agriculture infrastructure.

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The government had stated that FDI in food processing will benefit farmers, reduce wastage of fruits and vegetables, give impetus to the industry and create vast employment opportunities.

Overall FDI in the country registered a growth of 29 per cent in 2015-16. It stood at USD 40 billion in that fiscal.

Pune: It's curtains for Ratnagiri's Hapus

Traders here say that the Hapus that they are selling is from Tumkur in Karnataka, and even their arrival is set to stop in 10 days.



Mangoes from east India like Langda from Malda in West Bengal is expected to hit the market in the next fortnight.

Officially, it's the end of the season for Hapus mangoes from Ratnagiri this year as Pune has not received any boxes of the fruit for seven days.

Traders here say that the Hapus that they are selling is from Tumkur in Karnataka, and even their arrival is set to stop in 10 days.

After a dismal last year, the mango season this year saw a bumper crop and an early start too.

This year, exports saw a record increase of 20 per cent with the European market opening up in all earnest.

“Mangoes from Konkan had stopped arriving almost a week back.

We guess the arrival of Hapus from Karnataka would also stop in the next 10 days,” said Rohan Ursal, a trader in Pune marketyard.

Other than Hapus, the local varieties of mangoes like Payari would still be available.

Mangoes from east India like Langda from Malda in West Bengal is expected to hit the market in the next fortnight.

The mango season would officially be over by the end of June.

Ursal said that overall, the mango season has been good with excess production flooding the market.

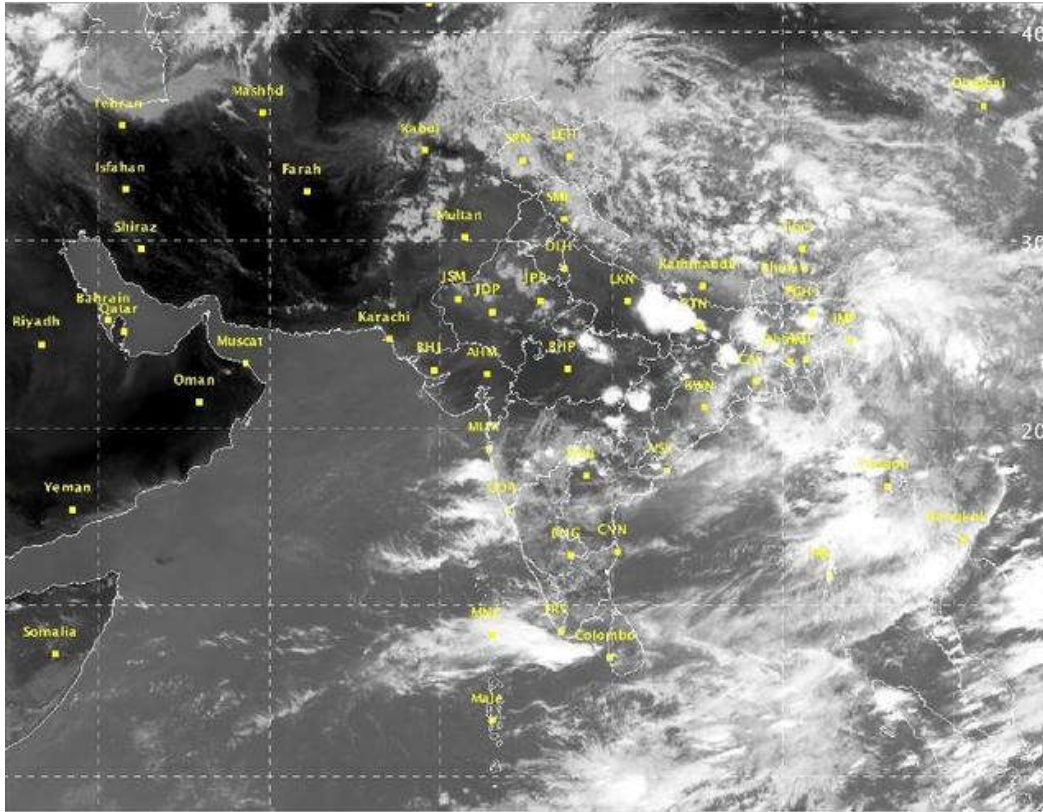
While the market might have seen a good season, growers in Devgad did complain of a late pest attack and heat cutting their produce.

Omkar Sapre, chief marketing officer of Devgad Taluka Amba Utpad Sahkari Sanstha Maryadit (a cooperative body of Hapus growers from Devgad), said that the body has done business of around 11,000 dozens for the current season.

“Last year the season had seen lesser than 10,000 dozens of mangoes being sold by us,” he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Monsoon slows down on West Coast, may revive from mid-week



Insat satellite image as of 15.30 IST.

The progress of the monsoon along the West Coast has slowed after the offshore trough, which acts as its spine, weakened from yesterday.

Satellite pictures this afternoon showed rain-bearing clouds having reached the Ratnagiri-Ganpati Phule-Dapoli-Harihareshwar stretch, some distance south of Mumbai.

Northern limit

The northern limit of the monsoon (south of which has already been covered) continued to pass through Karwar, Gadag, and Ongole, and then into the Bay of Bengal.

The monsoon has already covered Kerala, Tamil Nadu, most parts of South Interior Karnataka, Coastal Karnataka, and some parts of South Andhra Pradesh.

India Met Department has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall Konkan, Goa, Coastal Karnataka and Kerala for today and tomorrow.

There is a scale-up of rain indicated for Sub-Himalayan West Bengal and the rest of the Northeastern-States for the next three days before fresh action begins from the South.

Fresh rain pulse

Coastal and South Interior Karnataka and Kerala may start receiving thundershowers from June 16, according to the Met Department.

The US Climate Prediction Centre agrees with this outlook and points to an increase in rainfall over Coastal Karnataka, Goa and Konkan during the week beginning June 18.

Rains are also indicated for parts of Central India and East India, including Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh during this period.

The offshore trough, now a feeble feature, is forecast to come back to life after June 16, according to available indications.

This would bring back rains and showers over the West Coast, more specifically to the northern parts, including Konkan and Goa.

Extended forecast

An extended range weather forecast for the period from June 10 to June 23 issued by India Met Department in association with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture has indicated the following:

Normal or above normal rainfall is likely to occur over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Konkan, Goa, Coastal Karnataka and Kerala.

Normal or above normal rainfall is likely to occur in either of the two weeks in Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Vidarbha, Telangana, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, Interior Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

MMTC invites bids to import 5,000 tonnes of pulses



To keep domestic prices under control by increasing availability

State-run MMTC is looking to import 5,000 tonnes of pulses to keep the domestic prices under control by increasing the availability of lentils.

The gap in demand and supply of pulses has widened in the last two years due to drought. Pulse production is around 17 million tonnes while demand is for 23.6 million tonnes (MT).

The country had imported around 5.5 MT of pulses in 2015-16, there is still a shortfall of around 1 MT, putting upward pressure on prices.

The government is importing pulses through MMTC, using Price Stabilisation Fund for creating buffer stock of pulses and other essential commodities so as to intervene in the market to check prices when need arises.

According to the tender document, the MMTC has invited bids for import of desi chick peas from Canada or Australia.

The bid should be made for minimum 2,500 tonnes and the last date is June 15.

“Note that all the pulses quoted shall be from new crop and shall be sound, clean, wholesome, free from moulds/fungus, ...artificial colour, admixture of unwholesome substance and should be of reasonable uniform size, shape and colour characteristics,” MMTC said in the tender.

The Centre is procuring pulses to create a buffer stock of 1.5 lakh tonnes. State-run agencies FCI, NAFED and SFAC had already procured 1.11 lakh tonnes of pulses so far from farmers for creating buffer stock.

At the same time, for raising lentils’ domestic output, the Centre has raised their minimum support price (MSP) by up to 425 per quintal for this year.

The pigeon pea (tur daal) MSP has been raised to 5,050 per quintal for this year, from 4,625 per quintal last year.

Mung bean (moong daal) support price has been increased to 5,225 per quintal for the 2016-17 kharif season, from 4,850 per quintal in the year-ago period. Black lentil (urad daal) MSP has been raised to 5,000 per quintal, from 4,625 in the said period.

India is the world’s largest producer of pulses, but its domestic demand outstrips production. The shortfall is met from import.

As per the Agriculture Ministry’s estimate, pulse production is estimated at 17.33 MT in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), marginally higher than the previous year’s production of 17.15 MT.

Kharif sowing begins as monsoon sets in



Acreage down 7% so far; but planting expected to pick up as rains progress

The arrival of the South-West monsoon has kickstarted seasonal farming activity with farmers taking up sowing of key kharif crops such as rice, pulses, oilseeds and cotton, among others, across many States.

According to the preliminary data put out by the Agriculture Ministry, sowing of kharif crops was complete on about 71.24 lakh hectares (lh) as on June 10 — about 7 per cent lower than last year's acreage of 76.65 lh.

Sluggish trend

The sowing trend, so far, was rather sluggish due to the delayed arrival of the monsoon, the lifeline of the country's agriculture sector, by about eight days. Also, lower-than-normal pre-monsoon rainfall in Central and Southern parts of the country has contributed to the sluggish trend in kharif plantings.

Till Friday, the monsoon had covered Central Karnataka and parts of Andhra Pradesh and was seen advancing further. The IMD has predicted above normal rainfall this year for the country, which had witnessed two successive deficits, which triggered a drought in over ten States.

Bigger target

Transplanting of rice, the main kharif cereal crop, has commenced and acreages, so far, were higher in the North-Eastern States of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and also in Kerala. The Centre has set a rice production target of 93 million tonnes (mt) for the kharif season this year, over the 90.59 mt (per third advanced estimate) produced in the last year.

Sowing of pulses has commenced in States such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. So far, a total of 1.46 lh has been covered under pulses such as tur (arhar), urad and green gram as against 2.32 lh in the corresponding period last year.

The increase in bonus and higher prevailing prices of pulses could prompt farmers to shift from crops such as cotton and plant more legumes this year.

In fact, in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, where cotton planting has already been completed, acreages under the fibre crop have been lower on account of the threat of pests such as whitefly, which had caused significant losses last year. Also, the threat of pink bollworm could affect acreages in major growing States such as Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh this year.

Among coarse cereals, maize has been planted on about 1.5 lh, while sowing of other grains such as jowar, bajra, ragi and millet has commenced mainly in Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. Sowing of oilseeds has also commenced in Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu.

Cane acreage up

So far, this kharif season, the acreage of sugarcane has been higher than in the corresponding last year.

Although a drought has impacted planting in Maharashtra, Union Agriculture Ministry data suggest that the acreage under sugarcane has risen in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

So far, sugarcane has been planted on 44.38 lh, with close to half of it being reported from UP where acreages currently stand at 21.79 lh (18.10 lh). Karnataka has planted the crop on 2.84 lh (2.66 lh), and Tamil Nadu on 2.61 lh (2.56 lh). In Maharashtra, sugarcane acreage is lower at 7.62 lh (8.21 lh).

A sluggish start		
	2016	2015
Rice	5.75	6.42
Pulses	1.46	2.32
Coarse Cereals	2.01	3.82
Oilseeds	0.72	1.22
Sugarcane	44.38	41.01
Jute & Mesta	7.06	7.55
Cotton	9.87	14.30
Total	71.24	76.65

Kharif Acreage in lakh hectares as on June 10

Jeera gains aroma as strong export demand boost outlook

Jeera (cumin seed) prices have moved north again as a sudden spurt of 2,000 per quintal since March is fuelling speculation of a further rise in prices amid a strong export outlook.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), the far month contract expiring in September stood at 17,160 a quintal, while the near month contract, expiring in June, stood at 16,585.

Spot jeera prices at Unjha market touched 16,850 on Friday against 14,900 in March. Last time, a similar upside was seen in October 2015, when jeera prices hovered around 16,500-17,000.

Overseas demand

Reduced stock for domestic consumption coupled with strong export outlook for 2016-17 has pushed jeera prices up in the domestic market.



“In the first three months, around 45,000 tonnes of the spice has been exported. Exports will continue till the next sowing in October-November. We expect total exports will cross 100,000 tonnes this year with China being a major buyer at around 35,000 tonnes,” said Vijay Joshi of Vijay Exim in Unjha.

Last year, India exported 1,55,000 tonnes. Notably, the country’s jeera exports have been on a decline since 2013-14 from 1,60,000 tonnes reported that year.

“Turkey and Syrian supplies will not have any major role in the price as their contribution will not be significant,” said Joshi.

Domestic scenario

Trade sources say most farmers have offloaded their crop. Of the total estimated crop of around 2,50,000 tonnes for Gujarat and Rajasthan, close to 70 per cent

has already been sold in the market. The local demand itself is pegged at 1,65,000 tonnes, putting further pressure when exports rise.

“We have seen a prolonged weakness in jeera. Prices had hit the lowest at 14,100 in February this year.

Since then, there has been sharp and steady upside. We can see a small correction in the price in the near future, but the overall trend will be upwards,” said a trader from Unjha.

Jeera sowing begins around October-November and harvest starts in February.

The peak season for market arrivals is between February and May, with arrivals crossing 15,000 bags (of 40 kg each) per day. Currently, arrivals hover around 5,000 bags per day.

Indigenous oils continue to rise

Indigenous edible oils such as groundnut, cotton and rapeseed oil continued their uptrend with rise of 5, 10 and 10 per 10 kg each on back of tight supply, while imported palmolein remained under pressure with a decline of 4 on slack demand.

Sources said in absence of fresh bulk demand prices for imported oil remained under pressure.

Stockists stayed away from making fresh purchases and concentrated on fulfilling old commitments.

Ruchi was quoting soyabean refined oil 638, sunflower refined oil 730. Allana traded palmolein 586, soya refined oil 638, sunflower refined oil 740.

At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin rose to 1,950 (1,940) and loose (10 kg) was 1,250 (1,250).

Business Standard

Vegetable prices rising on crop damage reports

Scorching heat burns flower pods thereby reduces yield to a fourth



There has been a sharp rise in vegetable prices over the past five weeks, on reports of crop damage.

Tomatoes in Bengaluru are Rs 90 a kg in the retail markets, with its wholesale price around Rs 70 a kg. In Delhi and Mumbai, it is quoted at Rs 17.50 a kg and Rs 28.50 in the wholesale mandis, with its retail price at Rs 35 and Rs 50 a kg, respectively. Other vegetables have moved in line.

Rising temperatures due to deficient rain in the past two monsoons caused damage to vegetable crops. Flower pods in winter-sown crops were burnt. Consequently, vegetable production is seen as declining this season, despite almost flat output growth forecast by the National Horticulture Board (NHB).

“Yield has been severely lower this year, with farmers witnessing 25 per cent recovery of major vegetables, after summer heat. As against eight tonnes per acre of tomato output in the normal case, farmers are harvesting two 2 tonnes or less. The quality of harvest is also poorer than expected,” said Shri Ram Gadhawe, president, Vegetables Growers Association of India.

NHB in its first advance estimate for crop year 2015-16 had forecast vegetable production at 168.5 million tonnes, a marginal decline from 169.48 mt the previous year. The fall was estimated on proportionate decline in sowing at 9.47 mn hectares for 2015-16, from 9.54 mn ha the previous year.

All essential vegetables in day to day life have become costlier. The cheapest of the entire group, cabbage, has become costlier by 57 per cent to sell at Rs 11 a kg in wholesale markets. Okra(ladies finger) has surged by 43 per cent to Rs 17.5 a kg and cauliflower by 36 per cent to Rs 26.7 a kg in the wholesale mandis in Delhi.

VEGETABLE PRICES-DELHI MARKET					
(₹/quintal)	Apr 29	May 31	Jun 10	%Chg*	%Chg**
Tomato Local	600	820	1,750	113.41	191.7
Okra	2,000	1,220	2,500	104.92	25.0
Cabbage	525	700	1,175	67.86	123.8
Brinjal Round	875	1,300	1,925	48.08	120.0
Cauliflower	2,085	1,960	2,740	39.80	31.4
Peas	5,500	4,000	5,500	37.50	0.0
Bitter Gourd	1,750	1,350	1,750	29.63	0.0
Brinjal Long	925	1,375	1,700	23.64	83.8
Potato Fresh	1,110	1,470	1,670	13.61	50.5
Garlic	7,000	9,000	9,625	6.94	37.5
Ginger	2,285	3,666	3,833	4.56	67.7
Chilly	3,450	2,600	2,650	1.92	-23.2

*Month to date, **since May; compiled by BS Research Bureau Source: NHB

“Consumers are unlikely to get a respite as there will be no new crop arrivals for the next two months,” said a senior official at the wholesale yard at Vashi, Navi Mumbai.

There has also been a sharp decline in arrivals due to crop losses. At Vashi, arrivals of okra were 18 tonnes on Friday, from 132 tonnes a day in early May. Arrival of cauliflower were 48 tonnes, from 82 tonnes a day in the earlier period.

“Vegetables sown now with the onset of the monsoon rain would be harvested only by the end of August. Till then, consumers will have bear with high prices,” said Gadhave.

Taskforce suggests 5-point agenda for cash-starved Maharashtra farmers

Mission will focus on suicide-prone regions, aims to bring at least 80% farmers into institutional credit net

A Maharashtra government appointed taskforce to address agrarian issues has suggested a five-point agenda to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, to bring at least 80 per cent of farmers into the institutional credit net.

Vasantrao Naik Shetkari Swavalamban Mission, headed by agriculture expert Kishore Tiwari, has suggested that Fadnavis direct collectors of 14 suicide-prone districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada region to start a crop loan helpline, the details of which be published in leading newspapers and the action taken report be submitted to VNSSM.

He also suggested to set up village and taluka-level crop loan committees comprising of ground staff and sarpanch which will prepare a list of hardships being faced by credit-starved farmers.

"Tehsildars, block development officers, taluka agriculture officers and other government and bank officers along with the local MLA should be a part of the committee. They should be empowered to take corrective action so that a smooth crop loan disbursement is done," Tiwari said.

He further said all banks should put big flex boards requesting farmers to come for fresh crop loans, and contact numbers of all senior bank officials, the district collector and the VNSSM chairman should be displayed prominently.

Tiwari said banks which do not comply with government norms of disbursing loans should be sent notice for criminal action and list of such banks should be sent to RBI for further action.

He also demanded that district collector should appoint a nodal officer for each bank branch who would be required to provide a daily update of crop loan disbursement.

"If banks do not act fast and provide crop loans, 50 per cent of farmers would be forced to borrow from private lenders at higher rates or abandon sowing altogether.

"If timely action of restructuring old dues and granting fresh loans is not taken, farmers would not be able to take advantage of a good monsoon expected this year," Tiwari said in his letter to Fadnavis.



8-day deadline for banks to disburse crop loans

District guardian minister Sanjay Rathod on Saturday gave an eight-day ultimatum to nationalized banks and warned of action if they fail to disburse crop loan to needy farmers.

"All the nationalized and loan distributing financial agencies have been given eight days to achieve their pre-stipulated crop loan target. The responsibility is entrusted with the branch managers. If they fail to achieve their target, action would follow against them," said Rathod at a crop loan distribution progress review meeting held on Saturday.

MP Bhavana Gawali, Vasantnao Naik Sheti Swavalambi Mission (VNSSM) chairman Kishor Tiwari, district collector Sachindra Pratap Singh, ZP CEO Deepak Singla, deputy collector for rehabilitation Narendra Fulzele, DDR Archan Malve, and district coordinators of lead bank were present.

The minister expressed concern over apathy of nationalized banks towards distribution of crop loan to farmers. He asked them to display the list of eligible farmers for crop loan and defaulters in their respective banks.

The state government has set the loan target for the district at Rs1,736 crore and in spite of repeated requests and warnings, nationalized banks could complete only less than 20% of their targets so far which is not acceptable, Rathod said.

The government's aid, insurance compensation and even superannuation benefits of farmers are being diverted to their crop loan accounts. It is illegal and should not happen in future, Rathod said.

Over 58,000 farmers have not taken any crop loan from nationalized banks so far though they are eligible for the same, he said, adding that all the eligible farmers should be given crop loan on the basis of guidelines set by the government.

The bank managers defended themselves saying they have not received orders from higher authorities which caused the delay.

MP Bhavana Gawali had toured the district in the last 3-4 days on the basis of complaints received from farmers. She had even met branch managers of nationalized banks in a number of villages.

Talking to TOI, she said the crop loan distribution is not satisfactory and branch managers take it in a casual manner causing miseries to farmers.

Unemployment hitting farmers hardest: Bodies

The farmer organisation BKU Ekta Ugrahan, protesting at Bathinda for the last 20 days demanding agri loan waiver, has termed the rising unemployment as one of the biggest reasons behind rising debt on farmers, apart from expenses on agriculture related activities.

Farmers asserted that they spend large amounts on educating young sons and daughters, and when the youngsters fail to get employed it directly affects the farmer and his family. They added, "This makes paying back the loans difficult and pushes them towards suicide."

The farmers had started protest for debt waiver and survey of suicides after 2010 on May 24 and completed 20 days of protest on Sunday. BKU Ugrahan general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokri said that though the unemployment was affecting every individual in the state but the farmers were hit the hardest. They took loans to educate their children and when educated youth failed in getting any employment, the families were devastated.

The Bathinda police on Saturday resorted to lathi-charge thrice on unemployed teachers and others. Three different cases too have been registered against 25 persons, including half a dozen women under sections 283(obstruction in public way), 427(mischief causing damage) and prevention to damage to public property Act, and the highway Act.

UP enhances prize money, to honour 3 progressive women farmers

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to augment the prize money of the annual award, which is being given to farmers every year on December 23 -- the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh.

As per the information received, the cash amount for the first prize, now stands at Rs 1 lakh (after revision). Similarly, the second prize is of Rs 75,000 and third prize is of Rs 50,000. Elaborating further on this agriculture minister Vinod Kumar alias Pandit Singh said that the awards are being given since 2006-07 to 10 top performing farmers.

The prize money used to be Rs 20,000 for first place, Rs 15,000 for second place and Rs 10,000 for third place.

The agriculture minister also said that in order to strengthen the women farmers and also encourage them, the state government would honour 3 progressive women farmers also. As a result, the total number of farmers who would be felicitated on December 23 stands at 33.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Paddy sowing down 10 per cent, pulses area falls 37 per cent this kharif season



Farmers have sown pulses in 1.46 lakh hectares so far in the ongoing kharif season of the 2016-17 crop year as against 2.32 lakh hectares in the same period last year.

NEW DELHI: Total area sown under paddy is lower by 10 per cent so far in this kharif season at 5.75 lakh hectares, while pulses acreage is down 37 per cent mainly due to delay in onset of monsoon.

Farmers have sown pulses in 1.46 lakh hectares so far in the ongoing kharif season of the 2016-17 crop year as against 2.32 lakh hectares in the same period last year.

"Preliminary reports of crop coverage in the kharif season have started coming in. The total sown area as on 10th June, as per reports received from the states, stands at 71.24 lakh hectare as compared to 76.65 lakh hectare at this time last year," an official statement said.

After a delay of almost seven days, southwest monsoon hit Kerala on June 8. India Meteorological Department (IMD) has projected an "above normal" rainfall this year.

According to Agriculture Ministry data, paddy acreage is 5.75 lakh hectare so far this Kharif as against 6.42 lakh hectare in the corresponding period of last year.

Area under coarse cereals is also down by 47 per cent at 2.01 lakh hectares so far compared with 3.82 lakh hectares in the year ago period.

In non-food grains category, oilseeds acreage is lower at 0.72 lakh hectares so far as against 1.22 lakh hectares in the same period last kharif.

Cotton sowing is also lagging behind by 31 per cent at 9.87 lakh hectares compared with 14.30 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

However, sugarcane area is up at 44.38 lakh hectares so far against 41.01 lakh hectares in the same period last year.

With the onset of South-West monsoon, the government expects sowing operations to gain momentum.

"The monsoon is arriving at almost the same time as IMD predicted. We are hopeful and optimistic that there will be higher sowing and a very good production this year. Overall, this will be good year for agriculture," Agriculture Secretary Shobhana K Patnaik had said earlier this week.

India's foodgrains production stood at around 252 million tonnes (MT) during the 2015-16 and 2014-15 crop years (July- June) due to two consecutive drought year.

Govt may rollback import duty on wheat: Ram Vilas Paswan

NEW DELHI: Government may scrap the 25 per cent import duty on wheat if prices continue to rise, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan today said.

At present, import of wheat attracts a 25 per cent duty, which is applicable till June 30. Despite expected increase in production this crop year, the prices have shown a rising trend over the past few weeks.

"The government is keeping a close watch on wheat prices. So keeping in mind the recent rise in price trend of wheat, We can rollback the import duty on wheat. We don't want extra burden on consumers," Paswan said.

He added that wheat procurement is so far down by 50 lakh tonnes to 229 lakh tonnes compared with 280 lakh tonnes in the year ago period.

In March, the government had extended the import duty on wheat by another three months, till June, to curb imports as domestic production is estimated to rise by over 8 per cent this year.

Indian flour mills have already contracted to import three lakh tonnes from Australia and France for shipment in July- September.

Last year too, private millers had purchased about 5 lakh tonnes of wheat from Australia for the first time in a decade due to sluggish supply of domestic high protein wheat and lower international prices.

As on April 1, state-owned FCI had a stock of 30 million tonnes of wheat, much higher than the actual requirement of 7.46 million tonnes.

Despite drought in over 10 states, wheat production has been pegged at 94.04 million tonnes for 2015-16 crop year (July-June) compared with 86.53 million tonnes in the previous year, as per Agriculture Ministry's third advance estimate.

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