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THE HINDU

India must ensure energy efficiency in irrigation: Experts

With agriculture's share of electricity consumption at 18 per cent of total usage, experts and officials on Monday said that the country must move toward energy efficiency in irrigation to ensure food security and meet demand for water.

“To tackle energy security the European Union [EU] has brought policy and financial experts as well as European business to India, offering concrete solutions in this regard,” Tomasz Kozlowski, Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to India, said during a workshop — titled ‘Agricultural Demand Side Management (AgDSM): Adopting Technologies to Boost Efficiencies’ — organised by Federation of India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the European Commission.

Mr. Kozlowski added that partnership between India and the EU would facilitate policy dialogue, bring in best practices, business solutions and joint research and innovation, and would help with finding financing models for clean energy and climate change.

More pumpsets

In his address, Bureau of Energy Efficiency Additional Secretary B.P. Pandey pointed out that about 20.27 million electrified pumpsets had been installed.

“Due to the increasing demand for water to meet the agricultural needs, about 0.25 to 0.5 million new pump sets are being added annually...By adoption of high-efficiency pumps about 25-30 per cent energy can be saved,” he said, adding that the industry could supply sufficient number of pumpsets but there was a need to work out a feasible finance model.

Nitin Zamre, the Managing Director of ICF International India, said Centre-State coordination in pushing for the policy was ineffective and there was a demand-supply gap of star-rated pumps.

“Also, concentration of agriculture pump manufacturers is in limited locations and the high initial cost of energy efficient pumps becomes a deterrent. There is a need to make international technology easily accessible and mindset change towards transition to energy efficient technology,” he added.

Fishermen confident of good season ahead

61-day annual fishing ban in East Coast comes to an end today



Raring to go: Fishermen fixing a pulley on a mechanised boat as post-ban fishing season is set to begin from midnight of Tuesday in Visakhapatnam.—
Photo: C.V. SubrahmanyaM

Fishermen are gearing up to venture into the sea on their maiden voyage post-annual conservation period with high hopes of a bumper harvest.

The forecast of near normal monsoon and the pre-monsoon showers have raised the expectation level. The big catch the fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry could get post-ban has also pepped up the spirit of local fishermen.

“On the whole the expectancy level is very high this time. The rain triggered by the cyclonic storm is expected to fetch them better catch than the previous year,” Joint Director of Fisheries Koteswara Rao told *The Hindu* Monday.

The annual ban observed for 61 days for the second time in the East Coast was not followed by Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Fishermen there went into sea on

May 30 cutting short the conservation period recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture for 61 days.

Hectic preparations

After completion of annual maintenance works like painting, wood and wire rope replacement, gear and propeller works and registrations with Fisheries Department and MPEDA, 70 per cent of 700 mechanised boats, 100 big and small trawlers and 250 to 300 beach landing crafts have started hectic preparations for starting of new season post-ban.

Though the ban will end on Tuesday midnight, due to Gangamma (Goddess of Sea) Yatra falling on Tuesday, Dolphin Mechanised Boat Operators' Association and AP Mechanised Boat Operators' Association have advised the boat owners to set out on sail from midnight of Wednesday.

“Those who are interested can go on voyage tomorrow midnight itself,” said Dolphin Mechanised Boat Operators' Association president Ch. Satyanarayana Murthy. It is expected that there will be good harvest of pink, white shrimp and tiger prawn this time.

“The high operational cost following steep increase in diesel price notwithstanding, the fishermen this time are confident of a good season ahead,” Federation of Indian Fishery Industries president Y.G.K. Murti said.

Boosting agriculture



Information and Public Relations Minister Palle Raghunatha Reddy taking part in agriculture activities at Garladinne in Anantapur district on Monday. — Photo: R.V.S. Prasad

Financial assistance to coconut farmers

To replace old, pest infested, and unproductive palms

Coconut farmers can heave a sigh of relief as the Coconut Development Board is to extend subsidy assistance to farmers in Tamil Nadu to replace the old, senile, pest and disease infested, and unproductive palms, and rejuvenate the remaining trees on a mission mode.

“We have earmarked Rs. 20 crore for Tamil Nadu to disburse as subsidy for the 2016-17 financial year for the purpose. The disbursal of subsidy and implementation of the scheme will be done through the State Agriculture Department.

“This is for the first time such an assistance is being be extended to coconut farmers in Tamil Nadu”, G. R.Singh, the Chief Coconut Development Officer of Coconut Development Board under Government of India, told *The Hindu*.

Productivity

The project is aimed at enhancing the production and productivity of coconut as the impotent trees affects the overall yield and profit margins of the farmers.

Besides replacing such palms, the scheme also covers the rejuvenation of existing trees through integrated management practices.

S. Selvaraj, a coconut farmer and chairman of the farmers’ consortium named ‘Udumalpet Coconut Farmers Producer Company’ pointed out that the scheme would definitely enthuse the farmers to replace the old palms that constitute almost 10 per cent of the total palms in districts like Tirupur, by rotation.

“Similarly, when sudden pests and disease attack occurs, usually around 50 to 60 trees out of the 175 trees been planted in every hectare will somehow gets affected before the farmers could take measures to combat the pest.

“Since the scheme covers such replacements too, it will help farmers reduce losses to a significant level”, he opined.

On the scale of subsidy, Deputy Director of Coconut Development Board R. Gnanadevan said Rs 1,000 was earmarked for cutting and removal of unproductive palms, Rs. 17,500 towards cost of rejuvenation per hectare for a period of two years, and bear 50 per cent of seedling cost at the rates fixed.

“Purchase only certified seeds”

The Agriculture Department has appealed to farmers to purchase only certified seeds from licensed dealers. In a statement issued here, S.Mohamed Abdul Nazeer, deputy director, Seed Inspection, said farmers should also verify the variety, lot, expiry date and quantity of the seeds purchased by them. Dealers should issue receipts for all purchases. Complaints regarding sale of seeds by unauthorised dealers or failure to issue receipts can be lodged with the Deputy Director office by dialling 2420587, the release said.

APPLICATIONS INVITED

Applications have been invited for various benefits extended under the Narikurvar Welfare Board. Collector K.S.Palanisamy, in a press release, said various benefits such as accident compensation, educational and marriage assistance can be availed by members of the board for themselves and their wards. Applicants can approach the District Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Officer for more details.

543 tonnes of certified paddy seeds ready

The Departments of Agriculture, and Seed Certification and Organic Certification have made ready 543 tonnes of certified paddy seeds, including the much demanded varieties of NLR 34449 and Anna (R) 4 for distribution to farmers for this season.

As use of quality seeds played a vital role in sustained growth and development of agriculture, the departments procured nine varieties of paddy seeds, mostly from certified seed farms under their direct supervision and supplied the seeds with ‘certified seed tag’ after subjecting them to strict and meticulous quality processing at seed processing units in the district.

High-yielding quality seeds of paddy, millets, minor millets, pulses and oilseeds were being given ‘certified seed tags’ at the three seed processing centres in the district, R. Harivasan, Joint Director (in charge) of Agriculture and S.S. Shaiek Abdullah, Assistant Director of Seed certification, said after inspecting a seed processing centre in Thiru Uthirakosamangai near here on Monday. The certified seeds were given the tags also at the seed processing centres at Paramakudi and Thiruvadanaï, they said. The certified paddy seeds ready for distribution included 200 tonnes of NLR 34449 and 135 tonnes of Anna (R) 4, they said. Besides, the departments had also made ready 26 tonnes of pulses, 7 tonnes of millets and minor millets and 4 tonnes of oilseeds, they said. The certified seeds had an expiry period of nine months, they added.

For the first time, the district has produced certified seeds of minor millets of Banyard, Samai and Varagu, they said. Farmers cultivated paddy in 1.20 lakh hectares in the district and the Department met 33 per cent of the total seed requirements, while the balance was met by private agencies after government certified the seeds procured by them, the officials said.

As the Tamil Nadu State Seed Development Agency offered good minimum support price, farmers evinced interest in raising seed farms, they said adding the departments proposed to raise paddy seeds on 696 hectares, pulses on 43 hectares and oilseeds and millets on 36 hectares during 2016-17. The departments had identified about 260 farmers to grow certified seeds during this year and proposed to offer them training, Mr. Abdullah said. "This time, we want the seed farms to be compact and demo plots for all technologies," he said. The farmers were trained to use seed drill sowing, bio fertiliser seed treatment and balanced use of nutrients, he added.

Training in mushroom cultivation

A training on mushroom cultivation techniques, Oyster and Milky, and its value added products will be held at Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Sandhiyur between 9.30 a.m. and 4 p.m. on June 17.

A press release from programme coordinator N. Sriram said that the training would cover mother spawn production, bed spawn production, bed preparation techniques for oyster and milky mushroom, diseases and pest management in mushroom cultivation, harvest and preservation methods. Also, techniques of preparation of value added products from mushrooms such as pickle, dehydration, soup, chilly, short and long term storage techniques, soup mix powder would also be imparted.

Training fee is Rs. 300 as per Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) norms. Training certificates, training kit and lunch will be provided to all participants. Interested should confirm their participation to the office before June 16 at 0427-2422550, according to the release.

Area under red gram cultivation expected to go up in Raichur

Anticipating an expansion of the area under red gram cultivation this year in Raichur district considering the failure of Bt cotton crop due to pink-bollworm pest attack last year, Minister of State for Medical Education and Raichur in-charge Sharanprakash Patil has directed officials of the Agricultural Department to get ready to meet the requirements and face the challenges posed by crop pattern change.

He was speaking at a Karnataka Development Programme review meeting here on Monday.

Earlier, Kiran Kumar, Joint Director of Agriculture, told the meeting that the area under red-gram cultivation in the district was expected to go up from 35,000 hectares (ha) last year to 70,000 ha. Basavaraj Patil Itagi, MLC, estimated that it was expected to be 1.25 lakh ha.

“Most of the cotton growers will switch to red gram as they suffered heavy losses last year due to pink bollworm pest menace. You should consult scientists at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, and take their opinion about whether or not Bt cotton cultivation should be recommended this year and disseminate their recommendations among farmers,” Dr. Patil said.

As above-normal rainfall was expected this year, he added, rain-fed areas were likely to see 100 per cent sowing and the department should be ready to meet the demands of farmers by stocking seeds and fertilizer in sufficient quantity.

When the meeting began, the Minister and K. Shivanagowda Naik, BJP MLA from Deodurg, exchanged heated arguments over the long-pending development works in Deodurg taluk over the last few years.

Mr. Naik alleged that 116 development works taken up in the last 10 years remain unfinished despite allocating funds for the purpose.

The issue was settled with the Minister directing the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer of the Raichur Zilla Panchayat to have a special meeting with officers and look into each work enlisted by Mr. Naik and resolve them.

Farming given more focus in district panchayat budget

5,000 farm units, each of 20 cents, to be set up

The maiden budget of the ruling Left Democratic Front in the district panchayat has given priority to enhancing agriculture productivity and augmenting infrastructure in schools and hospitals.

The budget outlines schemes to provide succour to the financially backward, including free lunch for destitute elderly persons and breakfast for children in settlements and coastal areas.

The budget for 2016-17, showing revenue of Rs.156.74 crore, expenditure of Rs.156.01 crore, and surplus of Rs.72.95 lakh, was presented by district panchayat vice president A. Shailaja Begum at a special committee meeting on Monday.

LISTED MEASURES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free laptops for visually challenged children 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mobile sales outlets for the differently abled 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mobile Animal Birth Control unit for sterilisation of stray dogs 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proper buildings for 25 libraries in district 	
<p><i>District panchayat vice president A. Shailaja Begum presenting the panchayat budget at a special committee meeting in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday. - PHOTO: C. RATHEESHKUMAR</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Girl students will be given karate training ▪ 42 comfort stations to be constructed 	

Storing rainwater

To make the district self-sufficient in vegetables, the budget has rolled out Jaivasmrithi scheme to create 5,000 farm units each in 20 cents of land. The panchayat will set up Agro Service Society to provide scientific inputs and advance machinery to increase farm output. The budget has set aside Rs.30 lakh to procure farm equipment for the society. Around 1 lakh concrete pits will be dug to store rainwater .

The budget has allocated Rs.5.16 crore to carry out maintenance and to construct kitchen and boundary walls in six schools under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan. The civic body has set aside Rs.31 crore for general education.

Allocation has been made to set up a dialysis unit, power laundry and generators in government hospitals at Nedumangad and Peroorkada. The panchayat will construct a mortuary in Nedumangad hospital. A sum of Rs.16.09 crore has been set aside to improve the condition of hospitals run by the panchayat. The budget has set aside Rs.36.17 crore for improving the condition of roads.

Symposium

A symposium on cultivation and marketing of spice crops will be held under the aegis of University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, Shivamogga, at 10.30 a.m. at Jawaharlal Nehru National College of Engineering here on June 15. N.K. Krishna Kumar, Deputy Director General of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, will inaugurate the programme.

M. Tamil Selvan, Additional Commissioner of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare will release a souvenir on the occasion.

Farming gains momentum in Kodagu as monsoon sets in

Intermittent rains and cloudy weather conditions over the last few days in Kodagu district have set the tone for the onset of monsoon, and agricultural activities have gained momentum.

The district received an average of 11.97 mm of rainfall on Monday as against 5.03 mm during the corresponding period last year.

Madikeri taluk received 22.95 mm of rainfall, while the taluk received 405.88 mm from January to May this year. Reports indicate that the rainfall has been uniform and widespread across the district. Virajpet taluk received 11.03 mm of rain on Monday, while Somwarpet received 1.93 mm. Hobli-wise rainfall statistics indicate that Madikeri kasaba received 17 mm, Napoklu 20.8 mm, Sampaji 13.4 mm, and Bhagamandala 40.6 mm of rainfall on Monday.

B.B. Pushpavathi, Municipal Commissioner, has appealed to people living in low-lying areas to shift to safer locations as there were forecasts of heavy rainfall across the district.

The inflow into Harangi reservoir was recorded at 258 cusecs as against an inflow of 119 cusecs the same day last year.

The Kodagu district information and publicity department said the conditions were right for the onset of monsoon in Kodagu and has buoyed the spirits of farmers and the agricultural community in general. Meanwhile, nearly 31,000 hectares of farmland will be brought under paddy cultivation this year. A release appealed to farmers to take precautionary measures against outbreak of various crop diseases by treating the seeds and saplings.

Maize is the second most important crop in the district and about 4,000 hectares was expected to be brought under cultivation. Fisheries will receive fresh impetus during the season and the authorities plan to distribute nearly 48 lakh fishlings during 2016-17 under pisciculture programmes.

Farmers' grievance meeting

The monthly farmers' grievance redressal meeting would be held on June 17 at 10.30 a.m. at the Collectorate. Officials of various departments including agriculture, horticulture, agriculture engineering, sericulture, fisheries, animal husbandry, cooperative sugar mills, water resources department, forest and pollution control board would take part in the meeting and reply to grievances raised by representatives of farmers' associations. The officials would also inform the farmers about the action they had taken on their petitions received last month, according to a press release.- Staff Reporter

Marketing Department moves to capital region



Personnel of the Agricultural Marketing Department on the office premises in Guntur on Monday.— PHOTO: T. VIJAYA KUMAR

The Agricultural Marketing Department, Andhra Pradesh, has moved lock, stock and barrel to the capital region. On Monday, 35 personnel of the department arrived in a Volvo bus from Hyderabad and were accorded a warm welcome by the local staff. The department would start functioning on June 16 from a refurbished Farmer's Rest House on the premises of Old Chilli Yard at Chuttugunta on Guntur-Hyderabad highway.

The premises will also have the camp office of Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao, offices of departments of Agriculture, Horticulture and Sericulture.

With this move, the Department of Agriculture and its allied wings have their base in Guntur. Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University office has already been functioning from an apartment on Inner Ring Road, Gorantla.

The dilapidated building has been refurbished and individual cabins have been created to accommodate the offices of Director, Joint Directors, Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors. The department will also recruit a few personnel to work as data entry operators through outsourcing.

Headed by Commissioner and Director, Marketing, P. Mallikarjuna Rao, an IFS officer on deputation, the department will supervise the functioning of 13 Agricultural Marketing Committees in the State besides Rythu Bazaars.

“We have moved to Guntur primarily because we have a building on our land. Over 10,000 square feet space has been made available after carrying the repair works to an old building which has never been used. We have also moved files and other office furniture from Hyderabad.

The staff have been told to make their own accommodation arrangements,” Joint Director, Marketing, Ramanujayulu told *The Hindu*.

With the department of marketing moving into the Capital region, the other departments like Women and Child Welfare are also likely to move soon.

Meeting

The monthly farmers grievances day meeting will be held at the Collectorate at 10.30 a.m. on June 17.

An official press release called upon the farmers and their representatives to participate in the meeting and get their grievances solved.

BLOOD DONATION

A large number of people donated blood at a voluntary blood donation camp organised by the North division unit of the Salem Central District unit of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam at the community hall in Thalavaipatti in Salem city on Sunday.

R. Rajendran, MLA and secretary of the Salem Central District unit of the party, inaugurated the camp.

The MLA also inaugurated a mass sapling planting campaign and distributed saplings to those who donated blood at the camp.

Rs. 398 crore to encourage sheep, goat breeders: Minister

Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries Talasani Srinivas Yadav said that the government has allocated an amount of Rs. 398 crore to encourage sheep and goat breeders, and Rs. 100 crore towards incentives for dairy development.

Participating in an official programme in the district on Monday, he said that Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, while aiming at economically empowering community occupations and artisans by providing necessary facilities, financial support and infrastructure, designed several schemes. He said that by spending Rs. 20 crore, each Assembly constituency would be provided with a mobile veterinary hospital.

To promote dairy development, farmers would be paid an additional Rs. 4 as incentive per litre of milk for which Rs. 100 crore was allocated, the Minister said, adding that veterinary doctor posts would be filled through the TSPSC shortly. The government will provide Rs. 5 lakh life insurance to sheep and goat breeders as they were prone to be harmed by wild animals when they roam around forests.

Farmers demand return of tractors

Farmers staged demonstration demanding to return the tractors seized from farmers by financiers.

A farmers' outfit called 'National-South Indian River Link Farmers Association' organised a novel protest to insist this demand apart from other demands in front of collectorate here on Monday.

The protesters came not wearing anything on their top and wielding a 'thiruvodu' to show that they were begging for their demands.

Protesters said that 17 tractors have been seized by financiers from the farmers who borrowed for buying tractors in the last one year, despite the supreme court's order to not to seize tractors from farmers.

The protesters demanded action from collector in this regard.

They also demanded that even the land and jewels mortgaged by farmers should not be auctioned.

‘Develop software to regulate use of urea’

To prevent the use of excessive urea that will result in pests impacting on output a software should be prepared, Collector N. Yuvaraj has said.

Directing officials of the Agriculture Department to take steps to supply fertilizer of only required quality, he said MARKFED, dealers, primary agricultural credit societies and sugar factories should use the software online to regulate the use of fertilizers, the Collector said at a meeting with them on Monday.

There was no dearth of fertilizer and its timely supply should be ensured.

Agriculture officials should encourage production of RGL paddy seed popular with farmers and also use of 1061 and 1064 seed.

The administration was ready to sanction godowns for stocking seed and seed processing units if proposals were submitted. Land would be allotted for construction of MARKFED godowns at Narsipatnam, Elamanchili and Chodavaram, Mr. Yuvaraj said.

'Polam Pilustondi'

The farmers awareness programme, “Polam Pilustondi,” will be organised in the district from June 20.

Joint Collector (Two) D.V. Reddy and Joint Director, Agriculture, V. Satyanarayana participated.

An agrarian success story

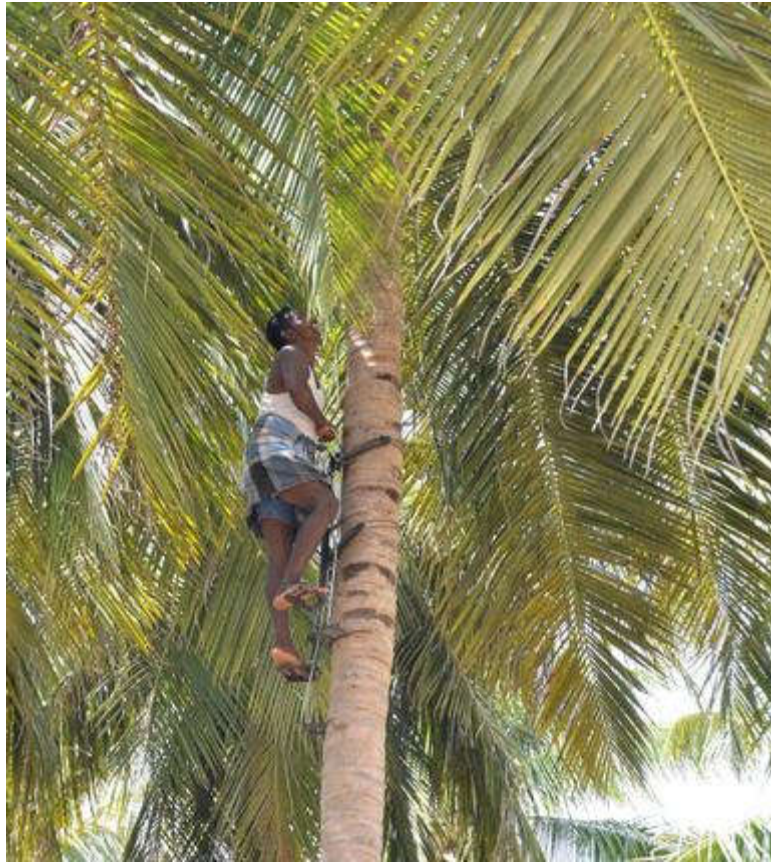
Organic farming has helped this clan to reap rich dividends

“We sold gold to buy this land. Now we are reaping the gold back from it,” says Mrs. Palaniammal Muthu, the matriarch who runs a 7.8 acre farm at Thenkadai Kurichy (also known locally as Koundampatti), Karur District with her eldest son Arivuazhagan.

Visitors could spend the whole day in the verdant surroundings, sipping the sweetish water from an endless supply of tender coconuts, listening to the mother-son duo recount their tryst with agriculture.

“This stretch was just a scrubland when my father bought it in 1967, by selling Amma’s 6-sovereign gold thali chain,” says Arivuazhagan. “I joined the farm

when in 1987, after I failed my 9th Class exams. With six siblings to take care of, I used to do everything with my mother – including kitchen work, babysitting, besides the farming.”



M. Arivuazhagan’s brother Tamilvanan picks coconuts using a new implement to climb the trees at the family farm in Thenkadai Kurichy. Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

That early graft has paid off handsomely. Today, Arivuazhagan proclaims with pride that his four brothers are all college graduates, and his two sisters were married off in a grand manner with the help of the farm’s income.

Palaniammal has overseen the calving of at least 500 cows in her 40 years as a farmer, and now, still sprightly in her late sixties, is already on to other value-added farming practices such as vermicomposting and maintaining a small pond of freshwater fishes. Solar energy panels help to pump the water for the farm’s requirements.

Given the precarious nature of agriculture today, one keeps expecting to hear a cautionary tale soon. But in this narrative, there seem to be only inspirational ideas.



M. Arivuazhagan and his mother Palaniammal have managed to script a success story in farming by adapting traditional agriculture and eco-friendly organic techniques to modern technology. They use solar panels (seen in the background) to supply the electricity required to pump the water for the farm in Thenkadai Kurichy, Kulithalai Taluk. Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

“We were following a mixed organic and chemical fertiliser-based farming system earlier. Now we have gone completely organic, because of its long-term benefits,” says Arivuazhagan. Though his school education stopped early, he hasn’t stinted on getting acquainted with the latest trends in farming.

He ruffles through stacks of notepads from all the courses that he has attended around Tamil Nadu. “One of the earliest lessons I learned was that in order to be successful, a farmer had to run a farm that would yield a daily, weekly, monthly, half-yearly and yearly profit. So instead of growing crops based on

what is selling well in the market at a particular time, it's better to plan for a sustained harvest," says Arivuazhagan.

The Koundampatti farm has 450 coconut trees, inter-cropped with casuarina, curry leaf, lemon and wild jasmine (pichhi poo).

In the centre, is a pond with around 2.5 tonnes of 'kendai (rohu),' 'katla' (Bengal carp) and 'jilapi' (Tilapia) in it. Arivuazhagan dives in with a friend to coax some of the fish into his net as his children wait with a sack for the catch that will be cooked for lunch.

"It is important to innovate in agriculture, whether in machinery or marketing," says Arivuazhagan. To this end, his farm has become a collaborator with a Chennai-based company Giv Farms that promotes organic agriculture on a big scale. 'Giv' stands for 'Grow more', 'Integrated farming' and 'Value-addition'.

Initially, the Koundampatti farmers are cultivating okra and brinjal organically on 20 acres in nearby villages. This is part of a 150-acre project.

"Our old natural manures, pest and disease control methods coupled with scientific understanding of micro nutrients and vermicompost are good enough to have long term food security," says A.K. Sankar, Managing Director, Giv Farms. The management professional from Tirunelveli has had an abiding interest in organic farming, which he has tried to standardise through the company.

"I visited more than 50 farms across Tamil Nadu in the past 2 to 3 years and have learnt chemicals are not really required for increasing crop yield," says Sankar.

"It takes lot effort to get back the beneficial microbes to the soil. If we take that bit of extra effort we could succeed," says Sankar.

He has cultivated banana, okra, brinjal, tomato, tapioca, turmeric, watermelon and drumstick, among other crops, organically over the past two years on 60 acres of leased lands.

Arivuazhagan's brothers M. Anbazhagan, a mechanical engineer and Tamilvanan, an ITI machinist, are now part of the Giv operations which take local fields in and around Nangavaram on lease for cultivation.

Each of the seven fields is under the supervision of a hitherto unemployed engineering or B.Tech graduate who has been retrained in organic farming. Giv Farms pays the supervisors a stipend of Rs. 7,000.

Among the latest projects on the anvil is a plan to cultivate spinach on a 24 acre plot and transport it to around 500 green groceries in Chennai daily through refrigerated trucks.

“We are using sprinklers to irrigate the spinach plot, because they keep the soil moist enough for easy harvesting,” says Arivuazhagan.

“This way, we can grow spinach through the summer, and in rainy weather, do it in covered enclosures.”

Palaniammal still manages the day-to-day working of the family farm, which includes manual harvesting of the wild jasmine, and tending to the many by-products of the coconut trees.

“You can get at least six to seven products out of a single coconut palm,” says Palaniammal.

And true to her word, she shows the firewood, roof thatching panels, brooms, copra, and coconut oil that the plantation yields.

As the day wears on, she calls her son Tamilvannan to pluck some coconuts from the tree towering over the old thatched hut that used to be the family homestead once.

Visitors gather around as he fixes a newly-acquired self-operated device that helps him to climb the tree as if on steps to the top.

As the nuts come thudding down, Palaniammal looks for something else to keep herself busy.

“This land has made us what we are,” she says.

BACK STORY

In the shadows

Koundampatti Muthu makes a dignified entrance at the end of a day's visit to the family farm that is being managed by his wife Palaniammal and son Arivuazhagan.

The 92-year-old's benign appearance belies his history as a freedom fighter, and in the 1960s, in local politics.

Born in 1925, K. Muthu was the youngest of six siblings of a farming family, and perhaps the only one of his siblings to study up to Intermediate level.

He worked in the Railways, and in the 1950s, became a close associate of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) supremo M. Karunanidhi, helping him to draft screenplays and political speeches.

After a political career that included leading farmer agitations and a brief stint as a Member of the Legislative Council (Kulithalai), K. Muthu gave it all up to settle down in his native village.

The farming practices that he had picked up from his father helped him to lay the foundation of the farm's growth.

"He was 40 when we got married," recalls Palaniammal. "Like him, I had attended school. We both knew that we would have to educate our children so that they could be successful and independent. But he would also take charge of the farm work whenever he could."

Still a staunch friend of his 'annan' (elder brother) Karunanidhi, K. Muthu today stays in the shadows, relating his stories of bygone strikes and political gatherings that wrote the history of Tamil Nadu.

Whitefly in Punjab, Haryana a worry

Farmers have been asked to keep an eye on their crops after the pest was spotted in cotton belts

After spotting whitefly pest in cotton belts of Punjab and Haryana, officials have asked the farmers to keep an eye on their crop. The pest damaged the Bt cotton varieties last year in both States, bringing the yield down by 40 per cent. Bt cotton accounted for 98 per cent of the total cotton planted last year in these States. Even this season, Bt cotton accounts for over 92 per cent of the total cotton sown.

In Haryana, cotton is planted mostly in Sirsa, Hisar, Jind, Bhiwani and Fatahabad districts.



“We have noticed whitefly in the cotton belt. It is now below the economic threshold level (ETL) and there’s nothing to panic, but caution is vital,” Babu Lal, Deputy Director of the Haryana Agriculture Department in Sirsa, told The Hindu.

However, experts fear if the dry spell lasts longer, the pest may damage the crop at later stages. “Certain trees and vegetable fields serve as host plants for the pest. Officials of the Agriculture Department and experts of the Central Institute for Cotton Research and Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, are watching the situation,” Mr. Babu Lal said. Farmers were being informed of crop management techniques.

In Punjab, the government has constituted a committee to check the spread of whitefly. It will be headed by the Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University. It also includes representatives from Haryana and Rajasthan.

‘Must be managed’

“Earlier, whitefly used to appear after June; but now, this insect has started appearing within 10 days of sowing and needs to be managed at every cost... We are concerned about the Abohar and Fazilka areas,” R.K. Gumber, Director of Research, PAU, said recently, after a meeting to discuss steps to check the spread of whitefly. At the meeting, PAU Vice-Chancellor Baldev Singh Dhillon urged scientists to visit villages in groups every weekend to help out farmers.

During Kharif-2015 in Punjab, the pest damaged over 75 per cent of the crop. It was considered the major reason for the suicide of more than 12 farmers.

In Haryana as well farmers had suffered huge losses due to white-fly attack and the state government had announced a compensation package of nearly Rs 967 crore for farmers who suffered losses.



Maharashtra government mulls Rs 2000-crore guarantee for crop loans

The proposal being considered is to give the guarantee to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB), which in turn will disburse loans to 14 DCCs in drought-affected areas.

After facing three droughts in four years, the Maharashtra government is actively considering a proposal of issuing a Rs 2,000 crore bank guarantee to district cooperative (DCC) banks for crop loan disbursement in 2016-17.

The proposal being considered is to give the guarantee to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB), which in turn will disburse loans to 14 DCCs in drought-affected belts of Vidarbha, Marathwada, and North Maharashtra.

“The forecast is for a good monsoon. There is a need to support farmers to ensure a good yield to improve agriculture production,” said a minister.

Sources said the proposal might come up for discussion at the state cabinet meeting on Tuesday. Ironically, the MSCB is “not comfortable” with a government guarantee. Instead, it is angling for Rs 1,000 crore to be provided in

deposits to the bank. The Maharashtra government has issued a guarantee against crop loan only once in the past. This was to the Nagpur DCC in 12-13.

Tribal welfare project in Maharashtra: Impostor played a key role in siphoning off funds, says report

The report says the department's Integrated Tribal Development Project's (ITDP) office in Nandurbar's Taloda had released the funds without any scrutiny.

An impostor played a key role in siphoning crores of rupees earmarked for the poor in Maharashtra's Nandurbar district.

On a day when The Indian Express reported that government officials had decamped with Central funds worth Rs 1.85 crore meant for construction of dug wells on farm lands received by tribal families under the Forest Rights Act, a fact-finding report submitted to the state government by Nandurbar Zilla Parishad's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ghanashyam Mangle laid bare the lax functioning of the tribal development department in the state.

The report says the department's Integrated Tribal Development Project's (ITDP) office in Nandurbar's Taloda had released the funds without any scrutiny.

While the ITDP had earlier claimed that the amount was disbursed following a proposal from the ZP's Agriculture Development Officer (ADO), Mangle's investigation found that no such proposal was floated by the ADO in the first place. The report claims that the then Agriculture Officer with the Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MREGS) cell of the ZP, SR Padvi, had allegedly misused the ADO's rubber stamp to float the proposal and authorise the payment.

Based on Mangle's report, Nandurbar Collector Dr Mallinath Kalshetti has recommended Padvi's immediate suspension. The tribal department has also written to the agriculture department seeking a departmental probe against him. Sources also revealed that a criminal complaint will be lodged against him. Tribal development minister Vishnu Sawra, meanwhile, said that "others responsible for the scandal would also be acted against". The tribal department is verifying the role of officials from its own department in the scam.

Retail inflation hits 21-month high in May on rising food prices

The retail inflation measured on Consumer Price Index (CPI) for April has been revised upwards to 5.47 per cent from the earlier 5.39 per cent, government data showed on Monday.



In the bi-monthly policy released earlier this month, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan had maintained status quo in the key policy rate (repo rate) citing higher upside risks to ‘inflation trajectory’.

Retail inflation rate, as measured by consumer price index (combined), surged to a 21-month high of 5.76 per cent in May on account of an increase in prices of food and beverages, mainly vegetables and pulses. Combined food price index-based inflation rate for May rose to 7.55 per cent from 6.40 per cent a month ago.

According to data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), retail inflation for April has been revised upwards to 5.47 per cent from the earlier 5.39 per cent, while that for May 2015 stood at 5.01 per cent.

Vegetable price inflation rose 10.77 per cent in May from 4.82 per cent a month ago, while inflation rate for pulses increased 31.57 per cent in May from 34.13 a month ago. Cereals and products inflation rose 2.59 per cent as against 2.43 per cent in April. Prices in fuel and light segment eased during the month. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its monetary policy review on June 7 had left key policy rates unchanged citing more-than-seasonal jump in food prices in April. It had also highlighted the uncertain trajectory of inflation going ahead after the surprise increase seen in April.

“The inflation surprise in the April reading makes the future trajectory of inflation somewhat more uncertain.

The expectations of a normal monsoon and a reasonable spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall, along with various supply management measures and the introduction of the electronic national agriculture market (e-NAM) trading portal, should moderate unanticipated flares of food inflation.

In addition, capacity utilisation indicators suggest that the available headroom in industry could keep output prices subdued even as demand picks up.

Nonetheless, there are upside risks – firming international commodity prices, particularly of crude oil; the implementation of the 7th Central Pay Commission awards which will have to be factored into projections as soon as clarity on implementation emerges; the upturn in inflation expectations of households and of corporates; and the stickiness in inflation excluding food and fuel,” RBI had said.

Inflation rates in April and May have been higher than the 5 per cent inflation target set by the RBI for March 2017. Economists said the rise in May has been mainly on account of food prices, which are likely to soften going ahead due to favourable base effect. “Even though food inflation increased in May, core inflation recorded a decline. Going forward, prices are likely to soften owing to favourable base effect,” Kotak Mahindra Bank’s Economist Upasna Bhardwaj said.

Aditi Nayar, Senior Economist, ICRA said, “CPI inflation is expected to print in the range of 5.5-6.0 per cent in June-July 2016, with food prices likely to remain firm during those months.

Moreover the rise in the service tax rate and retail prices of petrol and diesel would add some upward pressure to CPI inflation. From August 2016 onward, we expect food inflation to soften on account of a number of factors, including a favourable base effect.

Moreover, incoming data on the distribution of rainfall and pace of sowing may dampen food inflation, particularly if higher MSPs are successful in boosting the acreage of high-inflation items such as pulses.”

Inflation edges up to to 5.76% in May on costly food items

Inflation in the vegetable basket more than doubled to 10.77 per cent in May as compared to 4.82 per cent in the previous month.



CPI inflation edged up for the second straight month to 5.76 per cent in May.

Rising for the second month in a row, retail inflation shot up to 5.76 per cent in May due to rise in prices of food items, including vegetables.

The rise may make it difficult for the RBI to lower the interest rates.

The retail inflation measured on Consumer Price Index (CPI) for April has been revised upwards to 5.47 per cent from the earlier 5.39 per cent, government data showed today. It was 5.01 per cent in May 2015.

Inflation in the vegetable basket more than doubled to 10.77 per cent in May as compared to 4.82 per cent in the previous month.

Similarly, the rate of price rise was sharp in protein rich eggs at 9.13 per cent as compared to 6.64 per cent in April.

Overall food inflation moved up to 7.55 per cent in May as against 6.32 per cent in the previous month, the data showed.

Cereal and related products, meat and fish, milk and its products, and fruits were dearer in May as compared to the previous month.

As per the data, inflation in the fuel and light segment was marginally down in May from the previous month.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation collects data from selected towns and villages to calculate CPI-based retail inflation.

The Reserve Bank factors in the retail inflation while arriving at its monetary policy.

In the bi-monthly policy released earlier this month, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan had maintained status quo in the key policy rate (repo rate) citing higher upside risks to ‘inflation trajectory’.

As per the RBI, the expectations of a normal monsoon and a reasonable spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall, along with various supply management measures and introduction of the electronic national agriculture market (e-NAM) trading portal, “should moderate unanticipated flares of food inflation”.



Southwest monsoon making slow progress, says MeT

The progress of southwest monsoon is relatively slow as it is not getting a favourable system to move forward, but days of heat wave condition in central and northwest India will soon be over as pre-monsoon showers will bring moisture in the air, Met department said on Monday.

The southwest monsoon has now reached Karwar and Gadag in Karnataka and Ongole in Andhra Pradesh, but its progress is relatively slow, India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Laxman Singh Rathore said.

“The progress of monsoon is slow as it is still not getting a favourable system that can give it a boost to move forward,” Rathore said, adding that this is a normal phenomenon.

But in next two to three days, the monsoon is expected to make some progress and cover North Bay of Bengal, Sikkim, Northeast India, and sub-Himalayan West Bengal, as a system is getting generated.



A woman walks holding an umbrella as it rains in Jammu. (AP)

“And by June 18, it will give the progress a boost,” he said.

The southwest monsoon hit the Kerala coast on June 8, after a delay of seven days. Normally, it hits the Kerala coast on June 1, Mumbai by June 10, Delhi by July 1 and reaches Jaisalmer--the last place in India--by July 15.

The slow progress of monsoon means the central and Northwest India will have to wait a little longer for rains, but these places will get respite from heat wave conditions due to pre-monsoon showers.

“Due to pre-monsoon showers there will be moisture in the air, so there will no longer be the spells of heat waves,” Rathore said.

Several parts of northwest, central India and southern peninsula have been reeling under intense heat wave conditions.

Retail inflation rises again on spiralling food prices



Central bank governor Raghuram Rajan, who has made taming India's once-runaway prices a priority of his tenure, has set a medium-term goal of limiting inflation to 5% by March 2017. (Twitter)

Consumer prices rose faster than expected in May due to higher food prices, official figures showed on Monday, which will likely hold off an increase in interest rates.

The inflation rate increased by 5.76% from a year earlier, substantially higher than 4.8% recorded in March and 5.4% in April, reported the statistics ministry. The jump was mostly driven by higher food prices due to back to back droughts, reported Bloomberg.

"The recent pickup in Indian inflation is due to higher food prices, not a pickup in overall inflationary pressures," Bill Adams, senior international economist at PNC Financial Services Group, said in a statement to AFP.

“Nevertheless, the Reserve Bank of India is likely to leave interest rates on hold for the rest of 2016 after its 25 basis point cut in the repo rate to 6.5% on April 5,” Adams added.

Central bank governor Raghuram Rajan, who has made taming India’s once-runaway prices a priority of his tenure, has set a medium-term goal of limiting inflation to 5% by March 2017.

The RBI’s April rate cut, designed to lower the cost of borrowing and provide a boost to the economy, took the key interest rate to 6.5%, its lowest level since early 2011.

Economists are now looking ahead to the imminent monsoon, a key factor in food price inflation owing to its outside impact on India’s farmers, whose crops are highly dependent on the annual rains.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Wheat prices gain as arrivals peter out



Millers inking wheat import contracts counting on rollback of 25 per cent duty

Wheat prices have risen by about a tenth over the past two months, on lower-than-anticipated output, forcing large buyers such as flour millers to scout overseas markets, including Australia and France, to secure their supplies.

Millers have already started contracting wheat imports in anticipation that the Centre will either roll back or tweak the 25 per cent import duty currently in force till June 30.

Spot prices (in ₹/quintal)		
Markets	June-13	April-11
Delhi	1,793	1,604
Kanpur	1,680	1,485
Kota	1,772	1,603
Indore	1,758	1,607

Import volumes could see a sharp increase once a clear signal emerges from the Government on the duty front.

On Friday, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had indicated that the government, which is keeping a close watch on prices, may scrap the import duty if the wheat prices continue to rise.

The Agriculture Ministry, in its third advance estimate, had pegged wheat output at 94.04 million tonnes (mt), higher than the previous year's final output of 86.53 mt.

However, the trade is sceptical about the government's estimate and pegs the domestic wheat output to be between 81 mt and 84 mt, because of lower acreage, poor weather and drought in several States impacting the output.

Lower procurement

Wheat procurement by the government agencies, which is nearing completion, has been down by about a fifth to around 23 mt — down from last year's 28 mt and the targeted 30 mt.

“All indicators — the rising prices, lower procurement and the government's willingness to reduce import duty — point to a decline in domestic production,” said Tejinder Narang, grains trade analyst.

The Centre should reduce the duty and facilitate the imports to ensure that there is no shortage of the cereal and that the price rise is curbed, he said.

The trade has already contracted about 5 lakh tonnes (four lakh tonnes from Australia and one lakh tonnes from France) for imports in the months ahead, said MK Dattaraj, Managing Director of the Bengaluru-based Krishna Flour Mills. “The indigenous high protein wheat is in short supply and we are forced to import Australian premium wheat,” he said, adding that the next domestic harvest was ten months away, in April 2017.

Domestic prices have risen by up to 300 per quintal depending on the quality of wheat and the markets over the past two months and continue to trade firm. Wheat futures on the NCDEX are trading firm.

“If the prices go up further, we have to look at imports. In fact, we have contracted a small quantity in anticipation that the government will remove the import duty,” said Pramod Kumar Jain of Sunil AgroFoods.

India had imported about seven lakh tonnes of wheat and this year cereal imports could exceed two million tonnes.

Onion exports jump 33% in value terms

India’s onion exports went up 33 per cent to Rs. 2,362 crore in the first 11 months of 2015-16 on higher realisation of sales.

Onion exports stood at 9,80,566 tonnes during the 11 months of 2015-16 against 9,70,442 tonnes in the same period of the previous financial year, according to data compiled by the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF).

In value terms, the exports increased to Rs. 2,362 crore from Rs. 1,771 crore in the year-ago period on the back of higher sales realisation, the data showed.

The average price realisation worked out to Rs. 28,215 a tonne in 2015-16 as against Rs. 18,507 for the whole of 2014-15.

Last year, the Government had hiked the minimum export price (MEP) to USD 425 per tonne in June and then to USD 700 per tonne in August after prices skyrocketed on lower output due to unseasonal rains.

On December 25 last year, the Government had scrapped the onion MEP to push exports as domestic prices crashed. MEP is the rate below which no trader is allowed to export.



India had exported 10,86,072 tonnes of onion for Rs. 2,010 crore in 2014-15.

Onion output stood at 189 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 crop year (July-June). In the 2015-16 crop year, production is estimated at 206 lakh tonnes.

Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are the top three onion-producing States in the country.

Onion prices are currently ruling at Rs. 20-25 per kg in the retail market of the national capital..

Monsoon delay may save Gujarat cotton crop from pink bollworm



Overall sowing may not to be affected as Met predicts rains from late June

Even as the South-West monsoon moved at a snail's pace to cover the western parts of the country, sowing activity in Gujarat is likely to remain unaffected. Experts revealed that a delay of around 8-10 days may not affect the sowing prospects of the kharif crops – mainly groundnut and cotton.

According to experts, a delay in cotton sowing will favour farmers as the threat of the pink bollworm in the fibre crop may be eliminated. “If the cotton sowing begins just after the first rains of monsoon, the threat of pink bollworm stands almost eliminated. So, the delay of about 10 days would actually turn in favour of cotton farmers,” said MF Acharya, Associate Professor, Department of Antomology, Junagadh Agriculture University.

Acharya, however, expressed concerns about advance sowing of cotton in select places, which could provide a conducive situation for pink bollworms to survive. Farmers having irrigation facilities — mainly in Central Gujarat — have taken up early sowing of cotton.

Farmers have become wary of the fibre crop, which has witnessed sharp fluctuations in prices, leaving them in the lurch. “Traditionally, cotton has been the king of kharif crops. But this year we fear there will be a dip in cotton acreage as farmers may turn to other crops such as groundnut, urad and tur. The sowing is likely to be normal even if the monsoon is late by a week or so,” said Ramesh Bhorania, a farmer from Rajkot district.

Gujarat's cotton acreage is estimated to have been around 27.61 lakh hectares in 2015-16, about 10,000 hectares lower than the previous year.

Rains along West Coast may revive this weekend



Extreme heavy rainfall has been warned at isolated places in the East. File Photo

The monsoon is getting active over East and North-East India after it lost its momentum over the West Coast with a crucially supportive atmospheric feature weakening.

The initial thrust had led weather models to believe that the monsoon would reach Mumbai by now but the weakening of the offshore trough has put paid to such hopes.

Major influence

The trough lies over the sea just off the coast and has a major influence in steering the monsoon flows towards land in the right quantum and intensity to sustain the rainfall over land.

Its weakening has apparently brought the monsoon progress over the coast to a brief halt.

The trough is now expected to revive by the weekend and trigger a fresh rain spell from Kerala to Goa.

According to projections by the India Meteorology Department, a cyclonic circulation may spring up off the Andhra Pradesh coast during this period and help drive rain from the Bay of Bengal into Central India.

It may also set up interaction of the easterly winds from the Bay with the westerlies from the Arabian Sea generating rainfall in the process over parts of North-West India as well.

Dateline Mumbai

This may help bring in the pre-monsoon showers to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and even Delhi apart from triggering some heavy falls along the Himalayan foothills in the region.

On the West Coast, this phase might see the arrival of the monsoon over Mumbai and the rest of the peninsula, though Gujarat would have to wait for longer.

Position, extension and strength of the offshore trough have a major role in determining the extent of rainfall over Gujarat.

The monsoon usually advances into Gujarat in the third week of June and withdraws from the second week of September.

Livelier week

Nearly 95 per cent of the state's annual rain falls during the monsoon period, of which July contributes as much as 45 per cent.

The Met projections did not indicate monsoon rains entering Gujarat up till June 20. But the US Climate Prediction suggests that the first few showers may fall during the June 19-25 week.

The entire West Coast stretching from North Kerala to Konkan-Mumbai is forecast to come under heavy to very heavy rain during this period, per the US agency.

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.

“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 Gadhawe.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Assam govt to create jobs through agriculture schemes

The Assam government has planned employment generation through innovative agriculture schemes, said agriculture minister Atul Bora here on Monday.

Addressing the media on the sidelines of a departmental review meeting held at Jorhat circuit house here, the minister said, "There are thousands of jobless youths in the state and we are thinking about employing them and utilizing the workforce through various agriculture schemes. Unemployment in Assam is now a serious problem and our chief minister has also expressed his serious concerns about it. We have given priority on the issue and steps will be taken soon. We have already made our commitment to the people of the state regarding the issue and we will try our best to keep it."

Bora said sectors like horticulture, veterinary and food processing have lot of opportunities to generate employment.

He said the government was committed to starting skill development schemes in these sectors in order to address the unemployment problem.

"We will also introduce a strong monitoring system on the government schemes so that the poor and the needy are benefited. We are also ready to punish the

corrupt government officials involved in irregularities in government schemes," Bora said.

The minister participated in a review meeting of his department as a part of the government's 100 days' action plan. All top government officials in the district were present in the meeting.

The minister asked the government officials to do their duties properly.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University botanical garden gets a facelift

New merry-go-round, slides and park benches have given a facelift to the children's park in Tamil Nadu Agricultural University's botanical garden here.

The botanical garden, with more than 800 species of flora, draws a lot of schoolchildren. Professor and head of floriculture and landscaping department M Kannan said, "The park is almost 40 years old, and we felt that it was time we provided a facelift to it. A lot of children play in the park daily, and schoolchildren from across the city visit the botanical garden for excursions."

TNAU has spent more than Rs 5lakh and has set up a merry-go-round, different types of slides, butterfly swings, spring ducks and new park benches. "We have set up three types of slides and swings in the park," Kannan said. The park is open for public from 9am to 12noon, and from 2pm to 6pm.

"We will be laying paver blocks around the park to ease walking of parents who bring their kids to the park," said Kannan.

Keeping in mind the cleanliness of the environment, TNAU has set up new dustbins across the park. "We have planned to build a new toilet," said Kannan.

While the new equipment will enthuse the children, the park will also get a new lawn with colourful flowers. "We have chalked out a plan to have colourful flowers in the lawn. The flowers will be seasonal, and the lawn will bear a new colour every season," he said.

When asked about the details of the flowers, Kannan said university has sought approval for the same and will make the announcement soon. It took more than three months for the university to complete the renovation.

University vice-chancellor K Ramasamy is looking forward to formally inaugurate the park with the help of the city municipal corporation.

Onion farmers seek Minimum Support Price of Rs2,000 per quintal

Farmers staged demonstrations during state co-operatives minister Chandrakant Patil's visit to Niphad tehsil on Sunday, in protest against the recent crash in onion prices. The growers demanded a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 2,000 per quintal for onions during the protest.

Farmers staged demonstrations at Niphad square on Auranbagad Road, near the place where Patil was present for the inauguration the new branch of a co-operative bank. The Niphad police rushed to the spot immediately to control the agitation. As many as 14 onion farmers were detained as a result and then released afterwards.

Delegations of the Shetkari Sanghatana, a state-level association of farmers and Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatna also met the minister Patil, seeking a waiver of complete crop loans to farmers and MSP of Rs 2,000 per quintal for onions. In turn, Patil said the decision regarding onion MSP will be taken at a state cabinet meeting soon.

Santu Zambre, North Maharashtra president of Shetkari Sanghatana said, "We met the state co-operatives minister Chandrakant Patil during his visit to Niphad and presented with memorandum of our demands, seeking waiver loans to farmers and MSP of Rs 2,000 per quintal to onions. The minister said the government is mulling to introduce MSP to onions and the decision is to be taken at the state cabinet meeting shortly."

"Farmers are already facing drought and unseasonal rains with hails for the past two-three years. We want the state government to give a complete loan waiver to farmers of the state. Now, onion prices have also crashed in APMCs and farmers are suffering huge losses as they are not even making up their production costs," he added.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government-to-government contract plan to import pulses, says Ram Vilas Paswan



State governments have also been asked to purchase pulses (for retail distribution).

BENGALURU: Government-to-government contract is being planned to import pulses to bridge the supply-demand gap and maintain stability of prices, Union Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan today said.

The situation of pulses is now under control and month on month their prices have gone down, he told reporters here.

"There is a gap between demand and supply. This year our production is 170 lakh tonnes, last year it was 171 lakh tonnes, before that it was 173 lakh tonnes.

"On the demand side it is increasing 10 lakh tonnes per year. This year it will be 246 lakh tonnes," he said.

The minister said the central government has worked out a strategy to mitigate the shortage of pulses and maintain the stability of the prices.

He said there would be a gap of over 76 lakh tonnes. In this case, private importers may import only 60 lakh tonnes. For the rest, the government has

planned to have government-to-government contract to fill the gap. "Our team will go to Myanmar and other countries for this."

Paswan said the government has also maintained a buffer stock, for which it has already purchased 1,13,000 tonnes of pulses.

State governments have also been asked to purchase pulses (for retail distribution).

"We are providing them tur dal at Rs 66 per kg and urad dal at Rs 82 per kg. The strategy that we have made has resulted in price stability," he added.

On sugar prices, Paswan said in the last few months it has gone up and to mitigate this, government has taken various steps.

Maintaining that price of foodgrains and onion had not increased, he said the only problem was pulses, but government had taken measures on that front.

He said the Centre has also asked state governments to take action on hoarding of pulses and this has resulted in reduction of prices.

West Bengal government sets Banglar Fasal to sell veggies at fair price



This new project will be helpful to both common people and farmers.

KOLKATA: West Bengal government is all set to sell vegetables at a fair price.

The state co-operation department has taken steps to introduce Banglar Fasal, an initiative to sell vegetables at a fair price after procuring them directly from farmers.

It will be introduced at Barrackpore in north Kolkata and then gradually extended across the state. The stall in Barrackpore will come up on June 22, said Arup Roy, the state co-operation Minister.

It may be mentioned that earlier a project similar called Sufal Bangla was introduced.

This new project will be helpful to both common people and farmers. The farmers will be benefitted as the state government will directly procure their cultivated crops and on the other hand, common people will get vegetables at a fair price.

It will also help to curb the problem of unnecessary increase in the price of essential commodities as there will no more be the intervention of middlemen.