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THE HINDU

Government caps Bt cotton seed price



Farmers across States will benefit owing to uniformity in prices.

In an attempt to bring about uniformity in cotton seed prices across the country, the Centre government on Wednesday announced a maximum sale price for Bt cotton seed varieties.

Announced for the financial year 2016-17, the maximum sale price of Bt Cotton seed BG-I version has been fixed at Rs. 635 while for the BG-II version it is Rs. 800. The seed packets would be of 450 grams, including 120 grams refugia.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said a nine-member committee was set up to recommend the maximum sale price of Bt cotton seeds. “After taking into consideration the seed value, licence fees, including one-time, and recurring royalty (trait value), trade margins and other taxes government declared the maximum sale price of Bt. cotton seed on Wednesday,” he said.

Mr. Singh said that earlier there was no uniformity in pricing of Bt cotton seeds across the country, hence the Central government had recently intervened and issued a Cotton Seed Price (Control) Order, 2015, to fix a uniform price of Bt cotton seed across the States in the country for the benefit of farmers.

Monsanto dominance

He said that based on the representations, the department also made a reference to the Competition Commission of India for investigation of dominance of

Mahyco Monsanto Biotech Ltd (MMBL) and abuse of monopoly in Bt cotton technology so as to ensure competition in the market.

‘Livestock distribution completed before model code of conduct came into force’

Amid concerns of a possible model code of conduct violation, the Agriculture Department’s bid to retag livestock that was issued before the coming into force of the model code of conduct was stopped midway here at Kamalanatham village near Thoppur on Wednesday.

Tagging of livestock for the animal insurance cover was briefly carried out for livestock that was bought by beneficiaries under a back ended subsidy scheme of the Agriculture Department at Saamichetty patty Panchayat in Nallampalli on Wednesday.

The livestock was last issued to beneficiaries last Thursday, a day before the coming into force of the code of conduct.

According to an official source, some of the animals had lost the polyurethane tags bearing the unique identity numbers that qualify the owner for insurance cover in the event of death of the animal. In a bid to retag the animals, the department had landed in the village to retag the animals, giving way to concerns that free livestock was being distributed. Following complaints, the retagging was stopped.

When contacted Collector K. Vivekanandan said the livestock distribution was completed ahead of the coming into force of the model code of conduct and a closure report was already sent.

Raman Singh presents Rs. 73,996-crore budget

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh presented a Rs. 73,996 crore budget for the year 2016-17 in the State Assembly on Wednesday.

Presenting his 10th successive budget, the BJP Chief Minister, who also holds the Finance portfolio, hoped that the GDP of the State would remain at 7.6 per cent in the coming year. He said “special focus and attention” was given to agriculture sector in the budget.

“We have provided Rs..540 crore for the drought-hit farmers. We have allocated Rs.223 crore for the drought-hit farmers in budget. We have also set aside Rs.150 crore to provide free seeds to paddy farmers. Rs.8 crore have been set aside for the marriage of drought-hit farmers’ daughters under the ‘Mukhya

Mantri Kanya Vivah Yojna'. The allocation for farm insurance has been increased from Rs.50 crore to Rs.200 crore," the CM said in his budget speech.

He said the State had bagged the Krishi Karman Prize for record farm production in the last four years.

Raman Singh presents Chhattisgarh budget with special focus on agriculture

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He said the State had bagged the Krishi Karman Prize for record farm production in the last four years.

"Chhattisgarh farmers not only feed the people of the State but also provide food to all of our countrymen. We have allocated Rs.2,574 crore for the development of irrigation in the State and the target is to increase irrigation facilities on 83,000 hectares in the State in the coming years," he added.

Apart from Agriculture sector, Mr. Singh also gave special attention to education, infrastructure development and skill development in his budget. He set aside Rs. 4,640 crore for the construction of bridges, which is 56 per cent more allocation compared to last year.

The CM also allocated Rs. 700 crore for the Prime Minister Modi's 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and claimed that around 1554 villages in the State have been made "open defecation-free villages".

Seedling distribution

Seedlings of chilli, brinjal and tomato will be made available to the public at the rate of Rs. 2.20 per piece at the Thikkodi Coconut Nursery here. Further details

may be had from the nursery (phone: 0496-2606788), the Agriculture Assistant Director said in a release here on Wednesday.

Scanty rain brings down cultivation of summer crops

In wake of scanty rain in the district, the sowing for summer crop has taken place only in 45 percent of the targeted area. The Department of Agriculture had set a target to undertake cultivation in an area of 24,620 hectares of land for the summer season in the district this year against which the sowing has taken place only in an area of 11,218 hectares.

Joint Director of Department of Agriculture K. Madhusudan told *The Hindu* that the average annual rainfall in the district is at 1,818 mm against which the district has received 1,545 mm rain in 2015. The water level in the major reservoirs was not as expected owing to the decline in the rainfall, he said. The water level in Bhadra reservoir was at 147 feet against the maximum level of 186 feet. The reservoir had 167 feet water last year on the same day. Due to low water storage, the Irrigation Consultative Committee of Bhadra Command Area Development Authority had directed farmers in command area not to grow food crops including paddy and ragi in the summer. The water is being released from the reservoir only for horticultural crops, he said.

The command area of Bhadra reservoir is spread over 15,000 hectares in the district.

The department had planned to cultivate paddy in an area of 16,355 hectares in summer this year against which cultivation has taken place in an area of 5,674 acres only. Moreover, only the farmers who have borewell irrigation have cultivated paddy this year.

Similarly, it was planned to cultivate maize in 4,811 hectares against which sowing has taken place in 952 hectares. In Shikaripur and Sorab, maize is cultivated during summer by farmers who have borewells. Owing to poor rain, the groundwater level has declined in these taluks due to which the farmers have not taken up the cultivation of maize, he said.

Only the area of cultivation of pulses that require less water has exceeded the target. The department had fixed the target to cultivate pulses in an area of 930 hectares in the summer against which sowing has taken place in 2,766 hectares, he added.

Depleting numbers

- ***The average annual rainfall in Shivamogga***

is at 1,818 mm

□ *The district received 1,545 mm rain in 2015*

□ *Water level in Bhadra reservoir was at 147 feet against the maximum level of 186 feet*

Millet fest from tomorrow

The Millet Fest-2015, organised to raise awareness on millets, is being held at Mahima Gardens, behind Grand Nagarjuna Hotel, from March 11 to 13.

Faculty of Home Science, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU) in association with Department of Agriculture and various private millet and food processing units will arrange stalls in the exhibition-cum-sale, said event convener and associate dean, T. Neeraja.

The millet fest would be inaugurated by Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao.

Festival aim

The aim of the festival is to explain the people on the nutritional values in millets and foster millets for good health, said Dr. Neeraja.

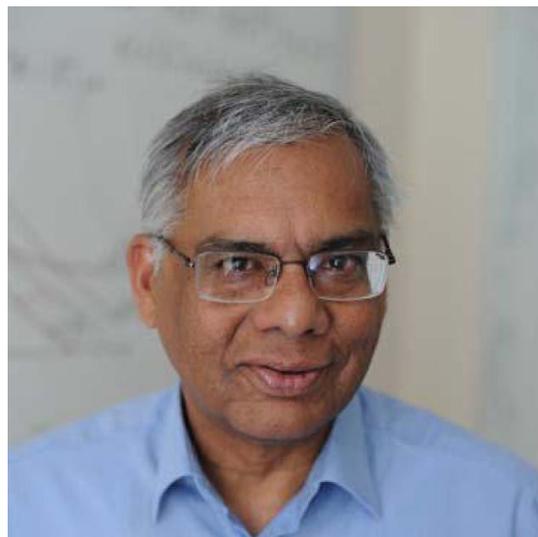
Good economics is good politics



Mr. Jaitley hoping for a significant increase in revenue from personal income tax. Picture shows him arriving at Parliament House to present the Union Budget, in New Delhi. Photo: R.V. Moorthy

The qualitative stance in the Budget is praiseworthy: increase investment in the rural sector and infrastructure, particularly road construction, and hope that these relatively labour-intensive investments will have both a magnified effect on employment as well as output

The backdrop to Finance Minister [Arun Jaitley's third Budget](#) was a domestic economy confronted with a rather adverse global environment, an agricultural sector reeling from two successive years of drought, and a manufacturing sector that has been limping along. Although the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate has been relatively impressive at over 7 per cent (though this figure has been contested as unduly high by many who attribute the “overestimate” to the shift in the method of computing GDP), there was a universal feeling that the economy was in a vulnerable state and that even a relatively minor shock could cause a big downward slide. The believers in impending doom for the economy felt that an expansionary Budget designed to stimulate aggregate demand was the only way out. Ranged against this school were the fiscal conservatives who believed with equally strong conviction that the Budget must keep the fiscal deficit under control.



Bhaskar Dutta

Economic sense seemed to suggest that the Finance Minister would have to choose one or the other option. However, Mr. Jaitley seems to have achieved the impossible. He has definitely embraced fiscal prudence. He has announced that the budgetary deficit for the current year will not exceed 3.9 per cent of GDP, and has promised to lower the fiscal deficit for 2016-17 to 3.5 per cent of GDP. Since these are figures that were mentioned last year, the intention is clearly to ensure that there is no financial slippage in so far as the Central government is concerned. Surprisingly, fiscal prudence does not seem to have come at the cost of a cut in government expenditure. Mr. Jaitley has announced

a significant increase in the allocation to agriculture and rural development, as well as infrastructure. He has also made a large budgetary provision for payments arising out of the Seventh Pay Commission awards and the modified pension scheme for the military. Moreover, the tax measures are anything but draconian. So, how has he managed to square the circle?

Banking on assumptions

The government has benefited a great deal from the windfall gain arising from the steep fall in crude oil prices. The price of crude oil is less than half of what it was a year ago. However, the government has not passed on the substantial savings achieved on the import bill to consumers — the retail prices of petrol and diesel have come down by only a few rupees! Clearly, the government is hoping to continue its reliance on this source of non-tax revenue. Of course, this strategy carries with it the risk that the government estimates of revenue on this account during 2016-17 will be hit for a six if the global economy recovers from its current slump. This would result in an increase in the demand for oil and hence a rise in crude oil prices.

Mr. Jaitley has also made some rather optimistic assumptions about the volume of resources available to finance the government's expenditure. He is hoping for a significant increase in revenue from personal income tax. The bulk of this increase must come from better tax compliance since there has been only a modest increase in taxes for the super-rich. What is more questionable is his assumption that disinvestment and the strategic sale of public sector enterprises will fetch the exchequer the sum of Rs.56,000 crore. This is surely quite unreasonable in view of the fact that the revised estimate for 2015-16 is less than half this figure. The stock market will have to improve considerably if disinvestment proceeds are going to be anywhere close to Mr. Jaitley's estimate.

The government also hopes to exploit non-budgetary sources of financing infrastructure projects. First, there is the hope that some infrastructure projects will be funded through public-private partnerships. Second, the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) has been allocated Rs.4,000 crore in the 2016-17 Budget. The government hopes that the NIIF can leverage this to raise additional funds through the bond market. Third, there are approved market borrowings of around Rs.30,000 crore for several financial intermediaries. Of course, the government cannot be completely certain that the targeted volume of resources will materialise from these sources. There is also the danger that public borrowings will crowd out private borrowing if the overall credit scenario is not satisfactory.

Focus on the farms

As far as budgetary allocations are concerned, the emphasis has definitely been on agriculture and the rural sector in general, with a huge increase in the allocation to the sector. A key policy instrument will be a large increase in investment in irrigation, with the emphasis on completing several projects very soon. The Budget also provides for an increase in funds allocated to gram panchayats. This is part of a huge increase in outlay on rural development, including rural road construction. Somewhat surprisingly, the Budget has dramatically increased funding for one of the previous United Progressive Alliance government's flagship programmes — Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Other benefits to farmers include smoother credit flow, insurance against crop failures, and improved marketing facilities.

Echoing the Prime Minister's recent promise, Mr. Jaitley too has announced the target of doubling farm incomes within five years. This can be nothing more than a pipe dream. Farm incomes would have to record an average annual growth rate of about 14 per cent in order to achieve this target. The annual growth rate of agricultural output in India during any five-year period has not even touched half this level. What magic wand does the Finance Minister have to achieve this miraculous feat? And even if this could be achieved, who will buy double the current volume of agricultural output given the low income elasticity of demand for agricultural output? Of course, there are many countries where farmers' incomes are several times that of Indian farmers. But, in order for Indian farmers to reach these levels of income, agricultural productivity has to increase dramatically and far fewer people have to depend on agriculture for a livelihood. This in turn requires massive migration of people from the rural to the urban sector. There is no mention in the Budget speech of whether this is expected to take place.

Steady structure of taxation

There has been very little change in the structure of taxation. The Finance Minister has stayed away from overt populism such as raising the income tax exemption limit. There is clearly no justification for such a move when barely 5 per cent of households pay personal income tax. Direct tax rates for the vast majority of taxpayers remain unchanged, but those with taxable income above Rs.1 crore will pay a higher surcharge. Moreover, tax compliance is sought to be increased by levying a penal tax on undisclosed incomes. Some minor concessions have been provided to small taxpayers and new companies. Taxes on diesel cars have been increased in order to discourage their use. Diesel itself

is difficult to tax since this has an adverse knock-on effect on the entire transport sector. However, it has always been a mystery why Mr. Jaitley's predecessors have not imposed a disincentive tax on diesel cars. After all, indirect taxes are also supposed to serve an allocative purpose.

Viewed in its entirety, an admittedly simplistic characterisation of the Budget is that it is pro-poor rather than pro-rich. Certainly, there is very little in the Budget to label it as one for the "suited-booted". It is debatable whether the quantitative targets claimed during the Budget speech will be achieved. However, the qualitative stance in the Budget is praiseworthy — increase investment in the rural sector and infrastructure, particularly road construction, hope that these relatively labour-intensive investments will have both a magnified effect on employment as well as output. The cynical will claim that this shift in emphasis from pro-business reforms to the somewhat old-fashioned strategy of stimulating agriculture has been brought about by the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral defeats in the Bihar and Delhi Assembly elections. But good politics is not necessarily bad economics. This Budget may well be an example of this.

(Bhaskar Dutta is a Professor at the Department of Economics, University of Warwick, U.K.)

Half-way mark reached in FMD immunisation

The Animal Husbandry Department has attained half the target so far in its on-going immunisation of cattle against Foot and Mouth Disease. The 21-day operation began at the start of this month for immunising a total of 3.73 lakh heads of cattle. As on Wednesday, 1,85,900 heads of cattle were immunised, P. Ravichandran, Regional Joint Director of Animal Husbandry Department said.

The vaccination is being carried out by 118 teams including employees of Aavin, Forest Department and local bodies.

Thanks to the intensive vaccination once in six months, the farmers have been acclimatised to the schedule.

There is now no hesitation on their part to get their pregnant cows and calves immunised, Mr. Ravichandran said. The farmers have realised that immunisation will protect them against losses. The progress in immunisation will be checked at random on Thursday by a senior official from the Head Office Saravana Bhava.

The storage of vaccine, use of disposable needles, safe transportation of vaccine, and records will be scrutinised, sources added.

Rs. 1,540 crore drought relief for Belagavi

Revenue Minister says State has released all the funds granted by the Centre

AMOUNT RELEASED	
⇒ Bengaluru Rural Rs. 3.42 crore	⇒ Gadag Rs. 67.81 crore
⇒ Bagalkot Rs. 33.97 crore	⇒ Hassan Rs. 50.33 crore
⇒ Ballari Rs. 52.27 crore	⇒ Haveri Rs. 28.71 crore
⇒ Belagavi Rs. 220.68 crore	⇒ Kalaburagi Rs. 202.06 crore
⇒ Bidar Rs. 89.89 crore	⇒ Koppal Rs. 64.44 crore
⇒ Chamarajanagar Rs. 17.94 crore	⇒ Kolar Rs. 48.29 crore
⇒ Chikkamagaluru Rs. 20.85 crore	⇒ Mandya Rs. 28.48 crore
⇒ Chitradurga Rs. 59.38 crore	⇒ Mysuru Rs. 3.74 crore
⇒ Chikkaballapur Rs. 44.11 crore	⇒ Raichur Rs. 32.57 crore
⇒ Davangere Rs. 56.55 crore	⇒ Shivamogga Rs. 1.85 crore
⇒ Dharwad Rs. 98.52 crore	⇒ Tumakuru Rs. 73.08 crore
	⇒ Uttara Kannada Rs. 11.52 crore
	⇒ Yadgir Rs. 74.57 crore

Revenue Minister V. Srinivas Prasad has said that the State government has released the Rs. 1,540.2 crore granted by the Centre as drought relief to compensate farmers who lost their kharif crops.

In a written reply to an unstarred question from Amarnath Patil, BJP MLC, in the Legislative Council, Mr. Prasad said that Belagavi district had topped the list with a total release of Rs. 220.68 crore. Kalaburagi was second with Rs. 202.06 crore.

He said the State had identified 38,54,725 farmers as eligible for compensation as per the new norms of the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF). He said of them, 27,57,186 farmers have already been paid the compensation directly to their bank accounts.

He said Vijayapura tops the farmer list with 3,69,543, followed by Kalaburagi with 3,64,331 and Belagavi with 3,51,057. To another question, Mr. Prasad said that 31 taluks in Hyderabad-Karnataka region were declared as drought hit in the kharif season and 29 in the rabi season.

During the kharif season, a sum of Rs. 1 crore each was released to all the 31 taluks for emergency works to tackle drinking water and fodder shortage.

So far, Rs 336.79 crore has been spent under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) works in the six districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka region.

Vijayapura tops the list of farmers with 3,69,543, followed by Kalaburagi with 3,64,331

Godavari waters will address farmers' problems, says Harish Rao



Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao at a programme at Siddipet in Medak district on Wednesday.— PHOTO: Mohd Arif

Minister for Irrigation T. Harish Rao said that the government was committed to address the problems of farmers on a permanent basis, and as part of that, an agreement was signed with the Government of Maharashtra to supply Godavari water for irrigation. He urged the farmers not to commit suicide and said the government would stand with them.

Addressing farmers at Siddipet on Wednesday after distributing cheques to the families of farmers who had committed suicide in the past, Mr. Harish Rao said that the families would be extended Rs. 6 lakh assistance within 10 days after the incident and Rs. 1 lakh would be towards repayment of debts.

“We wish the families of farmers’ who had committed suicide could live with honour and get their children educated. The financial assistance is being extended with this intention. In addition, Rs. 1,000 pension, 35 kilogramme of rice, and houses are also being sanctioned to these families. Do not lose confidence,” he told the families of farmers.

Mr. Harish Rao distributed cheques worth Rs. 2.7 crore to 61 such families.

Alleging that the previous governments had failed to address the farmers’ problems and console them, Mr. Harish Rao said that the Congress has to face a

black day when the waters of Godavari irrigate vast chunks of land in Telangana.

Informing that Rs. 91,000 crore is being invested in the power sector, the Minister said that quality power would be supplied to farmers so that there would not be any problem for the transformers. Farmers would be extended nine-hour power supply during day time.

Stating that cold storage units, market yards and godowns would be established across the State for the benefit of farmers, the Irrigation Minister said that 44 market yards in the State would be linked with national markets.

MLAs S. Ramalinga Reddy, Hanumanth Shinde and others were present.

Drought-hit Mandya tops Karnataka in grain supply

1.36 lakh tonnes of paddy, ragi procured since January 1

Mandya district may be projected as the most drought affected in Karnataka after the suicides of over 100 farmers, which hit national headlines, since June last year. Nevertheless, the farmers here have taken the enviable top position by supplying 41,674 tonnes of foodgrains to the State government.

As many as 35,947 farmers have supplied 1.36 lakh MT of foodgrains to the government, through Direct Purchase Centres (DPC) established by the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd. (KFCSC), since January 1 this year. Of them, Mandya farmers stand on top by supplying 41,674 tonnes of foodgrains.

A total of 8,792 farmers from Mandya district have supplied Rs. 77.71 crore worth of grain (16,619 tonnes of paddy and 25,055 tonnes of ragi), said Rohini Sindhuri, managing director of KFCSC.

Speaking to *The Hindu* on Tuesday, Ms. Sindhuri said that the DPCs have procured 42,568 tonnes of paddy from 8,473 farmers and 93,882.88 tonnes of ragi from 27,474 farmers across the State.

The centres have procured grain worth Rs. 261 crore from farmers in the State. The percentage of supply from Mandya farmers is over 30.

White jowar nil

The State government had established paddy procurement centres at 55 places, ragi centres at 57 places and white jowar purchasing centres at 22 places.

Minimum support price (MSP) fixed for paddy is Rs. 1,510 a quintal (for common variety), ragi at Rs. 2,100 and jowar at Rs. 2,100 a quintal. The motive was to enable them to get remunerative prices for their produce. However, no farmers have supplied white jowar, Ms. Sindhuri said.

Zero procurement in 7 districts

According to the statistics available at the KFCSC (nodal agency to purchase foodgrains), the procurement of all three grain in Bagalkote, Bidar, Ballari, Kalaburagi, Mangaluru, Raichur and Yadgir districts is zero (up to March 5).

The KFCSC had procured 2.19 lakh tonnes of paddy, 1.35 lakh tonnes of ragi and 8,000 tonnes of jowar during 2014-15. In this season, it has already purchased 1.36 tonnes of paddy and ragi up to March 5. The last date to supply is March 31 and by that time, the procurement of foodgrains may reach around 2 lakh tonnes, sources said.

The government has already released Rs. 21 crore for the payment and will shortly release the remaining Rs. 5.14 crores to clear dues, added Ms. Sindhuri.

There's something about mangoes

Summer is almost here and so is the mango season. From delicious desserts to savoury gojju and paisley prints and colours—the king of fruit is everywhere

You must be aware of the good news: Karnataka has a rich bounty of mangoes this year.

Mallika, Alphonso, Malgoava, Thotapuri, Banganpalli, Rasapuri and Neelam are some varieties set to hit the market.

Although nothing can quite take away from the joy of eating mangoes as is, there is an endless list to how mangoes can be adapted to a variety of dishes, from chutneys and ice cream shakes to scoops of vanilla ice cream with cut mangoes and mango popsicles.

Chef Prashanth, Executive Chef of The Fatty Bao, says at the Fatty Bao, raw and ripe mangoes are used in a variety of ways.

“We do a salad of raw mango and papaya. During the mango season, we blend half-ripe mangoes with the curry paste, which goes well with meat, seafood and even vegetarian dishes.”

Maharashtra Government to grant Rs 10,000 cr for water conservation in drought hit regions

In the backdrop of the drought, the government's emphasis on rural agriculture and economics took centre stage in the report.

The Maharashtra government has decided to grant Rs 10,000 crore to boost water conservation in the drought-prone districts of Maharashtra. The funds will be routed as share capital assistance to the Maharashtra State Water Conservation Corporation, the nodal body executing projects with the objective to make the state drought-free by 2019.

This and several other policy reforms in core sectors — both rural and urban — along with the government's progress report were outlined by Governor C Vidyasagar Rao during his address to members on the first day of the Budget Session at Central Hall in Vidhan Bhavan.

In the backdrop of the drought, the government's emphasis on rural agriculture and economics took centre stage in the report. It reflected the special drive to provide both agro and industrial impetus to the backward Vidarbha and Marathwada, including total exemption of VAT, Rs 1,000-crore assistance for agriculture pumps and the food security act, which has benefitted 68 lakh families.

The restructuring of Rs 3,500-crore bank loans and interest waiver has helped 5.5 lakh farmers in drought-hit districts. As a result, the district central cooperative banks of Akola, Washim, Amravati, Yavatmal, Chandrapur and Nashik were able to extend fresh crop loans of Rs 405 crore to nearly 1,16,000 farmers whose loans were so restructured, Rao said.

The chief minister's flagship project Jalyukta Shivar Abhiyan has completed 1,33,000 projects across 6,200 villages leading to water storage capacity of 6,90,000 thousand cubic metres. In the second phase, the government will extend the initiative to 5,182 drought-prone villages. Under the Jalswarajya-2 scheme, the state has given its share of Rs 385 crore for the Rs 9000-crore scheme, being undertaken with the aid of World Bank.

While emphasising on industries in drought-prone and backward districts, the government has decided to strengthen infrastructure, complete with roads and power.

Under integrated development of agriculture, 21 projects have been approved to provide assured market links to farmers through public and private partnership models.

Under the Atal Solar Krushi Pump scheme to make farmers self-reliant, the state will provide 10,000 solar pumps. The farmer will have to pay only five per cent cost of the pump with no recurring energy bills or maintenance charges.

To check farmers suicides, health programmes such as “Prerna Sankalp” have been implemented. The “Hinduhri-daysamrat Shivsena Pramukh Balasaheb Thackeray Niradhar Swavlambhan Yagna” helps widows of deceased farmers.

The government stressed on its textile policy to boost industry and employment, which has resulted in banks sanctioning 1,127 projects with investment of Rs 11,000 crore and 64,000 jobs. Referring to the Make In India Week, the government said it attracted Rs 8-lakh-crore foreign direct investment with a job potential of 30 lakh.

Other announcements

The statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji in the Arabian Sea has been given all clearances and would be completed before 2019.

To commemorate Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary, the government has drawn up plans to develop Wardha-Sevagram-Pavnar area.

Interview-Dubi Raber: Addressing production gluts through citrus fruit diversification

Farmers in Punjab should look beyond kinnow cultivation for ensuring viability of orchards, says Israeli expert.

Dubi Raber, believes the solution lies in farmers producing a variety of citrus fruits, which can help prolong the harvesting season.

Kinnow growers are reeling from a production glut leading to a crash in price realisations. This is something Punjab’s ‘king fruit’ is naturally prone to, given the short period (mid-December to February-end) during which it is harvested.

Dubi Raber, a citrus cultivation expert who had worked with Israel's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, believes the solution lies in farmers producing a variety of citrus fruits, which can help prolong the harvesting season. Such 'diversification within citrus fruits' is what the Indo-Israeli Centre of Excellence for Fruits (Citrus) at village Khanaura in Hoshiarpur district is aiming at. Set up in an area of 27 acres, it has a 1,000 square-metre polyhouse and net houses on another 6,000 square metres for raising the nurseries of citrus plants imported from Israel.



Excerpts from an interview with Dubi Raber by ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA:

What is the objective of this new centre?

The Punjab farmer today grows a single citrus crop – kinnow – due to which he has a limited harvesting period. Our centre is working on providing an extended period of at least six months for harvesting of citrus crops. This can happen if the farmer dedicates the area in his orchard to cultivate a wider range of citrus crops maturing at different times. We are providing 15-20 citrus varieties for diversification. These include other Mandarin group fruits (Daisy, Murcott, Michal, Pearl Tangelo, Fremont and Fairchild), sweet oranges (including Jaffa or Shamouti oranges that is harvested in August, Mosambi in September-October, Hamlin in November, Blood Red in January and Malta in February), grapefruit (Sweetie, Star Ruby, Marsh Seedless, Redblush Chakotra and Pomelo, which are harvested from mid-January to March) and lemons/limes (Baramasi and Kagzi).

What will Israel's role be?

Most of these varieties being tried out in this centre have been imported from Israel. We are growing them here in mother plant units in climate-controlled net houses, from where they will be shifted to the nursery. The pest and disease-free saplings raised there can, then, be taken for planting in open orchards. At this Indo-Israeli centre, which was started around a year back, we are also providing all the required technical knowhow to grow these varieties in Punjab's climate.

But can these imported Israeli varieties be easily cultivated in Punjab?

It is a big challenge, no doubt, but the plants that we have introduced are all currently doing well at the centre. We have to observe these for the next few years, till they are actually prepared for surviving in the open orchards of farmers. In Israeli, maximum temperatures do not rise beyond 40 degrees Celsius, whereas here in Hoshiarpur, they go up to 44-45 degrees. We have made small changes to the irrigation and fertiliser application schedules to adjust to the cultivation and climatic requirements of Punjab.

How can farmers be motivated towards planting the imported citrus varieties?

The objective of setting up this centre is to impart knowledge about good citrus cultivation practices. These extend to use of micro-irrigation system for nurseries and fields, application of the right doses of fertilisers through 'fertigation', weed and canopy management, and post-harvest management techniques. We are also emphasising new farm machinery and use of plastic culture, apart from conducting regular training programmes, both on- and off-campus, for scientists who will disseminate the knowledge so gained to the farmers. Besides, we will be bringing farmers to enable them to see what we are doing here.

Our ultimate objective is to help Punjab farmers, by making citrus fruit cultivation more lucrative through a longer harvesting period that will also contribute to price stability. Consumers, too, will be able to savour a wider range of citrus fruits that were hitherto unavailable from Punjab.

Technology and Agriculture: Messed in India!

India's average yield is low mainly due to unsuitability of hybrids for rain-fed regions which constitute 60 per cent of India's cotton area. The crop duration, too, is longer, at 7-8 months, compared to 5-6 months in other countries.



Unchecked proliferation of hybrids has led to Bt cotton's growing susceptibility to insect pests.

For the first five years after its introduction in India in 2002, 'Bollgard', the genetically-modified Bt cotton developed by Monsanto, effectively controlled bollworm insect pests. Yields increased by 67 per cent and use of insecticides — which couldn't contain the extensive damage from American bollworm prior to that — decreased by 33 per cent.

True, yields may have also gone up due to other factors: a 36 per cent increase in fertiliser use; doubling of area under hybrids; increase in irrigated cotton area in Gujarat; and the effects of seed treatment with imidacloprid and introduction of at least six new insecticides to control sap-sucking insects.

The scenario, however, changed after the introduction in 2006 of 'Bollgard-II' Bt cotton, containing a second gene, Cry2Ab, derived from a soil bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis*, in addition to the original Cry1Ac gene of 'Bollgard'. Average seed-cotton yields per hectare in India have stagnated at 1,500-1,700 kg since 2006, despite the share of Bt hybrids in overall acreage rising from 38 per cent to 96 per cent and fertiliser usage rising by 70 per cent. More disturbingly, insecticide usage has gone up by 92 per cent, because of increased sap-sucking insect pest attacks.

The blame for this can be laid largely on the whopping 734 Bollgard-II hybrids — compared to just about 20 in the first five years — being approved to saturate almost the country's entire cotton area. The bulk of these hybrids were highly susceptible to leaf hoppers and whiteflies. Increased insecticide use only accelerated the development of 'insecticide-resistance' in these pests. Even more worrisome was the pink bollworm, which was almost forgotten in India after 1980, but made a reappearance to rapidly develop resistance to Bollgard II.

The main reason why India has been unable to harness the full potential of Bt cotton technology is that it got caught in the hybrid trap. Strange but true, only India cultivates Bt cotton hybrids, whereas other countries grow only 'straight varieties'. The general perception is that hybrids give higher yields. With 95 per cent of India's cotton area under Bt hybrids, its yields should have been the highest. The truth is that India's seed-cotton yields are way below the average 2,700 kg/hectare for the rest of the world, despite these countries predominantly cultivating straight varieties. In fact, Pakistan and China rejected the idea of 'Bt-cotton hybrids' and Monsanto doesn't have a presence there.

India's average yield is low mainly because of the unsuitability of hybrids for rain-fed regions which constitute 60 per cent of India's cotton area. The crop duration, too, is longer, at 7-8 months, compared to 5-6 months in other countries. The plant density in hybrids of about 11,000 to 16,000 plants per hectare is a tenth of the global average based on straight varieties. High-density planting is simply unviable with expensive and bushy hybrids producing more foliage. Because of low plant population in hybrid cotton fields, each plant is required to produce more number of bolls, which extends into long duration. Long duration isn't good for rainfed conditions, where the crop suffers moisture and nutrient stress, especially during the critical flowering and boll formation stages from the 4th to 7th months, resulting in lower yields. Hybrids generally perform well under irrigated conditions with high chemical inputs, but even there long-duration hybrids provide opportunities for insects like pink bollworms to proliferate in multiple cycles. These feed mainly on developing cotton seeds in green bolls.

Bt cotton is a powerful and useful technology to control bollworms: American bollworm, pink bollworm and spotted bollworm. But since the technology in India was available only with private companies, they ensured it was incorporated only into hybrids and not in straight varieties enabling farmers to reuse the farm-saved seeds. They were left with no choice, but cultivate hybrids whether or not these suited their soils. In the irrigated belt of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, the acreage under hybrid cotton was negligible prior to the introduction of Bt hybrids. But by 2008, the entire cotton area in the region was covered by commercial Bt-cotton hybrids, replacing all straight varieties. These included excellent publicly-bred high-yielding varieties tolerant to insects and diseases. Unfortunately, with the proliferation of hybrids since 2006, Punjab's cotton crop suffered heavy infestation of whitefly last year. Nor have yields gone up much. Yields in Pakistan under similar conditions have been 20 to 30 per cent higher than in the adjoining North-West Indian states.

Bt cotton technology was messed up in India by the private seed industry, which underestimated the power of bollworms and undermined the need for implementing proactive insect resistance management strategies. No wonder, a small worm called 'pink bollworm' has brought Bollgard-II technology down to its knees. It needs to be asked why the pink bollworm developed resistance to Bt cotton only in India within just 5-6 years, and not elsewhere in the world. The industry is instead blaming the Indian farmer for not planting non-Bt cotton seeds as refugia. But this could only have marginally delayed resistance development. China doesn't have any recommendation of 'refugia' planting along with the regular Bt cotton seeds. Yet, the pink bollworm hasn't developed resistance despite 18 years of Bt-cotton cultivation there.

There are three factors unique to Bt cotton in India, all of them related to hybrids, that have accelerated the development of pink bollworm resistance to Bollgard-II.

* 1 Bt toxins are absent in 25 per cent of seeds in the bolls of hybrid Bollgard plants and in over 6 per cent of seeds in the bolls of Bollgard-II plants. The young bollworms can, then, survive initially on non-Bt seeds and subsequently, as they get older, feed on the rest of the seeds containing Bt toxins. This accelerates resistance development. When Bt technology is available in 'straight varieties', all the developing seeds in bolls contain the toxins. Therefore, resistance development is delayed.

* 2 Hybrids take longer time to produce more bolls/plant, thus providing continuous food source that help pink bollworm proliferate in multiple cycles and adapt to Bt toxins.

* 3 More than a thousand Bt cotton hybrids were approved in India without proper agronomic recommendations. These, in a matrix of combinations, provided synchronous and overlapping flowering and fruiting windows over a long stretch of time to support pink bollworm populations, thereby accelerating resistance development.

Next in waiting is the impending resistance threat from the most dreaded American bollworm. It is clear that for the next five years, there are no new genetically-modified solutions in the offing. One immediate option under the circumstances is for seed firms to explore the sale of Bt straight varieties under high density planting. All of them have such varieties that they use as parents for hybrid development. Also, they must promote only a few Bt cotton hybrids of 5-6 months duration. These can escape pink bollworm attacks occurring during November-February in central and south India.

Over the past five years, CICR has been pursuing non-Bt 'desi' cotton cultivation as a sustainable alternative option, especially in rainfed tracts. Our results have shown that high yields with low production costs can be obtained with short-duration, early-maturing and compact varieties even in the rainfed regions of Vidarbha and Telangana. The crop could also escape bollworm attacks for most part of the season. Besides, CICR has converted around 20 of the elite public sector cotton varieties into Bt. These would be tested this year in Maharashtra and Telangana under multi-location trials to identify the most suitable Bt varieties for rain-fed tracts. Their seeds could be available from 2017 or 2018 onwards at low cost. Since the Bt toxins would be in a homozygous condition in the straight varieties — i.e. in all the seeds in the bolls — they would effectively combat the American bollworm and escape pink

bollworm because of short duration. They will also have better yields because of high-density planting.

Despite the big challenges ahead for cotton, the battle is not lost. We can consolidate our ammunition to tide over the next 4-5 years, if science receives precedence over commercial interests at least now.



Drought declared in 1,053 more villages

Mumbai: The drought situation in Maharashtra is worsening. The state government on Wednesday announced drought in 1,053 villages of Ahmednagar and Solapur districts of Maharashtra. With this, the total number of villages affected by drought has risen to 16,800.

“Considering the situation, the state government decided to announce drought in 1,053 villages of Ahmednagar (408 villages) and Solapur (645 villages) district,” revenue minister Eknath Khadse said, while declaring drought in the legislative council.

As a relief, the aggrieved farmers in affected villages will now get several exemptions from the government. This includes exemption from the payment of land-related revenue, school examination fees, a discount of 33.5% on power bills of agriculture pump, restructuring of crop loans and a stay on debt recovery, the minister said.

The decision was taken in the state cabinet meeting held on Tuesday evening.

“Until today, no government has given any aid to Rabi crops. But we have decided to provide them drought relief of Rs250 crore. From today onwards, the affected farmers of two districts have started getting relief,” Khadse told HT. The 15,747 drought-hit villages are only for Kharif crops, he clarified.

In his 40-minute speech, governor CH Vidyasagar Rao informed the joint session of the state legislature about the drought mitigation measures his government has taken over the past sixteen months. He said his government has disbursed Rs2,536 crore to drought-affected farmers in 15,757 villages. “We have waived off three-months interest on crop loans of the farmers affected by drought and have also decided to restructure crop loans worth Rs3,500 crore, which has benefited nearly 5.5 lakh farmers. District banks in Akola, Washim,

Amravati and Chandrapur were able to extend fresh crop loans of Rs405 crore to nearly 1.16 farmers whose loans were restructured.”

However, the water storage percentage has also been decreasing, according to data released by the government on February 26. According to the figures, only 28% of water is left in various dams of the state. This number was 48% in 2015 and 53% in 2014.

The situation is going to get worse in the coming days, said a senior official from the irrigation department. Marathwada, the worst-affected region, has only 6% water left in its reservoirs.

Taking an aggressive stand on the issue, Dhananjay Munde, leader of Opposition, demanded a condolence motion be moved in the council for farmers who have committed suicide. “In the past one year, more than 3,500 farmers committed suicide owing to drought, crop failure and indebtedness. A condolence motion should be moved in the House for them too,” he said.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Kuwait reimposes ban on Indian poultry products



Kuwait has re-imposed the ban on import of Indian poultry products following the recent outbreak of avian influenza or bird flu in the north-eastern state of Tripura.

The Department of Animal Husbandry, under the Ministry of Agriculture, had confirmed the latest outbreak of avian influenza at the State poultry farm in Gandhigram, Tripura in mid-January this year.

“In the wake of incidence of outbreak of H5N1 virus in Tripura on January 4, 2016, the Government of Kuwait has imposed a ban on import of poultry products from India,” said the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) on its website on Wednesday.

Exports hit

Though Kuwait accounts for a miniscule portion of India’s poultry exports, the re-imposition of the ban by the Persian Gulf nation could add to the concerns of the domestic poultry sector which is already reeling under the impact of high feed costs and volatile realisations.

In October last year, Kuwait had lifted the ban on Indian imports of poultry products that was imposed sometime in 2013, following a report by the World Organisation for Animal Health that India was free from the highly pathogenic avian influenza. India had declared itself free from avian influenza in July last year.

Exports of India’s poultry products in the first nine months of the current financial year have grown by about a fifth to ₹584 crore from ₹484 crore in the corresponding last year, according to provisional estimates by Apeda.

Farm compartmentalisation

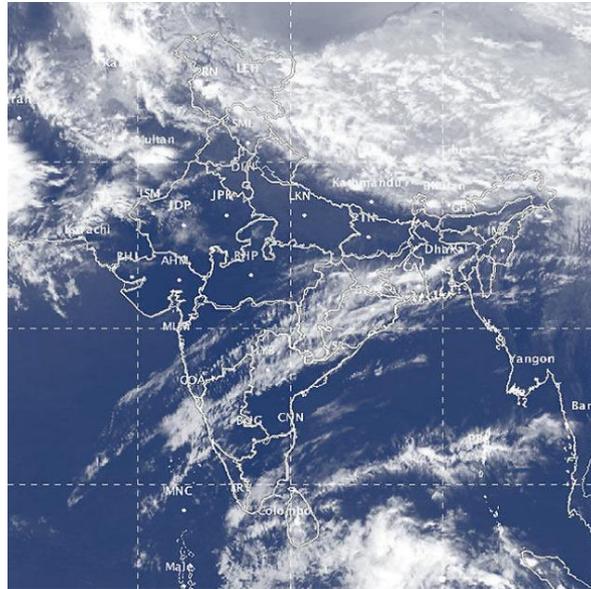
C Panneerselvam, Managing Director of Namakkal-based Abi Egg Traders, that exports to many West Asian countries, told *BusinessLine* that it is high time the Union Government implemented compartmentalising farms and zoning of regions to ensure that exports are not hit.

“This move will ensure that the impact of the flu-hit area is restricted and does not affect the entire industry,” Panneerselvam said. The Centre should take up the issue with the countries concerned and help the industry which is already

Rain, snow, hail warning for N-W, East from weekend

Heavy rain, snow, hail and thundershowers have been warned for the hills and the plains of North-West India over the week-end as a western disturbance is heading in from across the border from Pakistan.

Attendant heavy weather is predicted to unfold from Friday, with the India Met Department hinting at the possibility of heavy rain for Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.



Thunder squalls

Simultaneously, thunder squalls (violent gusts of winds accompanied by thunder and lightning) accompanied by hail would lash expansive parts of the plains of the region, triggering concerns over a potential impact on the ready to harvest rabi crops such as wheat and mustard among others.

IMD advisory

Affected regions would extend from Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, West Rajasthan, to West Uttar Pradesh.

The Met Department has advised farmers in the region to harvest the mature crop at the earliest and keep the harvested produce in a safe place.

The IMD has also advised the farmers to maintain the proper drainage channels and use the hail nets to protect their orchards from mechanical damage.

Damage to wheat crop

IMD's advisory assumes significance as unseasonal rains around the same time during last year had damaged the standing wheat crop that eventually led to a reduced output of the cereal besides affecting the physical quality resulting in the lustre loss of the grains.

Wheat output on account of unseasonal rains last year was reduced to around 86.53 million tonnes from the previous year's record output of 95.85 million tonnes.

For the current 2015-16 season, the government estimates wheat production to be around 93.82 million tonnes.

On Saturday, the heavy rain will spill over from Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh into Punjab with thunder squalls stalking the region right from Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha.

On Sunday, heavy rain will once again pound Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The thunder squall would whip its way across the plains of North-West and into further East.

May spill over

Areas likely to be affected are Uttarakhand, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Vidarbha.

The rain, snow and thundershower regime is likely to spill over further into the next three days as well, an extended outlook by the Met Department said.

Rain or snow is very likely at many places over the hills of the North-West while rain and thundershowers would lash the adjoining plains.

Simultaneously, rain or thundershowers is likely at a few places over East and North-East India and isolated places over Central and Peninsular India.

An outlook by the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction said that the wet regime from the North would meet up with a tropical wave across the Bay of Bengal to trigger thundershowers over the South Peninsula.

Noted agriculture scientist MV Rao passes away

Noted agriculture scientist and one of the key persons in India's 'Green Revolution', M V Rao, passed away on Tuesday night in Hyderabad. He was 88 and is survived by his wife, a son and two daughters.

In the company of Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug, M S Swaminathan, C Subramanian and many others who ushered in the Green Revolution during the early 1960s, Mangina Venkateswara Rao was involved in testing and identifying the best varieties of wheat from Mexico that were then grown in the country and changed the agriculture scenario forever.

Ironically for MV Rao, the golden jubilee celebrations of the Green Revolution held in New Delhi in November 2015, turned out to be his last big engagement. He was felicitated by Agriculture Minister, Radha Singh, and his 30-minute address to the galaxy of scientists drew wide applause.

However, on his return to Hyderabad, his health suffered a setback. He had to be admitted in a corporate hospital. Being a man of discipline and healthy lifestyle, Rao put up a valiant fight. However, the former Spl. Director General of ICAR and Spl Secretary of the Dept. of Agriculture, Research & Extension breathed his last on Tuesday night.

Born on June 21, 1928, at Perupalem in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, Rao joined the Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) in 1956 as an assistant wheat breeder, after completing his master's degree from Purdue University. He became the coordinator of the All-India Wheat Improvement Project in 1971.

During a long career, Rao rose to the highest posts in agriculture. He was asked by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to head the Technology Mission on Oilseeds (one of the four tech missions) in 1986. Post-retirement he became an Agriculture Expert with the World Bank in 1990. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister at that time, N Janardhana Reddy, invited him to take over as the Vice-Chancellor of the Acharya NG Ranga Agriculture University (1991-97).

A former Vice-President of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (2000-2003), Rao played an important role on several committees, especially chairing the Committee on the New National Seed Policy. He has served as a member of the board of directors of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and as member of the Wheat Advisory Committee of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).

In the last two decades, Rao strived hard to increase awareness about agriculture and scientific temper. He led the AP Akademi of Sciences, was a regular speaker at seminars and focussed on modern technology and improving the environment. He served as a member of the Legislative Council of AP during 2008-14.

A recipient of the Norman Borlaug Award and the Linker's Award, Rao was honoured with the Padma Shri.

M. S. Swaminathan, in his condolence message, said “Rao’s contributions to the food security of our country were truly monumental”.

India asks Iran to review import tariff to make tea more competitive

Iran agrees to take a re-look at pesticide norms based on field trials

In a move that would make Indian tea more competitive in the lucrative Iranian market, the Centre has asked Iranian customs authorities to be more flexible in calculating import duties to correct the disproportionately high levies being imposed on low-priced South Indian tea.

In a recent meeting with Iranian officials, a delegation from India comprising representatives from the Tea Board and the Commerce Ministry also pressed for review of certain pesticide norms that are affecting exports from the country.

“At present, the tariff line valuation for Indian tea in Iran is pegged to only the high-priced Assam and Darjeeling tea. As a result, buyers of low-priced South Indian tea end up paying much higher levies than what they should be if the import duty is calculated on the actual price of such tea,” a government official told *BusinessLine*.

India has asked Iran to have different tariff line valuations for the premium varieties and the South Indian teas and also two separate ones for peak-season and off-season. The Iranian customs authorities will soon get back to us on this, the official said.

“Indian tea exporters face a lot of competition from Sri Lankan tea in Iran and lowering of customs levies could play an important role in giving Indian tea an edge over its competitors,” the official said.

Iran imposes 20 per cent import duty on tea and charges 9 per cent VAT. A correct calculation of import duty on low-value tea can, therefore, make a considerable difference to exporters of low-priced tea.

Commerce Ministry officials are also in talks with the Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran for review of maximum residue levels (MRLs) of pesticides on tea imposed about a year ago which is resulting in rejection of some consignments of Indian tea.

“The ISIRI has agreed to examine field trial data in India based on which they would take a re-look at their risk assessment of tea from India,” the official said.

India’s tea exports to Iran were about 22 million kg (mkg) in 2015 against 18 mkg in 2014. However, with the country importing over 140 mkg of tea every year, India is looking at a higher share.

Centre cuts cottonseed price, royalty fee



Uniform pricing across country; Move may impact revenues of Monsanto, MMBL

The Union government has cut the price of cottonseed in the country to ₹800 for a packet (of 450 grams) of Bollgard-II against ₹830-1,000 in various parts of the country.

The price will be uniform across the country unlike in the past where different States announced different price tags for the transgenic seed.

The Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG) has strongly opposed the move, saying it violates the principles of free market economics.

Equipped itself with a newly-issued Cottonseed Price Control Order, the government has steeply reduced the royalty component to ₹49 from ₹184 that

Monsanto and Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (MMBL) charge the farmers through seed companies.

The Centre's notification put the seed value of BGII at ₹751 and the trait (or royalty with taxes) at ₹49, making it ₹800 for a 450-gm packet plus 120 grams of refugia (Refugia seed is planted around the main crop to reduce the risk of the worm developing resistance to the technology). For BGI, the seed value is put at ₹635 with no trait value to be charged.

Revenues take a beating

The government said the panel would announce the prices before March 31 every year so that the farmers and seed firms can plan well for the kharif season.

The move would have serious ramifications on the revenues of Monsanto, which owns the transgenic technology, and MMBL that sub-licenses the technology to seed companies in the country.

“We are in the process of examining the notification in detail and will be able to comment only after we study the document in its entirety,” an MMBL spokesperson has said.

The government has notified the pricing in the Gazette making it mandatory for seed firms to follow the order. It, however, is subject to the final decision of Delhi High Court that is hearing a plea from MMBL, which challenged the validity of Price Control Order.

The Union government has come out with the order recently to put an end to litigations around the cottonseed pricing by different governments and MMBL and Monsanto challenging their right to fix the royalty component.

The component ranges from ₹20 (Maharashtra), ₹50 each in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh as the seed price varied from ₹830 and ₹930 respectively.

“By slashing trait fees the government has clearly shown that it is going for short term populist measures rather than supporting innovation in the long term,” Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director of ABLE-AG, said.

‘Populist measure’

“Such a decision is a discouragement of research and is contrary to the respect for intellectual property rights in agriculture and ‘Make in India’ initiative,” he said.

The association, which comprises 11 firms including Monsanto, MMBL, Syngenta and others, said the decision would be detrimental in the long run as companies might have to reconsider their investments in research and development in the seed sector.

Meanwhile, the National Seed Association of India (NSAI) has welcomed the Centre’s notification. It, however, felt that the ‘seed value’ component would have been at least ₹100 more.

Edible oils stay firm

Edible oils market ruled firm on back of mixed reports from Malaysian palm oil conference where bullish trend for palm oil and steady trend for soya oil was predicted by experts. Vikram Global Commodities traded Malaysian super palmolein for ₹572. Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹543, super palmolein ₹562 and soyabean refined oil ₹611.

In Saurashtra/Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin increased to ₹1,450 (1,430) and loose (10 kg) at ₹925 (910). BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 930 (930), soya ref. 605 (605), sunflower ref. 745 (745), rapeseed exp. ref. 735 (730), cottonseed ref. oil 604 (605) and palmolein 538 (536).

Hybrid turmeric gains colour

Demand for the hybrid turmeric has increased. On Wednesday, 7,400 bags arrived for sale including 2,000 bags of new turmeric. About 50 bags of hybrid turmeric also arrived and the traders quoting ₹10,300 a quintal procured all of them.

Of the arrival of the 7,400 bags of turmeric, 65 per cent stocks were sold.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger turmeric went for ₹7,826-10,389 a quintal; the root variety at ₹7,619-9,466. Of the 2,314 bags offered, 1,310 were sold.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Government snubs Monsanto, caps price of Bt cotton seeds

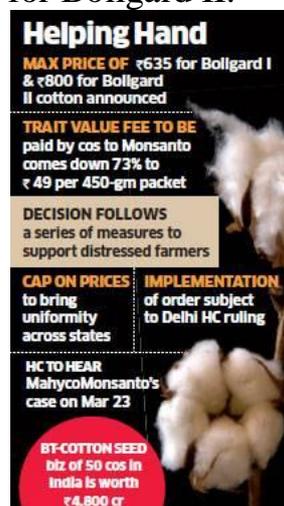


Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said the move will help farmers. The Trait Value (tech fee) including taxes has been cut to Rs 49 from Rs 183.46 per packet.

NEW DELHI: The government has capped the price of Bt cotton seeds, rebuffing US giant MonsantoBSE 4.26 % which had threatened to review business plans and withhold new technology if controls are imposed on the tech fee it charges.

The decision follows a series of measures such as a crop insurance policy and budgetary proposals to increase expenditure on irrigation and other schemes to support distressed farmers, who have suffered two consecutive poor monsoons and crop failure in the intervening period due to hailstorms.

A formal notification issued late on Wednesday recommended that Bt cotton seeds packets of 450 grams would be sold at a maximum price of Rs 635 for Bollgard I version and Rs 800 for Bollgard II.



Helping Hand

MAX PRICE OF ₹635 for Bollgard I & ₹800 for Bollgard II cotton announced

TRAIT VALUE FEE TO BE paid by cos to Monsanto comes down 73% to ₹ 49 per 450-gm packet

DECISION FOLLOWS a series of measures to support distressed farmers

CAP ON PRICES: to bring uniformity across states

IMPLEMENTATION of order subject to Delhi HC ruling

HC TO HEAR MahycoMonsanto's case on Mar 23

BT-COTTON SEED blz of 50 cos in India is worth ₹4,800 cr

The Trait Value (tech fee) including taxes has been cut to Rs 49 from Rs 183.46 per packet. The packet of seeds was being sold at a range of prices such as Rs 1,000 in Punjab and Haryana, Rs 830 in Maharashtra and Rs 930 in Telengana.

Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said the move will help farmers. "As there was no uniformity in pricing of Bt cotton seeds across the country, the Centre has recently intervened and issued a Cotton Seed Price (Control) Order, 2015, to fix a uniform price of Bt cotton seed across the states in the country to be notified on or before March 31 every year for the next financial year for the benefit of farmers," he said.

Monsanto said it was studying the situation. "We are in the process of examining the notification in detail and will be able to comment only after we study the document in its entirety." The company had earlier challenged controls on cotton seed prices and said: "Such a drastic intervention overrides existing private bilateral commercial contracts, and undermines the overall operating environment in India."

The Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises Agriculture Group said the government should reconsider the decision, which he said was populist and anti-innovation.

"By slashing trait fees the government has clearly shown that it is going for short-term populist measures rather than supporting innovation in the long term. Such a decision is a discouragement of research and is contrary to the respect for IPR in Agriculture and 'Make in India' initiative encouraged by our Honorable Prime Minister," association's executive director Shivendra Bajaj, said.

ET View

Let Indigenous Seeds Take Root The issue is not whether the government has the right to cap the price of Monsanto's GM cotton seeds but whether it makes sense for the government to cap the price, effecting a price reduction that ranges between ₹30 and ₹300. Instead, the government should focus on facilitating the setting up of a public seeds company that would bring to market the much cheaper, indigenously developed GM seeds, such as the one by the Nagpur-based Central Institute of Cotton Research or the Indian Bt Bikaneri Nerma developed by the University of Agricultural Sciences at Dharwad.

India cuts Monsanto cotton seed royalties despite threat to quit



India cut the royalties paid by local firms for Monsanto's genetically modified cotton seeds by nearly 70 per cent on Wednesday, ignoring a threat by the world's biggest seed company to leave if it did.

NEW DELHI: India cut the royalties paid by local firms for Monsanto's genetically modified cotton seeds by nearly 70 per cent on Wednesday, ignoring a threat by the world's biggest seed company to leave if it did.

The move follows complaints from local seeds companies that Mahyco Monsanto BSE 4.26 % Biotech (India) (MMB), a Monsanto joint venture with India's Mahyco, was charging high royalties.

This prompted agriculture ministry to form a panel to look into the matter, whose recommendation the government has now accepted.

MMB has filed a case in a Delhi court, challenging the authority of the panel to determine the trade fee agreed upon by MMB and a number of Indian seed companies.

As well as cutting the royalties, the government also capped GM cotton seed prices at 800 rupees for a packet of 400 grams after appeals by some state governments and farmers to lower the rate of the Bt variety that commands 90 per cent of the market.

Bt cotton seeds are being sold at between 830 and 1,100 rupees per packet in different parts of the country.

The government's move came after Monsanto threatened on Friday to pull out of the country and hold off new technology if the government forced a big cut in its payments from Indian seed companies.

India's Mahyco and U.S.-based Monsanto launched a GM cotton variety in India in 2002, helping transform the country into the world's top producer and second-largest exporter of the fibre.

Separately, the Competition Commission of India, the antitrust regulator, last month said there were indications that MMB had abused its dominant position in the country and asked its director general to complete an investigation within two months.

New Insurance scheme for Small Tea Garden workers, backed by Indian Tea Board



Each one of around 1.5 lakh workers of all the small tea gardens (STG) in India are going to get an insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh against own payment of Rs 3.5 only per annum.

SILIGURI: Each one of around 1.5 lakh workers of all the small tea gardens (STG) in India are going to get an insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh against own payment of Rs 3.5 only per annum. Under direct support of Indian Tea Board(ITB), the accidental insurance scheme is likely to get introduced pan country from 1st April.

"We are excited to have such a nice scheme that we have been asking for since long. We are thankful to Indian Tea Board for supporting this in such a big way," said Mr. B. G. Chakroborty, President of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Association (CISTA), the umbrella organization of Indian Small Tea Growers.

According to ITB officials, The Group personal Accident Insurance scheme will provide compensation to STG workers within age group of 18 to 70 years in the event of bodily injuries or death caused by accident. Premium per worker per annum has been worked out as Rs 14. Out of it, the board will bear 75 per cent

while the workers need to pay the rest 25 per cent amounting to be Rs 3.5.

The Master Policy will be issued by the Insurance Company in the name of Tea Board India on receipt of premium along with list of beneficiaries for whom premium have been paid.

"ITB is happy to introduce this scheme for the workers of this unorganized sector. The scheme may come even more workers friendly if the garden owners shoulder the responsibility to pay the workers share of premium that is not a big sum." said a senior ITB official.

According to him, it is difficult to assess exact number of beneficiary of the scheme at this moment as the national survey on workers profile of STGs is yet to be finished. But Mr. Chakrovorty approximately figured the number of STG workers as around 1.5 lakh throughout the whole country.

Nearly 2% of families derive major income from livestock farming



Nearly 2% of families derive major income from livestock farming while a large part of the land-holding is used for the same, NSSO's survey of 4,529 sample villages reveals more meaty data points.

A close look at livestock farming across the country throws up interesting nuggets: Nearly 2% of families derive major income from livestock farming while a large part of the land-holding is used for the same, NSSO's survey of 4,529 sample villages reveals more meaty data points.

1.75%

Of total rural households earn a large part of income from self-employment in livestock farming

2.7 m

Is the total number of rural households dependent on livestock farming

TOTAL LAND USED FOR DAIRY FARMING

53.8%

July-Dec 2012

69.7%

Jan-Jun 2013

>1%

Of land was used for pig-gery during both the summer and winter seasons

MAJOR COMMUNITIES THAT REPORTED INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN LIVESTOCK FARMING

0.75%
of total scheduled tribe households

1.50%
of total scheduled caste households

2.17%
of OBC households

1.67%
of other households

3.67% OF HOUSEHOLDS OWNING LARGE HOLDINGS (MORE THAN 10 HECTARES) WERE FOUND TO HAVE DERIVED MAJOR INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN LIVESTOCK FARMING

204.5 million

Total bovine population during 2012-13

135.6 million

Number of cattle

68.8 million

Number of buffaloes

99 million

Total sheep & goat population during 2012-13



254.7 million

Total poultry population in 2012-13

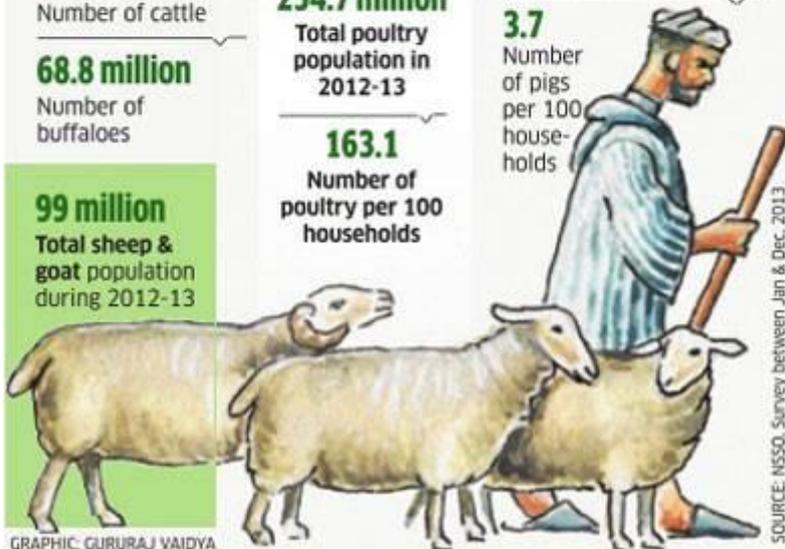
163.1

Number of poultry per 100 households

63.4 Number of ovines per 100 households

5.8 million
NUMBER OF PIGS DURING 2012-13

3.7
Number of pigs per 100 households



GRAPHIC: GURURAJ VAIDYA

SOURCE: NSSO, Survey between Jan & Dec, 2013