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# THE HINDU

## **Government mulls fresh study on post-harvest loss of farm produce**

Organisations of small retailers, street vendors and farmers are already up in arms against the budget proposal of allowing 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products.

The Centre is mulling a fresh study on the percentage of post-harvest losses of farm products following contradictory findings.

Official sources told *The Hindu* that a re-look is needed because while some data available with the government shows the percentage of post-harvest losses of perishables such as fruits and vegetables being as high as 30 per cent, studies commissioned by government have put it at as low as five per cent.

Organisations of small retailers, street vendors and farmers are already up in arms against the budget proposal of allowing 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products.

Demanding a roll-back, they said it will be blatantly wrong on the part of the government to implement this decision ostensibly to bring down wastage from the prevailing “high levels” when actually the post-harvest losses are “very low”.

The fresh study is also aimed at countering the allegation of such critics that ‘inflated’ farm products wastage data was being shown to justify the move to permit FDI in marketing of food products.

A March 2015 report of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)—Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology (CIPHET)—in Ludhiana showed that the cumulative percentage of post-harvest losses of cereals was low in the range of 4.65–5.99 per cent while that of pulses was between 6.36–8.41 per cent and oil seeds 3.08–9.96 per cent.

As per the report, the maximum losses were in fruits and vegetables (4.58–15.88 per cent) and fisheries—marine (10.52 per cent). Percentage of post-harvest losses was low in milk (0.92 per cent), fisheries-inland (5.23 per cent), meat (2.71 per cent) and poultry (6.74 per cent).

The ICAR-CIPHET study was commissioned by the government.

However, an earlier paper put out by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (or DIPP which formulates the FDI policy) had quoted data from agriculture ministry to say that 25-30 per cent of fruits and vegetables and 5-7 per cent of food grains in India are wasted.

It said post-harvest losses of farm produce, especially of fruits, vegetables and other perishables, have been estimated to be over Rs. one trillion per annum, 57 per cent of which is avoidable wastage and the balance due to avoidable costs of storage and commission.

Senior officials of the agriculture ministry had also said earlier that over 70 per cent of the fruits and vegetable production was wasted and that it accounted for around 40 per cent in terms of economic losses.

The sources said the DIPP had objected to studies showing “very low” wastage saying these findings were far removed from the ground reality. They said there will soon be inter-ministerial discussions on the issue. Detailed guidelines on FDI in marketing of food products will ensure three main objectives: maximum returns for farmers for their produce, huge employment generation and a major boost to the food processing industry, they said.

According to the DIPP, inadequate cold storage facilities results in huge losses to farmers in terms of wastage of produce, particularly that of fruits and vegetables. It also said that despite permitting 100 per cent FDI through the automatic route (without the government approval) in cold chain, in several agricultural sector activities as well as in wholesale trade, FDI inflows into these activities were not impressive due to the crucial missing link – which is FDI in (food) retail.

Organisations that have opposed FDI in marketing of food products include Confederation of All India Traders, India FDI Watch Campaign, Bhartiya Udyog Vyapar Mandal, Federation of Associations of Maharashtra, The Hawkers Federation and *Janpahal* .

They said the BJP had categorically opposed FDI in multi-brand retail before it came to power at the Centre and the party was now allowing big food companies and MNCs into multi-brand retail trade through the backdoor by allowing 100 per cent FDI in marketing of food products.

***Govt. is working on detailed guidelines regarding 100% FDI in marketing of food products***

### **Farm budget aims at drought-free AP**

*Rs. 16,250.58 crore allocated for agriculture and allied sectors*

With a declared objective of making agriculture less costly, more profitable, productive and sustainable, Agriculture Minister P. Pulla Rao presented the agriculture budget for 2016-17 with an outlay of Rs.16,250.58 crore.

Of this, the plan component for the agriculture and allied sectors is Rs.7,691.90 crore and non-plan outlay is Rs.8,558.68 crore.

Spelling out several ongoing and new initiatives to achieve a drought-free Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Pullarao said in the Assembly on Thursday that the Pattiseema project for interlinking of rivers was one such initiative last year to enable farmers in Rayalaseema to overcome dry spell conditions.

With the foodgrain production estimated at 137 lakh tonnes as against 160 lakh tonnes of 2014-15 due to drought during the kharif and unseasonal rain in November last year, the Minister said that the government was ready with drought mitigation measures for the kharif 2016-17.

For agriculture alone, plan is Rs.1,311.70 crore and non-plan is Rs.4,474 crore to take up measures like providing micro nutrients for restoring soil health, good quality seed, promoting organic and natural farming and bring down input cost, farm mechanisation and extension activities. It allocated Rs.3,512 for second instalment of debt relief scheme to benefit 35.15 lakh farmer families.

For improving water availability, 'Panta Sanjivini' programme would be scaled up for digging farm ponds under the MGNREGA and 'rain guns' would be made available in large scale to save every drop of water besides soil and water conservation measures. About 3.5 lakh farm ponds were being taken up and the NREGA would support pond construction up to five acres, he said.

Linking MGNREGS to agriculture and allied sectors, action plans were prepared with an amount of Rs.5,094 crore for 2016-17 as against Rs.1,904 crore in 2015-16.

### **New initiatives**

The new initiatives include large-scale promotion of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) by organising farmers into about 1,000 groups covering 10 lakh farmers in agriculture, horticulture, dairy and aquaculture sectors. “The purpose is to help small and marginal farmers in the State employ innovative technology and turn farming into viable business proposition,” the Minister said.

Adequate provision of Rs.3,000 crore has been proposed to extend power subsidy to farmers and provide seven-hour free and reliable power supply to 15.7 lakh agriculture services by investing on high-voltage distribution system and replacing non ISI pump sets with energy efficient pump sets.

The horticulture sector with focus on high yielding varieties, post harvest infrastructure like cold storage, value addition and micro irrigation under PMKSY was allocated Rs.659 crore, 31 per cent more than that of 2015-16. Fisheries, based on its huge potential and impressive growth of 32.7 per cent in 2015-16 has a special policy extending various incentives got Rs.339 crore, an increase of 51 per cent over that of last year.

The budgetary support to the Livestock Department was stepped up with an allocation of Rs.819 crore and the target was to make AP one of the top three states in the country in milk, egg and meat production by 2022. In line with it, the government brought in livestock development policy and fodder security policy, he said.

Sericulture where the State is being positioned as leading production centre for international grade silk production and an allied activity was allocated Rs.147 crore.

Labour and Employment Minister K. Atchannaidu presented the Agriculture budget in the Legislative Council.

## *SALIENT FEATURES*

- *The government is ready with drought mitigation measures for the kharif 2016-17*
- *Debt relief scheme will benefit 35.15 lakh farmer families*
- *About 3.5 lakh farm ponds are being taken up*
- *Promotion of farmer producer organisations has been planned*
- *Provision of seven-hour free and reliable power supply to 15.7 lakh agriculture services*
- *Budgetary support to the Livestock Department has been stepped up*
- *Sericulture has been allocated Rs. 147 crore*

## **Absence of MRL values for condiments, spices impact food safety**

The absence of Maximum Residue Level (MRL), prescribed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for pesticides, in condiments and spices is a major impediment to the government in enforcing food safety rules, according to experts.

The FSSAI has not prescribed MRL for various pesticides for ajwain, chilli powder, dry chilli, coriander seed, crushed chilli, cumin powder, dry ginger powder, garam masala, Kashmiri chilli powder, rasam powder, curry masala, pickle powder, sambar powder, tea dust, fenugreek seed, curd chilli, fennel seed and fennel powder, items commonly used in households across the State.

The MRL value acts as an indicator of ideal use of pesticides and ensures compliance with legal requirements for low residues in unprocessed food.

The annual report (2015) of the Pesticide Residue Research and Analytical Laboratory under Kerala Agricultural University reveals different levels of pesticide residue in most condiments and spices available in the open market or collected directly from farmers. Experts feel the absence of MRL standards for commodities masked the real picture.

“With no reference standards, the health hazard caused by pesticide residue in condiments and spices remains unknown. It is a hidden danger,” says an official.

To understand the health hazards caused by pesticide residue, it is essential to have MRL standards fixed for various pesticide-commodity combinations. The European Union has a comprehensive database of pesticide-commodity combinations, covering even the dietary habits of immigrant communities.

It has MRL standards for various pesticides used on red amaranthus, largely used by the immigrant Malayali community.

### **Global aqua meet from tomorrow**

An international conference-cum-exhibition ‘Aquabiz 2016’ on sustainable technologies, trade development opportunities in fisheries sector will be held at Kakinada from March 12 to 14.

The three-day event is being organised by the Andhra Pradesh Technology Development and Promotion Centre (APTDC), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Department of Animal Husbandry (AH), Dairying and Fisheries of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, AH and Fisheries Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University are the partners.

The conference will be conducted at the district sports stadium. Scientists, officials of various government departments, aqua farmers, exporters, representatives from processing and packing companies, marine and fish farmers’ association leaders, students, managements of different feed manufacturing units, exhibitors, hatchery owners and others are likely to take part in the meet, which is being held for the first time in AP.

Over 10,000 products would be displayed and exhibitors from different countries such as China, Singapore, Thailand and other places are expected to participate.

Power point presentations, interactive sessions, discussions on latest trends in prawn and fish culture, better practices in aquaculture, diseases surveillance techniques and business development will be the part of the event.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Seetaraman are likely to inaugurate the conference at 10 am on Saturday.

Home Minister N. Chinarajappa, Agriculture and AH, Fisheries and Dairy Development Minister Prathipati Pulla Rao and other public representatives will attend the programme, said the organisers.

### **Rs.16,250-cr outlay for agriculture, allied sectors**



Agriculture gets a big push in Andhra Pradesh Agriculture budget for 2016-17. - Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

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## **Seven-hour power supply**

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## **Support for livestock**

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## **Spurious seed, fall in shrimp price hit Prakasam aqua farmers**

*Aquaculturists seek supply of Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) brood-stock and lab to test soil, water and shrimps*

Aquaculturists in Prakasam district endowed with vast coastline and tropical climatic condition were a happier lot when vannamei shrimp produced by them fetching a premium price of Rs. 580 per kg for a 30-count early this year in the wake of a fall in production in East and Southeast Asian countries.

But they are now spending sleepless nights owing to spurious seed even as vannamei shrimp price came down to Rs. 520 per kg this month.

About 40 per cent of the aquaculturists are waiting for the situation to improve in the coming months even as the district administration has set a target to double the area under aquaculture to 6,000 hectares to ensure double digit growth.

### **Growth engine**

“It is high time the State government, which has identified the sector as a growth engine, takes sector-friendly initiatives like supply of Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) brood-stock and lab to test soil, water and shrimps right at aqua ponds for disease surveillance,” says Andhra Pradesh State Prawn Farmers’ Welfare Association secretary A. Kondal Rayudu while speaking to *The Hindu* .

Taking stock of the situation, aquaculturists expressed concern over mushrooming of hatcheries and mixing of local seed with imported ones by some erring hatcheries.

In the absence of quality seeds, the aquaculturists are getting only 10 gram growth as against the normal 33 gram growth after 120 days, laments Rythu Sangam district secretary D. Gopinath.

### **Prolonged dry spell**

The prolonged dry spell is adding to their woes. They have to use probiotics to ensure healthy shrimps in their farms and quality of produce, explains Tella Ramaiah, an aquaculturist from Tangutur.

The Centre should provide export incentives as the sector earns precious foreign exchange for the nation, says another farmer J. Venkatesan from Singarayakonda.

They want the government to set up cold chains and develop domestic market for protein-rich shrimp to shed their dependence on international market, marked by fluctuating prices, adds yet another farmer M. Edukondalu from Kothapatnam.

### **Soft loan**

The government should ensure soft loan for aquaculturists from banks and fix the scale of finance to Rs. 9 lakh per acre. Smaller players in the field are

forced to pay 12.5 per cent interest on their loans, laments Aqualculturists Association Prakasam district convenor D. Suresh Babu.

## **Sugarcane growers to move court on harvesting and transportation charges**

*Decision to fix charges at Rs. 850 per tonne is anti-farmer and pro-sugar factories: association*

Jagadish Patil Rajapur, president of the Kalaburagi unit of the Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers Association, addressing a press conference in Kalaburagi on Thursday.— PHOTO: ARUN KULKARNI

The Karnataka Sugarcane Growers Association has decided to file a writ petition before the High Court of Karnataka in Kalaburagi seeking a direction to the Commissioner for Cane Development and Director of Sugars to fix harvesting and transportation charges for sugarcane from the farmers field to the sugar factories uniformly at Rs. 400 per tonne.

Jagadish Patil Rajapur, president of the association's Kalaburagi unit, told presspersons here on Thursday that the writ petition would be filed before the High Court on March 16. He said that the action of the Commissioner for Cane Development and Director of Sugars issuing guidelines for fixing harvesting and transportation charges at Rs. 850 per tonne with additional diesel charges was anti-farmer and pro-sugar factories.

He said that the harvesting and transportation charges fixed in the guidelines issued by the Commissioner were a replica of what was being followed illegally by sugar factories which deducted Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,000 per tonne as harvesting and transportation charges. The guidelines also provide flexibility for increasing the harvesting and transportation charges.

The State government and the Commissioner, who had failed to ensure that the sugar factories adhered to the Fair and Remunerative Prices fixed by the Union government for 2014-15 and 2015-16, have now sounded the death knell to sugarcane growers by issuing the guidelines on March 1 this year.

Mr. Patil said that the farmers were to get Rs. 550 crore as per the Fair and Remunerative Prices from sugar factories for sugarcane supplied in 2013-14 and Rs. 500 crore for sugarcane supplied in 2014-15.

Mr. Patil said that the March 1 guidelines based on the prevailing diesel prices was in contrary to the harvesting and transportation charges fixed in December 2014 by the government.

The price of diesel per litre was Rs. 54.92 in December 2014, but the price of diesel has come down to Rs. 48.47 per litre now.

Instead of reducing harvesting and transportation charges, the guidelines have provided for increasing the charges ranging from 15 per cent to 30 per cent of the charges levied on sugarcane growers in 2014.

If the transportation charges in 2014-15 were Rs 55.83 to Rs. 103.83 (40 km to 120 km) in 2015-16, the factories deducted Rs. 101.86 to Rs. 149.85 for the same distances at a time when the price of diesel had come down. Harvesting and transportation charges have increased by nearly 1,000 per cent due to the unscientific fixation of charges by factories.

### **Green Atlas to help organic farmers have better reach**

With a view to bringing organic farmers across the State under one roof, a group of well-informed techies familiar with organic revolution are in the process of designing a unique 'Green Atlas' that provides all available details of farmers.

The atlas, once uploaded on the Internet, will help farmers coordinate with their counterparts across the State for field trips, besides exchanging ideas and organic farming techniques using various platforms.

The atlas designers are currently in the process of gathering contact details of organic farmers across the State through social media.

While the primary version of the atlas will be out in virtual space in a couple of months, designers say it will be developed to the expected level gradually.

“The idea is to enable farmers to collaborate with experienced persons of their choice in the sector to improve cultivation. It will also help them exchange products or seed for better cooperation,” says G.K. Salil, who coordinates the initiative.

## **No third parties**

According to him, the atlas will help potential buyers easily contact organic farmers anywhere in the State and buy their produce directly sans third parties.

The designers are also planning to develop an android application on completion of the digital atlas project. According to Mr. Salil, the application will ensure better reach to youngsters interested in organic farming. “Along with the location, contact number and address, the atlas and the android application will feature in detail the kinds of crops cultivated by each farmer. Such a utility application for the promotion of organic farming is the first of its kind in virtual space,” he adds.

*The atlas is designed to help farmers exchange ideas with their counterparts across the State*

## **Paddy harvest begins in Upper Kuttanad**

*More combine harvesters to be brought from Tamil Nadu*

It is harvest time in the paddy bowl of Upper Kuttanad in Pathanamthitta.

Farmers have already begun harvesting their fields in Peringara and Kadapra villages, braving the scorching summer heat. Half-a-dozen combine harvesters have been deployed in Peringara alone in the initial stage, according to Sam Eapen, district panchayat member, and the Kuttanad Nelkarshaka Samiti president.

Mr. Eapen told *The Hindu* on Thursday that the unprecedented heat might affect paddy production this year. Shortage of farm labour was a real problem facing the paddy sector in this part of the State, he said. Mr. Eapen said shooting cost of production, labour charge, and transportation were posing problems to the farmers. The huge cost has already eaten into the farmers’ profits, he said.

The government had fixed the head load charge (handling charge) of Rs.12 for every 100 kg paddy in 2003 and this rate is too low, compared to the current rate ranging from Rs.150 to Rs.170 for every bag of 100 kg. The harvester operators charge Rs.1,450 to Rs.1,500 an hour, he said.

## **Price crash leaves Korai grass farmers high and dry**

*Grass raised on acre fetches only Rs. 11,000*

Steep fall in the price of Korai grass, main raw material for making mats, has caused concern among farmers in Tiruchi and Karur districts.

The grass is cultivated on large tracts of land along the banks of the Cauvery. It is mainly grown in areas such as Musiri, Mohanur, Paramathi, Vangal, Kuppuchipalayam, Velur, Pandamangalam, Nangavaram, Melanangavaram, Pettavaithalai, Thottiam, and neighbouring villages.

With harvesting of the grass under way over the past few days, a large number of middlemen and brokers have arrived Musiri and other areas for buying grass, which will in turn be sent for the mat production units in Musiri, Vaniyampadi, and Salem. The grass is sent to a few north Indian states as well.

However, the prices offered by the middlemen have brought down the spirit of farmers.

As per the current market condition, grass raised on an acre fetches a meagre price of Rs.11,000 as against the average price of Rs. 25,000.

There were instances in which the farmers were offered up to Rs. 30,000 an acre a few years ago.

“The current price is inadequate to meet the overheads on raising korai grass. We suffer heavy loss. We do not have alternative options except selling it to middlemen,” says R. Selvam (45) of Ayyampalayam near Musiri.

Farmers complain that it is the middlemen, who fix prices for korai grass. The farmers have been kept in the dark as they do not know the actual price in the market.

They said that the middlemen and brokers fix prices at the fields as per the wish of them. They were the real beneficiaries in the cultivation of korai.

## **Convention to create awareness on afforestation on Sunday**

In a bid to give impetus to “Vruksha Raksha – Vishwa Raksha”, the flagship scheme of his Paryaya period, Vishwasha Tirtha Swami of Paryaya Pejawar Mutt has decided to hold a mega awareness convention here on Sunday.

Addressing presspersons here, the seer said that the objective of the scheme was to distribute about two crore saplings to interested people and organisations to plant them in their surroundings in the next two years. “The intention is to protect environment, prevent pollution and promote greenery,” he said.

The convention will be a sounding board, where opinions will be sought from individuals, youth organisations, heads of temples, voluntary groups, gram panchayat members and environmentalists. “Nearly 3,000 people are expected to take part in the convention. There will be lectures and presentations by environmentalists,” he said. To prepare a complete plan of action, a discussion will be held with all stakeholders. “The aim is to have an effective implementation of the scheme once it is launched in June, when the monsoon sets in. By then all preparations will be completed,” he said.

Vishwaprasanna Tirtha, junior seer of Pejawar Mutt, said that a variety of saplings will be distributed, including fruit and flower bearing and herbal ones. The mutt will place its demand for saplings with the Forest and Horticulture departments and some private nurseries.

Farmers and others can give seeds of saplings to the mutt. They can also procure seeds from the mutt and develop saplings and return them for distribution. “We will soon be opening a seed bank and a sapling distribution counter at the Krishna Mutt,” he said. In addition, awareness campaigns will be launched to rejuvenate and protect old and unused ponds, lakes and “nagabanas”.

B. Ramanath Rai, Minister for Forest and Environment, and Shyamnur Shivashankarppa, Minister for Horticulture, will participate in the inauguration of the convention at Rajangana at 9 a.m. on Sunday, the seer said.

Raghuram Acharya, Dewan of Pejawar Mutt, and Arvind Hebbar, coordinator, were present.

## **Import duty: cashew processors meet Jaitley**

### *cashew processors meet Jaitley*

A delegation of 20 cashew processors from across the country met Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in New Delhi on Thursday and submitted a memorandum to him, requesting withdrawal of the 9.36 per cent duty imposed on import of raw cashew nuts.

The delegation comprised representatives from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Orissa and Maharashtra. The delegation was accompanied by Union Minister for Law and Justice Sadananda Gowda, Union Minister of State for Transport Pon Radhakrishnan, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, former Union Ministers Oscar Fernandez and Veerappa Moily, former Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa, Kollam MP N.K. Premachandran and Mangalore MP Nalin Kumar Kateel. Kerala was represented by Kerala Cashew Processors and Exporters Association president G. Vasanthakumar. Speaking to reporters, he said cashew processors associations from each State presented separate memorandums, highlighting the adverse impact of the new import duty on the sector. Mr. Vasanthakumar said Mr. Jaitley's response appeared positive.

Earlier, during the meeting with the Finance Minister, Mr. Premachandran told him that of late, money laundering was being resorted to by the so-called north Indian lobby under the guise of raw cashew imports, and said strong steps were needed to curtail the practice. He, however, said that imposing import duty on the commodity as a preventive measure would hit the industry hard.

“Therefore, some other alternative has to be worked out to curtail laundering activity,” Mr. Premachandran said. He also wanted Mr. Jaitley to consider measures for promoting raw cashew production in the country.

In Kerala, the cashew processing industry is almost entirely dependent on raw nut imports.

***Delegation demands withdrawal of 9.36 per cent duty imposed on import of raw cashew nuts***



## **Honey-cum-organic mela from tomorrow**

Bee-keepers and those interested in taking up apiculture can learn more as the city's first Honey and Organic Mela will be conducted at the Kadri Park here for two days from Saturday.

Organised by the Department of Horticulture, Dakshina Kannada, the mela would have 25 stalls exclusively devoted to display and sale of honey and honey products, according to P.I. Sreevidya, Chief Executive Officer, Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat.

Addressing media here on Thursday, she said that the mela would display varieties of honey produced depending on seasons. Honey's quality differed based on the flowering seasons. The mela would also display by-products of honey.

She said that as honey was being used for medicinal purpose, its medicinal values would be highlighted at the mela. The exhibition would be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. The entry will be free. The mela would also have a seminar-cum-training session on Sunday at 10 a.m.

Yogesh H.R., Deputy Director, Department of Horticulture, Dakshina Kannada, said that students of SDM College of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences, Ujire, would prepare different beverages from honey at the mela. There would be sale of different ayurvedic medicinal products made from honey.

Mr. Yogesh said that the Department of AYUSH would put up a stall to highlight the medicinal values of honey. There would be live demonstration of species of honey bees.

A training session on organic farming would be conducted on Sunday at 2 p.m.

## **Two-day seminar on food security in India: ‘Gap between demand for food and food producing resources increasing’**

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Garry Fehr highlighted that the second Green Revolution would not be possible with the attributes of the first Green Revolution.

A two-day seminar on ‘Agriculture and Food Security in India: Challenges and Opportunities’ commenced at Panjab University on Thursday. The seminar is being organised by the Centre of Advanced Study (CAS-II, UGC), Department of Geography, Panjab University.

The students and research scholars of various national and international universities like University of the Fraser Valley, Canada; University of Newcastle, UK; Punjab Agricultural University; Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, Udaipur; JNU, New Delhi; University of Delhi are participating in the conference.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Garry Fehr highlighted that the second Green Revolution would not be possible with the attributes of the first Green Revolution. He said that agricultural technology was the need of the hour. “There is a gap between demand for food and food producing resources and that gap is increasing,” he said.

Christopher Gibbins, consul general, Canadian consulate, Chandigarh, highlighted the common area of research and development in India and Canada in agriculture.

In his presidential address, professor B S Dhillon, Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, referred to the misconceptions related to productivity in Punjab.

Comparing it with the yield in Madhya Pradesh, he proved that the productivity in Punjab was still higher. “A total of 85 per cent of landholdings in India is smaller than 2 hectare. In Punjab, it is 35 per cent. The small size of landholdings have a reverse impact on adopting new

innovative agricultural technologies,” he added. He discussed the scenario of Indian per capita availability of food grains and stressed on strategies for accelerating growth in the agriculture sector.

Earlier, the theme of the seminar was introduced by professor Dhian Kaur, Department of Geography, PU. She said agriculture was a crucial sector and faced problems like economic viability, environmental sustainability and global competitiveness.

The seminar was inaugurated by professor O P Katare, PU director, Research Promotion Cell. The delegates were welcomed by professor Ravinder Kaur, chairperson, Department of Geography. Professor Krishna Mohan, coordinator, CAS-II, Department of Geography, PU, proposed the vote of thanks.

The first plenary session was chaired by professor Swarnjit Mehta. Professor Harjit Singh from JNU spoke on issues of sustainability in agriculture in India. He deliberated on use and misuse of land resource, soil toxicity, and new chemicals entering into the food chain and the consequent health hazards. He highlighted that any course of action in improving the sustainability of agriculture needed to consider the rising aspiration of the increasing population.

“Development cannot be rejected neither can the technology be rejected, but application and adoption of technology needs to take place in an environmental friendly manner,” said Singh.

The second plenary session started with professor Gopal Krishan in chair. Professor B S Ghuman from Department of Public Administration, PU, and Suzanne Speak, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, New Castle, UK, were the speakers.

Speak deliberated on the importance of urban agriculture in contemporary cities and traced how people were getting all their food at the place of inhabitation and how food started moving. She highlighted that urban policy makers must stop thinking of agriculture as a rural activity.

Speaking on the status of food security and role of public policies, Ghuman highlighted that India had done exceedingly well in agriculture production

and yield per hectare. He said that in the post-economic reforms period, the yield per hectare had declined for both wheat and rice.

“Agriculture sector is hence a victim of economic reform. Public and private investment in agriculture has declined. Food production is not an indicator of food security. The per capita availability of food has declined in India. The decline in pulse production has impacted the protein intake in a country of vegetarians. Bihar is the worst sufferer of food insecurity, along with Chhattisgarh,” Ghuman said.

### **Rabi crops feel the heat of water scarcity in Pune**

The water scare in Daund taluka has resulted in only 41.01 hectares of sowing, as compared to the normal area of 277 hectares which goes for rabi sowing.

Water scarcity in the rural parts of Pune is making its presence felt with many areas of the district reporting reduction in rabi crop. Of the 12 tehsils of Pune district, eight have reported below normal sowing, with cereals, coarse grains and vegetable crops feeling the water scarcity the most.

Daund, Mulshi, Haveli, Khed and Indapur are the worst-hit talukas with all of these areas reporting sowing lesser than 50 per cent of their normal areas. The water scare in Daund taluka has resulted in only 41.01 hectares of sowing, as compared to the normal area of 277 hectares which goes for rabi sowing. Talukas of Bhore, Velhe and Junnar have reported around 75 per cent of the normal sowing area, while talukas of Maval, Ambegaon, Purandar and Baramati have reported normal rabi sowing. Only the taluka of Shirur has reported above normal sowing for the present rabi season.

Cereals, coarse grains, vegetables, oil seeds are the major rabi crops in the region. Pune along with Nashik, Jalgaon and Dhule is one of the important onion-producing districts in the state, which goes to feed the markets between the months of April and September. While Ambegaon has reported some reduction in its onion areas, Junnar has seen a slight increase. Post the price rise in pulses, many areas in the district have seen a rise in pulse-growing area with the agriculture department expecting a bumper crop to hit the market in the days to come.

Along with Pune city, the four dams of Khadakwasla, Temghar, Varasgaon and Panshet supply water for irrigation to the district. Mostly the district sees release of water for rabi from December post the monsoon. This year, the water released from the dam systems have been less due to the failure of the monsoon. With a long and dry summer staring, farmers are now speaking about the way the rabi crop has failed too.

Rajendra Patil, a farmer from Daund, said he had lost his kharif crop of cereals due to less rains. "I am a marginal farmer so sugarcane is not very lucrative for me. With the rabi crop also failing, I do not know how I will make the ends meet," he said.

**hindustantimes**

**Rain, hail and snow: Stormy weekend may spoil crops, farmers worried**



(Representative image) A spell of rain, hail and snow will bring bad and hazardous weather to many states. (Pardeep Pandit/HT Photo)

One swallow doesn't a summer make. A spell of rain, hail and snow will bring bad and hazardous weather to many states, prompting worries that it could spoil harvests, clog highways and trigger landslides.

An intense "western disturbance", or a squally weather pattern, that set off in Iran is headed toward India and will take hold from Friday onwards.

The stormy weather could ruin ripening winter crops, such as wheat, again this year. Most northwest states will get rain on March 11-13. Predictions that hailstorms could hit farms in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi,

Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have prompted the government to issue a farm alert.

Daytime temperatures, which have been climbing steadily over many northern cities, will likely fall by 34°C between March 12-14 and then rise again, an official said.

The weather could be severe enough in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, prompting a Met-office hazard warning. Heavy rains could hit pockets in these three states. “Landslides are a potential hazard these states should watch out,” a forecast official said, requesting anonymity. Driving in uphill regions could be risky too, he said.

A separate advisory from the India Meteorological Department called for immediate harvest operations, where possible. Last year, similar weather between February 28 and March 2, March 7-8 and March 14-16 flattened crops in about 10 million hectares in about 150 districts, or about a quarter of the country.

The wet and windy conditions are also likely in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha, apart from Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal in the east.

Wheat, the main winter crop, is ready for harvest in most states. A series of weather shocks has already shrunk agricultural output and incomes, triggering a rural distress. Two-thirds of Indians depend on a farm-based living.

An advisory issued to farmers asked them to “maintain proper drainage channels” and “postpone irrigation”, apart from reaping mature crops immediately. Orchards in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir should use hail nets to protect from heavy snowballs, the advisory said.

Some of the havoc could occur in areas witnessing an acute farm crisis, including Maharashtra’s Vidarbha and Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh.

## **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

### **Why should we not revoke Bollgard II patent, Centre asks Mahyco Monsanto**



A file photo of farmer showing Bt cotton bolls destroyed by pink bollworm, in a field at Kadagamdoddi village near Raichur, Karnataka

Govt acts on a letter from farmers' union on bollworm developing resistance to technology

Even as it announced a nation-wide uniform price for cottonseed for the upcoming kharif season, the Union government has asked Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (India) Limited why it should not revoke the patent it granted for the Bollgard II technology.



The Department of Industry Policy and Promotion (DIPP) has served a show cause notice to the firm, which sub-licences the transgenic technology to the cottonseed companies in the country.

### **Show cause notice**

The firm, a joint venture between Mahyco and Monsanto, received the licence from Monsanto to sell the technology under bilateral agreements to the seed firms.

The show-cause notice comes in the wake of criticism from the farmers' unions, non-governmental organisations and seed companies that the pink bollworm had developed resistance to the technology and that the technology was ineffective in addressing the challenge.

They contend that if it is not effective to address the problem there is no need to pay royalty.

The department was acting on a letter from the Union Ministry of Agriculture dated March 3.

“The Minister has received a letter from Bharatiya Janata Party Kisan Morcha. They requested the Minister to stop collection of royalty on Bollgard II technology patent and revoke the patent as it lost efficacy to control pink bollworm,” the letter said.

Citing reports of Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR) and Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage, the letter said that the resistance of the pest to BGII appeared to be fast accelerating.

“We have heard reports that the pest developed resistance in Saurashtra and adjoining areas of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh,” it said.

### **MMB response**

Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (India) Limited has acknowledged the receipt of the notice from DIPP, which works under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It, however, is yet to respond to the notice.

“We will respond to the same within the stipulated deadline,” an MMB spokesperson told BusinessLine in an e-mailed response.

“This show-cause notice comes against the backdrop of a bilateral commercial dispute where few licensees refused to honour their commitments to pay MMB over ₹450 crore after collecting these amounts from the cotton farmers in Kharif 2015,” he pointed out.

“MMB remains hopeful that with its intent to promote Make in India and commitment to improve ease of doing business, the government will encourage and continue to protect innovation, uphold fair business practices and provide predictability, which can benefit Indian farmers through access to relevant solutions,” he said.

### **Buyers’ resistance pounds pepper**

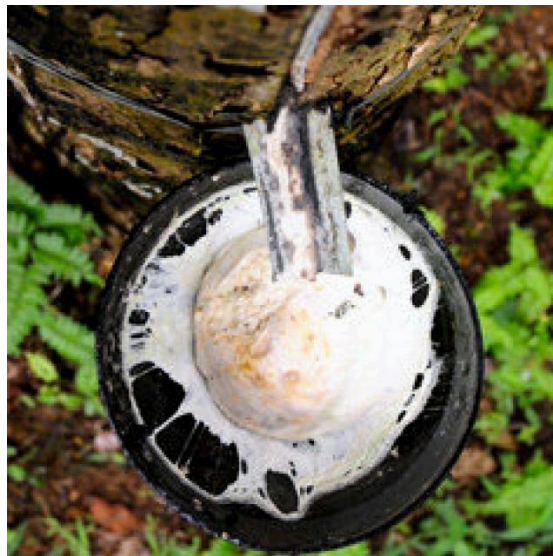


Spot pepper slipped on some selling pressure and buyers’ resistance. Re-processors were selling on reports that arrival of Karnataka pepper would pick up in the coming days as the harvesting has started in several areas such as Sakleshpur, Chikmagaluru. On the spot, 27 tonnes of pepper were traded. Pepper from the Wayanad district and the plains were traded at ₹635 a kg while that from the High Ranges were at ₹640. Rajkumari pepper was traded at ₹645. Spot prices dropped by ₹300 a quintal to ₹62,200 (ungarbled) and ₹65,200 (garbled). March contract remained unchanged at ₹64,500 on the IPSTA platform. Export prices were at \$9,875 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$10,125 for the US.

## Imported oils gain on global cues

Despite bearish futures, imported palmolein and soya oil rose by ₹5 each on the BCE tracking a 56.5 per cent jump in Malaysian palm oil exports and higher domestic demand. Local refineries increased the rates for soya oil by ₹2-4. Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹550, super palmolein ₹569, soyabean refined oil ₹615. Ruchi's rates: palmolein ₹548, soyabean refined oil ₹610 and sunflower refined oil ₹745. Allana traded palmolein for ₹553, soya refined oil ₹625, sunflower refined ₹760. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 930 (930), soya ref. 610 (605), sunflower exp. ref. 675 (675), sunflower ref. 745 (745), rapeseed ref. 750 (765), rapeseed exp. ref. 720 (735), cottonseed ref. 605 (604) and palmolein 543 (538).

## Spot rubber rules steady



Spot rubber prices were steady on Thursday. RSS 4 was quoted unchanged at ₹107 a kg by traders and the Rubber Board. The grade finished flat at ₹104, according to dealers. March futures improved to ₹105.48 (₹105.07), April to ₹108.20 (₹108.12) and May to ₹110.60 (₹110.10) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) firmed up to ₹98.55 (₹98.12) at Bangkok. March futures closed ¥156.6 (₹92.44) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange. Spot rubber rates (₹/kg): RSS-4: 107 (107); RSS-5: 105 (105); Ungraded: 100 (100); ISNR 20: 103(103) and Latex (60% drc): 78.50 (78.50).

## **Thunderstorms erupting over N-W India in sequel to West Asia**

The violent weather unfolding over North-West and East India would be a sequel to the one that has pulverised the UAE and parts of the West Asia over the past few days.

It is the same East-moving weather system (called here by the moniker of a western disturbance) that is causing a line-up of thundershowers, wind gusts, thunder, lighting and hail.

The system takes birth periodically around the Mediterranean region and travels South-West Asia and the West Asia before entering Afghanistan and Pakistan and India.

### **Piping in moisture**

By the time it reaches India, it would have lost much of its vigour but the odd one becomes large enough to pipe in moisture from the Arabian Sea and flare up just before pushing its way in.

The incumbent is forecast to do exactly this since it has already given birth to an offspring cyclonic circulation over Pakistan. This circulation will climb up slightly to North-North-East, strengthen in the process, and power its way into Punjab and adjoining West and North Rajasthan by Saturday.

### **Rain, thundershowers**

This would trigger heavy rain or thundershowers over Punjab, parts of north Rajasthan and north-west Haryana on Saturday and Sunday.

The India Met Department said in an update on Thursday that thundershowers are lashing parts of Jammu and Kashmir even as the western disturbance waited outside the international border.

Heavy rain/thundershowers will pound the southern flanks of Afghanistan and Pakistan as the offspring circulation draws in warm and moist air from the sea.

This moisture will get pushed up to cool and condense and interact with the air over heated-up land to set up virulent thunderstorms.

Meanwhile, there is a pre-existing cyclonic circulation over east Madhya Pradesh, and adjoining Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh.

### **To relay to east**

This will act in tandem with the developing weather over North-West India and help relay the odd thunderstorm into East India and even parts of the peninsula.

The Met has forecast heavy rain or snow variously over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi over the next two or three days. Thunderstorm/thunder squall is being forecast for almost the entire region including Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, west Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh during this period.

The US Centre for Climate Prediction said that fresh heavy rain may spurt out over Jammu and Kashmir, and adjoining Punjab and Himachal Pradesh from March 16 onwards.

### **Centre to launch insurance scheme for plantation sector**

The Centre is in the process of launching an insurance scheme for plantation sector, including rubber which would cover price fluctuations among other perils, with premiums shared by Union and state governments and other beneficiaries, Rajani Ranjan Rashmi, Additional Secretary, Commerce Ministry has said.

He was delivering the inaugural address at the India Rubber Meet 2016 in Goa, the yearly event organised by the Rubber Board in partnership with stakeholder associations in rubber and related sectors.

It is the responsibility of the Government to provide a conducive environment to enable the rubber industry to realise its full potential, achieve global excellence, maximise contribution to the domestic economy and fulfil its obligations to the different sections of society. Such supportive measures may consist of fiscal concessions, developmental assistance and regulatory simplification, he said.

The primary aim is to make things here and sell them everywhere underlying the "Make in India" vision of the Prime Minister. The Government is keen in

the overall development of the rubber industry value chain starting from rubber growers to consumers of end products, he added.

A. Jayathilak, Chairman, Rubber Board pointed out that the impact of low prices would be more severely felt in natural rubber production sector, dominated by small and marginal growers. The low prices will have a critical bearing on planting and replanting decisions and future availability of rubber. Providing safety nets for small-holders to protect them against price and other risks, beneath the prevailing socio-economic and political environment, is a critical task which has to be deliberated seriously, he said.

The meet is a major initiative of the Indian rubber industry to organise a regular forum for interaction, networking and exchange of information. The theme of IRM 2016 is Rubber Scenario: What lies ahead?

Vinod Simon, Chairman, Rubber Skill Development Council proposed vote of thanks.

### **Honey festival in Mangaluru from March 12**

The Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat, in association with the Karnataka Horticulture Department, will conduct a 'honey festival' in Mangaluru on March 12 and 13.

Addressing presspersons in Mangaluru on Thursday, PI Sreevidya, Chief Executive Officer of the zilla panchayat, said horticulture crops are the mainstay of the district and the festival is aimed at encouraging apiculture among farmers in the district.

Apart from increasing the productivity of horticulture crops, apiculture also provides a source of income to farmers, she said.

Yogish HR, Deputy Director of the Karnataka Horticulture Department, said bee colonies of various species and materials required for bee-keeping would be on display at the festival.

The Dakshina Kannada Bee-Keepers' Cooperative Society will make arrangements for the sale of honey at the festival. The organisers will also conduct a bee-keeping training programme as part of the honey festival on March 13, he said.

## Mustard oil rules stable



Mustard oil ruled firm on subdued buying as arrival of mustard seeds across the country rose to 5 lakh bags. On Thursday, mustard oil in Indore mandis quoted at ₹690, while it ruled at ₹680 in Neemuch and ₹695 in Morena. In Rajasthan mandis , pressure of increased arrival and subdued buying kept mustard oil prices steady with its prices both in Kota and Ganga Nagar being quoted at ₹695 each . Similarly in Jaipur, it quoted at ₹710. In Gujarat mustard oil quoted at ₹690. Mustard seeds and raida traded low on slack buying and rise in arrival of new crop with mustard seeds prices being quoted at ₹3,600-3,700, while raida ruled at ₹3,700. Plant deliveries of mustard seeds for Jaipur line quoted at ₹4,150-55. Arrival of new mustard seeds in the country rose to 5 lakh bags.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

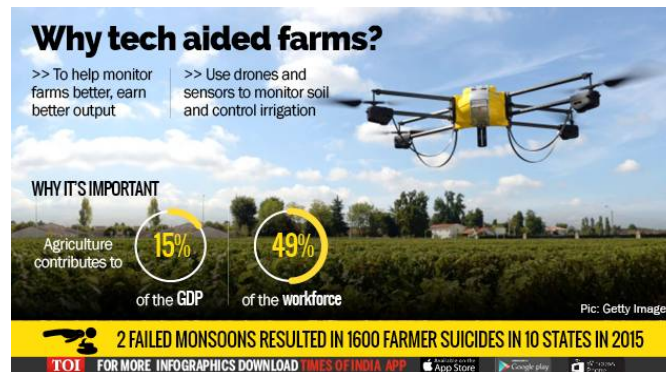
### **Drought-hit farmers get help from startups**

CHENNAI: Two consecutive failed monsoons made almost 40% of India receive less than normal rains in 2015, forcing more than seven states to declare drought. Erratic rains have left crops parched, jeopardizing India's nearly \$370 billion agricultural sector and thousands of jobs.

Helping farmers combat the problem, a clutch of startups have chosen to shun the stereotype entrepreneurial ventures in e-commerce or software to venture into precision farming (site specific crop management and technology). Karnataka-based Flybird uses sensors in the soil to detect moisture content and control irrigation. With over 45 installations in villages

of Karnataka for crops such as capsicum and a variety of flowers, the setup helps the farmers optimise irrigation.

"The method also proves economical for the farmer in the long run, although the cost of one sensor is Rs 6,000, as it is imported. We are working on making indigenous low-cost sensors," said K S Satish, co-founder, Flybird Agri Innovations. The startup currently makes Rs 22 to Rs 25 lakhs a year and projects a turnover of Rs 1.7 crore the next year, as more farmers from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu would join in.



NubeSol, which gauges soil quality based on various parameters and gives out fertility maps, also monitors soil moisture through remote sensing. Catering exclusively to sugarcane crops, the sensor sends out warnings when the soil moisture falls below the threshold level. "The sensor covers few acres of land, which can be used by more than one farmer. There are currently over 7,000 farmers from Belagavi and Bagalkot whom we cater to," said Suraj Dixit, co-founder, NubeSol. With more farmers adapting such techniques, the market for irrigation controllers would reach Rs 1 crore by 2016-17, according to data from National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM).

While two consecutive failed monsoons have propelled the need for better irrigation, shortage has necessitated automation of irrigation.

"Cash crops stand more to benefit from these innovations," said Chakravarty A B, senior investment manager, Villigro, an incubator for agro based startups. The Chennai-based Sree Sai Aerotech Innovations, run by father and son duo Sai Pattabiram and Venkatesh Sai manufactures drones and drone controllers. They have partnered with a company that has over 4,000 weather stations across the country to detect health of the crop using drones



and in-house software for aerial photos. "This is useful when the farmer needs to claim insurance for crop failure," said Sai. "Sometimes data provided by the weather station is inaccurate and the farmer loses out on insurance despite having a failed crop. These photos provide accurate data," he added.

The project was conducted in the districts of Osmanabad and Latur in Maharashtra. The startup has also piloted a project involving soil moisture sensors on a 4 acre land.

Also using drones to detect water logging is Agtroopers, which also uses IOT devices to schedule irrigation. "The systems help reduce water loss and also suggest levelling the land to prevent water logging and save water. Through an app UPAJJ, the farmers can schedule the irrigation. If this is implemented, the country would be able to save several kilolitres of water," said Taranjeet Singh, co-founder. The startup has piloted a project with farmers in two districts of Punjab and is working with Punjab Agricultural University.

### **Oppn seeks loan waiver for drought-hit farmers**

**Mumbai:** The Opposition in both houses of the legislature accused the government of being apathetic to the condition of drought-affected farmers and demanded a complete loan waiver.

The discussions will continue on Friday and the government will reply on Monday.

Opposition leader in the legislative assembly Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil who initiated the debate said if the government wants to stop farmer suicides, it should announce a loan waiver.

"In the last one year 3,228 farmers have committed suicide and the spate is still continuing. Farmers are ending their lives because they are unable to repay a debt of some thousand rupees," said Vikhe Patil.

NCP leader Ajit Pawar said that the government has failed miserably in terms of planning to control the drought situation.

"The government says that the bureaucracy doesn't listen to them, then the government should do something to show them their place," said Pawar.

Leader of the Opposition in the legislative council Dhananjay Munde said not a single guardian minister in worst affected Marathwada region had held a meeting on the water crisis in the last 8 months. "In Osmanabad there are over 7 lakh animals but the fodder camps have a capacity for only 82,000 animals," Munde said.

He said that the government had revealed its insensitivity through the comment of BJP MP Gopal Shetty who said that farmer suicides had become a fashion.

Supporting his demand for loan waiver, Munde said, "The government has given money to traders on Local Body Tax, it has waived tolls and provided money to money-lenders. Yet it is not ready to help farmers.

### **Untimely rain hits crops on 8,164 hectares in dist**

SHIK: The unseasonal rains and hailstorm severely affected the standing crop and ready-to-harvest orchards on 8,164.88 hectares across the district between February 29 and March 4, with Satana tehsil the worst affected.

The largest damage was reported of the onion crops on 4,469.05 hectares, followed by wheat on 1,281.53 hectares and grapes on 1,191.20 hectares. Vegetables and gram have been affected on 579.50 hectares and 374.35 hectares, respectively. Pomegranates have been damaged on 204.10 hectares, survey reports by the state agriculture department shows.

Sources from agriculture department said, "The unseasonal rains and hail hit the district between February 29 and March 4. A total of 8,164.88 hectares were damaged in 15 tehsils of the district. Around 12,000 farmers from 160 villages in 15 tehsils have been affected due to unseasonal rains."

"Around 83% of total crop have been damaged in five tehsils, including 4,503.10 hectares in Satana, 734.15 hectares in Niphad, 604.40 hectares in Nashik, 532 hectares in Igatpuri and 430 hectares in Malegaon," said an official.

He added, "The remaining 1,361.23 hectares have been affected in the remaining 10 tehsils- Nandgaon, Kalwan, Deola, Dindori, Surgana, Trimbakeshwar, Peth, Sinnar, Yeola and Chandvad."

The late kharif season is likely to end by March-end. Of the total 51,000 hectares under plantation of late kharif, around 95% has been harvested so far, while the remaining is expected to be harvested by March-end. In addition, the areas under plantation of summer crop, which is on 60,000 hectares, has already started arriving in the APMCs. Onion crops on 4,469.05 hectares have been damaged due to unseasonal rains and hails.

Gavind Pagar, district president, Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana said, "Last year, the unseasonal rains and hails badly hit the ready-to-harvest grapes, pomegranate and onions in the district. Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had immediately visited Nashik to review crop losses and had assured relief to farmers, but it remained a mere assurance."

He added, "Around 53 villages from Kalwan tehsil are yet to get compensation for the losses they incurred last year. The government needs to support farmers honestly."

The total areas under wheat crop are estimated at 52,000 hectares across the district. Of which, 1,281.53 hectares have been damaged due to unseasonal rains.

Of 70,000 hectares of vineyards in the district, 1,191.20 hectares of vineyards have been affected in the district. Of total 32,000 hectares of pomegranates, 204.10 hectares have been affected due to unseasonal rains and hails. The total areas under cultivation of gram is estimated at 39,000 hectares, of which, 374.35 hectares of gram have been affected in the district.

# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

## Global wheat glut may be washed away by rain in India



The global wheat glut that's kept prices trapped in a bear market is showing signs of easing after poor weather reduced harvest expectations in India and Australia.

The global wheat glut that's kept prices trapped in a bear market is showing signs of easing after poor weather reduced harvest expectations in India and Australia.

World inventories will be 237.6 million metric tonnes, down from 238.9 million tonnes estimated in February, the US Department of Agriculture said Wednesday in Washington. The crop in India, the world's biggest grower after China, will be 86.53 million tonnes, down from last month's forecast of 88.94 million, the agency said. Wheat futures rose after the report.

While the figures show some relief from overwhelming supplies, the world is still saddled with large stockpiles.

Wheat prices in Chicago are heading for a third straight quarterly slump, the longest skid since 2013.

American farmers, coping with a stronger dollar, are having an even harder time finding buyers for their relatively expensive supplies.

Ballooning inventories have pushed world food costs lower as declines in commodities help keep a lid on inflation.

**Government may provide market-linked insurance for plantation crops like tea and coffee**



The revenue insurance scheme for plantation crops, an official said, will be launched once the operational parameters are finalised by the government.

NEW DELHI: Government is likely to initiate a market-linked insurance scheme for plantation crops such as tea, coffee, tobacco and rubber to help growers tide over the impact of price and yield fluctuations.

The revenue insurance scheme for plantation crops, an official said, will be launched once the operational parameters are finalised by the government.

It would be implemented on a pilot basis in 7 districts and will provide insurance cover against fluctuation in prices and yield, the official added.

The scheme will be funded from the price stabilisation fund for plantation crops.

The price of these crops are sensitive to developments in the international markets. Besides, natural calamities too impact the productivity of these crops.

According to a Commerce and Industry Ministry report, these crops are grown in about 16 lakh hectares and they provide direct employment to about 17.10 lakh workers.

Though the plantation crops occupy only about 1 per cent of the total cropped area, they generate about 15 per cent of the total agricultural export earnings.

The report has also stated that the growers of plantation commodities are vulnerable to large risks in terms of production caused by adverse climatic conditions, as also to price risks caused by demand and supply situations and changes in domestic and international prices.

"The plantation crops are traded in an extremely competitive international market, which causes enhanced vulnerability in times of severe price drop. Cartelisation and indirect subsidies in international markets further increase price risks," it had said.

On the other hand, India needs to remain a credible supplier in the global market for which price stability is an essential consideration.

India is the largest producer and consumer of black tea in the world. It is the sixth largest producer of coffee and 4th in natural rubber production. The country is among the largest producers and exporters of tobacco in the world.

### **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 5.54 % 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.

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.