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THE HINDU

Farm Mechanisation Day

Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJ TSAU) organised Farm Mechanisation Day where Minister for Agriculture Pocharam Srinivas Reddy was chief guest.

Mr. Reddy said that the government is keen to bring reforms and strengthen the agriculture extension system in the State. He said One Assistant Director (AD) would be appointed for each about 100 rural Assembly constituencies in the State and an agriculture officer (AO) for each mandal, and one agriculture extension officer (AEO) for 5,000 acres each.

Campus Connect

OPPORTUNITIES IN BANKING SECTOR

A programme on “Opportunities in the banking sector” was organised by the Placement Cell of Agricultural College and Research Institute (ACRI), Killikulam, Tuticorin district, on March 17. L.S. Raman, former General Manager, UCO Bank, spoke on the need for fine-tuning, improving and utilising available human resources to the maximum level. He also explained how public sector banking would prove to be a challenging and secure career opportunity for agricultural graduates. V. Subramanian, Dean, ACRI, delivered the presidential address.

J. Pushpa, Head, Department of Social Sciences, welcomed the gathering and P. Sivakumar, Associate Placement Officer, proposed a vote of thanks.

CAMPUS PLACEMENT

A total of 28 students got placement orders in a pooled campus placement drive organised on the Noorul Islam University campus on March 18.

The students were given appointment as web researchers by a leading data services company in Chennai.

The Chancellor of the University A.P. Majith Khan gave away the placement orders.

Superintendent of Police G. Dharmarajan declared open the annual sports meet 2016 at the university ground recently.

GRADUATION DAY

The fourth graduation day of St. John's College of Arts and Science was held on Saturday.

V. Baskar, Vice Chancellor, MSU, was the chief guest and distributed certificates. Fr. A. Selva Raj presided.

Secretary of the college Fr. Sam F. Mathew welcomed the gathering. R. Jeba Malar, Principal, proposed a vote of thanks.

Cotton auctioned for Rs. 1.20 crore

Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 1.20 crore at the Agricultural Producers Cooperative Society at Konganapuram near here on Saturday.

DCH cotton

While DCH cotton variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,600 and Rs. 6,460 per bag; the surabhi variety fetched a price between Rs. 4,400 and Rs. 4,920.

More than 7,000 cotton bags were auctioned for Rs. 1.20 crore, Agricultural Producers Cooperative Society sources.

'Create awareness among farmers about their rights'

S.A. Patil, former director of the Indian Agriculture Research Institute, has said that the present agrarian crisis can be overcome by creating awareness among farmers about their rights through social engineering and ensuring that those in need of finance get money from banks and cooperative institutions.

He was here on Sunday to inaugurate a two-day seminar sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research on 'Agricultural finance in India: trends, issues and challenges'.

It was organised by the Department of Studies and Research in Commerce in Gulbarga University.



Agriculture scientist S.A. Patil delivering a talk at Gulbarga University in Kalaburagi on Sunday. —Photo: Arun Kulkarni

Dr. Patil, who is also a former chairman of the Karnataka Krishi Mission, said that access to agriculture finance continued to be a major challenge for farmers and cooperative institutions, which were set up to bring agricultural finance next to the farmers' doorsteps, had themselves become exploiters. Most of the cooperative societies are dominated by the rich and the affluent and the family members of those who get elected as board of directors. Most of the loans are swallowed by them. The genuine farmer requiring financial assistance is left in the lurch," he said.

Target

Dr. Patil said that the target of extending Rs. 9 lakh crore as farm loans was too little. "Most of this amount does not reach the genuine farmers and the government should adopt a flexible approach in extending crop loans by banks by giving them a freehand to extend loans for non farm and off farm business activities. The allocation of Rs. 35,989 crore for agriculture is also less compared to the enormity of the agrarian crisis."

Reasons

Dr. Patil said that reasons such as the diminishing soil fertility leading to a fall in production levels; repeating natural calamities; uncertainty of rainfall;

small and fragmented land holdings; shortage of good quality seeds and lack of mechanisation; and lack of agriculture credit were responsible for the present crisis. “Farmers are caught in a ‘chakravayuha’ from which they are unable to get out.”

Social engineering

Non-agriculture sectors such as commerce and business should step in to protect farmers and take up social engineering in the farm sector to create awareness about farmers’ rights. Farmers should take up rotation of crops to improve soil fertility, he added.

Glut in market

Vice-Chancellor of Gulbarga University S.R. Niranjana said that the agriculture plan should be designed and implemented to match the demand and supply of agriculture produce and avert their glut in the market.

He also wanted universities to be roped in to take up research in agriculture and allied activities.

Ensure that farmers in need of finance get money from banks and coop.s, says expert

Onion cultivation getting popular



U. Jaikumar, Head, Agricultural Research Station, Mannuthy, at an onion field. Jalaja Menon, research assistant, (right) is seen.

Onion cultivation is picking up momentum in the plains of the State, thanks to the sustained efforts of Thrissur Krishi Vigyan Kendra.

The research findings of Jalaja Menon in identifying varieties suitable for the soil and climatic conditions in the State have given the right impetus for the new crop culture.

Now onion cultivation is popular in as many as eight districts of the State and sixteen blocks in Thrissur district. People are growing onion in fields, backyards and even terraces.

Onion farming has been accepted by farmers in Palakkad, Thrissur, Wayanad, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Thiruvananthapuram districts.

“The seedlings have to be planted in October and March will be the harvesting time. Porus soil with sufficient irrigation facility is the best. Onion can also be grown in grow bags,” says Dr. Jalaja.

Even as the farmers who embraced onion farming are enjoying their harvest, Dr. Jalaja is exploring further possibilities in the field.

The harvesting in her experimental plot was of a different kind, as it was not of one variety but of 19 varieties grown for a comparative study of their productivity. The harvesting was inaugurated by U. Jaikumar, Professor & Head, Agricultural Research Station, Mannuthy, recently.

KAU to set out policy on organic farming

The Kerala Agriculture University (KAU) will formulate a comprehensive policy and package of practices for organic farming.

Vice Chancellor P Rajendran, addressing the General Council meeting recently, shared the concern of the house about the lack of clear guidance for organic farming.

The meeting pointed out the mismatch between moves to make Kerala a fully organic State and the non-existence of a scientific package of organic practices.

Jiju P. Alex of the KAU pointed out that though a comprehensive organic farming package is yet to be developed, everyone is pushing the agenda resulting in application of unscientific methods.

The Vice-Chancellor pointed out that an ad hoc organic farming package is existing and assured the house that a comprehensive package of practices will be developed with the involvement of all concerned.

Makeover for mushroom farming



The success of an experiment in cultivating mushrooms using sunlight, temperature and humidity controlled space on a terrace in Choornikkara village looks set to change the way mushroom production has been carried out so far. “Nobody takes up mushroom cultivation on terraces considering the harsh conditions. However, we have succeeded using a specially prepared space for the purpose,” said an Agricultural officer involved in the project, supported by the State Horticulture Mission.

“T.A. Shamsudeen and his wife Noorjahan in Choornikkara, who carried out the project with the guidance of the officials of the Department of Agriculture, are happy with the results,” said the officer, pointing out that the plan now was to spread the message and to encourage people to take up mushroom cultivation at the domestic level. Oyster mushrooms have been a great success with several farmers engaged in production and sales. “However, milky mushrooms are harder and have a longer shelf life,” he said.

The official said he expected the experiment to be replicated in individual homes. The experiment in Choornikkara was carried out using 200 beds specially prepared for the purpose. It would now be possible to provide units

of 25 beds each to individual homes so that each household would be able to produce mushrooms for their use, said the official. “It could bring about a major change in the way mushrooms are cultivated.” The experiment was done in space of 240 sq. ft. covered by UB stabilised sheets and flex sheets, keeping excess sunlight out.

Fisheries Dept to step up vigil along Goa coast

The department will work with the coastal police to ensure that the use of LED lights and Fish-Light Attractors are banned up to 12 nautical miles

The State Fisheries Department will conduct night patrolling along the Goa coast with the help of coastal police to ensure that the use of Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights and Fish-Light Attractors (FLAs) are banned in the State, up to 12 nautical miles.

The issue was raised in the State Legislative Assembly during the brief budget session, which ended last week, by Independent MLA Vijai Sardesai, saying the use of these methods by fishermen had led to a fear of fish famine in the State.

“Goa was once looked upon as an exporter of fish, but it is slowly becoming an importer of fish. With FLAs and LED use, the situation will worsen, leading to fish famine,” he warned.

Pointing out that the Kerala government had banned the use of LEDs on trawlers, Mr Sardesai demanded that the Goa government too introduce a similar law.

Minister for Fisheries Avertano Furtado reiterated his assurance in the State Assembly and told *The Hindu* that his department, together with the coastal police, would conduct night patrolling along the Goa coast to keep a strong vigil on such illegal activities. Fishermen in Goa fear that the fishing industry will shut down if boats are not prevented from using FLAs and LED.

Traditional fishermen and small boat owners say that the fishing industry will die out completely within two years if purse seine fishing boats are allowed to use LED lights.

Goa Ramponkarancho Ekvott (GRE), the body representing traditional fishermen, has also been opposing these methods of fishing, saying they would prove to be dangerous as the fish breed will reduce.

In fact, soon, traditional fishermen plan to petition the Centre to intervene and demand a ban on such methods of fishing across the country as not just Goan fishermen but others along the west coast of India also indulge in LED light fishing method, said a spokesperson of GRE, which is an affiliate of National Fishworkers' Forum.

The fishermen want the State government to undertake a study of this method by engaging agencies, including the National Institute of Oceanography and Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Goa has over 1,000 trawlers, of which around 300 are purse seine fishing boats. Of these purse seine boats, currently, about 60 boats have installed LED lights for fishing, said sources in the State Fisheries.

Goa was once looked upon as an exporter of fish, but it is slowly becoming an importer of fish

Vijai Sardesai

MLA

Tamarind price shoots up due to poor arrival

Farmers demand cold storage unit

The price of tamarind has registered an upward trend for the last one week in Omalur region due to the poor arrival from the surrounding villages.

The Eastern Ghats in Omalur block accounted for a large number of tamarind trees. Tamarind is one of the major crops in the nearby Yercaud hills, Kancheri, Kollimalai hills, Arunoothumalai, Manjavadi and Attur. The hilly areas always remained wet, leading to good tamarind production throughout the year. However, the repeated failure of monsoon led to drought on the hills too, affecting the tamarind production to a big extent.

Moreover, the heavy winds during the flowering season also affected the crop. Due to this, the farmers could manage only 60 per cent of the normal crop this season.



A farmer drying the tamarind fruits in Kottamettupatti village near Omalur in Salem district.— Photo: E. Lakshmi Narayanan

The residents of Kottamettupatti area near Omalur are involved in harvesting the tamarind. They visit various parts of the district and get the tamarind trees on lease. They collect the tamarind fruits, dry them before removing the shells. Later, they separate the fruits based on the quality and again dry it under moderate sun.

They later pack it and bring it to the market. The price of tamarind remains between Rs. 60 and Rs. 110 per kg. The same is being sold in the open markets at a price ranging between Rs. 90 and Rs. 140.

Due to drop in the arrival in the open markets, the price has registered an upward trend, say the local traders. This will affect the revenue earned by the farmers to a big extent, they say.

The local people have no storage facility to keep the fruits after harvesting, due to which they have to market the same without any delay. This is one of the reasons for the farmers suffering loss. The storage facility will enable them to stock the fruits and market the same when there is good demand.

The farmers and the people of Omalur villages demand the government to come forward to create storage facility and also set up a procurement centre so that the government itself could procure the stock directly from the farmers at reasonable price.

Cotton farmers demand hike in MSP

“Can’t get good price due to rising cost of farm inputs”

The dwindling market price of cotton has raised concerns among farmers growing the cash crop.

Two years ago cotton fetched a price of Rs. 5,500 to Rs. 6,000 per quintal, but now the price has come down to Rs. 3,300 to Rs. 4,000 for the same quantity, according to K. Navaneethan, a cotton farmer and president of Southern Dryland Farmers’ Association, Kovilpatti.

Since Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) did not give priority to procuring cotton in Tamil Nadu, especially in Kovilpatti, the farmers who raised cotton could not market their produce profitably.

Most of the farmers could not sell the produce at the minimum support price of Rs. 4,100 per quintal declared by the government. Hence, the minimum support price for cotton should be increased to Rs. 5,000 per quintal to support the livelihood of the cotton growers, he told *The Hindu* on Sunday. Since Kovilpatti block was blessed with black soil, cotton grew well in the region even with less amount of rainwater.

Now, the farmers also faced the problem of shortage of labour, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which provided employment to a large number of rural people.

With rising cost of farm inputs, production and labour, the cotton farmers could not get the price they needed for their produce.

A daily wage labourer, who plucked an average of 10 kg of cotton, was paid Rs. 200 for six-hour work, he said.

Mr. Navaneethan said that since most of the cotton farmers could not withstand the brunt of market slowdown, they switched over to chilli, which yielded a price of Rs. 13,000 per quintal.

Nowadays, Kovilpatti, which was known as a major producer of cotton in those days, had lost its ground.

Earlier, Kovilpatti cotton had gained international reputation, and cotton bales were exported to other countries from Thoothukudi sea port. Several ginning factories and spinning mills were established by the British in the undivided Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram districts.

A ginning factory established by the father of Tamil poet C. Subramania Bharathi was still in existence at Ettayapuram, he added.

High and quality yield of ‘nendran’ banana keeps farmers happy



Harvest of nendran banana has been brisk at Tiruvalarcholai near Tiruchi.—
Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

High and quality yield in ‘nendran’ variety of banana has come as a blessing for farmers in the district, who have been vying with one another in ensuring assured market to Kerala.

Timely and adequate rain, free from gale and absence of pest attack had all gone in favour of the ‘nendran’ banana this season, according to farmers.

The price per bunch has shot up by at least 10 per cent this month over the last month’s returns, say the farmers.

The district has about 1,000 acres of area under ‘nendran’ with a harvest of 1,000 bunches an acre.

“The price has been fluctuating from time to time depending upon the demand in Kerala where the fruit is readily converted into value-added products in the form of chips and powder,” say the farmers.

Horticulture Department sources say the crop is being raised on well-drained area with fertile soil and Manikandam block had a majority of area under cultivation.

Although other varieties are being raised in Musiri, Thottiyam and Lalgudi blocks, it is Manigandam block where the fields are blessed with adequate drainage. The duration of the variety is about one year. Although ‘poovan’ and other banana varieties could be raised as a ratoon crop, ‘nendran’ could not be raised on this pattern. Hence, many farmers skipped cultivating ‘nendran’ in the district.

In Kolar, no tomato will go waste

Bureaucrat comes up with idea to convert it into fodder



Kolar Deputy Commissioner K.V. Trilokchandra has conceived an idea of converting tomato into animal fodder.— File Photo

A meaningful and constructive solution for managing tomato waste has been found. Kolar Deputy Commissioner K.V. Trilokchandra has conceived an idea of converting tomato into animal fodder. He has submitted a plan to the State government, which has given the green signal for setting up a plant at the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) yard in Kolar.

Mr. Trilokchandra got the idea after seeing a huge quantity of the vegetable being abandoned at the yard, one of the largest tomato marketing yards in

Asia. On an average, transactions involving 150-200 tonnes take place every day during lean season. About 15 tonnes are wasted during loading and unloading. At the same time, farmers dump huge quantities of tomatoes on the roadside when there is a glut. Now, this will be fed into the plant that will turn it into a lycopene-rich meal for poultry, cattle, pig, and fish. The plant is coming up on a 5,000 sq. ft. site at a cost of Rs. 1 crore and expected to produce around 20 tonnes of fodder every month, Mr. Trilokchandra said told *The Hindu* . The plant would be the first of its kind in the country, he said and added that the State government will provide money under the Challenge Fund, which is meant to encourage innovative projects.

The method

Lycopene is a member of the carotenoid family, which gives the red colour to tomatoes. It would be the main ingredient to produce the feed.

The manufacture of fodder from tomato involves the following steps: Crushing waste through a roller, expeller and vibrator; dewatering of solid residue using a water extractor (centrifuge); cooking of solid residue using microwave reactor and dehydration of the cooked solid residue using alcohol in a microwave reactor.

Crisis-ridden cashew industry gets a breather



Ghana has lifted ban on export of raw nuts.

: The cashew industry here heaved a sigh of relief after the Ghana government on Friday lifted the ban on the export of raw cashew nuts from that country.

The ban had been imposed early this year. Crisis had loomed large on the cashew sector in the country after many West African countries had begun considering such a ban to boost cashew processing in those countries.

The raw cashew nut season in the West African countries is from January to June, with trade peaking during April and May.

India annually imports about 6 lakh tonnes of raw cashew from these countries. Under the ban orders imposed by the Ghana government, traders could purchase raw nuts from January, but exports would be permitted only after May 31.

Ghana produces about 68,000 tonnes of raw nuts annually. The order says that while kernel production through processing in Ghana had increased from 4,250 tonnes in 2009 to 17,600 tonnes in later years, last year it dropped to less than 2,500 tonnes. “This implies that the processing industry was operating at just 5 per cent of its installed capacity.”

Ghana had shut down 11 of its 12 processing companies owing to non-availability of raw nuts due to exports. But with the ban in force, huge quantities of accumulated raw nuts had begun to rot since the single processing company had capacity limits when it came to purchasing raw material.

In the wake of strong protests by farmers, the Ghana government lifted the ban, cashew traders from here stationed in Ghana told *The Hindu* .

Meanwhile, though Ivory Coast, a major raw nut supplier to India, has not imposed a ban, it has banned the movement of raw nuts outside the country through land borders. Raw nuts used to be smuggled out of the country in this manner by traders resulting in huge tax revenue loss to Ivory Coast.

Export is now possible only through the through ports of Abidjan and San Pedro. Ivory Coast produces about 6,25,000 tonnes of raw cashew nuts annually and processes only about 1,50,000 tonnes. The rest is exported and a good portion comes to India. But now owing to the restrictions, Indian

importers will have to pay more for raw nut from Ivory Coast by paying taxes.

Ghana govt. lifts ban on export of raw nuts, which was imposed

early this year



Maharashtra cuts capital investment in farm sector

Drought, erratic rains have pushed the sector into a negative spiral again.

The government's financial statement shows that the total capital expenditure on agriculture for 2016-17 is expected to be Rs 4645.59 crore, 10.07 per cent less than that of 2015-16. Public sector capital investment in Maharashtra's crisis-laden agriculture sector is anticipated to fall by over 10 per cent in 2016-17 as compared to the current financial year.

Even as a revival of the state's distressed rural economy was the focal point of the BJP government's 2016-17 budget speech on March 18, budget documents reveal that the government has downscaled capital investment in the sector.

The government's financial statement, which was presented to the legislature, shows that the total capital expenditure on agriculture and allied activities for 2016-17 is expected to be Rs 4645.59 crore, which is 10.07 per cent less than the revised estimates (RE) for 2015-16.

While the Maharashtra Economic Survey Report had last week pointed out that erratic rainfall and a persistent drought had adversely impacted the state's crop sector, the government has decreased its capital expenditure on crop husbandry by nearly 24 per cent – from 2993.25 crore as per RE for 15-16 to Rs. 2265.26 crore in the budget estimates for 2016-17.

Further, the capital outlay for soil and water conservation activities is also expected to drop by nearly 23 per cent- from Rs 54.48 crore to Rs 42.22 crore. Similarly, the CapEx on agricultural research and education activity is expected to witness a 16 per cent decline. Meanwhile, the Fadnavis

government has increased capital outlays for dairy development (6 per cent), fisheries (1 per cent) and forestry and wildlife (31 per cent), which are seen as farm allied activities. Finance Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar had earlier indicated that the government would push allied agricultural activities to rev up the rural economy.

Incidentally, Mungantiwar himself heads Maharashtra's forest department. The capital investment in the sector is expected to jump from Rs 1407.96 crore (RE 15-16) to Rs 1841.75 crore in 2016-17. While Mungantiwar had dedicated the budget to the 'baliraja' or the farmer and announced allocations totalling Rs 25,000 crore for the farm and allied sector, the decline in capital investment in the sector has invited flak.

Maharashtra's former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan said, "The capital outlay kept aside for the agriculture sector is disappointing. Instead of doing mere lip service and inflating the account of what it plans to spend over agriculture by pooling in both revenue and capital side expenditures, the government ought to have infused more capital to bail out the distressed farmer."

Even for the irrigation sector, capital expenditure on minor irrigation and flood control projects is expected to fall by 26 per cent and 24 per cent, although the government has made higher allocations of Rs 7394.35 crore for major and medium irrigation works. About 52 per cent of Maharashtra's population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities. Hampered by crop failure due to persistent drought conditions, the sector has witnessed negative growth the past two years.

But the government's big push in capital investment is on development on rural roads, restoration of defunct rural water supply schemes, and pushing the concept of 'smart' villages. It has set aside a capital outlay of Rs 4392.94 crore for rural development programmes as compared to Rs 1677.06 crore it will end up spending under the head this year.

This is nearly a 162 per cent hike. Critics, however, pointed out that the government had originally budgeted to spend Rs 6711.05 crore for rural development programmes in 2015-16 too, which had to be revised to 25 per cent of the amount due to cut in development spend and procedural gaps. Under rural development, Mungantiwar has announced a Rs 500 crore allocation for the new Mukhamantri Gram Sadak Yojana or CMGSY for

road repairs and improvement of road connectivity in rural pockets. Another Rs 500 crore has been set aside under the Mukhya-mantri Gramin Paye Jal Yojana or CMPJY for rejuvenation and restoration of rural water supply schemes. Mungantiwar also announced a push for transforming some of Maharashtra's villages into 'smart' villages.

Also under the e-reforms initiative, the plan is to install digital boards across all Gram Panchayats, he said. For urban pockets, the CapEx on water supply and sanitation sector would however witness a sharp drop. The government plan to infuse just Rs 20.23 crore in the sector in 2016-17 as compared to the Rs 464.09 crore it spent this year.

The power sector will also witness a 22 pc decline in capital investment. The capital outlay for the industries and mineral sectors in 2016-17 will be limited to Rs 14.84 crore in 2016-17, 90 per cent lower than Rs 147.50 crore the government spent this year.

CaPex on education, sports, art and culture (49 per cent), medical and public health (32 per cent), urban development (64 per cent), social security and welfare (56 per cent), and nutrition (100 per cent) will also see a drop. The other sectors where the government has projected an increase in capital expenditure include housing activities (27 per cent), road transport (10 per cent), social services (15 per cent), policing (16 per cent), welfare of backward classes (3 per cent), and public works (1 per cent) are projected to witness an increase.

The government has set aside Rs 31107.72 crore totally for capital expenditure in 2016-17, which is just about 9 per cent high than the capital expenditure in 2015-16. The budget document however shows that the percentage of capital expenditure in total expenditure has decline from 12.31 per cent in 2013-14 to 11.45 per cent in 2016-17.

An endless wait for water in Haryana villages

As Haryana and Punjab continue their 30-year-old slugfest over the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal, in the villages of the Rewari-Narnaul belt the endless wait for water is routine.

At Kheda Murar, a village about 13km from Rewari town, I R Sharma (80) tills his three-acre farm from "monsoon to monsoon". "There is no point

incurring heavy costs during the dry season as returns will be low or negative,” said the farmer. Two canals cut through the village. For the past one month they have been dry.

What Sharma, a retired armyman earning a pension, can afford, Udmi Gujjar cannot. The 65-year-old farmer is totally dependent on agriculture and is worried about his wheat crop. “Farming here is largely dependent on God. Canal is dry on most days. It has regular water only when it rains,” said Gujjar.

As Haryana and Punjab continue their 30-year-old slugfest over the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal, in the villages of the Rewari-Narnaul belt the endless wait for water is routine. The stretch is one of the driest in Haryana. While canals — if a village is lucky to have it — have irregular flow, water table have been going down steadily.

It is also at the far end of the SYL canal chain where the Haryana government hopes to provide water once the main channel is operationalised. Dhara Singh, village sarpanch, was a schoolboy when he first heard of the canal. He is 47 now. “That was Indira Gandhi’s time. We were told there would be plenty of water. It would bring prosperity. But our fields are still dry,” said Singh.

“Over the years the village has only become poorer. Water table is going down so one has to dig deeper incurring heavier cost even as crop prices remain stable,” he added. This is one of the reasons why no one grows water-intensive paddy in the belt. Kheda Murar is a large village with 600 families, almost all dependent on agriculture. It is also located at the end of the water channel and “so gets less water”.

Those who can afford it have set up tubewells, but power too is erratic. Badlu Ram, 65, irrigates his fields with the help of a tubewell. “It’s an expensive affair; not reliable, as power is irregular. Power cost is high too. But we cannot depend on the canal water. I have lost many a crop waiting for water. So I got this tubewell. But I had to go over 100 feet deep. Earlier water was available at 40 feet,” he said.

He is still lucky. The canal flowing through the area has helped raise the water table. In villages such as Manglesar Majri, adjacent to Kheda Murar but away from the canal, one has to dig 250-feet to find water. Villagers

claim it takes over a year to get permission to set up a tubewell, which does not happen without paying bribes. “Setting up the tubewell itself will cost you Rs 1 lakh. Then you have to keep the electricity guys happy so that at crucial hours you get uninterrupted supply,” said Jadish Pal, 55. Though many wish for more water in the canal, those who have heard the latest controversy are convinced it will never happen.

“I don’t think the SYL canal will ever come. It’s been more than 30 years we have been hearing this. Punjab can do gundagardi, but we can’t...It’s an NDA government in Haryana, Punjab and Centre. If still the SYL canal can’t be built, who do we blame?,” said Sharma. Water crisis is creation of Centre: Phoolka Ludhiana: The water crisis of Punjab is a creation of the central government, said AAP leader H S Phoolka.

“In 1976, Indira Gandhi Congress government and subsequently in 1982 again Indira Gandhi Congress government created these crisis and deprived people of its due rights over Punjab water,” he said.

“The present Central government has the same powers and it can restore the rights of Punjab. But Badal sahib, instead of forcing its own government at Centre, is diverting the issue and creating the conflict between the people of Punjab and the Supreme Court.”

The Centre has the power to withdraw the case from the SC through the President and resolve the issue itself, he added. ENS

THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

PM to discuss implementation of new crop insurance scheme this week

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to meet top officials of all banks and insurance companies this week in Mumbai to discuss the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana.

Under the new crop insurance scheme PMFBY, premium burden on farmers has been kept low — up to 2 per cent of the sum insured, and claims are to be settled at the earliest. The scheme will come into force from April 1 for kharif crops to be sown from June.

According to sources, the Prime Minister's meeting is scheduled at the Nabard office in Mumbai on March 22.



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and senior officials from the ministries of finance and agriculture will be present in the two-and-half hour meeting, sources added.

Since the new scheme is both for loanee and non-loanee farmers, the meeting will deliberate on bringing more loanee farmers under the crop insurance scheme so that the target of 50 per cent is achieved and more farmers take up insurance coverage.

At present, about 25 per cent the total crop area of 194.40 million hectares is being insured.

Out of the farm credit target of Rs. 8.5 lakh crore set for this fiscal, only Rs. 75,000 crore is under crop insurance. So there is huge scope to reach out to loanee farmers, the sources added.

The government is giving a big push to the crop insurance scheme after drought, unseasonal rains and hailstorms last year led to state governments seek over Rs. 10,100 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund.

Tobacco Board fixes crop size in Karnataka at 95 million kg



The Tobacco Board, which met in Bengaluru on Saturday, has fixed the crop size in Karnataka for 2016-17 at 95 million kg.

According to a press release issued here on Sunday, Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, Joint Secretary in the Union Ministry of Commerce, presided over the meeting in his capacity as the chairman of the board.

G Jayadev, Guntur member of Parliament and a member of the board, and M. Uma Maheswara Rao, president of the Indian Tobacco Association (ITA), also attended the meeting.

On the demand made by ITA, the crop size in Karnataka was fixed at 95 mkg against 100 mkg fixed last year. Against the authorised crop size of 100 mkg, 71.95 million kg of tobacco was sold in that state at Rs.135.24 a kg. The shortfall led to the price spurt.

During the previous year (2015-16), 103.40 million kg of tobacco was sold on the Karnataka floors at Rs.107.49 a kg.

G Seshagiri Rao, member of the board, was elected as the vice-chairman at the meeting. A decision was also taken at the meeting to increase the interest-free loan amount from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 to the farmers from the welfare fund to be repaid in three years in three instalments.

Tobacco auctions in Andhra Pradesh are at initial stage and auctions in Karnataka had concluded on March 16. It may be noted that in Karnataka tobacco is an early monsoon crop whereas in AP it is a late rabi crop.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agri department to allocate more land for khazan paddy crops

The agriculture department has claimed that about 2,485 hectares of khazan land has been protected in the state. The department has plans to bring additional area under paddy cultivation. By 2019-20, the department aims to have 600 hectares of additional area under paddy cultivation.

Khazan lands have been a major cause for concern, as many farmers in the state have quit cultivating paddy due to the high cost of cultivation.

In some areas, paddy under khazan land is affected by the growth of mangroves caused due to the seepage of saline water near breached bunds .

An agriculture officer said the soil conservation wing of the department is operating a scheme to repair breached bunds. Paddy cultivation is being revitalized in a phased manner by providing salt tolerant paddy seed 'korgut' to farmers free-of-cost, and tractors are provided for tilling with a 50% subsidy.

The agriculture department also intends to provide high-yielding seeds to farmers. A new variety of seed will be made available to farmers for trial during the coming kharif season, the official said.

'Implement farmers' panel suggestions'

It has been nearly ten years since the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) submitted its analysis to the government but not all the recommendations been implemented yet.

In a bid to revive the demand for implementing these agricultural measures the chairperson of NCF professor M S Swaminathan presented an overview of the recommendations made in five reports submitted by the NCF between 2004 and 2006. Pointing out the relevance even today, he was speaking on 'The recommendations of the National Farmers Commission: A Ten-Year Balance Sheet' at an event organised by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies on Saturday. Calling for a comprehensive policy support to boost agriculture Swaminathan said "There have been many commissions for agriculture, but

this was unique in its effort to represent the voices of the farming community."

Hannan Mollah, general secretary of the All-India Kisan Sabha urged the government to ensure that the measures were implemented at the earliest. "We tell farmers to say 'no' to suicide, to identify the problem. If agriculture dies, the nation will die. We want everyone to come forward and support the farmer." tnn

Tribal farmers rake in moolah at herbal mandi

Sale of medicinal and aromatic herbs, plants started at the Krishi Upaj Mandi has helped the poor tribal villagers reap good profits.

Before the facility to sell herbs here, Safed Musli (a wonder drug for cancer cure, boosting vitality) fetched them a mere Rs 20,000-25,000 per quintal but now the sale of the plant is getting them Rs 1-1.25 lakh per quintal. Similarly, pure honey collected from the jungles that earlier fetched them mere Rs 6,000-7,000 per quintal but at the new platform, the rates have soared as high as Rs 35,000, directly benefitting the tribal people.

Earlier, the traditional system of selling forest produce to middlemen fetched them a meager amount and the buyers made large profits by selling the goods at bigger mandis in other cities. With the elimination of middlemen, the growers are getting remunerative prices for their produce. Forests in Udaipur produce numerous other medicinal plants and gums like ratanjot, kanji, gond, honey, fuhad, mahua, aamla (gooseberry) etc, and the separate platform for marketing these products has proved as a boon for the poor tribal community.

The arrangement was made for the convenience of the growers and pluckers of these herbs at the initiative of the chief minister Vasundhara Raje in August 2014 during the 'Sarkar Apke Dwar' campaign held here. State's first special Laghu Vanopaj Mandi (special mandi for forest produce) was announced then and until the construction of the same be completed, the government ordered for the sale of aromatic plants at the existing mandi premises itself. The construction of Herbal Mandi is going on at full swing and may be operational by August.

However, even before a full-fledged mandi is operational, villagers have

started making good money. "From November 2014 to January 2016, forest produce has been sold for Rs 44.30 crore. The mandi has earned an income of Rs 71 lakh," said Bhagwan Sahay Jatav, the mandi secretary.

Fuhad, another medicinal plant which is sold for Rs 1,200 is getting them Rs 5,000-6,000 a quintal now. Similarly, the price of mahua has increased from Rs 1,500 per quintal to Rs 4,000 per quintal.

The traders in herbs, manufacturers of ayurvedic medicines, traditional medical practitioners, vaidyas and manufacturers of cosmetics come here to purchase these produces from a single place.

Farmers can use 'private forest land' for cultivation: Report

Farmers from Konkan region, which covers Thane, Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri districts, whose land was declared as forest under section 35 of The Indian Forest Act, 1927, can now use the land for cultivation.

Sources said that state Advocate General (AG) Shrihari Aney has recommended that the state government exempt private land belonging to farmers and land owners from the purview of section 35. The state cabinet committee is on the verge of taking a final call, they added.

State forest minister Sudhir Mungattiwar said that the AG's recommendation is under consideration and a decision in this regard will be announced soon. "We are in favour of the report. The concerned department is examining the case in accordance with the Supreme Court ruling of exempting such lands from section 35 of forest act," he added.

Farmers from Palghar, Raigarh, Ratnagiri and Thane had formed a 35-member Sangharsh Samiti in January to fight for repealing this section. They alleged that their land was referred to as "private forest" and they had to obtain permission from state forest department to use it.

"Section 35 has affected over 25,000 farmers and involves 6 lakh acres of land. Since their land has been classified as private forest, the farmers cannot cultivate the land. The only way to provide relief to them is to repeal section 35," said a committee member, Om Prakash Sharma.

Citing an order passed by Supreme Court in 2014, Sharma said, just as the tag of private forest was removed from the land belonging to some realtors, the same benefit should be extended to farmers' land as well.

But the AG report stated that section 6 of the 1975 Act deals with settlement of disputes. "If any question arises as to whether any forest is a private forest, it has to be determined by the collector. The decision of the collector is final, subject only to an appeal before the tribunal," stated the report.

AG Aney, in his letter, stated there's no inter-relation between section 35 of 1927 Act and Section 6 of 1975 Act. "If any action, likely to affect rights of individuals, is to be taken, the authority may grant hearing," he added.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

PM Narendra Modi to meet banks, insurance companies on crop insurance



Under PMFBY, premium burden on farmers has been kept low - up to 2 per cent of sum insured, and claims are to be settled at the earliest.

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to meet top officials of all banks and insurance companies this week in Mumbai to discuss the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana.

Under the new crop insurance scheme, PMFBY, premium burden on farmers has been kept low - up to 2 per cent of sum insured, and claims are to be settled at the earliest.

The scheme will come into force from April 1 for kharif crops to be sown from June.

According to sources, the Prime Minister's meeting is scheduled at the Nabard office in Mumbai on March 22.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and senior officials from the ministries of finance and agriculture will be present in the two-and-half hour meeting, sources added.

Since the new scheme PMFBY is both for loanee and non-loanee farmers, the meeting will deliberate on bringing more loanee farmers under the crop insurance scheme so that the target of 50 per cent is achieved and more farmers take up insurance coverage.

At present, about 25 per cent the total crop area of 194.40 million hectares is being insured.

Out of the farm credit target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore set for this fiscal, only a sum of Rs 75,000 crore is under crop insurance. So, there is huge scope to reach out to loanee farmers, sources added.

The government is giving a big push to the crop insurance scheme after drought, unseasonal rains and hailstorms last year led to state governments seek total of over Rs 10,100 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund.

Save water, diversify crops, take up allied jobs: PM Narendra Modi to farmers

PM Narendra Modi gave a clarion call for second green revolution in eastern states, which have adequate water and fertile land, through adoption of modern technologies.

NEW DELHI: With back-to-back droughts hitting the agriculture output hard, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today called for steps to conserve water and asked farmers to focus on crop diversification and go for allied activities like dairy, poultry and food processing to boost their income.

Inaugurating a 3-day 'Krishi Unnati Mela', Modi said since May 2014 when it came to power, his government has taken several initiatives for agriculture growth, including introduction of a new insurance scheme and giving soil health cards to farmers, with a view to doubling their income by 2022.

As per the latest government data, the all-India average monthly income of agricultural households during the crop year July 2012-June 2013 was estimated at Rs 6,426.



He even gave a clarion call for second green revolution in eastern states, which have adequate water and fertile land, through adoption of modern technologies.

Putting a premium on water conservation to raise farm productivity and income, Modi said the government has identified 90 stuck irrigation projects which can irrigate 80 lakh hectares. The government is spending Rs 20,000 crore to boost irrigation projects.

Attacking opposition parties for claiming that all projects and programmes started when they were in power, the Prime Minister said: "You would be surprised to know that as much as 90 projects which are full of water like dams have been built, but there is no way to provide water to farmers."

He added: "Now, my government is working to provide water from these projects and once it is completed, around 80 lakh hectares will get water. And once water reaches there, you all can think how much that land will give us back."

The Prime Minister spoke of funds from MNREGA programme to be utilised this summer for creation of assets such as ponds to conserve water.

"About MNREGA, many discussions take place, but no asset has been created. This government is emphasising... during this summer in every village, one work should be done through MNREGA and that is desilting of ponds, deepening of ponds and creating new ones. In this Budget, the government is aiming at 5 lakh ponds," Modi said.

For good part, the Prime Minister emphasised on micro and drip irrigation as well as liquid fertiliser to reduce cost of production and raise farmers' income level.

"Water harvesting is of as much importance as water conservation. We do not have the right to waste water. Per drop more crop is how we can do that," Modi said.

The Prime Minister asked farmers to continue with their regular farming activity, but also told them to adopt animal husbandry, grow timber and go for value addition and processing.

"Food processing is the best way to increase the farmers' income," he suggested.

Wheat production to be higher than in the previous year: Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh

Radha Mohan Singh refuted reports by Assocham that wheat production will be less in the country and said he expects it to be higher than the previous year.

NEW DELHI: Agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh refuted reports by an industry chamber that wheat production will be less in the country and said he expects it to be higher than the previous year.

"Today's news report of Assocham stating that wheat production in the country this year is likely to be lower by 1.5 crore tonne is factually incorrect. The recent untimely rains and hailstorm in some parts of the country have caused some damage but, as per present assessment,

production of wheat in the country would still be around 92-93 million tonne," Singh in a press statement said.



The minister added that such incorrect information is being publicized with a view to compel government to reduce import duty on wheat. In October last year, the import duty on wheat was raised to 25 per cent till March 2016 to restrict imports in the wake of falling global prices.

"Lower import duty on wheat would lead to a fall in wheat price in the domestic market and farmers will incur heavy loss while traders will purchase from farmers at lowered price. Government is keeping a close watch on prices, particularly prices of food items and will make all efforts to keep food prices under control," said Singh.

The production will be substantially higher than the wheat production of 86.53 million tonnes during 2014-15 he said. In 2015-16, wheat production in the country is estimated at 93.82 million tonnes as per the 2nd advance estimate.

The minister said that current stock of wheat with the Food Corporation of India is higher than the buffer and strategic norms. "Against the stocking norm of 7.6 million tonnes as on April 1, the present stock of wheat in the central pool is 13.5 million tonne,"he said.

During the last one year FCI has sold 7 million tonnes of wheat through open market operations. For the past some time, the market response to the tenders floated by FCI has been weak which implies that there is no shortage of wheat in the country at present,said Singh.

"Harvesting of wheat has started. With a target of 30.5 million tonne, FCI has already started procurement activity," said Singh.