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## THE HINDU

### **Paddy farmers concerned over leaf folder attack**



Paddy attacked by leaf folder pest at Nannambra, near Tirurangadi.

The recent increase in atmospheric temperature has brought in leaf folder pests to paddy fields in the district at an unexpected time.

Farmers have begun to worry about major crop loss because the pest attack has taken place soon after panicle initiation.

Although leaf folder pest is usual in paddy, the attack after panicle initiation is rare and more worrying for farmers.

“We are usually not worried about this pest. But the attack after panicle initiation gives us little choice against the pest,” said A.K. Marakkarutty, a young farmer who has paddy in 20 acres near Tirurangadi.

Mr. Marakkarutty said he was wary of using any pesticide at this stage.

“I wouldn’t mind using pesticide if it is in the initial stage of the paddy. Once the panicle initiation takes place, application of pesticide can be dangerous. I’m sure it will affect the rice,” he said.

Other farmers of Kundoor and Cherumukku areas too echoed similar concern.

“Unlike other areas of Malappuram district, we begin our paddy farming a little late because of water logging. This year, we started in January only. So the pest attack has come at a wrong time,” they said.

The agricultural officials, however, have a different view to the crisis. According to them, there was nothing to worry. The leaf folder attack may affect 25 per cent, but it can be controlled by harmless pesticides, they said.

K. Divya, agricultural officer at Nannambra, said that the sudden increase in heat and increased application of nitrogen fertilization had caused the leaf folder attack. She said it could well be controlled by applying a pesticide called Fame.

“It is relatively a safe pesticide. Its toxicity will not last more than a week,” Ms. Divya said.

However, the officials are yet to succeed in addressing the concerns of a large number of paddy farmers this summer.

### **Award for two ICAR scientists**

D. Damodar Reddy, Director of Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) and Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI), Rajamahendravaram, received the prestigious Fellow of AP Akademi of Sciences for his outstanding contributions to science and technology in the first induction ceremony of the akademi held at Acharya Nagarjuna University in Guntur on Sunday.

On the occasion, he delivered a lecture on ‘Phosphorus use efficiency in Indian Agriculture – importance, impediments, and improvement interventions’.

H. Ravisankar, Senior Scientist, ICAR-Central Tobacco Research Institute, too received the prestigious Associative Fellow of the akademi for his outstanding contributions to science and technology at the programme.

### **Certificates presented**

Ms. Sumita Dawra, Secretary, Higher Education, Government of AP, was the chief guest at the event. Prof. A. Rajendra Prasad, Vice-Chancellor, Acharya Nagarjuna University, was the guest of honour.

Dr. B.L. Deekshatulu, president, A.P. Akademi of Sciences, presented certificates.

Nearly one hundred distinguished delegates, who included professors, scientists, and vice-chancellors attend.

### **Govt to help fishermen buy trawlers, explore deep seas**



For several years, fishermen have been complaining about dearth of fish inside the territorial waters—Photo: AP

This could be good news for 10 lakh fishermen residing across India's 7,500-km coastline.

The central government is working on a scheme to allow them to venture beyond India's territorial waters (12 nautical miles or 22.2 km from the shore) for fishing, and help them buy trawlers with financial assistance.

If the plan materialises, fishermen can go fishing right into the Exclusive Economic Zone, which is 200 nautical miles or 370.4 km from the outer limit of the territorial waters.

For several years, fishermen have been complaining about the dearth of fish in the shallow waters and even inside territorial waters, forcing them to lead a life of penury. And if they ever ventured out of the territory, their boats have been impounded, and they have been arrested by the navies of neighbouring countries.

Union Minister for Highways, Shipping and Ports Nitin Gadkari, said: "Since there is hardly any fish left inside 12 nautical miles zone, we want our fishermen to go beyond this point. For that they need permission from ports. We are willing to provide that."

At a maritime event in Mumbai, he said, “Since their boats cannot go into the deep sea (beyond the territorial waters), we want to ensure that they buy trawlers.”

Being aware of the fact that a poor fisherman cannot afford to buy a trawler, which costs about Rs 1 crore, the government is advising the community to form fishermen’s societies in different clusters, pool in Rs 5 lakh through equal contributions and apply for a loan. Some fishermen can come together, and also float a partnership firm to buy a trawler through a bank loan.

“The Centre will provide a subsidy of Rs 12-15 lakh, and a trawler can be purchased through funding from Mudra (Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, which is available for small enterprises and entrepreneurs),” Mr Gadkari said.

Currently, only companies with financial muscle are able to fish in the deep seas using trawlers. “The government will encourage the community to avail of this facility. Fishing in the high seas with trawlers can increase the catch by 10 times, and this will help the fishermen to increase their income sharply,” he added.

The minister said that with the output projected to go up, several cold stores and sea food processing units can come up in the coastal regions, which will help the fishermen.

The initiative is in line with the government’s agenda to boost farmers’ income by addressing various issues in the agriculture sector and augmenting funding.

### **Kokum, jackfruit developers must plan a development strategy: NABARD**

The National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) has advised kokum and jackfruit developers to focus on market survey and chalk out a development plan to meet the market demand.

Speaking on ‘Finance for Entrepreneurship’ at a seminar on ‘Entrepreneurial Development in Kokum and Jackfruit in Western Ghats States’ held here over the weekend, deputy district manager of NABARD T Geetha, said the market survey and plan to meet demand was crucial to make profits. Goa

Chamber of Commerce & Industry's Committee on Agriculture and the Western Ghats Kokum Foundation had jointly organised the seminar.

“In India, we talk about our heritage, land, resources and climate. In Israel, they talk about productivity and product quality. We produce what we can, the Israelis produce what the market needs. We need to learn the strategy of success from them. We need to move away from the traditional pattern of high volume-low value type of produce to low volume-high value products,” said Ajit Shirodkar, founder-chairman of Western Ghats Kokum Foundation and its chief mentor.

The faculty for the seminar included M Mahadeva Naidu of Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI), Mysore; Sanjay Orpe of Hardikar Technologies - Pune; CD Pawar and NS Thakor of DBSKKV-Dapoli; Mohan Hodawadekar of Sindhusfurti-Kudal, and K Subhash of M/s Artocarpus Foods, Kannur-Kerala.

Mr Hodawadekar shared the success story of SINDHUSFURTI that produces Jack modaks for use during Ganesh Chaturthi, Jack discs, Kokum khajur (date-like candy) and other products.

Mr Pawar and Dr Thakor of Dr Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth (DBSKKV), Dapoli, spoke on the standardisation of products and the equipment to make this possible, respectively. Mr Naidu spoke on the quality assurance of the products while Mr Orpe shared information regarding the technology available for cottage and farm-level processing of fruits.

The overwhelming response that the seminar received is witness to the growing interest in the commercial utilisation of these fruit crops and value addition possible through farm-level processing into pulp, powder, jams, juices, ready to serve (RTS) drinks and other consumer products. The seminar was sponsored by NABARD, Goa Directorate of Agriculture and NRB Group, Vasco, south Goa.

***We produce what we can, the Israelis produce what the market needs. We need to learn the strategy of success from them***

***Ajit Shirodkar***

***Founder-chairman of Western Ghats Kokum Foundation***

## Farmers urged to market produce online



The Mysuru APMC has launched an awareness campaign on the benefits of trading agricultural produce online.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

A campaign to popularise online transaction of agricultural produce among farmers was launched in the city on Saturday.

A vehicle will tour the rural hinterland and educate farmers of the benefit of online transactions.

Mysuru APMC president K. Shivanna, who flagged off the vehicle, said that the products will be inspected for quality and this will enable a good and remunerative price for farmers. Among the major benefits of online sale, is the wider market that the farmers can tap at the click of the mouse without moving away from their respective villages or APMC marts, said Mr. Shivanna.

What is significant is that the money for completed transaction is credited to the account of the farmers within 24 hours by the traders, he added.

There are 103 APMCs in the State linked with the facility for online sale of agricultural produce including Mysuru and Sarguru and farmers in any part of the State can secure the highest bid for the produce.

Besides ensuring transparency in the transactions the farmers are assured of remunerative prices devoid which also obviates the need to pay commission charges to brokers and middlemen.



At present around 1.4 million farmers in the State are trading online and reaping the benefit of the system, said Mr. Shivanna urging more number of farmers to opt for online trading.

Deputy Director of Information Department A.R. Prakash and others were present.

*A vehicle will tour the hinterland and educate farmers*

*on the benefits of online transactions*

### **Seminar focuses on food security for women and children**

The two-day national seminar on “Food Security for Women and Children: Challenges and Opportunities” being organised by the Kakatiya University Centre for Women’s Studies began here on Monday.

Addressing at the seminar chief guest Prof. K. Purushotham, Controller of Examinations said that though women have 30 per cent share in food production in agriculture, they are foregoing their due share in consumption. This was due to lack of food availability, taboos and socio cultural aspects of our society.

“At domestic level, women as mothers sacrifice their share to husband and children giving them priority,” he said. Delivering keynote address CT Anitha, School of Medical Sciences, University of Hyderabad said malnutrition among pregnant women has an effect not only the child to be born but also future generations. Malnutrition during pregnancy is complicated by stunted growth and infections leading to high mortality. Half of the child malnutrition in the developing world is in India, she pointed out.

Seminar director G Shamitha said that more than half of women were suffering from malnutrition.

K. Sayulu, Sharada, S. Girisham, T. Ravinder Reddy, G. Brahmeshwari, M. Surekha, S. Jyothi were present.

## Small onion farmers in tears as wholesale price crashes



Farmers lament that they are not able to recover even 10 per cent of their seed costs, forcing many of them to switch over to other crops in the next season. —PHOTO: G. Karthikeyan

With a huge arrival of shallot from major onion production centres in Dindigul and nearby districts, the wholesale onion market in Dindigul has witnessed a crash in prices of small onion, worrying farmers. Onion growers could not get even 10 per cent of their seed costs as returns and many of them would be forced to switch over to other crops in the next season, traders said.

The prices of shallots that hovered around Rs.18 a kg last month suddenly fell to Rs.7 a kg on Monday. On the retail market, shallots were being sold up to Rs.15 a kg. Regular arrival from Theni, Andipatti, Dharapuram and Udumalpet was good owing to high yield, small onion traders said.

The market received 4,100 bags of shallots (each weighing 60 kg) on Monday, of which the arrival from domestic production centres, especially Iyyalur, Eriyode and Gujiliamparai, was around 2,500 bags, said V. Rajendran, onion wholesale trader.

With no exports in the last one month, prices fell sharply. Already, Sri Lanka has started cultivating onion to reduce imports, traders added.

“I purchased onion seeds at Rs.70 a kg. But, shallots were sold for Rs.7 a kg in the market. Selling price of small onions did not cover even 10 per cent of



the seed costs. How can I meet other expenses such as input costs, plucking and freight charges,” asked R. Balakrishnan, a farmer in Iyyalur.

*Huge arrival of shallot from major onion production centres in Dindigul and nearby districts cited*

**Good 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.

### **Plans to construct cattle troughs under NREGS**

Collector Neetu Prasad has assured to take all measures for the construction of cattle troughs to quench the thirst of cattle during summer under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in Karimnagar district.

Responding to a telephone call from a farmer from Ramagundam mandal during the weekly 'dial-your-Collector' programme on Monday, the Collector said that they were planning to construct cattle troughs on a massive scale under the employee guarantee scheme in the district to quench thirst of animals as well as provide employment to farm labourers.

### **Good days ahead for jasmine farmers, traders**



The arrival of jasmine flower has been on the rise in the recent fortnight, with the crop registering a good yield during the summer in Tiruchi district.

## Save water now or there will be nothing left to save



*This year's intense summer is accompanied by reservoirs across the State dropping to historic lows raising questions about the city's water security*

World Water Day on Tuesday comes at the back of two incidents of mass fish kill in two of the city's lakes — the blame falling on sewage inflow.

Arkavathy and Vrishabhavathy, the two rivers closest to the city, resemble cesspools. Rejuvenation efforts have led to little success. Added to this, the intense summer is seeing reservoirs across the State drop to historic lows. In the process, questions have arisen on the city's water security.

### **Water: Need more sources**

With KRS and Kabini reservoirs dipping to historic lows, a delayed monsoon can spell trouble for the city.

Engineers at T.K. Halli, from where a majority of the city's water is being supplied, say that current inflow to the reservoir matches demand. "We need around 1.5 TMC or more every month during summer. This would translate to between 6 and 8 TMC till June-mid or July, assuming the rains are weak," said an engineer.

However, at KRS, the water level is barely half as much as last year – and weak pre-monsoon showers could spell trouble.

While BWSSB officials seem confident of weathering a potential crisis, these near-misses clearly point to the need of scouring around for alternative sources for the city. With the Cauvery river being tapped to the maximum, a report commissioned by BWSSB had suggested drawing water from Linganamakki dam – more than 250km away.

### **Lakes: Can STPs save water bodies?**

From the mass fish kills at Ulsoor and Devarabisanahalli lakes to the incidents of frothing and fire in lakes in the last one year, sewage inflow into lakes has thrown the spotlight on the fragile eco-system of the city's lakes.

The proposed solution is a near blanketing of the city with Sewage Treatment Plants. In the past decade, 14 STPs have been constructed to treat nearly 750 Million Litres per Day (MLD) while at least 19 STPs are in the pipeline to ensure treatment of the city's sewage.

But, Priyanka Jamwal, a researcher with ATREE, says that while STPs are the first step to removing organic waste being dumped in lakes, it does not remove nutrients which encourage eutrophic conditions (algal growth).

“The answer may lie in smaller STPs near lakes rather than large-scale plants some distance away,” says Sharathchandra Lele, an ATREE researcher. “There is no accountability in huge plants. Whereas, if there are neighbourhood STPs, residents will know if untreated sewage is being dumped in the lake. These are governance-friendly solutions, rather than just engineering plans,” he said.

### **Rivers: Not being revived**

Among the storm water drains and sewer canals that cross-cross the city are two rivers that once catered to the water needs of the city. Arkavathy has more-or-less dried up. The little water that flows is highly contaminated. The putrid sewage of Vrishabhavathy river has been found to leach nitrates into the groundwater.

Efforts to rejuvenate Arkavathy River are still on paper.

Janardhan K. from the Arkavathy-Kumudvathi River Rejuvenation Committee at Doddaballapur wants the government to form a River Basin

Institution, which is the key recommendation of the recent report compiled by Environmental Management and Policy Research Institute (EMPRI). “In 2014, the government had proposed an authority, governed by bureaucrats. Instead of that, our demand is to include farmers and residents in the institution to ensure water-intensive crops are phased out, groundwater is recharged and encroachments are removed,” he explained.

Citizens are also pushing for revival of Vrishabhavathy. An online petition, which has gathered nearly 1,000 signatures, calls it ‘the city’s only river’ that requires urgent attention.

### **Groundwater: The slow and steady recharge**

The groundwater situation is not rosy at all, but in the long run, the slowly progressing Rain Water Harvesting scheme may improve the situation, believe experts.

“Nearly one lakh households are estimated to have implemented RWH,” says A.R. Shivakumar, Principal Investigator of the RWH project with the Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology (KSCST).

“While this may look small in the large city, we have targeted only residential houses above 2,500 square feet in the core areas. Nearly 55 per cent of these installations contribute to the groundwater recharge while the rest reuse the water. Already, we are seeing benefits. The water level in the core area has improved,” he said.

The fast-growing peripheral areas, however, continue to see the level depleting, and this problem will be tackled when BWSSB extends the water network, he says.

### **App to help**

In an attempt to encourage the use of RWH, KSCST and UNESCO have developed a ‘Do it yourself Rain Water Harvesting (RWH)’ app that will be launched in Puducherry on Tuesday.

A.R. Shivakumar, Principal Investigator of the RWH project with the KSCST, said the application is available on the web and on the Android platform for mobile phones. “To develop this data, we have collected details

from 174 towns and cities in Karnataka, besides details of rainfall for the last 100 years from 285 towns and cities in 15 States of India,” he said.

### **“Withdraw import duty on raw cashew”**

Owners of cashew nut processing units across the State demanded withdrawal of 9.36 per cent import duty on cashew in the general Budget as it would dampen the very existence of the industry, said Cashew Factory Owners’ Development Association of Tamil Nadu here on Monday.

Addressing a demonstration in front of the Collectorate, M.P. Jayachandran, general secretary of the Association, said that though the government was giving back five per cent of import duty while exporting the processed nuts, the factory owners could not bear the brunt as the industry was already in doldrums due to shortage of raw materials and not getting remunerative prices for the processed nuts.

The industry, which provided employment to over two lakh women, was resorting either to shutdown or restricting processing and producing to one or two days a week. This had had a cascading effect on the livelihood of workers’ families. The Budget announcement and subsequent notification, dated March 1, enhancing the import duty to 9.36 per cent were unacceptable, Mr. Jayachandran said.

He feared that if the notification was brought into force, the cost of raw cashew nut would go up by at least Rs. 10 per kg.

He said that over 2,000 cashew nut processing industries were in operation across the State, and 535 of them were in Kanyakumari district. The industry downed shutters across the State for three days from March 7.



## **Haryana Budget: Focus primarily on rural sector, jobs & education**

Finance Minister Capt Abhimanyu says BJP govt committed to making sure state gets its share of water after completion of SYL canal



Finance Minister Haryana Captain Abhimanyu presents the Budget in Haryana Vidhan Sabha, in Chandigarh on Monday. (Express Photo by Jasbir Malhi)

The Haryana budget for the financial year 2016-'17, presented on Monday by the state finance minister Capt Abhimanyu, focused on the rural sector, increasing job opportunities and giving a boost to education and health sectors.

The budget estimate for the next fiscal increased to Rs 13,494 crore against Rs 11,444 crore in the revised estimate of 2015-'16. Over 13 per cent of the budget was earmarked for agriculture and allied sectors.

Budgetary allocation for schemes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Food Security Mission, National Mission on Agriculture Expansion and Technology, National Oilseed and Oil Palm Mission has been increased to Rs 205 crore, an increase of 54 per cent from last year.

With the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal controversy yet to be resolved, the Haryana government has decided to invest heavily in irrigation; the

sector has seen a nearly 21 per cent increase in allocation. It has proposed to improve the capacity of lift irrigation system at a cost of Rs 143 crore, rehabilitation of 565 water courses for Rs 300 crore, extension, renovation and modernisation of 75 irrigation canals and minors and preparation of District Irrigation Plans under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

Capt Abhimanyu reiterated the state's commitment to make sure Haryana's gets its share of Ravi-Beas water after the completion of the SYL canal. Education Over Rs 14,300 crore for has been allocated for education sector. To strengthen the Make in India programme, the government is moving towards vocationalisation of secondary education.

Ten vocational trades have been started in 490 government schools. The budget outlay for Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan has been increased by 20 per cent. Under the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan, a centrally sponsored scheme for funding of state Universities, an outlay of Rs 166 crore has been made, an increase of 988 percent.

Industry To capitalise on the first-ever "Happening Haryana" Global Investors Summit, Capt Abhimanyu, proposed an outlay of around Rs 830 crore for Industries and Mines, which is a 325.1 per cent hike. The minister said that the government planned to promote and support the Khadi and Village Industries, start-ups and MSMEs to provide entrepreneurship opportunities and generate employment in the rural areas.

He said that there was a need to protect and support the traditional industries of the state, incentivise agro-based and food processing industries, open new industries in the hinterland of the state to provide jobs to the youths closer to their homes; and also bring in some new big mother industries in areas like Defence, Railway and Aviation to be able to create new streams of small ancillaries and supporting manufacturing units.

Health The finance minister said that the government envisioned setting up a medical college in every district. Under the National Health Mission, special focus has been given to Maternal and Child Health. The minister pointed out that Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has reduced to 33, while Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has reduced to 127. Under the scheme of Mukhya Mantri Muft Ilaaj Yojana (MMIY), free secondary level surgeries are being made available at Government Health Institutions. Aviation Capt

Abhimanyu said that Hisar Civil Aerodrome will be upgraded to the level of International Airport. In the first phase, the government plans to expand the runway from 4,000 feet to 7,000 feet and renovate the terminal building at a cost of Rs. 50 crore.

A consultant has been engaged to develop Hisar as an Integrated Aviation Hub comprising International Airport, International Cargo Airport, Maintenance, Repair and Overhauling (MRO) hub on PPP basis. It is also proposed to upgrade civil aerodrome in Karnal to domestic airport.

Transport To improve public transport, new initiatives like implementation of hand-held electronic ticket issuing machines, RFID passes and installation of GPS system in buses would be being taken up. Haryana has increased the budget allocation for Welfare of Schedules Castes (SCs) and Backward Classes (BCs) for the year 2016-17 by 83 per cent.

Capt Abhimanyu said that Deen Dayal Jan Awas Yojana is being implemented in the State. The government has proposed to reduce the AT&C losses in the power sector from 30 percent to 15 percent in 2018-19. Work would be undertaken to provide 24×7 power supply in rural areas. Cut in allocation However, the sectors where the finance minister chose to reduce the budget allocation as compared to last year include education sector where 13.34% of the total budget has been granted as compared to 16.20% granted in the previous year's budget.

Since the social welfare sector was last year allocated 6.69% from the total budget outlay, this year the sector has to remain contended with 6.06% allocation. Similarly, in last budget the finance minister had allocated 16.20% of the total budget to the education sector but this time it has been reduced to 13.34%.

Allocation for Public Health and Engineering Sector was also reduced to 3.16%. Sops this year New proposals

- \* Setting up horticulture university at Karnal.
- \* Rs 300 crore allocated for “Pradhan mantri Fasal Bima Yojana”
- \* Health University as a Centre of Excellence at Kutail in District Karnal, the National Cardiovascular Institute in Jhajjar
- \* New medical colleges at Panchkula, Bhiwani and Jind
- \* A new All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rewari
- \* AYUSH university

- \* For ensuring accountability, government has decided to open Personal Ledger Accounts (PLA)
- \* Under the Mukhyamantri Vivah Shagun Yojana, the grant to girls increased to Rs 41,000
- \* Enacting Water Supply and Sewerage Act to provide drinking water in rural and urban areas
- \* Smart Electricity Grid proposed for Gurgaon Tax exemptions
- \* Reduction on tax on footwear, having MRP of above Rs 500, to 5 per cent and exempt shoe uppers from VAT
- \* Tax exemption has been proposed on ‘Khal’, ‘Binola’, ‘Besan’ and cotton yarn manufactured in the state. Tax on Vermicelli (Sewian) lowered to 5 per cent
- \* Reduction in tax to 5 per cent on the sale of electric vehicles.
- \* To encourage the customers to obtain invoices, the government has proposed to introduce “Submit Bill, Get Prize Scheme”

### **Punjab Cabinet approves bill on agricultural debt**

A decision to this effect was taken in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Tuesday.

Punjab Cabinet on Monday approved the Bill on “The Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness 2016”.

The proposed legislation provides for a framework for expeditious determination and settlement of non-institutional agricultural debt, an official spokesman said , adding the Bill would be tabled on Tuesday in the ongoing session of Punjab Vidhan Sabha for consideration.

A decision to this effect was taken in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Tuesday.

The spokesman said the Bill envisages establishment of District Level Agricultural Debt Settlement Forums and a State Level Agricultural Debt Settlement Tribunal to alleviate difficulties of farmers in getting their non-institutional debts reconciled and settled. The District Level Forums would be headed by a retired/serving District or Additional District Session Judge and will comprise of two more members — one representative of farming community and another representative of money lenders.

The State level Tribunal would be headed by a retired Judge of the High Court and will have two more members. Both the Forum and Tribunal will have a term of three years. The Bill also enables the government to prescribe a maximum rate of interest which can be charged by the creditors on non-institutional loans provided by them.

The Forum will decide the dispute within three months, he said adding the jurisdiction of Civil Courts has been barred. All pending disputes in the Civil Courts will be transferred to these Forums from the date the Act is notified. The Forum can determine and settle the agriculture loans upto Rs 15 lakh. The Bill will cover agriculturists and agriculture labourers as well.

According to the provisions of the proposed Bill, any debtor or creditor of agricultural loan can file a petition before the District Level Forum for settlement of their debt and if aggrieved with the order of the Forum, can file an appeal before the State Level Tribunal.

### **Maharashtra govt plans permanent shelters for old cows**

Rs 34 cr allocated for project, sheds to be set up in 34 districts.



The objective is to ensure that cows and other cattle are not abandoned once they turn non-productive.

The Maharashtra government has decided to set up permanent shelters in 34 districts for old cows that have stopped yielding milk to ensure they are not abandoned. The decision comes a year after its controversial move to ban beef across Maharashtra.

Finance Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar has allocated Rs 34 crore for the project in the state budget 2016-17. The project — Govardhan Govansh Raksha Kendra — will get a one-time state financial aid of Rs 1 crore in each selected district and will be implemented through a non-government organisation. The NGOs will be selected based on experience and commitment to protection of cows.

The objective is to ensure that cows and other cattle are not abandoned once they turn non-productive. The finance minister said, “The new scheme Govardhan Govansh Raksha Kendra will be established in 34 rural districts of Maharashtra for rearing of non lactating and unproductive cattle with the participation of experienced NGOs. A one-time grant of Rs 1 crore will be provided for this project.”

The government believes NGOs committed to the cause can look after the cow/cattle shelters and even earn profits from products like dung and urine, which can be processed to form organic manure to be used by farmers. Moreover, cow urine has medicinal value.

Agriculture Minister Eknath Khadse asserts, “Cows and cattle by-products have multiple utility. From bio-gas fuel to enhancing agriculture produce through use of solid waste, they can be of great utility.” He said cow urine had a good international market.

To turn cow dung into liquid fertilizer, several plants are being set up. Every cattle shelter will have the infrastructure to liquefy the dung through water filters before it is passed through concrete drain and connected to pipes to reach agricultural fields.

The cow shelters will be connected to fields, depending on their geographical location. In some cases they would make provisions for transporting the manure to other villages.

Another decision by the government relates to rearing and conservation of local indigenous breed of cattle at two places in the state, Hettikunti in Wardha and Boad in Amravati which would be modernised and renovated. For this scheme, during the year 2016-17, an outlay of Rs 18.61 crore has been proposed.



Emphasising there is no question of reconsidering its decision to ban cow/cattle slaughter, the government dismissed critics saying that farmers were suffering as they could not sell cattle because of the beef ban.

Recently, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had said, “Let us not forget that farmers take care of cows/ cattle as their own children. It is extremely insensitive to even think that because of drought the farmers would hand over their animals for slaughter.”

While acknowledging that the government would provide all financial and logistic help for the farm animals, he said, “We are providing fodder and water for animals in drought hit districts.”

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s keenness to push organic farming has been taken up seriously by the state government. It believes organic farming will not only help in soil preservation and enhance soil fertility but also provide chemical-free foodgrains, vegetables and fruits.

It was also decided that all four agriculture universities in the state will be equipped with organic farming research and training centres.



### **Punjab cabinet gives nod to bill on farm debt**

The Punjab cabinet on Monday approved ‘The Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness Bill-2016’ that deals with expeditious determination and settlement of non-institutional agricultural debt.

The bill covers agriculturists and agriculture labourers and will be tabled in the ongoing session of the Vidhan Sabha.

Under the bill, district-level agricultural debt settlement forums and a state-level agricultural debt settlement tribunal will be set up to help farmers reconcile and settle their non-institutional debts.

The district-level forums will be headed by a retired/serving district or additional district sessions judge having two more members (one representative of farming community and another representative of

moneylenders), while the state-level tribunal will be headed by a retired judge of the high court, besides two members.

Both the forum and tribunal will have a three-year term.

The Bill also enables the government to prescribe a maximum rate of interest which can be charged by the creditors on non-institutional loans provided by them. The forum will decide the dispute within three months. Jurisdiction of civil courts has been barred. All pending disputes in the civil courts will be transferred to these forums from the date the Act is notified. Each creditor will issue an authenticated passbook to the debtor. The proceedings before the forum and the tribunal will be judicial proceedings.

According to the provisions of the proposed Bill, any debtor or creditor of agricultural loan can file a petition before the district-level forum for settlement of their debt, and if aggrieved with the order of the forum, can file an appeal before the state-level tribunal. The forum can determine and settle agricultural loans up to Rs 15 lakh.

### **Huge hike in gallantry award money**

Rs 2 crore: Param Vir Chakra/Ashok Chakra-up from Rs 30 lakh

Rs 1 crore: Maha Vir Chakra/Kirti Chakra-up from Rs 20 lakh

Rs 50 lakh: Vir Chakra/Shaurya Chakra-up from Rs 15 lakh

Rs 14 lakh: Sena/Nau Sena/Vayu Sena Medal (One for gallantry awardee-up from Rs 7 lakh)

Rs 10 lakh: Mention-in-Dispatch-earlier Rs 5 lakh

### **Nod to recruitment in health**

Nod to fill the posts, including Group A (non-teaching), nursing faculty posts (Group A and Group B), Group B and Group C through a committee headed by the vice-chancellor, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot.

The posts of medical/dental teaching faculty would be filled by the committee under the chairmanship of the adviser to the Punjab government on health and medical education Dr KK Talwar. The Group D posts would be filled by the head of the institutions concerned. The step would remove the deficiencies raised by the Medical Council of India/Dental Council of

India and Indian Nursing Council with regard to shortage of faculty and staff in these institutions.

The government had already sanctioned 34 posts of teaching faculty in Government Medical Colleges, Patiala and Amritsar.

The cabinet also gave approval to grant extension in the contract of health pharmacists and sweepers working as service providers at Rs 7,000 and Rs 3,000 per month, respectively, in 1,186 subsidiary health centres under zila parishads from April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### **Govt should play a key role in seed pricing: MS Swaminathan, Founder, MSSRF**

The seed sector is abuzz with lot of developments in the recent weeks, with the latest being the Union government's intervention to control the price of Bt cottonseed. Noted agriculture scientist and father of Green Revolution, Prof MS Swaminathan argues in favour of government intervention and says in an e-mailed interview that the pricing model for grains can be extended to seeds. Excerpts:

**There is a perception that the government's move to control the price of the seed would stifle innovation and hurt private investment in the seed sector in the long term. What is your view on this?**

It is one of government's responsibilities to fix input and output prices in a manner that the farmer, the consumer and the producer all feel comfortable. Seed prices are important and when hybrid seeds are involved the farmers have to buy the seed every year. I had, therefore, suggested that in the case of costly seeds, like that of Bt cotton, the company should also give an insurance policy which will insulate the farmer from unforeseen calamities like drought, floods, hailstorm, etc. The policy should be a win-win for all leading to accelerated agricultural growth coupled with the economic well-being of the farmer and the company.



### **Should the farmer (market) be allowed to decide the price?**

The price of seed should be fixed in the same manner as the price of grain taking into account the cost of production, the amount invested in research, etc. Normally the State Seed Committee suggests the price. A mechanism similar to that of pricing of grains could be developed for seeds. The farmer alone will not be able to suggest a price which takes into account the investment involved

### **How crucial is the role of private sector in the country's agri R&D, especially in the context of stagnating productivity and shrinking arable land?**

The private sector can play a useful role provided they help farmers to improve crop productivity, stability of production and profitability. Ultimately, it is the farmer's well-being that will ensure the well-being of the private or public sector. A balanced view is necessary. The private sector should also remember that a majority of our farmers have very small holdings and very limited risk taking capacity. The cost of production, risk involved and the returns expected are not favourable to the farmers today. This is why I recommended the formula C2 plus 50 per cent with reference to pricing of grains. We need in our country a dynamic public sector, private sector and co-operative sector in the field of agriculture. Farmers belong to the private sector since they own the land and they are the decision makers. Farming is the largest private sector industry.

**In the context of diminishing yields and new pesticide related challenges to Bt cotton, do we have to go back to concept promoting seed diversity and how do we do that? Does it call for a policy correction?**

Genetic heterogeneity is essential to ensure that the crop does not suffer from vulnerability to pests and diseases. Genetic homogeneity enhances vulnerability, while genetic heterogeneity reduces risks. Therefore, in the land use plan as well as in farming system design, seed diversity should be a basic consideration. Our farming is in a critical stage from the point of view of the economic viability of agriculture. Unless agriculture becomes economically viable and intellectually stimulating, it will be difficult to attract and retain youth in farming.

**Board fixes Karnataka's tobacco crop size at 95 million kg**

The Tobacco Board which met in Bengaluru on Saturday fixed the crop size for Karnataka for 2016-17 at 95 million kg (mkg), according to a press release.

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's Member of Parliament and a member of the Board, M Uma Maheswara Rao, President of the Indian Tobacco Association (ITA), the trade body, also attended the meeting.

On the indication of the demand given by the 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, a quantity of 71.95 mkg was sold in the State at ₹135.24 a kg. This shortfall led to a price spurt. During the previous year (2015-16), 103.40 mkg of tobacco was sold on the Karnataka floors at ₹107.49/kg.

G Seshagiri Rao was elected the Vice-Chairman of the Board at the meeting. A decision was also taken at the meeting to increase the interest-free loan amount from ₹25,000 to ₹50,000 to the farmers from the welfare fund to be repaid in three years in three instalments.

The tobacco auctions in Andhra Pradesh are in the initial stages and auctions in Karnataka 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.

## EU, Canada red-flag India's crop cover scheme at WTO



Fresh trouble is in store for India at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), with the EU, Canada, Australia and Thailand questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's crop insurance scheme for farmers. The countries have sought details from India at the multi-lateral trade forum to examine if it should be classified as a trade-distorting amber-box subsidy subject to a cap.

India is already fighting to get food procurement subsidies recognised as non-trade distorting subsidy. New Delhi can notify the scheme as a permissible and un-capped subsidy (green box) at the WTO only if it establishes that the insurance amount is payable after at least 30 per cent crop is destroyed and a natural calamity has been declared — conditions that may not be easy to meet.

“At a recent meeting of the committee on agriculture at the WTO, Canada and the EU asked India about the crop insurance scheme and noted that it would bring down the rate of premium paid by farmers to 2 per cent. The countries want to find out if they can stop India from declaring the subsidy for crop insurance as a green-box subsidy,” a Commerce Ministry official told *BusinessLine*.

### **Threat of a 10% cap**

If India wants to give unlimited amounts of crop insurance subsidy, it has to comply with the green-box criteria, pointed out Abhjit Das from the Centre for WTO Studies.

“If not, the subsidies will be classified as amber box and clubbed with all other product-specific support, including the minimum support price programme (MSP) and subject to a cap of 10 per cent of farm production,” he said. Overshooting the 10 per cent cap may, in turn, lead to challenges and penalties.



Under the PM's Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), three levels of indemnity — 90 per cent, 80 per cent and 60 per cent — corresponding to low-risk, medium-risk and high-risk areas will be available for all crops based on production in the past ten years. This means farmers will have to bear the loss of the first 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 40 per cent for the different categories.

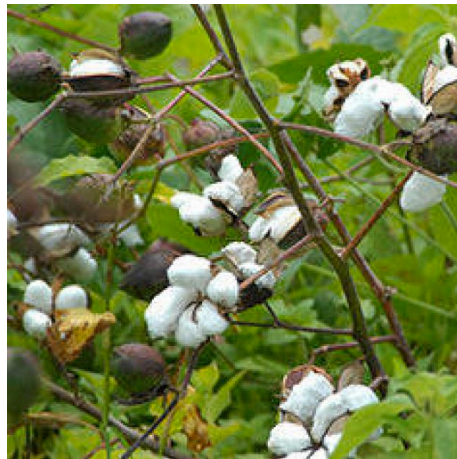
“However, there is no clause in the scheme mentioning the minimum crop loss that would make a farmer eligible for insurance pay-outs. It would depend on the assessment done by the insurance companies,” the official said. Therefore, green-box eligibility based on a minimum 30 per cent loss of income or production could be difficult to meet for the government.

### **Political decisions**

The requirement for declaration of a ‘natural disaster’ in order to meet the eligibility criteria of green-box subsidy is also tricky; such declarations are usually political decisions and the government may not always want to come up with such an announcement.

The PMFBY, which will be operational from April 1, seeks to provide insurance coverage and financial support to farmers in the event of natural calamities, pests and diseases and stabilise income in distress years.

### **Price control may hurt investment in seed sector**



Can stifle innovation, affect R&D efforts, fear industry players

The latest row over royalty relating to Monsanto and the subsequent intervention by the Centre to set a uniform price across the country would have long-term implications on farm sector research, industry players said.

Seed technology developers such as Bioseed and Rasi Seeds among others are jittery over the current developments and feel that the move to control prices would stifle innovation, besides hurting the private investments into agriculture research and technology availability.

“We believe farmer is the best judge to make right choices. As a result, the pricing should be left to the market forces,” said Paresh Verma, Research Director of Bioseed, a DCM Shriram Group company.

### **R&D cycle**

Developing a new hybrid seed or a transgenic technology is a time-consuming process as the research and product development cycles are pretty long.

“It takes about eight years to develop a hybrid and about 10-12 years to come out with a technology. As a developer, if I face any uncertainty relating to sharing of the value, it does not motivate me to invest further,” Verma said.

The private sector seed companies in India lag the leading international seed producers in terms of R&D spend.

According to ICRA, the average R&D spend of seed companies in India is about 4-5 per cent of sales compared to about 8-10 per cent for leading global companies.

“Developers should be given the freedom to price their produce,” said M Ramasami, CEO of Salem-based Rasi Seeds Pvt Ltd, which is developing a transgenic rice resistant to stem borer and also Bt brinjal.

“Besides spending a lot of money on research, we also put in lot of efforts without knowing the returns,” Ramasami said.

For the North Indian cotton growing regions of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, where cotton leaf curl virus (CLCV) is a major issue, Rasi Seeds has introduced special hybrid that is resistant to the virus.

“As a result, we were commanding a premium. But with the uniform price set by the government, we will be losing ₹50 per packet (of 450 grams) in the region,” Ramasami said.

Rasi Seeds is among top two players in the Bt cottonseed market in North India.

After a row over royalty between Monsanto and some seed companies, the Centre recently intervened and fixed the maximum retail price of Bt cottonseed lower at ₹800 per packet by reducing the trait value.

Earlier, the Bt cottonseed prices were pegged at ₹930.

### **No impact: Activists**

The Coalition for GM-Free India, however, feels that the Price Control Order will have no impact on the R&D investments of seed firms.

“They have collected far more than what they invested on R&D in India. The argument that the Order will deter or disincentivise investments in research and development don’t hold water,” Kavitha Kuruganti, a leader of the Coalition, points out.

The government has a role in regulating the price as the cottonseed is in the Essential Commodities category.

“The Order does have a component of trait value,” she says.

## We're fast running out of water



Promoting water saving technologies in paddy and shifting to pulses and oilseeds can make a big difference

The UN has selected “water and jobs” as the central theme for this year’s World Water Day, which is being celebrated annually throughout the world on March 22. But, water resources are under more serious threat today than ever before. Water is reportedly the world’s most exploited natural resource.

As per the latest National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) satellite data, more than half of the Earth’s 37 largest aquifers are running too fast to be replenished. This is extremely troubling, considering the fact that we draw about a third of world’s water from the aquifers.

The United Nation’s World Water Development Report on Water for a Sustainable World (2015) has made a startling claim that world would face a 40 per cent shortfall in freshwater in as soon as 15 years.

The water tables are also dropping globally at an alarming rate. For instance, NASA’s findings suggest that India’s water table is declining alarmingly at a rate of about 0.3 metres per year. Falling water tables has prompted various users to use expensive deep-water equipment which has consequently put the groundwater under severe stress.

At the backdrop of such a precarious situation, the World Economic Forum in its Global Risks Report (2016) has cited water crisis as one of the three biggest challenges of the world.

A latest study has backed up these findings estimating that about four billion people face scarcity of water and among them about one billion live in India.

So scarce is the global water supply that the United Nations World Water Development Report on Water for a Sustainable World (2015) has reportedly warned that by 2030 only 60 per cent of the world's demand for water will be met by the existing resources at the current rate of use.

Climate change is expected to worsen the situation further by distorting the geographical and time-period distribution of rainfall resulting in floods and excessive dry seasons.

### **Alarming withdrawals**

As per a very crucial study by Mekonnen and Hoekstra (2015) of the University of Twente, Netherlands, about 80 per cent of Indians face a severe scarcity of water for at least a month every year. And as per the United Nations World Water Development Report about 22 out of 32 Indian cities face daily water shortages.

The precious groundwater resources are alarmingly under severe stress today. Of the total 5842 blocks assessed by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), about 802 are over-exploited, about 523 are semi-critical and about 169 are critical.

Indiscriminate withdrawals have been reported from the agriculturally well-developed states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.

Water scarcity is most likely to threaten the country's food security as well. Farmers in the major growing regions of the country are unable to manage their crop cycles due to unavailability of both surface and groundwater.

In some regions, such as in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, acute water scarcity has driven large number of farmers to sell off their lands and migrate to cities in search of better opportunities. Is the crisis just because of the disturbances in the demand and supply curve or is it due to the mismanagement of water resources?

Besides increased population pressure, constant competing demand for water from household, agriculture, industry and energy sectors reportedly contribute to declining water availability.

According to the data published by the Ministry of Water Resources, the annual groundwater draft is 243 BCM out of which 221 BCM is for irrigation use and 22 BCM is for domestic and industrial use. It is reported that farmers tend to overdraw groundwater by keeping their pump sets switched on for long periods as they fear that power cuts may interrupt the water flow.

As a result, inadvertently they often flood their fields that are causing further distress to water resources. What can we do to bring this down dramatically?

### **More yield with less water**

In order to secure the future of India's water resources, it is very important that certain steps be taken immediately especially in agricultural sector which consumes about 85 percent of the available water today. Introduction of more efficient water management is the need of the hour.

There is an urgency to compute the water requirements of different crops and introduce water saving measures such as drip irrigation, sprinkler and system of rice intensification for irrigation on large scale.

The Economic Survey 2015-16 has also underlined that it is imperative that the country focuses on improving efficiency of water use in agriculture in the form of adopting such water saving technologies.

Various field level investigations prove that these technologies besides bringing about a substantial increase in crop productivity, also save about 50 per cent of water and electricity per acre. In States such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu the drip irrigation method is found to be working very well.

Crop distribution needs a drastic change wherein the water-stressed states can shift from cultivating water-intensive crops like paddy and sugarcane to pulses and oilseeds which would require less water, but generate more profit.

Climate experts have predicted that there will be fewer rainy days but in those days it would rain more, increasing the chances of flooding. Therefore it is imperative for India to develop capacity to store and even transport water.

In this regard the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) suggests that a mix of storage options, including aquifer recharge, restoring natural wetlands, enhancing soil moisture and small ponds and tanks would complement reservoir storage to increase water availability. Rainwater harvesting is one of the cheapest and easiest ways of augmenting water stock.

Despite an existing regulation which makes rainwater harvesting mandatory for all new buildings with a roof area of more than 100 square meters, few do it.

Let us pledge to conserve and manage tomorrow's water more sustainably that is being used to meet today's need.

*Narayanamoorthy is professor, Alagappa University, and Alli is assistant professor, Vellore Institute of Technology.*

*Today is World Water Day*

### **Fresh spell of rain to lash North-West from Thursday**

The India Met Department has joined the watch for arrival of a weather-making western disturbance into North-West India by Wednesday night, which will get active from the next day itself.

Thunderstorms accompanied with hail have been forecast for Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday. The plains of North-West India are forecast to get hit from Friday onwards.

### **Heavy rain, snow**

A prevailing western disturbance is in the process of exiting eastern Jammu and Kashmir but has brought rain, thundershowers and hail over parts of North-West India and North-Eastern India overnight on Monday.



It is here that the follow-up western disturbance would move in over the next couple of days and start influencing weather. Heavy rain or snow may lash isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir on Friday.

Thunderstorms and hail are likely to punctuate weather over Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Rajasthan the same day.

A three-day forecast valid from Saturday spoke about the possibility of fairly widespread rain or snow over the Western Himalayan region.

### **Trough of low**

Scattered rain or thunderstorms are likely over the plains of North-West India, Central India and East India. Fairly widespread rain/thunderstorms have been forecast for the North-Eastern States during this period.

Meanwhile, a trough of low pressure (an elongated area of lower pressure) over Equatorial Indian Ocean and the Malay Peninsula (across international waters adjoining the Andaman and Nicobar Islands) is promising to send a rain wave into the Andaman Sea and the adjoining Bay of Bengal from the weekend.

This will be of interest to the eastern coast of Sri Lanka and the mostly dry Tamil Nadu coast since international agencies suspect rains escalating across the Bay of Bengal after the weekend.

### **Bay rain wave**

Entire Sri Lanka and the southern coast of Tamil Nadu are forecast to receive welcome showers early next week and some of them are likely to scatter into the rest of South Peninsula as well.

According to the US National Centres for Environmental Prediction, southern Tamil Nadu, entire Kerala and adjoining Coastal Karnataka may receive rain or thundershowers from March 29 to April 6.

In the South, Tamil Nadu, Rayalaseema, South Interior Karnataka, and, worse of all, Coastal Karnataka have been suffering from a mounting rain deficit from March 1 onwards.

The incoming Bay of Bengal rain wave is expected to bring relief to some if not all parts of the affected region from early next week, the international weather agencies suggested.

### **Higher inventories in the consuming markets drag cardamom**

Small cardamom markets remained steady with marginal fluctuations at last week's auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Arrivals stood at around 695 tonnes against 710 tonnes the previous week.

North Indian buyers stayed away from the declining market. Despite having three auction holidays this week, the market was sluggish, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, Kumily told *BusinessLine*.

Inventories in the consuming markets in the upcountry regions are full and hence no buying interest is emanating from those centres, he said. Exporters have also slowed down because of slack overseas demand and non-availability of exportable grade capsules. They have bought an estimated 30 to 40 tonnes, trade sources in Bodinayakannur said.

The individual auction average was vacillating between ₹500 and ₹540 a kg.

At the auction on Monday in Bodinayakannur by the Cardamom Planters' Association, arrivals were at 50.8 tonnes against 40.3 tonnes last Monday and of this 48 tonnes were traded. The average fell to ₹481.77 a kg from ₹528.25 last Monday. Total arrivals during the season up to March 19 were at around 24,153 tonnes and sales were at 23,258 tonnes. The individual auction average as on March 19 stood at ₹600.36/kg.

Prices of graded varieties (₹/kg): 8mm bold good colour 860-925; 7-8 mm 670-700; 6-7 mm 550-600; below 6 mm: 500-525.

### **Positive cues boost soyabean, oil**

Both soya oil and soyabean traded higher on strong global cues with soya refined being quoted at ₹620-22. Similarly, soya solvent ruled higher at ₹590-95. Amid arrival of 2,500-3,000 bags, soyabean ruled higher at ₹3,800-3,850 a quintal. Plant deliveries too were higher at ₹3,800-25.

Soyameal on the spot went for ₹34,500 a quintal on scattered demand in the domestic market.

### **Palm oil to test resistance, dip**

Malaysian palm oil futures on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives hit a 23-month high on Monday, driven by lower expected production and improving export demand.

Exports of Malaysian palm oil products for March 1-20 rose 23.2 per cent to 717,670 tonnes, cargo surveyor Societe Generale de Surveillance said. CPO active month June futures moved perfectly in line with our expectations.

As mentioned in the previous update, as the trend still remains strong both on the short-term and medium-term, we expect supports to hold again and edge higher again.

As expected supports levels held and then prices rose higher again towards our next technical objective near MYR 2,690-2,700/tonne levels. Further upside to a potential equality target at 2,800-15 is possible in the coming months.

But, for that to happen, prices need to correct lower or consolidate in a trading range for a while taking a breather. Supports are at 2,630 followed by 2,585 .

Only an unexpected decline below 2,540-50 levels, also being a rising trend line support point, could cause doubts on our bullish view. Such a fall though not expected could see prices drifting lower again towards 2,460-65 levels where strong supports are noted again.

Though, any corrections could see rapid selling pressure, the trend remains strongly bullish and such dips could prove to be short-lived.

We will now reassess the wave counts, as prices have crossed over above 2,370-2,400 . A possible new impulse looks to have started again.

One of our targets at 1,850 was met. The rally from there looks very impressive. The current move could push higher towards 2,645 initially and then it could correct lower in a corrective pattern towards 2,310 or even

lower to 2,250, and then subsequently rise towards a medium to long-term target at 2,900, which could bring this current impulse to an end. But, this is clearly a medium to long-term expectation and not to be mistaken for a short-term view. Any dips could prove to be opportunity to participate in the upcoming uptrend.

RSI is in the neutral zone now indicating that it is neither overbought nor oversold. As mentioned in the earlier update, the averages in MACD are above the zero line of the indicator hinting a bullish trend to be intact.

Only a crossover again below the zero line could hint at a reversal in trend to bearish.

Therefore, look for palm oil futures to test the resistances and then slide.

Supports are at MYR, 2,650, 2,620 and 2,575. Resistances are at MYR 2,710, 2,745 and 2,800.

*The writer is the Director of Commtrendz Research. There is risk of loss in trading.*

## **Business Standard**

### **Romit Sen & Kamal Vatta: The importance of water management**

Growth and development in India will be governed by the way water is used and managed. On World Water Day, the columnists analyse how a proper framework can ensure the safety and sustainability of this resource

Water has been at the centre stage of the development and political debate. Growing scarcity; increasing pollution; enhanced competition, conflicts and trans-boundary water sharing issues have dominated the national discourse in current times. Recent policies and programmes of the central government indicate an increased impetus on addressing some of the major concerns facing the sector. Given the complexities associated with the management and governance of water resources, an effective framework on how we can better manage and use our water resources appears challenging. However,

certain fundamental aspects need to be addressed if we are to ensure the safety and sustainability of this precious resource.

The first among these is a comprehensive assessment of water resources in India. The last time a comprehensive assessment of water resources for the entire country was done was in 1999-2000. The planning of water resources needs to be based on updated data and it is time that a complete assessment on water availability, use and future demand is carried out.

A large share of our water needs is met by groundwater.

Groundwater depletion has become a serious problem, with aquifers across the country moving into the over-exploited zone.

There is a Budget allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for undertaking a major programme for sustainable management of groundwater resources in 2016. However, one must address the fundamental problem of limiting groundwater extraction. There are no exact estimates on the number of groundwater extraction units in the country and the number of observation wells is far too less. There is an urgent need to increase the number of observation wells across different regions to get an accurate estimate of groundwater levels.

Deteriorating groundwater quality has also been an area of concern. This makes a large section of our population, depending on groundwater as their major source of drinking water, vulnerable. The Central Ground Water Board in its assessment has indicated that India faces the problem of arsenic, fluoride, nitrate and heavy metal contamination. While the cause of groundwater pollution is both natural and anthropogenic, the management options have to look at a complete profiling of aquifers, conjunctive use of surface and groundwater and programmes for rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharge.

Improving water-use efficiency is the need of the hour and is crucial for reducing the dependence on freshwater sources. Agriculture accounts for 85 per cent of the total water use and therefore, resource optimisation in this sector is vital. Water-use efficiency in agriculture can be brought about by the adoption of low-cost technologies. It is also important that measures for bringing efficiency in the urban and industrial sector are implemented through better demand management and effective recycling and reuse.

The initiative of setting up a Bureau of Water Use Efficiency is an innovative step. The Ministry of Water Resources has been working for the past four years to set up a National Bureau of Water Use Efficiency. The National Water Mission had a target of improving water-use efficiency by 20 per cent by March 2017. However, little headway appears to have been made in these areas and it is time that efforts are undertaken to revive these initiatives.

Water has an economic value in all its uses and thus should be recognised as an economic good. Therefore, suitable pricing mechanisms need to be developed. Pricing of water has always been a politically sensitive issue but it is high time we recognised the need to bring financial stability in our water utilities. An important prerequisite would be to set standards for water pricing according to the ability to pay. Pricing should be looked upon as a critical input for activities such as agriculture, industrial and domestic use and as a means to increase the financial stability of water projects, which do not exclude the provision of water to the poor and the marginalised.

One of the arguments cited for the current state of affairs in the water sector relates to the governance of water spanning across different departments and ministries, both at the central and state levels. A few years back, the central government proposed the idea of having a National Water Framework Law. This was opposed by the state governments because they saw it as an infringement of Constitutional provisions that mention water to be a state subject, giving rights to the state to frame legislations on water. In December 2015, a committee was constituted to examine the provisions of the draft National Water Framework Law and suggest changes/modifications therein, taking into account *inter-alia* the emerging challenges in the water sector, reuse of wastewater, the likely impact of climate change on water resources and the importance of river restoration/rejuvenation among others.

Given the enormity of the challenges the water sector faces; given the fact that water is a resource that has a strong inter-relationship between natural and anthropogenic activities and given the urgency that our interventions on managing water needs to be synchronised across users, departments, states and government, a framework law with basic principles for alignment of legislations sounds rational.

The objective of celebrating World Water Day on March 22 every year with

a pledge to conserve water will be successful only if we remember the fundamental: water cycle and life cycle are one. Our existence, growth and development will be governed by the way we use and manage water in the times to come.

### **Modi to meet bankers, insurers on crop insurance**

Currently, only around 25% of the country's total crop area is covered by insurance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to meet senior officials of all banks and insurance companies in Mumbai on Tuesday to discuss the implementation of the government's crop insurance scheme, an official source said on Monday.

The finance ministry source said Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will also attend the meeting at the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development office along with officials of the finance and agriculture ministries.

The meeting will discuss ways to bring more loanee farmers under the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana' (PMFBY) so as to realise the target of 50 per cent insurance coverage.

Of the farm credit target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore set for this financial year, only Rs 75,000 crore is under crop insurance.

Currently, only around 25 per cent of the country's total crop area is covered by insurance.

Drought and unseasonal rains last year forced the state governments to seek over Rs.10,100 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund.

Under the new crop insurance scheme to be implemented from April 1 for kharif crops to be sown from June and available to both loanee and non-loanee farmers, the premium is a low two per cent of sum insured for all kharif crops and 1.5 per cent for all rabi crops.

For annual commercial and horticultural crops, farmers will have to pay a premium of 5 per cent. The remaining premium share, as was the case with



previous schemes, will be borne equally by the central and state governments.

Addressing farmers at the Krishi Unnati Mela here on Saturday, Modi explained the benefits of PMFBY and said it had been evolved after wide-ranging consultations.

The 2016-17 budget has increased the allocation for agriculture, irrigation and rural infrastructure in order to help farmers cope with the impact of two successive years of poor rainfall.

### **Mega farmers' fair concludes in Delhi**

By official estimates, around 100,000 farmers were expected to attend. Information was displayed in about 500 stalls

S P Tiwari from Congress president Sonia Gandhi's constituency of Rae Bareli is thanking the Gods that the recent bout of hail and rains left his five-acre farm untouched.

A progressive farmer, Tiwari planted wheat, mustard and potatoes in the current rabi season and plans to harvest these after Holi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mega farmers fair, which concluded here on Monday gave Tiwari and others an opportunity to purchase newer varieties of seeds. It was organised on a much bigger scale than earlier and perhaps for the first time had sessions on topics like post-harvest loss, but most preferred to use it as a platform to purchase new seed varieties.

"This fair does give us a chance to learn about new varieties but we don't know whether these would be available nearer home," said Bhagirath Dass, who runs an ashram near Kosi in Vrindavan, where he grows wheat, paddy and moong (green gram) in 36 acres.

Most of those spoken to seemed aware of the PM's ambitious crop insurance scheme but were unsure of details.

The fair, was inaugurated by the PM on Friday. His address assured farmers of his government's commitment to double income in the next six years.

By official estimates, around 100,000 farmers were expected to attend. Information was displayed in about 500 stalls.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Cabinet approves bill on interest rate for farmers**

Punjab cabinet on Monday approved a key bill to fix the rate of interest by private moneylenders for farmers amid rising indebtedness.

The proposed legislation, likely to be tabled on Tuesday, will provide a framework for expeditious determination and settlement of non-institutional agricultural debt. A government note said the Bill envisages the establishment of district-level agricultural debt settlement forums and a state-level agricultural debt settlement tribunal to alleviate difficulties of farmers in getting their non-institutional debts reconciled and settled.

The district-level forums would be headed by a retired/serving district or additional district sessions judge and will comprise two more members -- one representative of farming community and another representative of money lenders. The state-level tribunal would be headed by a retired judge of the high court and will have two more members. Both the forum and tribunal will have a term of three years. The bill also enables the government to prescribe a maximum rate of interest which can be charged by the creditors on non-institutional loans provided by them.

The forum will decide the dispute within three months. Jurisdiction of civil courts has been barred. All pending disputes in the civil courts will be transferred to these forums from the date the Act is notified. Each creditor will issue an authenticated passbook to the debtor. The proceedings before the forum and the tribunal will be judicial proceedings.

According to the provisions of the proposed Bill, any debtor or creditor of agricultural loan can file a petition before the district-level forum for settlement of their debt and if aggrieved with the order of the forum, can file an appeal before the state-level tribunal.

## **Farmers in Andhra Pradesh set to get free energy-efficient agri pumpsets**

early two lakh farmers across 13 districts in the state will be provided energy efficient agricultural pumpsets free of cost in fiscal 2016-17.

There are nearly 15 lakh agriculture workers including 2.5 lakh under Vizag-based Eastern Power Distribution Company of AP Limited (APEPDCL) and 12.5 lakh under Tirupati-based Southern Power Distribution Company of AP Limited (APSPDCL).

The state government wanted to distribute the pumps to the 2 lakh select farmers in all 13 districts under phase-1 of the Agriculture Side Management Programme (AgDSMP). The state energy department on Sunday instructed the heads of both APEPDCL and APSPDCL to come up with a proposal and road map of the AgDSMP within the next 15 days.

Each pump set costs Rs 50,000 and a beneficiary will have to give away his existing inefficient or obsolete pump sets to get the 5-star rated pump set from the government. The Centre will provide Rs 5,000 crore to the AP government to distribute the pump sets under the AgDSMP through New Delhi-based Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL).

Presently, a pilot programme is under implementation in Rajanagaram mandal of East Godavari under the APEPDCL wherein about 2,500 existing pump sets are being replaced by EESL at a cost of Rs 20 crore. "We have so far replaced nearly about 292 pumps under the pilot programme. We can get minimum 25% energy savings through the pump sets," said Ajay Jain, energy secretary for the AP state government. Ajay Jain said APSPDCL has nearly 12.5 agriculture pump sets, while the remaining 2.5 lakh pump sets fall under APEPDCL.

## **Migration hits crop harvest, local economy, say experts**

People from scarcity-hit Marathwada are moving out in droves this year, claim activists, with the move likely to leave a severe impact on the employment availability and economy in the region.

Experts said the shift to other districts with better water availability is likely to pick pace after the completion of the board examinations.

Left leader Rajan Kshirsagar, who just finished a tour of parts of scarcity-hit Marathwada, said there has been a rise in migration from the region this year. "Every year, around 10 lakh sugarcane labourers and nearly equal amount of construction workers seasonally migrate from Marathwada. Current estimates indicate that such seasonal migration has touched a whopping 50 lakh this year and is likely to increase in the coming days," he said.

He said the large-scale migration is primarily going to affect employment in agricultural and allied businesses. "A dearth of labours was felt by farmers during the rabi harvest season. Marathwada has around 100 cotton mills that were struggling to get raw cotton and labour due to the drought-like situation. Similarly, construction houses from the region are not finding labour they used to get in the past as many of them have already migrated," he claimed.

Fringe areas in Pune, Nashik and Thane districts have been identified as possible areas where a major chunk of migrant population has shifted.

Sharing her observations about drought-like situation in Marathwada, Parineeta Dandekar, associate coordinator with the advocacy group South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), said industries from the region were also finding it difficult to engage unskilled and semi-skilled labourers.

"Industries have not only been struggling to get water, but also labourers. The employment scenario in general is grim as there are no takers for some category of jobs. Sugar industry is one of the affected areas. Parts of Marathwada have sugarcane growing belts and these were not getting labourers to harvest as easily as in past due," she said.

Subhash Lomte of advocacy group Marathwada Pani Hakka Sangharsh Samiti said consecutive years of deficient-monsoon has resulted into drastic surge in seasonal migration. "People are leaving their homes in search of water and livelihood. Such migration is going to have adverse impact on local economies as net production is going to come down," he said.

Veteran economist and former member of Maharashtra State Planning Board

H M Desarda said population shift would have adverse effect including worsening of issues arising out of urbanisation.

"The government measures such as MNREGA and PDS should arrest the large-scale migration. Effective implementation of these schemes should take place along with other relief measures to help affected people stay back," he said.

The state government has declared almost all villages in Marathwada as scarcity-hit, with an unprecedented number of tankers supplying drinking water in the eight districts of the region.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Excess rainfall in over 72% of the country in March: IMD**



More than 72 per cent of the country has received excess rainfall in March in a phenomenon of unseasonal rains that led to crop losses.

NEW DELHI: More than 72 per cent of the country has received excess rainfall in March in a phenomenon of unseasonal rains that led to crop losses.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), from March 1 to 18, of the 36 sub-divisions, 26 received excess rainfall. During this period only one sub-division received normal rainfall.

The entire north, west and central India witnessed excess rainfall during the period.

However, the eastern coast, which includes southern part of West Bengal, Odisha and coastal Andhra Pradesh, has received "deficient" rainfall, and the Rayalseema region, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry witnessed "scanty" rainfall.

In several parts of the country, rainfall is seldom witnessed in March.

Unseasonal rains and hailstorm in the past few days have damaged wheat crop in several parts of the nation, including Punjab and Haryana. Mango crop was also affected to some extent due to rains in Maharashtra.

Last year, unseasonal rains and hailstorm during March- April period had damaged the wheat crop significantly, resulting in sharp fall in production by 9.32 million tonnes.

Wheat output is estimated to rise to 93.82 million tonnes in the 2015-16 crop year (July-June), as against 86.53 million tonnes the previous year, despite drought.

### **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.