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# THE HINDU

## **‘Kisan Vikas Chamber’ planned to help farmers**



Punjab will now have ‘Kisan Vikas Chamber’, to be set up on the pattern of industry outfits like CII, Ficci and Assocham.

The Chamber is being set up to bring State’s dwindling agrarian economy back on track.

Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on Sunday laid the foundation stone of Punjab Kisan Vikas Chamber (PKVC)—farmers’ advisory body to be constructed over two acres of land here in Aero City here.

The Chief Minister said this farmers’ autonomous body shall certainly help them to do lobbying to get their genuine demands accepted at the Centre’s level through persuasion within the democratic means.

He said this platform would prove to be a milestone in putting the views of eminent agriculture experts and economists across the state government as well as the Centre in streamlining the policies related to agriculture and allied farming.

He said this Chamber on the pattern of industrial organisations like Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), PHD Chamber of Commerce, Associated Chambers of Commerce of India (ASSOCHAM) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) would provide affirmative say of peasantry in the policies and programmes related to agricultural and allied activities.

The Chief Minister said this would be a non-political forum exclusively dedicated to the cause of farming community.

Eminent academicians and experts in different fields of Agriculture and allied services have been nominated in this prestigious organisation, Mr Badal said, adding that this body would surely reach zenith of its glory under stewardship of Chairman Punjab Farmers' Commission G S Kalkat as its patron and leading progressive farmer Kulwant Singh as its President.

Mr Badal said the entire construction cost of the chamber's complex would be borne by the state government and adequate land had been provided by GMADA free of cost.

The State government had initially provided Rs 20 crore as corps fund to run the chamber till it becomes fully self sustainable.

The Chief Minister said it was high time to set up such organisation to provide an interactive platform to farmers so as to enable them to take up their issues at an appropriate level for the quick resolution to their satisfaction. He said the chamber would engage the services of renowned agriculture experts for seeking their advice on matters related to the agriculture sector.

This would help the chamber to contest their claims vigorously with the Central and the State government in a meaningful and result oriented manner. -- PTI

## 101 species of spiders found in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary



One of the spiders, known as *Gea subarmata*, found at Chinnar. Photo: Special arrangement

Researchers recently spotted 101 species of spiders belonging to 65 genera from Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary in Idukki, Kerala, when documenting spider diversity in the Sanctuary. The spider population from the sanctuary accounted for 6.98 per cent of the Indian spider species.

Lycosidae, better known as wolf spiders and with excellent eyesight and agile movements, were the dominant species in the sanctuary. The researchers encountered multiple web cast in the sanctuary and spotted as many as 10 species of Araneidae. These orb-weaver spiders cast their carefully knitted web in gardens, fields, and forests and wait for the prey to walk in. The documentation, which was carried out by C.K. Adarsh and P.O Nameer of the Centre for Wildlife Sciences of the College of Forestry, Kerala Agricultural University, Kerala, was published in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*.

The spiders were surveyed in bushes, tree trunks, ferns, forest floor, foliage and grasslands and were handpicked for documentation.

Two endemic genera of Indian spiders — *Annandaliella* and *Neoheterophrictus* — were identified during the study. Also, seven feeding guilds of spiders namely orb-weavers, stalkers, ground runners, foliage runners, sheet-web builders, space-web builders, and ambushers were identified. The report of *Latrodectus hasselti* from Chinnar is the first record of the species from Kerala. There are only very few reports on the occurrence of *L. hasselti* in other parts of India.

Spiders perform important ecological services by functioning as predators in nature. They feed on other insects and even small vertebrates. The loss of spiders could lead to ecosystem imbalances. Little has been understood about the spiders of India, especially that of the Western Ghats, they pointed out.

The world of spiders is often shrouded in mystery, and much misunderstanding has been woven around them. There are popular misconceptions that all spiders are poisonous creatures. But, in reality, a very few spiders are poisonous and harmful to human beings, the researchers pointed out, quoting earlier studies.

### **Siblings' success story in mushroom spawn**

Twenty five years of mushroom and mushroom spawn production - it is rare that mushroom farmers themselves involve in mushroom spawn production too (normally they source from specialised producers) and that adds to the beauty of this siblings.

Started mushroom cultivation out of sheer fascination, P. Kathiresan (44) and his younger sibling P. Suresh (40) from Nallagoundenpalayam have now completed 25 years of donning the dual role of mushroom and mushroom spawn producers.

“It is rare that mushroom farmers themselves produce mushroom spawns as they usually outsource the spawns. Here, the brothers are not only using the

spawns for their own mushroom production but also commercially producing the same for other mushroom cultivators,” pointed out A. Venkattaraman, Assistant Director of Agriculture.



P. Kathiresan, the mushroom cultivator from Tirupur district, and his son, taking a look at the mushrooms produced in his unit.

Belonging to an agrarian family which was involved in vegetable cultivation, Mr. Kathiresan and Mr. Suresh developed interest in mushroom in their student days just by the sight of the said produce. They did not think twice before setting up shed on a 12,000 sq ft area and started mushroom production in a primitive way using cholam as a medium to cultivate spawns.

“We have started the production of mushroom spawn, which is nothing but the seed required for growing mushroom, in tandem with the mushroom rearing. This is due to the difficulty faced to source the spawns at requisite quantities at desired intervals because of inadequate production of spawns,” pointed out Mr. Suresh.

Sustainability of the brothers in spawn production, which is highly technical, has been attributed to their willingness to incorporate new technologies from time to time.

They are now using ultra-violet chambers and related advance techniques to produce sterilised spawns to avoid contamination. Due to this, the brothers are able to produce 120 kg of mushroom and 500 packets of mushroom spawn (each 350 g that can produce 1.5 kg of mushroom) daily.

Each kg of mushroom fetches them Rs. 140 and each packet of spawn gets them Rs. 30. “Since not much of high quality spawns are available, customers from as far as Chennai come here to source it,” said Mr. Suresh.

*Sustainability of the brothers in spawn production, which is highly technical, has been attributed to their willingness to incorporate new technologies from time to time.*

### **Pachamalai farmers get an alternative source of income**



**IDEAL BREEDING GROUND:** Fish farming offers a stable source of income for farmers at Top Sengattupatti in Pachamalai.— PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Fish farming on the hills? Hard to believe, but true. The implementation of the Integrated Tribal Development Project by the Nationalised Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development for six years till 2020.



A group of tribal farmers of Pachamalai is poised for economic growth thanks to the off-shore fish farm being developed at three places – two in the Tiruchi district and one in the Salem district as the hills is spread over these two revenue districts.

One of the tribal farmers, Raju, who owns a sprawling pond, said that he did not imagine that he could rear fishes in his pond.

The pond has been getting perennial supply from an adjoining source and is even 15 to 20 feet in depth, depending upon the percolation of water from the adjoining source.

He was one of the tribal farmers identified under the programme for developing fish farm.

He has been rearing ‘catla’ and ‘rohu’. He said that he was confident of an assured revenue from the fish farm from October – November this year.

Another tribal farmer Thambusamy in Top Sengattupatti said that the pond had been converted into an income-generation source.

The project, being implemented by The Hand in Hand, a non-governmental organisation, had been gaining momentum as it provides economic uplift for the tribal farmers.

“We have groups of farmers skilled in various vocations – right from coffee cultivation to cashew orchard development. Those owning a pond have been identified under the off-shore fish farming activity,” says an official source. Four persons have been identified so far – three in Tiruchi district and one in Salem district.

### **Two sites identified**

The third pond in Tiruchi district would be set up at Thannerpallam while the pond in Salem district would be set up at Nallamatthi village, according to sources.

## ‘Organic farming boosts productivity’



All ears:Participants at the meeting on organic farming held at Bharat Institutions in Narayanguda on Sunday.— Photo: G. Ramakrishna

Organic farming has to be encouraged and supported as it not only helps in improving productivity, but it is the ideal way of dealing with the effects of climate change, said C.S.R. Murthy, Deputy General Manager, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) here on Sunday.

Mr. Murthy advised the farmers, especially the small and marginal ones, to form themselves into groups to take up organic farming as was being done successfully in States like Maharashtra. But, for taking up organic farming movement further, the apprehensions among farmers about decline in production should be removed, he observed.

The Nabard official also emphasised that constant usage of chemical fertilizer and pesticides would only lead to gradual decline in productivity and not the other way round. He was speaking at the inauguration of the three-day training programme for farmers in organic farming being jointly organised by Ekalavya Foundation and Grama Bharati at Bharat Institutions in Narayanguda.



Farmer trainers have been chosen from all the 10 districts for the programme and during the three days, they will be exposed to the benefits of organic farming through known practitioners in the field. The trainees in turn are expected to help other farmers in their respective areas to take up organic farming. The objective is to ensure natural farming in 10,000 acres within the next three years.

“The TS government should also train farmers in organic farming as the A.P. government has done recently with the help of noted agriculture scientist and natural farmer Subash Palekar. Government support is vital in these kind of activities as it would only be incentivising the farmers”, said former Nabard Chief General Manager P. Mohanaiah, who presided over the programme.

### **Alternative income sources**

The former banking official, also associated with Grama Bharati, pointed out that taking up organic farming also meant preserving natural resources for the future generations. The government too has realised the importance and had formulated plans with the support of Nabard.

Along with farming, the farmer should be supported in having livestock like cattle and others as an alternative source of income.

Ekalavya Foundation chairman P. Venugopal Reddy called for support to the indigenous seeds, farming, natural fertiliser, livestock like the ‘desi’ cow and so on. For VC of N.G. Ranga Agriculture University also spoke.

### **Giving a new shape to agriculture in State**

*Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao to lay foundation stone for Kaleshwaram project today*



K. Chandrasekhar Rao would lay foundation stone for Kaleshwaram project, the State government's prestigious irrigation project across Godavari for optimum utilisation of Pranahita and Godavari river waters, at Medigadda in the district on Monday.

As part of redesigning the Pranahita-Chevella project, the State government had decided to construct a main barrage across Godavari at Medigadda, about 20 km downstream of Kaleshwaram temple, and named it 'Kaleshwaram project' after Sri Kaleshwara Mukteeshwara Swamy Devasthanam.

### **160 tmc ft of water to be lifted**

The main barrage at Medigadda, to be built at a height of 100 meters, can store 16 tmc ft of water and lift 160 tmc ft for a period of 150 to 170 days.

As part of the project, two other barrages would also be constructed at Annaram to store 6.22 tmc ft of water in Mahadevpur mandal where river Manair meets and another at Sundilla to store 2.16 tmc ft of water in Kamanpur mandal across the Godavari river. Through reverse pumping system, the water from Medigadda would be lifted to Annaram and to Sundilla project. From Sundilla, it would be lifted to Sripada Yellampalli project and later to Mid Manair Dam (MMD) in Karimnagar district and other projects elsewhere in the State. The completion of the Kaleshwaram project is expected to change the agricultural scenario of the State.

It may be recalled that the State government had conducted Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey on the river flow of Godavari last year and finalised Medigadda for construction of the barrage following the

availability of abundant water in river Godavari and Pranahita throughout the year.

Meanwhile, the district administration has been making elaborate arrangements for Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's maiden visit to Kaleshwaram temple shrine.

The Chief Minister along with his wife, Shoba, would offer special prayers at the temple shrine and present golden crown to the presiding deities before participating in the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Medigadda project.

Unprecedented security arrangements are also being made by the district police by deploying additional police forces at Kaleshwaram and Medigadda.

### **Workshop on terrace gardening**

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information and Training Centre is conducting a workshop on terrace gardening on May 5 at No.U-30, 10th Street, Anna Nagar. For details, call 044 - 2626 3484.

*At Anna Nagar on May 5*

### **'54 cr. farmers in the grip of drought'**

*Rural populations across 13 States hit by multiple crisis, with food and fodder getting scarce*

arduous trek: Women trudge to collect drinking water from a near-dry well in Samba district of Jammu. It has become a grim battle for survival in several States.— file PHOTO: AP

Over 54 crore farmers and rural populations across 13 States are in the grip of drought, and it is a multi-dimensional crisis. This fact was highlighted at a national consultation on drought here on Sunday.



Yogendra Yadav, convener of Jai Kisan Andolan, told journalists that owing to the drought, people were battling for drinking water, food had become scarce, domestic cattle were dying a nomadic death and farms had turned fallow.

“Good rains [in the coming monsoon] may end the water crisis, yet food shortage will continue until the new crop comes in; the government needs to ensure food security,” Mr. Yadav said.

Bundelkhand was the worst affected. “Dal [pulses] has become a luxury for the ordinary people in Bundelkhand,” he said, appealing to the youth to help the people of the affected villages during their summer vacation.

“We will have a two-week internship programme for students during the summer vacation to serve in the drought-hit villages. Come and join to understand what’s going on...,” he said.

Mr. Yadav said Jai Kisan Andolan, along with other farmers’ organisation, would start a 10-day ‘Paidal Yatra’ from Latur in Marathwada to Mahoba in Bundelkhand on May 21 so as to implement the decisions taken at the consultation.

Farmers in a dozen States struggling with severe drought conditions and experts participated in the consultation, which was organised by Swaraj Abhiyan and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

### **‘Man-made crisis’**

CSE director-general Sunita Narain said: “Drought in the 1990s was essentially the drought of a poor India. The 2016 drought is of richer and more water-guzzling India. This classless drought makes for a crisis that is more severe and calls for solutions that are more complex.

“The severity and intensity of drought is not about lack of rainfall; it is about the lack of planning and foresight, and criminal neglect. Drought is human-made.”

### **Maharashtra to shun water-intensive crops, to support pulses production**

*State to give extra 5% to 10% incentive over the procurement prices announced by the Centre*



Boosting productivity: The idea is to encourage farmers to invest in improving production of pulses.— File Photo: Reuters

The Maharashtra government has taken steps to promote pulses over other crops as the clamour to bring down water-intensive farming in the State grows following three consecutive years of drought.

In the bid to encourage farmers to grow more pulses amidst falling sugarcane rates, the State has decided to give an additional 5% to 10% of incentive over the procurement prices announced by the Centre annually. The incentive will also be over and above the one-time bonus of Rs. 75/quintal already granted for chana (gram) and masur (lentil) last Rabi season, officials said.

The proposal to grant additional incentives from the State's side has been prepared by the Agriculture Department, which is now seeking to answer questions raised over growth of water-intensive crops in drought-hit regions like Marathwada, where some experts have pointed out excess consumption of water, attributing to crops like sugarcane, banana, grapes and oranges, which are mostly groundwater dependent.

Senior officials said the decision taken will give a strong price signal to farmers to increase acreage and invest in improving production of pulses. "It was about time we took a strong stand from our side to send a message to farmer to increase acreage in other crops and not only sugarcane. Merely telling him not to grow any particular crop does not make much sense anyway," said a senior official.

The Centre's current minimum support price (MSP) for tur (pigeon peas), urad (black gram whole), moong (green gram), masur (lentil), currently stands at Rs. 4,625/ quintal, Rs. 4,625/ quintal, Rs. 4,850/ quintal and Rs. 3,425/ quintal.

However, experts said the State intervention is too little too late. With market prices for pulses hovering two times the MSP — tur trading over Rs. 10,000 and Urad around Rs. 15,000 — increasing the MSP or even adding an incentive over and above that will not serve as a motivating factor for the farmers, experts said.



“The government’s intentions are good, but even if assuming that the Centre increases the MSP next season by say 10% and we add another 10% incentive of the State, it will still be way below the market price to influence the planting decisions of the farmer in October when he actually takes a call on what to sow,” said Nitin Kalantari, of Kalantari Foods Ltd, a prominent trader in the State.

Some others pointed out that procurement must continue even as the government was looking at bonuses and incentivising the use of pulses.

At most times, the State machinery does not procure even when prices hit below or around MSP, “We have to petition the local collector to start procurement but the implementation of the MSP is poor in the districts,” said Lalit Shah, of the APMC, Latur.



### **Band-aid solutions**

India’s agriculture needs less regulation, greater play of market forces.



National Agriculture Market (NAM) — the online trading portal for farm produce being launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. (Reuters)

Indian agriculture suffers from several weaknesses but perhaps none more severe than overweening government intervention in the sector.

Be it inputs such as fertiliser, which is governed by one of the most complicated subsidy regimes ever devised, or outputs, governments over the years have laid out a complicated mesh of regulations.

There is enough evidence to show that excessive regulation has hurt not just agricultural productivity but also farmers and, eventually, consumers. Even the breakthrough economic liberalisation undertaken by the country in 1991 could barely loosen the government's stranglehold on this sector.

Last week saw yet another round of regulations — purportedly unleashed in the name of protecting the interests of the common man — that point to a further deepening of the licence raj.

On April 27, responding to an increase in the prices of pulses, the Maharashtra cabinet adopted a draft legislation aimed at regulating and capping them.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Girish Bapat even claimed Maharashtra was the country's first state to adopt a price-control mechanism for pulses. On the same day, the Centre asked states to crack down on hoarding by imposing stockholding limits for traders on all varieties of pulses.

A day later, the Centre issued a similar decision on sugar, empowering Central agencies and state governments to control prices by imposing stock limits, and regulating its supply, distribution, storage and trade.

It is easy to characterise hoarding as an unjust activity that robs the farmer, increases prices for consumers, and benefits only the middlemen. As such, the crackdown on hoarding has instant appeal.

But another perspective could be gained by thinking of the government's buffer stock policy — essentially, the government is the biggest hoarder in the agricultural market. Indeed, timely hoarding of commodities, enabled by proper warehousing facilities in the country, can go a long way in stabilising price fluctuations.

Take the case of onions. Thanks to the fluctuations in the government's arbitrarily set minimum export price for onions, there is, at present, a glut in the market. Prices have crashed to below Re 1 per kg and farmers are justifiably despondent.

This is when hoarding, or creating a buffer stock, helps the farmer and smooths prices, both for consumers and producers. Instead of cracking down on hoarding and arbitrarily controlling prices, neither of which is a sustainable solution, the government should allow greater play of market forces in agriculture.

Prices signal the direction in which farmers must move to remain profitable. Government band-aid is a poor alternative.

**hindustantimes**

**Govt's swift response helped avert drought crisis: Radha Mohan Singh**

The drought-like situation in 11 states has led to concerns about food security in the country. In an interview with Hindustan Times, agriculture

minister Radha Mohan Singh, however, dismissed them, suggesting there was enough stock of grains and there would be no shortage. Excerpts:



“We prepared an elaborate corrective scheme to mitigate the effects of a prospective drought,” says Union minister of agriculture, Radha Mohan Singh. (Sonu Mehta/HT File Photo)

### **How serious is the drought situation across India?**

In spite of the bad monsoon in the last two years, the agricultural production is set to increase this year. Due to the government’s proactive approach, policy coordination and swift response from states, a crisis in the offing has been dealt with successfully.

### **Will there be any shortfall of grains this year?**

The IMD predicted a bad monsoon in 2015. We prepared an elaborate corrective scheme to mitigate the effects of a prospective drought. Around 600 districts were chosen and emergency schemes were launched to strengthen seed and water supply chain. As a result, according to second advance estimates, crop production in 2015-16 is expected to cross that in 2014-15. There is no shortage of grains. Any such prediction is totally misplaced.

## **Why hasn't the government been able to deal with the situation in Marathwada?**

This problem was built over time. During UPA rule, Maharashtra got several dam projects. But most of them were built to cater to the sugar industry, not farmers. These dams, built with public money, served just 10% of the population. I hope someday there will be a discussion on who took those decisions and at whose behest.

## **How are states being assisted to deal with the situation?**


Allocation under the State Disaster Response Fund has almost doubled to over Rs 61,000 crore for the next five years. Over Rs 2,500 crore for 10 drought-affected states have already been released from SDRF. The Centre released Rs 9,000 crore more than what states asked to cope with natural calamities in 2014-15.

# THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

## **Global commodity bust boosts India Inc's profits**



Lower raw material costs shore up bottomline despite tepid revenue growth last quarter



<b>Modest revenue, healthy profits</b>		
	<b>Q4 FY16</b>	<b>FY16</b>
Revenue	2.6	-4.8
Operating profit	17.4	7.4
Adjusted net profit	23.1	5.0
Operating margin	1.8	2.2

\* change vis-à-vis same period in %

The downward cycle in the global commodity market, which has severely impacted several economies, including the behemoth China, has come to the rescue of India Inc as the March quarter performance of companies that have declared results shows.

The aggregate operating profit of 156 companies (excluding banks and financials) that are listed on the Indian bourses and have announced results has grown by an impressive 17 per cent year-on-year.

Even as the larger economy continues to grapple with a demand slowdown, as evident from the tepid 2.6 per cent rise in revenue, the weakness in global commodity prices has been the saving grace for the import-dependent economy. The sharp correction in prices globally has helped India Inc save on its raw material cost.

The cost of raw materials as a proportion of revenue has come down from 33.6 per cent in the March 2015 quarter to 29.6 per cent last quarter. This helped the aggregate operating profit margin widen from 12.5 per cent in March 2015 to 14.3 per cent last quarter.

The reported profit was, however, impacted by exceptional items (write-offs) made by Cairn India and Vedanta, owing to the global weakness in crude oil prices.



For the fiscal year 2015-16, the aggregate operating profit growth of these 156 companies stood at 7 per cent, compared with 2014-15. This is despite a 5 per cent fall in revenue. This aided the 2.2 percentage point improvement in operating profit margins to 19.3 per cent.

### **Sectors that gained**

Which are the sectors that fared well? Companies in the auto ancillaries, agrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, FMCG, and oil and gas space witnessed healthy growth in revenue and profit during the March quarter. Falling raw material prices helped ancillaries make tidy gains.

For agrochemical companies, it was hopes of a better monsoon this season and saving on input costs that aided performance. Likewise, cheaper raw materials lifted the profits of FMCG players even as volume off-take remained weak.

### **The laggards**

Cyclical sectors such as infrastructure, real estate, engineering and construction continued to reel under losses in the March quarter, too. Funding and execution issues continue to pose challenges to these sectors.

While IT companies managed healthy revenue and profit growth on a year-on-year basis, the performance was sedate on a sequential basis, compared to the December 2015 quarter.

A consumption slowdown in key markets such as the European Union and the US and the resultant cut in IT spends impacted performance.

Also, a slowdown in sectors such as manufacturing, banking and financial services and telecom globally, which constitute a large chunk of the clientele for Indian IT majors, also posed challenges.

The quarter has been a mixed bag for private banks; Public sector banks are yet to declare their results. HDFC Bank, YES Bank and IndusInd Bank have

managed a good show amidst credit growth and asset quality concerns. The loan book of these banks witnessed strong double digit growth in the March quarter.

However, higher exposure to troubled sectors did not augur well for Axis Bank and ICICI Bank. While both managed to deliver strong loan growth and keep margins intact, asset quality remained a concern.

For instance, a provision of ₹3,600 crore as a contingency reserve led to a 76 per cent slide in ICICI Bank's net profit during the quarter. More pain is expected in the coming quarters.

*(With inputs from Radhika Merwin and Rajalakshmi Nirmal)*

### **Telangana to set up Spices Park in Nizamabad**



The Telangana Government is setting up a Spices Park in Nizamabad. The park will come up in Padigal in Nizamabad district with an outlay of Rs. 31 crore.

“The park is coming up in 40 acres, catering to farmers in Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal. We have sanctioned Rs. 15 crore for

the project so far,” Pocharam Srinivas Reddy, Minister Agriculture and Cooperation, has said.

“The park would primarily focus on turmeric farmers. The idea is to eliminate middlemen and provide the farmers with remunerative prices for the commodity,” the Minister said.

Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, he said the Agriculture Department is all set for the kharif season. “We have kept sufficient stocks of seed and fertilisers. The weathermen have predicted a good monsoon and we expect good cropping season this year,” the Minister said.

The Minister asked the farmers not go grow cotton this year and go for alternative crops like soya and maize. “Cotton dominates the acreage with 42 per cent of all the arable land of 36 lakh hectares. We are targeting to reduce this excessive dependency on the crop,” the Minister said.

Farmers grow cotton in 17.7 lakh hectares, followed by paddy with 10.59 lakh ha and maize with 4.78 lakh ha.

### **Centre, States take multi-pronged approach for drought: Agri Minister**

The Centre and State governments have made a multi-pronged effort to mitigate the impact of drought, said Union Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare Minister Radha Mohan Singh.

“The country has experienced two successive years of poor rains. Immediately after the IMD’s monsoon forecasts in April, 2015 and recognising the gravity of the situation, the Government of India, in collaboration with State Governments, responded rapidly,” he said on Saturday, adding that the government is closely monitoring the situation on a daily basis.

Outlining various measures taken in this regard, the Minister said that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme has been strengthened while availability of food and drinking water is a priority.

“Additional allocation of food grains has been made to Maharashtra and Karnataka States on their request,” he said, adding that the majority of the drought affected States have obtained financial approvals to serve mid-day meals during summer vacations in their drought affected districts and areas.



The Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture along with the State agricultural universities has also prepared a Contingency Plan for 600 districts while States also took steps like in-situ soil and moisture conservation, micro-irrigation and ground water re-charge.

“These steps ensured that in spite of two successive droughts, the overall agriculture production has not dipped and food stocks are adequate,” he said.

Meanwhile, to make available more drinking water, the government has taken various measures such as commissioning of 44,498 new bore wells and repair and restoration of over 77,000 hand pumps.

For farmers’ assistance, the Government of India has rolled out a new Crop Insurance Scheme called the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna from kharif 2016, said Singh, adding that insurance companies have also been asked to make timely payments.

Claims to the excess of Rs. 13,000 crore have either been paid or are being settled expeditiously, he said.

## **Soil moisture set to improve with rains ahead; heat wave to continue**

Soil moisture conditions are expected to improve over major parts of the country from Sunday, with the likely commencement of rain/thundershowers.

Heat wave conditions may sustain over parts of Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern Madhya Pradesh, northern Chhattisgarh, and Vidarbha, up till Sunday.

Maximum day temperatures may stay above normal over eastern India and the South Peninsula until May 5, and normal or below normal up till May 25.

This is as per the outlook of the Extended Range Forecast by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. Meanwhile, heat wave conditions were recorded over Kerala for a second day on Friday.

### **Rain for Kerala**

But the India Met Department has forecast the possibility of heavy rain in Kerala on May 3 as seasonal summer showers announce their delayed arrival.

It also predicted an increase in rainfall over Kerala and Lakshadweep for the next four days until May 6.

According to the US Centres for Climate Prediction, the rains will be heavier to the south of Kerala and extend into coastal Karnataka, south-interior Karnataka and parts of Madhya Maharashtra and Marathwada.

### **Soil moisture**

Even as parts of the south take a much-needed break from the heat, rains will have started to pelt the hills and plains of northern and western India. The US agency forecasts said rain would be heavier over Himachal Pradesh and

adjoining Punjab, while being scattered to moderate over Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand during May 5 to 11.

Parts of Delhi and Haryana, as well as most of south-west Rajasthan may benefit from spill-over showers.

### **Dust storms**

India Met Department has said that heat wave conditions may abate over north-western, central and eastern India from Monday (May 2) due to dust storm/thunderstorm activity.

Before this happens, maximum temperatures may rise by up to 2 degree Celsius over north-west India on Saturday and Sunday. Heat wave conditions on Saturday would however be confined to the east over Bihar and Odisha, and isolated areas over Gangetic West Bengal.

On Sunday too, heat wave conditions are forecast to sit mainly over Bihar and Odisha, while the weather over north-west starts to cool down.

Dust storms and thunderstorms may lash Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Rajasthan during the day.

From the next day, this activity will spread out to western UP, towards the east and J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to the North.



## **Farmers cold to rising demand for flaxseed**



Flaxseed or linseed (Alsi or Teesi), a popular traditional food and remedy, may be gaining ground among urban consumers due to its huge health benefits, but the demand in cities has failed to enthuse farmers.

Its area under cultivation declined from nearly 10 lakh hectares in early 1990s to around 3 lakh hectares in 2015-16, prompting the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to take multiple measures to motivate farmers towards cultivation of this wonder seed.

"It is quite unfortunate that farmers are gradually withdrawing from cultivation of flaxseed despite its growing demand," said BB Singh, assistant director general of ICAR, while attributing this to the absence of assured price to farmers and disorganised nature of farming. He however said that ICAR has taken note of it and has been working hard to reverse the trend.

ICAR has recently opened a value addition centre at Bharati Vidyapeeth University, Pune, to pursue the basic and strategic research. It has also

started training programme and front-line demonstrations for farmers to create awareness in all the 16 flaxseed-growing states amid high domestic demand due to its huge health benefits.

Flaxseed can be consumed both in powder form or as oil for cooking or in salads. "Around two tablespoon of flaxseed, preferably ground, can be very beneficial, particularly among vegetarians," says Dr Anoop Misra, a leading endocrinologist and chairman, Fortis C-DOC.

Apart from Omega-3, flaxseed is also rich in proteins, magnesium and vitamins, particularly vitamin B1, which provide multiple health benefits and are good for overall physical development, said nutritionist Parul Khurana at SCI International Hospital.

Fibre of the flax plants is used in textile. Linen is a natural fibre which is made from the stalk of flax plant. It is being widely used in the textile industry in India. Though the country does not need to import flaxseed for consumption as food item or remedy, it has to import its fibre in large quantities from European countries and Canada.

### **A farmers' co looks to do business with Raymond**

As textile giant Raymond Ltd builds its Rs1400 crore plant at Nandgaonpeth in Amravati, a farmers' company is looking to do business with them.

Krushi Samruddhi Producer Company Ltd promoted by Ravikiran Patil, an engineer-turned-social activist, has come up with an offer to supply lint (processed cotton) to Raymond.

A meeting of representatives of the two companies facilitated by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis is expected to be held next week.

Based in Achalpur town, this farmers' company came into existence two years ago. Formed under state government's convergence of agriculture intervention in Maharashtra programme, at present it has 2,000 shareholders and the share capital stands at Rs4 lakh.

The government has infused Rs2 lakh with an equal amount subscribed by the farmers, said Patil, also a director in the company.

The shareholders are farmers in the vicinity with each one holding a single share. Most farmers have holding below 5 acres bringing them into small and medium category growers.

"We have clocked a turnover of Rs3.68 crore so far. However, this cannot be compared with any conventional business. Our company does not directly deal in the farm produce but facilitates. We facilitate contract farming arrangements for members.

The income earned by the farmers through such deals is taken as our turnover," he told TOI. It is a no-profit-no-loss company with discounts earned on bulk purchases of raw material also passed on to the farmers.

"A group of 60 farmers associated with the company have undertaken cotton ginning operations. Instead of selling raw cotton for a small margin, we decided to sell lint instead. Textile industry buys lint which is made after separating seeds out of raw cotton," he said.

"We began with making 110 bales of lint. The first lot was sold to Netherland-based Louis Drefus through a local stockist as the company does not have direct export licence.

The next year production was doubled with the lint sold to Indore-based based Laxmi Cotton Mills," he said. Patil claimed this year it had a stock of 1200 bales which are being disposed of as and when profitable deals happen.

With Raymond, there are plans to jack up the production 10 times at 12,000. The company is already getting calls from farmers in the area to join the group.

The bales would have to be made according to the Raymond's standards of length and weight which will be discussed in next week's meeting, said Patil. A similar deal is planned with Siyaram's too.

The business idea came up during discussions with farmers themselves. It was seen that selling raw cotton through middlemen fetched them around Rs4000 to 4500 a quintal.

Lint fetched them Rs32,700 per candy (2 bales). Each quintal of cotton generates 37kg of lint. A candy weighs 370kg. Around 10 quintals of raw cotton go in making one candy of lint. Apart from it farmers sell 650 kgs of cotton seeds generated at Rs2250 a quintal.

Patil admitted this year the profits were just Rs300 a quintal more than what would a farmer gain if he sold raw cotton. Last two years were better with a premium of Rs500 and Rs700 per quintal of cotton sold after processing into lint.

"It is a part of business so we have to be prepared for ups and downs. There was hardly any profit in soyabean due to crop losses. But farmers who sold tur and oranges through us earned a profit. It was Rs10,000 per quintal in tur and double for oranges," he claimed.

Ravi Agrawal, a cotton ginner in Paratwada, said he was aware of the company's activities and it was indeed helping the farmers. The company has been set up based on government's idea of making the grower sell his produce directly to the end-user.