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THE HINDU

Help on the way for horticulture farmers

The State Cabinet has decided to waive off the debts taken by the horticulture farmers.

The government will release Rs. 384 crore by May 7 towards their debt redemption, according to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Mr. Naidu said that 2.23 lakh horticulture farmers would be benefited.

The government would also release another tranche of Rs. 3,300 crore agricultural loan waiver by this month-end.

The government would release another three instalments in the next three years. The government would be paying a total of Rs. 25,015 crore as debt redemption, he said.

The Cabinet also decided to extend government guarantee to HUDCO loan for Bhogapuram, Dagadatta, and Orvakallu airports in the State.

Idukki's farmers worry about bouts of 'yellow rain'

Leaves in cardamom plantations discoloured, chemical tests on to analyse cause

Kerala's Idukki district received 'yellow' rain at some places on Monday, causing apprehension that the droplets were carrying harmful chemicals. The yellow mist created fears of damage to cardamom plantations at Moolakkada in the high range Kunchithanny village.

This is the second episode of raindrops with the hue falling here in a fortnight. It left powdery spots and discoloured cardamom leaves.



Impact of yellow rain on the vegetation in Idukki district.

Many people feared it was ‘acid rain’, but scientists ruled out the possibility, since the stains could be washed clean and had not burnt the leaves.

Sudhakar S., plant protection specialist at Bapooji Krishi Vigyan Kendra (BKVK) at Santhanpara, said preliminary examination did not indicate acid presence.

“The leaves could be washed clean, which would not be the case if it was caused by acid. It did not seem to have been caused by fungi either, but an examination of samples is under way at the National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources, Bengaluru. The results are expected in a couple of days,” he said.

M.A. Siji, agricultural officer at Pallivasal, said the phenomenon was concentrated over a half acre area at Moolakkada. “Nobody saw yellow rain. They only spotted the powder on the leaves. While some leaves partially dried up, it was not strong enough to cause crop damage. A farmer caught in the showers did not report any health issues,” she said.

Foul smell

However, Titus Thomas, ward member, Pallivasal panchayat, said such rains had occurred for two weeks, leaving a foul smell afterwards. Rajappan Kunnumpurathu, an affected farmer, said it occurred over an area between the Pallivasal and Bison Valley panchayats.

Tapioca farmers want sufficient exposure to value addition

Farmers harvesting tapioca crop on Sathy hills are relieved about productivity, but not the price.

The price of the crop harvested after one year duration runs at around Rs. 4,000 per tonne, which, the farmers say, is un-remunerative.

Their crop is procured mostly by Salem-based sago factories, but there are concerns about exploitation of the cultivators. Transport charges are deducted from the farmers, pushing them to more misery.

Discrepancies

There are also discrepancies in evaluation of starch content at the time of procurement, said Logusamy, functionary of Tamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. There is no stability in procurement price. Ideally, the rate needs to be fixed at Rs. 8,000 per tonne, Mr. Logusamy said.

In Hassanur, Sathy and Bargur blocks in particular, tapioca is cultivated in several hundreds of hectares as a rain-fed crop.

Orientation

Farmers desire orientation on value-added products from tapioca, and emphasise on establishment of an extension centre of the Thiruvananthapuram-based Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) in either Erode or Salem.

Earlier this year, CTCRI conducted a model training course on Tuber Crops Technology Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship development sponsored by the Union Agriculture Ministry, with the objective of enabling farmers to produce commercially viable crops, and value added products such as pasta, alcohol, snack and savoury foods.

Tapioca is also used for manufacture of animal feed and is used as raw material for industrial products. Though Tamil Nadu ranks first in processing of tapioca into sago and starch throughout the country, meeting about 80 per cent of country's demand, potential for value addition could be explored further, official sources said.

Agriculture the main stay for Mahabubnagar ryots

Mana Telangana, Mana Vyavasayam' initiative was launched on April 25

The need for adopting best practices in agriculture and for taking to crops that required less water was underscored by District Collector T.K. Sreedevi.

She was participating in an awareness-generation programme among farmers about best practices and water conservation on Monday.

The District Collector explained them that while farmers in several districts were suffering from reduced income from agriculture, it was the reverse in Mahabubnagar, with income levels rising steadily.

Mana Vyavasayam

She inaugurated the programme organised at the Dr. C.N. Reddy Seva Sadan Function Hall in Nagarkurnool on Monday, as part of the ongoing 'Mana Telangana, Mana Vyavasayam', an initiative that was launched on April 25 and will go on till May 5.

The sole objective of the initiative is to improve awareness among the farming community.

Gram sabhas

Ms. Sreedevi said that Mahabubnagar district which is the second largest in Telangana after Ranga Reddy, was largely dependent on agriculture, and with best scientific practices followed it could make a huge difference to the farmers.

Through the 10 days, agriculture officers would tour villages and conduct 'Grama Sabhas' and help farmers with inputs about which crop they could grow.

They would also be told about the negative effects of growing cotton.

Instead of cotton farmers could grow red gram, which would help in improving soil fertility, said scientists from ICRISAT – Regional Director-Asia, Suhas P. Vani and Red Gram Breeder Sameer Kumar.

Using fertilizers

They also explained to the farmers about optimal utilisation of fertilisers and the need to ensure that micro-nutrients were retained in the soil, apart from having farm ponds.

Others who addressed the gathering included Joint Director-Agriculture (Mahabubnagar), Balu Naik, Revenue Divisional Officer-Nagarkurnool, Devender Reddy, apart from Principal Scientists M.V. Nagesh Kumar, Ramanjaneyulu and Sashi Bhushan from the Agriculture Research Station, Palem and Govind from the Agriculture Technology Maintenance Agency and progressive farmers.

Rs 400 cr worth of pulses languishing in godowns

State price monitoring committee has pointed out that government must soon decide the fate of the procured stock



Taking stock: Food Corporation of India officials say 7,200 MT of tur, 163 MT of urad and 4.5 MT of chana has been procured so far.— File Photo
Maharashtra government is yet to put in place the logistics for the distribution of nearly 7,500 metric tons (MT) of pulses meant for those suffering from the vagaries of a truant monsoon.

The buffer stock worth over Rs 400 crore is languishing in godowns at Latur, Akola, Jalgaon, Udgir and Yavatmal, now raising fears of a repeat of previous year's scam that occurred last year when nearly 74,846 tonnes of pulses were seized from the hoarders with the state failing to distribute procured stock to the milling units.

The fears were raised at a meeting of the state price monitoring committee on pulses on April 21, where members pointed out that the government must soon decide the fate of the procured stock being accumulated from the start of 2016.

The stock has been purchased by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as a 'market intervention' on the request of the Union Ministry of Agriculture.

Members of the committee said the government is yet to chalk out a plan to transport 7,367.5 MT of tur, urad and chana to the milling units over disagreement of prices being charged by the millers.

The government also does not have a plan to distribute the stock to the poor through the public distribution system (PDS). "They have no clue where the milling and polishing of the naked grain is going to be carried out or what will be the recovery percentage millers are going to charge, all this while a huge stock is lying at the FCI godowns," said a member of the committee.

Another member added that concerns were raised over the repeat of the scam from last year, when of the total 74,846 tonnes of pulses seized from the hoarders across 13 states, the maximum 46,397 tonnes were recovered from hoarders in Maharashtra.

"Irony was that the government ended up handing out the same stock (via auction) to traders who were themselves involved in hoarding in the first place," said a member of the committee.

Senior official from the FCI said they had started procuring pulses since January. So far 7,200 MT of tur at Rs 8,900 per quintal, 163 MT of urad at Rs 4,800 per quintal and 4.5 MT of chana at Rs 10,800 per quintal has been procured.

"We do not yet have information on what the state wants to do with this stock, whether they want to distribute it through PDS or auction it directly into the market. We do not have any experience of distribution or transportation," said GS Rajasekhar, general manager, FCI (Maharashtra).

Senior officials in the food and civil supplies department said while they are focussed on the distribution, the state had already enacted a pulse price control act to allay fears of price rise and hoarding in the market.

“This is a drought-like situation but this government is refusing to take tough calls. Unlike Tamil Nadu and Telangana, Maharashtra also does not procure round the year, leading to confusion in its PDS policy,” said Nitin Kalantari, exporter/importer of pulses from Latur.

‘Organic farming boosts productivity’

Three-day training programme for farmers in organic farming inaugurated

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.

He was speaking at the inauguration of the three-day training programme for farmers in organic farming at Bharat Institutions in Narayanguda.

Farm sector hitch in FTA talks with New Zealand: Pranab

But agricultural can't be given total protection forever, he cautions

Seeking to dispel the impression that India was lukewarm about the ongoing negotiations with New Zealand on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), President Pranab Mukherjee on Monday said the government was “not maintaining silence” on the issue, but was carefully considering the issues involved.

However, Mr. Mukherjee indicated that the differences were mainly in regard to agricultural products. “No, we are not maintaining silence. Ten

rounds of discussions have taken place since 2010 on the FTA. Unfortunately, we have not been able to finalise an agreement.”

He went on to add: “There are some problems about agricultural products. However, we have come a long way since the days when our agricultural sector required total protection,” the President said, answering questions from journalists on board his special aircraft on his way back from a five-day tour of Papua New Guinea and New Zealand.

“I conveyed India’s willingness to work towards an early conclusion of an FTA keeping in mind the need to find a satisfactory resolution of our mutual concerns,” he said earlier in an initial statement to the media on board his special aircraft.

Though officials have so far been tight-lipped about what exactly was the factor behind the protracted negotiations, Mr. Mukherjee’s replies to queries threw some light on it after he was asked why India was “maintaining silence”, whereas New Zealand Prime Minister John Key was stressing on the early conclusion of a free trade pact with India.

He said India was the largest producer of liquid milk in the world. “The 300 million Indian middle class has developed an appetite for consumer goods and consumer durables. What was relevant in the 1960s and the 1970s, or even the 1980s, may not be relevant in 2016. The government is considering these aspects very carefully,” he said.

Citing a recent example of FTAs boosting trade, he said trade between India and Sri Lanka went up 20 times after the signing of a free trade agreement.

Expressing satisfaction over his visit to the two countries, in both cases, the first ever state visit by an Indian President, Mr. Mukherjee said it was aimed at taking forward India’s ‘Act East’ policy. “My visit has provided momentum to our foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region,” he said.

He noted that even though diplomatic ties with New Zealand were established soon after independence, there had not been many visits. In the

case of Papua New Guinea, no politician had visited the country in 40 years of diplomatic relations. Though geographically distant, these countries had come forward to support India's "legitimate claim to permanent membership of the Security Council."

He also spoke of the benefits accruing to India from expanding ties with New Zealand. "If we develop our cooperation in agriculture, in maintaining cold chain management, we can learn much and greatly benefit from their experience and expertise.

Overall, he believed that India's relations with the Asia-Pacific region would be expanded manifold and in many areas. He expressed the hope that the third summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation, to be held in Papua New Guinea, would have high level political representation.

The centre of gravity in economic affairs in the world, he said, was shifting away from the G-8 countries, and even the European Union and North America, and was moving towards emerging economies. "These facts can't be ignored. The economic scenario is changing and we cannot be left behind."

Earlier, in his last engagement on the tour, Mr. Mukherjee addressed students and faculty members of the Auckland University of Technology. A memorandum of understanding on an ICCR Chair of Indian Studies in the University of Victoria was signed on the occasion. He left New Zealand in the forenoon of Monday by a special aircraft.

For the love of coffee

Is the modern day coffee cultivation threatening our biodiversity? Read on to find out how you can responsibly source your favourite morning cuppa

It's the quintessential breakfast drink, the morning elixir, the ambassador for good days and the one drink with absolute power to wake you up. Yes, our morning cuppa coffee is what we all look forward to wake us up from a slumber hangover.

But, what if we didn't have coffee anymore? Or, if the modern day production of coffee is impacting forests and wildlife, in turn, affecting our consumption? Alarming isn't it?



The bean cause Working together for that perfect cuppa, (right) Arshiya Bose

Arshiya Bose has set out on a quest to responsibly source coffee without making an imprint on our environment. She started Black Baza Coffee in an attempt to save biodiversity. Technically, coffee is grown under a marquee of trees.

But, because of deforestation, coffee is now grown under direct sunlight, giving way to monoculture which affects our biodiversity levels drastically. “After my Ph. D., I started spending time at coffee landscapes in India, mostly Coorg,” says Arshiya, a wildlife scientist.

“We found that compared to other parts of the world where forests had been clear-felled to grow coffee, India had retained forest trees and planted coffee underneath the shade of these trees.

This meant that coffee farms in India have supported all kinds of beautiful biodiversity for decades. The challenge arises because, since the 1970s onwards, many farms have been removing shade trees in the hope of better coffee yields.

The trade-off here is that the yields of coffee are actually higher when coffee is grown under direct sun (which is why in high coffee producing nations like Brazil, Vietnam etc., there are no shade trees).

This was the problem we were trying to address. How can we make it economically viable for farmers to grow a more ecologically-friendly coffee?”

The first step involves identifying farms in places like Kodagu and B.R. hills, based on factors like potential of the farm to support biodiversity and willingness to participate in conservation projects.

A conservation agreement is then drawn up with the farms that include maintaining 100 trees per acre, protection of water sources, restricting the usage of chemical pesticides and maintaining 60-80 per cent shade cover which means no cutting of tree branches.

“In 2009 I met a young scientist - Claude Garcia, a French, who spoke fairly good Tamil,” recalls Arshiya. “He told me: ‘if we can’t achieve biodiversity-friendly farming with coffee we probably can’t achieve with any other farming system either’.

That sentence stuck on as I believe that coffee is the perfect crop to experiment with. Coffee gets the attention of people and then becomes a way to engage someone who previously never cared about conservation. I always say: we want to bring conservation to everybody’s breakfast table.”

Black Baza Coffee is already available at natural and health food stores, where they partner with like-minded cafes and institution who would want to serve great coffee with a story.

Aesthetic packaging and cheeky questions on their cover makes Black Baza Coffee a unique product. “What does moth-friendly coffee taste like?” “What does Otter-friendly coffee taste like?” – are some of the questions you get to see on their packages.

“All of our coffee varieties are a tribute to the charismatic plant and wildlife species that share the Western Ghats landscape with coffee,” says Arshiya, “For example, the Otter coffee comes from two riverside farms in Kodagu where we are protecting the Cauvery River from effluents and degradation of riverside vegetation.

The Luna Moth is a magnificent indicator of ecological health as well. So while we could test our coffees in the lab for chemical residues etc. (which we do), we also go out to the farm and count Luna moths or Ficus trees or Otters because these species tell us the whole ecological picture - lab tests don't tell us whether farms are biodiversity-friendly or not.”

Black Baza Coffee now works with 30 farmers and there are over three lakh small-medium growers in India. While Arshiya isn't sure about the future of the model in India, she is positive and fiercely relentless about being a major coffee player that makes biodiversity-friendly coffee a household staple instead of an exception.

Drought takes away even the sweet smell of mangoes

Crackdown on calcium carbide and extreme temperatures too have squished the mango dreams



Forbidden territory: One of the worst droughts in recent times in the State has hit mango production by at least 30 per cent, forcing farmers to stay away from cultivating the water intensive crop.— PHOTO: MARRI RAMU

mangoes may be sweeter because it is hot, but fewer because we had two successive droughts, this is the message of fruit researchers in Telangana.

Drought, crackdown on use of calcium carbide, and extreme temperatures in April have squished the dreams of many mango orchard owners as well as connoisseurs of the fruit.

Big shopping malls which keep heaps of mangoes in tubs creating a seductive fragrance near the exit, have a sign 'Ripened without carbide'.

"The mangoes are there but smaller and unattractive. I didn't feel like picking them up," says Sunita, a housewife.

"The price of mangoes should have come down by this time and we should have godowns full with the sweet smelling fruit. Instead, we have empty godowns and the smell is not that sweet," says Mohammad Tajuddin of Kothapet Wholesale Fruit Merchants Association.

A drive on the Medchal Highway shows the dire situation with mango orchards with russet-coloured leaves instead of green ones.

Just as the yellow ambrosially sweet fruits flood the timelines of people, a visit to the neighbourhood shops presents a bleak picture.

The early seasonal fruits of malgotha, alphonso have not made their presence in Mehdipatnam Rythu Bazar, but instead, the dussehri, rasal and benishan are available at higher prices. And the fruits are smaller in size.

"This year, the harvest is very low. There was a flowering disease which has badly affected the harvest in Telangana.

To top it, there is a crackdown on use of carbide and many growers are directly sending the produce to Maharashtra, Karnataka and other states,” says Imtiaz Patel, a mango grower and merchant from Zaheerabad.

“By this time of the year, we would be ferrying 80 tonnes a week to foreign markets, but this year it’s just 100 tonnes per month,” he says.

“The ban on use of carbide has affected the trade adversely. The farmers are in a dilemma as they have to harvest the crop or risk havoc from unseasonal weather.

If they harvest it immediately when the mango has not fully matured, the fruit will not ripen without the use of carbide. If they wait, they risk losing everything.

They are in a lose-lose situation and we are the victims,” says Mr. Tajuddin, who says the fruit arrival at the market is down by about 60 per cent. Then he throws a gauntlet.

“I will send a basket of fruit to anyone who can take up the challenge and ripen the fruit without using carbide in 40 days!” he says.

The fruit scientists at one of the largest orchards in Telangana at the Fruit Research Centre in Sangareddy blame climate change for the dip in mango harvest.

“We are having May temperatures in April which has triggered early maturity before the fruit reaches its proper size and we also notice there is sunburn on the fruit which affects its appeal as there is yellow patch on the fruit,” says Adapa Kiran Kumar a scientist at the fruit research station.

But whatever the causes and effects, it will be unfulfilled tryst with the yellow fruit this summer for most lovers of this king of fruits.

A drive on the Medchal highway shows the dire situation with mango orchards with russet-coloured leaves

Sudden spurt in prices of green chillies



Rising prices: Green chillies are being sold at Rs. 160 per kg in the retail market in Nalgonda town.– Photo: Singam Venkataramana

Prices of certain vegetables, particularly green chillies, have shot through the roof in the district during the past one week. Green chilly is being sold at Rs. 120 a kilogramme in the wholesale market, which was normally sold at Rs. 40 per kg. The price of green chilly in the retail market was put at Rs. 160 a kg.

The vendors at the vegetable market located in Praksham Bazar said that the supply of green chilly has declined drastically during the past one week, which was the reason behind the escalation of prices.

Not only green chillies, most of the vegetables saw a spurt in the price during the past week.

The vendors and farmers attributed the increase to prevailing heat wave conditions.

Beans are being sold at Rs. 80 per kg, while carrot, bitter gourd, and capsicum were being sold at Rs. 60 a kg.

Almost all the vegetables were being sold over Rs. 40 except potato and cucumber, which are sold at Rs. 30 and Rs. 20 a kg respectively.

Prices of vegetables go up

“Heat waves have an adverse effect on growth of horticultural crops”



Despite rise in the prices of vegetables, shops at the Gandhi Market in Tiruchi record brisk sale. —Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

Vegetable prices have been soaring up in the past fortnight due to fall in the arrivals of horticultural crops from the villages in and around the district.

Barring a few vegetables, the retail price of vegetables has shot up by at least 20 per cent over the last fortnight's rate. The prices of few vegetables have doubled in the retail market.

Retail traders at the Gandhi Market say that the severe heat waves have an adverse effect on the growth of horticultural crops.

The price of tomato has shot up from Rs.10 to Rs.30. Beans which was sold for Rs.15 during January, now costs Rs. 70 a kg.

“There has been a sharp demand for beans during domestic functions and other important occasions during summer,” says M. Gopinath, one of the dealers.

The price of brinjal stands at Rs.40 from Rs.25 last fortnight. However, the prices of potato and cabbage remained steady without any hike.

Dheen, a trader in carrots, says that the price per kg stood at Rs.20 now registering an increase by Rs. 5 a kg over last month's rate.

Apart from increase in the price, the quality of vegetables would be far less during the summer season, as the horticultural plants could not be irrigated adequately.

Ministerial team visits drought-hit areas in Hassan



Spot check: The team was led by Ministers H.S. Mahadeva Prasad and T.B. Jayachandra.— photo: prakash Hassan

The Cabinet sub-committee on drought visited parts of the district on Sunday. The team, led by Ministers H.S. Mahadeva Prasad and T.B. Jayachandra, visited the Hemavati reservoir at Gorur, and a few villages in Arkalgud, Hassan and Belur taluks.

During the visit, the members interacted with farmers in the area and people engaged in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme works.

Mr. Jayachandra, the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, told reporters later that different teams of Ministers have been going to various parts of the State to review the drought situation.

The teams are expected to submit their reports soon.

Regarding the Central government's assistance to tackle the situation, Mr. Jayachandra said the total crop loss in 2015-16 added up to about Rs. 17,000 crore. "We had sought assistance of Rs. 3,800 crore from the Centre.

However, the Centre has released only Rs.1,572 crore so far. We have distributed the amount to farmers as compensation.

Meanwhile, BJP leaders have begun finding fault with the government," he said.

He added that the Ministers' visits had helped speed up the drought-relief works across the State.

Borewells are being drilled wherever required and tanks have been filled with all the water available, he said.

"All the deputy commissioners have sufficient funds to handle the drinking water requirement," he said.

After collecting data on the storage in the reservoir, the Ministers visited Ichalahalli near Kandali, where MGNREGA work was under way.

Mr. Mahadevappa, the Minister for Public Works Department, interacted with the workers and asked them how much they were getting paid (Rs. 224 a day).

In the evening, the Ministers visited parts of Belur taluk, before reaching Chickmagaluru.

A long and hot summer ahead



Union Minister of State for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar signs the Paris Agreement at the United Nations headquarters in Manhattan, New York, on April 22.

India has already made substantial concessions to enable a consensus for the Paris pact. Now it must ensure that its vital interests are safeguarded, and that the principle of equity is reflected in the climate change architecture

On April 22, representatives from 175 countries gathered in New York to affix their signatures on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was adopted by consensus by the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP-21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which met in December 2015.

The scene will now shift to obtaining enough instruments of ratification to bring the agreement into force before 2020, the first year of its proposed implementation.

The agreement will enter into force with the ratification of at least 55 countries, whose aggregate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions constitute at

least 55 per cent of global emissions. One will need to watch what happens in the United States after the forthcoming presidential elections.

There is a real risk that the Kyoto Protocol drama may be repeated with the U.S. Congress rejecting an agreement that the U.S. administration has signed.

Were this to happen, other countries may withhold ratification since the U.S. is the second largest emitter of GHGs after China. India should not be in a hurry to ratify the Agreement until there is clarity on the U.S. position.

Still a work in progress

The Paris Agreement represents only a skeletal framework which will now have to be fleshed out in post-Paris negotiations. Several major concepts and provisions were deliberately left ambiguous and open to differing interpretations in order to reach consensus.

Further negotiations are necessary to reach a common understanding to enable implementation. For example, take the concept of “transparency”. Developed countries claim that transparency requires a “common and unified system” to compare climate action undertaken as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) by Parties.

The Expert Review Teams (ERTs) under the UNFCCC currently evaluate the achievement of quantitative reductions in GHGs by developed countries only. There are demands that this should be modified to enable a common template to review national GHG emissions and removal (by carbon sinks) data for all countries after 2020.

Developing countries, on the other hand, point to the “flexibilities” available to them in recognition of the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (the well-known CBDR principle) and insist that this should be reflected in the application of the transparency provision.

The Paris Agreement provides for a five-yearly “stocktake” which would enable an estimation of how much progress is being made in the implementation of the various contributions pledged by Parties in respect not only of mitigation but also adaptation, finance, technology transfer and capacity building.

How each of these contributions will be measured and evaluated still needs to be worked out. This will be both a political and technical challenge.

Developed countries want to make the mitigation aspect specific and measurable while keeping other aspects such as finance and technology transfer to developing countries as indeterminate as possible so as not to be held accountable for what they have pledged in these areas.

For example, the UNFCCC Secretariat has already opened what it calls a “public registry” for NDCs ahead of negotiations which may, by default, create a common reporting framework, pre-empting negotiations among Parties. Developing countries should question the rationale for such a registry ahead of a negotiated outcome on this issue.

At the insistence of the European Union, it was agreed at Paris that there would be a “Facilitation Dialogue” among Parties in 2018 focussed on the adequacy of aggregate NDCs with respect to the 2° Celsius global temperature limit and, even more ambitiously, the 1.5° Celsius limit favoured by the small island developing states.

Such a review will inevitably and rightly come to the conclusion that the aggregate mitigation pledges made so far fall far short of the above temperature limits.

There will be pressure on major emerging economies, including India, to take on more ambitious mitigation commitments since the developed economies, though major emitters, are progressively reducing their emissions while the developing countries are still on a rising though diminishing trajectory.

India in the cross hairs

Since India, along with other developing countries, agreed to drop the key principle of “historical responsibility” enshrined in the UNFCCC from the Paris Agreement, the responsibility of the developed industrialised countries for the largest proportion of GHG emissions accumulated in the Earth’s atmosphere, and which is what is responsible for global warming, will be ignored in comparing mitigation contributions.

Only current emissions will be the basis for this exercise. The principles of equity and CBDR are easier to operationalise with the acknowledgement of historical responsibility, for the simple reason that the responsibility of each country to the accumulated GHG stock is as measurable as are current emissions.

Which country is occupying how much of the available carbon budget consistent with any specific temperature rise limit can be calculated with reasonable accuracy.

These measures can be used to evaluate whether equity is being translated into practice in terms of climate actions by different Parties. With the concept of carbon budget out of the way, it is current emissions alone which will become the focus in the new climate change regime and create inevitable pressures on India for enhanced mitigation pledges — as we saw in Paris itself.

India, for its energy security, will continue to rely on coal to generate power for its growing economy for the foreseeable future.

This is already being projected as being contrary to the spirit of the Paris Agreement irrespective of the fact that several developed countries including the U.S. and Japan and among emerging economies, China, already use far more coal than India for their power generation.

That is ignored because there is an incremental decline even though from a very high base in their case, while India is in the cross hairs because there is

an incremental increase but from a much lower base. This, too, is a classic “stock versus flow” problem, where focussing only on the latter completely distorts the picture.

Back-peddalling

While trying to impose specific and onerous commitments on developing countries, the developed countries continue to evade providing any clarity on what they intend to contribute by way of finance, technology and capacity building to fulfil their Paris Agreement pledges.

On finance there has been backsliding. There is a commitment, going back to the Copenhagen Accord of 2009, that \$100 billion of finance a year will be available by 2020 to support climate action by developing countries.

In Paris, it was agreed that no increase will be expected over this figure until 2025, five years into the implementation of the agreement. When the agreement talks of “financial flows” rather than public resources in the form of official transfers, it is not clear what would be the constituents of these flows and the value assigned to each.

On technology transfer, there is already an offensive by the U.S. corporate sector to ensure that in the post-Paris negotiations there is no concession on intellectual property (IP) issues.

The U.S. lobby has objected to the UN High Level Panel on Access to Medicines, which is considering how the IP issue may be dealt with, balancing the interests of different stakeholders to ensure equitable access to medicines, in particular for the poor and deprived.

In a communication to the U.S. administration, these American companies have said that “significant challenges to IP remain in the Paris Agreement’s implementation and subsequent negotiations — especially those related to the technology development and transfer chapter”.

India has already made substantial concessions to enable a consensus and successful outcome at Paris. Now it must ensure that it is not caught in a relentless attrition process where each concession becomes an argument for making the next one.

The post-Paris negotiations will determine more precisely the shape of the climate change architecture for the next several decades.

We must ensure that India's vital interests are safeguarded and the principle of equity and equitable burden-sharing is reflected across this architecture. There lies a long and hot summer ahead.

Shyam Saran is a former Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Climate Change (2006-09). He is currently Chairman, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), and Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research.



Professionals lend helping hand to Maharashtra farmers

Working under the umbrella of a social organisation named Apulkee, the professionals aim to raise Rs 85 lakh to pay off the debts of these families.

Even as the state government is yet to decide on loan waivers for farmers, a group of professionals from Pune have taken it upon themselves to step in and aid 122 debt-ridden farmers' families.

Working under the umbrella of a social organisation named Apulkee, the professionals aim to raise Rs 85 lakh to pay off the debts of these families.

Set up in 2012, Apulkee comprises a bunch of professionals from various fields hailing from farmers' families from the crisis-ridden areas of

Vidarbha. Abhijit Falke, founder member of Apulkee, said that they have decided to go ahead with the scheme to provide succour for the distressed farmers of Vidarbha.

“Since the last two years, farmers have received a raw deal, given the drought and other natural calamities. Even if the farmers want to pay their dues, they are not able to,” Falke said.

Falke said that the state government’s recent initiative of restructuring crop loans might not have the desired effect as the basic financial health of farmers is weak. “In the absence of any output for two consecutive years, the financial backbone of the farming sector is broken.

Our humble effort is to help at least some of the affected families stand up,” he said. The decision to waive off the loans had started in November through Mayuri Dhavale, a CSR consultant, who works in the manufacturing sector.

Dhavale said that companies involved in the work of supplying components for tractors had floated the idea of helping the farmers write off their loans. “Back in November, we had floated this idea in our immediate circle, and were able to raise around Rs 3 lakh immediately.

Post this, we decided to reach out to a larger community and joined hands with Apulkee,” Dhavale said. Apulkee has volunteers in almost every region of Vidarbha. It was these volunteers who zeroed in on the 122 names after careful scrutiny.

Families which were selected had land holding of less than 5 acres and were dryland marginal farmers. Spread across the districts of Wardha (25 families), Washim (25 families), Amravati (27 families), Yavatmal (25 families) and Akola (19 families), the average unpaid loan on farmers was around Rs 50,000. Falke said that around 15-20 of these families have seen at least one member committing suicide due to debts.

Raising money through crowd-sourcing, Falke said that they had tied up with banks and would be depositing the money directly into the accounts of farmers.

“Once the loans are repaid, the farmers would be given certificates to that effect,” he said. The cut-off date for collection is May 31. Interested donors can visit the site <http://www.apulkee.org>.

hindustantimes

PM Modi sets up panel on doubling farm incomes in 5 years



The Centre has set up an inter-ministerial panel to devise a plan to double farm income in five years, a promise made in this year’s budget (Hindustan Times)

The Narendra Modi government has set up an inter-ministerial panel to devise a plan to double farm income in five years, a promise made in this year’s budget, which some economists say will require miraculous agricultural growth.

A back-to-back drought in 10 states has shriveled crops and caused rural wages to dip, stoking a challenging rural distress for the government. The

panel will submit a report in two months, suggesting ways to boost farmers' income.

In his budget speech, finance minister Arun Jaitley said: "Government will, therefore, reorient its interventions in the farm and non-farm sectors to double the income of the farmers by 2022."

But many economists doubted the plan, saying a "nominal" increase of 50% in farm income would not mean much and has happened before. The real test is to increase "real" income.

If it is just a "nominal rise" — a term economists use for income not adjusted for inflation — then it is possible, economist Abhijit Sen said. Income growth is always benchmarked against rise in prices because inflation shrinks purchasing power.

If the increase in farm income has to be "real" — or income adjusted for inflation — then it's "a lot of fluff", Sen told HT.

The Opposition has often criticised the ruling NDA of throwing "jumlanomics" or making boastful claims with regard to the economy.

The National Sample Survey Organisation says the average farm household earns Rs 6,426 a month. Farm income grew fastest between 2004-05 and 2011-12, when it had in fact doubled nominally, that is without taking into account the inflation rate.

The committee formed to devise a turnaround is headed by Ashok Dalwai, an additional secretary with the farm ministry.

It will study the current income levels of farmers and determine the growth in agriculture required to double farm income, apart from what strategies that need to be adopted, a farm ministry order states.

Drought cuts crop production by 70% in Marathwada



As farmers deal with agricultural slump, the bigger challenge for the administration is tackling the shortage of water in the region until the monsoon begins. (HT FILE)

Severe drought in Marathwada over the past year has brought crop production across its eight districts down by nearly 70%, figures compiled by the Aurangabad divisional office show.

This is one of the biggest slumps faced by farmers in this central Maharashtra region in recent years, and their claims having no earnings over the past one year are ringing true.

As farmers deal with agricultural slump, the bigger challenge for the administration is tackling the shortage of water in the region until the monsoon begins, with the total water stock in Marathwada's dams now down to just 2% .

The administration will now only focus on supplying drinking water for all in the region, senior officials said.

The live water storage - or the amount of water that can be used - in its three big dams is down to 116 million cubic metre (mcum), down from the 134.28 mcum last week. The remaining eight dams are on dead storage level .

Kharif crops such as pulses, followed by cereals and oil seeds have taken a hit. The production of urad, moong and tur dal per hectare has come down by 78% , 79% and 64%, compared to the average production of these pulses in the region in the last five years.

Soyabean is down by 68% and groundnut by 58%; cereals jowari and bajari have also come down by 72% and 66% respectively.

The yield of the region's biggest cash crop - cotton - in a good year brings money to farmers, but this has come down to 2.74 quintals a hectare. The last five-year average of cotton production worked out to 7.15 quintals a hectare.

As Marathwada leads in the production of pulses in the state, this slump is expected to bring down overall supply in the market and jack up prices in the coming months.

The overall decline in foodgrains so far, according to the third estimate sent by the state to the Centre includes 41% reduction in cereals and 19% for oilseeds.

“The rabi crop output in Marathwada is likely to throw up similar losses of up to 70%, if not more.

The kharif crop compilation done recently, comparing the average of the last five years, shows an overall loss in the range of 65-70%.

The farmers in the region have technically lost their last two kharif and rabi crops,” said PD Lonare, superintending agriculture officer, Aurangabad division.

On water scarcity, divisional commissioner Umakant Dangat said, “We will have to manage ourselves with the available water in dams, dead storage and ground water in requisitioned wells and borewells.

Appropriate decisions [regarding further cuts] will be taken as per local conditions to ensure drinking water to all.’’

Last year, in this week, the region was battling drought, but the water storage level in all dams stood at 12% .

Today, the water storage across Marathwada’s big and small dams is 2%. Only three of its big dams – Lower Dudhana, Vishnupuri and Yeldari have live water storage.

With evaporation losses up to 35% , it is likely that Vishnupuri that supplies water to Nanded city may also go dry. Currently, Vishnupuri has live water storage of 4%, with just 3 mcum water.

Villages in Maha declared drought-hit



A dried well at Sidhha wadi village in Shahapur taluka, Thane. (Praful Gangurde)

More than 73% villages of Maharashtra are drought-hit after the state government declared 938 more villages affected by the natural calamity.

The Rabi crops (sown during winter season) in the villages were ruined in the drought.

The total number of villages reeling under drought has now reached 29,610. Of them, 1991 villages harvest Rabi crops. The state has 40,559 villages.

The villages that are added to the drought-hit list are from Solapur and Ahmednagar districts. Both districts are in Western Maharashtra which is less affected by drought compared to Marathwada and Vidarbha regions.

The state government will give seven major exemptions to the farmers in the affected villages. This includes exemption from payment of land-related revenue, school and college examination fees, 33.5% discount on power bills of agriculture pump, restructuring of crop loans and a stay on debt recovery.

Relief and rehabilitation minister Eknath Khadse confirmed the decision, saying it was taken after getting fresh reports from the collectorates.

Crops that are grown during monsoon are called Kharif crops while those grown during winter season (between October and March) are called Rabi crops.

“This is for the first time that such a huge number of villages have been affected by drought,” said a senior official, requesting anonymity.

The state government has been supplying water to Latur through railway wagons since April 11. The total waterstock of the state has started reducing drastically, worsening the drought situation.

Within a fortnight, the total water stock has come down from 19% to 16%.

Rain, thunderstorm may cool down some parts of India

The country sizzled on Monday as most places recorded temperatures 5 degrees above normal. Uttar Pradesh was the hottest, with Banda recording 47.2 degrees Celsius, followed by Telangana at 46.7 degrees Celsius.

The meteorological department said temperatures in most places in India was 5.1 degrees Celsius above normal, but also forecast some respite from the intense heat wave in the coming days with rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms in some parts of the country.

However, intense heat wave will continue in most parts of Odisha and coastal Andhra Pradesh, the IMD added.

The death toll due to heat wave this season has already touched 178 in Telangana, with more deaths being reported in the last 24 hours from Nalgonda district. Four deaths have also been reported from Jharkhand.

Daltonganj district recorded the highest temperature of 45 degrees Celsius in Jharkhand. Ranchi sweated at 41.5 degrees Celsius, while Jamshedpur simmered at 44.6 degrees Celsius.

“The heat wave condition may prevail for the next 24 hours in many places in Jharkhand,” meteorologist Upendra Srivastava said, adding rainfall is expected on Wednesday.

Hisar in Haryana scorched on Monday, with mercury touching almost 44 degrees Celsius. Talking to HT, Dr Raj Singh, HOD, agriculture and meteorological department, said:

“The temperatures recorded in Hisar district in the first week of May last year were between 37 degrees and 40 degrees Celsius.” He added, “However, we have also recorded western disturbance in the atmosphere and by May 5, some places in Haryana will get rainfall.”

However, there was respite in Rajasthan as the mercury dipped after a dust storm followed by mild rainfall on Monday afternoon.

According to Met department data, the maximum and minimum temperatures in Jaipur were 43.1 and 29.6 degrees Celsius. A departure of five degrees from normal was observed after the dust storm.

Even as the Met department predicted rains in the next 24 to 48 hours, Monday was the season's hottest in Himachal Pradesh.

Shimla too recorded the season's highest temperature at 29.8 degrees Celsius while maximum temperature in Himachal was recorded at Una at 43 degrees Celsius.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Drought to shrink tea output in South India by 10%, say planters



Planters in South India expect the tea crop in the region this year to shrink by about 10 per cent due to the prevailing heat wave and drought conditions.

"We see the drought impacting tea production significantly and expect the output to be lower by 10 per cent this year in South India," said N

Dharmaraj, President of the United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI), the apex planters body in the region.

South India produced 227.5 million kgs of tea in 2015, accounting for around 20 per cent of the 1200 million kgs produced in the country.

Dharmaraj was in Bengaluru to announce the seventh edition of the India International Tea Convention 2016, to be held in the Nilgiris between September 22 and 24.

Hot weather conditions in states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka has impacted tea production since February this year.

Production was lower by about 1.8 million kgs in February and around 2 million kgs in March. However, in April, the production further shrunk by 5-6 million kgs due to the aggravating hot weather in key producing regions, UPASI officials said.

"April-May is one the peak season for tea production. Whatever we lose in April-May is very difficult to make up," said Peter Mathias, former president of UPASI and a tea producer in Karnataka.

A lower trend in the production has already resulted in price rise for the black tea. Average prices have moved up from around Rs. 86 a kg to around Rs. 104 a kg, over the past few months.

However, the increase in prices has not benefited the producers as it is still below the cost of production, which ranges between Rs. 120-130 a kg.

"Tea industry is under pressure as the prices are still lower than the cost of production. Besides low prices, producers are battling other challenges such as high wages, a stagnating trend in exports, stiff competition from other producers such as Sri Lanka and Kenya and the impact of the climate change," Dharmaraj said.

Reeling under the impact of high wages and lower realisations, about 7-8 estates have shut down in Kerala, he added.

Though production is being impacted in the South, it is largely flattish in the North and North Eastern parts of the country, there ensuring adequate supplies.

"Production till March was up, though it was impacted by floods in April. Overall, we expect the production this year to remain same as that of last year," said S Patra, Secretary of the Indian Tea Association.

Marine fish catch drops 5.3% in 2015, 51% decline in oil sardine landings



India's marine fish catch has dropped by 5.3 per cent in 2015 with oil sardines recording the sharpest fall of 51 per cent.

The overall marine fish landings fell to 3.40 million tonnes against 3.59 million tonnes in 2014, registering a fall of 1.89 lakh tonnes, scientific data estimated by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) said.

After all-time high landings of 3.94 million tonnes in 2012, the marine fish catch has shown a decreasing trend every year. It was 4 per cent in 2013, 5 per cent in 2014 and 5.3 per cent in 2015, scientists who estimated the data said.

In a major setback for the fisheries sector, a sharp decline of 2.79 lakh tonnes (51 per cent) was witnessed in oil sardines landings, mainly in the South West coast comprising Kerala, Karnataka and Goa.

A catch of 2.66 lakh tonnes oil sardines was recorded against 5.45 lakh tonnes in 2014. The contribution of oil sardines, which is the single largest contributor towards the total catch, narrowed from 15 per cent in 2014 to eight per cent in 2015.

Scientists at CMFRI attributed the sharp fall in sardine landings to several reasons including rising water temperature, the El Nino effect and over-exploitation. The catching of spawning stocks and algal bloom also played its role in the declining trend.

The institute has carried out a special review of the situation on the decline in sardine catch as it will affect the livelihood of the fishermen community.

The catch of other important species/ groups is lesser — sardines 2.56 lakh tonnes, Indian mackerel 2.38 lakh tonnes, penaeid prawns 1.99 lakh tonnes, ribbon fish 1.77 lakh tonnes, threadfin breams 1.63 lakh tonnes, croakers 1.55 lakh tonnes, non-penaeid prawns 1.49 lakh tonnes, scads 1.12 lakh tonnes and Bombay duck 1.10 lakh tonnes.

Of the nine maritime States and two union territories, Gujarat topped with landings of 7.21 lakh tonnes (21.2 per cent of share towards total catch), followed by Tamil Nadu with 7.09 lakh tonnes (20.8 per cent share) and Kerala with 4.82 lakh tonnes (14.2 per cent share).

Over 1000 houses damaged in thunderstorm in Nagaland

Thunderstorm coupled with heavy rain has damaged over 1000 houses, injured two persons and snapped electricity supply in five districts in Nagaland, the State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA) said here today.

Heavy rain and thunderstorm have been reported in Chuchuyimlang areas of Mokokchung district besides, Longleng, Phek, Wokha and Mon districts, a release issued by Khrienuo Metha, Secretary (Home) Relief and Rehabilitation said.

Two persons were injured in the storm in Mongtikong village in Longleng district by the uprooted roof of a nearby house, he said.

Damages to 816 houses were reported from 40 villages in Mokokchung district while 100 houses were damaged in Longleng and 16 houses were damaged in Wokha district, the NSDMA release said.

A cyclonic storm hit Tobu Sub Division under Mon district damaging 37 houses, Metha said.

Damages in Phek district were under assessment, he said.

Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority has deputed four officials to assist the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in physically assessing the damages and to provide relief to the affected people.

State capital, Kohima and Dimapur also felt the thunderstorm last night but there were no reports of any damages.

Sugar output for 2015-16 seen down 11.7%

India, the world's biggest consumer of sugar, is likely to produce 25 million tonnes of the sweetener in the 2015-16 marketing year ending on Sept. 30, down 11.7 per cent from a year ago, a leading trade body said on Monday.

The first back-to-back drought in nearly three decades hit cane plantation in Maharashtra, the biggest producing state, pulling down the country's total output, the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said in a statement.

Mills have so far produced 24.6 million tonnes of sugar, compared with 27.6 million tonnes during the same period a year ago, the trade body said.

India is likely to become a net importer of sugar in 2016-17 as back-to-back drought years dry irrigation channels and ravage cane fields, with output in the country's biggest producing state seen dropping over 40 percent.



The country will soon scrap an order that requires sugar mills to export excess supply, two government officials said on Monday, after back-to-back droughts look set to turn the country into a net importer by October.

Ooty set for tea convention

The seventh edition of the India International Tea Convention (IITC) 2016 proposes to showcase the sustainability aspect of the tea industry.

The three-day event from September 22-24 at Ooty, the largest growing region in south India, is expected to attract about 500 delegates from India and overseas – both from consuming and producing countries.

“Let’s ‘Tea’m up for Sustainability” is the theme of the convention and all elements of sustainability followed by the Indian tea industry, such as sustainable agricultural practices, ethical and fair employee engagement, safety at work place, livelihood issues, besides supporting environment, will be taken up, said N Dharmaraj, President of UPASI and Chairman, IITC 2016.

The event is jointly organised by the Tea Board, UPASI, Consultative Committee of Plantation Association in association with trade bodies such as the Federation of All India Tea Traders Association (FAITTA), Indian

Merchant Tea Exporter's Forum and the South India Tea Exporters Association.

Palm oil futures to test support levels, keep rising



Malaysian palm oil futures on BMD were lower on Friday, to a new seven-week low, as palm exports slow down amid output increases.

Recent cargo surveyor data recorded zero to little growth in export demand for Malaysian palm oil shipments between April 1 and April 25 from a month ago.

Poor performing rival vegetable oils, bearish local sentiment driven by rising output, and weak export demand kept prices pressured throughout the week.

Improving weather conditions are expected to reduce the impact of the crop-damaging El Nino, which brings scorching heat across South-East Asia. CPO active month July futures moved lower as expected.

As mentioned earlier, prices are looking vulnerable for a drop as the failure to hold support at 2,610-20 MYR/tonne could push prices even lower towards 2,570, which is a potential target for this correction to end.

Prices have hit the target at 2,570 levels, but still haven't shown enough strength to pull back higher from there. We still view this correction as a healthy one within a larger bullish trend.

Only an unexpected decline below 2,550 levels could cause doubts on our overall bullish view.

Such a fall, though not expected, could see prices drifting lower again towards 2,508 MYR/tonne, followed by 2,460-65 levels where strong supports are noted again.

Despite this price correction, the overall trend remains neutral to bullish, with a good chance of prices moving back towards 2,800 levels.

Our favoured view expects prices to hold support in the 2,550-70 range and then gradually edge higher towards 2,650-75 levels where it run into strong resistances going forward.

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

One of our targets at 1,850 was met. The current move could push higher towards 2,645 initially and then 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.

Any dip could prove to be an opportunity to participate in the upcoming uptrend. RSI is in neutral zone now, indicating it is neither overbought nor oversold.

As mentioned earlier, averages in MACD have gone below the zero line of the indicator hinting at a bearish reversal in trend. But, the crossover tends to happen in a correction and again, a bullish crossover can materialise.

Therefore, look for palm oil futures to test the support levels and then rise higher again.

Supports are at MYR 2,570; 2,545; and 2,465. Resistances are at MYR 2,630; 2,675; and 2,720.

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

Business Standard

Punjab's mounting farmer crisis

Green revolution pioneer now marked by rising rural despair, with high costs and low incomes pushing a mass of small cultivators into a debt trap



Fifty eight and counting...the number of farmers' suicides in Punjab in the past three months due to agrarian distress is alarming.

Maharashtra, Punjab and Telangana top this grim list, the Union government informed Parliament last week.

Rainfed states are in a crisis due to two years of drought but Punjab is a largely irrigated state, that pioneered the country's green revolution. Yet, its farmers grapple with mounting debt and dwindling income, despite the government's assured purchase of wheat, paddy and cotton.

Satish Verma, professor at the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development here, did a study which showed a debt to income ratio in Punjab at 96.8 per cent as of end-2013.

And, this ratio is the highest among low-income farming families; it decreases with increase in income. A joint study by three universities in the state has calculated the estimated farm debt total at Rs 69,000 crore.

The study also incorporates data on farmer suicides between 2000 and 2010; it estimates this at 3,954. Another study for the period after 2010 is on.

While the minimum support price of grains are raised by four to five per cent yearly, on average, the cost of cultivation has been rising by eight to 10 per cent annually -- of labour, diesel, pesticides, deepening of tubewells, etc. This has accelerated the suicide numbers, says G S Kalkat, chairman, Punjab Farmers Commission.

RURAL DISTRESS				
Rural indebtedness and debt-income ratio in Punjab as on December 2013				
Household income (₹ lakh)	No. of households	Annual income per household (₹ lakh)	Debt Outstanding per household (₹ lakh)	Debt outstanding per household as percentage*
Up to 0.50	8	0.22	0.86	390.91
0.50-1.00	28	0.66	1.29	195.45
1.00-2.50	44	1.67	2.47	147.90
2.50-5.00	38	3.49	5.36	153.58
5.00-7.50	19	5.86	6.49	110.75
7.50-10.00	15	8.26	6.50	78.69
10.00-20.00	23	13.62	10.61	77.90
20.00 and above	4	28.13	9.45	33.59
Total	179	4.95	4.79	96.77

*Of income per household

Source: Study conducted at CRIDD Chandigarh

According to National Sample Survey data issued in December 2014, the average debt per household in India is Rs 47,000 a year and at least 60 per cent of rural households are under debt.

A survey report by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, issued in January 2016, pegged the average debt per household in Punjab at Rs 552,064. The state average of households under debt, it said, was 85.9 per cent.

The census of 2011 showed the number of small farmers in Punjab (having a holding of five acres or below) dipped from 500,000 in 1991 to 360,000 in 2011. The high cost of cultivation due to mechanisation and the low water table has turned small holdings increasingly unviable for crops.

An average income of Rs 3,000 an acre after meeting all expenses is not sufficient for even daily need and the farmer borrows from one source to repay the other, getting into a debt trap, reveal the studies.

Farmers do get interest subvention from nationalised banks but need to repay the principal and interest at the end of the year to be eligible for a loan next year. He borrows at a higher rate (24-36 per cent from commission agents) to repay the bank to maintain a good credit record.

One year's income is needed to pay off debt in rural areas but at low income levels, it is almost four times the income, and such households comprise two-third of rural households, says Verma's study. And, the grip of commission agents has become stronger over time.

Farmers in Punjab cannot, in effect, sell their produce in the open market. They are entitled to various state schemes like health insurance only if they produce a 'J Form', a receipt of sale of grain to the commission agent.

The network of moneylenders and procurement agencies makes it impossible for him to go to the open market for a better price.

To address all this, the state's legislative Assembly recently passed a 'Punjab Settlement of Agriculture Indebtedness' Bill.

The maximum rate of interest, says the bill, would be fixed each year by the government, based on the repo rate of the Reserve Bank of India and interest charged by banks.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Agriculture no longer a viable vocation: Par Panel

agriculture, a parliamentary panel has said the sector is no longer a "viable vocation" and asked the government to make it more remunerative.

The Parliamentary standing committee on Agriculture headed by BJP MP Hukmdev Narayan Yadav said the condition of small and marginal farmers is 'pitiable' and suggested the government to increase the financial allocation to the sector.

Besides, the vocation of agriculture needs to be remunerative like any other vocation, the report suggested.

Despite the fact that farm sector plays a vital role in the nation's economy, the panel is constrained to note that things are not satisfactory in the vital component of the economy, the report said.

The country is still far from achieving the goal of food and nutritional security for the poor, it added.

"The condition of farmers, especially the small and marginal farmers is very pitiable," the panel said.

With rising cost of agricultural inputs, vagaries of climate change and a myriad of other problems like depleting water table, this sector is not a viable option, the report said.

"..the agriculture sector is no longer a viable vocation. Deeply perturbed and concerned at this alarming state of affairs, the committee impresses upon the government to take a stock of the situation in a holistic manner and work in real earnest to bringing a turnaround of the agriculture sector..," it added.

The panel also emphasised that every troling farmer of the country should be adequately paid in return for their produce.

The Department of Agriculture, being the nodal agency of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, should also ensure the smooth implementation of the scheme and act as a facilitator and coordinator with other departments, the report added. JTR MJH ANU

Hit by losses, onion farmer dumps crop

So utterly dejected and despondent was Subhash Gangurde, an onion farmer, with the prices his crop was getting in the market, that he dumped all his yield on the road adjacent to his farm in frustration.

Gangurde, a farmer from Vahegaon Sal village in Chandvad tehsil of the district, could not even manage to obtain the production cost of the crop due to the lower rates in the agriculture produce market committee. He used his crop as fodder for the cattle instead.

Gangurde said, "I cultivated onions on 1.5 acres with the hope of getting better prices this year.

I spent Rs 1.20 lakh to grow the crop, but the decline in prices has shattered my hopes of even breaking even. The onion prices at the APMCs have declined to the range of Rs 300 to Rs 500 per quintal.

The labour cost of harvesting onions, along with transportation cost, is altogether Rs 300-400 per quintal. There is no use of selling the produce in the market," adding that he thus decided against selling the commodity in the market.

In August last year, the average wholesale onion prices had sky-rocketed to an all-time high of Rs 5,700 per quintal due to scarcity.

The retail prices had touched Rs 100 per kg in Mumbai and Delhi during the last week of August last year. The retail prices had touched Rs 80 per kg in Nashik's retail market.

The price trend has, however, reversed due to huge arrival of onions in the market in the past few months. The average wholesale prices have declined to Rs 700 per quintal today due to rise in supply as compared to demand. The production cost for growing onions is Rs 1,000 per quintal.

Nivrutti Nyaharkar, Nashik divisional president of Jay Kisan Farmers Association, said, "The cost of onion production is around Rs 1,000 per quintal.

But the average wholesale price at the Lasalgaon APMC is around Rs 700 per quintal, while 80% of total arrivals are being sold in the range of Rs 300 to Rs 400 per quintal. The farmers are suffering losses to the tune of Rs 500-600 per quintal."

20 sugar mills penalized for fleecing farmers

The BJP-led state government has taken action against 20 sugar mills across the state, most of them directly or indirectly controlled by NCP leaders, for not paying fair reasonable price (FRP) to farmers who supplied them sugarcane.

A senior bureaucrat said licences of six mills have been cancelled and eight suspended, while the remaining six have been fined Rs 116.6 crore by the state's sugar commissioner.

Cooperative minister Chandrakant Patil, who confirmed the move, told TOI, "Many of the factories are controlled directly or indirectly by NCP leaders."

Sources said among the leaders who control some of the mills are former deputy CM Ajit Pawar, Vijaysingh Mohite Patil, Shyam Bagal and former MLA of Jan Surajya Shakti Party Vinay Kore.

Of the 20 mills, four are run privately , while the others are run on a cooperative basis. Those whose licences have been cancelled are Aadinath, Shri Kurmadas and Shivratna Karkambh mills (all Solapur), Vasantdada Shetkari mill (Sangli), Chopda mill (Jalgaon) and Chhatrapati sugar mill in Pune.

Former MLA Vinay Kore's Korevarna mill in Kolhapur district has been fined Rs 66.9 crore for not paying FRP to farmers. Among the other fined are U Gaikwad sugar mill in Kolhapur (Rs 20.4 crore), Manganga in Sangli (Rs 8.6 crore), YashwantKhanapur in Sangli (Rs 8.5 crore) and Shankar in Solapur (Rs 8.9 crore).

A senior official said unless they pay the fine and FRP to farmers, the licences of those who have been fined or had their licences suspended will not be renewed for the next year.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

India International tea convention 2016 to be held at Ooty from September 22



(Representative image) The convention is aimed at reinforcing the salient and unique features of Indian teas to the tea fraternity across the world.

KOCHI: Tea Board of India, and The United Planters' Association of Southern India (Upasi) are jointly conducting the India international Tea convention from September 22 to 24, 2016 at Ooty in Nilgiris.

The convention is aimed at reinforcing the salient and unique features of Indian teas to the tea fraternity across the world.

The theme for the convention is 'Let's 'Tea'm up for Sustainability' as the Indian teas follow sustainable agricultural practices, ethical and fair employee engagement, safety at work place, livelihood issues of community besides supporting environment, according to a press statement from Upasi.

The highlight of the convention will be the business session in which around 500 delegates from around the world are expected to participate.

There will be a special focus on south Indian teas at the convention. The tea that won the 12th edition of golden leaf awards recently held in Dubai will be featured at the event.

Federation of All India Tea Traders Association , Indian merchant Tea Exporter's Forum and The South India Tea Exporters Association are also associating in the conduct of the convention

ISMA cuts sugar output estimate by 1 MT



Despite estimated 12 per cent fall in production, ISMA said India would have a closing stock of about 7 MT at the end of September.

NEW DELHI: India's sugar production estimate has been revised downward by about one million tonnes, to over 25 MT, in the current marketing year ending September on lower sugarcane availability.

Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) had earlier pegged the output by the country, second largest producer after Brazil, at 26 MT in the October-September (2015-16) period, as against 28.3 million tonnes in the previous year.

Despite estimated 12 per cent fall in production, ISMA said India would have a closing stock of about 7 MT at the end of September.

ISMA's latest projection is lower than the government's estimate of 25.6 MT.

In the October-April period, production has fallen by 11 per cent to 24.6 MT.

"From the beginning of the current 2015-16 season and till 30th April 2016, sugar mills have produced 24.60 million tonne of sugar, down 11 per cent as compared to 27.60 million tonnes produced in 2014-15 sugar season in the same corresponding period," ISMA said in a statement.

Sugar production in Maharashtra, which is facing a drought like situation, fell by 19 per cent to 8.37 MT in the first 7 months of the marketing year, as against 10.34 MT in the year-ago period.

Uttar Pradesh-based millers have produced 6.8 MT sugar compared with 7.04 MT.

Nearly 48 sugar mills across the country are still continuing their crushing operations as against 97 mills which were operating on the same date last year.

Out of the 48, 35 sugar mills operating are in Tamil Nadu. The other sugar mills are in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Haryana, which may close in next few days.

"Considering the number of sugar mills which are in operation as on 30th April 2016 and cane availability in these States, sugar production in the current season is expected to be just above 25 million tonnes by the end of September 2016," ISMA said.

"However, with the carry forward of 9.08 million tonnes from previous season and estimated domestic consumption of 25.6 million tonnes and exports of 1.5 million tonnes, sugar mills would still have a carryover stocks of 7 million tonnes at the end of the current season," it added.