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THE HINDU

Modi to meet CMs of drought-hit States today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka in Delhi on Saturday to discuss the drought situation in their respective States, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

“The Prime Minister will assess the drought situation and seek details of progress of relief work in the meeting with Chief Ministers,” said a top source close to the Prime Minister's Office.

A source in the Finance Ministry said a package for the Bundelkhand region was being considered.

Union Cabinet Secretary P. K. Sinha on Monday reviewed the drought and drinking water situation with Chief Secretaries and officials from the departments of drinking water, rural development, water resources and agriculture of 13 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

He directed all Ministries to release funds under various schemes as soon as the Finance Bill was cleared by Parliament.

The Lok Sabha approved the Bill on Thursday.

Paddy, mango orchards damaged

Unseasonal rains in the past four days wreaked havoc in various parts of Karimnagar district causing extensive damage to standing crops such as paddy and mango orchards.

The Karimnagar district recorded an average of 26.5 mm rainfall. The Sircilla division recorded 37.2 mm rainfall, followed by Jagtial division with 33.1 mm, 29.8 mm in Karimnagar division, 25.1 mm in Huzurabad division, 26.5 in Manthani revenue division and 17.5 mm in Peddapalli division.

The Ellanthakunta mandal recorded 70.3 mm rainfall, Konaraopeta 55.4 mm, Husnabad 5.6 mm, Mallial 68 mm, Jagtial 40 mm, Gollapalli 39.6 mm etc.

The Jagtial division was worst hit with extensive damage to the mango groves causing huge loss to the farmers.

Mangoes that were ready for harvesting were damaged in the rains and hailstorm.

Similarly, the paddy which was ready for harvesting was also damaged in the Jagtial division.

In Manthani division, paddy and chilli crops were damaged in various Mahadevpur, Malhar Rao, Kataram and other mandals.

Several quintals of paddy that were brought to the marketyards in the division were also damaged in the rains.

This has come as a blow to the farmers who are already reeling under acute drought conditions since two years. Venkataiah, a farmer from Gunakula Kondapur village of Bejjanki mandal said that his six-acre crop was totally damaged due to rain and hailstorms and was worried further losses he would incur.

He complained that the authorities were not visiting the fields to assess the crop damages and provide compensation accordingly to help the farmers.

Nalgonda Staff

Reporter writes: The rains coupled with gales damaged paddy, lemon and mango orchards in Nalgonda district, on Friday. The district recorded an

average rainfall of 29.6 mm in the last 24 hours as many mandals recorded over 70 mm rainfall. Valigonda registered 78 mm rainfall, followed by Chivvemula, 72mm and Mothey 71 mm and Pochampally mandal 62mm.

Out of 59 mandals, excepting Chandampet and Gundlapally mandals, all others received rains in the wee hours of Friday.

Mango and lemon orchards were damaged paddy that was brought to the procurement centres by farmers and also the harvested paddy kept in the fields was damaged due to rains. Strong winds swept the district uprooting trees and electric poles at several places.

Warangal Special

Correspondent writes: The sudden rains that came as a boon to people reeling under the impact of blistering summer heat, however, proved to be a bane to farmers who were hoping for a good harvest.

The three-day rain during the evenings and the rain that lashed the district on Thursday resulted in heavy damage.

The rain left the mango farmers in lurch totally.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, M Ramesh of Lybarthi village in Wardhannapet mandal said they welcome light showers but the heavy downpour left them dumbstruck as it left a trail of damage.

“There is little flowering of mango orchards. Majority of it withered away due to long dry spell.

The little crop that was left is also damaged now. The fruits have dropped following heavy gales,” he rued.

More damage was being reported in Narasampet, Mahabubabad, Jangaon, Station Ghanpur, Dornakal, Palakurthy and Parkal mandals while the paddy that was ready to be sold at market yards in Mahabubabad, Kuravi,

Narashimulupet, Dornakal and other mandals was completely damaged due to sudden rain.

Of the 51 mandals in the district, 38 mandals received rain. About eight mandals received 20 mm rain. There was an average of 9.8 mm rain across the district with Station Ghanpur recording highest rainfall of 25.2 mm.

Nizamabad Special Correspondent writes: Strong gales and rain lashed the district including this town and several other areas on Thursday night.

The nature's fury inflicted damage with umpteen big and old trees getting uprooted and roof-tops flinging away.

About 500 electric polls fell down throwing the entire district into darkness for about 20 hours. No human or animal loss was reported from any part of the district. Strong gales

Strong gales followed by rain began around 10 p.m. and continued to blow till small hours of Friday.

Electricity department after a hard work for several hours could restore power supply only in the late afternoon on Friday.

In Kotagiri mandal 20 houses were damaged and standing paddy crop razed to ground.

Traders, who arrived from across the country and set up stalls in the Agriculture and Industrial Exhibition on the Government Polytechnic College for Boys ground were in deep sorrow as their stalls were destroyed in the rain and gales.

Drains were clogged with debris and municipal sanitary workers were seen removing it at many places in the town.

Paddy crop damaged

Untimely rain that hit the district for the past two days adversely impacted paddy crop. According to agriculture officials, the crop loss was identified in about 101.28 hectares, paddy in 99 hectares, and two hectares of maize.

Coming to horticulture crops, mango crop was lost in 550 hectares while vegetable crop in 240 hectares.

ICRISAT teams up with UAS-R

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) will work with University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur (UAS-R), in Karnataka in setting up an agribusiness incubator on the university campus in Raichur.

A memorandum of agreement to this effect was signed by the officials of the two institutions here on Friday, giving a new dimension to agri-preneurship development. The initiative is also expected to enhance agricultural growth through innovation and partnerships.

The agreement was signed by Vice-Chancellor of UAS-R, P.M. Salimath and Deputy Director General (Research) of ICRISAT Peter Carberry.

Boon for people but bane for farmers

Heavy rains damage mango orchards in Warangal district

The sudden rains that came as a boon to people reeling under the impact of blistering summer heat, however, proved to be a bane to farmers who were hoping for a good harvest.

The three-day rain during the evenings and the rain that lashed the district on Thursday resulted in heavy damage.

Though the Agricultural Department is yet to assess the damage, the rain left the mango farmers in lurch totally.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, M Ramesh of Lybarthi village in Wardhannapet mandal said they welcome light showers but the heavy downpour left them dumbstruck as it left a trail of damage.

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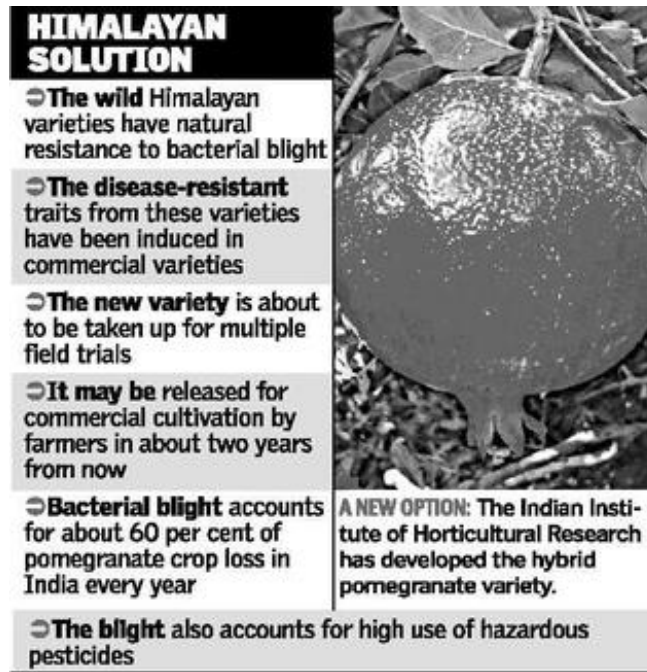
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There was an average of 9.8 mm rain across the district with Station Ghanpur recording highest rainfall of 25.2 mm.

Agricultural and Horticulture officials said they were yet to assess the extent damage across the district due to sudden rainfall.

Agricultural Department is yet to assess the damage in Warangal district

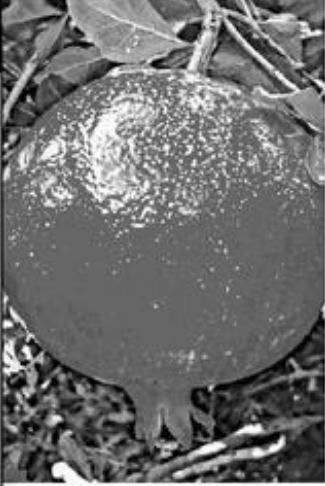
Himalayan varieties help scientists develop blight-resistant pomegranate



HIMALAYAN SOLUTION

- ⇒ **The wild Himalayan varieties** have natural resistance to bacterial blight
- ⇒ **The disease-resistant traits** from these varieties have been induced in commercial varieties
- ⇒ **The new variety** is about to be taken up for multiple field trials
- ⇒ **It may be released** for commercial cultivation by farmers in about two years from now
- ⇒ **Bacterial blight** accounts for about 60 per cent of pomegranate crop loss in India every year
- ⇒ **The blight** also accounts for high use of hazardous pesticides

A NEW OPTION: The Indian Institute of Horticultural Research has developed the hybrid pomegranate variety.



Disease-resistant wild varieties have been hybridised with commercial varieties

The wild varieties of pomegranate that have survived in the Himalayan region for centuries have now helped scientists in developing a hybrid pomegranate variety that has resistance to the deadly disease of bacterial blight.

Bacterial blight has turned out to be a major destroyer of this premium fruit crop, especially in south India.

Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) has developed the hybrid bacterial blight-resistant variety after nearly 15 years of research.

The disease-resistant variety, which is set for field trials at multiple locations, is expected to be released for commercial cultivation by farmers in about two years, according to B.N.S. Murthy, principal scientist and head of

fruit crops division of the IIHR, who is heading this research project for the last four years.

“These wild varieties of pomegranate being grown in the Himalayan region, including in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, for hundreds of years have natural resistance to bacterial blight.

But they are not high yielding. On the other hand, the commercial varieties of this crop are high yielding and have attributes such as quality, softness of seeds and bright colour.

The commercial varieties, however, lack resistance to the bacterial blight. We have introduced disease-resistance traits from the wild varieties into the commercial varieties through hybridisation,” explained Dr. Murthy.

Under the project, 73 wild varieties of pomegranate had been collected by the scientists for developing the new hybrid variety.

Affects 60 p.c. of crop

The new hybrid variety may turn out to be a boon for pomegranate growers as over 60 per cent of the fruit crop is being lost every year in the country owing to bacterial blight.

The loss level is very huge considering the fact that India accounts for about 110 million tonnes of pomegranate crop a year.

The disease-resistant variety is also bound to contribute to the environment-friendly cultivation of this crop by substantially reducing the quantum of pesticides being sprayed to protect it.

At present, farmers spray pesticides for nearly 50 days of the 180-day fruiting period. Of this about 40 days of application of pesticide is for handling the bacterial blight alone, Dr. Murthy pointed out.

IIHR Director M.R. Dinesh noted that even as the bacterial blight-resistant variety was set to be taken up for multiple location trials, the further research on development of more disease-resistant varieties was on.

Training on pangasius fish culture

A free one-day training programme on ‘pangasius fish culture techniques’ will be held on the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on May 17.

A press release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, said that the training will cover the types of pangasius fish, rearing methods, maintaining the pond and water management.

Farmers, members of self-help groups and youth can take part in the programme. Interested should register themselves before May 14.

For registration visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650.

Farmers in Uttara Kannada district hit by drought



Arecanut trees are withering in the eastern part of Sirsi taluk.

Farmers are hit by the severe drought conditions in Uttara Kannada district.

Tanks have dried up and arecanut trees are withering in the eastern part of Sirsi taluk. There was no rain in the district since last October.

Usually, the summer rain in April helps farmers take up sowing. Farmers in Banavasi, Dasankoppa, Badanagod, Andagi and other villages in Sirsi taluk could not take up sowing.

Though more than 300 borewells were drilled in these areas, only 30 are yielding water.

The farmers are also worried about mounting loans.

Progressive farmer Anand Goudru of Santolli said that the government should come to the help of farmers by dredging tanks.

Balchandra Goudru, an 85-year-old farmer, said that the last time the district had a drought was 40 years ago.

“If the monsoon fails, the situation will be worse this time,” he added.

Harvested paddy in fields damaged



Helpless position:Harvested paddy damaged at a village near Munugode in Nalgonda district.- Photo; Singam Venkataramana

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Mango and lemon orchards were damaged paddy that was brought to the procurement centres by farmers and also the harvested paddy kept in the fields was damaged due to rains.

Strong winds swept the district uprooting trees and electric poles at several places. However, the rains provided much needed relief to the people of the district, who were otherwise reeling under sweltering heat. The day temperatures came down considerably.

Kerala records first birth of sexed semen calves



Dairy farmer Ramachandran alongside his cow and the first female calf born of sexed semen in Kerala.

Dairy farmers in Kerala could now rely on technology rather than the whims of Mother Nature to produce more female calves for their herds.

The Kerala Livestock Development Board (KLDB) has reported the first female calves born of sexed (gender selected) semen in the State. Both the births were in Palakkad.

The first calf weighing 30 kg was born to a crossbred Jersey heifer belonging to a farmer at Vakkavu in Nenmara on May 1.

The 20-month-old heifer had conceived in one shot of sex-sorted semen. The second calf was born to a crossbred Holstein Freisien cow at Nenmara on May 4.

The 15-month-old animal had conceived in the second insemination.

Both the inseminations were performed at the Veterinary Hospital, Nenmara, Palakkad, by Sudheer Babu, Senior Veterinary Surgeon, under a pilot project taken up by the KLDB and the Department of Animal Husbandry.

The sexed semen doses were imported by the KLDB from Canada at a cost of Rs.1,250 per dose, Jose James, Managing Director, KLDB, said.

As many as 60 doses of pure HF semen and 40 doses of Jersey semen were used for the study.

The KLDB had earlier reported success in the use of sexed semen in its bull mother farms.

“Using sexed semen for artificial insemination is a pragmatic and easy way for quick production of dairy animals of the desired sex,” says Dr. James.

“Initial results of the pilot study are encouraging. In a State like ours with a declining cattle population, sexed semen offers a means to produce more female calves in the years ahead.”

Reports however suggest that conception rates with sexed semen are lower by 10 per cent compared to the results obtained with conventional semen doses.

Hence, the KLDB is recommending sexed semen for use only in healthy virgin heifers with sound reproductive health and inseminated with skilled technicians.

The first calf was born to a crossbred Jersey heifer belonging to a farmer at Vakkavu in Nenmara on May 1

Ramanagaram to host mango mela from today



To help people buy naturally ripened and organically grown fruits directly from farmers, the Karnataka State Mango Marketing and Development Board, in association with the Department of Horticulture, is organising a mango mela in Ramanagaram town.

The mela will be held near Janapada Loka and near Shivalli Lalbagh from May 7 to May 14, K.S. Manjunath, Chief Executive Officer, Ramanagaram Zilla Panchayat, told presspersons on Friday.

The aim is to sell naturally ripened fruits directly to consumers without the involvement of middlemen, K.N. Roopashree, Deputy Director, Horticulture (Ramanagaram), told *The Hindu*.

The board has decided to set up stalls at both places to sell their produce, she said.

Farmers question distribution of input subsidy in instalments



rationale questioned: The government released Rs. 3,573.93 lakh to Mysuru district to be distributed as input subsidy.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

Input subsidies are being distributed to farmers on piecemeal system, because of which farmers are unable to purchase seeds, fertilizers and other requirements for the kharif season.

On directions from the government, the district administration in all drought-hit districts have been distributing 68 per cent of the subsidy to farmers as the first instalment.

Another 19 per cent will be distributed from next week as the second instalment and the remaining 13 per cent will be distributed after the administration receives further grants.

After a couple of surveys, the district administration had submitted a report to the State government regarding the actual crop loss in the district.

The government released Rs. 3,573.93 lakh to Mysuru and the district administration released over Rs. 2,546.76 lakh to taluk-level officials as the first instalment.

An amount of Rs. 580.68 lakh was released to H.D. Kote, Rs. 597.88 lakh to Hunsur, Rs. 638.11 lakh to Nanjangud, Rs. 645.46 lakh to Periyapatna, Rs. 84.63 lakh to T. Narsipura.

The officers have distributed Rs. 557.47 lakh in H.D.Kote, Rs. 456.06 lakh in Hunsur, Rs. 574.72 lakh in Nanjangud, Rs. 524.52 lakh in Periyapatna and Rs.72.15 lakh in T.Narasipura so far.

An amount of Rs. 361.84 lakh is yet to be distributed to over 88,508 farmers. Many farmers felt that the amount, distributed in instalments, was of no help to them and added that they would spend it on domestic expenses.

They said that if the government gave the amount in bulk, then they could purchase seeds, fertilizers and other inputs for the coming season, they said.

Many farmers also felt that the subsidy amount was very low.

Talking to *The Hindu*, Ganghadhar, Puttanna, Chandrashekar, Manjunath, Umashankar, all farmers, questioned the rationale behind distributing the amount in instalments.

Showers in Kolar may help mangoes, but not tomatoes

The pre-monsoon showers on Thursday and Friday have brought some smiles on the faces of mango and tomato cultivators in Kolar district, which was reeling under a spell of dryness.

There are chances of good yield owing to the rain as it reduces the temperature and increases the humidity, D.C. Halalingaiah, Senior Assistant Director of the Horticulture Department told *The Hindu* on Friday.

However, this will prevail provided there are no gusty winds, which will result in fruit-falls. “Since it is the development stage of mango fruit, the rain is good for it,” he said.

But the same cannot be said in the case of tomato. Though a decline in temperature will help the crop, there are chances of aggravation of diseases owing to a sudden fall in the temperature and increase in humidity, he said.

Continuous rain like in November last might also spell doom for tomato, he added.

A water-starved region, Kolar is bereft of a perennial water source. With the lakes and tanks drying up, there is a crying need for a permanent irrigation project.

Implementation of G.S. Paramashivaiah report has been the main demand of the people of the region. Yettinahole project, a part of this plan, is swamped in controversy.

In spite of several plans and proposals, people are suffering and eagerly awaiting a scientific and sustainable project to quench their thirst and irrigate their crops.

Horticulture hub of State badly hit

High-velocity winds, coupled with unseasonal drizzle, that swept several parts in the district over the past two days, wrecked havoc on horticulture plantations, especially ready-to-harvest banana and mango crops across the district, considered as the horticulture hub of Telangana State.

Banana plantations in Aswaraopeta and Dammapeta mandals bore the brunt of the gusty winds that uprooted banana trees with fully grown bunch of fruits on Thursday night, sources added.

The strong gales have inflicted extensive damage to banana crops at Mushtibanda, Akinepalle and several other villages in Aswaraopeta mandal, known for its expansive horticulture plantations.

Mango orchards in Aswaraopeta, Dammapeta, Vemsoor, Kalluru, Sattupalli, Garla, and various other parts of the district also suffered heavy losses due to the devastation caused by dusty winds, coupled with untimely showers.



At nature's mercy: A farmer showing the damaged mangoes at Rammannapeta village near Khammam on Friday.- PHOTO: G.N.RAO

The latest spell of unseasonal showers, accompanied by strong winds, during the prime fruit harvesting season caused heavy losses to mango growers, who are already facing bleak crop prospects due to hostile weather conditions.

Unseasonal rains have reportedly caused damage to the harvested chilli in the open fields in several villages in Khammam rural, Raghunadhapalem and its neighbouring mandals in the past two days.

The area under mango cultivation in the district is around one lakh acres, sources said.

R Srinivasa Rao, Deputy Director, Horticulture Department, Khammam, said a preliminary survey conducted by the department's extension officers has revealed that banana crops in around 500 acres have been damaged mainly in Dammapeta and Aswaraopeta mandals due to gusty winds.

A detailed field survey will be conducted in a few days to assess the exact extent of damage caused to the horticulture crops including banana, mango and papaya in the district, he said.



Gosikhurd irrigation project: Maharashtra CM to seek Rs 8,000 crore from PM

Project will cover three districts of Bhandara, Chandrapur and Nagpur in cotton-growing belt.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis will request Prime Minister Narendra Modi to extend a separate package of Rs 8,000 crore for the Gosikhurd National Irrigation Project in Vidarbha region.

Fadnavis has set three years timeline for the project if funds are provided.

A meeting of chief ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra to discuss the drought has been convened by the prime minister in Delhi on Saturday.

According to sources, “Fadnavis has decided to seek Modi’s personal intervention in completion of the Gosikhurd National Irrigation Project, languishing for over three decades.”

What marks this project apart from other 89 projects under the Prime Minister Krishi Sinchai Yojna, is its magnitude and immense potential to transform the cotton-growing belt of Maharashtra.

Another aspect relates to availability of plenty of water. But due to incomplete work, and lack of canals, several lakh farmers have been deprived of irrigation facilities.

The project would cover three districts of Bhandara, Chandrapur and Nagpur.

On completion, the project would bring 2.5 lakh hectares under irrigation.

The BJP-led government wants to take this project to its logical end not only to help farmers but also to set an example to expose the complacency displayed by the Congress-NCP in this project.

A complete profile which would be placed before the Centre points to details of the project, which was inaugurated by late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1984.

The cost of the project was Rs 380 crore.

The revised cost is Rs 16,167 crore. Till now, Rs 8,000 crore have been invested. And almost equal amount is required to complete pending works.

Apart from civil works related to canals, infrastructure and civic amenities for relocated project-hit people is under way.

When the project gets going, it would benefit 2.5 lakh hectares across Bhandara (81,697 hectares); Nagpur (22,997 hectares); Chandrapur (1,43,106 hectares).

At the meeting, the chief minister will outline the short and long term measures taken by the government in tackling drought and the challenges ahead.

The success of “jalyukta shivar yojna” which has led to completion of 1.33 lakh works spending Rs 1,600 crore across 6,200 villages will be highlighted.

Also the issues related to crop pattern change and efforts to enhance soil health would be discussed.

A ringing silence

The public would have benefited from knowing what the representatives of the people have to say on the drought situation as it has unfolded in their areas.



After all, this is the first time after 1986 and 1987 that the country has witnessed back-to-back monsoon failures.

Only 80-odd MPs were present when the Lok Sabha finally found time on Thursday to discuss the drought, which, by the Centre's own admission, has affected about 33 crore people across 256 districts in 10 states.

Such seeming indifference to an issue that should be the top national concern today is shocking.

The public would have benefited from knowing what the representatives of the people have to say on the drought situation as it has unfolded in their areas.

Their views and suggestions, extending to criticism of government measures, would have provided valuable inputs for dealing with a crisis that calls for both immediate and long-term responses.

This role, basically that of putting pressure on the Centre and states to act, is something the legislature is expected to perform.

The fact that it required the Supreme Court to tell the Centre to provide immediate relief to drought-hit states and release adequate funds for taking up MGNREGA works, only shows how much space the lawmakers have vacated for others to fill.

Such abdication is dangerous. While activist judges and PIL-filing NGOs have done a stellar job in recent times in taking up public causes, they cannot substitute for elected representatives.

What, then, accounts for the apparent lack of concern among the latter — at least reflected in their priorities in Parliament — over drought? After all, this is the first time after 1986 and 1987 that the country has witnessed back-to-back monsoon failures.

It could be that while they still overwhelmingly hail from rural areas, many of them have sunk roots deep in state capitals and urban centres — and here, sensitivity to the suffering that the drought has brought for their fellow countrymen has been more conspicuously absent this time than in the past.

Previous droughts were inevitably accompanied by a surge in food prices.

This time's drought has been unusual in this regard, as consumer food inflation has been relatively benign at 5.2-5.3 per cent and there isn't any evidence of hoarding by unscrupulous traders.

Prices of many crops have actually fallen, making it a drought essentially for farmers.

But since urban India hasn't been affected as much, it has also not drawn attention of the kind that would have forced Parliament to take more than cursory notice.

Another example is that of the onion crisis. Last August-September, the bulb was making headlines when its retail prices crossed Rs 80/kg.

But today, when there is a glut and farmers have been selling at Rs 2/kg or below, no one's talking about the problem for the farmer.

When the list of those not talking includes even the honourable MPs, something is rotten indeed.

hindustantimes

Indebtedness bill notified; implementation to take time



The act seeks to provide a framework for settlement of non-institutional agricultural debts. (HT Photo)

It might be long before the much-celebrated Punjab Settlement of Agricultural Indebtedness Act—which was notified following approval by the governor this week—is implemented across the state.

The act seeks to provide a framework for settlement of non-institutional agricultural debts and largely involves the setting up of special forums/tribunals in all districts where disputes arising out of the giving and taking of such loans will be taken up.

The act also lays down that all such cases which are already being heard in lower courts anywhere in the state would be referred to these special tribunals once they are in place.

Besides, the act also provides for immediate relief from these tribunals in all those cases where the debtor has paid an amount equal to double the principal amount, wherein the debt would be considered as settled.

Financial commissioner development NS Kalsi on Friday said while the act had been notified and is now being printed, the modalities of implementing it are being worked out.

The department, for instance, is working out the possibility of setting up special tribunals at five divisional commissionerates in the state—Faridkot, Ferozepur, Rupnagar, Jalandhar and Patiala—to see the initial response of the farmers under debt to the new facility.

The government is likely to advertise the facility once it is in place at five places in the state.

Since there is no ready data available as to how many such cases are pending in the district courts, the government is likely to write to the district and sessions judges to start shifting such cases—both which are being heard and fresh ones being filed—to the tribunals once they are in place.

Since the act requires these tribunals to be set up at the district level, setting these up in all districts simultaneously might take long besides a large amount of expenditure by the government.

“Also, we might have a stage where the tribunals are all set up and there is no response from the farmers,” said a senior officer of the department involved in the process of implementing the act.

Once the work with the commissionerate-level tribunals is enough and it needs to be divided, further tribunals would be set up catering to one or more districts.

The officer said state-level tribunals would be set up once the commissionerate-level tribunals are functional and a body is required to hear appeals against the orders of the commissionerate tribunals.

The first step is the setting up of a selection/screening committee which will invite applications from retired judges who are interested in heading these tribunals.

Once the judges are selected arrangements have to be made for seating them and deploying adequate staff with them.

The forums/tribunals set up under the new act will have the powers to declare the debt as having been discharged and waive the entire loan amount with interest as well as order the release of any property pledged or mortgaged by a debtor whose debt is decided as having been discharged.

However, its provisions are limited only to non-institutional agricultural debts up to Rs 15 lakh—mainly loans given out by arhtiyas.

The bill does not cover rural indebtedness—in other words, loans taken by villagers for activities other than agriculture or institutional loans.

Water train has sent 5 crore litres to Latur since April 12

By Saturday morning, drought-hit Latur city will have received around 5 crore litres of water through the state-commissioned train which will have completed 27 trips.

Since April 12, Railways has been operating water trains to Latur city. A water train that carried 5 lakh litres of water went to Latur from Miraj on April 12.

After supplying 45 lakh litres of water in nine days, on April 20, the capacity of the train was upgraded to 25 lakh litres.

Since then, Latur has been getting 25 lakh litres of water daily, said a senior official from the chief minister's office (CMO).

Despite this, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday had expressed unhappiness that he was receiving complaints from Latur about residents not getting water.

He asked the Latur collector to resolve the issue as soon as possible. The state government is also planning to start another water train to supply water to neighbouring areas of Latur such as Udgir and others that are facing a severe water crisis.

“We are in talks with railways for starting another water train. People from Udgir will get water from Nimna Dudhna dam situated in Parbhani district. The dam currently has around 40 MLD water,” said a senior officer from relief and rehabilitation department.

Meanwhile, opposition parties are pressuring the state government to waive off loans for farmers.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), on Friday, demanded the government should waive farmers' loans completely instead of offering to restructure the loans.

The demand was made by Ajit Pawar who is currently touring Marathwada. Pawar criticised the government, saying the lack of planning has worsened the situation.

State Congress president Ashok Chavan will also start his tour from Saturday.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Soybean association raises concerns about alleged import of GM variety



The Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) has raised serious concerns about the alleged import of genetically modified (GM) soybean in India by violating the environment and plant quarantine regulations.

Raising its objection on the alleged imports, the Association has written a letter to the Union Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India expressing the concerns.

In the letter dated May 6, executive director of the association, D N Pathak wrote, "It has come to our knowledge that soybean is being imported into India from various countries.

Flouting of environment and plant quarantine regulations is a very serious matter and we would request immediate investigation into all soybean imports to ensure that plant quarantine and environmental regulations are strictly followed," the letter reads.

There are separate regulations for import of soybean seed for sowing and seeds for consumption or processing.

There are additional restrictions on import of genetically modified food items which can be imported only against permission from the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC).

So far GEAC has not given any clearance for import of GM Soybean.

"To the best of our knowledge, none of the plant quarantine conditions have been fulfilled by the importers and approval of GEAC has also not been obtained for import of any genetically modified soybean," Pathak wrote.

SOPA represents the soybean processing industry in the country

"It is not clear whether the consignments of Soybean cleared through customs meet the Plant Quarantine Rules which also specify that the disposal of any imported soybean consignment will have to be under the guidelines issued by the Plant Protection Advisor to the government of India," said Pathak.

SOPA has requested the Government that all consignments of Soybean, whether GM or otherwise, imported into the country should be strictly as per import and Plant Quarantine regulations.

US seeks greater access to Indian markets for soybeans

The US is trying to gain greater access to Indian agriculture produce market, which is currently limited by tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Scott Sindelar, Minister-Counselor of Agricultural Affairs (for India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) at the US Embassy in India told a select group of reporters here that the US was “engaged” in dialogue with India to open up more for the US agriculture items.

In terms of bilateral trade in agricultural products, US had a deficit in 2015. India imported agricultural items such as almonds, cotton, apple, walnuts and pulses worth \$ 1.33 billion last calendar year but exported shrimps, guar gum, spices and other agri-items worth \$ 4.1 billion.

The value of US agricultural exports declined in 2015, reversing five consecutive years of export growth. Since 2000, developing countries—led by China—had been the main drivers of US export gains, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

After making some progress in pulses and soybean oil, the US is looking for export opportunities in soybeans. Last year, India had imported 1.72 million tonnes of soy oil.

India prohibits genetically modified soybeans and non-genetically modified soybeans have a high tariff of 30 per cent, the US official mentioned. The US exporters consider India’s phytosanitary regulations and certifications for non-GM soybeans.

The US is also promoting and expanding market for a few items such as Washington apples and California walnuts through modern retail chains such as Spencers and Reliance Fresh.

Firm demand for good liquoring tea varieties at Kochi auction

With active blenders' participation, good liquoring medium tea varieties in CTC dust category was firm to dearer at Kochi auction this week.

However, high-priced tea varieties were irregular and sometimes lower and the quantity on offer was 10,69,000 kg in sale no 18. Plain grainier varieties were steady to firm while powdery types eased.

There was subdued demand from exporters and upcountry buyers, auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said.

In orthodox grade, the market was barely steady and tended to ease. With low arrivals, the quantity on offer was only 8,500 kg.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties fetched ₹105-140, mediums quoted ₹95-116 and plain grades stood at ₹90-98.

In leaf sale, the market for Nilgiri brokens and whole leaf in orthodox grade was lower with longer margins of ₹10-15 and sometimes more. The quantity on offer was 138,000 kg.

However, in CTC leaf, the market for good liquorings was steady to firm and sometimes dearer. Of the quantity of 75,500 kg on offer, exporters and upcountry buyers absorbed the bulk of the CTC sold.

In dust grade, Pasuparai RD quoted the best prices of ₹156 followed by Injipara RD at ₹151. In leaf category, Chamraj FOP-Sup (Green Tea) came to the top quoting ₹331 followed by Chamraj OP at ₹296.

No prohibition on cattle trading: Home Ministry

Opposition says attack on cattle traders on the rise

The Rajya Sabha witnessed a spirited debate on the attacks against cattle traders in various parts of the country.

Expressing concern over the situation, the Home Ministry told the elders that strict guidelines have been issued to States to avoid any untoward incidents and said cattle trading is not banned in the country.

“Cattle trading is not prohibited in the country. It has been going on for centuries,” Minister of State in the Home Ministry Kiran Rijiju said.

The Opposition leader Ghulam Nabi Azad wondered why no action is taken against BJP leaders who have been making communal statements against cattle traders.

“In some places private forces parallel to the police are blocking the cattle traders and attacking them,” Azad added.

The discussion was on a calling attention moved by CPI (M) leader Tapan Sen.

Sen said in his speech that attacks against cattle traders saw a rise in the last two years and held the silence of BJP leaders as responsible for it.

Rijiju said in his reply that the Opposition is trying to divert the issue for political purposes.

Prabhat teams up with Abbott to foster dairy entrepreneurship

To facilitate budding entrepreneurs in rural dairy farming communities and bring about capacity building and socio-economic growth, Abbott Nutrition has teamed up with Prabhat Dairy, an integrated milk and dairy products company.

For close to six years, Prabhat Dairy has been supplying milk powder and milk to Abbott Nutrition.

The US firm, which has nutrition products for people of all ages, decided to go to the grass roots in Maharashtra to meet the growing demand for high-quality milk powder for its paediatric and geriatric nutraceuticals.

Local sourcing

Elizabeth Riordan, Divisional Vice-President (Global Dairy Operations), Abbott Nutrition, said the firm decided to share its modern dairy, engineering, nutrition and business expertise with Prabhat to create new systems for dairy in Maharashtra.

“We opened a plant here in 2014 for nutritional business, and now source almost 80 per cent of our milk from here,” she told reporters at Shrirampur, Ahmednagar.

The company sources 3,000 tonnes of milk from the region, more than half from Prabhat Dairy.

“India is the largest milk market. Our biggest opportunity is to continue development of quality sources of milk here,” she added.

The duo launched Nirmal Dhara dairy development project to create stronger farming communities. Some 350 farmer households have participated since its inception in March.

Bulk coolers

Abbott made an extensive survey of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra, and located 10 villages where bulk milk coolers of 2,000 litres each would be installed.

The bulk coolers are meant to be an initial road map for local entrepreneurs to ensure good hygiene practices and transparent milk procurement systems.

The new milk collection centres in five villages allow farmers to sell milk in their own communities.

Through ongoing training, incentive and improved infrastructure, the Nirmal Dhara programme aims to empower dairy farmers to increase both the quantity and quality of their milk.

Vivek Nirmal, Joint Managing Director of Prabhat Dairy said around 250 villages were screened before participation in the programme.

“It is not just a clean-milk project. We tried to identify costs involved, and how to bring down production costs,” he said.

The US company said its nutrition business needed a sustainable approach to securing quality milk in India, and the programme provided an opportunity to tackle complex social and economic barriers.

The writer was in Shrirampur at the invitation of Prabhat Dairy.



ICRISAT signs MoA with Agricultural Sciences varsity, Raichur

Giving new dimensions to agripreneurship development, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed between University of Agricultural Sciences Raichur (UAS-R) and city-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

This will provide support to set up an agribusiness incubator (ABI) at the university's Raichur campus in Karnataka, a release from ICRISAT said today.

ICRISAT will help to identify and promote agribusiness start-ups, as well as facilitate agro-technology transfer in the North Karnataka region, which is expected to enhance the impact of outreach activities for the university, it said.

"Entrepreneurs will get technical and business development support in seed production, farm machinery and food processing domains.

This will be through technical support to develop business models, capacity building and training for incubator personnel, facilitate strategies and systems," the release said.

The partnership with ICRISAT opens a new chapter for the university in promoting technology and agri-based entrepreneurship in the region, said PM Salimath, Vice Chancellor of UAS-R.

"ICRISAT and its partners have been successful in facilitating the establishment of agribusiness incubators in India and Africa aimed at engaging youth, women and farmers to initiate small and micro-level agribusiness ventures.

We hope to achieve similar results through this partnership," said Peter Carberry, Deputy Director General (Research), ICRISAT.

The handholding and mentoring support for UAS-R will be provided through the co-business incubation initiative of the Agri-Business Incubation Program part of the ICRISAT Agribusiness & Innovation Platform (AIP).
VVK ARS

Agriculture machinery bank need of hour, emphasized in BAU workshop

Drawing attention on the establishment of Agriculture Machinery Banks (AMBs) as well as the Agricultural Machinery Custom Hiring Centers (AMCHCs) in rural and suburban areas for transformational change in the agriculture sector, the recent workshop held at Bihar Agriculture University (BAU) aims at augmenting the agriculture yield through optimal utilization of land and other farm resources.

Objective of the workshop, held under the 'Unnat Bharat Abhiyan' scheme of the central government and Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), was to create awareness about using various farm machinery and equipments among the different categories of farmers including small and marginal farmers, constituting 80% of the land holding, in order to improve mechanization in places with low farm manpower availability, said BAU experts.

Need is towards gradual shift from dependence on manpower and animal power to mechanical power because increasing cost for upkeep of animal and growing scarcity of human labour, added the BAU experts saying use of mechanical power has a direct bearing on the productivity of crops apart from reducing the manual labor and facilitating timeliness of agricultural operations.

Establishment of AMBs and AMCHCs in rural and suburban areas would result building-up of farm machineries, implements and equipment meant for custom hiring by farmers, said BAU sources adding implements and equipment like tractors, power tillers, self-propelled machineries, combine harvesters etc should be added in AMBs and AMCHCs for letting it out on hire to the farmers for agriculture purposes.

BAU Vice Chancellor Dr Ajay Kumar Singh said that making use of farm machineries and equipments is the need of hour.

Establishment of AMBs and AMCHCs is urgently need as small and marginal farmers, by virtue of their economic condition, are unable to own farm machinery on their own, added the BAU Vice Chancellor saying in order to bring farm machinery available within the reach of small and marginal farmers a collective ownership or AMCHCs needs to promoted in a big way.

BAU experts who provided training to the farmers for their capacity building included Dr R K Sohanay, Dr Abhay Mankar, Dr Sanoj Kumar, Er Satish Kumar, Er Pankaj Kumar and others.

30 progressive agriculturists from across the districts were given training during the six-day workshop besides were also awarded with certificates on successful completion of their training. They were asked to disseminate their expertise and establish the AMBs and AMCHCs in their respective areas.

Crop loans for kharif season to begin from May 10

The district administration will begin to receive applications and distribute crop loans for kharif 2016 from May 10.

Collector Sachin Kurve said special camps will be organised between May 24 and 31 to easily provide crop loans to farmers.

"Camps will be organized at all tehsils between 11am and 5pm. Crop loan distribution co-ordination committee formed at tehsil-level will begin to meet from May 10 onwards.

The committee will work as help centre from 3pm onwards on every Tuesday and Friday at tehsil offices," he said.

Kurve added talathis will also organize special camps to provide documents to farmers for obtaining crop loans.

"Farmers will have to apply along with various types of documents, so they should ensure all of them are available while filing the applications."

Kurve also said farmers who obtained crop loans in last season and did not pay back before March 31, and hail from 1,171 villages having annewari below 50 paise, can also avail crop loan.

"Existing loan will be turned into new one. The state government has taken a decision in this regard," he said.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Cultivable land declining, but situation not alarming: Government



"The average cultivable land is reducing by 0.03 million hectares per year. But land productivity has increased slowly. It is not an alarming situation," Minister of State for Agriculture Sanjiv Baliyan said.

NEW DELHI: Cultivable land in the country is decreasing by 0.03 million hectares every year but the situation is not alarming, government said in Rajya Sabha today.

"The average cultivable land is reducing by 0.03 million hectares per year. But land productivity has increased slowly.

It is not an alarming situation," Minister of State for Agriculture Sanjiv Baliyan said during Question Hour, adding that the net sown area has remained almost the same.

Replying to supplementaries, the Minister said this can be checked by increasing crop density from 138 per cent to 200 per cent, with focus on improving irrigation facilities.

He said the quality of seeds was a major problem and crop output can be increased by deploying technology in agriculture sector and irrigation facilities.

"The biggest problem is irrigation as only 45 per cent land is irrigated in the country," he said.

Admitting that India is far behind countries like Israel which has deployed drip irrigation facilities to get maximum yield out of every drop of water, he said states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat deploy drip irrigation facilities.

He, however, said the Prime Minister's Krishi Sinchai Yojna is a scheme that can help improve crop yield.

To a question on the break-up of cultivable and fallow land, Baliyan said, "Out of a total of 328 million hectare of land, 181.95 million hectares is cultivable land, which is 60 per cent of total land.

"The current fallow land is 15.25 million hectares and another 11 million fallow land, which is not cultivated for last five years, a total of 26 million hectares can be made cultivable by improving irrigation facilities."

To another supplementary, he said in 2007 when the National Policy for Agriculture was made, states were advised against converting land for non-irrigation purposes.

Earlier in a written reply, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said "as per report on Land Use statistics for 2012-13 (latest available), total land under cultivation/ cultivable land in the country has marginally declined

from 182.01 million hectares in 2010-11 to 181.96 million hectares in 2011-12 and further to 181.95 million hectares in 2012-13."

He also said "the average decrease in the cultivable land in the country during the above period has been 0.03 million hectares per year."

Hybrid seed makers pin hopes on alternative crops



Hybrid seed industry representatives admit a likely fall of around a tenth in sale of cotton seeds.

The hybrid cotton seed sales fell to 4.5 lakh crore packets last year from 5.2 crore packets in the previous year.

HYDERABAD: Despite successive droughts, revived pest attacks on hybrid cotton crops and governments dissuading farmers away from cotton crops, Indian hybrid seed makers pin their hopes on alternative crop seeds to help suffice any possible drop in sale of hybrid cotton seeds.

Hybrid seed industry representatives admit a likely fall of around a tenth in sale of cotton seeds.

The hybrid cotton seed sales fell to 4.5 lakh crore packets last year from 5.2 crore packets in the previous year.

Seedsmen Association's President M Harish Reddy said, "Such a move could lead to a fall in sale of cotton seeds.

But it won't affect our business as farmers will take up cultivation of other crops and there will be demand for seeds that'll drive our business."

Of the total production capacity of seed manufacturers, nearly 50 per cent is dedicated to alternate crop seeds while the rest is for BT cotton production. With changing market scenario, they hope to increase production of alternate crop seeds over a period of time.

National Seed Association of India's Vice president MG Shembekar said, "Shifting from production of one crop seed to the other is not a big task and we are equipped with the required machinery.

It's just that it will happen over a period of time and not instantly."

The Indian hybrid seed industry is currently estimated at around Rs 13,000 crore and is growing at 10-15 per cent a year with BT cotton accounting for nearly 45 per cent of the market.

The country saw a record growth in cotton crop acreage last year at about 13 million hectares, the highest cotton acreage globally with more than a third of global cotton area, says a report by ICAR-Central Institute for Cotton Research.

However, the production is likely to drop to 28.5 million pound bales in 2016 from 29.3 million pound bales last year on account of marginal fall in acreage to around 11.8 million hectares, says a report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"The governments' move would not have any major impact on the industry as there is always a plus or minus 7 per cent variance in the cotton industry's business.

Also, farmers wouldn't immediately shift to cotton production and the transition would take time," says Kailash Gandhi, director with KRG Strategic Consultancy.

A hybrid seed industry representative, who did not want to be named, said the profitability among some of the alternate crops like soybean was quite attractive at close to 20 per cent, much higher than cotton seed now wherein the selling price was capped coupled with payment of several charges including royalty.

Experts also view that the move by the government to encourage farmers take up alternate crops would be successful only when it has a concrete plan to procure such alternate crop production.