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# THE HINDU

## Savour the red mango, a new variety in Medak



Eye-catching:(Above) Sk. Jalaluddin handing over the red mangoes to Collector D. Ronald Rose in Medak on Tuesday. The red mango sapling at his nursery.— PHOTOS: Mohd Arif

The red-coloured mango, grown by Sk. Jalaluddin of Narsapur in Medak district, was released here on Tuesday.

Mr. Jalaluddin had collected different saplings from forest area for his nursery out of which one was left to grow for a year that yielded red mangoes.

Later, he started working on the mother plant and developed seedlings from that.

At present, he has five mother trees and about 60 trees grown from the seedlings and he is planning to expand it to another six acres in the coming season.

“Even after the harvest, the mango fruit is in good shape and has more fibre. Even the largest fruit will not be more than 300 grams,” Mr. Jalaluddin told *The Hindu* .



With the expansion, it is estimated that each acre would accommodate about 120 saplings under ultra high density system.

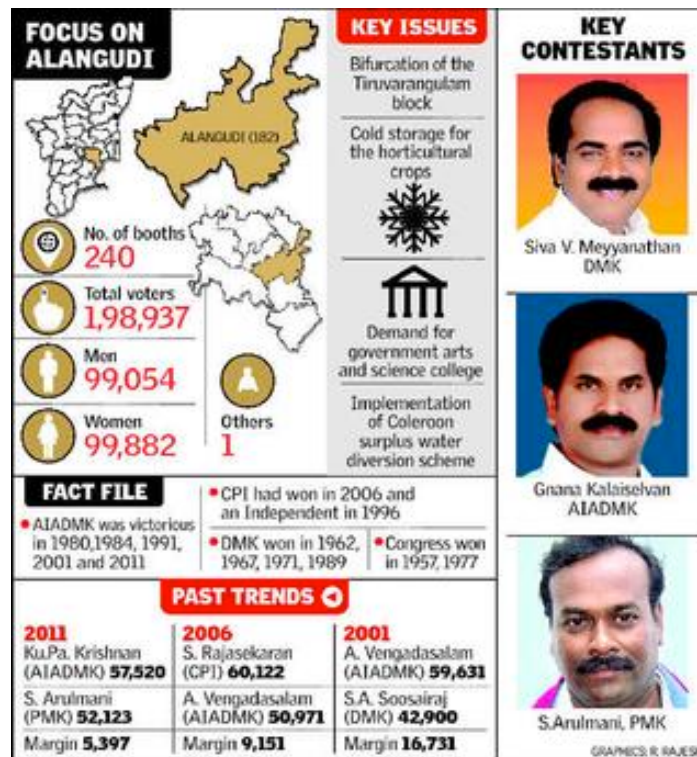
He says while the cost for expansion the first year would be between Rs. 18,000 and Rs. 20,000, the annual expenditure would be about Rs. 6,000 from second year onwards.

The variety was not yet named and he was in touch with the officials of the Agriculture University.

Mr. Jalaluddin met District Collector D. Ronald Rose on Tuesday and handed him over the red mangoes. The Collector formally released the variety.

## Farmers yearn for cold storage facility

*The constituency also requires an arts and science college and bus facility for interior villages*



The Alangudi Assembly constituency in Pudukottai district is a land of horticultural crops and is blessed with the distinction of producing major fruits – mango, jackfruit and banana – popularly known as ‘mukkani,’ besides a variety of flowers.

But poor post-harvest technology and drastic depletion in groundwater has been cause for concern for farmers.

Being an educationally backward area, the constituency has been in need of an arts and science college to cater to the collegiate-level educational level.

A majority of the population are small and marginal farmers with small landholdings.

Serious depletion in groundwater has come as a severe blow to the agricultural and horticultural activities across the constituency.

A long pending proposal for diversion of the Coleroon surplus water, made by the former Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran, still remains an election issue.

Nominees of major political parties assure the voters that they will work for overall development of the constituency in general and for the cause of the horticultural farmers in particular.

The constituency witnessed much political heat and drew widespread attention after sustained protests seeking a change in the DMK candidate.

The party bowed to the pressure and replaced its original nominee, G.Sathish with Siva Ve. Meyyanathan.

However, the two rival camps have buried the hatchet and the party cadre are working hard to pose a stiff challenge to the ruling party.

Mr.Meyyanathan says that the infrastructure in the constituency has to be strengthened much.

He would work towards getting a government arts and science college so that the students from this constituency would benefit in a big way.

Hitherto, they have been relying on the colleges located outside the constituency. He also said that the cold storage facility would be set up for the benefit of farmers.

“Though a large area has been brought under floriculture, adequate storage facility is yet to be provided,” he said.

Farmers cultivating mango, jackfruit and banana were also facing problems in post-harvest storage and processing.

He would work hard for getting an integrated court complex for Alangudi.

The AIADMK nominee Gnana. Kalaiselvan says that his priority would be provision of cold storage for the benefit of the horticultural farmers.

“Banana, jackfruit and flowers are raised here in a large area but farmers need cold storage facility,” he said.

There was a demand for the Government Arts and Science College in the constituency which would be sanctioned immediately after the AIADMK is voted to power.

He said that many voters demanded bus facility for the interior villages and he would take immediate action after victory.

He is confident that the AIADMK party’s poll manifesto had gone down well with the voters.

“There has been overwhelming response to the AIADMK campaign, particularly after the announcement of the poll manifesto,” he said.

The PMK nominee S. Arulmani says that he has been popular among the voters of the constituency.

Even in the 2011 elections, he posed a stiff fight to the AIADMK nominee K. P. Krishnan who won by a margin of just 5,300-odd votes.

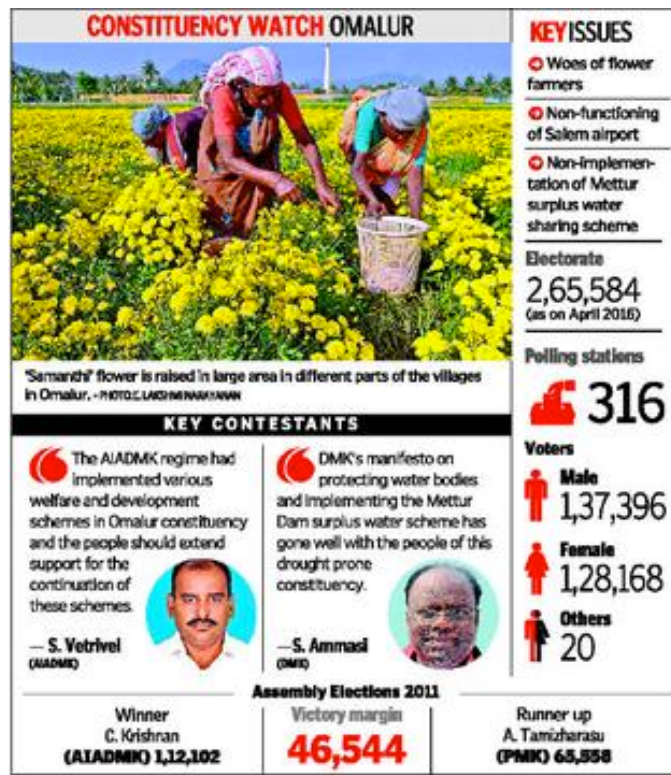
Mr. Arulmani launched his campaign well ahead of his rivals and has been visiting various villages, explaining the PMK party's election manifesto.

There has been big support for closure of liquor shops, one of the main planks of the party. The MDMK is also in the fray, leaving the field wide open.

### **Fragrance yet to reach the lives of farmers here**

The presence of Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) candidate A. Tamizharasu and Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) treasurer A. R. Elangovan in the fray is giving tough time to the nominees of both the Dravidian parties – S. Vetrivel of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and S. Ammasi of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Omalur constituency.

In the first ever general election, Omalur constituency elected an Independent.



In the next two elections, the constituency was given a new name Taramangalam. Omalur re-emerged again as a constituency in the delimitation process in 1967.

The AIADMK has emerged victorious here six times, DMK twice, Congress, PMK and TMC once each.

‘Palpakki’ C. Krishnan the incumbent, who had captured Omalur twice 1989 and 1991 elections too, has been denied ticket by the AIADMK this time.

The woes of flower farmers, who formed a majority among the farming community, are plenty.

Though flowers are the major crop, the fragrance is yet to reach the lives of the farmers. The flower farmers’ sweet smelling scent pervades all around the air to create a serene atmosphere.

But their livelihood is not that much rosy.

‘Samanthi’ flower is raised in large area in the villages of Deevattipatti, Mookkanur, Gundukkal, Kongupatti, Kaaruvalli, Kanjanayakkanpatti, Pannapatti during the season spread over November to February.

‘Samanthi’ flowers of different varieties including Chandini, Poornima, white, yellow flood the markets of Salem and the neighbouring districts also the markets of Bengaluru, Chennai, Tirupati during the peak period.

The long pending demand of the florists is the setting up of a scent manufacturing unit in Omalur.

Every candidate contesting here in the past have assured to set up scent factory, but they have remained only on paper.

The farmers continue this demand this election too, besides specialised training to them in making value added products from flowers.

The non-functioning of the airport at Kaamalapuram is another major demand of the whole Salem district.

The airport commissioned by spending a huge amount in 1993 is remaining idle. Various organisations have taken up this vital issue at different levels, but with little success.

Mr. Tamizharasu, who represented Omalur from 2006-11, claims that a major Mettur Surplus Water Scheme of supplying the excess water through natural canals to Rivers Sarabanga, Tirumanimuthar and Vasishtanadhi for farm activities in the drought prone areas was mentioned even in Governor’s address. But the scheme was shelved by the present regime.

He alleges that the project of desilting River Sarabanga at an outlay of Rs. 330 crore has not been executed.

Another project of diverting the Thoppaiyar reservoir water to Kaadayampatti area is also pending.

He assures special agricultural economic zone, completion of all irrigation projects within two years, construction of a large number of check dams.

The AIADMK cadre claim that the preliminary investigations into the construction of a dam across River Sarabanga in the Servarayan foothills are

in progress. The demand of scent factory has already been taken to the notice of the Chief Minister, who as a first step sanctioned a cold storage facility.

The AIADMK cadre claim carving out of a new Kadayampatti taluk, new roads and renovation of existing roads and other infrastructure development works (Rs. 74.29 crore), connecting roads to tribal villages; infrastructure facilities in the rural areas from MLA LAD; five milk chilling plants; upgradation of the existing Primary Health Centres; development works in the Omalur GH, new school buildings as their achievements.

Mr. Ammasi (DMK) takes cover under the DMK manifesto which assures irrigation facilities by implementing the Mettur Surplus water scheme.

He also assures steps for the renovation of channels leading to water bodies in Vellalapatti, Thekkampatti areas which will enable farm activities in additional 10,000 acres.

### **Control rooms in taluks to tackle monsoon calamities**

A meeting of senior officials of various departments here on Tuesday decided to open round-the-clock control rooms in all taluk headquarters of the district to tackle monsoon calamities.

Accordingly, Deputy Tahsildars will monitor the control rooms and submit reports to the collectorate on a regular basis. The meeting also directed Agriculture Officers of each Krishi Bhavan to submit daily reports on crop loss.

### **Medical aid**

Sanitation drives in all tribal hamlets will be completed before monsoon, and arrangements will be made to offer medical aid to tribesmen during emergencies.

The meeting directed the Public Works Department to fill potholes on major roads in the district. Besides, steps will be taken to fill vacancies of Fire and Rescue services personnel.



Also, bill boards will be erected at risky zones at all adventure tourism destinations in the district.

The meeting directed the Mining and Geology Department to study the ecological impacts and threats to the public before granting permissions to granite quarries in the district. C.M. Muraleedharan, Additional District Magistrate, Wayanad, presided over the function.

### **Drive to expand crop insurance cover**



Reaching out: Authorities will give a fresh push to widen crop insurance cover in Mysuru.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

In the run-up to the monsoon and the new agricultural season, the authorities in the district are bracing up to expand crop insurance cover in the district.

At present, less than 15 per cent of the nearly 3.7 lakh agricultural loanees in the district have crop insurance cover and hence the focus on widening the insurance net.

District Lead Bank Manager K.N. Shivalingaiah told *The Hindu* that a high-level meeting, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and involving all senior level officials from different fields, including banks, Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture etc., will be convened in due course to finalise the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

Lack of insurance cover is one of the reasons for the spate of farmer suicides in case of a crop loss and even among those insured, the terms and conditions are stringent. Hence not many opt for the insurance scheme though it is compulsory for farmers availing loans from commercial banks, to have insurance cover.

But there is a catch here. As Kurubur Shanthakumar, President, Karnataka Sugarcane Cultivators Association explained: insurance cover is extended only to those cultivating the notified crops and this varied from region to region.

Mr. Shivalingaiah conceded that insurance cover is only for the notified crops for the region but there are proposals to bring in more crops under the ambit of notified crops. “This will ensure that more farmers are covered under the insurance scheme,” he added.

Besides notified crop, the notified area or the unit area of insurance is also being redefined. Earlier, the unit area was a hobli but it has been further reduced to gram panchayat level under the PMFBY, said Mr. Shivalingaiah.

But Mr. Shanthakumar said that farmers want the unit of insurance to be further localised.

There are further relaxation in norms for declaring crop failure in the unit area and earlier it was mandatory that at least 50 per cent of the crops had failed in the unit.

“But it has now been reduced to 33 per cent to avail insurance cover,” according to Mr. Shivalingaiah.

## **Cashew yield in Pachamalai hit**

### *New cultivation method in progress*

Cashew cultivation in Pachamalai forms a major livelihood for tribal farmers and on an average, every family in 16 major villages owns at least five to six cashew trees, indicating the assured income from the cash crop.

Farmers had resorted to conventional cultivation practices, using cashew seeds. No graft technique had been adopted, as they were not aware of the advantages of grafting pattern.



A woman farmer watching the cashew in a tree raised on conventional method at Kambur in Pachamalai.— Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

According to a cross section of farmers, though they had cultivated cashew, they do not adopt any crop protection techniques.

The crop is subjected to two types of problems – withering of flowers during excess humidity – a phenomenon observed during the December-January; problem caused by stem borer which brings down the yield. Against 50 to 60 kg a tree, the yield is reduced anywhere between 40 and 50 kg.

To tide over the problem being faced by the cashew farmers due to conventional practices, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has introduced six-year ‘Integrated Tribal Development Project’ for adopting latest cultivation practices.

Under the project, being implemented through the service organisation Hand-in-Hand, the NABARD has covered 41 villages – 16 villages in the Tiruchi side and 25 villages in the Salem district, as the Pachamalai is spread over both districts.

Under the project, ‘VRI 3’ variety, grafted saplings with high yielding variety had been raised in 970 select villages – 543 in Tiruchi district and the balance 427 in Salem district.

Though the Integrated Tribal Development Project aims at adopting latest agricultural practices, the NABARD and the Hand-in-Hand have been extending assistance to the cashew farmers to protect the trees from the impact of stem borer.

“We supply bio fertilisers such as ‘pancha kavya’ to check the adverse impact of stem borers on the standing cashew,” sources said.

### **Drought has affected 1.5 lakh villages across the country: govt.**

*MPs want Centre to waive loans of farmers and ensure drinking water supply*

The government on Tuesday told the Lok Sabha that drought had affected nearly 1.5 lakh villages across the country and around a quarter of its population had been impacted.

Rural Development Minister Birender Singh said 313 districts, 1,58,205 villages and 4,44,280 dwellings had been hit by drought and the government was taking efforts to deal with the situation.

He was replying to the discussion on drought, water scarcity and inter-linking of rivers, with members voicing concern over the worsening situation and demanding waiver of loans of farmers.

### **MGNREGS funds raised**

“The Centre has allocated Rs. 1,360 crore to Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka well before the drought,” he said, adding there was no lack of funds.

Mr. Singh said the government had also increased funding under the MGNREGS from Rs. 37,000 crore to Rs. 45,000 crore and the man-days had been raised to 252 days.

Members, while participating in the debate, expressed concern over the worsening drought situation and demanded that the government waive loans of farmers and work on a war footing to ensure that people did not suffer for want of drinking water.

NCP member Supriya Sule said the Maharashtra government was not serious and had not done enough to deal with the drought situation in Marathwada.

### **Culling begins in bird flu-hit farm**

Culling operations began in a private poultry farm near Humnabad in Bidar district where bird flu was detected two days ago. Officials entered the farm around 3 p.m. and the culling was expected to go on till midnight.

The operation was supposed to start at 6 a.m. on Tuesday. However, it was delayed as a medical check-up of workers took over four hours. The removal of water from burial pits and digging of new pits went on till 2 p.m.

Officials began emptying the pits on the ground that was filled with water after Monday's rain. Six earthmovers dug pits inside the 14-acre Arunodaya farm. Each pit would be filled with around 15,000 chicken loaded into 300 bags, an officer said.

The district received 2,000 Personal Protection Kits (PPTs) for workers to wear during the culling operation.

A team of community medicine department officers from the Union government, headed by Naveen Gupta, visited Molkera and the surrounding villages.

The team is creating awareness among villagers about bird flu and ways to avoid the infection, and suggested cure for the symptoms.

*Prices have remained the same as it takes a few days till consumers take in the news of the bird flu. We anticipate a demand drop in spite of there*

*being no danger. Besides, demand also traditionally reduces in summer by around 10 p.c. because people realise that poultry generates heat when consumed.*

*H.N. Nagabhushan,*

*General Secretary, Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders' Association*

### **Minister distributes affidavits to farmers**

Minister for Rural Development and Housing Kimidi Mrunalini on Tuesday said that 2, 34,606 paddy growers and 3,948 horticulture farmers in the district were benefited with the waiver of loans totalling Rs. 626.07crore and Rs, 9.04 crore respectively in four phases.

After distributing affidavits to farmers eligible for loan waiver in the fourth phase at MPDO's Office at Cheepurupalli, the Minister detailed the government's efforts and programmes being taken up for the benefit of farmers in the State and asked farm officials to enlighten farmers on Neeru-Cheetu, NTR Jala Siri etc.

Earlier, the Minister formally launched digging of soak pits on the premises of the Housing Department here.

### **Food processing sector finds going tough**

The State government has set a target of attracting an investment of Rs. 5,000 crore to the food processing sector by 2020, but there seem to be many stumbling blocks in achieving it.

Processable raw material, labour with required skills, necessary infrastructure, and even investment seem to be insufficient.

Secretary for Food Processing Girija Shankar, delivering the keynote address at a seminar on 'Opportunities and challenges — Food Processing Industry', organised by the Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation here on Tuesday, said that investment was hard to come into the food processing industry.

Semi-skilled, less skilled persons could also be employed in the sector. The government had set a target of creating an employment of 50,000 in the sector by 2020, Mr Shankar said.

Top on the priority list was the maximum exploitation of crops like banana, coconut, millets, citrus fruits, and mango that were being produced on a massive scale in north Andhra, but were undergoing minimum processing.

Other priorities were encouraging processed freshwater and sea fish export, domestic sale of frozen fish, and exploring tuna fishing, he said.

In all, 87 Expressions of Interest (EoIs) were received in the food processing sector. Out of them, 13 were for mega food parks, eight for integrated food parks, 10 cold chain projects, four primary processing centres, three testing labs, 42 new food processing units, and seven expansion/modernisation units.

Federation of Chambers president-elect Muthavarapu Murali Krishna said that the A.P. food processing industrial policy was one of the best in the country, but just that was not enough.

Non-Resident Telugu Association office-bearer and adviser to the government Vemuri Ravi Kumar said that the skill level of people in the State was very poor.

Ninety per cent of the labour available was of “level one” skill. There was an urgent need to address the problem.

While 65 per cent of food was processed in western countries, in India it was only 2 per cent. There was some sort of stigma toward processed food, which needed to be addressed, he said.

AP Chambers Executive Director Potluri Bhaskara Rao and CEO of Andhra Pradesh Food Processing Society Y.S. Prasad spoke.

### **Farm sector start-up Agrihub to raise \$3mn**

The Agrihub, a digital platform for the farm sector, will raise \$3 million over the next four months for scaling up operations, according to the co-founder of the Bengaluru-based start-up.

## **Scaling up operations**

Abhishek Bhatt, one of the founders, told *The Hindu*: “Ours is a bootstrapped firm. We have invested Rs.10 lakh. Plans are on to raise \$3 million over the next three to four months.

We are already in talks with three investors. The fund will be used for scaling up technology, operations and marketing.”

## **Access to new products**

“While the urban trader has access to new products and technology, it is difficult for those from remote towns to know about them.

At the best, he can know about them through extensive visits to exhibitions.

Businesses and small companies spend thousands of dollars to showcase their existing products and launch new products in exhibitions.

The duration of these exhibitions is for about three to four days and the footfall is usually more from casual visitors.

Agrihub has been started to address these issues,” said Rajeeb Roy, a co-founder. The B2B and B2C portal will connect seed providers, agriculture equipment providers, retailers and distributors.

It will also help the stakeholders to track innovations or products, find suppliers and facilitate and educate to make rapid purchase decisions.

Mr. Roy, who has done M. Tech in Post Harvest Technology from IIT-Kharagpur, has co-founded the firm along with Sidharth Kumar and Mr. Bhatt in Bengaluru.

Over 3,600 farmers and well-known brands such as John Deere, Yara Fertilizers, Rallis, Namdhari Seeds, Tafe, KF Bioplants, New Holland Agriculture, Known You Seed, Ginegar and Nagarjuna have already been listed on the platform.



The product category offered by the company includes: seeds and plants; irrigation products; fertilizers and plant protection products; farm tools and equipment and hi-tech agriculture and allied products.

### **Agrihub to provide one-stop solution to farmers**

The Agrihub, a digital platform floated by two mechanical engineers will provide one-stop solution for farmers about products and technologies.

The Bengaluru-based portal will connect seed providers, agriculture equipment providers, retailers and distributors.

It will also help the stakeholders to track innovations or products, find suppliers and facilitate and educate to make rapid purchase decisions.

Rajeeb Roy co-founded the firm along with another Mechanical Engineer Abhishek Bhatt and Sidharth Kumar in Bengaluru.

Talking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Bhatt said: “Ours is a boot-strapped firm. We have invested Rs.10 lakh. Plans are on to raise \$3 million.

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### **Maharashtra: All water-intensive crops to be brought under drip irrigation**

Notwithstanding the financial hurdles, the Centre and the state are all set to make drip irrigation a compulsion, as part of the long-term drought mitigation policy.

The state government will bring all water-intensive crops under drip irrigation in the next three years.

However, there are financial implications in the way as sugar mills have urged the government to stand guarantor for loans it seeks from banks for investment in drip infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the financial hurdles, the Centre and the state are all set to make drip irrigation a compulsion, as part of the long-term drought mitigation policy.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, “There is no alternative to drip irrigation for all high water-intensive crops. To begin with, we will have to make drip irrigation mandatory for sugarcane crops.”

All studies by government on water management recommended that all water-intensive crops/horticulture, including sugarcane, bananas, grapes should be brought under drip irrigation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after a drought meeting with the chief minister, had observed, “I have stressed on vitality of increasing water use efficiently through sprinkler and drip irrigation, including in sugarcane cultivation.”

A senior cabinet minister said, “Despite the necessity, we have to adopt flexibility.

We will extend subsidies upto 50 to 75 per cent to small and marginal farmers from backward category who switch over to drip irrigation to enable them to sustain the additional expenditure.”

Sugar mills are not seeking direct subsidies. But they have urged the state government to stand guarantor for bank loans they would seek for investments in drip infrastructure.

However, the ministry of finance is not very keen on making immediate commitments. As sources said, “Rs 4,000 crore support to farmers for drip irrigation is not viable in the long run.”

At present, less than 20 per cent of sugarcane growers have adopted drip irrigation.

The chief minister indicated that various research institutes and collaborations with Israel can pave the way for adapting a more economical model for drip irrigation in rural Maharashtra.

Former minister for cooperation, Harshvarshan Patil, said, “I fully support the state government’s initiative for making drip irrigation compulsory for sugarcane crops. We have to go for better water management.”

The results from drip irrigation, compiled by the state government across districts reeling under drought, show that drip irrigation, along with protected farming yielded higher and better crop.

The higher expense in drip infrastructure is easily recovered through dividends from higher production.

The agriculture department is playing a crucial role to provide logistical and technological support to farmers' groups ready to experiment in drought prone districts in Vidarbha and Marathwada.

### **Maharashtra plans to bring 20 lakh new farmers under credit plan**

Plan will be expanded from the current Rs 53,000 cr to Rs 68,000 cr



Photo for representational purpose. File Photo/Reuters

The state government has set a target to bring 20 lakh farmers, who have never taken loan, under the state credit plan 2016-17.

The proposal has been conveyed to the Centre and would require an expansion of the plan from the current Rs 53,000 crore to Rs 68,000 crore.

In Maharashtra, only 45 per cent farmers avail loans from the nationalised or district cooperative banks.

Alarmed by the sizeable number of small and marginal farmers being deprived of bank loans, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis presented the subject before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, indicating that farmers covered under the loan credit plan should increase from 45 per cent to 80 per cent.

While urging the prime minister and Union finance ministry to bring out a mechanism to facilitate bigger loans from the financial institutions, he said, “Farmers cannot be turned down on the conditions of bad recovery.

There have to be multiple parameters that need to be incorporated to bring new guidelines, which would serve the welfare of the smaller and marginal farmers more effectively.”

In Maharashtra — that has registered large number of suicides in 14 districts — the uniform pattern noted was the failure of the farmers to avail fresh loans from financial institutions that made farming a difficult task.

Secondly, in absence of assured bank loans from credible institutions, rural villages saw farmers forced to seek alternative mode of borrowings.

It included private money lenders exploiting the farmers by seeking higher rate of interests, which further drove them to poverty and suicides.

The PMO and the Union ministries of finance and agriculture have taken the decision to expand the credit plans across all drought-prone districts in the country.

They will take up the matter with Reserve Bank of India and nationalised banks. While outlining the state’s initiatives through loan restructuring, Fadnavis informed the Centre, “The interest rates on crop loans have been reduced from 12 per cent to six per cent.

We have extended the repayment from three years to five years period. In the first year, interest rates on loans have been completely waived.

This has helped to bring 17 lakh farmers to avail the loans in just one year.”

However, he indicated, “The financial institutions will have to lend support by evolving models that would spread funds to larger number of farmers, specially small and marginal.”

The Centre-state and financial institutions together will have to find a way forward to make farmers self reliant, he added.

Chief Secretary Swadheen Kshtriya said, “At the meeting held in Delhi, the chief minister highlighted two significant aspects.

One relates to expansion of the credit plan from present 45 per cent to 80 per cent and second decision was to expand the benefits of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yogna (PMFBY) to farmers from present 40.8 per cent to 60 per cent.”

Meanwhile, the government has already initiated the process to spread the benefit of crop insurance under PMFBY. Almost 10 to 15 insurance companies are competing for the schemes.

### **PM Modi reviews drought situation in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana**

The PM appreciated the suggestion and said Soil Health Cards aim to achieve the same objective, the statement said.



An amount of Rs 712.62 crore had been released to Telangana under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi Tuesday reviewed the drought situation in Telangana and Madhya Pradesh, during which several historical examples as well as global best practices in the area of water storage and irrigation were discussed, according to a PMO statement.

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao, during his meeting with the PM, suggested delineation of the entire country into “crop colonies” so that specific strategies could be evolved.

The PM appreciated the suggestion and said Soil Health Cards aim to achieve the same objective, the statement said.

It said an amount of Rs 712.62 crore had been released to Telangana under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

This is in addition to Rs 205.5 crore released as central share of State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for 2015-16 to the state.

Later, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan briefed the Prime Minister on the steps the state government has been taking in dealing with the drought situation.

Chouhan said that due to preparatory steps, including creation of water storage structures, taken over the last 10 years, the state was relatively well placed to tackle the drought.



## **6 yrs on, 41 Maha villages wait for their share of water**

Barely 20km from Jayakwadi, one of Asia’s largest earthen dams, is Nanegaon village in Paithan taluka.

Shrivelled sweet lime orchards, barren cotton fields, dried up wells and water tankers belie the fact that this village, like nearly 40 others, is within the vicinity of the largest water storage body in the state.

Even as Marathwada faces its fourth consecutive drought this year, the Nathsagar reservoir of the Jayakwadi dam is currently at its dead storage capacity of 330 million cubic meters (mcm), which is more than the live storage of the big four lakes that supply water to Mumbai.

Dead storage is the level at which water cannot flow out of the dam sluice gates, but has to be pumped out.



Sampat Jadav, a farmer, who lost his sweet lime crop at Navegaon village in Marathwada owing to the drought. (Satish Bate/HT)

Nanegaon has been waiting to get its share of the Jayakwadi water, promised via the Brahmghavhan lift irrigation scheme cleared six years ago.

The long wait has hurt the farmers financially and taken the life of nearly 22 farmers in the region over the past two years.

But the bigger tragedy that most farmers are unaware of is the Rs222-crore lift irrigation scheme, cleared in haste ahead of the 2009 Assembly polls, is not technically feasible.

Nanegaon's story is similar to that of the entire region, where even as big dams get built, the promised water rarely reaches the beneficiaries.

The reasons for these are varied —unrepaired canals, technically unsound irrigation projects and cornering of rightful share of water by politically strong western Maharashtra region. But it largely stems from the government and political apathy and corruption.



“Year after year, we wait in the hope that the government will budget the remaining money for the project and we will finally irrigate our fields.

For the past one year, our village is being supplied water through tankers twice a day.

Where is the water for crops when there isn't enough to drink? When my sweet lime orchard turned into a wasteland last month, I felt like jumping into the Nathsagar reservoir,” said Ashok Sarjerao Mane, whose sweet lime orchard spread over one hectare has turned yellow, its fruit the size of dried lemons.

Mane invested Rs8 lakh in pipelines, a few years after the ambitious lift irrigation project was planned, to draw water from the Kherda water tank, where the water from the scheme was to reach.

Now, indebted like many others in the village, this is Mane's third year without any income from the fields.

What Mane doesn't know is that the lift irrigation scheme – like hundreds in Maharashtra - was cleared to aid contractors more than farmers.

The special investigation team (SIT) report on Maharashtra's multi-crore irrigation scam states the lift irrigation scheme with a potential to irrigate 18,790 hectares was planned and cleared without getting a water availability certificate from the engineers concerned, approval of the Central Water Commission (CWC) or the Maharashtra Water Resources Regulatory Authority (MWRRA). In short, it was cleared without financial, technical or environmental scrutiny.

“The phase two of the project was planned even though the initial minor scheme running from 1994 had been able to achieve only 10 per cent of the projected irrigation target.

The administrative approval note did not have the certificate on whether the required water could be lifted from Jayakwadi.

The revised administrative approval was granted in July 2009 and had the executive director and the minister's [NCP's Ajit Pawar's] signatures,”

states the report. The SIT report makes it clear the project is unlikely to ever get water to these 41 villages,” said water expert Pradeep Purandare.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## As China plays hard ball, India eyes Indonesia to sell buffalo meat

Buffalo meat shipments		
	Quantity (tonnes)	Value (\$ million)
2015-16 (April-Feb)	1,202,318	3,747.00
2014-15	1,475,526	4,781.16
2013-14	1,449,758	4,350.38
2012-13	1,107,506	3,201.86

Source: Apeda

Big opportunity for Indian exporters as prices offered more attractive than Australia's

While China drags its feet over allowing import of buffalo meat from India, the country hopes to make in-roads into the Indonesian market, currently monopolised by Australia.

“A team of veterinary experts from Indonesia has already inspected facilities in India. The experts reviewed the disease control system and visited some modern abattoirs ,” an official said. New Delhi hopes to get necessary approvals for export soon, he added.

Although Indonesia's demand for buffalo meat is not as much as China's, its market size is substantial and could generate an annual business of about \$400 million for India.

“Our exporters could export as much as 1.5 lakh tonnes of buffalo meat to Indonesia to begin with, which is about a tenth of our present exports of 12 lakh tonnes,” official said.

Officials said Indian meat suppliers could give Australian exporters a run for their money.

“At present, Indonesia is a captive market for Australia and it dictates prices.

In the retail market, Australian meat sells for \$12-13 per kg. Our meat can be supplied at half the rate at about \$5-6 per kg.

There is no doubt there will be a big demand for our product,” the official said. A trade delegation from the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has just concluded a successful road-show in Indonesia, and held meetings with the media and academicians to spread word about the high quality of Indian buffalo meat.

“The delegation got a very good response,” the official said. The Indian industry’s luck, however, seems to be running out as far as accessing China’s market is concerned.

Although China finished with all formalities and inspections required for importing buffalo meat from India last year, it has gone completely quiet on the issue.

“Our Indian embassy in China has tried to push the country to act on the matter, but it has not got a positive response,” the official said.

India has the potential of exporting \$2 billion worth of buffalo meat to China, some of which is already getting smuggled into the country through Vietnam.

India exported buffalo meat worth \$4.06 billion in 2015-16, which was 14.9 per cent lower than last year’s export.

## **Tea Board to launch new system for pan-India auctions**

From next month, a registered tea buyer at Kochi can participate in the e-auction of Darjeeling tea, thanks to the new unified and linked system to be introduced by the Tea Board.

E-auction of tea will no more restrict buyers of one centre and make them go in for multiple registrations. Inaugurating the pan-India auction system, Rita Teatia,

Union Commerce Secretary, said on Tuesday that the integrated digitised system would bring in ease of doing bulk trading in different types of teas across the country.

From June 22, registered buyers of any of the existing seven e-auction centres of the Tea Board will be able to transact at all other centres, Tea Board Chairman Santosh Sarangi said.

Apart from single registration of buyers, the new system will have uniform electronic auction rules for trade participants at Kolkata, Siliguri, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Coonoor, Kochi and Coimbatore centres.

The system will also introduce e-auction for Daljeeling tea for the first time. It will generate delivery orders after actual realisation of payments.

Bank of India will provide payment gateway services for the platform.

The maximum catalogue printing time for the items to be auctioned has been fixed at 15 days for April and May.

For the other months, it shall be 19 days. The system can process transactions of 5-10 lots a minute.

The aim of the system is to facilitate better price discovery and higher trading volumes on the digitised platform.

“The new system could prove to be a turning point for tea auctioning in India, which began in 1861 in this city,” Teatia said.

## India Met puts a watch for 'low' over South Arabian Sea by Friday



International agencies maintain outlook for storm; heat wave set to intensify

India Met Department has put out a watch for a weather-setting low-pressure area taking shape up over the equatorial Indian Ocean (South Arabian Sea) and adjoining Maldives over the next three days.

This will likely set off a series of linked events, which could keep the Arabian Sea and later the Bay of Bengal in an 'active mode' into the last week of the month, according to indications.

### **Storm brewing?**

It will bring thundershowers across the South Peninsula, especially along the West Coast, during the week beginning May 16, according to the US Climate Prediction Centre.

Some of the international models have maintained their outlook for storm formation both in the Arabian Sea as well as in the Bay of Bengal over the next couple of weeks.

On Tuesday, the Maldives Meteorological Service warned that winds may speed up to 37 km/hr and gust to 72 km/hr during torrential rain and severe thunderstorms in the northern atolls.

According to the European Centre for Medium-Term Weather Forecasts, the low-pressure area may move in closer to Sri Lanka and cross into Tamil Nadu in South India by May 17.

It will later travel in a west-northwest direction and park itself off North Kerala and adjoining Coastal Karnataka, where it will intensify.

A US-based tracker said the storm in the Arabian Sea will feed in moisture across the South Peninsula into a counterpart system developing in the Bay of Bengal, taking it towards Myanmar/Bangladesh.

### **Cross-equator flows**

Meanwhile, the cross-equatorial wind flows (southern hemisphere to northern hemisphere), which bring in the monsoon, have strengthened off the eastern coast of Africa.

This is helpful as far as the monsoon onset dynamics are concerned, but these winds are blowing into stiff resistance over the central Arabian Sea and being directed instead into the Maldivian atolls (well south-southwest of Kerala).

This is exactly where the low-pressure area is expected to develop by Friday, according to India Met Department outlook.

During the last 24 hours ending on Tuesday morning, heat wave conditions prevailed at isolated places over West Rajasthan and North Kerala, the Met said.

India Met said on Tuesday that there may not be much change in maximum temperatures over North-West and Central India for the next two days, but they will gradually rise thereafter.

## European forecast

An extended outlook by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts suggested that mercury level over Rajasthan and the neighbourhood would rise significantly into the third week of May.

India Met did not indicate any chance of heat wave conditions developing until May 17, although, according to the European agency's forecast, extreme heat conditions may develop immediately after.

# Business Standard

## CM KCR meets PM Modi, seeks release of funds towards drought assistance

The state govt had asked for a Rs 3,064 crore assistance from the Centre to undertake relief activities



*Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussing the drought situation in Telangana with the Chief Minister of the state, K Chandrashekar Rao in New Delhi. (Photo: Narendra Modi Twitter Handle)*

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) on Tuesday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to release the balance amount of Rs 2,352 crore as was sought by his government towards drought relief measures.

The state government had asked for a Rs 3,064-crore assistance from the Centre to undertake relief activities covering supply of drinking water, cattle fodder and the distribution of input subsidy to farmers in the drought affected areas in Telangana.

The union government has so far given Rs 712 crore to the state for this purpose.

Chief Minister KCR met the PM Modi in Delhi and explained about the drought situation prevailed in the state.

He also informed the prime minister about various measures being taken up to provide relief to people in drought affected areas.

"Crops were damaged in 13.52 lakh hectares affecting 2.18 million farmers in the state.

Cotton, maize and soya bean among other crops were affected while vegetable and horticulture crops in another 23,700 hectares were also damaged.

We will distribute the input subsidy to the affected farmers as soon as the Centre releases the funds to us," Chief Minister Rao said in a meeting, which lasted for about one and half hours.

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh and other officials were also present in the meeting.

The chief minister explained to the PM Modi about the progress on two of the state government's flagship programmes-Mission Bhagiratha and Mission Kakatiya.

The state government has undertaken a massive programme called Mission Bhagiratha, aimed at providing drinking water through pipeline to each



household across 24,000 habitations and 90 per cent of the work on this project was expected to be completed by 2017. Mission Kakatiya involves restoration of 46,000 ponds and other minor water resources.

He also requested PM Modi to release funds promised under the AP Reorganisation Act towards the development of backward regions in the state, according to the chief minister's office.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **'China to help farmers grow vegetables'**

After their slugfest in and outside the Punjab assembly over investments and achievements, the SAD and Congress are bickering over deputy chief minister Sukhbir Badal's ongoing China trip.

The Punjab government on Monday announced that Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission will partner with it for transfer of technology and to help Punjab farmers grow Chinese vegetables to give a boost to the state's diversification drive.

However, Capt Amarinder Singh, who is too on a visit to United States, made a sarcastic jibe at Sukhbir, saying, "He has gone to explore his personal investment options and opportunities there."

Earlier, the Punjab government said Shanghai Agriculture Commission vice-chairman Feng Zhioyong "expressed satisfaction with the measures being taken by the Punjab government to attract industry and said there was a huge scope for investment in the food processing sector".

During his visit to a milk plant in Shanghai, Sukhbir said that Punjab will use Chinese expertise to rejuvenate the Verka brand.

The plant, which is one of the biggest in China, is one of the biggest producers of ultra heat treated milk. tnn

Along with Hero Cycles chairman Pankaj Munjal, Sukhbir also discussed the exact nature of investment which could flow into the integrated cycle park Cycle Valley in Ludhiana as well as the quantum of investment.

Taking a jibe at Sukhbir's announcement about setting up the "cycle valley", Capt Amarinder said, "It is not for the first time that catchy phrases are being coined in an apparent bid to fool people.

What happened to the textile park in Ludhiana? May be you plan to set up the 'Cycle valley' on the rooftop of the textile park."

### **Vigilante groups take toll on dairy farmers**

With the Punjab and Haryana high court observing that cow vigilante groups in the region were circumventing law and ordering a CBI probe into the death of an alleged "cattle smuggler" in Haryana, there has been a marginal decline in rates of cows. Even the dairy farmers in Punjab have started opting for rearing buffaloes.

Punjab has been the leading exporter of milch cows to other states, including Gujarat.

Inquiries from various quarters revealed that not only the prices of cows of improved breeds with higher yields being sent to other states come down, but even in the local market the prices have dropped. At the same time, buffalo prices have risen.

"Rates of cows have fallen in the last couple of years. Farmers who are also into dairy business have started preferring buffaloes since vigilante groups have made even local trading of cows very difficult. Besides, people are afraid of frame ups," said Pawandeep Singh, of Mauli village near Phagwara, who owns milch cattle.

"In the local market, price of a reasonably good cow was around Rs 70,000 but now the going rate is Rs 50,000 to 55,000," he said.

"Cows are cheaper, but buffaloes have become costlier. Another reason for this is poor veterinary services, which doesn't help a lot of cows turning unproductive early," added Sham Sunder Sharma, a dairy owner of

Hadiabad. "The number of unproductive stray cows has been going up," said Sital Singh, a farmer of the same area.

"While a buffalo still fetches around Rs 20,000 when it is sold to meat factory after it turns unproductive, one has to pay up to leave an unproductive cow at a gaushala," claimed Amrik Singh of Reru village near Jalandhar.

The worst hit are the dairy owners, who invested in the trade in a big way and also worked on improving the breed by using semen of Holstein Friesian, a high milk yielding breed, from US.

"Our cows would fetch around Rs 1.25 lakh when sold in other states, but now, after several instances of vigilante groups attacking trucks and operating freely with Punjab police gunmen, the trade has hit such a level that prices have dropped to around Rs 75,000," said Punjab Dairy Farmers Association (PDFA) president Daljit Singh. "An annual trade of Rs 2,500 crore has been reduced to a few hundred crores now," he revealed.

"When chief minister Parkash Singh Badal urged the Union government to help save the agriculture sector a few days back, he should have considered the plight of agriculturists who diversified into dairy farming but are under stress because of vigilante groups," he added.

Rajinder Singh of Jharr Sahib village near Machhiwara in Ludhiana said they had reports of vigilante groups charging protection money to allow trucks carrying milch cattle to other states without any hassle. "Truck freight is very high due to this reason," he added.

"It is not happening without the collusion of Punjab police and state government. There are several videos uploaded in social media, which show these groups flaunting weapons and bullet proof vests and indulging in violence against cattle traders. Still, there has been no action against them," alleged Daljit. He also rued the fact that every consignment needs to be cleared through the deputy commissioner.

Punjab Gau Sewa Commission chairman Kimti Bhagat admitted that while he was all for protecting cows from beef traders and butchers, the state government should ensure that none breaks the law. He claimed that the permits to transport cows had increased in the last few months.

## **CM shows concern over reducing income of farmers**

Chief minister Anandiben Patel expressed her concern over the number of families giving up agriculture as their profession and opting for alternate jobs.

Speaking at the inauguration of the perishable cargo centre at Ahmedabad Airport, Patel said "It is a matter of concern that the farmers in the state are giving up agriculture as professions.

The yield of the farmer has increased but he is not getting good price for his crop. The current situation leads to financial crisis for the farmers and this dwindling incomes and profits is forcing the farmers to quit the profession of farming," she said.

She further said that there is a need to make farming more enticing by introducing novelty and increasing the returns. She said that new unveiled Center for Perishable Cargo would increase the value of agricultural produce and provide big benefits to farmers exporting their produce out of Gujarat.

Patel said that initiatives like water conservation and irrigation, guidance through soil health card, good quality seeds, tissue culture, spread of greenhouse and crop diversification has led to a many fold increase in agriculture incomes of the farmers.

Also, she further added that Gujarat comes at the top among all other states of the nation in production of cotton, Isabgul, castor and cumin.

The Perishable Cargo has four cold storage chambers with different temperatures and is capable of maintaining temperatures between -20 degree centigrade to 15 degree Centigrade.

Gujarat will now be able export vegetable fruits to countries like America, UK., Russia, France, Germany, Europe, Singapore, UAE and other Gulf countries. The construction of this complex having annual capacity of 14600 metric tonnes.

## **Farmer to get Rs1.5 Lakh award for conservation of plant genetic resources**

A Puducherry-based farmer-breeder, T Vengadapathy has been selected for a cash award of 1.5 lakh by the Protection of plant varieties and farmers' rights authority of the Union ministry of agriculture and farmers' welfare for his contributions in conserving and preserving plant genetic resources.

The award will include a citation and a memento.

The authority's registrar Ravi Prakash in a letter dated May 3 addressed to the farmer-breeder said the date and venue of the award ceremony will be intimated later.

The registrar sought Vengadapathy to deposit specific quantity of seeds (two packets of 100g seeds) of the new variety of crops developed and conserved by him recently in the National gene bank of the authority in New Delhi.

The authority's registrar general R C Agarwal had earlier appreciated the farmer for developing a new variety of casuarina, which not only grows faster but also resistant to drought and pollution.

Vengadapathy named the new variety after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The authority had also come forward to help him in getting intellectual property rights for his new variety.

Vengadapathy said the new variety is a hybrid of *Casuarina junghuhniana*, a native species of Indonesia, and *Casuarina equisetifolia*, a native species from Burma and Vietnam.

## **Scorching heat, absence of showers hit mango crop**

After three years of drought between 2012 and 2014 and copious rainfall in 2015, the mango crop was expected to bounce back this year.

However what should have turned into a bumper crop this season has failed because of unusual heat during April and the failure of summer showers in the region.

Mango crop is predominantly cultivated in areas like Alanganallur, Vadipatti, Melur and Kottampatti blocks in Madurai district as well as Periakulam in Theni district and Natham in Dindigul district, known as the mango belt of the region.

During the drought in 2012-2014, the horticulture department estimated 50,000 mango trees withered in Madurai district alone. Many farmers suffered massive losses.

Though the situation improved after good rain in 2015-end, the long-term crop takes some years to bounce back, according to market sources.

Even this season appeared promising in March when mango trees started flowering. "But we did not get that crucial rain after the flowering stage.

A couple of showers post flowering would have resulted in a good crop," said C Selvaraj, a mango farmer in Madurai district.

Fruit vendors in Madurai said they anticipated only 20% of the usual supply. The Madurai fruit market - one of the biggest in the region - used to receive more than 100 tonnes of mangoes every day during the mango season.

After the drought, the supply started dwindling and only 30 tonnes was received per day in the last mango season.

"We are getting roughly 20 tonnes of mangoes per day in this season. Most of mango crop is rain-fed and there were hardly any summer showers in April," said secretary of the Madurai Fruit Market Commission Agents Association, S Muruganandam.

Further, April turned out unusually hot in 2016. Lack of rain and unusual heat affected mango production, fruit merchants said.

Though the supply is poor, the prices have not skyrocketed as feared. Usual mango varieties are priced between Rs 50 and 60. "Prices are moderate but the mangoes this year are not that good," said S Poongothai, a resident.

## **HC asks Punjab, Haryana to clarify on purchasing crops at MSP**

Punjab and Haryana high court on Monday asked Haryana government to clarify if it would purchase entire stock of bajra (pearl millet) and sunflower instead of the 25% it buys normally.

HC also asked Punjab government to clarify the minimum support price (MSP) for sunflower seeds and maize. A division bench headed by Justice S S Saron made these queries during the hearing of a PIL filed by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), pleading that the MSP of agricultural produce had been fixed much below the actual cost of production and even that had not been given to farmers.

Submitting that such reasons were forcing farmers to commit suicide in the region, the petitioner claimed that data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that between 1995 and 2010, there were 2.56 lakh suicides of Indian farmers and a substantial number of these were related due to the agrarian crisis.

The PIL has also sought directions to implement the MSP policy and compensate farmers for losses due to itnon-implementation of policies.

# **THE ECONOMIC TIMES**

## **Real agricultural growth in India to rise 1.1% in FY16: Nomura**

The composition of Indian agriculture continues to change and from a largely foodgrain (rice and wheat) dominated sector, the importance of other core and ancillary activities, such as horticulture and livestock, has risen.

NEW DELHI: India's real agriculture Gross value added (GVA) growth is projected to rise 1.1 per cent in 2015-16, despite below-normal monsoon last year, says a Nomura report.

According to the Japanese financial services major, the ongoing diversification in the agriculture sector has reduced volatility in agriculture output and farm incomes.

The composition of Indian agriculture continues to change and from a largely foodgrain (rice and wheat) dominated sector, the importance of other core and ancillary activities, such as horticulture and livestock, has risen.



A reduced dependence upon foodgrain output over time is one of the main reasons why volatility in agricultural GDP growth has moderated, the report said.

"Indeed, despite below-normal monsoon rainfall in 2015, real agriculture GVA growth is projected to rise 1.1 per cent in FY16," Nomura said, adding that "diversification has smoothed farm income cycles and supported higher farm incomes over time".

Horticulture crops, which include fruits, vegetables, flowers, spices and other plantation crops, have become particularly important.

"We estimate that output growth in horticulture has outpaced foodgrain, and resulted in a share increase to 52.8 per cent in financial year 2015-16 from 46.7 per cent in financial year 2005-06, while the share of foodgrain has fallen to 47.2 per cent from 53.3 per cent," the report said.



## **Government procures 62,178 tonnes of pulses for buffer stock**



Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan have so far requested for allocation of pulses from buffer stock.

NEW DELHI: The government has procured over 62,000 tonnes of pulses to create buffer stock and contracted imports for 26,000 tonnes to increase domestic supply and check prices.

"Domestic procurement of pulses has been undertaken including from farmers.

Till now, a total of 50,424.07 tonnes of tur and urad from kharif marketing season 2015-16 and 11,754.06 tonnes of chana and masur from rabi marketing season 2016-17 have already been procured," Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

In addition, imports have been contracted for about 13,500 tonnes of tur and 12,500 tonnes of urad, the Minister added.

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan have so far requested for allocation of pulses from buffer stock.

"There has been a strict vigilance by the government to prevent importers from misusing the facilities of Customs Bonded Warehousing facility.

Domestic searches and surveys have also been conducted on a number of importers, traders and financiers engaged in pulses trade," Paswan said.

The country is estimated to have produced 17 million tonnes of pulses in the 2015-16 crop year as against the annual demand of 21-22 million tonnes. The shortfall is met through imports, largely by private traders.

### **Sugar output seen to fall 11% to 252 lakh tonnes in 2015-16**



However, there is no shortage of sugar in the country, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a written reply to Lok Sabha today.

NEW DELHI: Sugar production in the country is estimated to fall by 11 per cent to 252 lakh tonnes this marketing year ended September due to lower sugarcane supply in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.

However, there is no shortage of sugar in the country, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a written reply to Lok Sabha today.

He said the government is closely monitoring sugar prices in the domestic market as well as sales by millers.

"During the current sugar season 2015-16 (October- September), the production of sugar has been estimated to be about 252 lakh tonnes which is less as compared to last sugar season's production of 284.63 lakh tonnes," Paswan said.

Sugar production declined mainly due to low sugarcane production and its availability to sugar mills for crushing in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, the Minister said.

With the carry over stock of 90 lakh tonnes and an estimated production of 252 lakh tonnes, the total availability of sugar would be more than estimated domestic demand of about 256 lakh tonnes.

"As such, there is no shortage of sugar in the country," Paswan said.

The minister said in recent past, certain quarters were indulging in speculative activities and holding their stock in anticipation of price rise.

To stabilise price, the Centre has imposed stock holding and turnover limits on sugar traders. "The government is also inter-alia closely monitoring prices of sugar in the domestic market as well as sales by sugar mills," Paswan said.

"The area, yield and production of sugarcane in the state of Maharashtra has reduced during current sugar season 2015-16 as compared to last season 2014-15 due to drought situation. This affected sugarcane availability to sugar mills for crushing," the Minister said.