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# THE HINDU

## Monsoon cheer as El Nino ends



A farmer in his dried up cotton field at Chandampet Mandal in Nalgonda, Telangana. File photo

*This could cause monsoon to spill over to October: Officials.*

Australia's weather bureau said the withering El Nino — among the strongest in history and responsible for two years of consecutive droughts and record summer temperatures in India — had ended. While that bodes well for the monsoon, weather officials in India said this could also be a precursor to floods during August and September and monsoon possibly spilling over to October.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology said on Tuesday that there was "...little chance of [sea surface temperatures] returning to El Niño levels, in

which case mid-May will mark the end of the 2015–16 El Niño.” Typically, an El Niño — marked by above-average temperatures in the Pacific — that begins to cool is followed by a neutral phase before transitioning into La Niña, a phenomenon of below-normal temperatures. The latter brings heavy rain over India.

“Changes in the tropical Pacific Ocean and atmosphere, combined with current climate model outlooks, suggest the likelihood of La Niña forming later in 2016 is around 50%,” said the agency’s press statement. “It’s good news...there is a good chance that La Niña conditions will begin to show up in the second half of monsoon. August could mean heavy rain and we might see some monsoon rain in October also,” said Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences.

### **Gains for agriculture**

Private weather agency Skymet said in a Wednesday statement that it expected all of the monsoon months, except June, to record rains well above what’s usual and would translate into gains for Indian agriculture.

“In the year 2016, the total area under kharif food grains is expected to increase by 15 to 20% over last year. Accordingly, the kharif food grains production is expected to be around 129 to 130 million tonnes. Area under oilseeds including soybean, groundnut, pulses (tur, moong and urad) and rice may increase. Area under cotton may reduce marginally while total agricultural land under sugarcane may remain the same as previous year,” Skymet said in a statement.

According to the IMD’s latest update, the monsoon is likely to set in on June 7 over Kerala. This was partly due to a depression in the Bay of Bengal that morphed into cyclone Roanu and brought heavy rains to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and killed at least 20 in Bangladesh.

The monsoon-rain-bearing systems were yet to gain enough force to coast over India and though the El Niño was gone, it would take some time for its effect to spill over into the atmosphere and aid the monsoon, said Rajeevan.

These developments would be factored into IMD's update — next month — to the April monsoon forecast, that had forecast monsoon rains to be 106% of the 89 cm historical average.

### **University doors are open to you, VC tells farmers**



Farmers checking sowing seeds at a counter at the Monsoon Seed Festival organised on the UAS-R campus in Raichur on Wednesday. PHOTO: SANTOSH SAGAR.



Prakash M. Salimath, Vice Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, addressing farmers at the Monsoon Seed Festival. PHOTO: SANTOSH SAGAR.

Prakash M. Salimath, Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur (UAS-R), today said that his University was always ready to help farmers in all possible ways.

Speaking at the Monsoon Seed Festival, organised by the Seed Unit of UAS-R, he told the farmers to maintain a live contact with the agricultural scientists in the University and get their problems solved. “We are for you. The doors of our university are always open for you. You can contact me or any other scientist for whatever technical help you need. You can solve your problems and clear your doubts with the help of experts,” he said.

### **Scientific farming**

Mr. Salimath stressed on the need for undertaking scientific farming for getting maximum benefits with minimum investment and limited resources. He advised the farmers to first understand the soil health, weather

conditions, rainfall and water availability and other important factors and accordingly decide crop pattern and cultivation methods.

“We must stop acting blindly. We should test the soil and know what nutrients are poor or absent and then provide them through fertilizers. There is no use of blindly giving additional nutrients that are already abundant in the soil. It would rather increase the cost of cultivation,” he said.

### **Seed production**

Earlier, Basave Gowda, Special Officer of Seed Unit, said that the Seed Festival at the beginning of kharif and rabi seasons was an unique programme being organised by UAS-R for imparting knowledge to farmers about the varieties of seeds available and scientific farming. He said that the UAS-R had thus far produced 2 lakh quintal of seeds since the inception of the University in 2010.

“The concept of seed festival was introduced by UAS-R and later followed by other Universities in the country. The purpose is not just about selling quality seeds to farmers, but imparting scientific and technical knowledge to farmers on various factors including newer varieties of seeds coming to the open market and deciding cropping pattern based on soil, weather and water conditions. We are happy that the festival is attracting more farmers every year,” he said.

He called upon the youth to come forward for taking up seed production by making use of seed processing units and technical knowledge of the University. “We will provide you technical knowledge and proper training on seed production. It will help you economically and help the farmers at large as they get quality seeds,” he said.

## Don't give up cotton cultivation completely, advises agricultural scientist



B.V. Patil, former Vice-Chancellor and present Director of Education, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, addressing farmers on the University campus on Wednesday. PHOTO: SANTOSH SAGAR.

Farmers massively turning away from cotton cultivation might lead to scarcity of cotton for domestic use, B.V. Patil, former Vice-Chancellor and present Director of Education, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur (UAS-R), has said.

He was addressing farmers at the Monsoon Seed Fest organised by the Seed Unit of the University on its campus on Wednesday, and referring to the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha's call to farmers to give up cotton cultivation for a couple of years considering the possibility of recurrence of pink bollworm threat that destroyed Bt cotton crop on around 1.5 lakh acres in Raichur district in the last kharif season.

“India requires 340 lakh bales a year for its various domestic industries. We are producing around 450 lakh bales a year. Surplus cotton is presently being exported. If domestic farmers stop cultivating cotton fearing the pink bollworm threat, we will be forced to import cotton. I therefore advise you not to give up cotton cultivation completely,” he said.

Mr. Patil attributed the Bt cotton crop failure in pink bollworm pest attack primarily to improper cultivation methods followed by farmers.

“We had advised farmers not to undertake cotton sowing after July. But they sowed it in August and September owing to the delayed monsoon. Consequently, the pink bollworm pest attacked it as expected and destroyed the crop massively,” he said. If proper cultivation methods are followed, Mr. Patil added, we can protect the crop from the pest and reap rich yields.

## **Maize**

Considering the severe water shortage in the tail-end parts of irrigation canals, deficit rainfall and heat weather conditions in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, Mr. Patil advised the farmers to switch from paddy to maize that requires less water and gives better yield.

“Our University has developed one of the best maize varieties in the country which requires very little water and gives yields up to 4 quintal an acre. It is ideal for weather conditions of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. Scarcity of water for paddy cultivation is a reality. We should accept it and modify our cultivation methods and crop pattern in accordance with the changing weather conditions,” he said.

## **Pre-monsoon showers to boost Kharif sowing**

Widespread rain in the past 24 hours across several parts of the north and central India will boost Kharif sowing, easing concerns over the possible late arrival of monsoon, officials and experts said on Tuesday.

In its recent forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the monsoon would reach Kerala by June 7. The monsoon rains, that usually

reach Kerala by June 1, are crucial for agriculture, more importantly this year after two years of back-to-back drought.

“This rain is certainly good for agriculture. It is the time when farmers are preparing their fields for sowing. It will help to cut irrigation cost,” K.K. Singh, chief of the IMD’s agricultural meteorology, told *The Hindu*.

Rain occurred in most places of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and in many places of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, besides many eastern States, in the past 24 hours, according to the IMD.

### **Farmer earns Re. 1 for almost a tonne of onions**



*Devidas Parbhane says like him several others have got a ‘raw deal’ despite a bumper crop this season.*

A farmer has claimed he earned only Re. 1 after selling almost a tonne of onions at the district Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) in Pune.

Devidas Parbhane, 48, said the fall in onion prices had taken a toll on him.

### **The math**

The farmer explained the math: he has two acres of farm land and he spent Rs. 80,000 to grow onions.

“On May 10, I sent 952 kg of onions in 18 gunny bags through a truck to the Agriculture Produce Market Committee and received Rs. 16 per 10 kg.

So, per one kg, it works to one rupee and sixty paise,” said Mr. Parbhane.

“The total onion was sold for Rs. 1,523.2. Out of the earnings, the middlemen took away Rs. 91.35, labour charges were Rs. 59 and Rs. 18.55, and Rs. 33.30 was paid against miscellaneous charges. Rs. 1,320 was paid to the truck driver, who transported the produce to APMC.”

The farmer claimed that after all the deductions, he took home only Re. 1.

### **Plan to popularise short duration paddy variety**

*It yields 10 % more grain than ADT-43*



A view of paddy cultivation at a village during kuruvai season .— FILE PHOTO

Even as farmers' organisations have urged the State government to take steps to get Tamil Nadu's due share of water in the Cauvery from Karnataka, the Agriculture Department has planned to popularise Co-51, a short duration paddy variety in the district during the forthcoming kuruvai season.

The new variety of 110 days yields 10 per cent more grain than ADT-43. Average yield potential of Co-51 is 2650 kg an acre.

This variety was released by Directorate of Plant Breeding and Genetics of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, during 2013, sources in the Agriculture Department said.

CO-51, being a fine grain variety, offers the advantage of being a non-lodging variety, a characteristic which is very much required for kuruvai. It has the preferred plant characters such as broad dark green leaves which

leads to higher photosynthesis, medium height (90-100 cm), broader leaves (2 cm width) and lengthy panicle. Each panicle bears on an average 250-300 grains, with a panicle length of 23 to 28 cm.

The variety has better resistance to green leaf hopper, brown plant hopper and paddy blast disease.

Co.51 variety with white medium slender rice is good for cooking and has high a milling percentage of 69 per cent and head rice recovery of 63 per cent.

The Department of Agriculture has stocked about 34 tonnes of CO.51 certified seeds in the agricultural extension centres in the Kuruvai growing blocks of the district including Lalgudi, Andhanallur, Manikandam, Musiri and Mannachanallur, the sources said.

Meanwhile, P.Viswanathan, president of the Tamizhaga Eri Matrum Attru Pasana Vivasayigal Sangam, has urged the new government to initiate talks with the Karnataka and Central governments to get Tamil Nadu's share of water in the Cauvery so that farmers could take up kuruvai cultivation this year. Over the past five years, Tamil Nadu was not able to get adequate water for kuruvai in the Cauvery affecting kuruvai cultivation in about 16 lakhs acres in the state, he said.

### **Sesame seeds auction**

Ellu (sesame seeds) were auctioned for Rs. 2 lakh at the Konganapuram Agricultural Producers Marketing Cooperative Society on Saturday.

The price of each kg of ellu ranged between Rs. 65 and Rs. 72 and about 40 bags of ellu was auctioned, according to society sources.

## **Cotton auctioned**

Cotton was auctioned for Rs. 5 lakh at the Konganapuram Agricultural Producers Marketing Cooperative Society on Saturday.

While DCH variety fetched a price between Rs. 5,800 and Rs. 6,450 per bag, the Surabhi variety fetched a price between 4,600 and Rs. 5,100.

## **500-tonne foodgrains godown inaugurated**

President of District Central Cooperative Bank Umakanth Nagamarapalli inaugurated a 500- tonne foodgrains godown at Jajana Mugali village in Basavakalyan taluk near here on Tuesday.

Addressing a gathering, he said that such facilities were being created under the crop protection and preservation scheme of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

The Jajana Mugali warehouse was built by the Ghotala Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society with assistance from NABARD and the District Central Cooperative Bank.

The Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in Ghotala village has collected Rs. 8 crore in deposits and distributed Rs. 4.7 crore as crop loan, he said.

The village-level cooperative society has promoted 126 women self-help groups and funded them with Rs. 1.6 crore. Marutirao Mule, former MLA, D.S.V. Joshi, NABARD district development manager, N. Krishna Reddy, DCC Bank chief manager, and others were present on the occasion.

## **Documentary series on farm produce**

The Akashavani will start a new documentary series titled *Desha Thanima... Desha Peruma* on the geographical connections of various farm produce and agriculture-related topics. The series, which has 30 episodes, will be aired on Wednesdays at 7.40 p.m.

The series will start on June 1 with a documentary on ‘Central Travancore’s Jaggery’. Akashavani Thiruvananthapuram Director R.C. Gopal said that it was for the first time that such a series which touched upon all aspects of a specific product had been conceived.

Eminent scientists and experts on the specific subject will take part in each episode. The broadcast will be from the Thiruvananthapuram and Alappuzha stations and will be available across the State.

### **Other episodes**

The other episodes in the series include *njavara rice, Vazhakkulam pineapple, Gandhakasala rice, Vechur cow, Malabari goat, Jeerakasala sugandha rice and Palakkadan matta rice* .

## **A week with farmers**

### *Undergraduate students of Agriculture on a rural outreach programme*

The College of Agriculture at Vellayani in Thiruvananthapuram has started a week-long rural outreach programme at Elanthoor in Pathanamthitta on Tuesday.

The district panchayat president, Annapoornadevi, formally inaugurated the week-long programme at a function held at the Government Vocational Higher Secondary School at Elanthoor on Monday.

Prince D., Block Development Officer, Dr V.B. Padmanabhan and Dr N. Kishore Kumar, both professors at the College of Agriculture, and M.S. Ajin, student representative, also spoke.

M.B. Sathyan, Elanthoor Block Panchayat president, flagged off the cultural procession held as part of the programme, earlier. The rural extension programme is part of the village outreach programme of the final year BSc. (Agriculture) students at the Vellayani college. The agricultural students will visit various peasant households and farmlands in the village, interact with the farming community there, and give modern farming tips they have learnt to the farmers as part of their week-long village extension programme.

The village outreach programme of the college will come to a close on May 30.

### **New varieties**

The Joint Director of Agriculture, Mahanteshappa, said on Tuesday that new pulse varieties developed by scientists have been introduced in the district. “These varieties are said to be disease-resistant and give better yield, besides adapting to the local conditions,” he said.

He said some varieties were given to them for field trials by research institutions after one or two years of study. “After seeing the outcome, they will be launched commercially,” he said.

### **Pulses the focus area, but sowing scene not encouraging in Mysuru**

*Govt. is giving subsidies to cultivators, but the poor pre-monsoon rain has not helped*

Even as the price of pulses, especially red gram (tur dal), green gram and black gram, has continued to be on the higher side since last year, despite assurances of price stabilisation, pulses continue to be the focus area of the Department of Agriculture.

As 2016 has been declared as the ‘International Year of Pulses’, the department has been promoting cultivation of pulses to boost production and bring down prices.



**PULSE POWER:**As 2016 has been declared as the ‘International Year of Pulses’, the Agriculture Department has been promoting cultivation of pulses.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

In Mysuru district, which gets pre-monsoon showers, farmers start off sowing pulses earlier than in the rest of the State. But this time, with the pre-monsoon showers ineffective as only 60 per cent rain was recorded across the district, the sowing has not been very encouraging.

Statistics available with the Agriculture Department show that the pulse cultivation scene this year pales in comparison to the previous year. This year, red gram has been sown in 523 hectares, while cowpea is being cultivated in 11,808 hectares. Black gram has been sown in 5,765 hectares, green gram in 4,842 hectares and flat beans (avarekai) in 203 hectares.

## **The numbers**

During the 2015 kharif season, black gram was cultivated in 21,169 hectares, green gram in 14,028 hectares, cowpea in 48,338 hectares, flat beans in 10,492 hectares, tur dal in 2,511 hectares and horse gram in 16,349 hectares. During the rabi season last year, chana dal was cultivated in 1,109 hectares, horse gram in 23,432 hectares, black gram in 4,546 hectares, cowpea in 6,017 hectares and flat beans in 8,446 hectares.

The cultivation of flat beans was on the higher side last year because of its wide acceptance and popularity. Different varieties of delicacies of 'avarekalu' had been prepared in this part of the region during the season.

Mahanteshappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* that the production of pulses would have gone up if the pre-monsoon showers had been copious, especially with subsidy being given for cultivating them.

Traditionally, Mysuru is one of the districts where different varieties of pulses are cultivated. Though red gram is not grown predominantly, pulses like black gram and cowpea are grown in surplus. Red gram is cultivated as an inter-crop as it is said to be suitable in black soil.



## **Demand-driven boost to economy rides on rains, rural income, Pay Commission's hike**

The biggest impact of the Pay Commission awards will be in the housing segment in smaller cities.



The RBI had cut rates by 125 basis points in 2015-16 but banks passed on only 60 basis points citing tight money supply conditions.

A fillip to the economy this year will come mostly from a consumption-led demand boost driven largely by easing liquidity conditions, lower interest rates, better rural incomes following normal rains and higher disposable incomes with the kicking in of the Seventh Pay Commission award.

That's the perfect storm policymakers in Government are waiting for.

The “game changer,” according to Nilesh Shah, Managing Director, Kotak Mutual Fund, will be a move to a neutral or positive liquidity situation in the system from a deficit that prevailed between 2010 and now. “The expectation based on RBI indications is more open market operations (OMOs) to cut the deficit from Rs 1,16,000 crore now to zero by year-end,” he says.

RBI manages money supply through OMOs by buying/selling government securities from/to banks. When RBI sells securities, excess liquidity is sucked out. When it buys g-secs from banks, it infuses liquidity. So far this financial year, RBI has infused Rs 40,000 crore and has announced the purchase of another Rs 15,000 crore g-secs on May 25.

“With a multiplier effect of 4, this will mean Rs 4 lakh crore additional liquidity over a period of time.

This will bring huge positiveness in the entire economy,” Shah says. Besides, this will not only bring down interest rates, but also result in better transmission of policy rate cuts.

“Earlier, when RBI cut policy rates in a deficit situation, it was akin to pushing the accelerator with handbrakes up. Going forward, there will be no handbrakes and the impact of rate cut will be magnified,” he says.

The RBI had cut rates by 125 basis points in 2015-16 but banks passed on only 60 basis points citing tight money supply conditions.

On April 6, the repo rate (the rate at which the RBI lends to banks) was cut by another 25 basis points, bringing down the policy interest rate to a five-year low of 6.5%. RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan also adopted an “accommodative” stance, with markets hoping for another 25 basis points cut during the year.

“Interest rate cuts will play out this year on the back of easy liquidity conditions,” says DK Joshi, chief economist with rating agency Crisil.

The Seventh Pay Commission award (23.6% hike) with arrears from January 2016 will also see 3.4 crore employees and pensioners (Centre, states and PSUs) spend more money on a variety of goods.

“This means higher consumption similar to what happened in the past. But the previous two Pay Commission awards came with a lag of two years.

So the arrears were large. This time, it will not be so,” says Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician, government of India and now Country Director, International Growth Centre, a think tank based at LSE, run in partnership

with University of Oxford. READ | Government clearances have got faster but lack of promoter interest stalls projects The biggest impact of the Pay Commission awards will be in the housing segment in smaller cities.

“Most people spend it on pre-paying home loans, making down payments for homes or buying cars,” said Sen. The incremental spending would be the highest on food, housing, transportation, jewellery and entertainment based on the NSSO Consumption Survey 2011-12, says Neelkanth Mishra, in a Credit Suisse report on the impact of the Seventh Pay Commission.

He expects the economy to see a Rs 4.5-lakh crore boost over the next two years if the government finally ends up increasing pays by 3-5% more than the recommendations. But Sen says that with an estimated 40% government staff now part of the National Pension System (NPS), a larger portion of their incomes is expected to be saved for the future than being spent.

“They do not get defined benefits (it has been 12 years since new government employees have been moved to a market-linked pension NPS since January 2004). To maintain their current standard of living, they will need to save more than those who benefited from the earlier Pay Commissions.”

While urban consumer spending has held steady over the last two years, rural incomes have remained stressed following two consecutive years of drought. In fact, rural wages have remained stagnant, and in real terms, possibly declined, despite benign inflation. READ | If people want only 30 days of work, how can you force them to do 100?: Birender Singh Even for market leader Maruti Suzuki, maintaining the national average of sales and compensating for dull sales, has required the car maker to cover many more villages and take extra sales reach-out efforts, said a senior executive of the company, who did not wish to be named.

Rural India contributes almost 30% to total sales of Maruti Suzuki, which has an overall market share of 46% in the passenger cars segment.

The passenger car industry itself has growth just 7% against a long-term average growth rate of 12-13%. Some experts, who track rural India closely, however, say the dynamics have changed over the last decade.

“It’s no longer a sleepy old place. True, two bad monsoons has impacted the rural economy. True, 75% of working population is engaged in agriculture, but it is the smallest contributor to rural GDP.

That’s why a drought makes a farmer lose not just his income but also confidence,” says Pradeep Kashyap, Founder-CEO, MART, a consulting firm with clients across sectors including banks and insurance firms, auto and FMCG companies.

“A decade ago, just 11% of rural workers had salaried jobs. This has doubled to 22%. What this essentially means is that one in five families has regular income coming into the household.

After work, he returns to the village and the purchasing power of this money is higher,” says Kashyap. He believes that India is really a consumption demand story, and says it’s a mistake to treat rural India as a block.

Within agriculture, food grains is the worst affected, where the output has seen a 2-3% drop. “But agriculture is not foodgrains alone. It’s just a third of the agri economy.

In fact, for the first time, horticulture — fruits, vegetables, flowers and spices — output was higher (280 million tonnes) than food grains (260 million tonnes) in 2015-16. Similarly, dairy and poultry, accounting for another third of the agri economy, has done exceedingly well,” Kashyap says suggesting that income of those engaged in horticulture and dairy has not been hit even during drought years. Adi Godrej, Chairman, Godrej Group, agrees. “Rural demand is not low.

Earlier, rural demand growth was double that of urban demand. Now its equal. So, it has slowed down.”

He, however, adds that the monsoon will play a very critical role in lifting sentiments. “Last year (2015-16) was particularly bad because a drought came on the back of a bad monsoon.

I see a turnaround now only when the new monsoon comes,” he says.

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## What does the ongoing drought teach us



Six hundred million of India’s 1.2 billion depend on agriculture and related means for livelihood. The sector was already distraught, with 41 farmers reportedly committing suicide daily on an average since 1995. Migration of the socio-economically deprived, from the largely-agrarian rural India to urban locations for survival had touched 15 million eight years ago. (AP)

With progressively increasing severity of rising temperatures and rain deficits over two consecutive years – 2014 and 2015, the Great Indian Drought was always coming. The India Meteorological Department,

ministry of home affairs, the ministry of water resources, the Ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare office, and the National Disaster Management Authority knew it.

The question is, what did we do with this knowledge?

Six hundred million of India's 1.2 billion depend on agriculture and related means for livelihood. The sector was already distraught, with 41 farmers reportedly committing suicide daily on an average since 1995. Migration of the socio-economically deprived, from the largely-agrarian rural India to urban locations for survival had touched 15 million eight years ago.

The drought had magnified these issues explicitly, with media reports suggesting more than Rs 14 crore has been pending in wages of labourers under MNREGA, in many villages of Bundelkhand – prompting mass exodus to cities like Delhi.

In December 2015, the Supreme Court had issued notice to the Centre and 11 states, seeking their response on the steps initiated to provide relief to the people affected by drought. In March 2016, when finance minister Arun Jaitley presented the Budget, seven states had been declared drought-hit.

Fully aware of the impending crisis, the government presented a budget that marginally increased the share of the ministry of agriculture by just 0.24% from last year. Shockingly, for a country with above 60% of its people reliant on agriculture, the investment in agriculture – in terms of the budget allocation of the ministry of agriculture – has not crossed more than 0.5% of the GDP in the last five years.

“Declaring drought was never the mandate of the IMD. It is the job of the state government. Our task is to say whether the rainfall is normal or deficient. Interpretation is the job of the state government,” IMD director Laxman Singh Rathore said.

Yes, the state governments interpreted it, but the question was whether they had enough money to spend on their interpretations. With multiple loopholes plaguing the length of money-flow pyramid, how could one have ensured that the money reached the struggling millions engaged in a range of agricultural and allied activities?

If an institution could stand up and deliver a solution to this, it was the Niti Aayog – which states its first function is “to evolve a shared vision of national development priorities sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in the light of national objectives.”

Perhaps it might be a profitable exercise to dwell on the question of what the ‘national development priorities’ actually are.

“Agricultural drought is probably the most socially constructed of all disaster risks,” says the United Nations. With just a few weeks to go before the IMD-predicted ‘above average’ monsoon to arrive, the discussions on drought will soon be erased from the public memory.

However, the monsoon session of the Parliament could be an opportunity. Measures to ensure the implementation of Right to Food Act could be the first step. People who had migrated need not have returned after the drought – leaving the families, especially children, in makeshift living conditions and at risk of abuse and deprivation.

To ensure that the affected children have three square meals a day, special budgetary allocations for Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mid Day Meal (MDM) and PDS need to be considered.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is yet to realise its potential, both in terms of ensuring the guaranteed wages reaching the rural poor, and in terms of creating more water storage structures.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India's recommendation to create separate Disaster Mitigation Funds at national, state and district levels should also be considered.

*Kunal Shah is Director (Disaster Management) with World Vision India  
The views of the author are personal*

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

**Alphonso comes a cropper in Maharashtra, Telangana**



But increase in mango output from Karnataka steadies supplies, prices

Changes in the weather and attacks by pests have hit the output of the famous Alphonso mango in Maharashtra and Telangana. However, while this had led to a slight thinning of supply, it has not had a huge impact on prices, thanks to supply from Northern Karnataka.

Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts in Maharashtra, home to Alphonso mangoes, have been facing erratic rainfall in the last couple of years. The change in climate has led to pest attacks on the orchards. As a result, in large markets such as Mumbai, there has been an almost 35 per cent decline in the supply of mangoes. However, prices remain stable at about ₹300 to ₹500 a dozen as Alphonso mangoes cultivated in the Hubli-Dharwad region of Karnataka are boosting supply.

### **Young orchards**

Bengaluru-based agriculture expert Jagadeesh Sunkad told *BusinessLine* that the orchards in Ratnagiri are very old, while the ones in Karnataka were planted in the last 10 to 15 years using high-density cultivation techniques. The planting has been done keeping in mind the mango pulp market, which largely caters to fruit drink makers. They have high yields and when the farmers get better rates in retail markets, they divert a part of their crop to places such as Mumbai, he said.

Sunkad, who is also the Chief Technology Officer of Villfarm Agri Solutions, said that Alphonso trees have a natural cycle and the tree gives good crops once in two years. But farmers in Karnataka have been using the Paclobutrazol growth hormone, which leads to better yields every year.

Vijay Dhoble, a leading mango trader from the Navi Mumbai APMC market, confirmed that in recent years mango arrivals from the Konkan have reduced considerably while supply from Karnataka has increased. “The Konkan variety has much better quality and taste,” he opined. “But people are getting the mangoes from Karnataka at much cheaper rates.”

P Upase, a mango farmer from Hubli, pointed out that both the Konkan region and Northern Karnataka have Laterite soil but trees in the Konkan are

dependent on rainfall whereas in Karnataka they have access to better irrigation facilities.

### **Telangana woes**

Meanwhile, the export hopes of mango farmers in Telangana have been dashed as the heat wave and dry spells have sucked up moisture in the soil. The State, which grows mangoes over 1.96 lakh hectares, has suffered a huge loss due to the drought. “About 70 per cent of the crop was damaged. Flowering was hit, resulting in poor output,” said a top Horticulture Department officer.

*(With inputs from KV Kurmanath, in Hyderabad)*

### **Selling pressure drags sugar**

Sugar prices on the Vashi remained unchanged but due to lack of demand and lifting pressure *nakarates* came down by ₹10-20 a quintal on Tuesday. Mills sold the commodity for lower prices by ₹5-10 to ease the inventory.

Traders are carrying stocks of about 110-115 truck loads keeping their fresh commitments limited. Arrivals were at 60-62 truck loads and local dispatches were at 60-61 loads. The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association’s spot rates: S-grade ₹3,575-3,662 (3,575-3,662) and M-grade ₹3,656-3,772 (3,662-3,772). *Naka* delivery rates: S-grade ₹3,530-3,610 (3,550-3,620) and M-grade ₹3,590-3,710 (3,600-3,720).

### **Centre aims for 270.10 mt foodgrain output in 2016-17**

The Centre has set a target to achieve a record foodgrain production of 270.10 million tonnes (mt) in 2016-17 crop year on hopes of bountiful rains after two consecutive drought years.

The country had last achieved a record output of 265.04 mt in 2013-14.

However, the production in 2014-15 and 2015-16 fell to 252.02 mt and 253.23 mt, respectively, due to drought in more than ten States.

“We have set an ambitious target at 270.10 mt for the 2016-17 crop year (July-June), which is much higher than the last year’s target of 264.10 mt,” a senior Agriculture Ministry official told PTI.

Higher target has been kept keeping in view the possibility of good monsoon and impact of several schemes like soil health card and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yojana, the official added.

### **Edible oils in bear grip**

Edible oils market continued their weak trend with limited activities on expectation of timely arrival of monsoon. On the BCE, palmolein declined by ₹2, sunflower oil and groundnut oil by ₹5 and ₹30 per 10 kg each.

Soya, rapeseed and cotton oil ruled steady. Liberty was quoting palmolein at ₹595, super palmolein ex JNPT ₹605, soyabean refined oil ₹645. Ruchi’s rates: palmolein ₹581, soyabean refined oil ₹628, sunflower refined oil ₹725. Allana traded palmolein for ₹575, soya refined oil ₹635, sunflower refined oil ₹740. At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was steady at ₹1,800 and loose (10 kg) was ₹1,160.

### **Groundnut oil traded flat at higher level**

Groundnut oil traded flat on limited buying. Demand in retail market decreased as prices gone up in past couple of days. Cotton oil remained unchanged on moderate demand.

Traders said that demand from brands and stockists was limited after price rise. With this less demand in retail market kept groundnut oil price at the previous level.

Groundnut oil loose was traded at ₹1,160-65 per 10 kg, Jamnagar line teliya tin stood at ₹1,787-88 per 15 kg. About two tankers of groundnut oil were traded in Saurashtra mills for ₹1,890-1,900 per 15 kg new tin.

Traders said that price may decline in coming days as demand likely to decrease.

Washed cotton oil quoted at ₹622-625 per 10 kg and cotton oil new tin stood at ₹1,090-1,100 per 15 kg. About 10 tankers of cotton oil were traded here.

### **Turmeric pales as arrival rises**

Spot turmeric prices at Erode market decreased as arrivals were on the rise. “Only medium variety turmeric arrived for sale along with 150 bags of local hybrid turmeric. So far no major orders were received from North India, so the traders procured 60 per cent of the stocks for their local use,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

The price of the spice decreased due to quality. The finger turmeric lost ₹150-250 a quintal and the root variety ₹200. At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association, the finger variety fetched ₹7,899-9,249 a quintal; the root variety ₹7,688-8,569. Of the 1,117 bags offered, 580 were sold.

### **Monsoon sets in over Sri Lanka; Kerala may have to wait**

The India Met Department has forecast heavy rainfall at one or two places in Kerala, Lakshadweep and coastal Karnataka variously from Wednesday to Sunday.

Strong winds from westerly direction with speed occasionally reaching 45-55 km/hr are likely to prevail along and off the Kerala coast and over Lakshadweep area.

## **Stalled for now**

This is not to be confused with the onset of monsoon rainfall, as can be inferred from the forecast bulletin. In fact, the monsoon is stalled over the Andaman region after cyclone *Roanu* died out over Bangladesh coast.

The monsoon literally rode the cyclone to arrive in the Andaman Sea and adjoining South and South-East Bay of Bengal but has lagged after it made a landfall.

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) says cross-equatorial winds turning off East Africa coast as the South-West monsoon winds into the Arabian Sea may strengthen during five days ending Thursday.

But they will bring about below-normal rainfall over India's South Peninsula, though heavy rain may fall at isolated places along the coast, as aforementioned.

This forecast merely says that an increase in rainfall is likely along the west coast during this period.

## **Monsoon in Sri Lanka**

Meanwhile, the South-West monsoon has established over Sri Lanka on May 24 (Tuesday), the last port of call before it hits Kerala.

This is around the normal time for the annual rainy season to set in over the island. From here, it should not more than a week before the rains can reach the Kerala coast in mainland India, just to the North.

But this would be delayed by at least a week, according to the long-range forecast made by the Met Department.

The Sri Lanka Met has forecast showers and thundershowers over many parts of the island on Wednesday.

Strong windy conditions are likely over the country as a whole and in the surrounding seas especially in the southern, eastern and northern areas.

### **Likely disruptors**

The IITM suspects that the onset of monsoon along the Kerala coast may not happen even during June 5 to 10 despite some of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle falling into place by then.

It remains to be seen if, as is being forecast by some models, a cyclonic circulation potentially taking shape off the Konkan coast and moving away generally towards Oman could prove the disruptor.

Other likely disruptive features include a cyclone (typhoon) each being forecast to erupt over the West Indian Ocean and the North-West Pacific during the this week and the next.

Meanwhile, the hot spell in North-West India is now shifting to eastern parts of Central and Peninsular India (Odisha, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Vidarbha and Telangana).

The sustained hot spell in the North-West till last week has been found to be ideal from the monsoon point of view since the upward lift of air in the region lowers pressure for the winds to blow in.

### **UAE tightens norms for import of veggies from India**

Amid quality concerns, the UAE has tightened norms for import of chilli peppers, mango and cucumber from India from this month onwards.

The Arab nation has now made it mandatory for Indian exporters to furnish a pesticide residue analysis report for each consignment of shipment of these products.

In a latest circular, the agri-export promotion body Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) has

advised exporters to “strongly adhere to the import requirement of the UAE and not make any shipments without violating the stipulated conditions.”



In a recent communication, the UAE has informed that “fruits and vegetables coming from India showed high levels of pesticide residues exceeding the permitted limits of in accordance with international standards adopted by Codex Alimentarius Commission.”

“In light of this, it has been decided by the UAE that for the sake of the health and safety of consumers, it will not allow the shipment of chilli peppers, mango and cucumber without accompanying a residue analysis report with each consignment with effect from May 1,” Apeda said in the circular.

In the 2015-16 fiscal, India had exported 2,62,158 tonnes of fresh vegetables and 48,591 tonnes of fruits to the UAE, says Apeda data.

# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

## Govt aims record 270.1-mn tonne foodgrains output in 2016-17



The country had last achieved a record output of 265.04 million tonnes (MT) in 2013-15. However, the production in 2014-15 and 2015-16 fell to 252.02 MT and 253.23 MT, respectively, due to drought in more than ten states.

NEW DELHI: The government has set a target to achieve a record foodgrains production of 270.10 million tonnes in 2016-17 crop year on hopes of bountiful rains after two consecutive drought years.

The country had last achieved a record output of 265.04 million tonnes (MT) in 2013-15. However, the production in 2014-15 and 2015-16 fell to 252.02 MT and 253.23 MT, respectively, due to drought in more than ten states.

For this year, the Met Department has forecast better than normal monsoon, the arrival of which in Kerala is expected to be delayed by a week.

"We have set an ambitious foodgrains production target at 270.10 MT for the 2016-17 crop year (July-June), which is much higher than the last year's target of 264.10 MT and even the actual output of record 265.04 MT in 2013-14," a senior Agriculture Ministry official told PTI.

Higher target has been kept keeping in view the possibility of good monsoon and impact of several schemes like soil health card and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yojana, the official added.

The agri crops are grown in the kharif (summer) and rabi (winter) seasons of the crop year (July-June). The sowing of Kharif season normally begins with the onset of south west monsoon from June. Harvesting begins from October.

Among foodgrains category, the government is aiming record rice output of 108.50 MT, wheat at 96.50 MT, coarse cereals at 44.35 MT and pulses at 20.75 MT in 2016-17.

As per the third advance estimated of the Agriculture Ministry, rice production in 2015-16 is estimated to be down at 103.36 MT, wheat at 94.04 MT, coarse cereals 37.78 MT and pulses at 17.06 MT.

In case of cash crops, the government has not kept much bigger production targets for 2016-17 and is aiming sugarcane output of 355 MT, cotton at 36 million bales (170 kg) and jute/mesta at 11.70 million bales (of 180 kg).

At present, farmers are preparing the fields to start sowing operations with the monsoon arrival. The government has positioned good quality seeds, fertilisers and other farm inputs required for sowing of kharif crops.

## **Famous Malda mango facing major export crisis**



Malda and adjoining districts in West Bengal form one of the largest mango yielding regions of the country producing over 5 lakh tonnes or near 5% of India's national yield.

SILIGURI: The joy of high yield in Mango hotspot Maldaha in West Bengal got clouded out by a major worry about its export prospect. Besides losing footage in Eastern European Countries, now Maldaha mango finds it tough to get into UAE also.

As per a recent advisory by India's Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Ministry of Climate Change & Environment of UAE has expressed its concern over high level of pesticide found in fruits and vegetable imported from India. Following that, the country wants residue analysis report for to remain with each fruit and vegetable shipments from India.

Following this, Indian Ministry of Agriculture has issued a memorandum making it mandatory for all UAE bound consignments to have Phyto

Sanitary Certificate(PSC) to be obtained after production of test report on residue pesticides done by any APEDA recognized laboratory.

The regulation has come as a big blow as UAE consumes around 70% of India's mango export. "It's known to all that hardly any consignment of Malda mango can have a clean PSC because of high level of pesticides used here as a general practice. Organic pesticides are expensive and not as effective as their synthetic counterparts," said a veteran farmer.

"Though as per traditional trend, after high yielding 'On Year' 2015, this 2016 was expected to be a low yielding 'Off Year.' But it has come as a consecutive second 'On year' with high level of output with an expected output of around 3 lakh Tonnes from Maldaha alone," said Mr. U. Saha. President Maldaha Mango Merchants Association.

Maldaha and adjoining districts in West Bengal form one of the largest mango yielding regions of the country producing over 5 lakh tonnes or near 5% of India's national yield. Healthy export is too important for proper price realization of it.

Earlier, EU countries imposed a ban on mango import from India in May 2014. Afterward, based upon EU Audit Team's satisfactory report on the corrective measures taken by India especially in phytosanitary control system, the ban was withdrawn in January 2015. But, that could hardly help India's eroding Mango export figure that slid from 63.5 thousand tonnes in 11-12 to 43 thousand tonnes in 14-15.