

30.05.2016

## THE HINDU

### **IFAD team tours drought-hit villages**

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will extend financial assistance to improve the livelihood opportunities to people of identified villages in drought-prone Prakasam district, according to an IFAD official.

An IFAD team visited Racherla, Vengalreddypalle, and K.S.Palle in Markapur division to study first-hand the condition of the villagers for funding under the Integrated Livelihood Support project.

Pouring out their woes before the IFAD team comprising Sunpreeth Kaur, Audrey Nepveu, Aissa Toure and Vincent Darlong, a group of villagers in Racherla said the water table had touched nadir in the wake of drought for successive years.

Most of the villagers were forced to migrate as they could not grow even rain-fed crops in the present situation.

They were not even getting Rs. 500 per week under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, they complained. They sought financial support to purchase cattle and start agriculture-related activities to augment the family income.

The IFAD team interacted with self- help groups in Giddalur to study the livelihood opportunities available to them and examine ways to extend additional livelihood support after preparing detailed project report.

### **Top priority for paddy production: Minister**

*Databank on State's wetlands to be prepared in 6 months*



ALL GEARED UP: Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar addressing a meet-the-press programme at the Thrissur Press Club on Sunday.— PHOTO: K.K. NAJEEB

Augmentation of paddy production will be given top priority, Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar has said.

Addressing a meet-the-press programme organised by the Thrissur Press Club on Sunday, he said a databank on wetlands in the State would be prepared within the next six months.

“The agriculture growth in the State has shown an alarming decline and it has reached minus 4.6 per cent in the current year. The State produces only six lakh tonnes of rice while our consumption is 45 lakh tonnes a year. It will affect our economic stability, food safety and ecosystem. The government has been planning both short-term and long-term strategies for improving food production,” he said.

### **School curriculum**

Agriculture would be made part of the school curriculum, the Minister said. “We should catch them young,” he added.

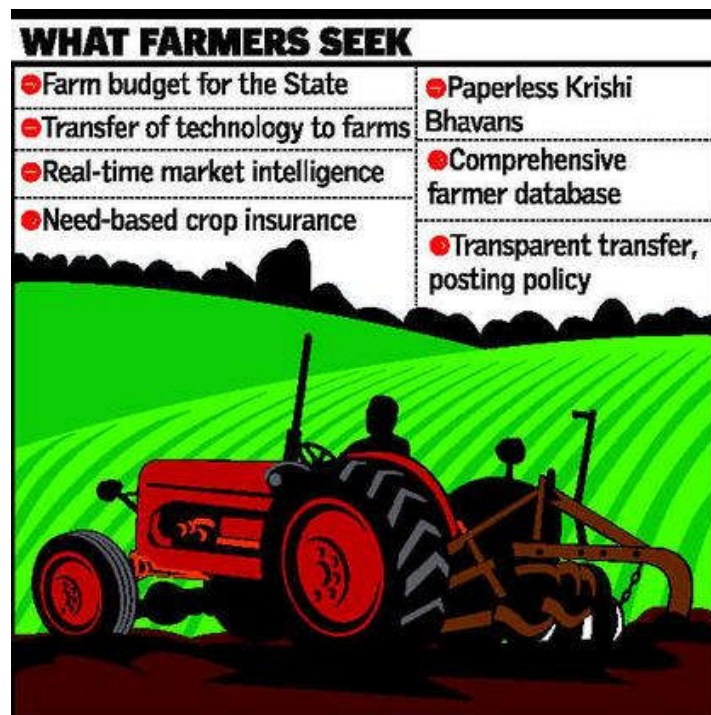
The Minister said the government would not allow filling of farmland. Efforts would be taken to change from one-time farming practice to two-time farming wherever possible.

“The fruits of research in field farming should reach the common man. Effective coordination of the Kerala Agricultural University and the Agriculture Department is necessary for that.”

Mr. Sunil Kumar said the government was committed towards propagating organic farming. “Trained teams to check pesticide attack will be deployed in the State, so that use of pesticides can be checked. Laboratories to check pesticide content in fruits and vegetables will be established across the State. Use of dangerous pesticides will be discouraged.”

The Minister said the Thrissur-Ponnani kole development package would be revamped.

### **An extended wish list for State farm sector**



### *Steps sought to address dip in paddy cultivation in State*

A State agricultural budget, timely transfer of technology to farms, real-time market intelligence, need-based crop insurance, paperless Krishi Bhavans, comprehensive farmer database and a transparent transfer and posting policy for

department officials top the list of demands raised by farmers as the new government starts action in Thiruvananthapuram.

Implementation of last year's State Agricultural Development Policy, which provides also for ensuring farmers' remuneration from end-product sale, needs immediate attention.

The government should also step in to arrest the obvious slide in paddy cultivation in the State, says a farmer in Palakkad, who felt that rampant reclamation of paddy fields continued across Kerala under the cover of confusion in government policy.

### **Neera technicians**

Biju John, CEO of Thirukochi Coconut Producer Company, says that government support is needed to address the problem of shortage of neera technicians. A shortage of hands is the biggest challenge before the fledgling neera business, he says.

Governments in the past have only touched the peripheral issues on making Kerala totally organic, says M.M. Abbas of the Organic Kerala Charitable Trust. Efficient marketing linkages and local production of quality inputs are needed urgently.

### **Delay in payments**

Despite all good intentions expressed by governments, farmers continue to face delayed payment of support price and insurance money. There is slippage in determining crop damage in the wake of natural calamities and the delay must end, says a department official.

Making Krishi Bhavans paperless will give agricultural officers more time to attend to farmers' needs. At present, about 90 per cent of the agricultural officers' time is spent settling paperwork in the offices. Providing two-wheelers to around 650 more Krishi Bhavans would improve agricultural officers' mobility, says the official.

## **Improve office set up**

Agricultural offices, the first point where farmers came face to face with the departmental machinery, need to be improved to make them like new generation business centres.

Reaching technology to farmers in a timely manner, providing market intelligence and helping farmers plan and time crops are better than providing subsidy support. Virtual classrooms for technology transfer, more efficient plant care clinics and help at farmers' doorsteps too are needed to help the farm sector.

*Government support is needed to address the problem of shortage of neera technicians.*

*Biju John,*

*CEO,*

*Thirukochi Coconut Producer Company*

## **Farmers turn to pineapple cultivation**

*“Adequate training and guidance would go a long way in utilising soil condition of the hills”*



Pineapple cultivation, though sporadic, brings an assured income to tribal farmers of Pachamalai.— Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

That the soil on Pachamalai hills is rich and suitable for agricultural and horticultural crops can be gauged from the fact that a variety of crops are being cultivated successfully by the tribal farmers.

Pineapple cultivation is one of the latest activity in which farmers have made a debut on the hills.

Although the area under the crop is sporadic and not knit together in a cluster, the farmers say that they raised the crop wherever they had extra or unused space.

“It takes at least six months for the full growth of a fruit,” says Mani, one of the farmer-educators working on the hills, guiding the farmers to the latest agricultural practices.

He said that though the fruit is seen in several villages across the hills, tribal farmers have not been properly guided to take pineapple cultivation on a more commercial basis.

### **Extra care**

Farmers said that they have to take additional care to protect the crop from rodent menace.

Only one fruit is allowed to grow at a plant with a specific length of five feet in length.

Farmers say that adequate training and guidance would go a long way in utilising the soil condition of the hills. The timely rain also adds to the deliciousness of the fruit. Most farmers say that the crop is raised only for personal consumption.

## Govt. buys 20,000 tonnes of onions



The Centre has procured 20,000 tonnes of onion from farmers to create a buffer stock for market intervention in the event of price rise. — PTI

## Bitter harvest for Godavari's coconut farmers

*Plentiful yields after three years have been nullified by plummeting prices*



No cheer: Labourers engaged in coconut fibre peeling in Konaseema region.—  
Photo: Special Arrangement.

After a long gap of three years, coconut farmers from East Godavari district have witnessed a significant yield from their groves during this summer.

But the plentiful harvest has not brought them cheer; instead prices have fallen and they are unable to even recoup their input costs.

East and West Godavari districts are known for large coconut groves. In East Godavari, most of the orchards are located in the lush Konaseema region; the crop is cultivated on 50,000 hectares.

### **Good production**

This year, the average yield is 70-75 nuts per tree, equal to the cumulative yield of the last three years. The farmers, who complained of a steep hike in input costs and cutting charges, had pinned all their hopes on this summer yield.

However, marketing the produce has hit an obstacle with the traders quoting very low prices, stating that there is no demand for coconuts in the neighbouring States.

“We got a yield of 2,000 nuts per acre this month. The same was hardly 300 nuts in the last three years owing to the climatic conditions. Till last year, the price had gone up to Rs. 10 per nut, but now the traders are saying they can’t give more than Rs. 3 per nut,” says Tikkiseti Satyanarayana, a coconut farmer from Razole.

### **Labour costs**

The farmers have to spend Re. 1 per nut for cutting charges and another 50 paise for the transportation. “In addition, we have to spend on tilling the orchard, fertilizer and pesticide. Leave aside profits, we can’t even get the input costs at this price,” says Mediseti Dharma Rao of Amalapuram.

“There seems to be a fall in demand due to excessive supply. The farmers must go for value-addition to get a remunerative price, which helps them make money from each and every part of the coconut,” says G. Ramanandam, senior scientist at the Horticulture Research Station at Ambajipeta.

***Yield is high in East and West Godavari districts but prices are going down***



## Rain, stormy winds hit Khammam, Nalgonda



NATURE'S FURY:A tree that fell on the Suryapet-Khammam highway, due to strong gales on Sunday, led to traffic jam.-Photo: G.N. Rao

The unseasonal rain accompanied by stormy winds left a trail of destruction in the town and elsewhere in the district on Sunday evening.

Sources said that a 50-year -old watchman of a shopping complex died on the spot when an asbestos sheet fell on him on the premises of the bus station in Thallada under the impact of high velocity winds late in the evening.

Asbestos roofs of several roadside shops and tiles of some houses in Khammam, Thallada and other towns were blown off due to the devastation caused by unexpected spell of heavy rain accompanied by gusty winds in the evening.

Several localities in Khammam and its surrounding areas went without power for more than two hours after stormy winds snapped power lines at various places under Khammam municipal corporation limits.

A garage of an automobile firm on the Wyra road reportedly suffered heavy damage after a part of the asbestos roof of the unit fell on the vehicles parked inside the garage, sources said.

Vehicular traffic on the Khammam-Kodad main road was disrupted for sometime after the branches of uprooted trees fell on the roadside blocking the movement of the vehicles late in the evening.

Nalgonda Staff Reporter adds: Saturday's night heavy winds shattered the dreams of banana farmer Bodhanam Bheemarjuna Reddy, who was ready to harvest 2,000 banana plants.

According to Horticulture Officer P. Ananta Reddy, only five to six farmers are cultivating the crop in the district. Mr. Reddy further said Mr. Bheemarjuna Reddy had successfully harvested one crop after taking up cultivation in 2015, and he was all set to harvest the crop in 15 days.

Mr. Ananta Reddy said the farmer was a model for many in banana cultivation. "We suggested many farmers to visit his farm to draw inspiration for taking up profitable alternative cultivation, he said. However, the gales caused extensive damage to his banana orchard as over 2,000 plants out of 4,000 plants fell down within a couple of hours.

Speaking to The Hindu, Mr. Bheemarjun Reddy, a native of Cherla Gouraram village of Kangal mandal, said that he got his investment back after harvesting the crop six months ago.

"I was expecting huge profit this time but the heavy winds have shattered my dreams," he said.

He urged the State Government to pay compensation to him after enumeration of crop loss.

Apart from Mr. Reddy's crop, lemon, sweet lemon orchards and other horticulture crops were also damaged due to the gales.

## Striking gold with pearl spot



Sunil Kumar (left) owns scores of netted enclosures at Thanimoodu in Thiruvananthapuram.

Lying wakeful at night is one of the fallouts of five years of farming fish, says Sunil Kumar, 43.

The national award-winning farmer owns scores of netted enclosures along the bank of the expansive backwater lagoon at Thannimoodu in suburban Thiruvananthapuram. Year-round, they abound with pearl spot, a pricey fish widely considered a delicacy. It sells for Rs.500 and above a kg.

The bounty attracts raiders at night. Certain lawlessness exists along Kerala's maze of inland waterways and lagoons and Thannimoodu is no exception.

Marine patrols are unheard of and farmers like Mr. Kumar are left to fend for themselves. They maintain solitary night vigils to protect their farms from raiding boatmen. Local goons who demand protection money are also a thorny problem.

Mr. Kumar's quest for self-employment had prompted the matriculate to attempt fish farming in 2010. His first shot at shrimp cultivation failed. But with pearl spot, Mr. Kumar struck gold.

Peak daily sales often touched Rs.15,000. He was able to keep his family of the breadline.

### **Traditional knowledge**

Most of Mr. Kumar's farming knowledge comes from anglers and traditional fishermen. They helped him devise the porous netted enclosures that allow tidal flushing, but keep natural predators out.

Tortoises, eels, catfish, rat snakes prey on pearl spot fingerlings. Top nets protect the corralled fish from predatory birds.

Mr. Kumar regularly traverses the lagoon with experienced fishermen to net healthy pearl spot pairs for controlled breeding.

“The male burrows into the lagoon bed to make holes for the female to deposit her eggs while she hovers around. They often breed close to the shore,” he says. Adult pearl spots are paired off in hatcheries, which simulate the lagoon environment.

Mr. Sunil is thankful to the Kerala Fisheries Department for its support. However, like other farmers, he faces the issue of land availability. The lease of his three acre farm is set to expire soon and he is scouting for a new place to relocate it.

## Rain fills up 25,000 farm ponds in Anantapur, says Collector



Tangible gains: District Collector Kona Sasidhar visiting farm ponds filled with rainwater at Kotanka in Garladinne mandal of Anantapur district on Sunday.  
Photo: R.V.S. Prasad

*62 mandals of the district receive widespread rain*

District Collector Kona Sasidhar said that over 25,000 farm ponds, constructed in the district under the ‘Panta Sanjeevani’ programme of the State government, were filled with water to the brim due to the widespread rains received on Saturday.

Mr Sasidhar, who visited farm ponds at Kotanka village of the Garladinne mandal of the district, said that the government’s vision of ensuring that every drop of rainwater was captured and stored for the use of farmers in the district was bearing fruit.

“As planned, all the one lakh farm ponds will be completed as early as possible as the government has already sanctioned Rs. 600 crore for the same, making funding a certainty,” said Mr Sasidhar even as he added that several thousands of farm ponds were in various stages of construction in the district besides the 25,000 already completed. Mr Sasidhar also interacted with farmers in the Kotanka village who were happy as ponds received water.

Meanwhile, 62 of the 63 mandals in the Anantapur district received widespread rain coupled with strong winds on Saturday night, helping the farmers in their pre-sowing preparations. In all, the district received a total of 2,469.5 mm of rainfall across 62 mandals. While the Kanaganapalli mandal received the highest amount of rainfall at 100.3 mm, the Anantapur mandal received 89.9 mm followed by Vidapanakal mandal at 81.9 mm and Guntakal at 80 mm.

With the heavy downpour in the Anantapur mandal, including Anantapur town in a matter of just a few hours, the Pandameru rivulet received its first inflows and could be seen in a spate on the outskirts of the town filling up several checkdams and other water conservation structures.

Underground parking areas in several houses were inundated in Anantapur due to the sudden burst of rain.

### **Govt. to acquire 52,000 acres in Medak district**

The State government will acquire about 52,000 acres in Medak district for various purposes.

A major chunk of this is for the proposed National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) that runs across 17 villages – 14 villages in Nyalakal mandal and three villages in Jarasangam mandal.

According to sources, the government has proposed to acquire 12,636 acres, out of which 8,773 acres is patta land and 3,045 acres is assigned land. The government has already acquired about 3,500 acres of land from farmers.

Similarly, the proposed redesigning of Kaleswaram project Kumurvelli Mallannasagar, being built at Toguta and Kondapaka mandals, adversely impacts seven villages, of which three will be completely submerged.

The district administration has commenced the process of acquiring as much as 16,000 acres of land in Toguta and Kondapaka mandals of Medak district for the construction of Mallannasagar reservoir, and the process is expected to be completed in 40 days. This is part of the Pranahita-Kandi project, the capacity of which would be 50 tmcft.

The project would cater to the needs of Ranga Reddy, Medak, Nizamabad, Warangal and Nalgonda districts. The project cost was estimated as Rs. 9,800

crore, including land procurement The administration has already acquired about 3,000 acres of land and the efforts are to get the remaining 13,000 acres.

However, district leaders of the CPI(M), who are fighting for better compensation to farmers, allege that as much as 21,379 acres is being taken by the government from 14 villages, adversely impacting about 20,000 people.

The government is acquiring 3,000 acres in six villages under Ranganai Sagar, about 6,000 acres in 14 villages under Kondapochamma reservoir, and about 8,000 acres for tunnels and canals as part of Kaleswaram project.

In addition, small chunks of land was already acquired for extension of National Highway 65 from Sangareddy to Zaheerbad, and the Medak-Akkannapet-Manoharabad railway line.

However, the Joint Collector is not available for comment.

### **Prospects for Kuruvai crop bleak**

*Water release from Mettur dam unlikely by June 12*



Farmers in the delta district might lose the crop the fifth time on the trot.—  
Photo: R.M. Rajarathinam

Farmers in the delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam are staring down the barrel with the prospects of kuruvai crop looking bleak. This is

the fifth time on the trot that the delta is set to lose cash-giving kuruvai crop in a vast majority of its area.

The storage level in the Mettur dam is not going to allow reopening of the reservoir on the customary June 12 for the delta's kuruvai irrigation. The chance of Mettur's Stanley Reservoir receiving appreciable inflow from Karnataka dams is bleak as the dams in the upper reaches of the Cauvery is almost dry and Karnataka is also reeling under severe water scarcity in most places.

"It is impractical for us to think of kuruvai this season too," rues Samy Natarajan, Thanjavur district president of the CPI (M)-affiliated Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam.

The weathermen say the South West Monsoon may set in by the second week of June. Even then, the dams in Karnataka should get filled and only after that the authorities there would allow surplus water to flow to Mettur dam. The water level should reach a comfortable height for the government to consider opening the reservoir for the delta.

All that might take a few weeks by which time the kuruvai crop would be pushed back to impinge on samba season, says Mr. Natarajan.

Usually kuruvai paddy is raised on 4.5 lakh acres in the three districts and over the past four years the crop had been lost owing to water scarcity. There was no timely flow down the Cauvery and the State government had to take a calculated gamble in opening the Mettur dam for delta irrigation in the past four years. This year is also going the same way.

Farmers who have borewell irrigation facility are able to raise the crop on an estimated 1.5 lakh acres. Last year, there was power shortage in some pockets which affected non-stop three-phase supply. Otherwise, it is only the 1.50 lakh acres that constituted kuruvai in the past four years.

"We fear that this year will be no different. On the one hand we can't afford to lose kuruvai straight away while on the other we are afraid to go for it as none could guess the flow in the Cauvery. Worse, we can't blame Karnataka or the State government for this situation," observes a farmer S. Durairaj of Erukkattoor in Tiruvarur district. If rains get delayed, drinking water availability for riverside cities will pose an additional problem, he says.



Under these circumstances Chief Minister Jayalalithaa could announce a kuruvai package and also ensure that all those who had raised kuruvai paddy got the benefits of the package. In the previous years, there were allegations that only those close to the power centres got the benefits while the real farmers were left in the lurch, points out vice-president of the Tamil Nadu Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam V. Jeevakumar.



### **Onions: Govt buys 20,000 tonnes for buffer stock, exceeds target**

Onion production is estimated to be increased to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per government data.



The government decided to buy on time and set a target to procure 15,000 tonnes of onion from the rabi crop of the 2015-16 crop year (July-June).

Exceeding the target, the Centre has procured 20,000 tonnes of onion from farmers to create a buffer stock to be utilised for market intervention in the event of price rise during a lean season.

Last year, the government had procured 8,000 tonnes of onion but it was done after the retail prices had gone through the roof to about Rs 80-90/kg.

The government, however, this year decided to buy on time and set a target to procure 15,000 tonnes of onion from the rabi crop of the 2015-16 crop year (July-June).

“Onion procurement has touched 20,000 tonnes so far, higher than the set target,” Food and Consumer Affairs Minister [Ram Vilas Paswan](#) said.

Nodal agencies Nafed and SFAC have procured onion at below Rs 10 per kg, which will be supplied in the market during the lean season (August-September), he said. Besides onion, Paswan said, the government has procured 40,000 tonnes of rabi pulses, especially gram and masoor.

The government has set a procurement target of 1,00,000 tonnes of pulses from rabi crop, comprising 80,000 tonnes of chana and 20,000 tonnes of masoor for creating a buffer stock. The procurement of rabi pulses is still going on.

Onion and pulses are being procured from the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF), which has a corpus of Rs 900 crore for this fiscal to support the market interventions.

Onion production is estimated to be increased to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per government data.

Whereas, pulses output is estimated to be down at 17.06 million tonnes, much lower than the demand of 23.62 million tonnes. The gap is met through imports.

At present, retail onion prices are ruling at Rs 15-25/kg and pulses in the range of Rs 85-185 per kg in most parts of the country, showed government data.

## Irrigation canals shut for repairs, no cotton over 1.7 lakh acres this year



The area under cultivation has dropped from around 5 lakh hectares last season to 2.75 lakh hectares this year. (HT File Photo)

The ill-timed schedule of repairs of canal distributaries has hit the cotton farmers hard in the state. They are left with no option but to sow water-guzzling paddy as cotton sowing could not take place over 70,000 hectares (1.7 lakh acres) for want of irrigation. Paddy sowing season will begin from June 10 in the state.

It will be a bad year for cotton farmers, especially after the extensive damage to the crop due to whitefly attack last year. The area under cultivation has dropped from around 5 lakh hectares last season to 2.75 lakh hectares this year.

The Lambi distributary, Arniwala minor and Bhagsar branch were shut during the peak season of cotton cultivation from mid-April to mid-May. These canals, which are predominantly for irrigation purpose, are opening now when the cotton-sowing season is over.

Though the state irrigation department says the canals were shut for repairs following farmers' demands, agriculture department officials say the canals were closed despite repeated requests to carry out repairs during the off season.

Irrigation department executive engineer RK Gupta said the three canals were shut for 45 days to carry out brick-lining works on April 29. "We have been completing the works ahead of schedule," he said, adding that after repairs, water in the Lambi distributary was released a fortnight ago, 10 days ago in the Arniwala minor, and the Bhagsar branch will be operational by June 5. Gupta said the department had fixed June 10 deadline to make these canals fully operational.

He said farmers wanted that they should get full flow of water during the paddy season and even agreed to shut water channels for repairs during cotton cultivation. "The irrigation department had no problem if the repairs were carried out after the paddy transplantation," added Gupta.

The Lambi distributary feeds the cotton belt in the Abohar block and Bhagsar minor and Arniwala branch in the Fazilka block. The irrigation department has spent Rs 12 crore, Rs 24 crore and Rs 10 crore, respectively, on these water channels.

"We have lost almost 70,000 acres under cotton cultivation," director of agriculture department JS Bains told HT. The irrigation department could have closed the canals after the cotton and paddy sowing was over, he added.

He said the agriculture department urged top government officials not to shut the water bodies from April 15, but of no avail. "We have asked cotton growers to shift to paddy cultivation for want of irrigation facility," said Bains.

**Poor rainfall behind costly pulses: Paswan**



Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan at an event in Lucknow on Sunday

Seeking to deflect Opposition attack over high prices of pulses, Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan on Sunday attributed it to poor rainfall and reduced imports during the last two years.

“Several factors have led to the rise in price of pulses. Rainfall was low during the last two years, causing damage to crops. Besides, import was less,” he said at a press conference here.

Paswan said last year, pulse production was 171 lakh tonnes whereas the requirement was 226 lakh tonnes. This year, the requirement has been pegged at 236 lakh tonnes. He further said private importers had imported lesser quantity of pulses than what was needed, due to which prices rose.

“Now the Centre has created a buffer stock,” he said, adding the State governments would get pulses from the Centre at 66 a kg for arhar and 83 a kg for urad. It is for the States to supply the commodity within a price ceiling of 120, he added.

### **IMD to start State-wise monsoon forecast from next year**

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) will start giving State-specific monsoon forecast from next year.

“IMD will start making State-wise monsoon forecast from 2017 apart from zone-wise predictions,” Union Minister for Earth Sciences Harsh Vardhan said.

The Secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences M Rajeevan said from 2018-19 it will be extended to include other seasons.

The IMD currently gives zone-specific daily monsoon forecast during the season for north-west, central India, southern peninsula and east and north-east regions. It is further divided into sub-zones.

### **Spices Board to launch 2nd e-auction centre**

The Spices Board will launch its second e-auction centre at Bodinayakanur, known as cardamom city, in Tamil Nadu’s Theni district, to ensure remunerative prices to cardamom farmers.

Spices Board Chairman A Jayathilak will inaugurate the centre tomorrow, according to a release here.

The new auction centre, constructed on two acres of land at the Spices Board premises in Bodinayakanur, is equipped with all the modern facilities to assist the cardamom trade.

“Spices Board has revolutionised the auction system for small cardamom by introducing electronic auction, which has started benefiting cardamom growers.

The first e-auction centre of the board was set up at Puttady Spice Park, Kerala in 2011,” Jayathilak said.

He added that e-auction had replaced the traditional “outcry” system of auction of small cardamom, which also provides increased transparency in trade. Since its introduction, the small cardamom trade has grown manifold.

“Small cardamom production during 2015-16 was 22,000 tonnes, registering the highest production in India. The country exported 5,500 tonnes of small cardamom valued at Rs. 450 crore during 2015-16, registering the highest export performance for small cardamom in the history of cardamom trade in India” he said.

He hoped that recent initiatives like the new e-auction centre, implementation of GAP (good agricultural practices), judicious use of pesticides, application of bio-inputs and better grading would go a long way in assisting the cardamom industry and promoting consumption of the spice.

### **Cane arrears at Rs. 9,361 cr this season: Food Ministry**



It was only Rs. 780 cr in 2014-15

Policy interventions by the Centre have brought down sugarcane arrears due to farmers during sugar season 2014-15 to about Rs. 780 crore, with Uttar Pradesh accounting for Rs.191 crore, the Food Ministry said here on Saturday, adding that when the NDA government took over in 2014, it had a “legacy of Rs. 14,000 crore pertaining to many years.”

However, for the current year (sugar season 2015-16), the arrears are about Rs. 9,361 crore compared with Rs. 22,000 crore last year, out of which, UP accounts for Rs. 2,855 crore, the Ministry said.

“The direct payment of industry loans into farmers’ account is a best practice in the DBT (direct benefits transfer) format, where cane arrears were directly reduced by a whopping Rs. 4,305 crore, which otherwise mills may have been diverted or delayed in giving to farmers,” the Ministry added.

On UP’s arrear, the Ministry said the State had allowed a two-stage payment of FRP (Fair & Remunerative Price). “Till end June, mills are expected to pay cane dues based on FRP (Rs 230/quintal), according to which arrears are presently Rs. 2,855 cr. However, July onwards, the mills will have to pay dues based on State Advised Prices (Rs 280/quintal) on the basis of which the dues come to Rs. 5,795 crore,” it added.

### **Cane farmers**

The Ministry’s statement comes two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a public meeting in Saharanpur that it was under his government’s watch that the arrears due to cane farmers, who were owed Rs. 14,000 crore, got cleared “to a great extent”.

“About Rs. 700-800 crore of payments are still pending. I am requesting the State government and warning the sugar mills that whatever you have done to farmers for all these years, now you will not be allowed to do,” he added.

However media reports, quoting the Cane Commissioner’s Office in Lucknow stated that cane arrears of UP mills alone stand at Rs. 5,795 crore.



Referring to reduced cane arrears, the Ministry said this was possible under a new policy designed by the Centre under which a soft loan was notified with a one year moratorium on interest payments. “Unlike in the past, provisions for direct payment to farmers were made even though mills undertook the loan and Rs. 4,305 crore was disbursed in 2015-16 by banks towards payment of cane dues. This provided a direct relief to farmers which reduced cane dues arrears and also provided support to the sugar industry in terms of liquidity to settle their arrear commitments”, it said.

## **Ethanol**

It said the modified ethanol blending program (EBP) to achieve up to 10 per cent blending levels with motor spirit also played a role.

“Remunerative prices of ethanol were fixed in an administered price regime, to help sugar industry come out of a crisis, so as to pay its cane arrears to farmers. Central Excise duties were waived for the current year increasing the ex-mill realisation on ethanol to about Rs. 48/litre,” the statement read.

Citing other benefits of the policy, such as reducing environmental pollution and saving foreign exchange as also serve as a vent for excess sugar production, it said in 2014-15, imports of about 4.2 million barrels of crude was saved through blending, resulting in foreign exchange saving of \$286 million, adding that in sugar season 2014-15, there had been a net reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the extent of 12.3 LMT.

## **India, Australia sign pact to boost horticulture research**

The pact was signed between the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council and Horticulture Innovation Australia.

India and Australia have signed a pact to boost horticultural research in a bid to develop and deploy modern tools of plant biotechnology to improve crop productivity with a funding commitment of up to Australian \$ 6 million over a period of three years.

The pact was signed between the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a public sector enterprise, and Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation) on Friday for launching a joint funding call to support research and development (R&D) organisations and other eligible entities to undertake novel and cutting-edge strategic translational research in horticulture at affordable costs, an official release said.



“Considering the gap between demand and supply for crops, it is of paramount importance to stimulate an enabling environment for R&D in both the regions.

Through the signing of this memorandum of understanding, we along with Hort Innovation aim to create a supportive ‘innovation ecosystem’ for researchers to undertake high-level research and promote horticulture techniques,” said K. Vijay Raghavan, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), in a statement.

David Moore, General Manager of Research Marketing and Investment, Hort Innovation, said, “We are pleased that our collaboration with BIRAC will allow for the exchange of skills, knowledge and information between horticulturalists of both the regions.”

# Business Standard

## **Pulses costlier due to poor rainfall, reduced imports: Paswan**

Last year, pulse production was 171 lakh tonnes whereas requirement was 226 lakh tonnes



Seeking to deflect opposition attack over high prices of pulses, Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan today attributed it to poor rainfall and reduced imports during the last two years.

"Several factors have led to the rise in price of pulses. Rainfall was low during the last two years causing damage to crops. Besides import was less," he said, replying to questions at a press conference here.

Paswan said last year, pulse production was 171 lakh tonnes whereas the requirement was 226 lakh tonnes. This year, the requirement has been pegged at 236 lakh tonnes.

The Union Minister of Food and Public Distribution said private importers had imported lesser quantity of pulses than what was needed, due to which prices rose.

"Now the Centre has created a buffer stock to meet the situation," he said, adding the state governments would get pulses from Centre at Rs 66 per kg for arhar and Rs 83 per kg for urad.

It is for the states to make the commodity available to people within a price ceiling of Rs 120, he added.

Expressing grief over reports of starvation deaths in certain parts of the country, he said there is no shortage of foodgrains. Regarding a starvation death in Banda in Uttar Pradesh, he said if someone dies without food, it is a matter of concern.

It is the duty of the state governments to collect foodgrains from the Centre and ensure availability among the poor, he said, but admitted that there was some laxity at the Public Distribution System level as well.

For this, the Centre has asked states to set up state food commission and monitoring cells at the district level.

Paswan said the Centre is providing wheat at the rate of Rs 2 per kg and rice at Rs 3 per kg to the poor, but some state governments are taking credit for it. "This is unfair," he said.

He also said the Centre has unearthed over 1.62 crore fake ration cards, which will prevent leakages of over Rs 36,000 crore.



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### **Farmers reap benefits of new agro model**

As farmers prepare for the sowing of 'sali dhan' (traditional winter paddy) that is set to begin in June, a farming model that yielded positive results has been adopted again.

Over 1,600 farmers in southern Nalbari districts are gearing up to carry on the farming model to prevent agricultural lands from lying idle and helping preserve the indigenous variety of rice paddy.

'Augmenting productivity of lead crop through adoption of sustainable agricultural practice' began as a three-year model pilot project. It was planned as a farming intervention to increase crop productivity, inculcate practical knowledge on seed selection and treatment, and preserve the indigenous variety of paddy.

The project was initiated by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Lotus Progressive Centre (LPC), a NGO, based at Morowa village in Nalbari district, in July 2011.

The project period got over in 2014. The model, however, continued to be practised by the farmers. The farming families in a cluster of seven villages held on to the practice because of the positive results it brought.

"The model led the overall crop productivity to jump from 13-18% to 30-40%, while also bringing about an increase in the income of the farmers," said Hemanta Baishya, member and coordinator of LPC.

The model ensures that the agricultural land does not lie idle. For instance, a farmer might have five bighas of agricultural land and may use three bighas to cultivate the main crop of paddy. The remaining two bighas, considered 'baam' or shallow, are utilized for rabi and other crops.

After the main crop is harvested, leguminous crops (peas, lentils and chick peas) and rabi crops are cultivated, improving the natural soil fertility.

"The farmers have informed us that they are continuing the practice. It has led to crop intensity. This project has been a success. The followup is continuing," said Tapan Baishya, secretary, LPC.

Before the introduction of the initiative, farmers had no practical experience in increasing crop productivity, and no knowledge of or systematic approach to seed selection and treatment, seed-bedding preparation, seeding duration. They also had an unsystematic approach to line preparation (the manner in which seeds are sown based on line rows).

"The project period is over but it is now that we are witnessing the impact. This has given an immense boost to their financial and motivational levels. We do have a plan to expand it to other places as well," added Baishya.

With most farmers are cultivating high-yield varieties - Joymoti, Luit, Athaisa, Untrisa and others, local varieties of rice paddy - Joha, Kola Joha, Mainagiri, Phool Pakhori, Tengre, Samraj, Boka Dhan, Tulsi Joha, Konkoni, Biru, Kajali Bah, Bordhan, Kalamdani, and others - are also being cultivated, besides mustard, peas, lentils, chick peas, among others.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Congress government in Karnataka chalks out huge drip irrigation project**



The Siddaramaiah government expects the Rs 2,500 crore project to not only help the sector but also improve its own image before the state assembly election scheduled in 2018.

**BENGALURU:** The Congress government in Karnataka , entering its fourth year, has chalked out a Rs 2,500 crore project to introduce drip irrigation in 3 lakh acres where sugarcane is cultivated, using water from reservoir canals.

The project is expected to double sugarcane yield in the country's third-largest cane-growing state, improve cane quality and boost revenue for farmers, sugar factories and the central and state governments, besides saving a 52 thousand million cubic feet of water - equivalent to the capacity of the KRS dam in Karnataka - in just the pilot stage of 1.5 lakh acres.

In the aftermath of drought, about 1,500 farmers have committed suicide in Karnataka last year, of which a substantial number grew sugarcane. The matter was underlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi , who claimed at his 'Vikas Parv' speech in Davanagere on Sunday that he had come to the aid of the farmers by releasing sugarcane dues.

Sugarcane farmers across the country are still owed money by mills, which made losses as global prices declined. With the domestic market improving, the arrears are expected to reduce, the Indian Sugar Mills Association said in April.

The Siddaramaiah government expects the Rs 2,500 crore project to not only help the sector but also improve its own image before the state assembly election scheduled in 2018. While Maharashtra, other cane-growing states and the Centre have offered large-scale subsidies to farmers to convert to drip irrigation, no government has so far set up the entire infrastructure needed to convert flood irrigation areas to the drip system.

The process involves releasing water onto the soil at very low rates from a system of small-diameter plastic pipes fitted with outlets. Water is applied close to the plants so that only that part of the soil in which the roots grow is wetted.

"We will set up the pumping stations, the motors and bring the drip facilities from the canal right up to the farm at our cost. The farmer just has to invest in the infrastructure needed in his own farm," Karnataka water resources minister MB Patil told ET.

The scheme has got in-principle cabinet approval and is expected to get final clearance in about 15 days. Patil proposes to get the scheme off the ground within 45 days. The state will invest an average of Rs 85,500 per acre, while the farmer may have to raise about Rs 65,000, largely covered by central, state and sugar factory generated subsidies. The state will also facilitate loan agreements

between farmers, financial institutions and sugar factories for this amount. "We will try to negotiate minimum interest for these loans," Patil said.

The state asked the Centre to partially fund the project, but has not got any response so far. "We will go ahead on our own and if the Centre also participates, we will be happy," he added.

The state's water resources ministry estimates that farmers who opt for drip irrigation will benefit to the extent of Rs 81,750 per acre in a year.

"The farmer saves on seeds, fertilisers and labour costs, while his yield will double," Patil said.

With such savings, farmers are expected to be able to repay loans taken for infrastructure on farms within three to four years. The sugar factory to which a farmer supplies cane regularly is to stand guarantor for the loans.

"It is a win-win project for all concerned," Amit Kore, vice president of the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, told ET. Kore, also chairman of the Doodhganga Cooperative Sugar Factory in Belgaum and a BJP leader.

"The returns to the state and central government will be enormous. It will more than justify the Rs 2,500 crore investment. We, the sugar factories will also benefit due to the increased production in sugarcane and its by-products like ethanol," Kore said.

However, as Kore pointed out, not all private sugar factories -- Karnataka has a total of 72 in government, private and cooperative sectors -- are ready to stand loan guarantors. The state government also has to convince sugarcane farmers of its sincerity.

"About 30% of the sugarcane farmers have already opted for drip irrigation in the state," Sugarcane Growers Association President Kurubur Shantakumar told ET. "However, there are cane dues of over Rs 2,000 crore pending from the last three years. If the government shows some commitment in getting that cleared, this drip irrigation project will get more credibility."



## **Pulses costlier due to poor rainfall, reduced imports: food minister Ram Vilas Paswan**



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LUCKNOW: Seeking to deflect opposition attack over high prices of pulses, Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan today attributed it to poor rainfall and reduced imports during the last two years.

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### **Spices Board to launch second e-auction centre at 'cardamom city'**



Since introduction of the e-auction, the small cardamom trade has grown manifold.

KOCHI: Spices Board will launch its second e-auction centre at Bodinayakanur , known as cardamom city, in Tamil Nadu's Theni district, to ensure remunerative prices to cardamom farmers.

Spices Board Chairman A Jayathilak will inaugurate the centre tomorrow, according to a release here.

The new auction centre, constructed on two acres of land at the Board's premises in Bodinayakanur, is equipped with all the modern facilities to assist the cardamom trade.

"Spices Board has revolutionised the auction system for small cardamom by introducing electronic auction, which has started benefiting cardamom growers. The first e-auction centre of the Board was set up at Puttady Spice Park, Kerala in 2011," Jayathilak said.

He added e-auction had replaced the traditional "outcry" system of auction of small cardamom, which also provides increased transparency in trade.

Since introduction of the e-auction, the small cardamom trade has grown manifold.

"The small cardamom production during 2015-16 was 22,000 tonnes, registering the highest production in India. The country exported 5,500 tonnes of small cardamom valued at Rs 450 crore during 2015-16, registering the highest export performance for small cardamom in the history of cardamom trade in India," he said.

He hoped that recent initiatives like the new e-auction centre, implementation of GAP (Good Agricultural Practices), judicious use of pesticides, application of bio-inputs and better grading would go a long way in assisting the cardamom industry and promoting consumption of the spice.

## **Government buys 20,000 tonnes of onion for buffer stock, exceeds target**



Onion production is estimated to be increased to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per government data.

NEW DELHI: Exceeding the target, the Centre has procured 20,000 tonnes of onion from farmers to create a buffer stock to be utilised for market intervention in the event of price rise during a lean season.

Last year, the government had procured 8,000 tonnes of onion but it was done after the retail prices had gone through the roof to about Rs 80-90/kg.

The government, however, this year decided to buy on time and set a target to procure 15,000 tonnes of onion from the rabi crop of the 2015-16 crop year (July-June).

"Onion procurement has touched 20,000 tonnes so far, higher than the set target," Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said.

Nodal agencies Nafed and SFAC have procured onion at below Rs 10 per kg, which will be supplied in the market during the lean season (August-September), he said.

Besides onion, Paswan said, the government has procured 40,000 tonnes of rabi pulses , especially gram and masoor.

The government has set a procurement target of 1,00,000 tonnes of pulses from rabi crop, comprising 80,000 tonnes of chana and 20,000 tonnes of masoor for creating a buffer stock.

The procurement of rabi pulses is still going on.

Onion and pulses are being procured from the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF), which has a corpus of Rs 900 crore for this fiscal to support the market interventions.

Onion production is estimated to be increased to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per government data.

Whereas, pulses output is estimated to be down at 17.06 million tonnes, much lower than the demand of 23.62 million tonnes. The gap is met through imports.

At present, retail onion prices are ruling at Rs 15-25/kg and pulses in the range of Rs 85-185 per kg in most parts of the country, showed government data.