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# THE HINDU

## **Cotton-growers asked to shift to paddy**

After the extensive crop damage caused by the whitefly pest attack last year, cotton farmers in Haryana and Punjab have brought down the area under cotton this season. They are likely to shift to paddy and pulses.

In Haryana, farmers have planted cotton on 4.76 lakh hectares so far, against nearly 5 lakh hectares during the same period last year. In Punjab, the area under cotton is 2.57 lakh hectares, against over 3 lakh hectares last year.

“The drop in area under cotton was expected this season as farmers suffered losses last year because of the whitefly attack,” Jasbir Singh Bains, Director, Punjab Agriculture Department, told *The Hindu*.

In these two States, the whitefly pest damaged the Bt cotton varieties last year, bringing the production down by nearly 40 per cent. Bt cotton accounted for over 98 per cent to the total cotton sown last year; the rest were the indigenous varieties.

Mr. Bains attributed the reduction in area under cotton in Punjab to the repairs to canal links and branches (used for irrigation).

“Farmers will now sow paddy instead as the cotton-sowing period is almost over. The government has allocated new tube well connections, so we have asked cotton-growers to shift to paddy,” Mr. Bains said.

Cotton is usually planted from the middle of April to late May in most parts of Punjab and Haryana.

In Punjab, the whitefly epidemic during Kharif 2015 damaged over 75 per cent of the crop and led to widespread protest. The crop loss was also thought to be the major reason for the suicide of over 12 farmers in the cotton belt, especially in Abohar, Fazileka, Bathinda and Muktsar districts. The total area under cotton in the State last year was 4.50 lakh hectares. The government later announced a Rs.644-crore compensation package.

In Haryana too, farmers suffered huge losses, and the government announced a Rs. 967-crore compensation package.

“Cotton acreage this season has gone down, and the whitefly attack is the major reason... Farmers are opting for pulses and paddy,” said Babu Lal, Deputy Director of the Haryana Agriculture Department in Sirsa.

### **Ryots seek enhanced kuruvai package**

Pinned down by the loss of *kuruvai* paddy crop consecutively for the past four years, delta farmers are now looking up to the State government for an enhanced *kuruvai* package especially for those who are raising the crop using sub surface water with the help of motor pump sets.

Though the normal area under *kuruvai* paddy in the delta region will be around 4.5 lakh acres, around 1.5 lakh acres are raised with the help of motor pump sets and the *kuruvai* package helped them in the past years immensely.

The *kuruvai* package extended to farmers last year included free transplantation using machinery under the aegis of the Agricultural Engineering Department while the farmer had to pay only for the seedlings, Rs. 315 per acre for application of micro nutrients, 12-hour uninterrupted three-phase power supply a day, 200 kg gypsum per acre free of cost and in the Vennar Division of the delta where sub surface water could not be tapped the package included free ploughing for green manure raising for soil enrichment.

“The situation has only worsened over the past year and the farmers’ lot has gone down as could be seen from the financial woes that have come the ryots’ way,” points out vice-president of the Tamilaga Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam V. Jeevakumar. While thousands of farmers have borrowed money from banks and private lenders for sustenance and for undertaking agricultural operations and are being harassed for returning the money with interest, hundreds of farmers attempted to better their lives by buying costly farm machinery with loans from scheduled commercial and private banks are not able to pay the EMI and have become defaulters, he explains.

## **Plea to grant free harvest**

To help farmers who are raising *kuruvai*, the State government could consider extending an enhanced *kuruvai* package, says the State president of the CPI (M)-affiliated Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam and former MLA K. Balakrishnan. Chief Minister Jayalalithaa could think of granting free harvest of the crop besides providing micro nutrients and the essential zinc sulphate free of cost to the farmers. Farmers during peak harvest season cough up at least Rs. 2,400 per acre for harvesting while in the normal course it would be around Rs. 1,600 to Rs. 1,900 per acre. If the State government through its agencies undertake the harvest then farmers will benefit directly, he reasoned.

The State government's *kuruvai* package definitely served as an inducement for delta farmers to go in for cultivation using sub surface water in potential areas. An enhanced *kuruvai* package this year will cushion their requirements and all farmers who irrigate fields using pump sets will benefit on the whole, says general secretary, Consortium of Cauvery Delta Farmers V. Sathyanarayanan.

*Last year's package included free transplantation, 12-hour power supply among others*

## **Farmers demand special package**

The farmers' wing of the Tamil Maanila Congress has urged the State government to sanction a special package to enable delta farmers to take up paddy cultivation during the ensuing "kuruvai" season.

They wanted waiver of loans to all farmers, including big farmers.

Speaking at a meeting of the wing here on Sunday, Puliur A. Nagarajan, State president of the wing, said that agricultural inputs estimated at Rs. 25,000 should be distributed to each farmer for the season. He wanted uninterrupted three-phase power supply to farmers.

The meeting adopted a resolution expressing concern over inadequate water storage at Mettur Dam for the "kuruvai" season and wanted the Centre to take steps to persuade Karnataka to release Tamil Nadu's due share of water in the Cauvery.

Representatives of other farmers' organisations who addressed the meeting as special invitee urged the Centre to take steps to constitute the Cauvery Management Board and Cauvery Water Regulatory Authority. Mahadanapuram V. Rajaram, executive president of the Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association, said only the board would be competent authority for implementing the recommendation as per the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal.

**PUDUKOTTAI:** A group of farmers led by G.S. Dhanapathy, president of the Federation of All Farmers Associations, submitted a memorandum to District Collector S. Ganesh on Sunday demanding waiver of loans to all farmers, including big farmers. Farm loans sanctioned by the nationalised banks should be taken over by the State government. C. Appavu Balandar, R. Govindaraj, and C. Subramanian, all progressive farmers, explained the need for uniform procedure for waiver of loans.

***Delta farmers say only Cauvery Management Board will be competent authority to implement the tribunal order***

### **Cardamom farmers cautioned against use of pesticides**

Implementation of good agricultural practices, judicious use of pesticides, application of bio inputs and better grading will help growers produce high quality cardamom and boost exports. Detection of disease at an early stage will reduce crop damage.

These were highlighted at a technical session on integrated pest management convened by scientists from Spices Board in the second auction centre, spread over two acres, on the campus of Bodi Spices Board office here on Monday.

Artificial colouring to maintain greenness in cardamom and produce with high residue of chemicals would affect exports as well as domestic consumption, farmers were told.

Residue of eight dangerous chemicals were found in 300 samples collected from various fields, said scientist M.A. Ansar Ali.

It was an alarming factor and use of pesticide in the country was almost double the quantum used at the global level.

“For example, Endosulfan is banned in Kerala. But it entered Kerala through Tamil Nadu. We found residue of Endosulfan in our samples,” he added.

Saudi Arabia, a major importer of Indian cardamom, had imported 3,500 tonnes in 2015-16 when compared to 2,800 tonnes in 2014-15. UAE, Kuwait, USA, Japan, Canada Qatar Australia and UK were other buyers.

“Already, we have lost the Japan market. So growers should be very careful in application of pesticides for cardamom and avoid banned pesticides,” he also advised.

Former scientist D. Kumaresan said contact pesticides would not enter the seeds but systemic pesticides would.

### **Helping farm labour earn an income during a hard time**

*A few individuals and organisations have come together in drought-hit Kalaburagi to provide the much-needed succour*



The combined work of the organisations and individuals has ensured gainful employment under MGNREGA to thousands of needy agricultural workers. A file photo of work taken up at Honna Kiranagi village in Kalaburagi taluk.

A few individuals and organisations in Kalaburagi district have come as a saving grace for landless agricultural labourers to earn an income during drought.

This has not only helped the needy get employment and payment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the innovative ways introduced by these individuals and organisations have ended the misuse of job cards and MGNREGA funds by vested interests and elected representatives at the gram panchayat level.

K. Neela, vice-president of the State unit of the Janawadi Mahila Sanghatane, Sadashiva Haralayya, Nandadevi Managundi and Ningappa Managundi are trying to bring smiles on the faces of the exploited sections of society.

The untiring work of Ms. Neela and a group of committed women volunteers in taking up MGNREGA works in different parts of the district has inspired people such as Ms. Nandadevi Managundi and her husband, Mr. Ningappa Managundi, and Mr. Haralayya.

Ms. Neela, in association with the Nandadevi couple and a few other teachers, have played a pivotal role in Aland taluk in Kalaburagi district, which is one of the worst-hit by drought, by taking up work to remove silt and restore tanks in at least 50 villages. They have also taken up the construction of Krishi Hondas, Gokattas, check-dams and soil conservation work.

“The work of mobilising the people for MGNREGA works and bringing about officials to fall in line and provide the needy work under MGNREGA which began at Gunj Bablad in December last year when the district started feeling the effects of drought, has been continued and we have covered nearly 50 villages and helped people to get job cards and employment under MGNREGA,” Ms Neela said.

All those employed in the works taken up under the initiation of Ms. Neela and her committed team were provided new job cards and saving bank accounts to ensure that the wages due to them are not siphoned off by vested interests. “There were complaints of large-scale bogus job cards and bank accounts in fictitious names. To avoid this, we provided new job cards and also opened new bank accounts in the name of the job card holders,” she said.

Mr. Haralayya, who works as a volunteer, Kshetra Sahayaka, to help people get work under MGNREGA, has withstood the threats from vested interests and elected representatives of gram panchayats to throw open new avenues of employment to thousands of people under MGNREGA.



The combined work of these organisations and individuals has ensured gainful employment under MGNREGA to thousands of needy agricultural labourers who otherwise would have migrated to other cities in search of employment.

### **Improve production of pulses to boost growers' income: Minister**



Qamarul Islam, Minister for Municipal Administration and Minority Affairs, flagging off a campaign in Kalaburagi on Monday. —Photo: Arun Kulkarni

Minister for Municipal Administration and Minority Affairs Qamarul Islam has emphasized the need for improving the production of pulses to increase growers' income.

Inaugurating a Krishi Abhiyan programme here on Monday, he said that the United Nations had declared 2016 as International Year of Pulses to improve the production and productivity of pulses and to ensure nutrient security.

During the three-day programme, officials and experts from the departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Forest would conduct workshops at hobli levels to impart professional skills to farmers in farming, planning and adoption of new technologies.

Mr. Islam said that the farmers would be given information on agricultural schemes of the State government.

Officials would tour the 32 hobli's in the district for the first two days. On the last day, an interaction between farmers and agricultural scientists would be held.

Deputy Commissioner Vipul Bansal and Joint Director of Agriculture Mohammad Jilani Mokashi were present.

### **‘Inculcate awareness among Bt cotton growers’**



Deputy Director of Agriculture T.N. Ashok speaking at a workshop at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, on Monday. — PHOTO: SANTOSH SAGAR

Bheemanna, entomologist at the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, has told seed traders to create awareness among farmers about cultivation methods recommended for Bt cotton.

He was speaking at a workshop on pre-monsoon preparation and the role of seed merchants in handling pink bollworm in Bt cotton, at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) here on Monday. The workshop was organised by the Department of Agriculture.

“Cultivation method plays a crucial role in protecting Bt cotton crop from pink bollworm pest attack. Sowing non-Bt refuge seeds supplied with Bt cotton seeds in about five rows around the Bt cotton crop is a must. Spraying appropriate pesticides as soon as discovering pink bollworm pest infection will significantly control the pest menace. The seed traders have a greater role to play in giving these valuable tips to farmers who approach them,” he said. T.N. Ashok, Deputy Director of Agriculture, underlined the time factor in Bt cotton cultivation. “The sowing of Bt cotton should be completed before August. Delayed sowing increases the chances of pink bollworm pest attack. The seed



traders should join hands with the Agriculture Department in its efforts to spread awareness among farmers about proper cultivation of Bt cotton. They should mandatorily distribute awareness leaflet to each farmer who comes to purchase Bt cotton seeds,” he said.

R.G. Sandeep, Assistant Director of Agriculture, told the merchants to sell quality Bt cotton seeds at revised rates and mandatorily provide the bills to buyers mentioning all required information in it.

“Legal action will be taken against those who indulge in malpractice such as selling spurious sowings seeds and selling seeds at higher prices,” he said.

Apart from seed sellers from across Raichur taluk, KVK representative Amaresh, and Monsanto representative Shambanna Adimani were present.

### **Mango mela to begin today**

According to officials of the Karnataka State Mango Development and Marketing Corporation, diabetics and mango addicts have to wait for just two more weeks for the right-sized Totapuri mango to arrive in the market. However, if you can't wait that long to catch a glimpse of this variety, head to the mango and jackfruit mela, which will begin in the city on Tuesday.

“It (this variety of mango) has a scientifically tested low glycemic index, and Karnataka leads in Totapuri cultivation with a yield of nearly three-lakh tonnes ... it will arrive in mid-June,” says the chairperson of the corporation, Kamalakshi Rajanna. The Totapuri will be one of the nearly 80 mango varieties that will be displayed at the month-long mela, which will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The mela will be on till June 29.

The mela will happen simultaneously in seven centres in the city — Lalbagh; Elements Mall, Thanisandra Main Road; Malleswaram Playground; Majestic Bus Stand; Shantinagar BMTC; and Jayanagar BMTC and Kengeri BMTC stands.

Mango cultivation, apparently, has increased steadily over the last three years. “This year, farmers have assured us of 14-lakh tonnes of mangoes ... it was 8-lakh tonnes last year. This is clearly a big jump. This has been the trend for the last three years,” says Ms. Rajanna.

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*For the attention of fruit lovers*

- *This year's mango and jackfruit mela will be held from May 31 to June 29*
- *Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will inaugurate the mela at Lalbagh at 11 a.m. on May 31*
- *Mela to be held simultaneously in seven centres — Lalbagh; Elements Mall, Thanisandra Main Road; Malleswaram Playground; Majestic Bus Stand; Shantinagar BMTC; Jayanagar BMTC and Kengeri BMTC bus stands*
- *Nearly 1,200 tonnes of mangoes will be available*
- *80 mango varieties grown in Karnataka to be on display (20 varieties will be for sale in 100 stalls)*
- *Alphonso, Badami, Mallika, Raspuri, Sendura, Dasherri, Kesar, Neelam and Malgovala to be on sale*
- *Locally-grown varieties— Sakkare Guthi, Gunda, Appe Midi, Jwaari, Chinna Rasam, Pedda Rasam— to be on display*
- *10 varieties of jackfruit and allied products will be on display in 20 stalls*

### **Neera tappers forge market linkage to export value-added products**

A group of traditional neera tappers from Udumalpet area have established market linkage with a Kochi-based firm to export value-added jaggery produced from neera.

The tie-up was made possible through an initiative taken by Udumalpet Coconut Producers Company, a consortium floated by around 1,000 coconut farmers from Udumalpet and Madathukulam blocks, with the support of Coconut Development Board.

“We have now grouped together 10 traditional tappers of neera, who have the licence to tap neera, for the purpose of producing jaggery from it. We plan to

add 15 more traditional tappers into the fold,” S. Selvaraj, a farmer and chairman of Udumalpet Coconut Farmers Producers Company, told *The Hindu* .

The company has started dispatching the jaggery produced by the traditional neera tappers to the Kochi-based firm in batches to be exported to west Asian countries.

Presently handling orders to the tune of three tonnes a month, the volume was expected to go up when the demand picks up, said the farmers who were part of the initiative.

As part of diversification plans, the Coconut Producers’ Company plans to find export avenues to market organic coconut oil extracted from ‘organic copra’ using traditional methods.

### **Organic**

“We have not added any chemicals or sulphur in the production process. The company has brought out the organic coconut on a pilot basis for domestic market in 250 ml, 500 ml and 1 litre bottles and given the common brand name of ‘snehalaya’, which is the name given for the range of agri products to be marketed by the member farmers,” said Mr. Selvaraj.

*10 traditional tappers, who have the licence to tap neera, have been grouped together to produce jaggery from it*

### **Govt. to intervene in market to check price**



P Thilothaman

Food and Civil Supplies Minister P. Thilothaman has said that the government will intervene in the market to control price rise.

Addressing mediapersons at a ‘meet-the-minister’ programme organised by the Alappuzha Press Club here on Monday, the Minister said efforts would be taken to avoid middlemen in the procurement of various items by the Civil Supplies Department.

He said the government wanted to bring down prices by adopting appropriate measures. The Food and Civil Supplies Department network included 904 Maveli stores, 380 Labham markets, 23 People’s bazaars, four hypermarkets, and one Apna bazaar.

Reforms to control prices will be put in place with the help of these outlets. The government will spend Rs.150 crore for measures to bring down prices.

District Supply Officers have been asked to give reports on the recent price hike in the case of certain vegetables such as tomatoes.

### **Organic farming**

He pointed out that organic farming of vegetables was being promoted at various levels, but farmers were complaining of the prevailing pricing system which was non-remunerative. The Minister said the State government’s share of the paddy procurement price would be distributed soon. On ration card distribution, he said wrong entries in the card data would be corrected before distribution.

### **Milk Day observance**

Purushan Kadalundi, MLA, will inaugurate the district-level observance of the World Milk Day at Balussery on June 1. A mobile quality control unit vehicle and a dairy farmer centre too will be inaugurated.

### **Demand to repeal Tobacco Board Act**

Anti-tobacco Forum convener Vasanthkumar Mysoremath has demanded that the Tobacco Board Act be repealed and the Tobacco Board disbanded since he claims that its vision, mission and charter of demands are “contradictory” to the FCTC protocol.

“With an increase in anti-tobacco and health awareness activities for implementation of the FCTC protocol, tobacco farmers are confused and many who are dependent on tobacco farming are expressing their concern and anxiety about their future.... They and their associations are demanding government intervention for hand-holding of gullible farmers,” he said. There is a need for creating a corpus for rehabilitating the farmers and other workers engaged in tobacco cultivation, he suggested.

### **Anti-tobacco activists question India’s commitment towards FCTC protocol**



Future tense: There is a demand to rehabilitate tobacco growers who wish to switch over to alternative crops.— PHOTO: M.A. Sriram

The Union government’s rule mandating 85 per cent of packaging space on tobacco packets for pictorial warnings comes into force from Tuesday, which is observed as World No Tobacco Day.

The respective States have been asked to initiate action, including withdrawing products that flout the rule, from the market. The question that anti-tobacco activists here are asking is whether India is serious about fulfilling its obligations under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) protocol.

Anti-tobacco Forum (ATF) has claimed that India seems to be adopting a “please all” policy and argued that the tobacco industry should not be granted “incentives” to establish or run their business.



Vasanthkumar Mysoremath, convener of the forum, alleged that some contradictory actions by the government and its agencies have eventually helped the tobacco industry to grow with government subsidies. Citing an example, he maintained that the Tobacco Board provided subsidies to the tune of Rs.3.73 crore in 2012-13. Karnataka had 18,751 licensed tobacco growers with 25,207 barns in 2001-2002. The area permitted for cultivation was 29,852 hectares but actual cultivated area was 47,699 hectares. But in 2011-12, the number of tobacco farmers with licenses increased to 41,737 with 57,512 barns. The area permitted was 80,516 hectares but actual cultivated area was 1,18,989 hectares, Mr. Mysoremath claimed.

In addition, the Tobacco Board decided to renew lapsed licenses, allow procurement of excess grown quantity as also illegally cultivated tobacco for auction in its platforms built with public money, he said, adding that such contradictory actions may hit India's FCTC commitment.

Under FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines, there should not be any conflict of interest for the government and government officials. The government officials must not take active part in any activity organised by the tobacco industry or related institutions, he said. He also claimed that some elected representatives and their families have a say in tobacco-related policies of the government.

He also took objection to the tobacco industry proposing to partner with governments on civic issues that appear unrelated to tobacco control. He expressed fear that this may provide tobacco representatives with access to policy makers/government officials.

*We are sceptical about reduction in consumption of tobacco as 85 p.c. pictorial warning on packets is just another theme.*

*Vasanathkumar Mysoremath*

*Convener, Anti-tobacco Forum*

### **Farmers provided substandard seed potatoes?**

Farmers who purchased certified seed potatoes from the Horticulture Department have complained that the seeds are of substandard quality. Farmers in Jodigubbi, Belavadi and other villages in Arkalgud taluk and a few villages in



Hassan taluk have alleged that the seeds they bought 15-20 days ago have already started losing weight.

Raje Gowda, of Kurana Koplpu in Arkalgud taluk, said that he had purchased 17 quintals of certified seeds from the Horticulture Department.

“I brought the seeds home 15 days ago. Now, two bags of seed potatoes are rotten,” he said.

The Horticulture Department is providing certified seeds at Rs. 17.30 per kilo, besides offering a subsidy of Rs. 10 per kilo. The seeds are provided only for those who registered their names earlier by paying an advance of Rs. 10 per kilo of seed potatoes.

As many as 2,308 farmers had registered their names in advance. The department procured 1,910.9 tonnes of certified seeds from the National Seeds Corporation in Punjab. The seeds were sold to farmers through HOPCOMS.

### **Some stocks replaced**

With respect to some complaints of inferior quality certified seeds in Arkalgud taluk, the officers have replaced the stock with fresh seeds. However, all farmers who have faced this problem have not received this benefit.

A truckload of certified seeds meant to be distributed among farmers was found carrying inferior quality seeds in Hassan recently. Office-bearers of Raitha Sangha stopped the truck and staged a protest.

### **How many benefit from tobacco industry in India?**

The Tobacco Institute of India, in its recent report, said India, which is the second-largest producer of tobacco in the world, with an estimated annual production of 800 million kg, provides earnings to 45.7 million people in the country.

The report adds that the tobacco crop occupies a meagre 0.24 per cent of the country's total arable land area.

This number of 45.7 million is contradicted by data from the 2013-2014 report by the Annual Survey of Industries, which lists the number of persons involved in tobacco manufacturing in the country at approximately 0.5 million.

While tobacco industries argue that the new regulation will only increase the illegal sale of imported cigarettes, affecting the Indian industry, anti-tobacco activists beg to differ. “The new regulation will certainly not lead to an increase in the smuggling of cigarettes into the country because the rules hold good for imported products as well,” said Upendra Bhojani, Assistant Director, Institute of Public Health.

### **Vegetable prices fall**

The rise and fall in supplies have triggered big fluctuations in the price of vegetables, a trend that appears now to be tapering off with the onset of rains in some of the vegetable growing areas.

French beans, the price of which had begun to climb beyond Rs 60 a kg in the retail market in Ernakulam more than a month ago, continued to be pricey though the price came down by about Rs. 15 and Rs. 20 a kg between Sunday and Monday. A wholesale vegetable dealer in the city market said that French beans sold for Rs. 75 a kg on Monday, down from around Rs. 100. Similarly, the price of green chilly came down to Rs. 70 a kg in the retail market on Monday.

The vegetable dealer said that the day-to-day fluctuations had been witnessed for quite some time now and blamed the trend on a squeeze in supplies. The fall in arrivals in the Ernakulam market has been blamed on poor crop in areas like Ottanchatram and neighbouring areas from where vegetables are brought to Kerala.

The price of okra too cooled on Monday from the Sunday levels. The price of the vegetable came down to Rs. 40 a kg on Monday.

Figures from the Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council Keralam showed the marked rise in the price of some of the key items, including that of nendran banana.

## **Drought years may become more frequent in India, says study**

A research paper by scientists from Kerala and Pune paints a gloomy monsoon picture.



According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), if the rainfall during the four monsoon months of June to September is deficient by 10 per cent of its long-term average, it is declared a drought monsoon. While India is awaiting a good monsoon this year after two consecutive years of deficient rains, the country may have to brace for more frequent drought years in the future, say meteorologists from from Pune and Kerala who have assessed country-wide rainfall data for more than 150 years. According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), if the rainfall during the four monsoon months of June to September is deficient by 10 per cent of its long-term average, it is declared a drought monsoon.

# DROUGHT FACTS

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**INDIA SAW** most severe droughts in 1982, 1987, 2002 and 2009

**THE WORST** drought was in 1899, which saw famine due to scarcity of food, fodder and water

**DROUGHT OF** 1972 saw Indian government having to import 2 million metric tonnes of food grains

The latest findings suggest that while there have been alternate dry and wet spells over the past three decades, the frequency of drought years has been increasing. The period between 1950 and 89 had 10 drought years, followed by five more from 2000 onwards. The frequency is set to increase between 2020 and 2049, meteorologists say in a research paper to be published in *Current Science*, an Indian peer reviewed science journal published by Current Science Association along with the Indian Academy of Science.

Meteorologists also say there is a need for further study to address this issue since the South Asian region is set to face severe drought spells for the next three decades.

The constant cooling of the atmosphere over Central Asia has been cited as one of the main reasons for frequent drought years in the country that affect agriculture, power generation and the overall economy of the country.

According to the study, during 1870-1900s, there were very few droughts, followed by droughts once in three years during 1900-1930 and once in 15 years during 1930-1950. There were 10 drought years during 1950-1990.

Since 2000, there have been five drought years: 2002, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2015.

The frequency is expected to increase with rapid cooling of the atmosphere in Central Asia, says P V Joseph, senior meteorologist and lead scientist of the research paper. "... The frequency and severity of droughts during 2020-49 is likely to be higher," states the paper written by Joseph, who is group head at the Monsoon, Ocean Variability and Climate Change Studies at Nansen



Environmental Research Centre in Kerala along with G Bindu and B Preethi from Pune's Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM). While it is well known that green gases cause global warming, rapid cooling of the atmosphere points to the large discharge of sulphate aerosols from the industries as one of its causes.

“There is a need to study the occurrence of frequent drought years which occurred during 1950-90 and has started again from 2002 onwards and whether they point out to the frequent discharge of sulphate aerosols?” says Joseph.

# hindustantimes

**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.

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

**SEBI favours linking spot markets with e-NAM for fair price discovery**



The Securities and Exchange Board of India has sent a letter to the Farm Ministry asking it to consider online integration of those basis centres and additional delivery centres

Suggests online integration of spot platforms to curb ‘gambling’ in commodity futures

To bring in more efficiency and transparency in agriculture commodities futures, market regulator SEBI has asked the Agriculture Ministry to connect the physical markets – from which it obtains information on spot prices to derive futures prices – to the online trading platform ‘e-National Agriculture Market’ (e-NAM).

## **Transparent spot prices**

“Having credible spot prices is crucial for determination of futures prices and ensuring that the futures market is not reduced to just a gambling activity. Since the online trading platform for farm produce, e-NAM, will create a transparent process for obtaining spot prices, we are keen that the Ministry includes the physical wholesale markets from which we obtain spot price data in the list of mandis that are to be initially integrated,” a SEBI official told *BusinessLine*.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has already sent a letter to the Ministry asking it to consider online integration of those basis centres and additional delivery centres on the basis of which spot prices are being polled and futures contracts are being settled.

e-NAM was launched by the Prime Minister this April with the objective of integrating 585 wholesale markets through the online platform in the next two years for transparent determination of prices.

## **Discrepancies in prices**

The Agriculture Ministry has responded positively to SEBI’s request.

“We will shortly have a seminar that will be attended by officials from SEBI, Agriculture Ministry and the States that want to participate in e-NAM. All relevant issues can be discussed and thrashed out,” the official said.

“We have been receiving complaints on the discrepancies in spot and futures prices and that these are being manipulated. We are sure that the quality of spot prices will improve tremendously once trading happens on e-NAM and as a result futures prices would also improve,” the official said. The eight States in which the pilot e-NAM project has been launched include Gujarat, Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh.

The commodities that will initially be sold online include chana (black gram), castorseed, paddy, wheat, maize, turmeric, onion, mustard, mahua flower, tamarind and shelling pea.

## Spices Board sets up e-sale centre for cardamom



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

Spices Board has launched its second e-auction centre at Bodinayakanur, known as Cardamom city, to ensure remunerative prices to farmers.

Spices Board Chairman A Jayathilak said that the new auction centre, constructed on two acres at the Board's premises is equipped with all the modern facilities to assist the cardamom trade.

The Board, he said, 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.

The small cardamom production during 2015-16 was 22,000 tonnes registering the highest production in India.

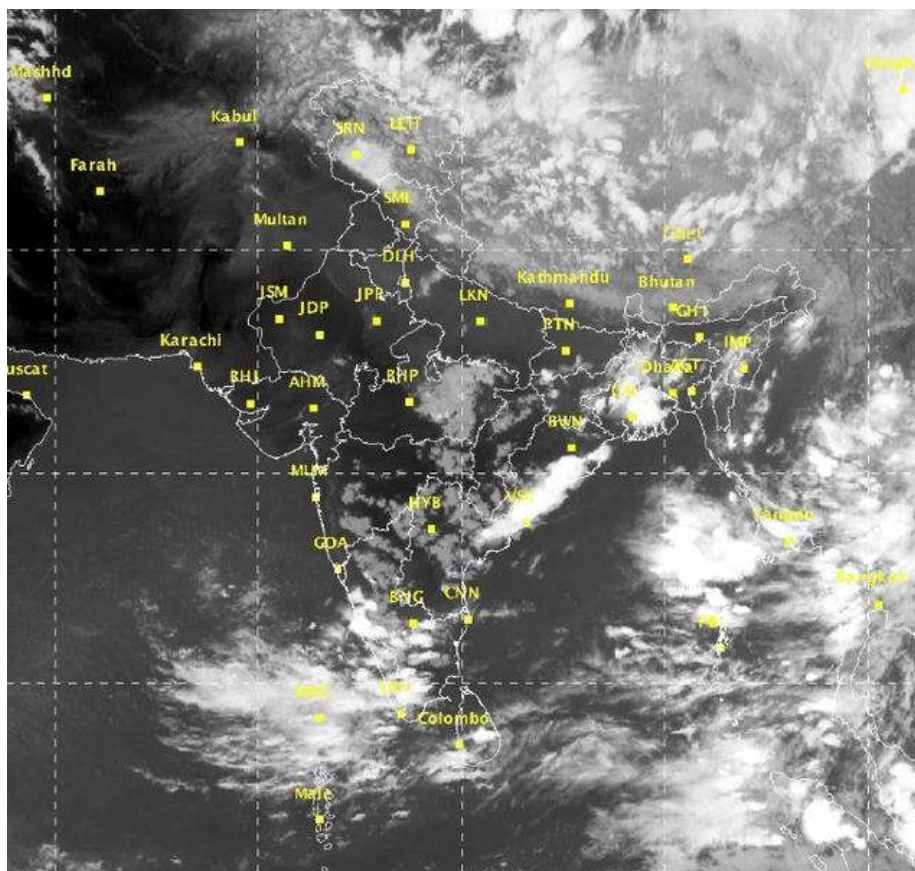
The country exported 5,500 tonnes of small cardamom valued at 450 crore during 2015-16. Development and marketing interventions of the Board has led



to the quantum increase in production and export of small cardamom, he pointed out.

The Board chairman hoped that recent initiatives such as 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.

### **Rainfall to increase along the West Coast from Saturday**



The India Met Department has indicated that rain or thunderstorms along the West Coast will increase in strength from Saturday (June 4).

Heavy rain has been forecast for isolated places over South Interior Karnataka and adjoining Coastal Karnataka from two days ahead (Thursday and Friday).

## **Cyclonic whirl**

The increase in rain/thunderstorms would likely be overseen by a cyclonic circulation that has been sitting over Lakshadweep and adjoining Kerala over the past two days and which persisted on Monday.

According to the US Centre for Climate Prediction, this circulation may descend to lower levels and convert itself to a low-pressure area ('low').

This conversion might materialise over the next four days and the projected 'low' move north along the coast towards Konkan-Mumbai and South Gujarat.

It is then forecast to emerge over land around the Amreli-Bhavnagar coast and wade into adjoining South Rajasthan where it would meet up with an incoming western disturbance.

This, according to the US agency forecasts, could bring scattered to widespread unseasonal showers for practically the whole of North-West India during the first week of June.

## **Unseasonal rain**

Meanwhile, heavy to very heavy rain will have been triggered along the stretch beginning from Coastal Karnataka, Goa, Konkan, Mumbai and South Gujarat as the 'low' tracks overhead.

Practically the whole of the country except Kerala and southern Tamil Nadu is forecast to receive normal to above normal rainfall for the week starting June 5 (Sunday). Goa, Konkan, Mumbai and South Gujarat may receive to very heavy rainfall during the period even as excess showers spread out into North Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

## **Monsoon onset**

The onset of the South-West monsoon over Kerala is likely to be declared during this phase since it correlates to India Met Department's timeline of the June 7 mean with a model error of four days.

An extended range forecast projected by the IMD's agro-met service bulletin had lately said that the onset is likely to happen between June 3 and June 9.

Meanwhile, thunderstorms are lining up all along over the plains of North-West India on Monday which has helped bring down the mercury level in the region significantly.

Thunderstorms accompanied by squall have been forecast over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, East Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Madhya Pradesh.

East India/North-East India too will receive rain or thundershowers on Tuesday.

### **McLeod posts 236-cr loss in Q4**

Subdued demand and inadequate price recovery saw the world's largest tea producer, McLeod Russel report a net loss of 236 crore, on a standalone basis, in the January-March quarter of FY16. Loss in the year-ago period was 208 crore.

“The impact of price rise of 2/kg was not sufficient to take care of increased costs,” a company release said. Average selling price in FY-16 stood at 173.97/kg ( 172.38).

The BM Khaitan group flagship, posted a 76 per cent drop in standalone net profit at 15 crore for the full fiscal (FY16). On a consolidated basis, including overseas operations, profits increased by 19 per cent to 37 crore.

The company's Ugandan operation is back in black this year. Rwandan operations showed improved performance, but loss on Vietnam operations widened. The Board has recommended a dividend of 2 or 60 per cent on a share of 5 face value.

According to the company, a favourable monsoon may help the tea industry to “recover” substantial part of crop losses suffered last year due to dry weather



conditions. The company stock closed at 184.55, up by 0.54 per cent, on the BSE, on Monday.

### **Steps taken to increase veterinary colleges: Radha Mohan Singh**

Facebook session focuses on animal husbandry, fisheries, ventures, schemes

The Centre has taken several steps to increase the manpower in veterinary profession, according to Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

When one of the Facebook users asked the minister to give focus on veterinary education in a 'Facebook Question and Answer' session on Monday, Singh said that to meet the shortage of trained veterinary manpower in the country, the Government has taken several initiatives such as to increase the number of recognised veterinary colleges from 36 to 46 and also to increase the number of annual veterinary graduates from 2,160 to 3,398.

The number of seats in 17 veterinary colleges has been increased from 914 to 1,334, he said.

To queries related to FMD (foot and mouth disease), he said that his department has initiated intensive FMD control programme. As a result of this, the incidence of disease has been tremendously reduced.

The facility for testing the FMD vaccine is available at Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bengaluru, he said.

### **Soil health card**

Asked if farmers are taking the benefit of soil health cards, the Minister said that 1.9 crore soil health cards have been distributed to farmers so far. Those farmers applying fertilisers as per recommendations in soil health cards are experiencing higher productivity and decreased input cost, he said.

## **Agri ventures**

On the questions related to starting enterprises in farming and fisheries sector, he directed them to take the benefit of ACABC (agri-clinics and agri-business centres) scheme to make their ideas a reality.

To a query on starting a fisheries venture, he said the scheme of DADF (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries) provides financial assistance for construction of ponds, fish hatcheries and one-time input for fish culture etc.

## **Marketing**

To a query on marketing, Singh said that the Central government has started National Agri Market (eNAM) to integrate mandis, to reduce middlemen and to increase farmers' share in consumer rupee.

“We are also working with the states to reform their APMC Acts so as to reduce the middlemen and promote direct marketing by farmers,” he said.

## **Fasal bima**

When a Facebook user pointed out that Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana is not being communicated properly to farmers, he said the Centre had recently organised Kisan Goshti at Krishi Vijnan Kendras throughout the country. The government is making all possible efforts to reach the benefit of the scheme to all farmers, he added.

## **Imported oils turn hotter**

Edible oils market witnessed an uptrend in imported oils, while indigenous oils ruled steady. With routine demand month end activities remained limited but trader's inquiry continued for forward delivery. Volume remained thin as reselling pressure continued. On the BCE groundnut oil and soya refined oil increase by 10 and 2 per 10 kg each. Liberty was quoting palmolein at 590 and super palmolein ex JNPT 600 for June, soyabean refined oil ex Shapur

640 for 1- 30 June. Ruchi was quoting palmolein ex Patalganga 590 for 1-20 June and Ex JNPT 584 for 31 May, soyabean refined oil 631 for 10 June and 635 for 11-30 June, sunflower refined oil 725 for 5-20 June. Allana traded ex Khopoli palmolein at 590 for 25 June and ex JNPT 587 for 25 June, soya refined oil 642 for 25 June, sunflower refi. oil at 740 for 1-2 5June.

At Rajkot, groundnut oil *Telia* tin was steady at 1,800 and loose (10 kg) at 1,160.

On The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates ( /10 kg): groundnut oil 1,190 (1,180), soya refined oil 630(628), sunflower exp. ref. 655 (655), sunflower ref. 730 (730), rapeseed ref. oil 845 (845), rapeseed expeller ref. 815 (815), cottonseed ref. oil 650 (650) and palmolein 578 (578).

### **Pepper continues to slip**

The spot pepper prices continued to slip on Monday on quality woes. On the terminal market 20 tonnes arrived mainly from the high ranges and the the plains of Pathanamthitta .

They were traded at prices ranging between 690 and 705 a kg . Karnataka was offering its produce at 700 in Cochin but there were no takers, they said. Spot prices fell by 200 a quintal to close at 61,800 (ungarbled) and 71,800 (garbled) a quintal. June, July and August contracts on the IPSTA remained unchanged at 71,000, 70,000 and 69,000 a quintal. Indian export prices were at around \$11,000 a tonne c&f for Europe and \$11,300 a tonne c&f for US.

# Business Standard

**At 7.5% projected GDP growth, India set to retain fastest growing economy tag**

India will likely hold its ranking as the world's fastest growing large economy in Q4, giving PM Narendra Modi more to celebrate after two years in office



India probably gathered momentum to hold its ranking as the world's fastest growing large economy in the quarter through March, giving Prime Minister Narendra Modi more to celebrate after completing two years in office last week.

Modi swept to power promising to revitalise Asia's third-largest economy and, despite a dearth of private investment and shrinking exports, his policies are having some success as cooling inflation and lower interest rates have boosted consumer demand.

A Reuters survey of economists expected data out on Tuesday will show India's gross domestic product grew 7.5% year-on-year between January and March, faster than the previous quarter's 7.3%.

"This 7.5 per cent growth, in a global slowdown environment, has a potential to pick up even more," Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said last week in general comments about the trends.

India's upbeat outlook contrasts with neighbouring China, where [growth](#) slipped to 6.7% in the first quarter - the slowest posted by the world's second largest economy in seven years.

Given the dim prospects for a boost from exports, Moody's Investors Service said a recovery in private investment would be needed if India's upturn was going to last.

"Combined with the fact that external demand is likely to remain lacklustre, a sustained improvement in domestic private investment would be required for the growth momentum to be sustained," the rating agency's analysts wrote in a note.

Meantime, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is widely expected to keep its policy interest rate on hold at a scheduled policy review on June 7 as it waits for banks to fully pass on the previous the benefits of earlier cuts to borrowers.

Consumers, particularly in urban areas, have been encouraged by the lower rates.

Sales of passenger cars and two-wheelers are growing at a double-digit pace. Sales of new residential units recovered in the last quarter, snapping a falling trend.

Personal loans that include loans for durable goods, housing and education are growing at a rate of 19% year-on-year, while credit card loans are growing at a 24% clip.

With good rains forecast this summer, the farm sector is set to get a fillip after two successive years of drought. That bodes well for depressed rural demand.

Impending increases in wages and pensions of government employees are also expected to underpin consumer spending.

## **CHALLENGES**

As part of his strategy to boost business and generate jobs, Modi has accelerated public spending on road construction, laying new power lines and upgrading the rail network.

He has also lifted caps on foreign investments in sectors such as insurance and defence manufacturing.

Still, an upturn in private capital investment remains elusive.

Festering bad loans have made banks wary of fresh lending, forcing cash-strapped firms to keep a lid on capital outlays and, in any case, many factories are still running well below capacity.

External uncertainties, meanwhile, are on the rise. Chances of US interest rates going up, Britain voting to leave the European Union, and China's economy worsening all pose risks for emerging markets like India.

The South Asian nation has benefited massively from cheap crude over the past two years as its oil import bill halved, inflation fell and public finances improved.

But, economists reckon oil's recent rally above \$50 a barrel could knock 20-30 basis points off the growth rate, while boosting the inflation rate by up to 60 basis points.

### **Ficci survey pegs FY17 growth at 7.7%**

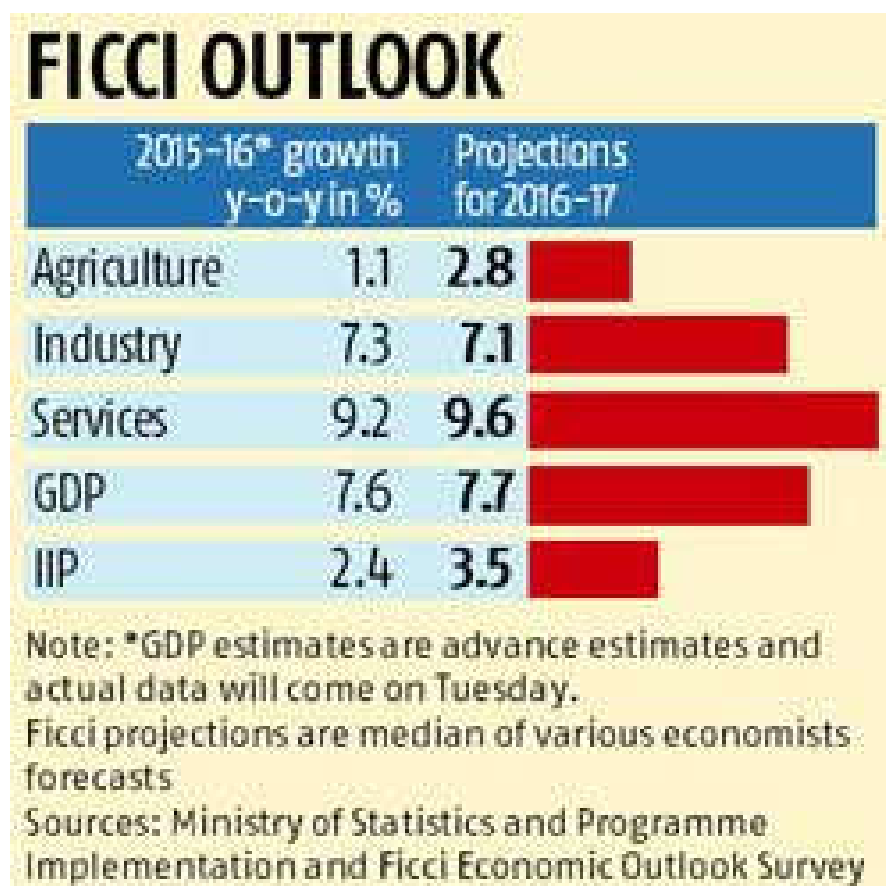
Survey says growth in 2016-17 is expected to be supported by improvement in agricultural and industrial sectors

Performance of the agriculture sector would help India post 7.7 per cent growth in 2016-17, said a survey by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci).

The findings were released on Monday, a day ahead of the government's scheduled release of the gross domestic product (GDP) data for 2015-16. Advance estimates had put GDP growth at 7.6 per cent for 2015-16. The survey estimated median GDP growth forecast of 7.7 per cent for 2016-17.



Agriculture was expected to record a median growth of 2.8 per cent in 2016-17, with a range of 1.6 per cent to 3.5 per cent against 1.1 per cent in the advance estimates of 2015-16. Industrial growth was anticipated to grow 7.1 per cent in 2016-17, slightly lower than 7.3 per cent given in advance estimates for 2015-16. The survey also projected services to grow 9.6 per cent, higher than the 9.2 per cent in advance estimates for 2015-16.



The survey was conducted during April among economists, who were asked to provide forecasts for key macro economic variables for 2016-17 and for January-March FY16 and April-June FY17. The median growth forecast for the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) was put at 3.5 per cent for 2016-17 against 2.4 per cent in the previous year.

The outlook on inflation remained moderate. The median forecast for Wholesale Price Index-based inflation for 2016-17 was 2.2 per cent, while it was at 5.1 per cent for Consumer Price Index-based rate of price rise.

Views of the economists were also sought on whether the government would be able to achieve the fiscal deficit target of 3.5 per cent of GDP in 2016-17.

A majority said the fiscal deficit target for 2016-17 seemed achievable. It was pointed out that some of the enabling factors would include expectation of a normal rainfall, improved buoyancy in domestic growth leading to higher revenue collection through direct and indirect tax collections and government continuing with subsidy rationalisation.

However, it was also pointed out that it would be important to realise the non-tax revenue target for achieving the targeted fiscal deficit to GDP ratio. Realising the targeted receipts from disinvestment and spectrum sales would be a critical factor.

The economy would have to achieve growth rate of 7-7.75 per cent this financial year (as projected in the Economic Survey) to be able to garner the requisite amount of revenue receipts.

An increase in global crude oil prices could change the projected trajectory of fiscal deficit this year.

On recovery of the banking system, majority of the economists said recovery would take time. It was unanimously that a turnaround in this financial year was unlikely.

### **Future of agriculture in India: Is the nation ready?**

We need much more than budget allocations and good rainfall to make agriculture sustainable. We need a broader vision and long term policy approaches, says Rajesh Aggarwal

The farmers' crisis arising out of two consecutive years of deficit monsoon has put a lot of focus on the state of Indian agriculture and its future readiness recently. The normally urban tinted media has also for once turned its attention to the problems afflicting India's agriculture sector, and distress of farmers who are disproportionately dependent for their livelihood on nature's benevolence.

The rising food prices over the past two years and the cascading effect on the entire economy of a slowing agriculture sector has shown us evidently that India

cannot dream about a two digit growth rate unless the shackled rural economy is freed and its engine speeded up.



The Union Budget of 2016-17 appropriately took cognisance of the fact that the closely intertwined farm sector and rural economy need more than piecemeal benefits to sustain the large population dependent on this sector. The prediction of a healthy monsoon from the weatherman has also brought much relief. However, we need much more than budget allocations and good rainfall to make agriculture sustainable in the long run. We need a broader vision and long term policy approaches.

This brings us to the crucial question on what lies ahead for the future of Indian agriculture and are we ready to make it a bright one?

### **Some facts and figures first**

Despite supporting almost 60 percent of India's total population, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP has been consistently declining. It currently stands at around 15 percent. A sector that provides work to more than half of the country's population contributing less than 1/5th to its GDP indicates a clear imbalance. While India grew by over 7 percent per cent last year, agriculture remained more or less stagnant. India's [foodgrain](#) production which

has consistently been abundant over the past several years is showing signs of plateauing, suggesting saturation.

These statistics point to the need for a major reshuffle in the rural economy. It clearly indicates that an unsustainably excessive part of the population is dependent on one sector and that we need to wean away labour out of agriculture to other sectors. The prevailing situation also calls for a need for major policy measures to boost the rural economy and create new infrastructure for the farm sector.

With a considerable budget allocation of Rs 35,984 crore, the government proposes to address several basic issues riling the rural sector including building new irrigation facilities, installing projects for ground water restoration, conservation of soil fertility and doubling farmers' income by 2022. But are these measures enough?

Given below are some of the important measures needed to make Indian agriculture future ready:

### **Diversification of rural economy**

As discussed above our rural economy is excessively dependent on agriculture for its livelihood. In fact more than 65 percent of the total rural population is engaged in agriculture. This results in under-employment, and low per capital returns. Unfortunately, diversification of the rural economy towards non-farm activities has been very slow due to low education and skill levels, especially among the rural women.

What we need is a dedicated policy push to create alternate avenues of employment and work in rural areas. This calls for major skill development programs in rural areas which can push a section of the population towards non-farm activities and reduce overcrowding of the agriculture sector.

Alternative income avenues to create jobs outside agriculture in rural areas include a policy push to help develop the retail sector, improve education, boost rural entrepreneurship, develop tourism, cottage and handicraft industries,

horticulture, fisheries and create better connectivity with urban centres and infrastructure to make business ideas viable.

### **Increasing produce per hectare**

With a population that is expected to continue to rise till 2050, India needs to keep up its food production. Unfortunately, the land area available to agriculture is not expected to increase. Despite increasing foodgrain production over the years, statistics show that per capital foodgrain availability in India has been declining. This brings us to the all important question of the need to increase productivity of agriculture and yields per hectare.

According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), India's crop yield per hectare remains much lower than the global average. With around 2.4 tonnes of rice produce per hectare, India ranks much lower than even other BRICS nations in terms of productivity.

Lack of availability of high-yield varieties, water shortage resulting in less than sufficient irrigation, absence of local R&D to improve yields and low per hectare usage of agrochemicals are among the reasons for India's low agro productivity. Addressing these factors is a major task at hand if we have to keep agriculture sustainable in the long run.

### **Greater penetration of crop protection measures**

Despite being the fourth largest producer of agrochemicals globally, after the US, Japan and China, the usage of agrochemicals in India stands is actually very low, in fact, the one of the lowest in the world at just 0.58 kg per hectare against 4.5 kg per hectare in the US and 10.8 kg per hectare in Japan. The world's average consumption is 3 kg per hectare. This shows there is a clearly large scope of growth in usage and demand. With limited availability of fertile land to cultivate food and feed an ever growing population, the only alternative we have is to increase productivity per hectare.

A study supported by industry body Assocham said that Indian farmers lose crop worth Rs 50,000 crore annually due to pest and disease infestation. The findings indicate a massive lack of awareness among farmers about crop



protection measures, that if adopted can save huge crop losses. We need to achieve greater penetration of usage of agrochemicals such as insecticides and pesticides to reduce crop losses and increase productivity per hectare.

### **Reducing dependence on monsoon**

Making the agriculture sector less dependent on rainfall by diversifying sources of irrigation has been an area long discussed by experts.

To combat the persisting problem of lack of irrigation facilities to make up for the unpredictable rainfall, the government has introduced the decision to increase the area under irrigation by 28.5 lakh hectares and set aside Rs 20,000 crore for a new irrigation fund.

Additionally, it has committed to Rs 6000 crore for recharging the groundwater, with special emphasis on drought hit areas.

Now, it is to be seen how these funds are utilised towards achieving the desired objective.

There have to be sustained efforts to improve groundwater levels through measures such as rainwater harvesting, discouraging deforestation, and developing artificial sources of irrigation.

### **Moving people out of agriculture**

Reducing the rural population's dependence on agriculture has to be a prime development target for the government over the next 20 years.

This does not mean giving any less importance to agriculture; rather it means reducing under-employment on the farm and building alternative jobs outside the farm sector to wean away excess people to other sectors.

This can be done by strategically encouraging establishment of industries near rural areas that can provide viable employment, improving education in rural areas, providing vocational and skill training to the rural population and creating

positive opportunities in nearby urban centres to encourage positive migration, as against distress migration.



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## **Organic farming: Dungarpur farmers to visit Sikkim**

With the government's move to promote tribal dominated Dungarpur as the first organic district in the state, selected farmers may soon take a trip to Sikkim, India's first organic state.

The government is likely to fund educational trip wherein farmers, observers and representatives would get an opportunity to interact with the Sikkim peasants and learn intricacies of organic farming.

A special plan has already been prepared for the mission 'Organic Dungarpur' and a budget of Rs 14 crore has been allocated for the purpose.

"To encourage the usage of organic manure, 1,000 vermicompost units would be set up in the district.

Agriculture department would extend 50% subsidy to farmers in setting up such units," informed Sharad Godha, nodal officer and additional director, agriculture, who was in Dungarpur on Friday to attend a meeting related to the mission.

The climatic and soil condition of Dungarpur is conducive to organic farming and in various phases. We aim to get rid of chemicals here completely, Godha said.

Farmers would be trained by experts through field demonstrations under the mission. 1 crore rupees would be spent on training, Godha added.

Further, the farmers covered under the mission would also be given mini kits including bio-fertilisers.

Efforts would also be undertaken to develop a market so that the farmers would make profits by selling their organic produce, Godha said.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

**Farmers may get soil testing machines to conduct soil fertility tests on their own**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched a project to hand out soil health cards to farmers in February last year. These cards carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients.

NEW DELHI: Concerned about the deteriorating quality of soil, the government is considering arming farmers with compact and handheld devices to enable them to conduct soil fertility tests on their own. The Prime Minister's Office has asked the Niti Aayog to oversee the plan.

"The device will help farmers not just assess the quality of soil but also suggest remedial measures to improve it in a very user friendly manner," a senior government official privy to the matter told ..

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched a project to hand out soil health cards to farmers in February last year. These cards carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients and fertilisers required for individual farms to help farmers improve productivity through judicious use of inputs.

But there is a growing realisation among policymakers that the process, targeted to be completed by 2017, may take longer as there are several logistical and other impediments. For instance, all soil samples need to be tested in labs which may not be located close to the places from the samples are collected.

The target is to test 2.5 crore soil samples, but just 28.7% of that is achieved until May 24. Only 1.8 crore, or about 13%, of the targeted 14 crore soil health cards are issued so far. Once the soil tests are done at the labs, experts have to analyse the results and suggest measures to deal with deficiencies, making the entire process tedious and time consuming. Moreover, the exercise will have to be repeated.

The government is keen to quicken the process. "With the handheld device, soil quality can be tested anytime and corrective steps can be taken immediately," the official added.

Depletion of soil nutrients in India is estimated to be 28 mt annually. While about 20 mt are added back, there is a net gap of 8 mt of nutrients created every year. This has prompted farmers to use more fertilisers, excessive use of which further creates imbalance in soil quality.

### **Despite efforts, no desired results in agri-economy: Nitin Gadkari**

Nearly 25-30 per cent of the rural population had unwillingly migrated to the cities because villages have no "no school, no college, and no proper roads," he said.

ANAND (GUJARAT): Lamenting that both politicians and bureaucrats are "far removed" from the rural problems, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari today said that despite provision of funds and efforts to boost the agriculture and rural economy, the "desired results" were still elusive.

He was addressing the students of Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) here during its 35th convocation.

"I have been living in Delhi for several years but the voice of villages does not reach Delhi," Gadkari said,

"Politicians and bureaucracy are far removed from the problems of rural India . And because of this, the amount of efforts that should be taken to resolve their problems is not happening.

"No primacy is given to connect rural areas with roads. We have purchased helicopters worth Rs 70,000 crore but our villages do not have water for drinking or irrigation," he said, in an apparent swipe at the UPA Government.

"Agriculture hardly generates 8 to 14 per cent of GDP," the Minister noted, adding "our Finance Minister has set aside Rs 9 lakh crore for agricultural crop finance and Rs 20,000 crore for interest subsidy in this year's budget .



And several states are even offering interest-free agricultural loans. But despite all this, we are not getting the results that we should be getting."

Nearly 25-30 per cent of the rural population had unwillingly migrated to the cities because villages have no "no school, no college, and no proper roads," he said.

"If we only connect 6.5 lakh villages in the country with roads, it will contribute Rs 1,40,000 crore to the economy," the senior cabinet minister asserted.

"Because then kids will start going to schools, farmers can carry their agricultural products to urban centres and agro-processing industry will grow," he said.

"Lack of vision for appropriate development of rural areas is our most vital problem," Gadkari said.

In a lighter vein, Gadkari also asked students to stay away from government officials and government for development.

"It is better to stay away from government officials and government for development. It is not appropriate for me to say so being a minister myself, but then, better stay away from them," he said, adding that students should take their entrepreneurial efforts to the social sector.

Talking about his ministry, Gadkari said the work on creating a "jal marg" (waterway) between Varanasi and Haldia had started and so had the work to construct 40 ports on this route. It would bring about a huge industrial revolution in the areas along the route, he said.

The Government had pledged Rs 12 lakh crore for Sagarmala project (port modernisation and coastal development), he noted. "Rs 4 lakh crore infrastructure development work for Sagarmala and Rs 8 lakh crore for port development project have been planned, and we will achieve that as we do not have shortage of money or technology," he said.

### **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."