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**BusinessLine**

**Govt to release new arhar variety in January to boost output**



Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian, and Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, inspecting one of many new varieties of Arhar pulse being grown at the Pusa Institute in New Delhi on Monday. This variety is an early maturing plant that can be harvested in a short span of 120 days. - Photo: KAMAL NARANG

**NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 31:**

The Central government today said it will release early maturing arhar dal variety in January for commercial cultivation that will help achieve self-sufficiency in pulses over the next three years.

Pulses production in India is lower than the demand of 23-24 million tonnes (mt). The output had fallen in the last two years due to the drought which sent the prices through the roof, forcing the government to take several measures to check inflation in pulses.

“We will put this new arhar variety (Pusa 16) for commercial use soon. Once we put for commercial use, certainly it will have great impact,” Finance Minister Arun Jaitley told reporters after visiting the experimental plot of new arhar variety in the IARI complex here. He hoped that the new arhar variety will bring benefit to the whole country.

Stating that there has been special concern about pulses in the government in last two years, Jaitley said: “The reason being that it is the main protein in our diet. We are not only the largest producer but also the biggest consumer and importer. So, there is shortage here.”

He said the Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian has been suggesting that the government incentivise pulses cultivation by higher MSP and bonus.

“Even Agriculture Ministry was pressing for this. We see the result of this and we have seen increase in production. It is evident this year as well,” Jaitley said.

On Pusa 16, Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh said, “this new variety will be released for commercial cultivation in January and will be available for sowing in the kharif 2017 season. This will help make the country self-sufficient in next three years.”

The new variety gets matured in four months instead of 6-9 months in case of existing pulses variety. It is a semi-dwarf variety suitable for combine harvesting. Its yield levels are in the range of 15-20 quintals per hectare, which is same as the existing varieties.

The country’s pulses output is estimated to increase to 20 mt in 2016-17 crop year (July-June) on account of good monsoon after two drought years. But the production is still lower than domestic demand of 23-24 mt.

Pulses production fell to 16.47 mt in 2015-16 crop year from 17.15 mt in the previous year.

## **Maharashtra offers best environment for agri-business: NITI Aayog index**

### **New Delhi, October 31:**

Maharashtra tops in implementing agricultural reforms and offers the best environment for doing agri business, according to an assessment carried out by NITI Aayog.

Maharashtra scored 81.7 on the index partly due to its decision to exclude fruits and vegetables from the APMC Act.

Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are in the next three positions in the 'Agricultural Marketing and Farm-Friendly Reforms Index' launched by the Aayog on Monday. The Centre is trying to encourage States to carry out reforms in the three broad areas of agricultural market, land lease and reforms related to forestry on private land-felling and transit of trees.

"It is very clear that if we want our agriculture sector to experience robust growth and farmers to double their income over the next few years, reforms are a must," said Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog.

However, almost two-thirds of the States could not even reach the halfway mark in the index. Major States such as Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Jammu & Kashmir are in this group. Delhi, with a poor score of 7.3, is second last in the list, just above Puducherry.

### **Criteria for ranking**

The index is based on implementation of seven provisions under the model Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act, joining the online marketing platform eNAM, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and levels of taxes in mandis.

"We are in consultations with States that have not performed well to find out what are the constraints that they face and why are they reluctant in carrying out reforms," Chand said.

The index is aimed at helping the States identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffer from low growth, low farm income and agrarian distress.

"These indicators reveal ease of doing agribusiness as well as opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade and commerce and have wider option for sale," Chand added.

NITI Aayog has asked States to bring about changes in its APMC Act based on a model legislation to make it more flexible and allow a national agriculture market to emerge that would give farmers the freedom to sell their produce wherever they want.

While the Centre is talking about bringing in reforms in the APMC Act, there are some States that are yet to adopt the Act or have revoked it. These include Bihar, Kerala, Manipur, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Andaman & Nicobar. They are not included in the ranking.

### **Maharashtra govt sets up panel on climate resilient farming**

The Maharashtra government has decided to set up a committee under the chairmanship of a top bureaucrat for the implementation of a ₹4,000-crore project on climate resilient agriculture.

The programme aims to reduce farmers' dependence on unpredictable weather cycles and enhance resilience of agriculture to climate change and vulnerability through research and use of technology.

The seven-member panel, headed by the Principal Secretary (Agriculture), has been set up with a target of selecting 4,000 drought-prone villages for the implementation of the project, according to a Government Resolution (GR) issued two days ago.

The committee would select 3,000 villages from eight districts of Marathwada region, while the remaining 1,000 will be chosen from six districts of Vidarbha, it said.

The panel has been asked to select indicators related to weather, agriculture and social status of the villages from Marathwada and Vidarbha based on which they would be ranked.

Agriculture Department told PTI.

“A climate resilient cropping pattern could be useful to minimise loss of crops. Unless there is a scientific approach to climatic variations, farmers can not sustain themselves,” the officer said.

The Vice-Chancellors of Vasant Rao Naik Marathwada Agriculture College, Parbhani, and Akola-based Panjabrao Deshmukh Agriculture University, State Agriculture Commissioner and Director General of Groundwater Surveys will be among members of the committee.

Director of the Project on Climate Resilient Agriculture would be the Member-Secretary, while Randhir Savarkar, MLA from Akola (East) would be the only non-administration member of the panel, the GR added.

## **Maharashtra moving to investment-based farming: CM**

### **Mumbai, October 30:**

The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis, is completing two years in office on Monday (October 31). These 24 months have been marked by cruel drought, promises of mega investments and intermittent fights with ally Shiv Sena.

In an interview with *BusinessLine* at his official residence, Fadnavis said that the State government had sometimes faced with some insurmountable difficulties but every difficulty has been turned around into an opportunity. Excerpts:

### **Which was the biggest challenge faced by your government in the last two years?**

In the last two years, drought and water scarcity was a huge challenge but the government managed to convert that into an opportunity for development. The Jalyukta Shivar programme of saving rain water by deepening and widening of streams, construction of cement and earthen stop dams and digging of farm ponds were implemented as a social movement, which resulted in 4,600 villages being made drought-free. By 2020, about 20,000 villages would be made drought-free. The programme also resulted in the increase in ground water table, which greatly supported the farmers.

“The Marathwada and Vidarbha regions have been at the receiving end of climatic variations. Erratic showers and heavy spells have damaged crops very often in the last few years,” a senior officer of

### **What are the other support mechanisms being offered to the farmers in the State?**

The crop insurance cover for farmers has been enhanced in a big way. In the last 15 years, farmers have received insurance payments of Rs. 4,700 crore but this year alone, they have received Rs. 4,200 crore. Today, in Marathwada, about 78 per cent of the farmers have been insured and across the state, insurance cover has only gone up for the farmers.

From 12 farmers availing themselves of crop insurance, it has increased to 90 lakh.

From relief and rehabilitation mode of helping farmers, the State government is moving to investment-based farming with a hike in expenditure on drip irrigation and agriculture pumps.

It would further enhance it by bringing newer technology such as sensors in the fields and real-time weather update.

*But what about post-harvest processing in the State?*

Today, the farmers are not getting the advantage because their products such as cotton are not processed within the State. For cotton, the government is developing an integrated value chain, which takes the cotton from the farm to convert it into fashionable garments within the state.

At Amravati in the Vidarbha region, an integrated textile park has been set up and it has received good response from the industry. Everything from raw cotton to final fabric is made at the park. In six months, we will climb the last leg of the value chain by using the fabric for making fashionable clothes. Similarly, we are also planning to set up processing industry for soyabean.

We are also delinking farmers from the Agriculture Produce Market Committee so that the farmers can get better rates for their produce. It has resulted in forming of farmer companies, which are giving a better rate to the farmers and cheaper prices to the consumers.

### **What is the status of various large ticket investments in Maharashtra?**

In February, the Maharashtra government along with the Centre had held Make in India programme in Mumbai city. At the conclusion of the programme Rs. 8 lakh crore of MoUs were announced. Since the conclusion of the programme Rs. 1.5 lakh crore of investments have been made in Maharashtra.

Other big investments such as Foxconn are already in the pipeline. Foxconn had faced some problems with the Centre but those issues have been sorted out. For the semiconductors project of the Vedanta group, the land parcel has been finalised. Now, the company has to get its project approved by the Centre.

### **What is the status of the various large infrastructure projects planned for Mumbai and other cities of Maharashtra?**

The Mumbai's suburban railway network, which as been developed over the period of time, has a carrying capacity of 70 lakh passengers per day but on the other hand, the metro network, which has been approved by the State government, has a capacity of 80 lakh passengers.

In the last one-and-a-half years, work on over 100 route kilometres of metro lines has commenced. In the next five years, all metro networks would be operational with last

mile connectivity provided by monorail and feeder bus system. In the next six months, all these systems would be integrated into a single ticket system.

The trans-harbour link project, which had run into multiple troubles, is also being revived. The process of RPF and RFQ has also been completed and soon the main contractor for the project would be decided.

The Nagpur-Mumbai super expressway is also being planned, which can help develop Maharashtra by leaps and bounds. It is a Rs. 34,000 crore project, which is not facing any financial constraints. It will integrate 24 districts of the State.

The Petroleum Ministry has promised to lay four major petroleum product pipelines, including LNG, below this expressway. It will open up a huge area of the State for development. The presence of LNG pipelines will attract a number of industries along the super expressway. The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation, which would be building the super expressway, has already securitised its assets of Rs. 50,000 crore for the project. Such financial engineering decisions would help raise large loans for the project.

**The previous government was accused of massive corruption in the irrigation sector, which had resulted in inordinate delays in project execution. Therefore, what is being done to revive the projects?**

Every project is being evaluated by two technical advisory committees. The committees are helping decide on the essential and non-essential aspects of the projects.

Nabard would be providing Rs. 13,000 crore loan and another Rs. 9,000 crore worth proposals have been sent to the Centre for approval. It will help us revive the stalled projects in the State.

## **Import of seeds will be controlled: Agriculture Minister**

THRISSUR: “The government will initiate measures to control the import of seeds from foreign countries. We will make use of the assistance of the Seed Authority of India to this end,” said Agriculture Minister V S Sunil Kumar while speaking at the polyhouse farmers’ state meet, here, on Sunday.

“The farmers cannot import seeds as per their will. The use of imported seeds will affect the ecosystem and bio diversity in the state. So such practices have to be strictly controlled,” he said.



The minister also said the government would take many steps to help polyhouse farmers. “The government will look into the possibilities of providing `3 lakh as interest less loan to the farmers. The government will hold a discussion with cooperative banks to materialise the loan project,” he said.

“This government has sanctioned `85 lakh to the farmers for the maintenance of the poly houses. But, the amount has not been distributed yet due to some technical reasons. The issues will be resolved soon,” he added.

In response to farmers’ complaint regarding the lack of markets to sell the produce from the polyhouse, the minister said the government was going to start 200 eco shops and would provide facilities to sell the polyhouse produce through these eco shops.



## Rains act as best Deepavali gift for farmers



THANJAVUR: When the monsoon rains arrived in the Cauvery delta districts of Tiruvarur and Thanjavur in the wee hours of Sunday, it was a grand finish to the Deepavali festivities. There could not have been a better gift for the farmers cultivating samba paddy.

“Samba paddy cultivated under direct sowing method about 45 days ago had started to wilt. The rains have given us hope,” said R Sukumaran, a farmer of Kakkarai village in Orathanadu. He said that the transplanted crops that are 10-15 days old would benefit. “The dipping ground water level has been making farmers dependent on borewells,” he added.

Apart from the new delta area fed by the Grand Anaicut, widespread rain was reported from the old delta area, irrigated by Cauvery and Vennar systems. “Kabisthalam, Kadichampadi, Eragaram areas near Papanasam saw rains and the farmers can now transplant from the nurseries with crops that are 40 to 45 days old,” said S Vimalnathan of Swamimalai, the district secretary of Cauvery Farmers Protection Association. He said that though the nurseries should have been transplanted in 17 to 20 days, it was postponed due to lack of water .

Widespread moderate rains were reported from Tiruvarur. P S Masilamani, a farmer of Mangudi and district secretary of Tamil Nadu Farmers Association, said that the rains would be beneficial for the directly sown crops.

In Thanjavur district, around 1.75 lakh acres were covered with samba paddy. Of this, around 65,000 acres was covered under direct sowing, officials said. In Tiruvarur district, samba paddy is cultivated in around 2.6 lakh acres – 2.26 lakh acres under direct sowing and remaining by transplantation method, the officials said

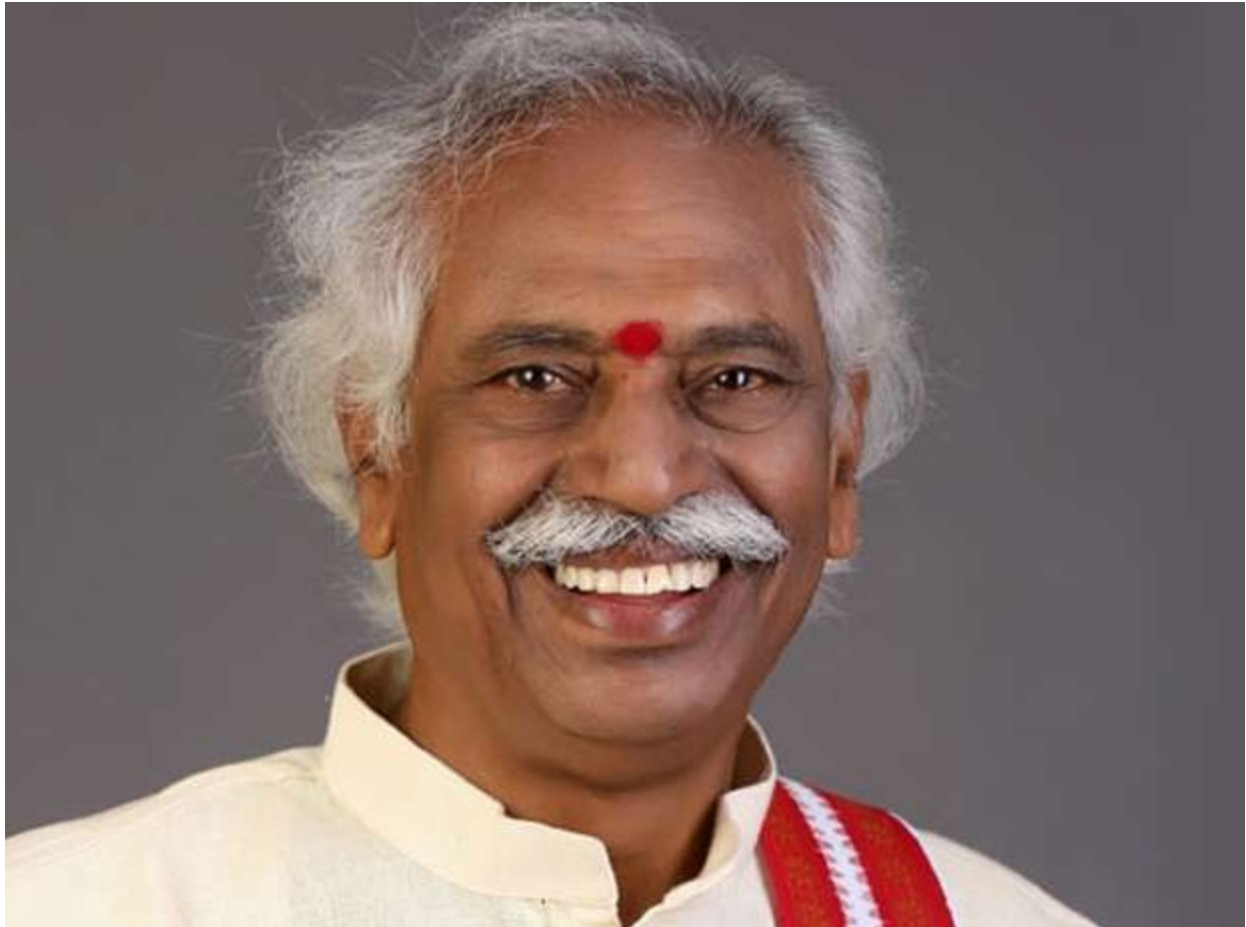
During the 24 hours that ended at 8.30 am on Sunday, Tiruvaiyaru in Thanjavur district experienced the highest rainfall of 70 mm.

In Nagapattinam, sporadic rainfall was witnessed in Vedaranyam, Anaikaranchathiram, Vaaimedu, Thagatoor and Maruthoor. Similarly, villages around Mayiladuthurai and Kuthalam witnessed intermittent showers not lasting more than a few minutes.

Meanwhile, the discharge from Mettur dam had been reduced from 5,000 cusecs to 4,000 cusecs from Sunday due to widespread rains in the Cauvery delta districts.

## Business Standard

**Govt to fix minimum wage rate; farm worker to get Rs 350 a day**



Labour Ministry has decided to fix the minimum wage at Rs 350 per day for unskilled agricultural labour in C-class towns in central sphere to be effective from November 1, 2016. At present, agriculture workers in the central sphere are paid as per the rates prescribed under the national floor level minimum wage, which is Rs 160 per day.

“The ministry will notify minimum wages on November 1 to enhance minimum wages,” Labour Minister Bandaru Dattatreya told reporters here. As of now the national floor level minimum wage is Rs 160 (per day), he added. On benchmark minimum wage across the country, he said, “We are going to get amendment in Minimum Wages Act, which will be called universal minimum wage. Once it is amended then it will become satutory..then all the state governments would have to apply the same standards (of wages).” At present, the states are free to fix wages for various category of workers as there is no benchmark minimum wage which is applicable across the country.

After the amendment, the states will have to maintain a benchmark minimum wage fixed by the Centre.

The minister said, “The tripartite meeting on ‘Code on Wages’ is over. Now it is going for the Cabinet approval. After that it will be come in Parliament in next session.”

On labour reforms, he said that these two key codes on wages and industrial relations will come in Parliament in the coming winter session.

“The tripartite consultations on Code on Industrial Relations are over and it will go for Cabinet approval. It will be introduced in Parliament in Winter Session.” The ministerial panel on labour chaired by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has set up a committee of secretaries to come up with a report on social security for anganwadi workers, ashra workers and mid-day meal workers following which the government will finalise its social security cover for them, Dattatreya added.

### **Sowing the right seeds**

At a time when small farmers across India are quitting agriculture in favour of more lucrative professions - even as the world worries about food security and long-term effects of chemical-dependent crops - a quiet movement is working its way up from the grassroots. Vividhara, a Delhi-based group of urban gardeners, has been slowly sensitising people about the pleasure of growing one's own organic food, even as it markets the organic produce of small farmers across the country. Vividhara promotes native (desi) seeds collected by small-scale organic farmers mostly in Uttarakhand amongst ...



## Maharashtra occupies top slot in farmer friendly policies: NITI Aayog



Maharashtra has occupied the top position, followed by Gujarat and Rajasthan, in pursuing farmer friendly policies, according to the NITI Aayog's ease of doing agri business index.

The Aayog's 'Agriculture Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index' was based on initiatives taken by the states in implementing farm sector reforms.

"Maharashtra achieves first rank in implementation of various reforms. The state has implemented most of the marketing reforms and it offers best environment for doing agri business among all the states and UTs," an official statement said.

It further said almost two-third of the states including West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and J&K, have done poorly with regard to agri-sector reforms.

Some of the states and UTs like Bihar, Kerala and Manipur are not included in the ranking because they either did not adopt APMC or revoked it.

According to the states' score in the Index, Madhya Pradesh ranked fourth, followed by Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Goa and Chattisgarh.

The Index is aimed at helping the states to identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffer from low growth, low farm income and agrarian distress.

The areas identified for action by NITI Aayog with a view to double farm income include agriculture market reforms, land lease reform, and reforms related to forestry on private land.

"Detailed study of the reforms in various states and UTs show that reforms have remained patchy, partial, sporadic and implemented in very diluted form," the statement added.

The index is based on implementation of seven provisions proposed under the model APMC Act, joining eNam (National Agriculture Market) initiative, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and level of taxes in mandis.

These indicators, it said, reveal ease of doing agri business as well as opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade and commerce and having wider options for sale of their produce. They also represent competitiveness, efficiency, and transparency in agri markets.

Releasing the report, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya said reforms in 1991 did not focus on the agri sector.

"One effort was made in 2003 through the model APMC Act reform and some progress was made but not enough and that has led to gap between industry and services on one hand and agri on other hand," he added.