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THE HINDU

Haryana farmers seek early purchase of paddy

They fear losses caused by the arrival of early maturing varieties

Farmers in Haryana are still waiting for the government purchase of the new season's paddy to commence but the official buying date is yet to be announced. Farmers have urged the State government to start purchasing paddy from mid-September itself, against the usual date of October 1 for the kharif marketing season, because they fear losses caused by the arrival of early maturing varieties in a few markets of the state.

"Paddy arrival has already started in a few markets and, therefore, the government should start procuring paddy from September 20. Any delay, will only end in exploitation of farmers at the hands of traders," says the Bhartiya Kisan Union State unit said. Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

Harvesting of the kharif season crop, which is primarily grown in the Ambala, Yamunanagar, Karnal, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Panipat, Sonipat, Fatehabad and Sirsa districts of the state, starts by mid-September. "Early procurement of paddy is a necessity now...traditionally, purchase of paddy by the government in Haryana starts from October 1, but that no longer makes sense. These days, we have many varieties of paddy that mature in 80-90 days, when compared with the 120-140 days it used to take. It's therefore important for the government to start early procurement otherwise farmers would suffer problems," said Gurnam Singh, State President of the BKU. Mr. Singh said that while the government intends to start online trading of paddy through the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board (HSAMB), it's important that all modalities are completed before large stocks of paddy start arriving in the market.

"The government should ensure that farmers are allowed to sell their produce across districts. For this, it is important that processes for securing the Release Order are eased out," he added.

Notably, the Haryana government has planned to link 27 grain markets of the state from October 1 with the National Agriculture Market (e-nam), a unified pan-India electronic trading portal for agricultural produce.

Farmers in Kolar seek drought relief package

Number of farmers under the banner of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) staged a dharana in front of tahasildar's office in

Mulbagal on Friday. They were demanding a relief package to the farmers in the taluk as it was reeling under drought.

Ragi, jowar, toor, ground nut and other crops cultivated on thousands of acre land was spoiled due to scanty rains and the farmers suffered

huge loss, KRRS state vice president K. Narayana Gowda said.

The district and taluk level officers turned a blind eye to the woes of farming community, he alleged. The organisation demanded that the government should provide Rs. 25,000 per acre as the rain fed crops have failed. The outfit also demanded that government should supply seeds and fertilizers free of cost for sowing activities again.

The government should also waive the farm loans, it urged. The government should take proper steps to prevent the private financial institutions from seizing the tractors on failure to repay the loans, the protesters urged.

HPGCL reclaims farm land fertility near power plant

The Haryana Power Generation Corporation Limited (HPGCL) on Thursday said it has succeeded in reclaiming the fertility of a farm land in Sutana village, which the farmers alleged had gone barren due to water seepage from the Panipat Thermal Power Station situated nearby.

Joint efforts by HPGCL and Central Soil and Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI), Karnal since October, last year, have finally resulted in successful planting of paddy in 10.5 acre in Sutana village of Panipat district. The land was lying uncultivated since 2009, a spokesperson of HPGCL said here.

Civil suit

In 2008, farmers of the village had filed a civil suit before the Punjab and Haryana High Court against HPGCL alleging that their 10.5 acre land near Thermal Power Station, Panipat had become barren due to seepage of water from it.

Since the High Court could not come to any conclusion about the cause of water seepage, the farmers filed a petition before the Committee on Petitions, Haryana Vidhan Sabha Secretariat, alleging that no crop could be grown by them due to the seepage of water, the spokesperson said.

Compensation

The farmers sought compensation for not being able to grow crops since 2009 and the HPGCL to acquire the land.

The committee decided that HPGCL would take the land on lease for two years and make it cultivable and pay lease money to the farmers since 2009 at simple interest, he said.

Willing to share

Conditioning of the soil was done and paddy was sowed on the land in June, he said, adding HPGCL is willing to share the experience it has gained from this experiment, with other thermal power stations of the country. - PTI

Araku coffee a big draw

Coffee is extensively grown in Brazil and it has an international repute. But I find this coffee, which is marketed by the Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC), very good and tasty", said Maria Quiteria Mendes, Mayor of Cardeal da Silva, Brazil.

She is one of the delegates attending the three-day third BRICS Urbanisation Forum, being held in the city.

Like Maria, the GCC Araku Coffee has become an instant hit with the delegates, who have come from Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa.

Diana from Brazil and Nonhlanhla from South Africa, not only liked the roasted product mixed with chicory, but also the green coffee beans.

What enthused the delegates more, was the fact that coffee is grown by the Aadivasi community in the forests and they made it a point to click a selfie with the sculpture depicting a tribal couple.

Many were seen transmitting the clicked selfies back home to their friends through WhatsApp and loading it as profile picture in Facebook.

The GCC stall not only exhibited packed coffee, but also served hot coffee, and showcased other tribal products such as soaps and other ayurvedic products.

According to a GCC representative, the stall served about 2,000 cups free on Wednesday and on Thursday they set a price of Rs. 10 per cup.

"Even today, we sold over 600 cups, and our coffee is being preferred over the one that is being served by the star hotel," said a GCC staff.

Farm fresh vegetables worth Rs. 1 cr. sold

The Department of Cooperatives, which is a nodal agency for the initiative, has achieved the feat within eight months of launching it.

: Sale of vegetables through Farm Fresh outlets in the city has crossed Rs.1 crore.

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Chief Minister Jayalalithaa launched seven farm fresh outlets through video conference on January 11 in a bid to make available fresh vegetables at cheaper than the market price when the prices of vegetables were ruling high. Ever since the outlets were started, customers visited these outlets in large numbers to buy vegetables.

Out of seven outlets, the outlets at Srirangam and Chinthamani received overwhelming support.

K.C. Ravichandran, Joint Registrar, Cooperatives, said that the sale had crossed Rs.1 crore on September 9. The outlets have so far sold 450 tonnes of vegetables. It showed that the customers had faith in the farm fresh outlets started by the government.

The city had nine outlets including 2 mobile outlets. All outlets were doing well. All were being operated on profit.

Of the nine outlets, the outlet in Srirangam was doing extremely well. Each outlet sold an average of 1 to 1.5 tonne of vegetables a day.

The bane of a bumper crop

Farmers in Maharashtra's onion belt are getting an unprecedented low price for their produce, though they retail at tear-inducing rates after leaving Asia's largest wholesale market for it, Lasalgaon. Alok Deshpande details their helplessness

Every day, around 3 p.m., hundreds of lorries loaded with onions queue up at the new agricultural market complex at Lasalgaon, around 45 km from Nashik, waiting for the afternoon auction to begin.

As a group of traders approach, the farmers drop their produce at their feet, as if to tempt them into bidding high. The traders halt and look over the merchandise. A market committee employee calls out the reserve price: "400!" Eyes roll, unspoken words seem to pass between the traders. Then the bidding starts: "1!" "11!" "13!" "17!" In less than 30 seconds, the auction is over. The farmer gets 17 rupees over the reserve price, Rs.417 per quintal (100 kg). A pittance at any given time, more so now when compared to prices last year.

A trader-controlled market

No matter how united the farmers are, no matter how hard they fight for a better price, they turn into mute spectators in front of the traders when auction begins. The auction is dictated by the traders with money and considerable political clout. Traders decide the price, farmers accept it without protest.

The market complex has a huge parking space for the lorries. Sometimes there are up to 1,000 vehicles at a time. The otherwise deserted place comes alive twice a day. The first auction of the day starts at around 10 a.m. and the second at 3 p.m. Depending on the number of vehicles, the auction can stretch from an hour to three hours.

Once the rate is fixed, the group of traders moves immediately to the next vehicle. The farmer, left with the price decided by the group, starts collecting the onions he has dropped on the ground. An official from the market committee approaches him with a receipt, bearing the auction rate, trader's name and farmer's name. With a receipt in hand and onions in the vehicle, the farmer then proceeds to the godown where the weighing process takes place. As per the rules laid down by the market committee, the farmer must get the payment before the end of the day, which is largely followed.

After the produce is dropped off at a shed in the complex, the traders take control of it. Workers start segregating the onions according to the quality and the packaging begins. Vehicles are loaded with the produce to be sent off to cities or to different States. Traders then get into a huddle to firm up the retail price of the produce — adding their profits — with nary a concern for the farmer and the price demanded by him. The operation is bloodless and smooth.

Barely breaking even

While onion is one of the major crops in this belt, farmers also cultivate grapes, soya bean, sugarcane, and ginger. Speaking out against the cartel of traders is not easy when the farmer is dependent largely on the onion crop, as it may result in traders ganging against him (or her) by dropping rates for his produce.

Official data from the Lasalgaon Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) says that this year's prices — between Rs.500-Rs.800/ql., down from Rs.970-Rs.3,786/ql. — are the lowest in the last five years. This year, Rs.1,020/ql. (in June) was the highest rate given to farmers, compared to Rs.6,326/ql. in 2015-16, and Rs.2,626 in 2014-15.

Growing onions costs between Rs.50,000 and Rs.80,000 per acre, and a cultivated acre yields not more than 100 ql. With this year's average selling price at Rs.728/ql., an acre's worth of onions would get the farmer around Rs.72,800. This sees some farmers barely break even; many lose money.

Small wonder that Milind Darade, who owns 13 acres of land, is furious. "This is the only industry where producers have no right to decide the price of their product," the onion farmer from Karanjgaon, Nashik district, says. "Isn't it cruel? Shouldn't we get angry?" The week before *The Hindu*caught up with him at the Saikheda sub-market committee, Darade was given a humiliating price for his produce: Rs.5/ql., or 5 paisa/kg. If that was not bad enough, Maharashtra's Minister for Co-operation, Subhash

Deshmukh, said on a live television show that his onions were rotten. “Let me give you some information,” he says indignantly, “this is the onion you eat at a restaurant. Just peel off two layers and you would wonder whether it was really rotten.”

Darade has preserved the official paper from the market committee with the offered rate; he has laminated it to ensure it doesn’t get dog-eared. He says that he was so angry that he refused to sell his onions and brought the load, some 10-11 ql., back to his farm to use as fertiliser. But, he says, “When I calmed down, it dawned upon me that I must use it to highlight the plight of onion farmers.”

Supply-demand mismatch

Simplistically put, there was a shortage last year, and this year has seen record onion cultivation. Abundant supply has brought the prices down. The farmers, though, are used to this kind of fluctuation. They don’t blame the bumper crop and supply-demand equation; they say it’s the traders who are conspiring against them and the government has done little — or the wrong things — to help.

To understand the current crisis for farmers, we need to step back a little.

India has three onion crops a year. Early kharif (the crop sowed in the monsoon) onions come to market between October and December. Onions from the rangda, or late kharif, crop arrive from January to March. The winter or rabi crop is up for sale from April to May. Usually, some parts of the rabi crop are stored for a few months to fill the gap from May to October. Traditionally, prices rise from July to October; official data show that wholesale rates rise by as much as Rs.1,000/ql., even Rs. 1,500, later reflected in the retail market with an increase of Rs.5-Rs.10/kg for consumers.

In 2014-15, the onions took a hit following a hailstorm in North Maharashtra which, in turn, affected their storage value. With many rotting, the onions that did make it to market commanded high prices.

Then the drought of the summer just past played a role too; many sugarcane farmers switched to the less thirsty onion this year. “The onion cultivation area in the State has almost doubled in year 2015-16,” says Nanasaheb Patil, Director, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED). “Farmers hoped that they will get last year’s rate — close to Rs.3,000-Rs.4,000/ql. — which did not happen, as production increased in huge proportions.”

India is the world’s second-largest onion producer (after China) with 26.79 per cent of the planet’s land under onion cultivation and 19.90 per cent of its production. Maharashtra is India’s largest producer, with a 32.45 per cent share of total onion production, and in turn, Nashik district in north Maharashtra accounts for with 41 per cent of the State's onion harvest. According to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), India produced 203.33 lakh metric tonnes (MT, 1,000 kg) of onions in 2015-16, up from 189.28 lakh MT in 2014-15. Lasalgaon, Asia's biggest onion market, received around 32,680 MT in the previous fiscal year. Five months into this year, it has received 10,874 MT.

To make matters worse for Maharashtra's farmers, other States — notably Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka — have reported higher onion yields.

Holding on for a better day

Aside from the production glut, another important factor was a 40-day strike by traders in July and August, opposing the State government's decision to free agricultural market committees from government regulations. With no outlet for their rabi onions, farmers had no option but to store them and wait for the strike to end. In addition, thanks to the low prices, some farmers are choosing to not bring their onions to the markets, and instead are storing them away hoping an artificial scarcity later in the year will pay off for them.

This strategy, however, comes with its own dangers: that of the crop rotting or the onions sprouting. Malti Bodke of Bhuse village points to her rotten onions with disgust. "How long can we store them? It's been almost four months. Once the onions start sprouting, they lose weight, and it becomes difficult to get a higher price."

The farmers also say that the traders are colluding to cheat them. "It's a cartel of traders which decides the rates and once the market reopened, they ensured prices didn't cross Rs.1,000/ql.," says Rajaram Fafale, from Maralgoi village.

The strike gets blame for the glut. But did trade actually stop? Officials and traders seem to want consumers to believe that, but farmers say it never really stopped. Darade says that opportunistic traders discreetly approached farmers and "quoted lowest possible rates. Farmers, thinking it was better to sell, even at a low price, rather than keep them and let them rot, did sell".

Three years ago, when the farmers were getting Rs.4,500-Rs.5,000/ql., retail onion prices reached Rs.90/kg., which resulted in protests from the then-opposition parties, as well as consumer organisations, in Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities, accusing the United Progressive Alliance government of failing to protect consumers.

The government's first step was to increase the Minimum Export Price (MEP) to $1,150/MT. This made it difficult for Indian exporters to compete in international markets; whatever stock was available was diverted to the domestic market, which brought prices down. By March 2014, when the late kharif crop got to market, prices had dropped to less than Rs.1,000/ql. in the wholesale market, and consumers got theirs at Rs.20-Rs.25/kg.

This may have played out well for consumers, but has had other consequences for the industry. “There is absolutely no consistency in our approach towards onion exports,” says NAFED’s Patil. A look at MEPs between December 2010 and December 2015 bears him out: the figure has fluctuated wildly, dropping to $0 in May 2012, and with a high of $1,150 in November 2013. “It only enrages our customers overseas,” says Patil. “They are left with absolutely no guarantee of quantity and price of onions exported from India. These customers have instead chosen Pakistan, China and Iran, and we have lost guaranteed markets.”

Patil says that the government’s decision to placate enraged urban customers has lost it both its farmers’ support and its overseas markets. The onion, he says, is no longer an agricultural commodity, it has become a political symbol.

An MSP for onions?

Assuming the government has to balance the needs of consumers with those of producers, what else could it have done to ensure that farmers get some return on their labour?

The National Horticulture Research & Development Foundation (NHRDF) keeps track of potential harvests by collecting information on each district. This year, despite being aware of the possibility of a bumper crop, the government appears to have failed to take any measures to protect farmers. The NHRDF’s estimates say the rabi onions should be selling at around Rs.818/ql., which is significantly higher than what farmers are managing to get. If the government chose to use its Price Stabilisation Fund, it could subsidise the crop, paying, say, Rs.500/ql.

What the State government has announced this week by way of relief — Rs.100 per quintal, up to a maximum of 200 quintals, or a maximum of Rs.20,000 — has, to put it mildly, failed to enthuse farmers. Every farmer *The Hindu* spoke to called the measure not just inadequate but practically a mockery of their plight.

Fafale, who sold 10 ql. at Lasalgaon for Rs. 220/ql., or Rs 2.2/kg., greeted the news with scorn. “Now I will get one rupee more. What a relief!” he says sarcastically. “We aren’t begging in front of the government. What we are asking is our right. How does this government conclude that this much of money is sufficient as financial aid? Who advises them? Have they bothered to check the ground reality?”

One of the major demands the farmers have is for the government to introduce a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for onions, as it has for sugarcane. “Why don’t the officers understand that we are not independent and traders enjoy a free run here?” says

Darade. “Unless an MSP is announced, we cannot be sure of a certain minimum profit. Why this neglect?”

Western Maharashtra, the State’s sugar belt, has seen, in recent times, sugarcane farmers agitating for an increased MSP. It became an electoral issue in 2014 when the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) suffered major defeats in the Assembly polls in the region considered a bastion for both.

The Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS; its name means ‘organisation for farmers’ self-respect’), led by Raju Shetti, which was in the thick of the agitation, is now part of the State government and Shetti is an MP. While the SSS has stage limited protests in the State’s onion belt demanding an MSP, it has not been able to take the protests to a wider audience. With the Bharatiya Janata Party-Shiv Sena regime, as with the previous Congress-NCP rule, the MSP for onions issue is far from being solved.

In the village of Bhuse, Ramdas Bodke, 65, is philosophical. “I have seen many seasons and farming has never been easy. We know how to tackle nature. What do we do with man-made problems? We farmers feed the world, but now we wonder whether we will have food cooked at home.” He lapses into silence for a minute, and then his tone turns bitter: “Did the government discuss its proposal to hike MLA salaries for even a day? The government takes an instant decision to increase the salary of MLAs, but it takes a long time to decide about farmers. This is injustice. But there is no one to give justice to farmers.”

As for the urban consumers and their agitations, farmers mince no words when the topic comes up for discussion. Turning towards me, one of them asks, “You get agitated when prices skyrocket, but have you ever wondered what happens when prices hit rock bottom? Why don’t you come out on the streets demanding a fair price for us?”

I have no answers.

“Go for new insurance scheme”

During the farmers’ grievance day meeting here on Friday, Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao urged all farmers to make use of the new crop insurance scheme, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema Yojana (PMFBY), which will be implemented in the district for all the crops from the upcoming ‘ *samba* ’ season.

Mr. Rao said that the new scheme would be comparatively more accurate in assessing the loss as sampling would be done at village-level instead of the *firka*- level, which will generally cover more than 10 villages, as used in the previous insurance scheme.

He said that all the farmers who avail crop loans would automatically be insured under the scheme while those who were not availing loans could approach the local Primary Agricultural Cooperative Credit Societies to insure their crop.

As per the scheme, a premium, generally in the range of 1.5 to 2 per cent of the sum assured has to be paid by the farmer while the remaining premium amount would be contributed by the Central and State governments.

The ‘scale of finance’ for every crop, which will be the sum insured, will be decided at district-level.

For instance, the sum insured for an acre of paddy in Madurai has been set at Rs.23,000 while the same for banana is Rs.47,000. S. Kanagaraj, Joint Director of Agriculture (Madurai), said that the scheme was advantageous in several aspects compared to the previous scheme as it not only covered loss in the yield but also prevented sowing.

“The claim amount will also be processed and disbursed by the insurance companies in a timebound manner unlike the previous scheme, in which farmers often complained about inordinate delays.”

An awareness session was conducted to the farmers on PMFBY on the occasion.

Osmansagar, Himayatsagar filled to brim only 7 times since 1981

Reservoirs were designed to be filled to the brim only once in three or four years.

Despite concerns of rapid urbanisation and real estate development in the vicinity of the Osmansagar and Himayatsagar reservoirs affecting the surface rainwater flow, experts say inflows also depend on the intensity and duration of the rain.

Nothing can stop water from flowing over its natural gradient to fill the reservoirs despite structures enroute, but what one should be more concerned about is the pollution of the reservoirs that could result with the violation of the G.O. 111, points out retired Engineer-in-Chief T. Hanumantha Rao.

Osmansagar and Himayatsagar were constructed for flood control after 1908 Musi floods submerged the then Hyderabad city and that is how their storage capacity was provided three times more than the expected yield of water in a year, he said. The expected yield to the reservoirs was only 1 tmcft each, he said.

The reservoirs were designed to be filled to the brim only once in three or four years. Never in the past, even in early decades, the reservoirs filled to their capacity every year.

According to the data given by the Hyderabad Metro Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Osmansagar and Himayatsagar reached their peak reservoir levels only seven times in the last 35 years: in 1981, 1983, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1998 and 2010.

Himayatsagar Reservoir alone reached its peak in 1982, 1991, 2001 while Osmansagar reservoir alone reached its full capacity in 1996 and 2000. In a conventional irrigation project, 0.7 tmc of stroage is provided for utilisation of 1 tmcft of water.

Because there will be outflows and it will be filled one-and-a-half times, Mr. Hanumantha Rao said.

The main reason for poor inflows into twin reservoirs of the city, he says is lack of intensity and distribution of rain as a consequence of global warming and climate change.

The run off occurs depending on the intensity of rainfall and absorption capacity of soil. There will be a good run off when 20 mm of rain occurs per hour.

In the urban areas, the run off water is ending up in storm water drains and the only way to prevent it is through rainwater harvesting in every house, open areas, play grounds by providing mini percolation tanks.

In the case of Himayatsagar and Osmansagar, the run off water first fills the chain of minor irrigation tanks and farm ponds in the catchment area and only after the last tank is filled, the run off water will form into a stream, he said.

But, due to urbanisation, construction of buildings on one hand and creation of farm ponds, mini percolation tanks in agriculture lands, watershed programmes and soil moisture factor, rainwater flowing into the streams will dwindle by about 20 per cent, he says.

Nothing can stop water from flowing over its natural gradient to fill the reservoirs despite structures enroute,T. Hanumantha Rao,Retired Engineer-in-Chief

Vamsadhara, Nagavali receive huge inflows

Vamsadhara and Nagavali rivers have received huge inflows, thanks to heavy rain in their catchment areas in Oidsha.

The rivers, which almost became dry one month ago, are brimming with water now.

According to irrigation officials, the Nagavali has received 40,000 cusecs of water, pushing up the level in the Narayanpur dam.

The Vamsadhara has received more than 50,000 cusecs of water as against 8,000 cusecs till August last week.

The huge inflow is expected to help the agriculture activity in many mandals.

The district administration has decided to release more water from the Gotta barrage for irrigation purpose.

Officials of the Agriculture and Revenue departments heaved a sigh of relief with the latest rainfall figures.

The overall rainfall in the district since the onset of rains in June this year has been put at 577.1 mm as against the normal of 614 mm.

The officials said that the rains would help the standing crops to a great extent in all the 38 mandals of the district.

The rivers, which became almost dry

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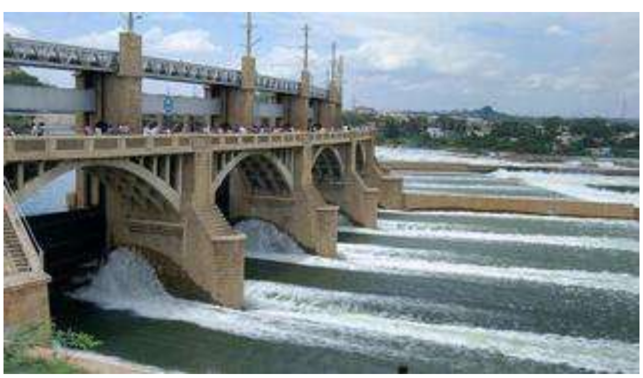
with water

Mettur water to be released from Tuesday: Jayalalithaa



CM expects a favourable order from the supervisory committee to aid release

RAISING HOPES:About 8.92 tmc feet of water from reservoirs in Karnataka has been received at Billigundlu in Tamil Nadu as of September 14, said Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. —FILE PHOTO

On a day Tamil Nadu witnessed a dawn-to-dusk shutdown of all trading and commercial activities and politicians, including Leader of Opposition M.K. Stalin, courted arrest over the Cauvery row, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announced that water would be released from the Mettur dam for irrigation on September 20.

“Taking into account the quantum of water Karnataka would release from its reservoirs as directed by the Supreme Court and anticipating a favourable order from the Cauvery Supervisory Committee and hoping that the Northeast monsoon would be normal, I have ordered the release of water from Mettur dam from September 20 for irrigation of samba crops,” Ms. Jayalalithaa said in a statement.

About 8.92 tmc feet of water from reservoirs in Karnataka has been received at Billigundlu in Tamil Nadu as of September 14, she said. The next meeting of the Cauvery Supervisory Committee has been scheduled on September 19.

The Supreme Court on September 5 directed the release of 15,000 cusecs of water from reservoirs in Karnataka on a plea by Tamil Nadu government. Later, on hearing a plea by the Karnataka government, the apex court directed the release of 12,000 cusecs of water every day between September 12 and 20 and held that the orders would be in place till September 20.

The apex court had also directed the Cauvery Supervisory Committee to issue orders for the release of water to Tamil Nadu based on the final verdict of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT), the Chief Minister added.

Ms. Jayalalithaa recalled the efforts of her government in the notification of the final verdict of the CWDT in the government gazette and observed, “However, since the Centre has not constituted the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Regulation Committee, even to get the share of Cauvery due to us, we had to approach the Supreme Court.”

The Chief Minister also chaired a review meeting in the Secretariat on Friday over the release of water for samba irrigation from Mettur scheduled on September 20. Chief Secretary P. Rama Mohana Rao and other senior officials attended the review meeting.

Farmers welcome opening of dam

Farmers associations have, by and large, welcomed Chief Minister Jayalalithaa’s announcement on the opening of Mettur Dam for irrigation on September 20.

Much would also depend on the northeast monsoon, farmers representatives observed.

“It is a right decision taken at the right time. Though there were demands to open the dam earlier, the government waited till receiving the quantum of water as ordered by the

Supreme Court," observed S. Ranganathan, general secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers Welfare Association.

"We expect the northeast monsoon to advance a little due to global warming and, if that happens, we will be safe and the samba crop can be managed well," Mr. Ranganathan said. He urged the government to ensure that the samba crop was entirely insured and the interest of farmers taken care of. He also advised farmers to go in for medium-term paddy varieties of 135 days duration rather than long-term varieties of 150 days duration.

Though it is a "calculated risk," this is the best that could be done under the given situation, observed Arupathi Kalyanam, general secretary of the Federation of Farmers' Associations of Delta Districts. "The delayed opening involves a risk for farmers and we need to get periodic and comfortable precipitation during the monsoon. Transplantation of samba crop should have been completed by end of September. However, farmers have no other go," he said.

He urged the government to evolve a crisis management plan to ensure strategic management of water for irrigation at the micro level in consultation with farmers representatives.

Pointing out that they had already suggested the opening of the dam around September 20, P.R. Pandian, convenor, Tamil Nadu All Farmers' Coordination Committee, however, said that the available water in the Mettur reservoir would not be adequate for the entire samba crop and the government should continue efforts to get Tamil Nadu's due share of water in the Cauvery river from Karnataka as per the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal.

Striking a discordant note, 'Cauvery' Dhanapalan, general secretary, Cauvery Farmers Protection Association, said that water should have been released at least by September 1. "We have to keep our fingers crossed now. Due to the delay, farmers face the risk of inundation at an early stage of the crop if there was heavy rain. The crop may not withstand flooding when young," he said. There are over 24,000 irrigation canals in the delta region and they have not been desilted and this could also compound the problem, he added.

Solution for crop damage by wild animals demanded

Claiming that damage to agricultural crops by animals like wild boars was prevalent in several parts of the district, farmers demanded a long-lasting solution for the issue during the farmers' grievance day meeting here on Friday.

V. Asokan, a State-level functionary of Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, said that States like Himachal Pradesh and Goa had declared certain animals as vermin under the Wildlife Protection Act with the help of Central government.

“Tamil Nadu should not waste any time in requesting the Centre in declaring wild boar as a vermin,” he said.

He added that classifying the animal as vermin would allow permission in culling the animal for a certain period of time to control their population.

C. Kumarasamy, a farmer, said that farmers like him were incurring heavy losses because of wild animals.

Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao asked the Forest Department to study the affected areas and look for measures to minimise the damage caused by the animals. A section of farmers also complained about alleged adulteration in manufacture of cattle feed, which is done by many small-scale companies.

K.O. Navaneethan, a farmer from a village near Vadipatti and a former employee of a dairy company, alleged that adulteration was mainly prevalent in manufacture of a feed commonly called as ‘’biscuit feed’.

“Companies adulterate the feed with urea, expired biscuits and a variety of other items,” he alleged.

Responding to the complaint, the Collector said that a team comprising senior officials from departments like Animal Husbandry and Aavin will test samples in companies operating in the district and take appropriate action if issues are found.

Other issues like removal of prosopsis juliflora (*seemai karuvelam*) and cleaning of water bodies were also stressed at the meeting.

Joint Director (Agriculture) S. Kanagaraj and among others participated.

Rain brings cheer to farmers but turns roads into slush pools

Light showers lashing Vijayapura district for the last three days have brought cheer among farmers. At the same time, they have created problems for commuters in the city.

Farmers who have taken up tur, sunflower and groundnut were anxiously waiting for a good spell of rain as standing crops were gradually losing moisture.

A delay in rain could have affected yield.

Farmers now believe that the drizzle will help the soil absorb more water.

While farmers are delighted, the showers have turned the city’s roads into slush pools.

The work on underground drainage system is going on in many parts of the city. Only a few days ago, trenches were dug for laying the pipeline but they are now filled with rainwater.

Road-side vendors, mainly vegetable sellers, are losing business as they are unable to do any business.

Meanwhile, City Corporation Commissioner Harsha Shetty has said that road-laying work would commence once the rain stopped and priority would be to fill potholes.

On and off' system to manage available water

The Tungabhadra Irrigation Consultative Committee (ICC), at its emergency meeting in Bengaluru on Friday, with Labour Minister Santosh Lad in the chair, decided to adopt an 'off and on' system to manage the available water in the dam to protect the standing crops in the command areas spread over Ballari, Koppal and Raichur districts.

The decision was necessitated owing to low storage in the Tungabhadra dam this year due to insufficient rainfall.

As per the decision, all the canals on the right bank and left bank of the reservoir would be closed for a period of 10 days at three intervals from Saturday.

For high-level and low-level canals on the right bank of the reservoir, catering to needs of Ballari district, the canals will be closed from September 17 to 26, from October 12 to 21 and from November 6 to 15.

The canals will be opened for 15 days from September 27 to October11; October 22 to November 5 and again for five days from November 16 to 21.

For the left bank main canal to irrigate in Koppal and Raichur districts, the closure period is for 10 days, from September 17 to 26; October 17 to 26.

It will be opened twice for 20 days from September 27 to October 16 and from October 27 to November 15.

Vegetable prices up

Prices of tomatoes and small onion have gone up in the city as movement of trucks between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu has been hit for the last few days.

M. Rajendran, president of Thyagi Kumaran Market Vegetable Merchants' Association, said wholesale price of tomatoes used to be Rs. 5 a kg. It has shot up to Rs. 20 a kg now.

This is because the main supply to Coimbatore is from Karnataka. In the case of small onion, the wholesale prices have gone up from Rs. 5 - Rs. 10 a kg to Rs. 20 a kg.

There is no supply of small onion from Karnataka and the merchants are buying only from Tamil Nadu farmers now, he said. In the case big onion, though the prices are low and supply is from Maharashtra, the lorries are not using the Karnataka route.

The vehicles are coming to Coimbatore via Andhra Pradesh and this has resulted in a slight increase in transportation cost.

The impact on prices and supply of vegetables could turn worse if the situation continued. Tamil Nadu is a major market for vegetable farmers in Karnataka and they will be affected, he said.

‘Form committee to monitor water resources’

Rajendra Singh, water conservationist, has stressed the need to form a high-level expert committee to monitor water resources in the State.

It is the need of the hour to preserve rainwater, increase the groundwater table and judiciously use the water, he told presspersons here on Thursday.

Mr. Singh, Magsaysay Award winner and leader of Tarun Bharat Sangh, was in the town to deliver a speech on the importance of preserving water, organised by ‘Vichara Vedike Karnataka’.

Speaking to the media, he stressed that the committee should comprise of officials from the departments such as mines and geology, forest, environment and irrigation.

Farmers and government agencies should initiate some rigorous measures, mainly changing crop patterns based on the quantity of rainfall in the catchments of rivers, for better management of water resources.

Long-term programmes should be initiated for the protection and optimum utilisation of water.

Time to protect these 400-year-old olive trees

Four centuries ago the Count of San Isidro planted nearly 2,000 olive trees from his native Spain in a sprawling grove on the edges of Lima, the capital of colonial Peru.

Perfectly suited to the arid climate, the olive trees thrived as the city grew around them. Their twisting, knobby trunks and shady leaves became the centrepiece of a park named for them ‘El Olivar’ that’s a magnet for exercise enthusiasts and children on school field trips.

What’s the issue?

After nearly a century of overwatering, many of the slow-growing trees are at risk of dying. Eleven have exposed roots and are in danger of falling, as one did in 2014. The problem is drawing attention to how residents and city planners waste scarce water resources ornamenting Lima with lush parks unsuited to the capital’s dry environment.

“Lima was built atop a desert,” Maureen Vilca, a teacher at a private Catholic school, reminded her students as they sat under the trees on a recent school day.

The district of San Isidro, Lima’s wealthiest and best-organised, is looking for ways to urgently fix a problem created by previous administrations. Under consideration are plans to substitute the current grass for a less thirsty species, or using targeted irrigation techniques to prevent overwatering.

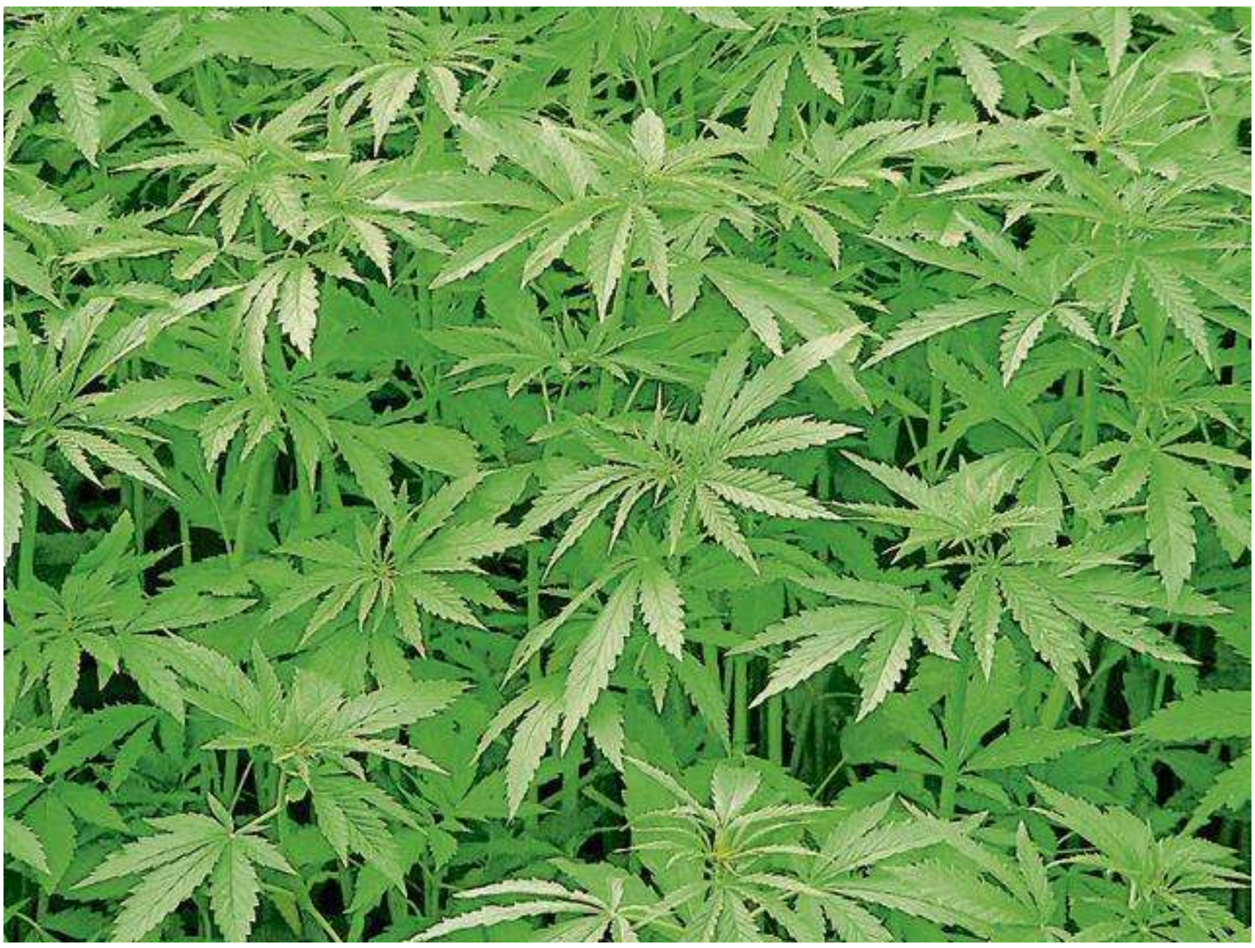
Under normal conditions the trees could live more than 1,000 years, said Fernando de la Vega, who oversees San Isidro’s parks.

Salustio Pomacondor, a forestry expert, said the lack of water planning is **endemic** to Lima. He cited as an example a 6-mile stretch of parks along El Malecon, which **overlooks** the Pacific Ocean and which the city spent years improving without much consideration for the constant watering that such**immaculate** landscaping requires.

Another example of the focus on aesthetics over utility is the preference on sidewalks for willows, a tree usually found next to rivers and which requires 150 litres of water each week. Pomacondor said the majority of Lima's nine million residents have little notion of how scarce a resource water is in the capital despite the fact that annual rainfall rarely exceeds a third of an inch.AP

hindustantimes

Proposal legalising hemp cultivation sent to U'khand govt



Uttarakhand authorities have come up with a draft policy proposal to legalise cultivation of hemp plants (cannabis) for industrial, medicinal and scientific purposes.
The proposal was prepared by Uttarakhand Excise Management System after chief minister Harish Rawat last year announced legalising cultivation of hemp plants.

“We have prepared the proposal and submitted to the government,” additional commissioner excise, DV Singh told HT.

A policy would be formulated and presented before the cabinet soon.

Legalising cultivation of hemp plants would also help keep a check on its illegal use as Section 8 of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, prohibits cultivation of cannabis for recreation. Section 14 of the Act allows state government to grow it for generating fibre and seeds.

“Derived fibre and seeds from hemp plants could boost the industrial sector in the state. That is what the government is eyeing,” joint commissioner excise, D S Chauhan said.

The proposal moots developing seeds with 0.3% tetra hydro cannabinol (THC) to be used for research and other business purposes rather than for recreation. Cannabis sativa plants generally contain 3-20% THC.

Officials admitted that developing seeds with low THC would be a challenge and research institutions would be roped in for the purpose.

“If we are able to manufacture seeds with 0.3% THC, only then can this industry boom. Scientific institutions like Indian Council for Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) and Forest Research Institute (FRI) could be considered for this task,” COO of Uttarakhand Bamboo and Fibre Development Board, Sashi Kumar Dutt said.

Low-THC seeds are also likely to be imported from countries like Australia, the US and China for research, officials said.

Currently, only one company in Haridwar is authorised to collect locally grown cannabis for markets in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and it is charged excise duty by the state.

The stalk of its plants are used to prepare shoes, car interiors, geo-textiles, apparel, ropes and also in packaging industry. Its seed is used in manufacturing of oil, flour and even animal feed. In hill states, the seeds are also used in pickles and chutneys. The specie is found extensively in hill state.

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Minimum support price of Kharif crop will be available by end of September

With some crops like pulses starting to arrive in mandis a bit early, the government on Friday said minimum support price (MSP) of all kharif crops grown this year will be applicable from September.

Normally, harvesting of kharif (summer) crops begins from October. But this year, kharif pulses, especially moong, have started hitting the market in September itself and the government has started its procurement at MSP as mandi prices have gone below the support price.

“The Centre has decided that MSP for kharif crops grown in 2016 will be applicable from September 1, 2016. The decision has been taken as harvested crops sown in kharif may reach the market even before October,” the Agriculture Ministry said in a statement.

The decision has been conveyed to agriculture secretaries of all states and Union Territories.

The Centre announces MSP in each season for major agricultural commodities to ensure remunerative prices to farmers for their produce. MSP for kharif crops for the ongoing 2016-17 crop year (July-June) was announced on June 1.

In a separate release, the ministry said total area sown under kharif crops has increased to 1,058.48 lakh hectares so far this year, from 1,022.61 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

Kharif (summer) sowing, which began with the onset of South-West monsoon from June, has almost come to an end.

There has been a significant jump in area sown under pulses to 144.96 lakh hectares so far this kharif season of 2016-17, from 112.43 lakh hectares in the year-ago period.

Area under paddy has increased marginally to 382 lakh hectares from 371.74 lakh hectares while that of coarse cereals has increased to 188.62 lakh hectares from 182.70 lakh hectares a year earlier, as per the ministry’s data.

In the case of oil seeds, the acreage has gone up slightly to 188.33 lakh hectares so far this kharif season, from 183.21 lakh hectares in the same period last year.

Among cash crops, cotton area has come down to 102.23 lakh hectares, from 115.20 lakh hectares in the said period due to fears of whitefly pest attack in Punjab.

Sugarcane area too has fallen to 45.77 lakh hectares so far this kharif season, from 49.60 lakh hectares in the year-earlier period.

The government is targeting a record 270.10 million tonnes of foodgrain production in the 2016-17 crop year.

Nepal invites Indian investment in agriculture, herbal sectors

Wooing Indian investments in farm and herbal sectors, new Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Friday said the country has simplified tax regime and also ratifying bilateral investment promotion and protection pact with India.

“After political stability, Economic prosperity is our sole agenda. Nepal has now become safer destination for FDI … Indian investors have done investments in many countries around the world. My message to the business leaders in India, if far corners of the world

can be your investment destination why cannot next door Nepal," Dahal said at an event organised by industry associations here.
Dahal, who is popularly known as Prachanda, said, "We are in the process of ratifying Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement(BIPA) with India."
The Nepal Prime Minister said that his country has taken many steps to promote growth and investment. "We have reduced tariff and simplified tax regime. More can be done to reform, we are continuously working in that direction," Dahal said. Noting that Nepal can be attractive business avenue, the Nepal Prime Minister said that his country is committed to creating best possible business reform for Indian investors. He said Nepal wants investment from Indian companies in the field of agriculture and herbal and tourism sector. Nepal plans to establish two Special Economic Zones (SEZ) near Indo-Nepal border, he said.

Rajasthan uses mobile apps to monitor mega water harvesting project

The Rajasthan government is using web-enabled geo-tagging technology to map and monitor plant-by-plant progress of the state's mega water harvesting project, the Mukhya Mantri Jal Swavalamban Abhiyan (MJSA).
Over the past eight months, Rajasthan River Basin and Water Resources Planning Authority — which oversees the MJSA — has used web-assigned unique longitudinal and latitudinal addresses for structures to monitor the digging of percolation tanks, building of bunds and anicuts, planting of soil-binding plants and other related work. Over one lakh water harvesting structures across the state have been geo-tagged so far.
"All field officers involved with departments like watershed management, horticulture, NREGA, forest, agriculture, water resources and rural development, ground water and panchayati raj at the district level have been asked to maintain photographs of the work before and after the monsoons to ascertain the impact of the rainwater harvesting project. The photographs when taken through a software records the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of a structure," said Rakesh Reddy, a member in the planning authority.
"All departmental field officers, who usually go to inspect digging of trenches and tanks or planting of saplings in a group, have been instructed to take photographs of earthworks in four phases at the completion of 25 per cent, 50 per cent, 75 per cent and 100 per cent of a structure," Reddy added. The authority has been accessing the geo-tags through mobile applications like 'Rajdhara', which only staff and officers have access to.

Pulses panel pitches PPP model for procurement

For the immediate kharif season, the panel has called for additional allocation of Rs 10,000 crore to the existing agencies, in order to launch a "war effort to procure moong, tur and urad at their respective MSPs".

The Centre should explore the creation of a new public private partnership (PPP) institution to undertake procurement, stocking and disposal of pulses as part of official minimum support price (MSP) operations, a committee headed by Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian has recommended.

The new organisation — in which the Centre may have 49 per cent stake, an "anchor" private investor 26 per cent, and other public/private sector institutional entities holding the balance 25 per cent — would not replace the Food Corporation of India (FCI), Nafed and other state procurement agencies, but "provide competition to them". Expanding the scope of buyers will ultimately benefit farmers, the committee has said.

For the immediate kharif season, the panel has called for additional allocation of Rs 10,000 crore to the existing agencies, in order to launch a "war effort to procure moong, tur and urad at their respective MSPs". Prices of moong, currently at around Rs 4,500 per quintal in Rajasthan, have already fallen below the MSP of Rs 5,225. "For tur and urad, current prices are a little above MSP, but there is a good chance that they will go down further," the committee has said, in its report for 'incentivising pulses production through MSP and related policies' released Friday.

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Chinese demand gives a boost to nutmeg exports

Kochi, September 16:
Exports of nutmeg have shown an upsurge so far during the current fiscal following a reportedly strong demand from China.

Export sources told *BusinessLine* that China, which has hitherto been importing nutmeg from Indonesia, has switched over to the Indian spices. Tight availability in other origins coupled with competitive prices here is attributed to the increased buying from India, they said.

The trade has estimated the Indian nutmeg exports so far at 3,000 tonnes, at a time when the country's production in recent years remained far below its annual requirement.

According to Spices Board statistics, nutmeg and mace exports during April-June 2016 have soared to 1,130 tonnes valued at Rs. 55.38 crore, registering an increase of 74 per cent in volume and 54 per cent in value. Shipments during the same period last year were at 648 tonnes valued at Rs. 35.95 crore. The unit value realised this year stood at Rs. 489.59 a kg against Rs. 554.82 last year.

The crop in India is lower by around 40 per cent because of unfavourable weather conditions such as drought this year. The output is estimated at somewhere between 10,000 and 11,000 tonnes, trade sources claimed.

"Our annual requirement for mace is 1,500 tonnes and as against this the indigenous availability is only around 800 tonnes this year," Anand Kishor, an exporter, told *BusinessLine* . He said Chinese buying has shown a significant increase so far during the current fiscal.

Nutmeg requirement is at 4,000 tonnes, while the availability is estimated at 3,000 tonnes, necessitating imports, he said.

This year, despite a fall in production, the prices have been remaining low and the current upsurge in demand might push up the prices now, trade sources said.

Prices of farm grade nutmeg without shell is ruling at Rs. 400-450 a kg against Rs. 800-815 three years ago, they said. Mace price was in the range of Rs. 600 and Rs. 950 a kg depending upon quality/colour, they said.

Domestic production of nutmeg, according to Spices Board sources, in 2014-15 was at 14,400 tonnes from a total area of 21,110 hectares. The major producer of this spice is Kerala with 14,190 tonnes from an area of 20,630 hectares, followed by Karnataka and the Andaman & Nicobar islands.

Pulses up on festival spirit

INDORE, SEPTEMBER 16:

Pulses and pulse seeds in mandis ruled higher on strong festival buying. Besides apprehension of damage to the harvested crops of moong and urad and other kharif crops on account of recent rains and the government's pressure to purchase pulse seeds from mandis on the minimum support prices have also fueled rally in pulse seeds and pulses with Masur (bold) today rose to ☐5,550, while masur (medium) rose to ☐5,100. Compared to last week, masur is ruling Rs. 100 a quintal higher Rally in masur also lifted it's dal with Masur dal (medium) today was being quoted at ☐6,800-6,900, while masur dal (bold) ruled at ☐7,000-7,100. Moong today perked up by ☐200 to ☐5,300-5,400 a quintal, while moong (Medium) ruled at ☐4,800. Compared to last week, moong prices in Indore mandis have gone up by Rs. 700 a quintal. Moong dal also ruled higher on rise in spot moong with Moong dal (medium) today was quoted at ☐5,900-6,000; while moong dal (bold) ruled at ☐6,000-6,100. Of all the pulse seeds today, urad however, recorded sharpest rise with Urad (bold) in local mandis rose to ☐7,000-7,500,; (up Rs. 1,000 from last week), urad (medium) rose to ☐6,500-6,800. Urad dal also traded higher with Urad dal (medium) today in local mandis was quoted at ☐8,500-8,700, urad dal (bold) at ☐9,000-9,200, while urad mongar was ruled at ☐11,300-500. a quintal. Similarly chana and tur also ruled higher on strong festive demand and buying with Chana (kanta) today was up at ☐8,700; chana (desi) ruled at ☐8,600.

Rise in demand also lifted tur with tur (Maharashtra) today being quoted at Rs. 7,000 a quintal (up Rs. 500 from last week), while tur (lemon) was quoted at Rs. 7,200 and tur (Madhya Pradesh) ruled at Rs. 6,400 a quintal respectively.