

07.01.2017

### **Yavatmal Baliraja Chetana Abhiyaan bears results, suicide numbers go down**

Appeals for generous financial help garnered impressive donations, which were utilised to help farmers' families.

The Baliraja Chetana Abhiyaan implemented in Yavatmal district has apparently borne fruits with the suicide count down by 110 from 386 to 276. The campaign involved various programmes ranging from spiritual to rehabilitative. Hundreds of bhajan, kirtan and spiritual discourse programmes were organised across the district. Essay competitions and lectures were organised in schools and colleges explaining the futility of suicide. Street plays were organised to drive home the point. Several relief and rehabilitation programmes were also implemented, like first year free education in MBBS to needy children of poor farmers, compensation of Rs 10,000 for cattle dying in lightning strike, aid of Rs 10,000 to families where someone suffered from cancer.

Appeals for generous financial help garnered impressive donations, which were utilised to help farmers' families. The Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers pitched in with Rs 60 lakh to help farm widows with milch cattle.

### **Number of suicides by farmers goes down from 2015 in Vidarbha**

The most spectacular drop was witnessed in the most suicide-prone Yavatmal district.

The number of farmers committing suicide in the six suicide-prone districts of Vidarbha— Amravati, Akola, Buldana, Washim, Yavatmal and Wardha — declined by 155 in 2016 compared to 2015. The numbers counted meticulously since 2006 had continued to fall from the 2006 peak of 1449 to 805 in 2013. It again rose to 964 in 2014 and to the second highest peak of

1348 in 2015. These, incidentally, were the worst drought years in recent history of the region. Year 2016 was a good monsoon year and saw the numbers drop to 1193.



Year 2016 was a good monsoon year and saw the numbers drop to 1193. (File Photo)

The most spectacular drop was witnessed in the most suicide-prone Yavatmal district, which had recorded its highest suicide count of 386 in 2015.

The district witnessed 276 suicides in 2016, a drop of 110 from 2015.

Yavatmal and Osmanabad were the two districts where the government had launched special programme called Baliraja Chetana Abhiyaan in which hundreds of different programmes and schemes were implemented. The programme didn't succeed much in Osmanabad, where the count has reportedly come down from 164 to 162.

The only two districts that showed an upward trend were Amravati, where the number went up from 306 to 323 and Buldana, where it went up from 189 to 228. Incidentally, Buldana was the district that had shown the biggest drop in 2013 and 2014 when the suicide number had gone

down to 111 from the peak of 306 it witnessed in 2006. The corresponding figures of 2015 and 2016 for Akola were 195 and 154, for Washim 108 and 87 and Wardha 164 and 125.

The 2016 figures, however, are in tune with the general trend observed in these six districts where the suicide count is higher in the second half of the year. While in the first half, there were 537 suicides, the second half witnessed 656 suicides.

These, however, are absolute figures that include both “eligible” and “ineligible” cases, meaning, those adjudged as related to agriculture and those for reasons other than agriculture. The eligible-ineligible trend has seen a reverse change from 2014 when the eligible cases started outnumbering the ineligible ones.

This year so far, 533 suicides have been adjudged as eligible and 572 ineligible and 105 cases are still under scrutiny.

### **In 80% farmer-suicides due to debt, loans from banks, not moneylenders**

It's for the first time that the NCRB has categorised farmers' suicides due to debt or bankruptcy based on the source of loans.



According to the NCRB data, “bankruptcy and indebtedness” witnessed the sharpest spike in 2015, registering an almost three-fold increase (3,097) as compared to 2014 (1,163). (Representational)

LOCAL MONEYLENDERS are usually portrayed as the villains in India’s farmer-suicides narrative, but government data shows that 80 per cent of farmers killed themselves in 2015 because of bankruptcy or debts after taking loans from banks and registered microfinance institutions.

According to National Crime Records Bureau’s latest farmer-suicides data, of the over 3,000 farmers who committed suicides across the country in 2015 due to debt and bankruptcy, 2,474 had taken loans from banks or microfinance institutions.

It’s for the first time that the NCRB has categorised farmers’ suicides due to debt or bankruptcy based on the source of loans.

The figures (see page 2) show that only 10 per cent farmers had committed suicide due to debts caused by loans taken from both banks and moneylenders — the share of loans from moneylenders under this section was 9.8 per cent.

As first reported by The Indian Express on August 19, 2016, farmer suicides saw a spike of 41.7 per cent in 2015 from 2014. The year 2015 saw 8,007 suicides by farmers compared to 5,650 in 2014, according to NCRB data.

Among the states, the data showed, Maharashtra (3,030), Telangana (1,358), Karnataka (1,197), Chhattisgarh (854) and Madhya Pradesh (516) led the table. Karnataka saw a more than three-fold rise in farmer suicides in 2015, as compared to 2014 when around 300 farmers ended their lives.

“The latest data is interesting because all of us thought that moneylenders were the culprits of the piece. Even today, more than half the people take loans from moneylenders,” said Abhijit Sen, a former member of the erstwhile Planning Commission.

However, Sen said, moneylenders were more flexible compared to banks and microfinance institutions. “The organised sector is less flexible because rules don’t permit them flexibility.

The microfinance sector is worse. They put pressure by telling others in self-help groups that their share would be cut if one person does not pay loans in time. This creates social pressure, as well. Many also send goons to the neighbourhood to scare borrowers,” he said.

According to the NCRB data, “bankruptcy and indebtedness” witnessed the sharpest spike in 2015, registering an almost three-fold increase (3,097) as compared to 2014 (1,163).

Similarly, farm-related issues, too, have seen a sharp spike of over 61 per cent. While 969 suicides were recorded due to crop-failure and other farm-related issues in 2014, 2015 saw 1,562 suicides in this category.

Among states, Maharashtra (1,293) reported the maximum number of suicides due to “indebtedness”, followed by Karnataka (946) and Telangana (632). With 131 deaths, Telangana reported the highest number of suicides by farmers who took loans from moneylenders, with 131 deaths, followed by Karnataka (113).

Similarly, farm-related issues such as crop failure forced 769 farmers to end their lives in Maharashtra, followed by 363 in Telangana, 153 in Andhra Pradesh and 122 in Karnataka. Family problems (933) and illness (842) were other top reasons for suicides among farmers in 2015, according to NCRB data.

## THE HINDU **BusinessLine**

### **Tea prices gain steam at Kochi sale on quality arrivals**

Kochi, January 6:

Support of leading blenders coupled with good arrivals lifted the prices of good liquoring tea varieties this week.

The market for medium and plainer PD, RD witnessed strong feature and appreciated by ₹3-4 a kg and sometimes more. The quantity on offer in CTC dust was 12,55,500 kg.


The market for orthodox varieties was also firm to dearer and the quantity on offer was 31,000 kg. Exporters were the mainstay of the market. In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties quoted prices at ₹110-158, mediums stood at ₹105-120 and plain grades fetched ₹99-107.

Prices of all varieties in leaf category also spurted with the market for good liquoring Nilgiri brokens, whole leaf and Fannings was firm to dearer. The quantity on offer in orthodox grades was 225,000 kg.

CTC leaf witnessed a strong demand with the market for all varieties were dearer by ₹3-5 and sometimes more.

### Rabi acreage up 7%; rice, coarse cereals take a hit

<b>Rabi report card</b>			
<small>(acreage in lakh ha; *As on Jan 6)</small>			
<b>Crop</b>	<b>This Year*</b>	<b>Last Year*</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>Wheat</b>	<b>303.16</b>	<b>281.7</b>	<b>7.62</b>
<b>Rice</b>	<b>12.74</b>	<b>17.56</b>	<b>-27.42</b>
Gram	96.83	84.12	15.11
Lentil	16.37	13.86	18.1
<b>Total Pulses</b>	<b>152.63</b>	<b>134.56</b>	<b>13.43</b>
Jowar	31.05	36.6	-15.16
Maize	13.95	12.87	8.39
Barley	8	7.17	11.54
<b>Total Coarse Cereals</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>-6.63</b>
Rapeseed Mustard	69.53	62.76	10.79
Groundnut	4.29	3.88	10.49
<b>Total Oilseeds</b>	<b>80.63</b>	<b>74.68</b>	<b>7.96</b>
<b>Total Rabi</b>	<b>602.75</b>	<b>565.89</b>	<b>6.51</b>



Source: Agri Ministry

Pulses, wheat, oilseeds gain area

New Delhi, January 6:

Sowing in the on-going rabi season maintained its pace of low growth in the new year with rice and coarse cereals posting a decline and oilseeds remaining stagnant compared with the average of the last five years.

Total sowing till January 6 increased 2.76 per cent to 602.75 lakh hectares (lh) compared with the previous five year's average (normal of corresponding week) of 586.55 lh in the comparable period, according to figures released by the Agriculture Ministry on Friday.

### **Wheat area**

Sowing of wheat increased to 303.16 lh in the current rabi season (which starts in October) as compared to 294.14 lh sowed in the normal of corresponding week. Higher sowing was reported by Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and UP.

Rice sowing in the period up to January 6 declined to 12.74 lh (17.28 lh). Chhattisgarh was the only State to report a jump in acreage, while all other rice growing States including Tamil Nadu reported a fall in sowing.

Coverage of pulses increased to 152.63 lh (139.01 lh). Maharashtra reported the sharpest increase in sowing followed by MP, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. Lower coverage was reported from Karnataka, Haryana, Odisha and Tamil Nadu.

Acreage under coarse cereals declined to 53.60 lh (55.81 lh). Higher acreage has been reported from MP, Gujarat, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, while Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana reported a dip in their acreage.

### **Oilseeds static**

Sowing of oilseeds remained stagnant at 80.63 lh. The States where acreage reportedly increased include Arunachal Pradesh, MP, Assam and Telangana, while lower sowing was reported by Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

### **Cooking oils in bear grip**

Mumbai, January 6:

Edible oils witnessed a weak trend tracking bearish futures amid slack demand. Liberty traded palmolein at ₹630, super palmolein ₹651 and soyabean refined oil ₹725. Allana traded palmolein for ₹628, soya refined oil ₹720 and sunflower refined oil ₹720. Golden agri quoted palmolein at ₹620. At Rajkot, groundnut oil *telia* tin was steady at ₹1,510 and loose (10 kg)

was at ₹960. BCE spot rates (₹/10 kg): groundnut oil 1,020 (1,020), soya ref. 715 (715), sunflower exp. ref. 660 (660), sunflower ref. 710 (710), rapeseed ref. 830 (830), rapeseed exp. ref. 800 (800), cottonseed ref. 690 (690) and palmolein 616 (620).

### **Global cotton prices likely to fall in second half of season**



ICAC says higher supply will drag prices; Indian production seen up by 4%

Ahmedabad, January 6:

Citing higher cotton supply scenario for the season 2016-17, the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) has hinted towards a bearish trend in the prices for the fibre in the second half of the year.

The ICAC Secretariat has forecast the season-average for Cotlook A Index in 2016-17 (starting October-September) will range between 66 and 83 cents per lb, with a midpoint of 74 cents/lb, which would be 4 cts/lb higher than last season.

But the world cotton production in 2016-17 is likely to rise by 8 per cent to 22.8 million tonnes (mt) and the world consumption is likely to remain stable at 24.1 mt, which may put pressure on the prices in the latter half of the season, the ICAC noted.



World ending stocks may fall by 7 per cent to 18 mt in 2016-17, though stocks outside of China are expected to grow by 6 per cent to 8.7 mt .

According to ICAC, the current season began with lower stocks, particularly from countries in the Southern Hemisphere, which saw ending stocks in 2015-16 fall by 21 per cent to 1.6 mt , the lowest since 2009-10.

The shortage in supply carried through the first few months of 2016-17 season thereby keeping the prices firm.

### **Indian picture**

In Gujarat — one of the key producers of the commodity in India — prices for raw cotton hovered in the range of ₹5,500-5,670 a quintal inching towards new record.

Traders cited the reduced arrivals and cash shortage in the banks as the reason for the rally in the cotton prices, whereas most believed that the rally may not continue longer on good production.

ICAC predicts India's cotton production to increase by 4 per cent to just under 6 mt , making it the world's largest producer.

The competing fibre, polyester, has shown uptrend but still well-below international cotton prices, making it unlikely that cotton mill use will expand unless polyester prices continue to rise.

Mill use in India is projected to decline by 1 per cent to 5.2 mt .

### **Farmers' groups urge PM to end their 'hardship', lift curbs on co-op banks**

New Delhi, Jan 6:

Farmer groups across the country have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi complaining that the "disruption" caused by demonetisation in rural areas could not be addressed by the inadequate sops announced on December 30.

They demanded more measures such as removal of all restrictions on deposits and withdrawals from cooperative banks, extension of loan waivers, and increase in scale of finance under the krishi credit scheme.



Demonetisation caused by demonetisation not being addressed, they say

“In villages all over India, there are numerous tales of hardship and woes such as agricultural workers not being paid in time by farmers owing to shortage of cash, farmers cutting back on investments on crop management, farmers not able to sell their produce with traders having no cash and, importantly, prices of perishables crashing and loanee farmers from cooperative banks not even being able to repay their loans,” the farmer groups’ representatives stated in the letter.

There are also the hardships of returning migrant workers, who are unable to find work outside villages in other sectors, it added.

The farmer groups, that are joint signatories of the letter, include the All-India Coordination Committee of Farmers Movement, Bhartiya Kisan Union, Laghu Simant Krishak Morach, Shetkari Sanghathana and Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, among others.

The most significant negative fall-out of the entire demonetisation process is the destruction that is taking place of the rural cooperative banking sector, the letter pointed out.

“Cooperative banks should be immediately brought on a par with other banks and all restrictions on deposits and withdrawals from the cooperative banks should be withdrawn,” it added.

The farmer groups also demanded that a loan waiver for all farmers should be immediately announced owing to the massive disruptions caused in the agricultural activities in this season.

With increased NABARD funding, soft loans should be extended to Joint Liability Groups and Self Help Groups, the letter said.

Further, in the kisan credit scheme, the scale of finance should be increased, interest rates should be lowered and agriculture credit expanded for more coverage.

### **Tea prices move up at Kochi sale**

Kochi, Jan 6:

New Year seems to have brought cheers to Kochi auctions with tea prices moving northwards.

Support of leading blenders coupled with good arrivals lifted the prices of good liquoring tea varieties this week. The market for medium and plainer PD, RD witnessed strong feature and appreciated by ₹3 to ₹4 and sometimes more.

The quantity on offer in CTC dust was 12,55,500 kg. The auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis attributed the increase in arrivals to the absence of auctions in the last week of December due to Christmas.

The market for orthodox varieties was also firm to dearer and the quantity on offer was 31,000 kg. Exporters were the mainstay of the market.

In Cochin CTC dust quotation, good varieties quoted prices at ₹110-158, mediums stood at ₹105-120 and plain grades fetched ₹99-107.

Prices of all varieties in leaf category also spurted with the market for good liquoring Nilgiri broken, whole leaf and Fannings was firm to dearer. The quantity on offer in orthodox grades was 225,000 kg.

CTC leaf witnessed a strong demand with the market for all varieties were dearer by ₹3 to ₹5 and sometimes more.

In dust varieties, Monica SFD quoted the best prices of ₹158, while Chamraj FOP-S (green tea) came to the top in leaf grades quoting ₹386.

# Business Standard

## **MP aims to raise pulse output to help India reach self-sufficiency goal**

Due to shortage of the protein-rich food, India has to fork out about \$2.65 bn a year on import



*A labourer carries a sack filled with pulses at a wholesale pulses market*

[Madhya Pradesh](#) aims to raise production of [pulses](#) by 60 percent in the next three years to help Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) achieve his goal of making the country self-sufficient in the staple, the state's chief minister said.

India, the world's biggest consumer of pulses, faces an acute shortage of the protein-rich food, forcing the country to fork out about \$2.65 billion a year to import the scarce commodity from Canada, Austria, and Ethiopia among others.

"Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has asked me to help achieve his objective of making India self-reliant in [pulses](#) by raising production in Madhya Pradesh," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told Reuters in an interview.

Madhya Pradesh, a top producer of pulses, could raise its output of crops such as chickpeas, pigeon peas and black gram to 8 or 8.5 million tonnes in the next three years from about 5 million tonnes now, Chouhan said.

Stung by spiralling prices for pulses, New Delhi last year signed a long-term deal with Mozambique to import the commodities and has also been looking to import [pulses](#) from Myanmar.

Pulses, mostly consumed in curries, are the primary source for protein, especially for the poor. Any spike in [pulses](#) prices stokes anger against the government.

"We have started encouraging farmers to grow more [pulses](#) by giving them a lot of help and support and expect the trend to continue until we obviate our import requirements," Chouhan, who flew to New Delhi from the state capital Bhopal, said.

In the 2015/16 fiscal year, India imported a record 5.8 million tonnes of [pulses](#) after domestic prices more than doubled. [Pulses](#) production totalled 16.47 million tonnes, lower than annual demand of 22 million tonnes, which is steadily rising due to robust economic growth. Modi aims to make India self-reliant in [pulses](#) by 2020. "The target of the state government is definitely plausible. But it depends a lot on the amount of rainfall the state is going to receive over the next few years," said Pukaraj Chopra, a leading trader of pulses.

Under Chouhan's watch, wheat output in [Madhya Pradesh](#) raced ahead of Punjab and Haryana, India's traditional grain basket.

"Wheat production has reached the optimum level, so we're not that keen to raise it further. Other than pulses, we also aim to raise basmati rice production by doubling the area under the crop," he said.

Currently [Madhya Pradesh](#) produces about 500,000 tonnes of basmati rice. India and Pakistan exclusively grow the premium long-grain, aromatic basmati, largely in the foothills of the Himalayas.

New wells and a focus on micro-irrigation have helped raise farm output in Madhya Pradesh, Chouhan said. [Madhya Pradesh](#) has clocked an annual 18 percent farm growth against a rather modest 4 percent at the national level.

### **Country's soybean output to hit highest in 4 years**

It is likely to rise 60% this year because of normal monsoon

Country's soybean output is likely to rise 60 per cent this year, because of normal monsoon and higher acreage area.

The apex Indore-based industry body the Soybean Processors Association (SOPA) in its latest estimates released on Friday showed India's total soybean output at 11.49 million tonnes. It is highest in four years, for the harvesting season 2016-17 as compared to 7.2 million tonnes reported in the previous year. In November 2016, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has forecast India's soybean output at 9.7 million tonnes, which was revised later to 11.5 million tonnes in December 2016.



In a sharp variation from the industry's observation, the Union Ministry of Agriculture in its first advanced estimates forecast India's soybean output at 14.22 million tonnes for the harvesting season 2016-17. The fourth Advanced Estimates suggest India's total soybean output at 8.59 million tonnes for the crop year 2015-16.

“With the estimated output for the current season at 11.49 million tonnes and carry over stock of 0.44 million tonnes, India's total availability of soybean would remain at 11.93 million tonnes for the crop year 2016-17. Along with total soybean output of 7.2 million tonnes and carry over stock of 0.61 million tonnes, total soybean availability stood at 7.81 million tonnes for 2014-15 million tonnes,” said D N Pathak, Executive Director, SOPA.

The increase in production is due to better than expected harvest as yield is estimated at 1.01 tonnes / hectare (ha), which is higher 15 per cent higher than the previous estimates and two per cent above 5-year average.

Meanwhile, India's Ministry of Agriculture has forecast India's overall oilseeds production at 23.26 million tonnes for 2016-17, significantly higher from 16.59 million tonnes produced last year. This year production of Kharif oilseed is also higher by 2.33 million tonnes than the average production of last five years.

Interestingly, SOPA reported India's total soybean meal exports at 370,000 tonnes in the October–December quarter 2016 as compared to 110,000 tonnes in the same period last year. Thus, India's soybean meal exports have more than trebled this year on higher production from local sources following better crushing parity. Japan and Vietnam have emerged as large importer of soybean meal from India.

Average realisation, however, has declined to \$370-400 a tonne this year compared to \$550 a tonne last year.

Owing to higher crushing, soybean meal production in India will increase to 6.8 million tonnes this year from 6.1 million tonnes last year. Similarly, its exports for 2016-17 are estimated to rise by 50 per cent to 1.8 million tonnes," said Ritesh Kumar Sahu, an analyst with Angel Commodities.

## **THE TIMES OF INDIA**

### **Haryana government to launch programme for farmers**



*(Representative image)*



CHANDIGARH: Haryana government has decided to launch a Rs 510 crore project to boost infrastructure-related facilities for farmers with a focus on 'Baagwani Villages', Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister O P Dhankar said today.

The 'Crop Cluster Development Programme on Farm and Marketing Support to Horticulture Farmers' in 2016-17 would be executed in three years during which infrastructure-related facilities would be created with a focus on Baagwani Villages. Dhankar said the project would be undertaken as part of the Swarna Jayanticelebrations in the state.

The project aims at collectivizing farmers, especially small producers, at various levels, fostering technology penetration, improving productivity, enabling improved access to inputs and services, and increasing farmer incomes, thereby strengthening their sustainable agriculture-based livelihood. It also aims at ensuring suitable market availability, both domestic and international.

Issues such as aggregation of produce, market linkages, grading, packing and standards, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, pesticide residues, microbiological contamination and market access would be addressed through the project.

It would help in finding a way out of such problems as direct approach to targeted beneficiaries, improvement in quality, grades and standards, improvement in post-harvest management and increase in bargaining power of farmers, he said.



### **Rain in Punjab, Haryana raises hopes of bumper wheat yield**

A dip in temperature following rainfall in the country's key wheat-producing States of Punjab and Haryana will boost the wheat crop, easing concerns about the adverse impact of unusual warm weather on the crop, officials and experts told *The Hindu* on Saturday.



The showers during the past 24 hours have been widespread and ended the long dry spell in parts of Punjab and Haryana. A mercury dip is a good sign for the “temperature sensitive” wheat crop, they said.

“Rain has come at a good time easing out concerns regarding dip in productivity of the crop due to unusual warm weather in the past few days. It will benefit the crop immensely, and if the weather remains conducive in the coming days, we can expect a bumper production this year,” P.S. Rangi, an agriculture expert and Punjab State Farmers Commission adviser said.

A long dry spell, since October had raised concerns among experts and farmers about falling wheat yields in the both these States — which have sown the crop on nearly 35 lakh hectares and over 25 lakh hectares respectively during the ongoing rabi (winter) season.

“Punjab and Haryana are experiencing widespread rains due to fresh western disturbance. Minimum temperature has come down and in the next few days it is likely to fall further,” said Surinder Pal, director at the India Meteorological Department, Chandigarh.

### **‘It will curb pest attacks’**

“These are welcome showers. It will not only boost the productivity of wheat but will also help in curbing disease such as yellow rust,” said Jasbir Singh Bains, director of Punjab agriculture department.

Wheat, the main rabi crop is sown between late October till December while the harvesting of the crop will start from April.

### **Rains boost wheat crop in Punjab and Haryana, say experts**



Widespread overnight rains and a dip in temperature in country's key wheat producing States of Punjab and Haryana will boost the wheat crop, easing concerns about the adverse impact of unusual warm weather on the crop, officials and experts told *The Hindu* on Saturday.

The showers during the past 24 hours have been widespread and ended the long dry spell in parts Punjab and Haryana besides, it has brought down the mercury as well — a good sign for the “temperature sensitive” wheat crop, they said.

“Rain has come at a good time easing out concerns regarding dip in productivity of wheat crop due to unusual warm weather in the past few days... It will benefit the wheat crop immensely and if the weather remains conducive in coming days, we can expect a bumper production this year,” P. S. Ranghi, an agriculture expert and Punjab State Farmers Commission adviser, told *The Hindu*.

“These showers have helped in bringing down the temperatures. Wheat is a temperature sensitive crop and needs cold conditions to thrive. These rains will help in improving photosynthesis and eventually its growth,” he said.

A long dry spell, since October 2016 coupled with unusually warm weather had raised concerns among experts and farmers about falling wheat yields in the both these States, which have sown wheat on nearly 35 lakh hectares and over 25 lakh hectares respectively during the ongoing Rabi season. Both States are major contributors of wheat to the central pool.

“Punjab and Haryana are experiencing widespread rains since Friday due to fresh western disturbance... Minimum temperature has come down and in next few days it is likely to fall further and will remain near normal or below normal,” said Surinder Pal, director at the India Meteorological Department, Chandigarh.

Notably, minimum and maximum temperatures have been hovering 2°C to 4°C above normal at many places in parts of Punjab during the past few days. IMD in its first ever winter forecast had predicted that seasonal temperatures across the country, from December to February, would be higher than normal with fewer cold waves over north and north-west India than what is typical.

“These are welcome showers. It would not only boost the productivity of wheat but will also help in curbing incidences of disease such as yellow rust,” said Jasbir Singh Bains, Director, Punjab Agriculture department.

Wheat, the main Rabi (winter) crop is sown between late October till December while harvest will start from April.

### **After a good run, prospects wilt for the farm sector**



## **The State's agricultural sector is reeling under the impact of a failed monsoon and demonetisation**

After achieving a bumper harvest and an all-time high in food grains production last year, the State's farm sector is now in the midst of a huge crisis.

And, the crisis is multi-dimensional: Besides the likely fall in production, the State is witnessing a spike in death of farmers, both natural and otherwise.

On Thursday, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), expressing concern, took suo motu cognizance of media reports regarding the deaths of 106 farmers in one month. The most affected districts, according to the NHRC's statement, are Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam (the delta region), Villupuram, Pudukottai, Ariyalur and Cuddalore.

S. Ranganathan, general secretary of the Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association, cites "monetary crunch" triggered by demonetisation as the primary reason for the current state of affairs.

"When a farmer realises that he or she does not have immediate cash to attend to the ailing crop, he or she feels depressed. There are reports of farmers dying out sheer helplessness and shock," he says.

An agricultural expert, who wishes to remain anonymous, says most of those who had died are senior citizens.

An official in the Agriculture Directorate, clarifying that it is the job of the Revenue Department to handle issues concerning compensation, points out that a number of officials of the State government are visiting the drought-hit areas for an on-the-spot assessment, after which the government will announce the next steps.

### **The insurance salve**

The official explains that under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana [the new crop insurance scheme launched by the Centre in January 2016], 13 lakh farmers have, so far, been covered against eight lakh farmers last year under the earlier crop insurance scheme.

Nearly 80 per cent of the farmers in the Cauvery delta region has been roped in under the new scheme, which entails higher compensation, the official says, adding that the government will come to the rescue of even those farmers who have not been covered under the insurance scheme.

Mr. Ranganathan says the government and the farming community should do everything to increase productivity so that rice production does not go down steeply even if the crop area gets shrunk during any drought in future.

Also, as more and more farmers are using high-powered pump sets, the capacity of distribution transformers need to be immediately augmented.

The power supply for the pump sets should be provided on rotational basis so that the farmers do not use water and electricity indiscriminately.

For the next five or six months, landless labour should be employed only for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, providing a period of “holiday” for agriculture, he added.

### **Now chilli growing farmers can insure their crops**

**Following Collector's initiative, the State and Agriculture Insurance Company gave consent to provide insurance cover to chilli crop**

After the more than one lakh paddy cultivating farmers became crestfallen, losing their crops following failure of north east monsoon, the district administration has brought some cheers to the Chilli growing farmers, allowing them to insure their crops in this season.

Farmers who had taken up chilli cultivation in about 15,000 hectares were keeping their fingers crossed following the failure of the monsoon when the district administration announced on Thursday that they could insure their crops on the lines of their paddy cultivating counterparts.

After finding that the chilli growing farmers faced difficulties in insuring their crop, Collector S. Natarajan took up the issue with the authorities, after which, the State government and the

Agriculture Insurance Company of India gave consent to provide insurance cover to the chilli growing farmers.

“We received orders from the Government to this effect on Thursday and asked the farmers to pay the premium in the Primary Agriculture Cooperative Credit Societies (PACCS) after completing the formalities,” Mr. Natarajan has said.

Farmers have been asked to pay premium of Rs. 1,000 per acre for total insurance cover of Rs. 20,000 per acre under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) scheme, he said.

Earlier, chilli growing farmers were allowed to insure their crops only in certain pockets and this was the first time, the facility has been extended to farmers throughout the district, S. Tamil Vendhan, Deputy Director of Horticulture has said.

Farmers have cultivated chilli in 15,022 hectares in this season and ‘we expect 12,000 to 15,000 farmers to avail the benefits by insuring their crops,’ he said. The farmers have taken up the chilli cultivation expecting some rains in the coming days, he said.

About 90 per cent of the farmers have cultivated the ‘Ramnad Mundu’ variety and the remaining, the ‘Samba’ species, he said adding the district produced an average 37,500 tonnes of chillies a year. The ‘Ramnad Mundu’, known for its saline and drought resistance, commanded good price, both in domestic and international markets, thanks to the colour and pungency, he added.

### **Monitoring officer to assess damage to paddy crop today**

Chandrakant B Kamble, Principal secretary, Tamil Nadu Transport department, who is the monitoring officer for Ramanathapuram, is visiting the district on Saturday to make on-the-spot assessment of damage to paddy crops due to failure of northeast monsoon.

Collector S. Natarajan, who inspected the withered crops with officials from Agriculture and Revenue departments on Thursday and Friday, said a final assessment would be made after the monitoring officer, deputed by the State government, inspected the crops.



He said paddy was cultivated in more than 1.20 lakh hectares, mostly in rain-fed areas, and almost all crops had withered due to monsoon failure. The district administration had sent a report to the Commissioner of Revenue Administration and a final report would be sent after the monitoring officer's visit, he said.

As the monsoon never looked promising, about 1.15 lakh farmers, as a precautionary measure, insured their crops under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), covering a total area of 1.16 lakh hectares, he said.

### **Drinking water issue**

As monsoon failure had brought in its wake drinking water problem, the district administration had identified 78 villages, which would face acute drinking water crisis, and launched measures to address the issue.

The district administration was confident of addressing the crisis in majority of the villages by distribution of drinking water under the combined drinking water supply scheme, drawing Cauvery water from Tiruchi. "As of now there is no problem in supplying the Cauvery water," he said.

In 78 villages, which had no access to Cauvery water, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board had been asked to supplement drinking water supply by sinking borewells, ring wells and repair existing borewells, he said. Power pumps were being installed to tide over the crisis, he added.