

06.07.2017



## **Cost of 173 irrigation projects revised to Rs 40,000 crore**

Aims at 16,000 hectares of land under irrigation



In the tenure of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, since October 31, 2014, irrigation proposals were discussed and approved in 35 cabinet meetings. (File photo)

The state government has given the nod to the revised cost estimates for 173 irrigation projects worth Rs 40,000 crore in the last two-and-a-half years. The water resources ministry has urged the finance ministry to exempt these projects from the 25 to 30 per cent cuts enforced across departments in the wake of the Rs 34,000 crore loan waiver to 89 lakh farmers. The decision, which overrides the state's financial constraints and a debt of Rs 3.5 lakh crore, sends out a message that irrigation projects cannot be put on the back burner as they directly relate to agricultural growth and the concerns of 1.36 crore farmers in the state.

According to a senior official in the ministry of water resources, "The consent for revised cost escalation of 173 projects would bring 16,000 hectares of land under irrigation." In the same period, the fast-tracking of the irrigation projects which were 75 per cent complete, and pending for more than two decades, have been taken up on priority. The documents provided by the department show that almost 93 irrigation projects have been

completed in the last two-and-a-half years. The government has set 2019 as the deadline to complete 225 irrigation projects. In the state, there are 515 irrigation projects worth Rs 1.25 lakh crore to be completed.

In the tenure of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, since October 31, 2014, irrigation proposals were discussed and approved in 35 cabinet meetings. The government has given the department highest priority along with agriculture. The approval, in the last two-and-a-half years, for 25 state irrigation projects by the ministry of environment and forest (MoEF) is also slated to be the highest. With a target to enhance the irrigation potential by 7.5 lakh hectares by 2019, the government has identified, area wise, the irrigation works which need to be further expedited. Although the state government has put a ban on taking up new irrigation projects, the focus would continue on completion of ongoing works.

Efforts are under way to urge the Centre to provide higher financial component for the Rs 6,000 crore Tapi River Recharge Irrigation Project. The Centre has given in-principle nod for the project for which the fund sharing would be in the ratio of 50:50. The project spread across three states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh will help bring four lakh hectares under irrigation. The districts which would be benefited include Nashik, Jalgaon, Dhule, Nandurbar, Washim, Buldhana, Akola and Amravati.

Officials in the ministry of finance confirmed, “Despite a cut of 25 to 30 per cent across departments, we will have to exempt some of the sectors including agriculture and irrigation works.”

### **Govt, industry and farmers need to ensure pesticides are used scientifically: Experts**

Vinay Mathur, deputy secretary general, FICCI, presented an overview of the seminar and said there was a need to facilitate national food and nutrition security.



Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

“The government, industry and farmers need to work in tandem to ensure that pesticides are used scientifically in such a way that Indian agriculture as a whole benefits with the resultant fall in crop attacks and increase in crop yields,” said experts during a seminar organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in association with the department of agriculture cooperation and farmers welfare and other departments.

The seminar held on Wednesday witnessed a panel discussion on empowering farmers with the use of agrochemicals.

Officials said the seminar was aimed at facilitating national food and nutrition security by empowering farmers with knowledge about role of crop protection chemicals, by bringing to their notice the good initiatives of the government about the latest technological developments which are sustainable and environment friendly.

Vinay Mathur, deputy secretary general, FICCI, presented an overview of the seminar and said there was a need to facilitate national food and nutrition security. “For that to happen, we must empower farmers with knowledge about role of crop protection chemicals, for a sustained growth of Indian agriculture and economy,” he said.

Dr Madhu Gill, consultant to the government of Punjab, organic farming, said initiatives like multi-cropping, crop rotation, and judicious use of agrochemicals should be taken into consideration. “Through the medium of this seminar, we aim to empower the farmers

to achieve higher yields and crop protection,” said G B Singh, regional head, Regional Council of Punjab, Haryana & Himachal Pradesh, FICCI.

# THE HINDU BusinessLine

## Rice exporters ask PM to intervene to protect Basmati exports to EU



Vijay Setia, President, AIREA, and CMD, Chaman Lal Setia Exports, with Gurnam Arora, Jt. Managing Director, Kohinoor Foods Ltd, addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. -- Kamal Narang

Want EU to postpone lowering of tolerance for fungicide tricyclazole

Rice exporters have sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s intervention in convincing the European Union to postpone by two years its decision to bring down the tolerance level for fungicide tricyclazole used by Basmati farmers to ‘near-zero’ levels.

“A virtual ban is being imposed by the EU on the widely used fungicide in India by reducing the import tolerance level a 100-fold from 1 ppm (parts per million) to 0.01 ppm. The move, which is to come into effect from January 1, 2018, will adversely impact the current kharif crop. We want the EU to give us at least two years more to settle the

matter,” pointed out Vijay Setia, President, All India Rice Exporters' Association (AIREA).

A delegation of officials led by the Commerce Ministry is visiting Brussels on July 12 to talk to counterparts in the EU asking for more time. Rice exporters believe that direct intervention by the PM could increase their chances of getting a sympathetic hearing.

In its letter to the PM seeking intervention, AIREA has argued that a delay in implementing the move will not harm anybody as there is no scientific evidence of the harmful effects of this fungicide on human health.

In the US the tolerance level for the fungicide is 3 ppm, while in Japan it is 10 ppm. “We have been exporting rice to the EU for the last 20 years. We also consume it in the country and export it to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the US. There have been no health issues connected with the fungicide so far,” pointed out Gurnam Arora, Kohinoor Foods.

Tricyclazole is a fungicide developed by US-based Dow Agri Sciences used to combat a disease called blast affecting paddy crop. Under Indian agro-climatic conditions, it is the most farmer-friendly and cost effective solution to protect the rice crop from blast, exporters say.

The EU has asked Dow Sciences to provide additional information on some safety parameters which it can do only by early 2019, AIREA pointed out. If the EU is satisfied, it could let the existing tolerance level to continue.

Meanwhile, AIREA has also started conducting workshops to educate farmers on the EU decision and to teach them good agriculture practices so as to minimise residue.

### **Supply crunch leads to rise in poultry prices in Kerala**

Keralites are spending more on chickens despite the advent of GST, which virtually nullified VAT on poultry meat.

Despite placing broiler chicken under the zero tax category in the post GST regime, retail prices started moving northwards, touching ₹150 a kg after witnessing a drop of ₹11 a kg on July 1 followed by a ₹9 reduction on the subsequent day.

### **Tight supply**

Binny Ematty, State president of the Poultry Farmers & Traders Committee, attributed the surge to lower production in Kerala and Tamil Nadu on the fears of a price drop in the GST era.

Coupled with this, the majority of small-scale poultry farmers sold their stock at higher rates in the last few weeks and were reluctant to start breeding new stocks. This has created a shortage in the market and impacted chicken arrivals, he said.

Hailing the introduction of GST on poultry, Emmatty said that “nil tax” on broiler chicken would encourage consumption of poultry meat, a major source of protein for the common man, at affordable rates.

Kerala is the only State levying a 14.5 per cent VAT rate on broiler chicken and poultry feed and the removal of all these taxes is expected to benefit both consumers and poultry farmers in a big way.

Roughly, broiler chicken sales in Kerala stood at 1 crore kg a week, valued at ₹4,000 crore. The State achieved 80 per cent self-sufficiency in production of poultry meat, with Tamil Nadu supplying the balance, he added.

Meanwhile, the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association has sought government intervention to arrest the price rise under GST after waiving purchase tax. They blamed traders for the artificial hike — saying they had raised tax at ₹30 per kg.

There were also apprehensions over the dumping of live chicken from Tamil Nadu as the cost of production is 15-20 per cent lower. This may impact domestic production, sources in the trade said.

### **Gujarat group cries for loan waiver, spills milk**



Thakore Sena activists pour milk on an Ahmedabad road as part of their protest against the Gujarat government, on Wednesday

OBC leader Thakore asks farmers to cease supply of milk

Gujarat, which led the White Revolution in the 1960s, making India the world's largest milk producer, on Wednesday saw milk flowing freely on the roads of the poll-bound State.

Police detained hundreds of activists from across Gujarat after they poured thousands of litres of milk on the roads, demanding a waiver of all farmer loans in the State, where essential commodities have seen a sudden spurt in prices. The going rate for coriander stood at ₹200 a kg, and tomato and chilly at ₹100 per kg. There has also been a revival of multiple social agitations that have been lying dormant for months.

The activists dubbed Wednesday's agitation as "Doodhbandi" and "Doodh Roko".

The activists, led by Kshatriya Thakore Sena founder Alpesh Thakore were detained across various districts. Thakore, who also doubles up as Convener of the OBC-SC-ST Ekta Manch, which was formed nearly two years ago to counter the Hardik Patel-led Patidar agitation, said the agitation would intensify from Thursday.

Supply of fruits, vegetables and foodgrain would be prevented if the farm loans were not waived soon.

Thakore, along with nearly 50 supporters, was detained in Ahmedabad after his group blocked roads and poured hundreds of litres of milk on the Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Highway. In various towns, hundreds others were detained by the police. Thakore also appealed to more than 15 lakh milk farmers not to supply milk to dairies for processing.

Interestingly, the Gujarat Congress suspects Alpesh, son of a Congress leader, of leading the ruling BJP's B-Team to eat into its own votes to compensate for any potential loss caused by the Patel votes. The State Congress was preparing to launch a state-wide farmers' agitation and organize rallies in August to support loan waivers.

A few weeks ago, his outfit was to launch a political party and contest around 80 of the State's 182 Assembly seats. By launching this agitation, he sought to take the wind out of the sails of the State Congress, which has invited party Vice-President Rahul Gandhi to lead its agitation.

Shankar Chaudhary, Gujarat Minister of State for Health and also Chairman of Banas Dairy, said the State had enough milk stocks and supply will not be affected. He appealed to milk farmers to continue supplying milk to the dairies.

## **Unrest may trouble BJP**

Like last year, the ruling BJP may soon have to grapple with multiple agitations. Both factions of agitating Patels — the Hardik Patel-led Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti and its rival Sardar Patel Group — have united and announced a revival of its pro-quota agitation.

Meanwhile, the strike of textile and apparel merchants in Surat, protesting against the GST, entered the third day on Wednesday. On Monday, police had lathi-charged them.

On the other hand, even the Petrol Dealers Association said it would not procure fresh stocks of diesel and petrol from various oil marketing companies in view of the uncertainties caused by the implementation of GST.

## **Now, a tool to check shrimp mislabelling**



Restaurants or marine products processing firms that substitute prized shrimp varieties with inferior quality ones, beware. Fisheries scientists in Tamil Nadu have developed a robust technique that will help regulators detect mislabelling and similar frauds.

Researchers led by Geevaretnam Jeyasekaran at the Fisheries College and Research Institute (FCRI) at Thoothukkudi have developed a sophisticated lab-based PCR test that is capable of differentiating four commercially important shrimp varieties from cheaper copycats.



“When you go to a restaurant and order a pan-cooked tiger shrimp curry, there is a possibility that what you get may not have tiger shrimp but contains a cheaper cousin, say Pacific white shrimp,” said Jeyasekaran, an FCRI scientist, who led the study. This is because once the head and tail are removed, different species of shrimps look similar and their distinct odour and taste are often masked by pungent spices,” he said.

### **A major concern**

“Food authenticity is an issue of major concern for food authorities all over the world, as mislabelling is a major commercial fraud,” the scientist said.

Such mislabelling is quite rampant in the shrimp processing industry. In 2014-15, India earned two-thirds of its total seafood export earnings, worth \$5.5 billion, from frozen shrimps.

“Those who are out there to make a quick buck mix cheaper varieties with prized ones and sell them as much-sought-after varieties,” Jeyasekaran said. The inferior varieties, containing lesser nutrients, are 25 to 30 per cent cheaper than the popular ones.

In many countries, the enforcement of correct labelling is emerging as a mandatory requirement.

According to Jeyasekaran, in developed countries, nearly 50 per cent of the shrimps sold are in processed form, and often, they do not bear an appropriate label regarding the species or farming method (caught from wild or farmed).

In 2014, DNA testing by the US-based not-for-profit organisation Oceana found that 30 per cent of 143 shrimp products from 111 grocery shops and restaurants were misrepresented.

The technique that Jeyasekaran and his team developed, however, can bring an end to this problem as it is capable of authenticating the shrimp species and thus protect consumers from economic fraud. The DNA-based technique, reported online in the journal *Food Chemistry* recently, has been developed for the first time in India and is suitable for testing the presence of popular Indian varieties such as giant tiger shrimp, Indian white shrimp, flower shrimp and Pacific white shrimp.

Apart from Jeyasekaran, other FCRI researchers involved in the project were Lidya Wilwet, Robinson Jeya Shakila, Balasubramanian Sivaraman and Pandurangen Padmavathy. More importantly, the tool is capable of identifying the species from any kind of sample — whether it is cooked, fried, canned or raw.

“This is because we extract the DNA from the shrimp muscle, which remains intact,” he said.

The Thoothukkudi institute is already a centre for certifying seafood products in India.

### **Ipsta exits from futures, may set up spot trading hub**



After conducting futures trading in pepper for about six decades, the India Pepper and Spice Trade Association (IPSTA) pulled down its shutters for futures early this week.

The Board of Directors of the Association took the decision following zero trading on the exchange platform for the past one year, which, as per SEBI norms, disqualified the exchange from further trading. It therefore opted to exit, Kishor Shamji, one of the directors, told *BusinessLine*.

### **Stringent compliance norms**

Added to this, he said, is the stringent compliance requirement specified by SEBI, such as ₹100 crore capital for commodity-specific regional exchanges.

Shamji said some multi-commodity exchanges were also looking for mergers so as to comply with the capital base requirement.

Given the IPSTA’s association with pepper for about 60 years and so as to remain in the trade, Mr Kishor, a veteran exporter and former President of IPSTA, said the board of directors, has “prima facie” decided to convert IPSTA as a spot trading hub for pepper.

He said all national exchanges have failed in conducting not only futures trading in this commodity but also spot trading under the Multi Commodity National Exchange banner.

IPSTA's directors are in the process of reviewing the role the association performed earlier, besides looking at utilising its online trading platform. Under this, the lots coming for sale duly tested by the seller can be either stored in a warehouse approved by the seller's association or at its own facility in the vicinity of the Kochi Spice market.

With minimal overheads and without much extra cost getting loaded into the price, the trade in general feels there is every possibility that spot trading through the IPSTA platform could gain momentum late this year or early next year. Planters and dealers in Karnataka can also make use of the IPSTA platform.

## Business Standard

### India among 5 countries using wastewater for irrigation

India comes after only four other countries - China, Pakistan, Mexico and Iran



India and four other countries – China, Pakistan, Mexico and Iran — account for the most cropland in the world irrigated by dirty wastewater, putting millions of lives at serious health risks, new research has found.

The global use of untreated wastewater from cities to irrigate crops downstream is 50 per cent more widespread than previously thought, according to the study published in the journal *Environmental Research Letters*.

The study relies on advanced modelling methods to provide a comprehensive estimate of the global extent to which farmers use urban wastewater on irrigated cropland.

Researchers analysed data with geographic information systems (GIS).

According to the study, farmers' use of wastewater is most prevalent in regions where there is significant wastewater generation and water pollution.

In these circumstances, and where safer water is in short supply, wastewater offers a consistent and reliable means of irrigating fields, including high-value crops, such as vegetables, which often require more water than staple foods.

Where raw wastewater is available, farmers may tend to prefer it because of its high concentrations of nutrients, which can lessen the need to apply purchased fertilisers.

In most cases, however, farmers' use of this water is motivated by basic needs. They simply do not have alternatives, the study showed.

"The de facto reuse of urban wastewater is understandable, given the combination of increasing water pollution and declining freshwater availability, as seen in many developing countries," said lead author of the study Anne Thebo from University of California, Berkeley in the US.

"As long as investment in wastewater treatment lags far behind population growth, large numbers of consumers eating raw produce will face heightened threats to food safety," Thebo said.

Results showed that 65 per cent of all irrigated areas are within 40 km downstream of urban centres and are affected by wastewater flows to a large degree.

Of the total area of 35.9 million hectares, 29.3 million hectares are in countries with very limited wastewater treatment, exposing 885 million urban consumers as well as farmers and food vendors to serious health risks.

Five countries -- China, India, Pakistan, Mexico and Iran -- account for most of this cropland, the findings showed.

These new findings supersede a widely cited 2004 estimate, based on case studies in some 70 countries and expert opinion, which had put the cropland area irrigated with wastewater at a maximum of 20 million hectares.

"Gaining a better grasp of where, why and to what extent farmers use wastewater for irrigation is an important step toward addressing the problem," said second author Pay Drechsel of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

"We hope this new study will focus the attention of policy makers and sanitation experts on the need to fulfill Sustainable Development Goal 6, particularly target 3, which calls for halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and increasing recycling and safe water reuse," Drechsel added.

*(Only the headline and picture of this report may have been reworked by the Business Standard staff; the rest of the content is auto-generated from a syndicated feed.)*