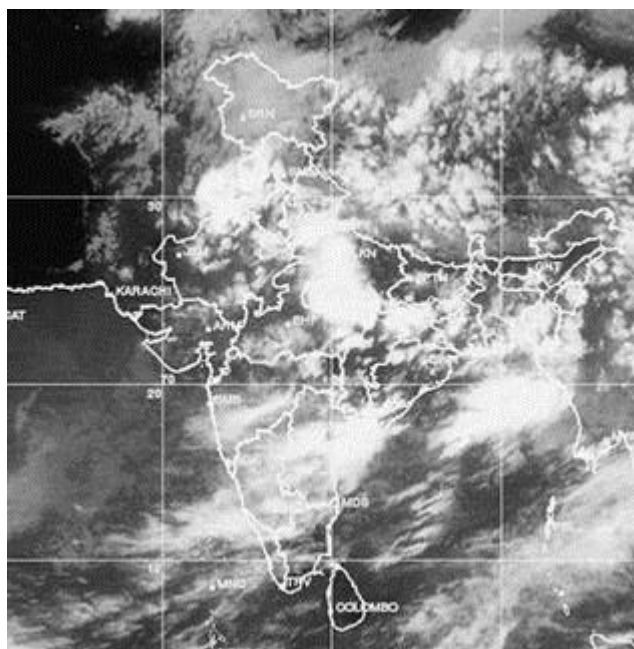


Date : 17.08.2013

THE HINDU

weather



INSAT PICTURE AT 14.00 hrs. Observations recorded at 8.30 a.m. on August 16th.

	Max	Min	R	TR
New Delhi (Plm)	31	26	2	427
New Delhi (Sfd)	31	25	16	540
Chandigarh	28	25	30	665
Hissar	31	25	33	409
Bhuntar	26	19	3	364
Shimla	19	16	10	670
Jammu	24	22	84	1000
Srinagar	22	17	4	205
Amritsar	29	24	61	562
Patiala	29	25	11	630
Jaipur	31	25	7	516
Udaipur	28	24	2	607
Allahabad	31	27	0	749

Lucknow	33	25	0	597
Varanasi	30	26	1	494
Dehradun	31	22	34	2354
Agartala	28	25	11	666
Ahmedabad	33	25	3	734
Bangalore	24	19	7	363
Bhubaneshwar	35	27	0	597
Bhopal	30	23	0	992
Chennai	29	25	2	387
Guwahati	34	25	2	625
Hyderabad	27	23	8	491
Kolkata	34	26	82	1012
Mumbai	30	26	2	1993
Nagpur	33	25	0	1224
Patna	34	26	42	234
Pune	29	21	tr	532
Thiruvananthapuram	31	24	0	864
Imphal	31	23	2	712
Shillong	23	17	0	654

The columns show maximum and minimum temperature in Celsius, rainfall during last 24 hours (tr-trace) and total rainfall in mm since 1st June.

RAINFALL

South west Monsoon has been Vigorous over Jammu and Kashmir and west Rajasthan and active over Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The axis of monsoon trough on S.L.C. passes through Shriganganagar , Bhiwani ,Satna and thence South-east wards.

RAINFALL: Rain/thundershowers have occurred at most places over Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab at many places over west Rajasthan, at a few places over east Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and at isolated places over rest of the region. The chief amounts of rainfall in cm are: (5 cm and above) HARYANA: Jhajjar 14, Nuh and Taoru 8 each, Naraingarh 7, Dujana 6 and Ellenabad, Chansa, Hissar, Julana, Assandh, Kanina and Samalakha 5 each, HIMACHAL PRADESH: Nahan 9, Kheri and Paonta 7 each, Baijnath and Nagrota Surian 5 each, JAMMU AND KASHMIR: Udhampur 13, Samba, Kathua, Bhaderwah and Jammu Airport 11 each, Batote 9 and Jammu and Katra 8 each, PUNJAB: Phangota 12, R.S.Dam Site 9, Pathankot and Shahpur Kandi 8 each, Amritsar and Muktsar 6 each and Malakpur 5, EAST RAJASTHAN: Deogarh 5, WEST RAJASTHAN: Bikaner Air port 9, Barmer, Jaisalmer and Sangaria 7 each, Hanumangarh, Fatehgarh and Nokh 6 each and Dorimanna and Bhadra 5 each, WEST UTTAR PRADESH: Rampur 8, Muradabad and Khair 6 each and jalesar and Karhal 5 each and UTTRAKHAND: Mussoorie 5.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 18th August 2013 : Rain/thundershowers would occur at many places over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh ,Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and east-Rajasthan. Rain/thundershowers would occur at many places over west-Rajasthan during next 24 hrs and decrease thereafter.

HEAVY RAINFALL WARNING: Heavy to very heavy rainfall may occur during next 24 hours and heavy rainfall during subsequent 48 hours at one or two places over Jammu and Kashmir. Heavy rainfall may occur at one or two places over Haryana , Punjab , Himachal Pradesh and west-Rajasthan during next 24 hrs and over west Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand during next 48 hours.

FORECAST FOR DELHI AND NEIGHBOURHOOD VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 18th August 2013: Generally cloudy sky. Rain/thundershowers would occur.

NABARD order decried

T.D. Janardhan Rao, former chairman of AP State Cooperative Central Bank (APCOB), found fault with a recent order of NABARD which envisaged that all the assets and loans of primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS) would be transferred to district cooperative central banks (DCCBs). It meant that the PACS would be reduced to the mere agents of DCCBs.

Cotton prices soar on export expectations

Cotton prices have crossed Rs. 45,000 a candy (for Shankar 6 variety) at the cotton markets (excluding the transport cost), causing concern among the cotton trade and textile industry here. According to vice president of the Indian Cotton Federation K.N. Viswanathan, the prices are expected to go up further. It is the end of the cotton season and new arrivals will commence only in October. The prices may come down if the Government decides that the stocks with Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) will be sold only in the domestic market.

The price of even the local cotton in the State is Rs. 46,000 to Rs. 48,000 a candy, without the Value Added Tax.

In the case of cotton purchased from other States, the mills will have to incur the transportation cost too. The international cotton prices are also going up and the mills have stocks only for a limited period. The local textile mills may not be able to absorb the cotton prices if it keeps going up. The market will be tight till the end of September, he said.

However, an official of the CCI said that though the Government has permitted the CCI to export cotton stocks with it, exports are not viable now. The difference between domestic and international cotton is just one to two cents for a pound of cotton. The difference should be four to five cents for exports to be viable. Even the private traders are not exporting.

The Corporation has seven lakh bales of cotton with it and the total stock in the country is estimated to be just 20 lakh bales. With two more months for new arrivals to gain momentum, the stock available will not be adequate. Hence, the prices are going up. The prices may come down in a week when it will become clear that exports will not be high at this stage, the official said.

Sugarcane diverted to private mills: farmers

Sugar is sweet, but issues surrounding its production remain bitter. Government officials in the district are struggling to check the smuggling of sugarcane from agricultural fields, meant exclusively for cooperative sugar mills, to private mills.

On Friday, N. Palanisami, president of the Tamil Nadu Sugarcane Farmers' Association and one of the directors of a cooperative sugar mill at Alanganallur here, attended a meeting convened by Collector L. Subramanian to redress farmers' grievances, including complaints about rampant smuggling of cane. He pointed out that the smuggling activity was more pronounced in Melur taluk. The Collector called for an explanation from Sugarcane Officer K. Shanthi, who confirmed the allegation and said that the offenders got away because they wielded political influence.

"Two brokers, Tirupathi and Kumar, lure farmers by paying Rs. 1 to 2 lakh. We had seized many lorries carrying smuggled sugarcane and handed them over to the police. But the vehicles are released within half an hour following phone calls from MLAs," she told the Collector.

Later, talking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Palanisami said that around 150 tonnes of sugarcane were smuggled at night in 10 to 15 lorries on a daily basis from Melur taluk. He said there were not enough check-posts in the taluk. "Production of sugar is very low owing to the dearth of cane. Presently, only a small amount of 1.5 lakh tonnes of sugarcane were available at the Alanganallur cooperative mill. In such a situation, letting people smuggle registered as well as unregistered sugar cane will be detrimental to the cooperative mill," he said.

However, denying that registered canes were also being smuggled, Ms. Shanthi said that the private mills and their brokers were involved in smuggling only unregistered sugarcane. But

even that required official sanction. "It is mandatory for private mills and their representatives to obtain a no-objection certificate (NoC) from me for transporting even unregistered cane from an area reserved for a cooperative mill. But the two brokers are smuggling the cane without obtaining the NoC," she added.

Policy on subsidy for organic fertilizers sought

Though subsidy is Rs. 60,000 crore, it is available only for inorganic or chemical fertilizers



Stephen Nortcliff, Emeritus Professor, University of Reading, the United Kingdom; Shantha Sheela Nair, Vice-Chairperson of State Planning Commission, Tamil Nadu, and David Croweller of Wherever the Need, the United Kingdom, at a conference in Puducherry on Friday.— Photo: G. Krishnaswamy

Shantha Sheela Nair, Vice-Chairperson of State Planning Commission, Tamil Nadu, on Friday said that there was a need to frame a national policy on extending or sharing fertilizer subsidy for organic inputs to promote naturally available resources.

She was inaugurating an international conference on Conventional and Non-Conventional Organic Inputs in Agriculture organised by Wherever the Need India Services and the Centre for Sustainable Development, Cuddalore, with the support of Annamalai University here.

Ms. Nair said though the governments in 1960's and 70's used all of their resources to promote inorganic fertilizers to improve productivity, various forums, scientists and intellectuals are now advocating the need for reverting to organic farming, which was a conventional method, to prevent soil contamination and grow healthy grains.

Fertilizer subsidy, which stood about Rs. 60 crore in the 70's, has been increased to a whopping Rs. 60,000 crore. But, it was available only for inorganic or chemical fertilizers. Though a section of farmers were using or producing organic manure to rejuvenate the soil and farming, they could not avail themselves of subsidy.

“It is time policy makers, scientists and economists framed a well-acclaimed policy on organic manure.” Claiming that 65 per cent of soil in the country was not contaminated, Ms. Nair said that besides animal waste, human waste too could be promoted as alternative organic manure. Stephen Nortcliff, Emeritus Professor, University of Reading, the United Kingdom, said research and scientific studies had proved that human waste could be transformed into safe, affordable compost and fertilizer and could return valuable nutrients to the soil. Awareness of recycling human waste was up the world over.

David Crossweller of Wherever the Need, a UK-based organisation, said that the ‘ecosan toilet’ concept, which was gaining momentum in developed and developing countries, was a real solution to meet the ever-increasing demand of agricultural fertilizers. It had attained remarkable success in India. With the support of nature lovers, his organisation was raising crops with ecosan compost in Cuddalore district.

S. Paramasivan, country director, Wherever the Need, said that results of research trials that used ecosan compost showed that average yields have gone up by 23 per cent.

Farmers encouraged to use seed drills for sowing

Plans to introduce it on 10,000 hectares, by providing subsidy

The district administration has decided to introduce seed drills for direct sowing on 10,000 hectares of rain-fed areas in the district to demonstrate the advantages of using the sowing device to farmers.

Seed drill sowing, a new technology in paddy cultivation in rain-fed areas helped the farmers to sow the seeds in correct spacing and gave them the advantages of System of Rice Intensification (SRI) technique enjoyed by farmers cultivating paddy in irrigated areas.

“We have decided to introduce seed drill sowing on 10,000 hectares, by providing a subsidy of Rs. 1,500 per hectare to the farmers to demonstrate the new technology and encourage them to adapt it,” Ka.Sakthimohan, Joint Director of Agriculture, said.

In a brief chat with reporters after the farmers’ grievance day meeting here on Friday, he said farmers, who were hitherto broadcasting the seeds manually after ploughing the lands, would be enlightened on the advantages of using the seed drill sowing machines to cut down production cost and improve production.

He said the department has 43 seed drills, including 28 machines purchased this year, and will start the seed drill sowing during the second week of September. “The first sowing will start in

the second week of September and the sowing on 10,000 hectares of land will be completed by October second week," he said.

Seed drills would be hired from the neighbouring districts to complete the process in one month, he said adding sowing on one hectare of land could be completed in an hour's time. The district has 74,000 hectares of rain-fed area and 54,000 hectares of semi rain-fed areas.

Mr. Sakthimohan said the department also proposed to increase the area of cultivation of pulses and millets during this season by taking up bund and border cropping. Presently, pulses were cultivated in the district on 4,100 hectares and it has been decided to increase the area of cultivation to 8,300 hectares by distributing free seeds and encouraging the farmers to cultivate pulses on the bunds around the fields, he said.

Similarly, the area of millet cultivation would also be enhanced from the existing 8,300 hectares to 14,100 hectares by asking the farmers to cultivate 'Kudhiraivali' as border crop on their fields, he said.

Mettur level

The water level in Mettur dam stood at 118.62 feet on Friday against its full level of 120 feet. The inflow was 10,413 cusecs and the discharge 11,999 cusecs. — Special Correspondent

Water level

Water level in the Papanasam dam on Friday stood at 125.20 feet (maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 671.64 cusecs and 1,104.75 cusecs of water was discharged from the dam.

The water level in Manimuthar dam stood at 65.69 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 27 cusecs and 55 cusecs was discharged.

Kanyakumari

The water level in Pechipparai dam stood at 26.85 feet, 65.50 feet in Perunchani, 11.55 feet in Chittar I, 11.64 feet in Chittar II and 30.27 feet in Mambazathuraiyaru dam.

Farmers make a pitch for remunerative prices

Sector facing acute labour shortage, Meena told

Farmers got Rs. 4.50 per coconut in 1983-84 and the rates remain the same 20 years later. However, the daily wages of labourers has gone up from Rs. 20 to Rs. 300.

President of Mangalore Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Prashanth Gatti brought up this point while highlighting the plight of farmers at an interactive programme here on Friday with Principal Secretary, Agriculture, Bharatlal Meena at the zilla panchayat, here on Friday. He demanded remunerative prices for farmers. Farmers were facing acute shortage of labourers, increase in input cost of farming at a time when remunerative prices remain a dream for them, Mr. Gatti said. Rajesh, a farmer, said that the government should not permit conversion of paddy fields for commercial purposes as paddy cultivation was on the verge of extinction, particularly in Dakshina Kannada.

Mr. Gatti said that in many villages, the village accountants had not updated the Record of Rights to Tenancy and Crops (RTC). Even if farmers had switched over to horticultural crops such as areca and coconut, the RTCs of farmers still mentioned that they cultivated paddy. As a result, farmers have not been able to get benefits from the horticulture department as the department rejected farmers' applications on the ground that they cultivated paddy.

Ashok Bhat, another farmer, said that now non-agriculturists were not permitted to purchase agriculture land. The ban should be lifted so that those interested in agriculture could buy farm land. Varanashi Krishnamurthy, founder, Varanashi Research Foundation, Adyanadkka, said that the government should make a policy for promoting jackfruit cultivation in the State as jackfruit was a food crop.

In his reply, Mr. Meena said that the proposed agriculture price commission was expected to address the marketing problems of farmers. The issue of allowing non-agriculturists to buy farm lands would be taken up with the government while village accountants would be asked to update the RTCs on annual basis.

He said that the government was thinking of paying the interest part of loans if a group of farmers built warehouses for storing agriculture produces at villages by availing bank loan.

Areca nut growers in distress over 'Koleroga'

According to sources 50 per cent of the crop has already been destroyed

Due to heavy downpour in the past twenty five days fungus infection has spread uncontrollably in the areca nut plantations in Uttara Kannada district. Already 50 per cent of the crop has been lost according to a source.

As per the latest report, the disease has spread in thousands of hectares in Sirsi, Siddapur, and Yellapur taluks.

There are reports of 'koleroga' having spread in Kumta, Honnavar, Bhatkal, and Joida taluks. The disease destroys the tree itself; most of the areca growers in the district are small landholders ranging from half acre to one acre.

Various organisations have already submitted memorandums to chief minister through Assistant commissioner. Thousands of areca growers from Sirsi, Siddapur and Yellapur taluks went to Assistant Commissioners (AC) Office at Sirsi recently and submitted a memorandum to chief minister to safeguard the interests of areca growers who are in distress over the wide-spread fungus disease (koleroga) this year.

They poured tender areca pods hit by the disease on roads and in front of AC's office to highlight their miserable condition.

The memorandum includes the following demands: a special package for relief, nutrients for the trees with 50 per cent subsidy, loans of the areca growers should be waived, research should be conducted to control the fungal disease effectively, action should be taken to control areca nut from the wild animal menace especially monkeys.

MLA Shivram Hebbar, Totgars Sale Society president Shantaram Hegde, District Congress Committee president Bheemanna Naik led the procession.

Addressing the farmers, Mr. Hebbar said a committee would be set up to meet the chief minister and he would be made aware of the farmers' plight, until then they were requested to not go to the extent of suicide at any cost.

farmers'




A flooded paddy field in Chellanam near Kochi.— Photo: K.K. Mustafah

The month of Chingam inaugurates the Malayalam New Year, marking a new dawn, hinged to the cycles of agriculture. The day is spent mostly in honouring thousands of great farmers in Kerala, where wind-swayed paddy stalks even on television screens stoke nostalgia. An unusually heavy monsoon season this year has wreaked havoc on large swathes of standing crops. But farmers are as patient as the earth.

Now, onions bring tears

But Hortcorp provides some cheer

PRICE PER KG AT HORTICORP
(MARKET PRICE IN BRACKETS)



• Beans	Rs.25 (Rs.35)
• Lady's finger	Rs.14 (Rs.20)
• Cow pea	Rs.56 (Rs.80)
• Green chillies	Rs.42 (Rs.60)
• Carrot	Rs.35 (Rs.50)
• Tomato	Rs.12 (Rs.16)
• Cabbage	Rs.18 (Rs.26)
• Cauliflower	Rs.32 (Rs.45)
• Small onion	Rs.28 (Rs.40)
• Potato	Rs.14 (Rs.20)
• Amaranthus	Rs.16 (Rs.21)
• Pineapple	Rs.37 (Rs.52)
• Capsicum	Rs. 46 (Rs. 65)

The sudden increase in the price of onions has upset family budgets. The price has shot up from Rs.38 a kg last week to Rs.70 this week. Many had heaved a sigh of relief when onion prices had remained stable during the recent hike in vegetable prices. However, that was not to be.

“We were already worried that the budget for Onam was going haywire with the prices of vegetables skyrocketing. The rise in onion prices has worsened the situation,” said a regular visitor to the Chalai market.

Onions now cost Rs.55 a kg in the wholesale market and Rs. 60-75 in the retail market. “We were surprised to find that onions were not affected by the initial price rise last week. But like all previous years, the prices shoot up very fast,” said Shamshid, a vegetable vendor at Chalai market.

However, the government, in a bid to hold the price line in the vegetable market, has decided to make market interventions through HortiCorp.

Vegetables will be available at prices lower than the current market prices in all outlets of the HortiCorp in the city. Onions are being made available at Rs.42 a kg by HortiCorp. However, given the scarcity of the item and the huge demand for it, the sale of onions has been restricted to two kg a person.

Vendors said vegetable prices would go up further during Onam since traders would start hoarding. They said supply shortage was a huge problem.

Prices of ginger, chillies and even fruits such as banana are also ruling high. This is also forcing many to revise their plans of an extravagant ‘sadya’ with 24 dishes to just a simple meal with two or three items for this Onam.

Paddy cultivation gets a fillip

The incessant rain and floods have not dampened the spirit of women farm workers belonging to the Oruma Joint Liability Group (JLG) of Vyshnavi Kudumbasree in Panamaram grama panchayat in Wayanad who are preparing to transplant a paddy nursery on 10 acres of rented land. The work has been delayed by two weeks due to rain.

“This year, we hope to cultivate paddy on 16.5 acres of rented land at three different sites, including 10 acres of fallow land, as against 8.5 acres during the corresponding period last year,” said K. Prema, chairperson of the group, who has been chosen the best woman farmer of the year by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. They have been engaged in paddy cultivation for the past eight years and it has been selected the best JLG in the district by the district Kudumbasree Mission this year.

Profitable

“We cultivated two varieties of rice last year — Gandakassala, a scented rice variety, and Athira, a hybrid variety on 8.5 acres of rented land — at an expenditure of Rs.1.26 lakh, including the land rent of Rs.5,000 an acre, and got returns of Rs.1.59 lakh within six months, she added.

The majority of the work has been done by labourers as we cannot complete the farm works on a large tract of paddy field, but the cultivation was a profitable venture for us for the past eight years, Ms. Prema said.

A five-member team of the Gramavelichom JLG under the Sheryas Kudumbasree at Puthusserikkadavu in Padinjarethara panchayat got 36 quintals of paddy costing Rs.72,000 from 3.5 acre of rented land last year. Hay was sold at Rs. 25,000.

They have extended the area of cultivation to seven acres , where plantain crops have been cultivated for past eight years, this year. They spent Rs. 35,000 on the cultivation, including the rent of the land, rent of tractor and combined harvester, as well as fertilizers and rent of the land, K. Joicee, secretary of the JLG said.

Kudumbasree

The district Kudumbasree Mission has launched a project with financial support of the NABARD and Canara Bank to provide interest-free loans up to Rs.3 lakh each to 1,082 JLGs, including 184 Scheduled Tribe JLGS to promote paddy cultivation, said P.P., Muhammed, district coordinator, Kudumbasree District Mission. “We are planning to revive the cultivation on 800 hectares this year,” he added.

The growing distress among farmers owing to low prices of the produce, dearth of skilled workers, and increase in input cost had forced them to shift to cash crops, said K. Gopi, secretary, Armadu Murani Padashekhara Samithi under the Meenangadi grama panchayat.

The introduction of several labour-oriented schemes by the government has had a cascading effect on the availability of manpower on the farm, he added. But, the introduction of modern farm machinery such as power transplanter, power tiller, power weeder and harvester has helped the farmers cut the input cost considerably.

Many a farmer has resumed paddy cultivation this year after the pro-farmers’ measures launched by the government such as procuring paddy at a minimum support price and various incentives to farmers for promoting paddy cultivation, he says.

According to the data of the Agriculture Department, Nanja, second crop, cultivation has spread over 13,000 hectares of land this year as against 11,000 hectares during the corresponding period last year.

Farming to celebrate Independence



Fun at farm: Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya students at Lakkidi in Wayanad planting vegetable seeds in a poly house on the campus on Thursday.

Students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya at Lakkidi in Wayanad district celebrated the 67th Independence Day by planting vegetable seeds in a newly constructed polyhouse on the school campus.

The polyhouse, a tunnel-like structure made of polyethylene used in precision farming, has been built with financial and technical support of the Horticulture Mission to demonstrate modern trends of agriculture practice for the students.

We also welcome farmers and visitors to learn the technique. They can avail themselves of the services of a teacher to learn more about the technology, said C.V. Santhi, Principal, JNV. She said the project cost Rs. 310 lakh.

Expenses

The Horticulture Mission contributed Rs.2 lakh for the purpose. The remaining expenses were met through cash awards won by the school for its environmental conservation activities including this year's Oisca International award.

The school authorities have also set up a green house as a part of the project and they plan to cultivate various species of orchids as well as ornamental and flower plants.

School dropout's pepper revolution



T.T. Thomas, the farmer who created a high-yielding variety of pepper. Photo: Giji K. Raman



'Pepper Thekken'. Photo: Giji K. Raman

T.T. Thomas, the creator of 'Pepper Thekken' wants the variety to benefit other farmers

In March 2013, T.T. Thomas received the President's award for the best innovative farmer at a ceremony in New Delhi. However, in this little-known village, he is just an ordinary farmer.

Mr. Thomas developed 'Pepper Thekken', a high yielding variety — the result of nearly 25 years of work after discovering a forest variety of pepper from the Anjuruly area. 'Pepper Thekken', unlike the ordinary one, gives a yield of more than a 1000 pepper balls in a single bunch. The specialty of this variety is that there are a number of branches in a single spike where as the other varieties are spiked without branches.

In a single spike there is usually only 60 to 80 pepper in the ordinary pepper and this innovative farmer developed the new variety after grafting the forest pepper wine with piper colibrium, a marshy weed plant. The Indian Institute of Spice Research, Kozhikode, had recognised this variety as a unique high yielding one with branches in the spike, a rare feature in black pepper.

The innovation of this Standard VIII dropout was acknowledged in the research circle as highly productive, resistant to disease and a natural variety.

Mr. Thomas claims that 90 per cent of the pepper in the area is affected with quick-wilt disease where as this variety is not affected as it is grafted in piper colubrinum.

He said that though he was recognised for this finding by the Union Government, he has not been given support for developing the disease resistant variety in a large scale to benefit pepper farmers. He said that there is official apathy and the move to import foreign varieties of wines to improve pepper production will have only negative impact.

According to him, there should be a change in the mindset for recognising farmers, a reason many leave the sector. "We recognise a farmer as the best one when he produces a large shaped yam or tapioca. It is possible if it is applied with high fertilisers", he said. However, a farmer who develops an indigenous variety highly endemic to the climatic or topographical condition is not recognised. It is not the mere shape and quantity of the produce that a farmer should be recognised for, he said. Though many keen farmers from outside the state and abroad enquire about 'Pepper Thekkan', even an agriculture officer from the official side from his village had never visited his sample farm, he said.

If the government supports him, he is ready to develop the large quantity of pepper plant for rejuvenating pepper cultivation in the district, he said.

It was after four years of research by agriculture scientists on the pepper variety that he was selected as the best innovative farmer, the award given by the National Innovation Foundation - India, under the Department of Science and Technology. However, for him it took many years

and experiments to develop the new variety, that benefit has not yet reached the ordinary pepper farmers.

“Yesterday, an officer from the agriculture department rang me up to participate in the three-day state farm exhibition at Kottayam on farmer's day. When asked for the simple accommodation and expenses to travel, he said they do not have the funds”, he said.

Bud rot haunts farmers



Bud rot disease is fast spreading in the hill areas of Kannur district.

The spectre of the ‘disaster’ that nearly eliminated coconut palms at Kappimala and Manjappullu in the hilly tracts 10 years ago has now come to haunt the coconut growers in the eastern parts of the district.

The fatal bud rot infestation that affects palms of all ages is fast spreading in the hill areas of the district. According to the Agriculture Department's figures, 4,17,250 coconut palms have been affected by the disease in Cherupuzha, Alakkode, Naduvil, and Udayagiri panchayats. Of these, 25,750 palms have been identified to be cut and removed.

The weather in the area, which got torrential rainfall over the past two months and had high relative humidity in air and few sunshine hours, has speeded up the attack of the disease.

"We are now anticipating here the decimation of coconut palms like what happened at Kappimala and Manjappullu areas 10 years ago," says C.U. Thomas, president of the Alakkode Federation of Coconut Producers' Societies.

"I have five acres of coconut garden at Alakkode, but my means of living is my pension money," says Mr. Thomas, who retired from government service six years ago. He said nearly 60 per cent of the coconut palms in the Alakkode panchayat have been affected by the rotting disease. Normally, farmers start chemical treatment immediately after the disease is detected to save the palms, but this time the heavy rains that lashed the area have made it impossible for them to do that, he says. Only 50 per cent of the affected palms in the panchayat can be now saved.

Also, the real extent of the damage caused by the disease will be understood only after some months. Babu Elambassery, a coconut grower at Kudiyanmala and president of the Kudiyanmala Kalpakajyothi Federation of Coconut Producers' Societies, says the coconut growers in the region are therefore in a panicky situation.

The situation has not yet prompted any crucial official action, Mr. Elambassery says. No agricultural official has visited Kudiyanmala area to take stock of the seriousness of the problem. The federation is now in the process of collecting data to assess the real extent of the damage. "Our initial assessment from the feedback from coconut farmers is that large number of palms has been hit by the disease," he says.

The diagnosis report by a joint inspection team comprising officials from the Kerala Agricultural University and the Agriculture Department has confirmed that the disease is spreading at an alarming rate in the four panchayats. The team observed that in majority of the coconut gardens in the areas they visited, the farmers practise disease management with comparatively no usage of chemical fertilisers, as they generally adopt organic methods by default.

The team recommends complete destruction of disease-affected plant parts from the gardens and application of Bordeaux paste over the chiselled area that should be protected from rain using polythene cover as some steps to fight the disease.

“It is generally a sporadic disease, but sometimes it appears in epidemic forms,” says K. Abdul Kareem, Associate Professor of the KAU’s College of Agriculture at Padannakkad in Kasaragod. The disease is caused by a fungus, *Phytophthora palmivora*.

Torrential showers in the region, since the onset of monsoon, is generally seen as a villain. The weather data obtained from the Pepper Research Station at Panniyur, situated about 20-30 km of the affected area, shows that the total rainfall received during June-July is 2789 mm, which is about 119.1 per cent more than the rainfall received during the same period last year (1272.7 mm) and 29.6 per cent more than that of 2011(2153.3 mm). No sunshine hours was recorded for 23 days during June and 24 days during July. Average humidity for the period was 93.2 per cent, according to KAU officials.

Their finding is that the torrential rainfall with strong wind has resulted in breakage of one of the leaves of the inner whorl leading to the infection and causing the toppling down of the palms.

The farmers and agricultural experts call for urgent action to deal with the situation and to protect the healthy palms from the disease, as coconut farming is the only mode of livelihood for most of the farmers in these areas.

Mani reiterates stand on NABARD fiat

Finance Minister K.M. Mani has reiterated his demand for withdrawing the contentious circular by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) that directed primary cooperative banks to stop accepting deposits from farmers. He was inaugurating the State-level farmers’ day observance here on Friday. Mr. Mani said the directive could not be implemented in the State at any cost as cooperative banks had been an integral part in supporting the farming community. The State government has already conveyed its opposition to the ‘anti-farmer’ fiat, he said. He said there was much to be done to promote agriculture in the State and the country as a whole. “The country’s agriculture sector has been witnessing a growth of merely 0.96 per cent. Furthermore, the contribution of the sector towards the country’s economy stood at a lowly nine per cent. The present circumstances demanded a relook at the economic system of the country,” he said. According to Mr. Mani, modernisation of the sector was required for the revival of the sector. Manufacturing value-added products would also provide the necessary boost, he said.

Corporation fails; panchayats to take up fish mart project



The modern fish marts, planned by the Matsyafed within the city Corporation limit, are likely to be shifted to the neighbouring grama panchayats as the Corporation authorities are allegedly cold-shouldering the project without allotting the required land for the project.

Of the 18 air-conditioned booths planned, 17 will come up in the grama panchayat limits as per the latest decision of the Matsyafed.

Officials from the Matsyafed have already contacted the grama panchayat authorities in Feroke, Olavanna, Kunnamangalam, Koduvally, Balussery and Ulliyeri to realise the project with their support. In the first phase, five panchayats from this group will be selected based on their response to the proposal and the swiftness in allotting the required land to start the construction works.

A senior officer attached to the Matsyafed said the Corporation had been showing a cold approach towards the proposal and raised objections against it citing “unjust” reasons. They had earlier given green signal to realise the project in five locations, but, the decision was later changed for “unconvincing” reasons, the officer claimed.

As per the approved plan, 18 air-conditioned fish vending booths had been planned in the city under a special recession package. The main aim was to streamline the conventional style of distribution and offer more standard facilities to the buyer. In the first phase, the plan was to open five such modern marts. But, the city Corporation’s Standing Committee on Town Planning slowly came up with straight opposition against two of the proposed outlets at Thiruvannur and

Link Road stating that the land identified for the project had earlier been reserved for other purposes.

The proposal for the fish mart along Link Road was sidelined as the site, according to the development standing committee, was earlier marked for a parking plaza. In Thiruvannur also, the justification was almost similar as they claimed that it was earlier identified for the construction of a modern fish market. Other outlet planned along Taj Road and Eranhipalam also evoked no positive response. At present, the Matsyafed would be able to construct only one mart at Arayidathupalam.

Officials with the Matsyafed said they did not want to give up the project as it would fetch a good return to small entrepreneurs in the field and gift a new buying experience to customers. "If the Corporation authorities are unwilling to take it up, the city dwellers will only miss it," they said. For realising the project, the Matsyafed would invest Rs.1 crore, sanctioned by the government under a special recession package for the welfare of fishermen community. As per the current plan, the construction cost of a single fish mart would come around Rs.5 lakh.

Along with these, a base station too would be developed at Puthiyappa harbour to sort out quality fish and transport it to the local marts. Superior storage facilities too would be made available at the base station.

The Corporation authorities are allegedly cold-shouldering the project without allotting the required land for it.

CM wants check on rising prices of onions, vegetables



New gold: Onions are sold at Rs. 70 per kg in retail market, while the price in wholesale markets soared to Rs. 4,100 per quintal as against the usual Rs. 2,500 thanks to shortfall in production this year. - PHOTO:

NAGARA GOPAL

Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy spent the major part of the day on Friday reviewing the difficult situation in several districts for various reasons — spiralling prices of essential commodities, law and order in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, and heavy rains.

At a meeting with senior officials, Mr. Reddy directed that measures including market intervention be taken to control the rise in prices, particularly of onions and vegetables.

The Chief Minister also asked the officials to closely monitor the law and order situation in Seemandhra, following the strike by APNGOs and RTC employees.

Emergency services

Alternative arrangements should be made for emergency services and transport facilities to ease hardship of the public, he said.

Officials told him that Velugodu and Auku reservoirs received good inflows. Crops in 2,550 hectares were damaged in Nalgonda district due to heavy rains from August 13 to 15, according to Disaster Management officials.

Meanwhile, the Met department has warned of heavy rainfall in East and West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore of coastal Andhra and in the districts of Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda, Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Medak and Mahbubnagar of Telangana during the next 48 hours. The average rainfall recorded on Friday was 20.4 mm and total rainfall received so far from June 1 was 443.5 mm as against a normal rainfall of 398.7 mm.

Rain, floods, damaged roads affect arrival of onion stocks



The continuing upward trend of onion prices in the Capital has led a worried Delhi Government to hold one more high-level meeting on Friday to review the situation. Heavy rain, floods, damaged roads, and restrictions in traffic movements due to security reasons leading up to Independence Day celebrations have all affected the arrival of onion stocks into the city.

At the meeting chaired by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, it was noted that arrival of stocks will improve on Friday and in the meantime the Delhi Government will facilitate the sale of

onions at reasonable prices at 1,000 points across Delhi. The sale points include Safal outlets, Delhi Agricultural Marketing Board, and 600 points to be covered by mobile vans.

Further, it was noted that the arrival earlier this week on August 13 and 14 was higher than previous dates and Delhi will soon be able to meet its demand. Wholesale rates in Delhi ranged between Rs. 30 and Rs. 50 per kg depending upon the quality. It was noted that wholesale prices of onion in Delhi was much less than many cities such as Karnal, Shimla, Kanpur, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Bangalore.

Ms. Dikshit further instructed all the departments concerned to keep a close eye on the prices and the availability of essential commodities, including onions, pulses, sugar, tomatoes and potatoes. She said the Government will not leave the citizens at the whims of the hoarders and black marketers.

The meeting was attended by Food and Civil Supplies Minister Haroon Yusuf, Development Minister Raj Kumar Chauhan, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Chairman Dr. Bijender Singh, Chief Secretary D.M. Spolia, Commissioner Food and Civil Supplies Department S.S. Yadav, Agriculture Secretary Ramesh Tiwari and DAMB Chairman Rajinder Sharma.

***The Delhi Government holds another high-level meeting to review the onion situation
It will facilitate sale of onions at reasonable prices at 1,000 points across the Capital***

Weather

INDIAN CITIES
INTERNATIONAL CITIES

▼

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather

Saturday, Aug 17

Max | Min

33° | 25°

Rain: 0 Sunrise: 05:56

Humidity: 79 Sunset: 06:29

Wind: normal Barometer: 1007

Tomorrow's Forecast

Sunday, Aug 18

Max | Min

31° | 24°

Extended Forecast for a week

Monday Aug 19	Tuesday Aug 20	Wednesday Aug 21	Thursday Aug 22	Friday Aug 23
32° 24° Cloudy	32° 24° Overcast	32° 24° Overcast	32° 24° Overcast	32° 24° Overcast

Airport Weather

▼

Rain: 0 Sunrise: 05:51

Humidity: 100 Sunset: 06:59

Wind: normal Barometer: 1002

Delhi vendor attacked for selling cheap onions

The onion crisis scaled new heights when a vegetable vendor was attacked and robbed at the Okhla market on Wednesday night, allegedly by his rivals for selling onions at lower rates.

Last week, Vijay Kumar Ahuja had set up a stall in collaboration with the Delhi government and the local Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) and started selling onions and potatoes at less than the prevalent wholesale rates in the market.

This, he alleges, did not go down well with his rivals as even their customers had begun to flock his stall. Moreover, Ahuja said his stall had been set up in a spot where they used to run an illegal parking.

On Wednesday night, he and his brother Rakesh and their partners Rajesh Bhatia and Ram Prakash Sharma were counting the day's earnings when his rivals Chand Babu and Akram arrived in an inebriated state, he alleged.

"Akram was carrying a baseball bat in his hand. They began abusing me and told me to remove the stall by Thursday morning or face the consequences. When I asked for the reason, they claimed the stall was affecting their parking business," Ahuja told HT.

Ahuja alleged that they attacked him and his partners with baseball bat when he tried to reason with him. "They also snatched my gold chain worth over Rs. 2 lakh and Rs. 77,000 in cash which was our day's earning and fled," said Ahuja, adding that they threatened to kill him if he did not remove the stall.

The Amar Colony police have registered a case of robbery and criminal intimidation against the accused. While Chand Babu has been arrested, efforts were on to nab Akram.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

University of Agricultural Sciences pitches in to boost sugarcane productivity

HUBLI: Sugarcane growers in the state have experts' help at hand to increase productivity. The University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Dharwad, is coming to their rescue by using its expertise for the same. A team of experts from UAS conducted an extensive research in the state to assess the productivity by focusing on the sugarcane belts like Belgaum, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Yadgir and Mandya. The team found that the productivity of cane down drastically in the past one decade. "Many sugarcane farmers suffered huge losses in most of the districts in the past 10 years while the percentage of farmers getting a good harvest has dwindled," said a member of the committee, who didn't want to be named. The UAS also conducted a comprehensive training for sugarcane growers and field officials in sugarcane factories to increase their knowledge in using advanced methods to improve the yield.

Speaking to TOI, L Krishna Naik, director of extension, UAS, Dharwad, said: "There is yield gap and no stability in cane productivity in Karnataka. Productivity declined from 100 tonne per hectare in 2000 to 80 tonne per hectare now. There is an urgent need to supply better material, including seeds, to farmers." "During the training programme, resource persons from our varsity gave tips on measures to be taken right from choosing good quality seeds till harvesting. We educated the farmers on selection of quality seeds, preparation of land and nutritional ingredient to be used to achieve good yield," he added. He also said that the main reason behind decline in productivity is due to the ignorance of sugarcane growers on cultivation pattern and irrigation management.

Business Standard

No immediate threat of rust disease to Indian wheat: scientist

Says the country is expected to produce a record 100 million tonnes in 2015



India does not face any immediate threat of Ug99 rust disease to its wheat crop and the country is expected to produce a record 100 million tonnes in 2015, leading wheat scientist Ronnie Coffman said today. 'Ug99' is a devastating strain of black wheat stem rust fungus. The wind-blown disease has capacity to affect the crop yield by over 70 per cent. It had recently emerged in Iran in 2009 and was contained with the use of resistant varieties.

Coffman, who has worked with Normal Borlaug -- the Father of the Green Revolution, said: "There is no immediate danger of Ug99 disease to India. However, its spread will depend predominantly on west-east air-flow pattern." Races of Ug99 black stem rust could migrate via wind blowing from East Africa, where the deadly disease was first detected, and move through wheat belt of the Middle East and into the bread baskets of South Asia, he told reporters.

The air-flow pattern is required to be monitored on a regular basis and the surveillance system is in place in most countries including India. Simultaneously, the research is being done to develop rust resistant varieties, he added. The challenges in protecting wheat crop from stem rust and yellow rust diseases would be discussed at a workshop during a four-day workshop commencing August 19 here. The workshop is organised by the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative (BGRI) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

"We are closer to our goal of protecting global wheat crop from rust disease but the vast wheat growing region that stretches across North Africa all the way to India and China is still

vulnerable," said Coffman, also a Vice-Chair of BGRI, funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK's Department of International Development. On India's wheat production, he told PTI separately: "The production has been in the range of 92-95 million tonnes in the last years. This will sustain. It could cross the 100 million tonnes mark not this year but in 2014-15."

Higher production could be achieved on adoption of improved varieties and better agronomical practices, he added. In India, wheat crop suffers from yellow rust fungal disease which is not catastrophic. Last year, it affected the crop planted in three million hectare but there was no crop loss, said Karnal-based Directorate of Wheat Research (DWR) Project Director Indu Sharam.

She said the BGRI will also commemorate 50th anniversary of Norman Borlaug's introduction of high-yielding wheat varieties in India. He visited India in 1963 when wheat production was only 12 million tonnes. Now, the country's wheat production has increased to 92.46 million tonnes in 2012-13 crop year (July-June).

Jeera prices set to rise on dwindling arrivals

Arrivals in key markets like Gujarat have seen a decline -- from 79 tonnes in March to 23 tonnes in May and 13 tonnes in July



Amid falling arrivals, the prices of jeera (cumin seeds) are set to rise. This year, production of the commodity was low, and this was exerting additional pressure on prices, traders said.

Early this week, jeera was traded at Rs 13,400-13,500 a quintal in the Unjha spot markets. Arrivals at key markets in Gujarat have seen a decline---from 79 tonnes in March to 23 tonnes in May and 13 tonnes in July. "Arrivals are falling. We see prices strengthening further, as the stock is less compared to last year due to reduced production," said a jeera trader in Unjha.

An Emkay Research report said the rise in domestic and export demand ahead of the festive season was also likely to boost prices. "Export demand is expected to remain firm till mid-December, as during Christmas season, the buying remains subdued. Good export demand from Singapore, Europe, Dubai and Bangladesh is being reported."

Insiders said a low carry-over stock was also fuelling the rise in prices. "There is less carry-over stock. Also, this has been one of the lowest production years in past three years. So, prices are likely to remain firm," said a trader source at Unjha. According to data provided by the Spice Board of India, jeera production stood at 3,94,328 tonnes in 2012-13, 4,61,160 tonnes in 2011-12 and 4,03,744 tonnes in 2010-11.

In 2012-13, India exported a whopping 79,900 tonnes of jeera, 78% more than the 45,000 tonnes exported in 2011-12. Jeera exports are likely to remain high this year, too, owing to a strong dollar and rifts and disruptions in Syria and Turkey, the major global producers. "The full-scale civil war between the regime and the opposition has led to complete isolation of Syria, in terms of beneficial trade. Expectations of lower production in Turkey and the supply halt from Syria would make India the sole major exporter of jeera," the Emkay report said.

Factors that could have an impact on jeera prices in the coming days include the possibility of the National Spot Exchange releasing stocks to clear dues to investors. An above-average monsoon in Gujarat may also affect jeera quality and, therefore, prices.

Soybean rises by 1.2% on global cues

Fall in production in the US, Argentina and Brazil raised hopes of strong export demand



Soybean prices rose by Rs 43.50 to Rs 3,033 per quintal in futures trade today on the back of increased buying by traders, driven by firm overseas markets cues.

Marketmen said reports of fall in production in the US, Argentina and Brazil raised hopes of strong export demand, and encouraged speculators to enlarge their positions in futures trade.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, soybean for October contract climbed up by Rs.43.50, or 1.46% to Rs.3,033 per quintal, having an open interest of 81,270 lots.

Near November contract rose by a similar margins of Rs 43.50, or 1.45% to Rs.3,041 per quintal, showing an open interest of 71,790 lots.

Coriander gains by 2.1% on strong demand

The sentiment improved further due to limited stocks position on restricted arrivals



Coriander prices gained 2.14% to Rs 5,678 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators enlarged their positions, supported by pick-up in spot demand.

The sentiment improved further due to limited stocks position on restricted arrivals from the major growing belts.

At the National Commodity and Derivative Exchange, coriander for September gained Rs 117, or 2.14%, to Rs 5,678 per quintal, with an open interest of 23,060 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in August traded higher by Rs 85, or 1.53%, to Rs 5,624 per quintal, with an open interest of 1,420 lots.

Market analysts said increased buying by speculators, driven by pick up in spot market demand against less arrivals from producing belt mainly helped coriander prices to rise at futures trade.

Chana prices higher on high buying activity

Restricted arrivals in the physical market also influenced the market sentiment



Chana prices rose by Rs 64 to Rs 2,888 per quintal in futures trade today as traders enlarged their holdings on rising demand in the spot market.

Restricted arrivals in the physical market also influenced the market sentiment.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, chana for delivery in August rose by Rs 64, or 2.27% to Rs 2,888 per quintal, with an open interest of 11,240 lots.

Similarly, chana prices for delivery in September higher by Rs 57, or 2%, to Rs 2,914 per quintal, with an open interest of 1,62,730 lots.

Traders said speculators increasing their holdings on hopes of rise in spot market demand ahead of festivals against restricted arrivals of the commodity in the physical market.

Crude palm oil up by 2.4% on overseas cues

Fresh buying by traders, influenced by a firming global trend mainly helped crude palm oil prices



Supported by a firming trend overseas and rising spot demand, crude palm oil prices up by Rs 12.10 to Rs 513.90 per 10 kg in futures trade today as speculators enlarged positions.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude palm oil for delivery in September rose by Rs 12.10, or 2.41%, to Rs 513.90 per 10 kg, with a business turnover of 170 lots.

Oil prices for August contract increased by Rs 9.80, or 1.92%, to Rs 518.40 per 10 kg with a volume of 471 lots.

Market analysts said fresh buying by traders, influenced by a firming global trend mainly helped crude palm oil prices to trade higher at futures trade.

In Malaysia, palm oil gained 1.60% to \$712 a metric tonne after palm oil headed for the biggest weekly gain in 32 months as soybeans rallied on concern that the US, the largest grower of the oilseed crushed to make an alternative oil, may harvest a smaller crop than forecast.

Cardamom up by 1.2% on spot demand

Restricted supplies from growing areas also supported the upside in cardamom prices



Cardamom prices rose by 1.25% to Rs 767.80 per kg in futures trade today as speculators enlarged their positions on the back of rising demand in spot market.

Further, restricted supplies from growing areas also supported the upside in cardamom prices at futures trade.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in September rose by Rs 9.50, or 1.25%, to Rs 767.80 per kg, with a business turnover of 405 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in October edged up by Rs 7, or 0.88%, to Rs 797 per kg in 33 lots.

Traders said rising demand in spot market on account of strong domestic and export demand against restricted arrivals from producing regions, mainly pushed up cardamom prices at futures market.

THE HINDU Business Line

'Indian wheat vulnerable to stem rust, but no immediate threat'



Yellow rust or stripe rust is the most prevalent disease in wheat crops in India though its impact is very limited.

Though India's wheat crop is seen vulnerable to 'Ug99', a devastating strain of black stem rust fungus that has emerged from Uganda in recent years, it does not face any immediate threat from the disease, said Ronnie Coffman, lead scientist and Vice-Chairman at the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative (BGRI).

Coffman is among the 400-odd top global wheat scientists from 47 countries who will congregate in New Delhi next week to deliberate on the challenges in protecting the global wheat supply from the stem rust and yellow rust diseases.

"There is no immediate danger from Ug99 disease to India. However, its spread will depend predominantly on air flow pattern and wind currents blowing from the West – especially from Yemen into South Asia," Coffman said at a curtain raiser ahead of the four-day technical workshop organised by BGRI and the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR). The air-flow pattern needs to be monitored on regular basis and a surveillance system is in place in most wheat-growing countries, including India.

BGRI will also commemorate the 50th anniversary of Norman Borlaug's introduction of high-yielding wheat varieties in India. Borlaug visited India in 1963 and triggered a wheat revolution.

India's wheat production, which stood at only 12 million tonnes in 1963 has grown to over 92 million tonnes in 2013.

Ug99 or stem rust was detected in Iran in 2009, but the spread of fungus was contained by deploying resistant varieties. It is the most feared disease for wheat and can slash crop yields by over 70 per cent. Coffman said stem rust could act like a "biological firestorm" turning fields of wheat into blackened stubble with no grain.

"We are closer to our goal of protecting global wheat crop from rust disease but the vast wheat growing region that stretches across North Africa all the way to India and China is still vulnerable," Coffman said.

In India, another form of rust – known as yellow rust or stripe rust – exists, but the impact has been rather limited. "Last year, yellow rust affected the crop planted on about three million hectares, but there was no crop loss," said Indu Sharma, Director of the Karnal-based Directorate of Wheat Research.

She said that anticipatory contingency plans had been chalked out aiming at immediate and long-term strategies to manage stripe rust along with leaf rust and stem rust.

Biomass, the forgotten option



Biomass can generate livelihood options.

India is a biomass-rich country. It is said that availability of agro residues is to the tune of around 600-700 million tonnes. Traditionally, a lot of biomass is used in the country, although in a very

inefficient manner. Considering the appropriateness of biomass as an energy source, it was one of the cornerstones of India's renewable energy programme.

Starting with the improved stoves, the country moved on to modern forms of biomass energy for energising irrigation pumpsets and then to rural electrification. TERI pioneered the development of technologies that use biomass for heat applications in small, micro, and rural enterprises; such enterprises occupy an important place in the country's economy. It is evident that the range of biomass energy solutions is very wide, from small cook stoves to MW scale power plants to industrial process heating plants.

Gradually ignored

But progressively, as we moved up the ladder, first focussing on large-scale wind energy deployment and thereafter on solar energy through the Jawaharlal National Solar Mission, biomass energy was relegated to the background.

This is surprising because biomass-based energy solutions have the potential to become focal points of overall socio-economic development. This is an aspect that differentiates biomass-based solutions from other technological solutions. These systems are also used for the socio-economic uplift of the villages with livelihood activities woven around them.

There are a few other factors that strengthen the case for biomass energy. First, energy from biomass is cost-effective. Secondly, as far as electricity generation is concerned, biomass power provides 'firm' or non-intermittent electricity, just like conventional grid electricity. From the perspective of utilities, it can be scheduled easily for advance planning. And third, technologies for converting biomass into energy are indigenous and there is no import dependency. In fact, properly supported, this indigenous industry can be easily transformed into an export hub for other developing countries. And finally, it can be utilised to meet the energy needs of different strata of our economy. Recent developments such as biomass (biomass-solar hybrid) decentralised cold storage-cum-power generation systems are examples of this.

Time to prioritise

The need of the hour, thus, is to accord priority to biomass energy, similar to that given to wind and solar energy. There is no reason why incentives and tariffs similar to that given to solar and wind, cannot be provided to biomass energy. Moreover, for a long time this nationally important resource is languishing in terms of R&D and innovation.

To reap the full benefits of biomass energy, there is an urgent need to addressing challenges in terms of providing appropriate and convenient technological solutions and organising the biomass supply chain in a sustainable fashion.

The latter becomes even more daunting if we consider the very nature of availability of biomass, especially agro-residues, which are distributed widely and unevenly. It is time a holistic national biomass energy mission, with ambitious goals and appropriate means, is launched.

Small growers hail Tea Board's regulatory measures

Small tea growers in the Nilgiris have hailed the measures initiated by the Tea Board towards regulating the functioning of the tea factories.

“Though late, the Board has at least now brought in certain measures to regulate the factories. The measures include creation of a District Price Monitoring Committee (DPMC) with representation from the Small Tea Growers (STG) community, declaration of an average price at the start of every month and particulars from the factories on the quantum of green leaves procured, quantity of made tea produced and the rate at which they have been sold at the auction or private sale and other details. Such measures will benefit the small tea growers (STG),” said H.N. Sivan, President of the Nilgiris Nellikolu Micro & Small Tea Growers and Farmers Development Society (NSTF).

“But there is no mention about the ‘green tea leaf agents,” he said and explained that the agents actually procured the leaf from the STGs at the village level and supplied them to the factories. Nearly 60 per cent of the supplies is through agents.

“Since the small grower concerned will not know the factory to which the leaf from his garden has been supplied, regulation of these agents is equally important. They must be registered with the Tea Board and made liable for the supply of the leaves from the small growers,” he said.

Rubber skids on lack of buyers

The physical rubber prices declined sharply on Friday.

According to sources, there were no genuine buyers in the market but it managed to sustain at the prevailing levels on supply concerns.

Expectations of improved arrivals within a couple of weeks following a positive change in weather kept the traders on sidelines. Meanwhile, a crash in domestic stock markets dampened the sentiments further.

Sheet rubber weakened to Rs 190 (194) a kg, according to traders. The grade moved down to Rs 191 (194) both at Kottayam and Kochi, as reported by the Rubber Board.

September futures declined to Rs 181.51 (Rs 184.69), October to Rs 172.50 (Rs 175.67), November to Rs 167.50 (Rs 169.06) and December to Rs 167 (169.35) on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) slid to Rs 159.91 (Rs 160.25) at Bangkok.

August futures closed at ¥ 258.8 (Rs 164.01) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber (Rs/kg): RSS-4: 190 (194); RSS-5: 188 (190); Ungraded: 179 (180); ISNR 20: 174 (175.50) and Latex 60 per cent: 163 (164).

Tea prices gain at N. India auction

This week at Sale Number 33 at Kolkata tea auction, both CTC and Orthodox prices were higher than those in the previous week (Sale 32), according to J Thomas & Company Pvt Ltd., the tea auctioneers.

The average CTC price was Rs 152.35 a kg (Rs 147.09) and the average price of Orthodox was Rs 224.03 (Rs 221.14). An estimated 81.62 per cent (66.9 per cent) of CTC and 86.68 per cent (87.55 per cent) of Orthodox volumes offered were sold.

This week, the total offerings (packages) at three North Indian auction centres at Kolkata, Guwahati and Siliguri were 4,10,120 compared to 3,12,522 in the corresponding sale last year.

This week's offerings are Kolkata comprised CTC/Dust 1,05,564 (97,718), Orthodox 45,957 (23,522) and Darjeeling 8,487 (7008).

The offerings at two other centres, mainly handling CTC/Dust, were: Guwahati 1,43,477 (97,864) and Siliguri 1,06,635 (86,410).

Best Assam CTC teas eased in value while good and medium categories maintaining quality sold at around last rates and occasionally dearer.

Dooars were irregularly lower. Tata Global was active. Hindustan Unilever operated selectively for the mediums.

Western India operated actively for the liquoring teas. There was improved interest from the exporters on the larger broken and fannings.

Orthodox tippy teas sold well in line with quality. Well made whole leaf and broken grades were irregular around last levels.

Bolder whole leaf and fannings were easier. CIS and West Asia shippers were active. There was some Continental interest on the tippy teas.

Darjeeling better varieties sold at around last levels, while medium and plainer sorts eased in value.

Local dealers operated for cheaper sorts.

Copra shortage heats up coconut oil

Coconut oil prices zoomed Rs 90 on Friday on the back of short supply of copra.

“The price of coconut oil has touched Rs 1,070 for 15-kg loose pack on Friday, which is Rs 90 higher than last week price and everyone is expecting the price to go up further within couple of days. Such increase is due to the shortage of copra availability because of the rains in Kerala and some parts of Tamil Nadu,” said R.M. Palanisamy, Coconut oil trader of Erode.

He said that still the price of palm kernel, which is the main competitor for the coconut oil, remains lower than the coconut oil, selling at Rs 850 a quintal. On Friday, at Avalpoondurai RMC auction, 1,150 quintals of copra (3,300 bags) arrived for sale and all the quantity were sold for higher price. Because of the competition among the buyers, the fine variety copra gained Rs 290 a quintal and the second variety Rs 335. Because of such increase, the copra farmers were happy and said that they are expecting more price for their produce by next week.

At the Avalpoondurai RMC the first grade copra was sold at Rs 4,890-5,035, second grade Rs 4,765-4,965. All the 1,150 quintals were sold.

US trims anti-dumping duty on Indian shrimp to 5.8%



Bright outlook: The International Trade Commission of the US would make the final verdict on the quantum of counter-veiling duty by the end of next month.

Though the US Department of Commerce has, in its final determination, imposed a 5.85 per cent countervailing duty (CVD) on shrimps imported from India, exporters are not much perturbed as the demand from the US is on the upswing and the dollar continues to appreciate against the rupee.

The DoC, on Tuesday, cut the CVD from the earlier 5.91 per cent to 5.85 per cent. Indian exporters had hoped the preliminary rate of 5.91 per cent, fixed in May, would be substantially cut in the final determination.

However, DoC opted for only a marginal cut in the case of India, while substantially increasing China's.

The CVD – a penal import tax to offset the alleged subsidies allowed by the governments to the shrimp exporters to the US – was imposed by the US Government on six Asian countries and Ecuador on a complaint by the Coalition of Shrimp Industries representing American shrimp farmers and processors.

The coalition had complained that these seven countries had offered huge subsidies to their respective shrimp industries, thus hurting the competitive capacity of the US shrimp industry. The six Asian countries are: India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Together, they had exported 3.4 billion dollar worth of shrimps to the US.

However, Thailand and Indonesia have been spared from the CVD by the DoC in its final determination.

Ravi Reddy, President of Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI), told *Business Line* that even the DoC's determination was not final.

The International Trade Commission (ITC) of the US would make the final verdict on the quantum of counter-veiling duty by the end of next month.

The ITC would take a decision on whether the subsidies had unfairly hurt the interests of US farmers and the CVD would depend on that verdict.

K.G. Lawrence, Vice-President of the association, pointed out that together with the anti-dumping duty 3.66 per cent, the total import duty of Indian shrimps in the US would be roughly 10 per cent.

“This is, of course, a huge burden on the Indian exporters, but the US demand is going up and the dollar value against the rupee is rising,” he told *Business Line*.

“These two factors will, by the end of the financial year, boost the shrimp export earnings.”

US demand has been on the rise because of the fall in supply from Thailand, whose shrimp farms have been hit by a unique disease.

In 2012, the US had imported \$551 million worth of shrimp from India.

Uptrend continues in pepper

Uptrend continued in pepper, both spot and futures, on strong demand amid tight supply. Tamil Nadu-based dealers were actively buying from Idukki farm grade pepper at Rs 400-405 depending on the quality. Upcountry buyers were also seen active. Re-processors were also showing interest to buy small quantities from the plains. Exporters who have imported 500 GL pepper at a landed cost of Rs 355 a kg were looking for high bulk density pepper at a premium for mixing with the imported material and re-exporting, traders said. On the spot, 13 tonnes of farm grade arrived and 17 tonnes were traded at Rs 399-400. September and October contracts on the NMCE increased by Rs 323 and Rs 673 a quintal respectively to Rs 42,713 and Rs 42,618. Total turnover dropped by three tonnes to 32 tonnes. Total open interest moved up by four tonnes to 32 tonnes. Spot prices continued to gain by Rs 200 to Rs 39,900 (ungarbled) and Rs 41,900 (garbled). Indian parity in the international market stayed at \$7,025 (c&f) Europe at \$7,275 a tonne (c&f) US.

Surplus rains boost kharif planting

Kharif acreage*		(in lakh hectares)	
	This Year	Last Year	
Rice	304.62	292.55	
Pulses	93.25	74.48	
Coarse cereals	181.52	157.97	
Oilseeds	183.37	158.92	
Sugarcane	48.53	40.06	
Cotton	110.93	110.26	
Jute & Mesta	8.30	8.36	
Total Area	930.52	852.60	

* As on Aug 16

As kharif sowing entered its last leg, the acreage of key crops, such as soyabean and maize, touched a high with farmers planting more area aided by surplus monsoon rains.

Latest data from Agriculture Ministry showed that plantings were complete in about 85 per cent of the normal kharif area of 1,068 lakh hectare area (lh) of mid-August.

Rice has been transplanted on 304.62 lh, about 4 per cent more than the corresponding previous year. States such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Haryana have reported higher acreages. However, rice acreage was lower in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

The monsoon rainfall till mid-August was 13 per cent surplus, with 31 of the 36 meteorological sub-divisions reporting either excess or normal rains, while the remaining five had deficit rains.

In pulses, the total acreage stood at 93.25 lh, about 25 per cent than corresponding last year. Acreage under tur or arhar was up at 35.76 lh (31.04 lh), while the area under urad bean was marginally higher at 20.76 lh (19.51 lh). Moong registered a 43 per cent increase in area at 20.68 lh (14.42 lh).

Under coarse cereals, maize recorded a higher area at 79.06 lh (69.45 lh), while bajra was up at 68.81 lh (53.91 lh). However, the area under jowar was down at 20.33 lh (22.98 lh). States such as Karnataka, Andhra and Bihar have reported higher acreages under coarse cereals, while Gujarat and Rajasthan have reported a decline in area.

In case of oilseeds, the total area has exceeded last year's level by about 15 per cent on account of record acreage under soyabean, which has touched a new high of 121.31 lh (106.41 lh), while groundnut area was higher at 39.96 lh (34.35 lh). States such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have recorded higher acreage over last year.

Cash crops such as cotton and sugar have seen their acreages stagnate at 110.93 lh and 48.53 lh respectively over last week.

Edible oils up on extended gain in Malaysia palm oil



Weak domestic currency touching record low against the US dollar and extended gain in Malaysian palm oil futures have pushed up edible oils prices higher in domestic market on Friday.

Imported palmolein and soyabean refined oil shot up by Rs 10 and Rs 8 respectively as local refineries have increased their rates for edible oils by Rs 10-13. During the day 1,000-1,100 tonnes palmolein and 80-100 tonnes soyabean refined were traded. Demand will be higher coming days due to continuous festivals, he said.

At the end of the day, Liberty quoted palmolein at Rs 565, super palmolein Rs 595 and super deluxe Rs 615, soyabean refined oil Rs 658 and sunflower refined oil Rs 820.

Ruchi quoted palmolein Rs 565 ex-Patalganga and Rs 555 ex-JNPT, soyabean refined oil Rs 655 and sunflower refined oil Rs 810. Allana quoted palmolein at Rs 563, super palmolein Rs 593, soyabean refined oil Rs 655 and sunflower refined oil Rs 808. Gokul quoted palmolein at Rs 562.

In Rajkot, groundnut oil was steady at Rs 1,520 (Rs 1,520) for *telia* tin and loose (10 kg) Rs 975 (Rs 975). Soyabean arrivals increased to 70,000 bags at Rs 3,400-3,450 ex-mandi and Rs 3,530-3,600 for plant delivery. Mustard seeds arrivals were 45,000 bags and the prices were Rs 3,300-3,625. Oilseeds are sown in 183.37 lakh hectares as of Aug.16, compared with 158.92 lakh hectares a year earlier, Farm Ministry data showed.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, soyabean refined oil September futures shot up by Rs 13.15 to Rs 666.25 (Rs 653.10), October higher by Rs 16.20 to Rs 639.50 (Rs 623.30) and November increased by Rs 15.15 to Rs 632.00 (Rs 616.85).

Malaysia BMD crude palm oil Sept futures settled higher at MYR 2,367 (MYR 2,349), Oct at MYR 2,324 (MYR 2,318) and Nov at MYR 2,309 (MYR 2,299).

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg) were: Groundnut oil 990 (990), soya ref oil 653 (645), sunflower exp. ref. 725 (720), sunflower ref. 810 (800), rapeseed ref. oil 704 (703), rapeseed exp ref. 674 (673) cottonseed ref. oil 655 (655) and palmolein 555 (545).

Vikram Global Commodities (P) Ltd has quoted Rs 615 for 10 kg for Malaysia super palmolein for September delivery.

Bullish trend in mustard oil, seeds on better demand



Bullish trend continued in mustard oil and seeds on improved demand and buying support.

Mustard oil in Indore mandis on Friday ruled at Rs 640, while it was Rs 645 in Morrena and Rs 635 in Neemuch. Compared to last week, mustard oil was up Rs 8 in Indore, Rs 10 in Neemuch, while it is ruling Rs 13 higher in Moorena.

Improved buying support has lifted mustard oil in Indore mandis in the past fortnight by almost Rs 18.

With weather remaining dry for the past one week, rise in buying support in soyabean and other pulse seeds have also added to bullish sentiment in mustard oil and seeds, Vinod Agrawal, a local mustard seeds broker, told *Business Line*.

Bearish sentiment in mustard oil in the coming days appears unlikely given rise in festival demand ahead.

In Rajasthan mandis also mustard oil has been witnessing an uptrend on improved demand with its price in Kota on Friday at Rs 652 (up Rs 12 from last week), while it was Rs 655 in Ganga Nagar (up Rs 15) and Rs 665 in Jaipur.

In Gujarat however, mustard oil continued to rule stable at Rs 635 on subdued demand and buying support.

Mustard seeds ruled firm at Rs 4,200 a quintal, while raida ruled at Rs 3,050. Mustard seeds futures however, traded higher on strong buying support with its August and September contracts on the NCEDX on Friday closing at Rs 3,356 (up Rs 85) and Rs 3,369 (up Rs 81). Compared to last week, mustard seeds futures are almost up Rs 100.

Plant deliveries in mustard seeds for Jaipur line were also ruled higher Rs 3,530-50 (Rs 3,400-3,420 last week) amid decline in arrivals and rise in demand from crushers.

Arrival of mustard seeds across the country on Friday declined to 45,000 bags with Rajasthan 27,000 bags, Punjab/Haryana 5,000, Uttar Pradesh 4,000, Madhya Pradesh 3,000, Gujarat 2,000 while 4,000 bags were offloaded elsewhere in the country.

Falling rupee may lend support to sugar exports



Spot prices in the Vashi wholesale sugar market increased by Rs 3 for fine variety M-grade while S-grade rule steady on Friday.

In Naka trade, M-grade bold variety sold at Rs 5-10 higher while S-grade was sold at Rs 5-10 lower.

Mill tender rates were unchanged as mills continued selling to cut down stocks. Volume was higher as the market remained closed the previous day.

Sources said, "Once the world market prices crossed \$525-530 level, chances of Indian shipment will be brighter.

"Weak rupee has helped India to re-enter in export market. Producers are carrying huge surplus stocks.

"Undercurrent of the market remained positive as producers and exporters have started discussing possible export deals as prices in the world market have improved in the last few days and the rupee is weak."

Sources said, considering higher cost of production and rise in supply in local market, prices are ruling range-bound since the last few weeks.

Stockists are seen keeping away from taking risk of bulk inventory buying as sufficient stocks are available in the market. Domestic sugar prices are not expected to go down further from current level.

Arrivals in the Vashi market were 64-65 truck loads (each of 100 bags) while local dispatches were 62-63.

On Wednesday evening only 9 -10 mills offered tenders and sold about 32,000-34,000 bags at Rs 2,910-3,000 (Rs 2,910-3,000) for S-grade and Rs 3,010-3,110 (Rs 3,010- 3,110) for M-grade.

On the National Commodities and Derivatives Exchange, sugar September futures were up by Rs 7 to Rs 3,017 (Rs 3,010), October by Rs 3 to Rs 3,030 (Rs 3,027) and November was higher at Rs 3,019 (Rs 3,018) till noon.

The Bombay Sugar Merchants Association's spot rates were: S-grade Rs 3,052-3,142 (Rs 3,052-3,142) and M-grade Rs 3,175-3,352 (Rs 3,172-3,352).

Naka delivery rates were: S-grade Rs 3,005-3,060 (Rs 3,010-3,070) and M-grade Rs 3,100-3,220 (Rs 3,100-3,210).

Turmeric price improves on quality arrivals



Turmeric prices increased by Rs 100-200 a quintal due to arrival of quality turmeric.

“We are still waiting for bulk order of turmeric from North India and we hope that within a couple of days, we may get some more orders”, said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said Erode turmeric is selling at par with Andhra Pradesh.

On Friday, 5,000 bags arrived for sale and 60 per cent were sold.

Traders have procured 40 per cent while the stockists 20 per cent. Because of the arrival of medium variety hybrid turmeric, the finger variety decreased by Rs 200 a quintal. But the other varieties in the Regulated Market Committee have increased by Rs 200 and Rs 100 in the other markets.

At Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 3,616-5,811, the root variety Rs 3,474-5,311.

Salem hybrid crop: The finger variety was sold at Rs 5,409-6,469, the root variety Rs 4,874-5,617. Of 946 bags, 490 were sold.

At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,170-6,026, the root variety Rs 4,867-5,629.

Of 664 bags, 611 were sold.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,780-5,944. The root variety was sold at Rs 4,569-5,439.

Of the arrival of 556 bags, 553 were sold.

Weak supplies push cotton up by Rs 500



Cotton price jumped Rs 500 for a candy on the back of thin supply and good demand from exporters and mills.

According to trade sources, price may gain further as cotton crop required clear weather at the production site which is not available and farmers have fear of some damage.

Gujarat Sankar-6 cotton gained Rs 500 to Rs 46,000-46,300 for a candy of 356 kg.

Kapas or raw cotton increased by Rs 15-20 to Rs 1,175-1,200 for 20 kg.

About 2,000-2,500 bales arrived in Gujarat and 4,300-4,500 bales arrived in India on Friday. A Rajkot-based cotton broker said that demand was high and price moved up. as compared to its supply which was poor so cotton price moved up. Mills were buying heavily. Higher domestic and foreign yarn demand supported the cotton prices.

In June, export registration surged by 72.7 per cent to a record 1,42,297 tonnes from that in the same period last year.

Moreover, tighter world cotton balance sheet and firmness in ICE futures also supported the prices.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the sowing area for kharif cotton crop 2013-14 has surged to 108.52 lakh hectares from 101.12 lakh hectares in the corresponding period last year.

Wheat futures may remain range-bound



A range-bound to weak movement is likely to be witnessed in the wheat futures market while dara and flour in physical market may continue to rule flat in the coming days, said trade experts.

Wheat futures extended loss on Friday. On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, wheat for August contracts dropped by Rs 3 and traded at Rs 1,596 a quintal with an open interest of 4,670 lots. The grain had touched a high at Rs 1,605 earlier in the day. September contracts went down by Rs 6 and traded at Rs 1,582. In the spot market, wheat spot prices on the exchange traded at Rs 1,500.

According to the market experts, a range-bound to weak movement is likely to be witnessed in the wheat futures market in the coming days. In the physical market, after witnessing an uptrend earlier this week, dara wheat remained unchanged and sold at Rs 1,470-1,480. Around 1,000 bags of wheat arrived and stocks were directly offloaded at the mills.

Mill delivery was at Rs 1,470-1,475 while delivery at the chakki was at Rs 1,480. Similarly, desi wheat variety remained unchanged and sold for Rs 2,600-2,650. Steady domestic demand coupled with easy availability of stocks kept dara wheat and flour prices unaltered, said Satish Kumar, a wheat trader.

In the absence of any major market moving factors, dara and flour prices may continue to rule around current levels for the next few days, too, he said. Flour continued to rule flat at Rs 1,700. Chokar ruled flat at Rs 1,150.

New tablet device to help agri companies

For seed and agri-business companies, here is a Web and tablet-based support product to help monitor various operations .

The product called 'MAICE' promises to give a 360 degree view of the agri-based company's field and supply chain operations. It will help agronomists and crop consultants to do crop planning and market the produce well.

The Hyderabad-based Sathguru Management Consultants (Sathguru), which developed MAICE, using Android-based tablet devices, says it is a good fit for agri-business companies due to the time sensitive nature of the industry and brings out significant return on investment, a company release said.

MAICE is designed as a multi-lingual solution. It can handle critical business areas such as crop support, grower management, farmer training, supply chain, sales force visit plans, stake holder management and order entry and expiry stock, said Ragunathan (Ragu) Kannan, Director, Sathguru.

Karnataka to set up agri price commission soon

Replying to a query by a farmer at an interactive meeting with farmers in Mangalore on Friday, Bharatlal Meena, Karnataka Principal Secretary for Agriculture Department, said that many farmers do not get remunerative prices for the commodities they grow.

Considering this, the government is planning to set up an 'agricultural prices commission' to fix suitable prices for the commodities. Apart from the agriculture scientists, farmers will also be part of such a commission. The commission will recommend prices based on its studies of different commodities, he said.

Considering the need for godowns for agricultural produces in rural areas, the government will also provide interest subsidy for rural godowns and cold storage units, he said.

Meena also suggested that farmers come as a group to produce and market their commodities. In places such as Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, farmers can also think of growing vegetables. He said these two districts get a major portion of their vegetables from other parts of the State.

Varanashi Krishnamurthy, a farmer from Adyanadka in Dakshina Kannada district, suggested that the government formulate a separate policy for jackfruit cultivation in the State. This food commodity has not got the attention that is required, he said.

The Dakshina Kannada Deputy Commissioner, N. Prakash, and the Chief Executive Officer of Dakshina Kannada Zilla Panchayat, Thulasi Maddineni, were present on the occasion.

Nafed sells onion at Rs 55/kg in Delhi

Cooperative major Nafed may float a tender early next week for importing onions to boost domestic supplies and curb prices that have risen to Rs 70-80 per kg in retail markets across major cities.

To give relief to Delhiites, the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (Nafed) has started selling onions at Rs 55 a kg through its five retail outlets and two mobile vans in the national capital.

In a bid to increase local supplies and curb rising prices of onions, the government on August 14 fixed a minimum export price of USD 650 per tonne for the commodity and asked Nafed to import onions.

Following the government's directions, sources said Nafed has started enquiring about supplies and prices in the global markets, including Pakistan and Iran. The cooperative is expected to gather all the information from trade channel partners by tomorrow, they added.

The tender for onion imports is likely to be floated early next week, sources said. Besides Pakistan and Iran, Nafed is exploring the option of buying onions from China and Egypt.

Meanwhile, onion wholesale prices eased by about Rs 2 at the Lasalgaon in Nashik to Rs 44 a kg on increased arrivals, according to data maintained by the National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF).

“Traders at Lasalgaon market are still selling onions at high prices as their sales have not been affected,” NHRDF Director R P Gupta told PTI.

At Azadpur mandi in Delhi, onion prices remain at the previous level of Rs 50-55 per kg.

“Onion supply is normal today. Around 12,000 quintals have arrived in the market but prices are still high due to speculation,” Onion Merchant Traders Association President Surendra Budhiraj said.

India exported 6.39 lakh tonnes of onions during April-July of this fiscal year, compared with 6.94 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period. Production stood at 16.6 million tonnes in 2012-13.

Farmers' protests force Modi govt to prune investment region area by 80%

Worried over a possible political fallout at a time when Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi is bracing for the crucial 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP Government has decided to shrink by 80 per cent the mammoth Special Investment Region (SIR) proposed to be set up next to the Maruti plant near Mandal-Becharaji in North Gujarat.

The State Government was particularly worried about the farmers' ongoing agitation as it prepares to launch a massive programme for agriculture in September on the lines of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit held in January 2013.

The SIR was proposed to emerge as a massive cluster of automobile and textile industries alongside the Delhi-Mumbai Freight Corridor, and was to be part of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC). The Mandal-Becharaji SIR was one of seven such notified regions. It is predominantly agricultural area without many industries.

Enthused at the response it got after Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) decided to set up a car factory in Mehsana district last year, the State Government had announced that it would create an SIR in the adjacent Mandal-Becharaji area spread over nearly 51,000 hectares (101 sq km), covering 44 villages, which is the bare minimum requirement for an SIR. This area was to be spread over Ahmedabad, Surendranagar and Mehsana districts. This includes the proposed Maruti Suzuki plant at Hansalpur on the Becharaji-Viramgam Highway for which the State Government had allotted 700 acres last year.

Apparently dissatisfied over compensation-related issues vis-à-vis what one of their counterparts around Sanand in Ahmedabad district got after Tata Motors moved in around 2008, the Mehsana farmers had mounted a number of protests, rallies and representations against this decision.

Following this agitation, the State Government had formed a ministerial committee in July to sort matters out. On its recommendation, the State Government on Wednesday decided to prune the SIR area to just 10,172 hectares spread over only eight villages, which is almost one-fifth of the original plan. The 36 villages being excluded will now be denotified and eight villages renotified, said Nitin Patel, Finance Minister and Government spokesman-member in the special committee. He said a majority of farmers in these eight villages “favoured” SIR.

Farmers from the 44 villages, led by two NGOs, Jamin Adhikar Andolan Gujarat, and Azad Vikas Sangathan, were spearheading the movement against the State Government’s plan.

This was the second such major agitation by Gujarat farmers against the State Government’s policies to acquire farm land for industrial development. Earlier, Bhavnagar farmers had protested on environmental grounds against Nirma’s attempt to set up a cement plant.

GM and the biodiversity balderdash



Strong parallels can be drawn between the recent anti-biotech and anti-nuclear movements. To begin with, both have nothing to do with safety; they are really a cultural/political war against modern science and progress.

The Prime Minister and the Government persevered in the case of nuclear power. It is time the Government showed a similar resolve for biotechnology.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, in its 500-odd page report, severely indicted the GM crops technology and called for complete cessation of even field tests, which are so crucial to research and development activities.

Condemning one of the truly transformative technologies of our times without a sound scientific rationale has harmed India's agricultural progress.

Increase farm productivity

Indian farm productivity is in doldrums and with increase in population growth and changing climatic conditions, there is no way India can feed its population in 2050 without modern science and technology. The much-touted Food Security Bill will become useless as do most of such "bleeding heart" programmes, if India does not increase its agricultural productivity.

The parliamentary report repeats the same old tired arguments proffered by anti-technology activists. It raises the question who might really have drafted the report. The report targeted the highly successful Bt cotton as a disaster for Indian farmers.

This is nothing but balderdash and contrary to all the empirical field data published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington, DC and the Centre for Economic and Social Sciences (CESS), Hyderabad.

Researchers from highly reputed institutions such as the Inter Academy Report on GM crops of India; economic assessment by the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences of India; Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Andhra University, the Gokhale Institute, Pune; Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; and publications in reputed scientific journals like the *Science* and the *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences USA* have documented the phenomenal success of Bt cotton in India.

The fact is more than 95 per cent of cotton-growing areas in the country is now under Bt cotton. The proven net benefits are environmental protection, reduced human exposure to insecticides, and measurable socio-economic benefits.

Bt benefits

The Parliamentary Report also praised the moratorium on Bt brinjal, saying that that India has over 2,200 varieties of brinjal that would take care of all future needs of the country.

The scientific fact is there are no more than 200 authentic brinjal varieties, most of which have gone out of cultivation.

More than 70 per cent of brinjal grown in India are modern day hybrids that are genetically modified, albeit using classical breeding techniques.

As much as it is valuable to have diversity in a crop variety, useless biodiversity is not a virtue unless it has redeemable features to the benefit of the grower. In this day and age, an overriding concern must be the financial benefit of the poor farmer, and not some feel-good reason that all “biodiversity” is good.

After all, agri-ecosystem is a man-made ecosystem solely for doing beneficial agriculture.

Weed management

The Supreme Court-appointed Technical Expert Committee (TEC) goes even further and recommends a ban on the Herbicide Tolerant (HT) GM crops on the basis that they will deprive livelihoods (poverty wages) of the poor agricultural labourers, mostly women and children.

It is back-breaking work that nobody wants to do, and as such there is acute shortage of farm labour all over the country.

Indian farmers need technologies that can save on labour and bring efficiency. Indian agriculture loses 30-40 per cent of its crops due to weeds. Efficient weed management is the crying need of the hour to increase India’s moribund agriculture, and for that we need modern science and technology.

The TEC has thrown all scientific objectivity to the winds and ignored voluminous credible literature in support of the safety and utility of GM crops.

There is no justification for recommending a halt to research in biotech food crops, even though over three trillion meals made out of GM crops have been eaten, the world over, in the past decade and a half. The suggestion to halt research till a utopian regulatory set-up is created is ridiculous.

There is not a single internationally reputed scientific body that endorses the kinds of tests the TEC recommends. The Government of India must boldly push ahead with GM crops technology with the same resolve shown for the nuclear energy.

Sathguru launches new tablet device to help agri companies

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The product has a remote crop support feature that allows customers to contact the agri-support centre to receive instant response and suggestions through audio-visual media. Since it is multi-lingual, by selecting the language it can be used in different locations, the release added.

Are high vegetable prices here to stay? - NO

A few months back, I was in a village called Kheri Man Singh in Haryana's Karnal district.

Farmers there told me how they sold tomatoes at Rs 20 per crate (of 25 kg each) this January and how by February-end, when their crop was already marketed, prices had crossed Rs 300.

"Today, using latest pesticides, I can control *keeda* (insect) and get yields of 850-900 crates per acre. But prices I cannot control. Growing tomato is like *satta* (gambling); there are times when even I have sold for Rs 200-300 and made money", explained one farmer.

Satta is understandable in tomatoes, where, without cold storage, supplies to the market cannot be regulated. It makes prices volatile in the natural course and, hence, more amenable for people to wager their money on — which ordinary farmers and consumers cannot. But this does not hold for onions, where all you need is a dry, heat-protected and well-ventilated environment to ensure not sprouting or rotting. The storage structure should essentially be constructed on a raised platform to prevent moisture or direct contact of the bulbs with the soil. No great technology or need for a Walmart there.

In onion, the main crop from Maharashtra arrives from mid-January till about mid-May, while harvesting in Madhya Pradesh happens from mid-April to mid-July.

The major crop after this, mainly of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, comes only from mid-September. Thus, the period from mid-July to mid-September is when there aren't any crop arrivals and the supplies mainly comprise the stored onions from Maharashtra.

According to Government data, India's onion output in 2012-13 at 16.65 million tonnes, wasn't much below the record 17.51 million of the previous year. Also, the fact that prices at

Lasalgaon, Maharashtra's and Asia's largest onion market, averaged Rs 8 to 8.50 a kg till mid-May shows the crop wasn't bad. What, then, explains the same Lasalgaon prices now touching Rs 45/kg?

The last time when wholesale prices rose so much — consumers paid Rs 100 then — was in early January 2011. But that was a year when crop in South India was hit, especially by floods in Andhra Pradesh. The country's entire requirement had to, then, be met from stored Maharashtra onions, allowing the traders at Lasalgaon to make a killing. But this time round, no such production disruption has happened; the kharif crop from the South is yet to be harvested. It only points to the power of traders, who would have bought at Rs 8 in early-May and stored to create artificial scarcity after July — when crop arrivals stop and the festival season takes off with Ramzan/Id-ul-Fitr!

They couldn't have done all this if FCI, Nafed or NDDB were also active in buying and stocking onions.
