



## **With an eye on polls, State may pay insurance premium for all crops**

*Plan to provide free SMS on prices, weather*

To woo the numerically strong farming community in the next Assembly elections, the government has proposed to make several new proposals, including payment of crop insurance premium and free SMS to farmers on commodity prices, in the State Budget for 2013-14.

A couple of days ago, Minister for Agriculture Umesh Katti had placed several farmer-friendly proposals in pre-budget meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar and the latter has shown interest to accommodate them, a senior official in the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu*.

As over 150 taluks have been declared drought-hit in 2012, several constraints dampened the growth of farm sector. Steps would be announced in the budget for revision of existing schemes and to bridge the gaps in distribution, storage and marketing systems to make agriculture a remunerative profession, the official said.

“The 2013-14 Budget on agriculture contains thinking on new dimensions for integrated development of farmers and other families engaged in agriculture and allied activities in the State,” the official said.

The government is mulling over providing crop insurance to cover to all small and marginal farmers the next crop season (kharif season 2013). If the Government included the crop insurance proposal in the budget, it would be benefit 55 lakh small and marginal farmers in the State. It is expected provide the Bharatiya Janata Party the much-needed electoral boost ahead of the elections.

The insurance scheme envisages payment of premium by the government for all major crops cultivated by farmers during the kharif, and rabi seasons.

It would cost the State exchequer Rs. 400 crore a year, but it is expected to provide the much needed relief to farmers during adverse climatic conditions. Now, payment of crop insurance is mandatory only for farmers, who have borrowed loans.

Currently about 10 lakh farmers, most of them owning vast tracts of land, obtain insurance cover for their crops.

### **Free SMS**

It is proposed to provide free Short Message Service (SMS) on commodities and weather to cellphones of farmers to enable them to get fair prices. The proposal on providing free SMS to farmers would cost the State Rs. 10 crore a year. The price information is expected to improve farmers' ability to negotiate with buyers and to enable them to bargain better prices. Information on weather is expected to help farmers reduce crop losses due to extreme weather events such as storms.

Allocations to agriculture would cross Rs. 20,000 crore this year. The State Budget for 2012-13 set aside Rs. 19,660 crore for agriculture and allied activities against Rs. 17,857 crore in 2011-12.

Allocations would increase for implementation of the Bhoo Chetana scheme meant for boosting yield in dry-lands areas, upgradation of markets, stock of fertilizers and revolving fund, sources said.

### **Red gram growers to go ahead with bandh plan**

Slamming the State government for being indifferent to problems faced by red gram growers, farmers and traders' organisations have decided to go ahead with the bandh call demanding minimum support price of Rs. 5000 a quintal for their produce.

Addressing a joint press conference here on Sunday, president of the Karnataka Pranta Raitha Sangha Maruti Manpade, secretary of the All-India Kisan Sabha Moula Mulla, president of the Hyderabad Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry Umakant Nigudgi, and secretary of the Karnataka Red Gram Growers' Association Karisiddappa Patil said the MSP of Rs. 3,850 fixed by the Centre and the Rs. 150 incentive announced by the State government over this were insufficient.

Mr. Manpade said that farmer leaders had met Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar on several occasions and apprised him of the difficulties faced by growers.

They had sought his immediate intervention to increase the MSP to at least Rs. 5000 a quintal. He said the nominal increase in the MSP of red gram had not solved the problem. The flawed government order stating that direct procurement would be carried out till the price in the wholesale market was not more than Rs. 3,850 a quintal threatened even nominal market intervention as price of red gram was hovering around Rs. 3,850 a quintal at present.

Mr. Manpade said the government should withdraw the earlier order on market intervention immediately and issue a fresh one, empowering the Red Gram Development Board to intervene in the market by offering a price of Rs. 5,000 a quintal. The board should also be sanctioned a loan of Rs. 100 crore immediately for effective market intervention.

He also demanded that the Centre establish a full-fledged pulses research centre in the city to give a fillip to research and development activities to come out with new high-yielding and pest resistant varieties of red gram.

Mr. Manpade and Mr. Nigudgi said they had already sought cooperation and support of other organisations to make the Gulbarga bandh on January 29 a total success.

### **Annual flower show attracts many**



Visitors taking a look at flowers on display at the annual flower show in Mandya.— photo: b. mahadeva

The annual flower show-2013 organised by the Department of Horticulture at a park near the Deputy Commissioner's office has been attracting huge crowds.

The eight-day show has various kinds of flowers, bonsais, and medicinal and aromatic plants on display.

The department has decorated the entire park with thousands of medicinal plants and a variety of flowers. Besides, fruit and vegetable carvings are also on display.

"At least 15,000 people have visited the show so far," M.C. Pushpalatha, Assistant Director (Horticulture Department), told *The Hindu* here on Sunday. The department has set up nearly 50 stalls, she said. On Sunday, nearly 4,000 were seen at the park to catch a glimpse of the show, she added. The entry fee is Rs. 5 and Rs. 10 for children and elders respectively.

### **Flower and fruit show in Shimoga evokes good response**

*Exotic flowers cultivated by farmers of Malnad are on display*



Hybrid vegetables and fruits of unusual size were the major attractions at the flower and fruit show in Shimoga on Sunday.— Photo: VAIDYA

The three-day flower and fruit show being held under the aegis of Department of Horticulture at Mahatma Gandhi Park has evoked good response. The exhibition will conclude on Monday. The cultivation of decorative flowers such as gerbera, gladiolus, gypsophila, oriental lily has become popular in Malnad in recent times. The climate in Malnad region is conducive for floriculture. The exotic varieties of flower cultivated by farmers of Malnad region were displayed at the event. The replica of stag, peacock, human heart, elephant made from the flowers, crocodile designed from bitter gourd, the images of Swami Vivekananda, and Ganesh carved out of water melon fruit were appreciated by visitors. The bonsais cultivated by Chandrakala S.V. and Shobha Ravikumar were on display at the event.

With the objective to create awareness among people on breeding ornamental fish, the Department of Fisheries had setup a stall. The charts on benefits of adopting system of rice intensification (SRI) method of cultivation of paddy that is best-suited for regions where the availability of water is less were on display at the stall of the Department of Agriculture. The diverse varieties of banana, areca cultivated in Malnad region, the minor forest produce such as *chinnikai*, *amatekai*, *jaikai*, and *soapnut* were put on display.

Krishna, an artiste from Nandi Hills, has showcased the artefacts he had designed from the roots of trees and plants. Sanjith V., a student of Mahaveer Vidyalaya, said the flower replica of peacock was impressive. Khalander Baig, an employee of a business process outsourcing firm, told *The Hindu* that the exhibition was both an entertaining and an enlightening experience. The model on rainwater harvesting made from flowers, the implements related to drip irrigation, and the charts on SRI method of paddy cultivation displayed at the stall of Department of Agriculture will help the visitors understand the significance of conserving water, he said.

### **Training course in vegetable carving**

Agri-Horticultural Society is conducting a three-day training course on vegetable carving from Wednesday at its premises on Public Gardens, according to a press release. For details and registrations on may contact: 99120-46095.

### **Farmers of the forests**



• Great Pied Hornbill: Getting rare by the day. Photos: N. Shiva Kumar



• Indian Grey Hornbill: Adapted to city life.



*The bulky beaked hornbills, known for their perseverance and seed dispersal skill, are facing the threat of vanishing woodlands and mushrooming concrete jungles*

Bangalore to Beijing and Baghdad to Bangkok there will be no husband worth his weight in gold when compared to the hornbill. A bird blessed with immense patience and perseverance in the world of bird brain — a definition with which human beings tend to delight in describing other creatures. Taking this into cognisance, recently the Environment Ministry declined a proposal to set up a RADAR installation on a secluded Island in the Andamans — thus saving the remaining 300 wild Narcondam Hornbills from extinction.

Hornbills are a group of birds distinguished by very large bulky curved beaks. If that is not enough, most Hornbill species have an extra projection known as casque on the upper beak and the precise use of this outcrop has yet not been deciphered by scientists. The utility of such an enormous beak in these birds is intriguing because it is almost half the size of its body.

Watching hornbills in the Silent Valley and Periyar Sanctuary of Kerala and in the jungles of Digboi, Kaziranga and Namdapha national parks in the north east, I wondered whether the birds topple forward with their oversized beaks. However, I learnt that the big beak is not as heavy as it looks since it contains perforated spaces to make it lightweight. Perfectly built and suitably streamlined, the beak of the bird is designed to fly like an airbus with a “nozzle nose” in front. The big beak is, however, dexterously deployed to pluck ripened fruits and berries from tree-top canopies.

Scientists at the San Diego Safari Park, USA, explain that hornbills are the only birds in which the first two neck vertebrae (the axis and atlas) are fused together. This probably provides a stable platform for carrying big beaks with ample agility even while airborne.

While most hornbills inhabit thick jungles of the north-east and south-west India, Indian Grey Hornbill, the smallest, is sighted even in Allahabad, Chandigarh and Delhi due to availability of tree canopy. Basically arboreal, all hornbills are sighted in pairs as they tend to be life-long couples. As the birds grow older, their feathers turn black and yellow from grey. The beaks also obtain grey, yellow to orange and all hues in-between as they mature.

The most exceptional aspect of all hornbills is that they nest in naturally ‘prefabricated’ cavity of large trees that are refurbished with love and care. A peculiar characteristic of this bird during nesting is that the female stays inside the nest and is literally imprisoned. The male, assisted by the female from inside, seals the nest entrance leaving only a small opening for feeding the female. By this clever modus operandi, the eggs and hatchlings are protected from possible

predators and vagaries of nature as well. The entire process takes about three to four months depending upon specific species.

Inside the nest, the female uses its own feathers to line up the nest bottom to cushion the delicate eggs and the chicks as they hatch. All the while, the male feeds the female and the fast growing chicks even as it itself becomes emaciated with the toil. The fresh growth of feathers on the female hornbill corresponds with maturity of the young chicks at which point the nest entrance is broken open and the mother escapes from its captive tree hollow. Now both parents feed the perpetually hungry chicks in the nest until they grow big enough to flutter away to freedom. As hornbills are omnivorous, they feed on fruits, occasionally crunchy insects, lizards; even rodents and small snakes are also relished.

Unfortunately, most of the 10 hornbill species in the subcontinent are now endangered due to fragmentation of forests, vanishing woodlands and mushrooming concrete jungles. These birds cannot live and procreate without the help of large trees. While the tree provides space to make a home in its wooden lair, the birds provide bird excreta rejected from the nest serving as manure for the tree. They are also excellent at dispersing seeds from the canopy to various locations propagating forest growth. A perfect example of interaction between two different organisms that is beneficial to both species, hence scientists the world over acknowledge that hornbills as the farmers of the forests.

In December last year, a Hornbill Festival was held in Nagaland to enhance the understanding of hornbills through tourism and a variety of cultural activities. The event used rock concerts, motor races, trekking, painting competitions, dance and drama to spread the message of nature conservation and to discourage tribal hunters who use hornbill beaks as decorative headgear for their rituals.

### **State keen on promoting solar pumpsets: Shettar**

*'Objective is to reduce demand for electricity'*



**LAUNCHING:**Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar inaugurating development projects at Honnali in Davangere district on Sunday.

Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar has said that the government is planning to promote solar-powered irrigation pumpsets in order to lessen the mounting demand for electricity from farmers.

Inaugurating various development schemes at Honnali, about 60 km from here on Sunday, Mr. Shettar said that it had become a huge challenge for the State government to provide uninterrupted power supply to irrigation pumpsets, which had in turn, rendered it difficult for farmers to cultivate their lands, especially during summer. Solar-powered pumpsets would bring some relief to farmers in this regard, he said.

The BJP government had launched several schemes for the welfare of people in the last five years. It had got more than 5,000 houses built and over 50-km roads laid in each taluk. Under the Suvarna Grama Yojana, 300 villages had been developed. The government was planning to develop at least 10,000 villages under this scheme. There were plans to provide a grant of Rs. 1 crore each to all villages for this purpose, Mr. Shettar said.

Claiming that the government had distributed about 6,000 Bhagyalakshmi bonds in each taluk this year, he urged the officials concerned to ensure that there was no delay in the distribution of these bonds. The State had witnessed a comprehensive development in the past five years, which none of the previous governments had achieved, he said. Mr. Shettar hailed Excise Minister M.P. Renukacharya for carrying out huge public welfare projects in Honnali taluk. Mr. Renukacharya would contest Assembly polls from Honnali constituency from the BJP, he said and appealed to the people to elect him again to continue the development process in Honnali.

Earlier, Mr. Renukacharya, in his address, said that no one could topple the BJP government, which would complete its term. Mr. Shettar would certainly present the budget on schedule. Housing Minister V. Somanna lauded Mr. Shettar for allocating a huge fund of Rs.1,000 crore to housing this year and added that poor people would soon be provided with houses at reasonable rates.

S.A. Ravindranath, Horticulture Minister, and G.M. Siddeshwar, MP, spoke. Inspector-General of Police (Eastern Range) Sanjay Sahay, Deputy Commissioner S.S. Pattanashetty, Superintendent of Police Labhu Ram, and chief executive officer of the zilla panchayath A.B. Hemachandra were among those present.

### **Mechanised transplanted of paddy improves productivity**

*'The yield increased to 20 quintals of paddy an acre'*





Gamble pays off:Prabhakara Mayya of Nada village near Ujire in Belthangady taluk adopted mechanised cultivation and harvesting of paddy on his two-acre plot five years ago.— PHOTO: RAVIPRASAD KAMILA

With area under paddy cultivation shrinking in coastal belt for want of workers and with the price of rice soaring, the challenge before farmers is to increase productivity.

“Switching over to mechanised paddy planting will increase productivity,” says Prabhakara Mayya, a progressive farmer at Nada village, near Ujire in Dakshina Kannada.

Mr. Mayya says paddy saplings should not be planted in depth as the saplings did not have mother root. They should be just planted on the surface of the slush field for roots to spread. Under the manual method, workers planted them at six-inch depth. When the machine is used it plants the saplings just on the surface with ideal spacing for the plants to breathe and spread roots. As a result, the plants grow healthy and yield more.

Mr. Mayya’s family owned only two acres of paddy field. Yet it harvested 25 quintals of paddy from an acre in 2012 *khariff* by adopting mechanised planting.

He says the family switched over to mechanised planting, harvesting and processing of paddy five years ago. For the first time after adopting mechanised planting five years ago, the family produced 20 quintals of paddy an acre. By following the usual manual planting method, the family produced only 15 quintals of paddy an acre. Mr. Mayya says he tried SRI (system of rice intensification) method of planting under which the production of paddy reached 18 quintals an acre. Usually, a quintal of paddy yields 68 kg of rice, he says. Rice produced from the paddy cultivated on an acre of land under mechanised planting can take care of the needs of a 10-member family for one year. He says he did not purchase the machines, instead rented it from Agriculture Department.

The progressive farmer who is in his 40s now says increasing productivity had nothing to do with applying more fertilizers. Recalling his experience, he says after mechanised planting he required less quantity of fertilizers as the roots were on the surface. Mr. Mayya says he did

allow the space on the bunds of paddy field to go waste. He planted 90 saplings of cowpea of YB 7 (yard long beans) variety on the bunds in August 2012. They started yielding after 40 days.

He harvested six quintals of cowpea from them in five months till December. It fetched him between Rs. 20 and Rs. 40 a kg in the market. It was an additional income, he says.

### **They prove farming too is rewarding**

At a time when the debate is on at the national level as to how to make agriculture an attractive proposition, Tamil Nadu has to offer at least two examples of young farmers who have realised that agriculture too can be rewarding.

Not only they are eager to chart a different path by going in for crops other than paddy but also ready to adopt less-practised and even costlier methods such as micro irrigation. Needless to say, they make efforts to acquire new knowledge in farming, even though they come from traditional agricultural background.

V. Deivendran of Annamalaipatti near Morappur hails from a water-starved and backward district of Dharmapuri. Till eight years ago, after acquiring a degree certificate, he was like yet another rural lad – going to cities in search of jobs.

When he found that his search was not yielding any success, Deivendran decided to take to farming, rather, out of compulsion.

This 36-year-old farmer, who says he owns about 3.5 acres of land, initially went by the conventional method of raising paddy, even though Morappur, the block under which his village comes, is identified at the national level as one of the over-exploited areas in terms of groundwater. About six or seven months ago, he came in contact with officials of the Centre of Excellence for Change (CEC), an organisation formed by officials from a variety of government bodies and institutions of higher education and which also collaborates with those in charge of the Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water-Bodies Restoration and Management project. Deivendran's exposure to the CEC representatives made him reflect the way he had been doing farming. The CEC officials advised him to raise horticultural crops and adopt micro irrigation. They have also helped him avail himself of the State government's subsidy scheme.

J. Parthasarathy of Perumperkandigai near Melmaruvathur of Kancheepuram district is another example of an enterprising farmer, who is willing to go an extra mile.

His area is relatively better placed than Annamalaipatti of Dharmapuri district in terms of water availability. Yet, he sees benefits in the adoption of concepts such as system of rice intensification, which involves less nursery area, water and labour and fewer seeds.

When the CEC officials visited the village some months ago to disseminate information regarding the alternative cropping method, he was among the early to respond positively. "At least there is 25 per cent increase in yield," he says, whose landholding size is around 30 acres. There is government support available for SRI too.

Parthasarathy, who has raised only paddy for the last 18 years, is planning to grow maize in a part of his land. "I would not have done it but for the CEC officials' advice, which was rendered at my doorstep," he says.

### **Fish processing units to be created**

Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on Sunday ordered creation of fish processing units in 13 coastal areas and ordered release of Rs 37 crore for implementing pilot projects in Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts under the mode of public-private partnership.

A release said farmers could not preserve their catch for long since there were no facilities for processing the fish and the same was causing revenue loss.

"The creation of fish processing units will facilitate export of fish and will earn foreign exchange," the state government said.

In Cuddalore, the unit will come up in 1.94 acres at Kanganamkuppam and the allocation for the project is Rs 14 crore. Similarly, a unit will be set up at 2.19 acres at Nagur in Nagapattinam district at a cost of Rs 23 crore. She also increased the daily wages of part-time sweepers of Animal Husbandry Department from Rs 60 to Rs 300. A total of 712 workers will benefit.

### **Extend special train for farm produces up to Coimbatore'**



**From place of yield to place of need**

**For Transporting**

- ▶ Coconut from Coimbatore and Pollachi
- ▶ Tea from the Nilgiris and Valparai
- ▶ Curry leaves from Karamadal\*
- ▶ Vegetables from The Nilgiris\*
- ▶ Grapes from Thondamuthur\*
- ▶ Products from Engineering industries
- ▶ Textile industry consignments
- ▶ Apparels from Tirupur

*Note: \* Consignments on short distance*

The Coimbatore Railway Struggle Committee has urged the Southern Railway to extend the special train for farm produces planned from Salem to Agra up to Coimbatore to benefit the farming community in this region.

Recently, E. Vadivel, project officer, Precision Farming and e-Extension, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, said in Erode that a proposal was in preliminary stages for operating a

special train for farm produces, to take products from a place of abundance to a place of demand.

Reacting to the same, G.K. Nagaraj of the struggle committee said that Coimbatore, a predominant agrarian belt was not too far from Salem. Either the train itself or at least some of the wagons should start from Coimbatore.

R. Raveendran of struggle committee and Residents Awareness Association of Coimbatore, pointed out that a dedicated freight train from this region had been a long pending demand of the committee.

It even appealed to the Divisional Railway Manager, Salem, and General Manager of Southern Railway to have a train starting from Coimbatore.

The appeal of the committee and that of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was to operate trains for farm produces, engineering goods, industrial commodities and even textile products.

This would definitely help the Salem Division see a soaring revenue graph.

Rail activist S. Ravi said that if the train was operated from Coimbatore, then coconut products from Pollachi region, tea grown in the Nilgiris, curry leaves from Karamadai and grapes from Thondamuthur could be transported.

### **Benefits**

The train could pick up industrial, engineering, textile commodities from Coimbatore, apparels and hosiery from Tirupur and power loom and handloom products and turmeric from Erode.

Transportation by rail instead of road would help bring down transportation cost.

Already, Kerala agriculturists were using the train "Kairali Queen" extensively for transporting latex (natural rubber), jack fruits, and bitumen.

If the dream of a freight train materialised, Irugur, Coimbatore North and Podanur could be ideal yards for these wagons, he added.



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## Vasant Agrotech Expo from today

Union Agriculture Minister and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar will inaugurate the four-day Vasant Agrotech Expo at police helipad ground on Monday. The agriculture exhibition, has been organized under the aegis of Yavatmal Zilla Parishad to celebrate its golden jubilee. The event has been named after former chief minister of Maharashtra late Vasant Naik to celebrate his birth centenary.

State agriculture minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil will be in the chair while former Lok Sabha speaker and former chief minister of Maharashtra Manohar Joshi and a host of other ministers, MPs and MLAs and agriculture experts would attend the function.

The concluding function will be held on January 31 at the same venue. Chief minister Prithviraj Chavan will preside over while deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, legislative assembly chairman Dilip Walse Patil and a host of other ministers and peoples' representatives would attend the function, informed zilla parishad chief Pravin Deshmukh at a press conference.

"There will be 137 stalls from seed, fertilizer, pesticide and other companies," said Deshmukh adding that there are stalls from government and banking sectors too.

"Experts from Agriculture sector and Agriculture Universities are invited to address the farmers during the seminars and discussions," Pravin said, adding that necessary steps have been taken to answer the queries of the participants with regard to the modern agriculture methods and implements.

Pravin has informed that a sum of Rs. 1.5 crore has been sanctioned by the State Govt for the exhibition and an equal amount is estimated to be collected from various agencies.



"Over 10 lakh people are expected to garner the benefit of the Exhibition and preparations are at the final stage," informed the Food and Drug Administration Minister Manoharrao Naik.

"A souvenir would be released on the occasion at the hands of Sharad Pawar," he added.








# HindustanTimes

Chennai - INDIA

<b>Today's Weather</b>  Sunny  Rain: 0 Humidity: 74 Wind: normal	<b>Monday, Jan 28</b> Max 28°   Min 22°  Sunrise: 06:35 Sunset: 06:07 Barometer: 1016	<b>Tomorrow's Forecast</b>  Partly Cloudy  Max 30°   Min 21°	<b>Tuesday, Jan 29</b> Max 30°   Min 21°
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## Extended Forecast for a week

<b>Wednesday</b> Jan 30  30°   21° Partly Cloudy	<b>Thursday</b> Jan 31  26°   23° Sunny	<b>Friday</b> Feb 1  26°   24° Cloudy	<b>Saturday</b> Feb 2  25°   23° Overcast	<b>Sunday</b> Feb 3  25°   23° Cloudy
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## India foils US firm bid to patent turmeric

The claim made by a US multinational company on the usefulness of turmeric, apple, basil (tulasi) for the treatment of inflammation, psoriasis and gastritis has been foiled by India, thanks to the efforts of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library.

Metaproteomics had filed a patent application at the Canada Intellectual Property Office. The patent title "Curcuminoid compositions exhibiting synergistic inhibition of the expression and/ or activity of Cyclooxygenase-2" claimed the usefulness of turmeric, apple, basil, kalamegha and licorice for the treatment of inflammation, psoriasis, gastritis and as anti-inflammatory to be novel.

The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), a unit of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) submitted prior art evidences in the form of references in books from 18th century to the 20th century citing evidences that turmeric, apple, basil, kalamegha and licorice have been used alone or in combination with a few other ingredients for the treatment of inflammation, psoriasis, gastritis and as anti-inflammatory in the Indian systems of medicine. The books that were used by TKDL for citing prior art of evidences include Khazaain-al-Advia,

Muheet-e-Azam, Vaidyamanorama, Rasayoga Sagara, Rajanighantauh, Bhavaprakasa, Siddhabhesajamanimala and Ilaaj-al-Amraaz. "Within a period of 87 weeks, a 10 years' old attempt to pirate India's knowledge by a multinational company of USA was ended," sources added.

## THE HINDU Business Line

### AP to set up panel on exclusive budget for agriculture



The Andhra Pradesh Government will appoint a coordination committee to finalise the proposal to go for the exclusive budget for the agricultural sector.

The Finance Minister has agreed to carve out a separate budget for the primary sector. But we need to distinguish allocations for this sector and other allied sectors," the official said.

The Ministers, Principal Secretaries and Commissioners of these sectors are expected to be members of the committee, which will discuss the nitty-gritty of the upcoming Budget.

"Though time is very short for preparation of the budget, the Government has decided to go ahead with the separate budget for agriculture," a top official of Agriculture Ministry told *Business Line*.

#### **POWER CRISIS**

The Agriculture Budget is all set to address the issue of power shortage. It would comprise a Rs 100-crore pilot project to introduce solar pump sets in 3-4 districts.

"The Chief Minister has okayed the proposal. The file is with the Finance Minister for his approval," the official said.

The cost of each pump set is expected to be around Rs 4-6 lakh.

“The Agriculture Minister Kanna Lakshminarayana is very keen on this project as the agricultural sector is reeling under severe power crisis. Each set is expected to supply nine hours of power. This would augment the regular supply,” the official said.

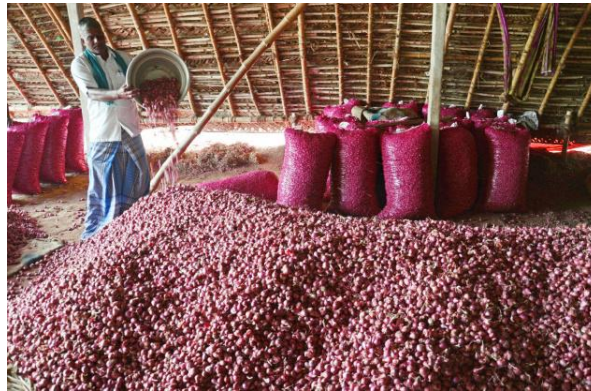
The State is deliberating on the huge initial costs that might create a hindrance in popularising the scheme. It is discussing on the final cost of the unit and the subsidy component.

Acute shortage of power has hit the farming community this summer, forcing the officials to appeal to the farmers not to go for the water-intensive paddy.

This, in turn, would put pressure on the demand of power, which is already in short supply.

“We are planning to address this issue in the Budget. If successful, we can expand the scheme to other parts of the State,” the official said.

### **Onion exports jump 17% in April-December**



Onion exports have risen by over 17 per cent to 12.95 lakh tonnes during April-December this fiscal, but shipments in the coming months are expected to slow down as local prices have begun to rise.

The country had exported 11 lakh tonnes in the same period last year, the Nashik-based National Horticultural Research and Development Foundation (NHRDF) said.

“So far, onion exports have been better than last year.

However, the pace has come down as domestic prices have risen making the agricultural commodity less competitive in the international market,” NHRDF Director R.P. Gupta told PTI.

The rise in domestic prices by Rs 2-3 per kg to Rs 14-15 per kg in the growing regions in anticipation of a drop in output this year, has reduced the export margins, he said, adding that shipments during January and February are seen lower.

Onions are exported mainly to Gulf nations and South-east Asia countries especially Indonesia and Malaysia.

Allaying fears of a fall in onion production in the 2012-13 crop year (July-June), Gupta said: "Total onion production is expected to be the same as at last year's level of 174 lakh tonnes despite 10 per cent decline in acreage."

Productivity of onion this year is expected to be higher and there will be no supply shortage, he said.

### **Indian Seed Congress at Gurgaon in February**

The Indian Seed Congress 2013 will be held in Gurgaon on February 8 and 9. The fourth edition of the seed meet, organised by the National Seed Association of India (NSAI), is being held at a time when the Rs 10,000-crore seed industry faces a major crisis.

Absence of institutional funding, increasing prices in cost of seed production and vagaries of climate have hit the industry in the last two years.

"The annual forum will deliberate on the new technological advances and the barriers to technology development and introduction. It will showcase new product range, services and network for better business development," an NSAI executive said.

It would provide a platform for the seed industry stakeholders to talk to technology developers, and policy makers. The theme of the congress would be 'Seeds of change – Ensuring the evergreen revolution'.

The earlier editions of the conferences were held at Bangalore (2010), Hyderabad (2011) and Pune (2012). Representatives from seed research firms and scientists from 15 countries are expected to take part in this year's event.

### **Tea Board to promote consumption via social media**



The Tea Board has embarked on using the social media to promote the consumption of the beverage within the country and abroad.

"We will use the social media like Facebook and Twitter intensely to promote the consumption of the beverage highlighting its health-related aspects," Tea Board Chairman M.G.V.K. Bhanu told PTI.

The campaign would start in two months, Bhanu said.

### **Production, consumption**

Domestic consumption of tea has been growing at an absolute amount of 20-25 million kg per annum, considered by the industry to be a decent one.

Bhanu said that the production was commensurate with domestic consumption which was largely met by the contribution of small tea growers estimated at 250 million kg per annum.

### **Exporting nations**

About exports, Bhanu said that the focus countries were USA, Russia, Kazakhstan, Egypt and Iran.

“We want to develop exports in these five countries in a focussed manner. We have increased our participation in the exhibition in these countries,” he said.

Regarding Pakistan, he said exports had slowed down largely due to increased prices of Indian tea. “Pakistan is now lifting tea from Vietnam. This is not a border issue,” he said.

### **Panel report**

When asked to comment on the Parliamentary panel’s recent observation about exports of bad quality tea, Bhanu said that the Tea Board had taken the matter very seriously.

“Two tea councils had been formed, one each in North and South India,” he said.

Bhanu said the Tea Board would take strict action against gardens manufacturing bad quality tea and not conforming to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

“Tea councils under Tea Board will check the quality of tea. Last week, 1,000 kg of tea was destroyed in South India for not conforming to FSSAI,” Bhanu said.

### **Aquaria India expo from Feb 8**

Marine Products Export Development Authority will host the Aquaria India 2013 in Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh from February 8 to 10.

An exhibition will also be held as part to showcase latest technology to the farmers, hatchery operators and breeders to facilitate interactions between stakeholders to enhance mutual business relations, a press release issued by MPEDA said.

The three-day event comprises technical sessions by renowned national and international experts in aquaculture and ornamental fisheries.

At least 100 stalls have been exclusively reserved for aquaculture sector and 50 for ornamental fisheries.

About 500 farmers from various States engaged in fish farming are expected to participate.



## Business standard

### Rubber consumption declines in December



Natural [rubber consumption](#) dropped 1.3 per cent during December at 78,000 tonnes (tn) as against 84,795 tn in December, 2011, owing to a slowdown in demand and production in the [tyre industry](#). However, production of natural rubber increased 3 per cent at 110,000 tonnes as against 106,800 tn.

Imports also slowed down during December due to a sharp rise in prices in the international markets compared with the local markets. The markets were in a reversal mode since the last week of November and the local prices were lower by Rs 20-25 per kg than the global price. This, coupled with the sluggish demand in the Indian market, forced the tyre majors to cut down import in December.

Till November, imports grew steadily as Standard Malaysian Rubber (SMR-20) was available at cheaper rates in the global market. But in December, there was a drop of around 35 per cent to 13,611 tn compared with 21,146 tn in the same month of last year, the [Rubber Board](#) stated.

The slowdown indicates that the total annual imports in 2012-13 might be restricted to below 200,000 tn. According to earlier estimates by the industry, imports were expected to cross 250,000 tn. During 2011-12, 205,050 tn came into the country — an-all time high.

However, cumulative imports during the April-December period rose to 168,686 tn, against 137,031 tn in the same period of last FY. Total production during the same period was 693,200 tn (681,900 tn), registering a growth of 1.7 per cent. Cumulative consumption was up 3.2 per cent at 742,330 tn (719,215 tn).

Earlier, the board had projected a total production of 930,000 tn and consumption of 10,06,000 tn for the current financial year, with an annual deficit of 76,000 tn. Industry experts told Business Standard that the shortage might be more than 150,000 tn. However, the board does not see a shortage in the domestic market as the local market has 'good stock' and the industry is entitled to import 150,000 tn through the duty free channel. The total stock stood at 290,000 tn as on December 31, according to the Rubber Board.