

03 July, 2013

Voices from the villages



ENTERTAINING AND EDUCATING At the Kottampatti Vayalaga Vanoli FM

90.4



S.S. KAVITHA tunes into 90.4 FM to get a slice of community news

Thayamma's phone beeps out an alarm and she announces to her co-workers on a coconut farm 80 km from Madurai on the Tiruchi Highway: "Today, namma (our) radio will air my song 'ele ele ...' Those around her instantly tune into

Kottampatti's community radio '*Vayalaga Vanoli*'. The village folks have been doing so for the past 30 months.

The 'Namma radio' is handled by Madurai District Tank Farmers Federation (MDTFF).

"Vayalaga Vanoli FM 90.4 is the first community radio station established and managed by a people institution called farmers federation," says B. Muthukumaraswamy, the station master.

Community radio is a third model of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting.

"While the commercial stations cater to music fans especially film songs, this not-for-profit venture fills the void in local programming that commercial radio has left," he adds.

In 2006, Indian Government allowed non-governmental organisations and educational institutions to run community radio stations.

MDTFF applied for license and got the sanction in 2011 with 90.4 MHz as its frequency. The frequency distance is 15 km radius. Vayalaga Vanoli caters to farmers of 27 panchayats which include 100 villages.

To what extent the community radio caters to the local flavour?

"Every programme," says Muthukumaraswamy, "is unique and need-based."

"RJs and members of information kiosks visit every village and enquire about their needs. Farmers choose what they want. It could be anything from tips on coconut, oil seeds and horticulture crops to cattle and poultry-related issues. We arrange live programmes accordingly," he adds.

Muthukumaraswamy says Vayalaga Vanoli aims at using information and communication as a tool for development besides building local knowledge using local expertise.

“There are old farmers who know traditional methods of agriculture. We make them speak and share their knowledge through FM,” says Sundarapandian, a radio jockey (RJ) and programme coordinator.

The team has plans to air special programmes for students as many of them opt for commerce stream in under-graduation. Recently, there were broadcasts on examination tips and interview with top scorers in board exams.

The FM reaches 5,000 farmers and has a packed bulletin containing information on health, education, social affairs, cultural and music programmes details of vaccination programmes, free treatment centres, employment opportunities. Births and deaths, council notices and agri tips are also aired.

From 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., Vayalaga Vanoli entertains villagers with devotional songs and agriculture-related tips. Between 10 a.m. and 12 noon, community radio airs non-news information, the day’s weather report , mobile offers, local employment information, birthday wishes and special events. Between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. programmes titled uluthundu valvom, penmaiyai potruvom, udal nalam, oli vali kalvi are broadcasted.

The team

Vayalaga Vanoli functions with four male and two female RJs. Of them four report from the field while two are studio-confined for broadcasting the programmes. The information kiosk also takes the responsibility of community resource identification, programme recording and phone-in live programmes.

“In places where there are no roads, radio is the cheapest and easiest way to reach the people,” says V. Amutha Rani, RJ and adds, “anyone who can speak can be on the radio, so virtually everyone in the community can take part.”

“Community radio provides a space for community participation and a platform for dialogue and debate,” says her colleague B. Tamil Selvi.

For farmers by farmers

MDTFF was promoted with a focus on sustaining tank-based agriculture by organising farmers in groups referred to as vayalagam. It covers Kottampatti, Kallupatti, Thirumanagalam and Sedapatti blocks of Madurai district.

Since 1992, in Kottampatti block the farmers are covered under the Vayalagams mainly to undertake water conservation activities to improve agriculture. Currently there are 159 vayalagams with 4,500 farming families.

The federation has an executive committee with 15 experienced farmers who are members of the federation. They meet once a month to discuss and review the radio programmes.

“Radio is being put to a substantial use and it seems more and more communities want their voices to be heard,” says Nivas.

“Community radio is the greatest tool of education and information we could have for the people. It follows people wherever they go without disturbing them unlike television,” says Muthukumaraswamy.

But Anusuya of Vairavanpatti has a reason to vote for community radios. She says, “It is interesting to listen to the folk songs sung by paatis and thaathaas “

OIL plans dairy cooperative

To tie up with Assam Government for its CSR initiative



It may be unheard of for an energy company, but Oil India Ltd. (OIL) plans to tie-up with the Assam government to start a co-operative dairy business along the lines of Gujarat's successful 'Amul' model.

The project named 'Kamdhenu' envisages setting up of a milk production facility in Upper Assam to establish the dairy business in 3-5 years, OIL said here on Tuesday.

"Assam is a milk-deficient state. Availability of good milk is a big issue here. So, as part of our corporate social responsibility, we have decided to join hands with the state government to start a co-operative dairy business here," OIL Chairman and Managing Director Sunil Kumar Srivastava told reporters. The model and OIL's role are being studied to see how the company can support it.

"We are an oil company and milk production is not our business. We will tie-up with the government and see how we can implement this plan," Mr. Srivastava said.

The company was assessing options such as giving cows to farmers in villages, setting up collection centres, and establishing a distribution network, he said.

"If the study suggests, we will set up a big milk production centre in Upper Assam.

"We already have a successful model 'Amul' in Gujarat. We are just trying to implement the same here," he said.

The co-operative might supply milk to the entire North East in future, he said. OIL has started the ground work for the project, and has initiated talks with the Assam government. — PTI

Now Gujarat farmers up in arms against road project

Protest against land acquisition for a bypass on National Highway 8D

After protests by farmers against a Nirma cement plant in Saurashtra, the proposed special investment region (SIR) near Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar

corridor and the Mirthi Viridi Nuclear Power Station, anger is now brewing against land acquisition for a bypass for National Highway 8D near Junagadh in Saurashtra region.

Farmers here have threatened to remove the demarcations made for the bypass jointly by the surveyors of the National Highway Authority of India as well as the district administration of Junagadh. They are for expanding an existing bypass to ensure farm lands are not diverted for the project. Under the banner of Khedut Heet Rakshak Samiti (organisation for farmers' rights), they have decided to file a petition in the Supreme Court as well as send letters written in blood by women to Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Veteran Gandhian Chunibhai Vaidya, whose Gujarat Lok Samiti, has lent support to the agitation, says that Congress general secretary Madhusudan Mistry, former BJP legislator from Saurashtra Kanu Kalsaria who led the stir against Nirma and veteran lawyer Prashant Bhushan of India Against Corruption are backing the farmers' Junagadh protest.

Just about a fortnight ago, about 10,000 farmers from 44 villages on the Mandal-Becharaji corridor close to Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar gathered here in some 500 tractors and other vehicles to oppose a proposed auto hub called the special investment region. The government has already allotted land to Maruti Suzuki in this region. According to Lalji Desai, one of the leaders of the agitation, the area covers 63,000 hectares of fertile land.

Such agitations have been building up in Gujarat in the backdrop of the fact that the number of farmers is falling at a steady rate in the State while there is a simultaneous rise in the number of landless labourers.

According to 2011 census figures, the number of farmers in the State during the last decade has fallen by 3.55 lakh, while farm labourers — landless labourers — have grown by a whopping 17 lakh.

There are several reasons for the increasing restlessness among the farmers in the State, says social scientist Achyut Yagnik. "The first is the government's

increasing tilt towards big industry; and then the high rate of urbanisation fostered by this,” he says.

Farmers willing to give up land

Farmers of villages in Sakleshpur taluk have come forward to give up their land to increase forest cover so as to tackle elephant menace, which is an everyday problem for them.

The farmers have demanded they be compensated suitably.

As many as 435 farmers have written to the Department of Forest saying that they are willing to give up their land — a total of 2,261 acres — in the villages of Balehalla, Bettakumari, Jagata, Ettahalla, Boremane, Mankanahalli, Bisale and Arani in Sakleshpur taluk to increase forest cover.

“The farmers have given us the letters. The State government has to take a call on this. It has to decide the price and start the process of taking over, R.N. Lakshman, Deputy Conservator of Forests, said.

Nabard's largesse takes rural poor for ride

One NGO (Janhit Foundation) got Rs.6.01 crore against Rs.1.87 crore for 302 NGOs

New evidence reveals a pattern of grants by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) to dubious NGOs that are profiting from the rural poor instead of uplifting them. These NGOs have all been found to be connected to those managing Nabard's affairs, either in the board room or in the Finance Ministry.

Janhit Foundation, Lucknow, and its banking partner Shivalik Mercantile Cooperative Bank (SMCB), which are linked to former Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, D.K. Mittal — who, in his official

capacity, was a strong influence in Nabard's decisions until recently — have been found to be the biggest beneficiaries.

Investigation reveals that Mr. D. K. Mittal's brother, Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Mittal is on the Board of Shivalik Bank. During his tenure as DFS Secretary, Nabard, Mr. Mittal permitted Urban Cooperative Banks, which are under the RBI's supervisory jurisdiction, to promote and finance Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) in rural areas. Shivalik Bank went on to become the lone beneficiary of this concession.

Of total grants of Rs 7.88 crore disbursed to 303 NGOs in Uttar Pradesh in 2012-13, Janhit Foundation alone secured Rs. 6.01 crore. A meagre Rs. 1.87 crore accounting for an average grant size of between Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 80,000 was disbursed to the remaining 302 NGOs.

Janhit-Shivalik's abnormal commercial appetite is laid bare by a Nabard Inter Office Memorandum which documents the fact that Shivalik Bank mobilises the savings of the poor at a meager interest rate of 3%-4% while lending this money to an urban clientele at a whopping 24%.

Despite its lucrative business model, loans to its associated and poor Self Help Groups (SHG's) which are collectively called Joint Liability Group (JLGs) — are disbursed at a high 18%, while its group members bear a staggering 24% interest rate, including the 6% service charge paid to Janhit.

Nabard not consulted, says Memorandum

"This arrangement has been made without consulting Nabard and the clients concerned," the memorandum states. It further observes that "99% of the groups promoted and credit linked has been with SMCB only, limiting the clients choices with such overdependence on one bank" and that the members are not even aware that they are being charged unnaturally high interest rates.

Documents and Nabard file notings relating to requests for grant of funds by Janhit Foundation, further reveal an inexplicable urgency to fastrack the approval

process and release funds to the NGO, admitting that the “office was kept open on Saturday in view of the urgency of the matter”.

Objections overruled

Overlooking this exploitation, as well the serious discrepancies documented in the claims made by Janhit, funds were still released to the NGO. “Photographs, as an evidence of conduct of programmes not submitted for all the programmes for which the claims have been made. The dates of the photographs and the date of programme conducted differ. NGO has been advised. Name of the district also does not match with the claim.... There seems to be a contradiction in the claims as the NGO has submitted claims for training of Group leaders of SHGs, which far exceeds number of SHG formed by the agency so far in the district. If SHG’s have not been formed, training for their group leaders cannot be conducted”.

The Memorandum further observes, “that the quality of group functioning, viz, book keeping, credit decision by groups and other operations needs close attention of the partner NGO”.

Reversing credit flow

While charging crippling interest rates from the rural poor, being an urban mercantile bank, Shivalik Bank, onlends those funds to an urban clientele at lucrative interest rates, further reversing the flow of funds from rural to urban areas. The Nabard report itself acknowledges that while its performance in mopping up rural savings is high (saving linkages were 64% in Unnao and 100% & 76% in projects of Saharanpur, U.P.), it is very slow to provide loans to the groups (credit linkages were 2.5% in Unnao and 8.6% & 55% in Saharanpur).

Responding to detailed questions by *The Hindu*, emailed to its Chairman, Prakash Bakshi, Nabard said it “is working with 460 NGOs including Janhit Foundation for promotion of SHGs in UP. Janhit Foundation has been partnering with Nabard since 2010”.

Documents additionally establish a clear rise in Janhit's fortunes since 2010, after Mr. Bakshi took over as Chairman in June 2010 and D.K. Mittal took over as Secretary, DFS. Nabard granted Rs 5.85 crore to Janhit within 18 months of Mr. Mittal's tenure (August 2011 to January 2013). The discovery of other major sources of funding to Janhit from grants and contributions under Corporate Social Responsibility schemes of companies like IOC, ONGC, Petronet, SAIL and NHPC, in the Nabard report, are further co-terminus with Mr. Mittal's stint in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Department of Commerce and other ministries. Mr. Mittal did not respond to either SMSs or a detailed email sent by *The Hindu*.

Conflict of interest

Another case of conflict of interest arises from grant of funds by Nabard to the Centre for Collective Development (CCD), Hyderabad. The NGO, which provides support to farmers engaged in groundnut cultivation in Andhra Pradesh, has IIM Bangalore Professor and Independent Director, Nabard, Trilochan Sastry as its secretary.

Interestingly, CCD, which has a turnover of just Rs 3 crore, was sanctioned soft loans with a subsidy for two projects worth Rs 2 crore each during 2011-12 and 2012-13 for procurement and marketing of agricultural commodities by Cooperatives.

Nabard told *The Hindu*, "Prof. Sastry came on the Board of Nabard in October 2011. As per information with us, Prof. Sastry is an 'Authorised Signatory' for the NGO and does not draw any financial benefits from it. A loan was sanctioned to the NGO for 2012-13 by the Projects Sanctioning Committee and the fact that Prof. Sastry is associated with the NGO was brought to the notice of the Board of Directors of Nabard and duly recorded. All these loans were sanctioned at an interest of 10% per annum as per UPNRM guidelines. Nabard has no business relation with CCD based at Hyderabad".

When contacted, Professor Sastry did not deny that CCD was getting funds from Nabard but stated that he “agreed to join the Board because of some initiatives which one is trying to get Nabard to take that will help all small and marginal farmers, not CCD”.

Regarding the conflict of interest represented by his being a member of the Nabard Board, Professor Sastry added, “I read through the documents and did not find any conflict of interest since there is no personal or organizational financial benefit to CCD. Even if you get technical, the written terms show there is no conflict of interest. Then I informed Nabard. They also asked the Ministry of Finance and they cleared it”.

Kumaraswamy holds discussions farmers

KUMARASWAMY INTERACTS WITH FARMERS

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly H.D. Kumaraswamy on Tuesday held discussions with leaders of the farming community to understand their needs.

He has also decided to hold discussions with the office-bearers of the Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI) and other industry associations to understand their problems.

Mr. Kumaraswamy said he would submit a memorandum on various demands of the farming community and industry to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who also holds the finance portfolio. He would urge the Chief Minister to include demands made by the representatives of farmers and captains of industry.

The State Budget will be presented in the Assembly in the session to be held between July 12 and 30.

— Special Correspondent

'Why harp on rice alone, why not jowar or ragi?'

Experts, farmers' organisations suggest distribution of other foodgrains through PDS

While discussions on the Public Distribution System in the State has centred around providing rice at Re. 1 per kg to BPL families, experts and farmers' groups said the government should procure wheat, jowar, ragi and minor millets from farmers and distribute them at ration shops.

They also felt it would benefit farmers if the government buys grains directly from farmers at the district-level.

"This is a golden opportunity for the government to help farmers and the common man," said Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha leader Veerbhushan Nandagave. "If the government were to replace the word rice with jowar or ragi, it would save the lives of lakhs of farmers. It would also address the issue of malnutrition," he said.

"We have been urging successive governments to include jowar and ragi in the public distribution system. We had recently sent a memorandum to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to distribute minor millets through ration shops," he said.

Experts support decentralised procurement and diversification in foodgrains.

"Local procurement is a good idea. So is diversification in grain distribution," said Abdul Aziz, professor emeritus of the Institute of Social and Economic Change. Local procurement makes great economic sense as it reduces the cost of transport and storage. Guarantee of a minimum price by the government would encourage farmers to grow jowar or ragi on larger tracts of land, Prof. Aziz said.

He also argued against diversification for socio-cultural reasons. "The government should not force people who are accustomed to eat a particular grain

into switching to other grains,” added Srinivas Kakkilaya, a Mangalore-based physician.

“Successive governments have neglected jowar,” a senior scientist and sorghum breeder with the university of agriculture science, Dharwad, said. “Area under jowar has fallen to 10 lakh hectares from 18 lakh hectares in the last ten years. We have been appealing to the government that this trend can be arrested if they can procure the grain for a minimum of Rs. 15 per kg. Then, more farmers will venture into jowar,” he said.

However, Maruti Manpade, Karnataka Pranta Raitha Sangha president, said though it was a good idea, it would be difficult to implement. “It is easier to procure rice because paddy is grown on large tracts of land and the processing industry is concentrated in a few towns,” he said.

Politics involved

According to him, procurement is a highly politicised process. “The foodgrain merchants lobby will oppose any move that could reduce its profits. Rice millers and traders are already opposing levy collection. If the government were to try to procure jowar or ragi, the traders are bound to create obstacles. They could also create deliberate shortages and push up prices of these grains, Mr. Manpade said.

Harsha Gupta, Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies, said the government is examining proposals for local procurement and distribution of grains other than rice.

SJM

The Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (CIBA), Chennai, will organise a tribal aqua farmers meet on Wednesday. It is aimed at creating awareness among tribal aqua farmers on brackishwater aquaculture technology through interactions, and studying the problems and needs of these farmers. CIBA

technologies will be demonstrated according to the needs of the farmers. Around 75 tribal aqua farmers from Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts are expected to participate in the programme.

'Take up dredging'

The Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam has urged the district administration and the Public Works Department to take up dredging work in Pugalur Channel, Palla Vaikkal, and Vangal Channel so that Pugalur area farmers in Karur district get water when it is released. Over the years, the irrigation channels have got silted up heavily and required immediate clearing of wild growth and other obstacles, according to a memorandum submitted to the administration by sangam district secretary M. Gurunathan.

Farmers honoured



Farmers were honoured at a gathering held here on Tuesday under the aegis of the Swathanthra Karshaka Sangham (SKS). The function, chaired by SKS district president K. Kunhimamu, was inaugurated by SKS State president Kurukkoli Moideen. The function also included classes on agriculture-related issues.

— Special Correspondent

Sowing picks up momentum in Gulbarga

However, even 50 p.c. of target for sowing of green, black gram hasn't been met



Farmers engaged in agriculture activity at Gobbur village on the outskirts of Gulbarga city on Tuesday.— photo: arun kulkarni

Sowing has picked up momentum in Gulbarga district.

As per the latest details, farmers have completed sowing on 1,83,708 hectares, which is around 32.16 per cent of the target of 5,71,200 hectares.

However, Joint Director of the Agriculture Department E.T. Balatkar told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday that owing to lack of widespread rainfall, sowing of the two major short-duration crops — green gram and black gram — had been slow.

As against the target of 40,000 hectares for black gram, farmers have completed sowing only on 17,812 hectares.

Sowing of green gram has been completed only on 13,932 hectares against the target of 30,000 hectares.

“The fact that farmers could not cover even 50 per cent of the targeted area is a matter of concern. This will have an impact on production of pulses in the district.”

Mr. Balatkar said that farmers had very little time left to complete sowing of these two crops.

In all probability they would not be able to cover the targeted area this year.

Red gram

Sowing of red gram, which is the major crop in the district, was also proceeding slowly. Of the target of 3.65 lakh hectares, farmers had completed sowing on 1,03,874 hectares. Mr. Balatkar said the district had recorded a rain deficit of nearly 8 per cent in June, which is crucial for taking up early sowing of kharif crops.

Rainfall

As against the average rainfall of 122 mm in June in the district, the district has received 112.99 mm. However, rainfall has not been widespread. Chittapur taluk was one of the worst affected with a rain deficit of 54 per in June.

While the coverage of cereals has been 20.35 per cent of the target, pulses coverage has been 30.96 per cent, oilseeds 32.23 per cent. Soya bean continued to be the preferred crop with coverage of 10,373 hectares so far against the target of 700 hectares.

Left peasant organisation to continue legal battle on farmer suicides

A peasant organisation of the Left parties in West Bengal vowed here on Tuesday to continue its legal battle against farmer suicides. The Pradeshik Krishak Sabha had approached the Calcutta High Court after the Trinamool Congress government in a recent affidavit denied farmer suicides.

“The case is on. Our position is to stand by the farmers who find themselves in distress ever since the Trinamool Congress government came to power more than two years ago,” the organisation’s secretary Madan Ghosh said.

So far, 87 farmers in the State have committed suicide in the wake of the agrarian crisis. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has admitted only one such suicide, although her government’s affidavit submitted in the High Court claims

there have been no suicides, said Mr. Ghosh who is also a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

'Centre bowed down to pressure'

The organisation also criticised the Centre "for bowing to the pressure of Reliance Industries and announcing the hike in price of natural gas from April 2014."

"It will automatically result in the rise of electricity and fertilizer prices which is totally against the farmers' interest. Our organisation is committed to building a strong movement against it," Mr. Ghosh added. He criticised the Centre's decision to reduce subsidies on nitrogen and potassium-based fertilizers on the ground that the prices have fallen in the international market.

Milk route

The Dakshina Kannada Cooperative Milk Producers Union will procure more milk from the unions in Shimoga and Hassan in future to meet the additional requirement of 47,500 litres to feed 3.16 lakh children from Dakshina Kannada and Udupi. The DKMUL has been getting 2.75 lakh litres of milk from local farmers although the two districts consume 3.2 lakh litres.

The union gets 60,000 litres of milk every day from Shimoga and Hassan Milk Unions. DKMUL Managing Director B.V. Satyanarayana said the union will get the milk and milk power required for schoolchildren from the two milk unions at a discounted rate.

Workshop for agricultural officers today

The Agriculture Department will organise a workshop and training programme for agricultural officers from the 12 districts of north Karnataka in Rangamandira on Wednesday.

Objective

The aim of the workshop and training programme is to increase the coverage under khariff and rabi crops and to achieve a quantum jump in increasing the yield of major crops in the region.

Joint Director of the Agriculture Department E.T. Balatkar told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday that experts and agricultural scientists from the University of Agricultural Science, Raichur, Agriculture Research Centres, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Agriculture colleges and the Agriculture Department would participate in the workshop and give an update on the latest research and development activities in the field of agriculture.

Agricultural officers from Gulbarga, Bidar, Raichur, Koppal, Yadgir, Dharwad, Belgaum, Gadag, Haveri, Bagalkot, Bellary and Bijapur would take part.

Also, Director of Agriculture Department Sarvesh, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, B.V. Patil, and Chairman of Karnataka State Agriculture Mission S.A. Patil would deliver lectures.

Production levels

Mr. Balatkar said according to studies, many progressive farmers had increased the production levels of major crops in the region by using innovative and improved agricultural practices. There was a need for propagating these practices among other farmers in the region to improve yield of major crops, particularly red gram, he added.

LBP farmers' plea to World Bank

Farmers in the command areas of Lower Bhavani Project (LBP) irrigation system have made a representation to the World Bank asking it not to fund the planned project by Public Works Department to lay concrete flooring along the irrigation canals in the region. Karthikeya Senapathy, a coconut farmer in the area, told *The Hindu* that the agrarian community had approached the World Bank headquarters as the authorities were trying to revive the project with the funding

support of World Bank. They authorities, some time back, had assured the farmers that the project would be shelved seeing the resistance from farmers only to deviate from the promise now, he said

According to farmers, laying concrete on the floor and the banks along 200 km stretch of canals will have a cascading effect on the viability of wells since concrete surface prevents the recharging of underground water table.

Since the LBP command area was in a semi-arid zone and falls within the rain shadow region of the Western Ghats, effective recharging of wells and broewells in the area were essential for sustainable irrigation as well as for the maintenance of livestock. The farmers also fear that if the authorities go ahead with the concrete laying project, many trees need to be cut. "This will then be a threat to the entire biodiversity," they said. The agrarian community was of the opinion that the World Bank should not go against the basic tenets of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity by funding these type of projects.

Foundation laid for lift irrigation scheme

Union Minister of State for Communications and Technology Killi Kruparani and Minister for Forests Satrucharla Vijayarama Raju on Tuesday laid foundation stone for lift irrigation scheme on Mahendratanaya River near Korsavada village of Patapatnam. Mr. Vijayarama Raju said that the government had already sanctioned Rs.5 crore for the scheme. DCCB Chairman Dola Jaganmohana Rao said that the bank was supplying seeds at subsidised rates to all the farmers.

Early release of input subsidy urged

The TRS on Tuesday urged the district administration to take necessary steps for early release of the input subsidy to all farmers who were denied the benefit due to a freeze. Over 40,000 farmers were denied compensation to the tune of Rs. 20 crore for crops lost in the drought of 2011. Circulating copies of a High Court

judgment on a Public Interest Litigation filed by him recently, senior TRS and farmer leader B. Goverdhan Reddy said the High Court had asked the Agriculture Commissioner to disburse the amount as per the statements of the district administration within six weeks. He said there should be no further delay in lifting the freeze and releasing the money.

When incomes mushroom



Generating an earning: Mushrooms are now part of the cuisine during special occasions like marriages. Photo: Ritu Raj Konwar



Farm fresh: However they have low shelf life. Photo: K. Ananthan

Women farmers in Himachal Pradesh earn a living by growing mushrooms

Beena Bharti from Banjar in Kullu district was an ordinary homemaker about 6 to 7 years ago. Today, she earns around Rs 70,000 to Rs 80,000 a year by growing mushrooms. Not just that, women farmers in the area look to her for help and guidance. She has come a long way since 2006, when she got trained in growing mushrooms from the Himalayan Research Group (HRG), an organisation supported by the Department of Science and Technology for making technology accessible to empower women farmers and other villagers.

“A few days back my mobile was not working properly so I bought a brand new one. My daughter said I could have got my old mobile repaired. I told her, why I shouldn’t get a new one when I can afford to buy it with money I earned myself. Today I don’t have to look towards my husband or children for money and instead I give them if they need some cash.” she says proudly.

Meena from Sias village in Gohar block of Mandi district also took training from HRG at its Dhangjara field station close to her village. Now she grows not just mushrooms but also medicinal plants like chirayita and kodu, both used as liver tonics. The medicinal plants fetch a price of Rs 300 to Rs 500 a kg.

“Today people respect me and with income of my own I am able to spend the way I want,” she says.

The HRG, a core group of 20 to 22 people headed by Dr Lal Singh, provides a complete technology package that includes free training, provisions of raw material and link to the market in the cultivation of mushrooms, medicinal and aromatic plants and innovative fodder production.

Training in the cultivation of mushrooms is provided preferably to women living in villages that are accessible (since mushrooms have a low shelf life), have at least one room in the house that can be spared for mushroom growing and women who have time on their hands. Apart from free training, the mushroom growers are provided with raw material that includes compost, seeds for spawning and

other ingredients necessary for growing mushrooms in the bags. Each of the bags costs Rs 70 and two kgs of mushrooms can be grown with it. The market price of mushrooms is between Rs 100 to 150 per kg. In fact, says Dr Lal Singh, the production of vermicompost has emerged as a household enterprise for women who are selling surplus quantity as well as saving on the use of chemical fertilizers.

Dr Maninder Jeet Kaur, member secretary of the executive committee of HRG and a recipient of the National Award for Women's Development through Science and Technology says they ensure that technology they provide to rural folk does not involve capital investment they can't afford, is easy to use, accessible, acceptable and sustainable and the resources are locally available. Also if they are not helped in marketing their produce, the whole effort is wasted.

Dr Kaur says to begin with they had to go from house to house to motivate women to grow mushrooms, later they approached them through Mahila Mandals or Self Help Groups and by holding awareness campaigns.

Today things have changed. In many villages mushrooms have become a part of the cuisine and in village dhams (dham is when the whole village is invited for lunch or dinner during marriages and other occasions in Himachal Pradesh), instead of the delicacy of peas and cottage cheese, it is now peas and mushrooms, says Dr Kaur.

Indira of Badhali in Shimla district and nearly 40 other women in the village got training in preparing silage, roughage treatment and plantation of improved and protein rich grass. This fodder, says Dr Kaur, is not only enriched with nutrients but has also soil binding qualities. The drudgery of the women she says is also reduced as they don't have to climb up and down the mountains to fetch grass for their cattle because they are growing it in their villages.

Indira says now the rains don't wash away the soil and the cattle after eating the enriched fodder give milk of a much better quality with lots of cream. The milk yield is increased by 20 per cent in winters.

Around 8,000-10,000 rural women have directly benefited from the complete technology package, claims HRG. Empowering women, providing livelihood and increasing farmers income through scientific interventions as well as conserving endangered species of medicinal plants through research is what we aim at, says Dr Lal Singh.

'Release water for cultivation'

H.D. Revanna, Janata Dal (S) MLA for Holenarsipur, on Tuesday, demanded that the State government release water from the Hemavati reservoir into canals for agricultural purposes.

The government should convene a meeting of the Irrigation Advisory Committee on the issue, he said at a press conference here.

Mr. Revanna said farmers had taken up sowing in most parts of the district.

"They have to complete sowing by July-end. The time is ripe to release water into the canals," he said.

Mr. Revanna, a believer in astrology, suggested that the Water Resources Department release water before the coming 'amavasya'.

"The month of Ashada, which is considered 'inauspicious', begins after the amavasya. Let the government release water into the canals before Ashada begins," he said

Award for CRIDA scientist

Dr. B. Venkateswarlu, Director of Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), bagged the prestigious Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed award of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for the year 2012. The award has

been given for the research work by Dr. Venkateswarlu and three associates - Dr. Mohd. Osman, Dr. Sreenath Dixit and Dr. K.V.Rao for developing and popularising water harvesting technology in tribal areas.

Water for irrigation used by sugar factories: Chavan

'Sugar factories will be asked to switch to drip irrigation'

Even as Maharashtra is slowly dealing with this year's drought, Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan admitted that water meant for irrigation and domestic use may have been diverted to various sugar factories of the State.

Speaking at a conference on water use organised at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Mr Chavan said that the State has not yet devised laws to regulate water use between industries and agriculture.

"A lot of water which is meant for irrigation is used by sugar factories in the State. To avoid the problems we encountered during the drought year, sugar factories in the State will be asked to switch to drip irrigation fully in the next three years. Those who fail to comply will not be issued licences," Mr Chavan said.

The Chief Minister also said that many irrigation projects do not get completed because of the lack of political will.

"Political conflict has affected the state of irrigation in the State," he said.

More girls opt for agriculture education

First phase of general counselling for admission to courses begins at TNAU

The first phase of general counselling for admission to the agricultural courses of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University that began here on Monday witnessed two unique features.

There were only five boys in the top 20 ranks. And, the first 18 candidates selected B.Sc. courses (17 Agriculture and one Forestry).

Only the 19th rank holder selected an engineering course. At the end of day one, out of 204 admitted, 178 students had chosen B.Sc. programmes, with the highest number in the Agriculture programme. But the university is not surprised. A. Rajarajan, Dean (Agriculture), told *The Hindu* that the university already had 70 per cent girls studying various courses.

“This is very high compared to the other State Agricultural Universities. This year too the trend is continuing”.

As regards the toppers selecting B.Sc. courses as against the engineering programmes, he said that B.Sc. Agriculture had always been the favourite of the toppers, even those who had cut-offs equal to that of medical and engineering. This time only those who were keen on the unique engineering programmes of the university chose them.

In earlier years, medical and engineering counselling of the Anna University was always held after TNAU counselling.

Some students, who chose an engineering course at TNAU, dropped out on securing a medical seat, or engineering seat of the Anna University.

This time, however, students who attended the TNAU counselling were ones who had made up their mind to study in the university only.

Since the counselling was held after the medical and engineering counselling, only those who were keen on an agricultural education attended the TNAU counselling.

True to this premise, the first student who received the provisional admit card – Indra Priyadarshini (198.25) from Udumalpet – had made up her mind about B.Sc. Agriculture. Though her medical cut-off would have enabled her get a seat in counselling, she did not even attend it.

“My aim is to complete the programme and appear for Union Public Service Commission examination. I want to become an Indian Administrative Service officer. The university provides good facilities for this too,” she said.

Indra Priyadarshini received the admit card from Minister of Agriculture S. Damodaran

Attappady crisis

Brinda Karat has raised many vital questions on the poor health status of tribals in Kerala (“Gruel, rice and tamarind water,” July 2). Across the political spectrum, there is a lack of political will to help the poor. Despite Kerala alternating between the Left parties and the Congress, the backwardness of adivasis has remained a constant. People’s welfare is thrown to the winds once a party or coalition forms a government.

A. Prabakaran,

Tiruchi

The article has exposed the State’s callousness in Attappady. Such deprivation can sow the seeds of alienation among the tribals with disastrous consequences. Direct cash transfers seem to be the only way to deal with rampant corruption and administrative delays. The government should expedite the process of inclusion.

Kamaldeep Singh,

New Delhi

The tribals have been dispossessed of their meagre livelihood resources in the name of development and rendered more impoverished and voiceless. Our leaders should ask themselves whether growth and development are meant for investors or the impoverished. The deaths of women and children in Attappady are murders resulting from callous, greedy, insensitive policies.

Indra Reddy Chavali

Hyderabad

Malnutrition has been plaguing the tribals of Kerala for decades. Scant attention is paid to the Integrated Tribal Development Project although the State boasts of

better development indicators on many fronts, including health. Despite the movement led by C.K. Janu for redistributing land to landless tribals, nothing much has been achieved to alleviate the poverty and suffering of the adivasis, irrespective of the governments in power. Ms Karat is right in saying that land is the primary source of livelihood for tribals. If it is restored to them and they are supported in growing crops and vegetables with watershed management, there will be a change in their living conditions.

P. Narayana Moorthy,

Chennai

The main cause of malnutrition is poverty but the maladministration of the State is equally to blame. Central government schemes do not reach the target group. However this is not unique to Attappady or Kerala. Across the country, urgent steps should be taken to make administration more effective.

R.P. Virupaksha,

Bangalore

The plight of adivasis is similar in Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Eradication of poverty, ignorance and corruption is a must if malnutrition and its harmful consequences are to be wiped out. We must focus more on removing the causes of malnutrition, the most significant being the ever-increasing population. The adivasis should be helped in such a way that they do not depend on government policies for everything. As Ms Karat rightly says, they want livelihood not charity.

Anjaneesh Pratap Singh,

Raebareli

India is among the countries that have a high rate of poverty. Ironically, it is also counted as a country with many millionaires. The numbers in both the categories are increasing with each passing decade. Our politicians and bureaucracy perhaps think this is another aspect of diversity. If they continue to do so, the

future of India will be very different from what was envisaged by the founding fathers of this great nation.

Punya Jyoti Boruah,

New Delhi

On the one hand, foodgrains are rotting in FCI godowns and, on the other, people are dying of malnutrition. Instead of making pious statements on food security, the UPA government should ensure proper foodgrain distribution to BPL families, as directed by the Supreme Court.

Savula Naveen Chandra,

Karimnagar

The plight of the people of Attappady is a grim reminder of the grave policy paralysis and bureaucratic quagmires in Kerala. The authorities should get rid of their lackadaisical attitude. Malnourishment has triggered a series of other problems and diseases in the region, rendering people weak and vulnerable. A strong integrated approach with emphasis on restoring the lands of the tribals should be adopted.

Arjun R. Shankar,

Thiruvananthapuram



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Two more Vidarbha irrigation projects await funds

It is not Gosikhurd dam alone for which the state government has to haggle for funds with the Centre. Two other major irrigation projects in the region also are waiting for central funds. There has been no central assistance for Bembla and Lower Wardha irrigation projects since last fiscal. The Vidarbha Irrigation Development Corporation (VIDC) is trying hard to get some money released at least this year.

Bembla, which is supposed to have a total irrigation capacity of 52,543 hectares, is coming up in the drought prone pocket of Yavatmal district, also known for high rate of farmers' suicides due to agrarian distress. The Lower Wardha project, coming up in Arvi taluka of Wardha district has a projected capacity of irrigating 44,150 hectares.

Ironically, in both the dams, the works such as building the main dam and construction of canals have either been completed or are nearing completion. What remains is creating the water courses. These are the routes for ultimately supplying water to the farms. Contractors say this does not need much investment and the work can be easily taken up. According a VIDC document in TOI's possession, in Bembla, the headworks are completely done, almost 95% of the work on canal has also been completed. However, only 20% of the water courses have been created. Similarly, with the earthen dam and main canal done in Lower Wardha, water courses have not become operational yet, as some of the work on the branch canal and distributary system remains incomplete.

Central Water Commission (CWC), has raised certain queries following which the funds have been held up, said a VIDC source. Bembla gets around 75% central funds and while Lower Wardha 25%. VIDC has submitted its reply to the queries and is expecting that the funds would be released this year. However, sources in

the state's water resources department said the Centre had now run out of funds under the head and was just buying time until further allocations are made.

Around Rs100 crore are expected for both the projects. Even in the year 2010-11 there was no central funding for them.

Thanks to delays, both saw massive cost over-runs

Both the projects are more than two decades old. Bembla was started in 1992 and was estimated to cost Rs190 crore. Today, its estimated cost is 1145% higher at Rs2176 crore and counting. The cost was revised thrice. The biggest escalation was in 2009, when the cost was hiked by 70% against Rs1278 crore in 2006. So far, Rs1618 crore have been spent on this project. Such sharp escalations in 2009, approved by the deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar had raised a controversy.

Lower Wardha, which began in 1981, has seen an escalation of 1071%. The current estimates stand at Rs2356 crore as against Rs48 crore in 1981. Again, the biggest escalation of 140% was in 2009 compared to the rates three years ago. So far Rs890 crore have been spent on it

Introduce pension for farmers: CPI's demand

Ahead of Congress government's first budget, the Communist Part of India on Monday asked chief minister Siddaramaiah to include farming community under pension scheme of the government.

Siddaramaiah, who holds the finance portfolio, is scheduled to present the budget in the third week of July. The CPI wants the CM to announce a pension scheme for the farmers, much like the scheme extended by Maharashtra and Goa governments. CPI activists led by district unit secretary H R Sheshadri, who protested in front of the DC office, said both Goa and Maharashtra were extending Rs 3,000 per month to farmers who were over 60 years and who

depend solely on agriculture.

It asked the government to spell out a plan of action in the budget on two important reports - illegal mining report submitted by the Lokayukta and former chief secretary Balasubramaniam committee report on encroachment of public land in the state.

The Left party wants the government to reclaim the land encroached by land mafia but exclude those used by farmers and use the reclaimed land for public purposes including farming. It asked the CM to initiate action against officials named in former Lokayukta Santosh Hegde's report. The CPI submitted a list of 12 demands to the district administration, which it wants the government to take a look and include in the budget.

Scientists in Talod develop new BT hybrid variety of cotton

Scientists at government agriculture research station at Talod in Sabarkantha have developed a new BT hybrid variety of cotton. The seeds of this new variety have been sent to genetic engineering approval committee (GEAC) of Union ministry of environment for approval.

Sources said the new variety of long staple having a length up to 29mm has been developed after a two-year-long research. Multi location trials have also been carried out in places like Talod, Surat and Junagadh and the variety has been found to grow successfully in all the three regions of the state.

Sources said once the approval comes from GEAC for the commercial plantation of this variety, the seeds would be partially made available to the farmers from next year. It will be formally named after the approval is granted to the seeds.

Scientists involved in developing the variety said that the most striking feature of the new variety is its resistance to pests. In addition to this, the new variety is high yielding.

"As compared to Shankar 6 and Shankar 8 varieties that were introduced in the

market recently, the new variety has a yield that is 20 per cent higher than them. While the Shankar varieties give 2,500kg to 3,500kg per hectare, this variety yields 3,000 kg to 4,000 kg per hectare," an official said.

Sources said the technical terminology used to identify the new variety is GTHH 49 BG 2. "It will soon get a user friendly name after it is approved," sources said. Gujarat is among the top cotton producing states of the country. Last year the cotton production had fallen by around 30 per cent on account of water scarcity.

Kathiawadi cattle, sheep devouring forests

At a time when fodder crisis is forcing cattle-owners from small towns in Vidarbha to sell their animals to slaughter houses, cattle and sheep from Kathiawad in Gujarat are devouring forest areas of Nagpur division.

This is in blatant violation of state government missive to forest officials on October 31, 2011, asking respective chief conservators of forest (CCFs) and deputy conservators (DCFs) to stop Kathiawadi cattle and sheep from grazing into the forests.

This is plantation season and grazing animals in forests hit regeneration.

Besides, there is danger of spread of foot and mouth and rinderpest disease among wild animals from these cattle, which are not vaccinated.

However, herds of cattle have entered various forest ranges in Nagpur division.

These herds were seen near Butibori, North Umred, South Umred, Khapa, Paoni, Kondhali and other ranges.

This being agriculture season, these cattle and sheep are not allowed in fields but their owners graze them in reserve forests and protected areas. Range forest officials do have knowledge about it but action is hardly ever taken. There are clear directions to book cattle owners under Indian Forest Act and file cases against them in court. The seized cattle should be auctioned. However, no action

is taken.

Five days ago, herds of cattle attempted to enter Umred-Karhandla sanctuary from Paoni (Bhandara) and Bhiwapur sides. However, forest officials did not allow the cattle to enter sanctuary area. Now the herds have scattered in forest pockets of North and South Umred.

The government had also directed authorities to set up a four-member committee under the district collector with superintendent of police, deputy director (animal husbandry) as members and deputy conservator as member-secretary.

The committee has to meet every month to review action. However, not a single meeting has been held in the last 20 months since the GR was issued. The CCFs have also not taken a review of Kathiawadi cattle every 15 days as told. The apathy is so glaring that Raju Bhojane, who was deputy director in 2011-12, did not even know he was member of the committee.

"I have no idea about any meeting," Bhojane said. Similarly, another member on anonymity said he was not aware of such a committee. "I was not called for any meeting," he said.

DyCF P K Mahajan admits meeting of the committee was not called. "But this year, I've warned officials that if Kathiawadi cattle is noticed grazing in forest areas, they will face suspension. I've issued a letter to all RFOs in this regard," he told TOI.

Retired teachers of Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology felicitated

The staff of Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology on Monday accorded a farewell to the faculty members who retired on June 30.

Seven of the nine retired teachers were present in the function.

Ram Krishna Yadav, CP Sharma, Ram Charan, Ashok Kumar Mishra, RL Srivastava, BP Pandey and AK Singhal were felicitated by acting vice-chancellor Ashok Kumar.

During the farewell party, it was decided that from next year, the families of the retiring teachers shall also be invited. Kumar praised the teachers for their contributions in educating the students. "Despite not being paid salary for the past two-three months, all the teachers conducted the classes which is commendable," he said.

Weather-Chennai

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Wednesday, Jul 3

Max Min

35° | 25°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:46

Humidity: 74

Sunset: 06:39

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1004

Tomorrow's Forecast



Cloudy

Thursday, Jul 4

Max Min

38° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Jul 5

Jul 6

Jul 7

Jul 8

Jul 9



38° | 27°

Cloudy



37° | 26°

Overcast



37° | 26°

Overcast



38° | 27°

Overcast



37° | 27°

Overcast

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:27

Humidity: 79

Sunset: 07:23

Wind: normal

Barometer: 999

Pepper continues to slide on selling pressure



Pepper prices continued their downward trend on Tuesday on selling pressure in Karnataka and the plains of Kerala . Karnataka sellers have reduced their prices to Rs 400 a kg delivered anywhere in India. Upcountry buyers are said to have slowed down their buying on the assumption that the prices might decline further. Dealers do not seem to be interested to buy from the declining market. Sellers in Kerala's Kottayam, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Malappuram districts are reported to have shown interest to sell when the prices moved up in recent days, market sources told *Business Line*.

Add to these factors, there has been a slow down in the buying from West Asia and Gulf Countries in view of the beginning of Ramzan, they said. Apart from these, reports emanating from Vietnam have indicated of an easier tone also aided the price decline, they said. On the NMCE, the last traded price for July and Sep contracts were down by Rs 258 and Rs 135 respectively to Rs 40,090 and Rs 40,355 a quintal. However, July contract showed a marginal increase by Rs 20 to Rs 40,210. Total turn over increased by 15 tonnes to 42 tonnes while total net open position declined by four tonnes to 110 tonnes. On the IPSTA platform, July, Aug and Sep dropped by Rs 167, Rs 500 and Rs 499 to close at Rs 40,000, Rs 39,930 and Rs 39,315 a quintal.

Spot prices decreased by Rs 500 to close at Rs 39,000 (ungarbled) and Rs 40,500 (MG 1) a quintal on increased selling interest, they said. Indian parity in the international market was at \$7,100 (c&f) for the Europe and \$7,250 a tonne (c&f) for the US.

Quality turmeric gains on N. Indian orders



The arrival and sales of turmeric were on the rise in Erode markets on Tuesday. “Local traders and exporters have received few upcountry orders for the yellow spice. So they are quoting higher price for the quality turmeric. Stockists too purchased. Further, prices improved by three per cent in the futures. Buying of the spice from other stations by the local traders have stopped, as the traders now prefer only the quality turmeric which is available in Erode,” said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

Traders said that with the rains coming to a halt in North India, they may get few orders within couple of days. Of the arrival of 4,012 bags of turmeric, 2,890 bags were sold. Due to arrival of good quality hybrid turmeric, the hybrid finger variety was up by Rs 330 a quintal and was sold at Rs 8,720 and the root variety by Rs 200. Similarly, the good quality finger variety at the Regulated Market Committee fetched a higher price of Rs 7,709 – Rs 450 higher than yesterday’s price. At the

Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety was sold at Rs 4,256-7,059 a quintal; the root variety Rs 4,199-6,260.

Salem Hybrid Crop: The finger variety fetched Rs 6,216-8,720; the root variety Rs 6,017-6,691. Of the 786 bags arrived, only 329 were sold. At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety ruled at Rs 6,314-7,709 and the root variety Rs 5,389-6,413. Of the 548 bags arrived, 512 found takers.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 6,161-7,469 and the root variety Rs 5,399-6,390. All the 248 bags were traded.

At the Gobichettipalayam Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety was sold at Rs 6,111-7,100; the root variety Rs 5,737-6,387. All the 77 bags were sold.

Chana prices seen rising on millers' demand

Chana traders expect a rise in prices in the coming days as millers' demand is likely to go up during the festival season. Besides bumper crop production, higher yield in dollar chana which is up 30 per cent compared to its production last year have also been keeping chana prices under leash, said a trader adding that with increased use of dollar chana by the millers for manufacturing 'besan', demand for chana from the millers in the past sometime has declined sharply, leading to fall in its prices.

Weak futures and poor demand in pulses pounded chana in Indore mandis by Rs 75-100 a quintal with chana (kanta) on Tuesday declining to Rs 3,050 a quintal (Rs 3,100-50). Similarly, chana (desi) declined to Rs 2,900. Chana (annagiri) ruled at Rs 2,700-2,800, Kabuli Bitki at Rs 2,800-2,900, chana (mausmi) at Rs 3,200, while Kaktu ruled at Rs 2,800-2,900.

Sharp decline in spot chana and sluggish demand in pulses also pounded chana dal in local mandis by about Rs 100 a quintal with chana dal (average) being quoted at Rs 3,650-75, chana dal (medium) at Rs 3,750-75, while chana dal (bold) declined to Rs 3,950-75. In container, dollar chana has declined by Rs 100

a quintal on weak export demand with dollar chana (42/44 count) being quoted at Rs 5,325-50, 44/46 count at Rs 5,100, 46/48 count at Rs 4,900, while 58/60 count ruled at Rs 3,500 and dollar chana (60/62 count) ruled at Rs 3,375 a quintal respectively.

Demand heats up groundnut oil



On the back of sudden demand at the lower level, groundnut oil loose jumped almost Rs 50 for 10 kg on Tuesday. However, prices were stable in the retail market.

TEMPORARY RISE

According to traders, it is a temporary price rise and overall sentiment is not so bullish in groundnut oil. Groundnut oil increased Rs 45-50 to Rs 920-925 for 10 kg in Saurashtra.

Jamnagar line *telia* tin was up by Rs 75 to Rs 1,421-1,422 for 15 kg while groundnut oil new tin remained steady at Rs 1,655-1,660 . About 8-10 tankers of groundnut oil were traded in Saurashtra's mills.

CHEAP

Demand has increased suddenly from almost nil trading to 10 tankers. Millers said that groundnut oil price has decreased so much in past one month and it is now an attractive level for buyers.

On the other hand, some traders believe that it is just temporary price rise as buyers keep out once price goes up.

COTTON OIL

Cotton oil wash was traded at Rs 620-623 for 10 kg and cotton oil new tin price stood at Rs 1,105-1,115 for 15 kg. About 30-35 tankers of cotton oil were traded here.

SOWING

Groundnut sowing has picked up momentum, with total area under the crop rising to 1.58 million hectares , up 273 per cent on year. In the year-ago period, farmers had sowed groundnut over 422,400 hectares. Sowing of the crop was highest in Gujarat at 1.06 million hectares so far (167,200 hectares).

'Hike import duty, open up exports to stabilise pulse prices'



The bearish trend in prices of pulses, wherein open market prices continue to hover around the minimum support price levels (MSP), has prompted the trade and farmers to seek the Government intervention. The pulses trade wants the Government to hike import duty and open up exports, a move that could help stabilise prices.

At the same time, a section of growers, not happy with the recently announced hike in MSP for tur or arhar at Rs 4,500 a quintal for the current kharif season, wants the support prices further hiked to offset the rise in input costs. “The Government should look at either increasing import duty or allowing exports to stabilise prices, or else the acreage next year could shift in favour of other crops,” said Pravin Dongre, President of Indian Pulses and Grains Association.

Citing the example of chana, prices of which are at a 24-month low at around Rs 2,900, below the MSP of Rs 3,000, Dongre said the farmers' realisations are getting affected. The Centre had prohibited the exports of pulses since June 2006 on domestic shortages and the ban, which has been extended from time-to-time, is currently in force till March 2014. India is the largest producer of pulses, but also imports about three million tonnes annually to meet the domestic shortfall in consumption.

Even the prices of red gram or tur are hovering around the MSP levels. At major markets in Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra, the average prices are ranging between Rs 3,700 and Rs 4,200. In Mumbai, even the landed price of imported tur from Myanmar stands at around Rs 4,000 for the old crop and at about Rs 4,100 for the new crop.

The imported prices are after factoring the recent decline in rupee against the dollar, said Rajesh Agarwalla of the Delhi-based Premier Pulses Ltd.

"The Government should open up the exports, at least with some quantitative restrictions," he said. Pulses importers have taken a hit on account of the recent decline in rupee value and have booked losses. "We have stopped signing new contracts," Agarwalla said.

In its price policy recommendations for the kharif season, the Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices (CACP) had also recommended imposing an import duty on pulses and oilseeds to boost the domestic production. Basavaraj Ingin, President of Karnataka Tur Growers Association, said the MSP for tur should be hiked to at least to Rs 5,500, as the cost of production on rising input costs of labour and fertiliser have shot up to around Rs 5,000. He demanded that the Government start distributing pulses through the public distribution system and control imports by imposing duty so that the prevailing prices of pulses stabilise.

Experts to learn a lesson or two from Bihar farmers' paddy growing method

Agriculture scientists and experts across India are keen to learn Bihar farmers' system of root intensification (SRI) method of paddy cultivation, which has resulted in record crop yields, an official said. Agriculture scientists and experts from neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and the Directorate of Rice Development will visit Bihar's Nalanda district in second week of July to learn about SRI method from local farmers, said District Agriculture Officer Sudama Mahto.

Bihar Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh told IANS that successful use of the SRI method of cultivation to boost production has impressed experts in and outside the country. Agriculture scientists and experts from Kerala, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and from abroad have earlier visited Nalanda to learn the SRI method, he said.

"Top officials of union agriculture ministry had also come," the minister said. According to officials, M.C. Diwakar, who heads the directorate of rice development, in his letter to Bihar Government, noted that till four or five years ago, the SRI method was not accepted as a scientific method of cultivation by agro-scientists.

"But thanks to record after record made by farmers of Nalanda in paddy production has forced all to declare it a successful method now," he admitted in his letter. After attaining record production of 87 lakh tonnes in 2012-13, Bihar has set a target of 100 lakh tonnes of paddy this year by using the SRI method of cultivation, an official said.

Narendra Singh said SRI method of paddy cultivation, locally known as 'Srividhi' and introduced four years ago, is so far successful in different parts of Bihar as it requires less water and gives two to three times the yield compared to traditional cultivation methods.

Initially, the farmers were reluctant to adopt this new technique despite the state Government providing free seeds, fertilisers and experts to guide them. But now, more farmers are taking to this method following its success. "Rice production in

Bihar was 36.4 lakh tonnes in 2009-10 which increased to 81.87 lakh tonnes in 2011-12 and 87 lakh tonnes in 2012-13, thanks to the SRI method,” Narendra Singh said. Sumant Kumar, a farmer in Darveshpura village in Nalanda district, had created a “world record” in 2011 by producing 224 quintals of paddy per hectare using this method, officials said.

Primary cooperatives can continue lending to farmers

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) has clarified that it has not issued instructions to stop primary cooperatives from issuing Kissan Credit Cards/crop loans.

Primary cooperatives can continue their lending to farmers, R.

Amalorpavanathan, chief regional manager of Nabard, said here. He said that it was the Centre that had required banks to extend loans to agriculture, especially crop loans, through ATM and Aadhaar-enabled Kissan Credit Card (the Rupay KCC). This was to facilitate farmers who obtain credit to operate accounts from any place of their choice as in ATM-based withdrawals and payments through point of sale terminals. Aadhaar-enabled kisan cards are essential for accessing benefits extended by the Centre under direct benefit transfer scheme, Amaloprvanathan said.

RBI RESPONSIBILITY

Reserve Bank of India has the responsibility to evolve a stable, safe and secure payment system in the country. Financial transactions, like those conducted through ATMs, worked through its payment system. But membership to the payment system was restricted only to banks. Amalorpavanathan requested cooperatives to understand emerging reality and initiate urgent steps to keep themselves in the mainstream.

Scientists bag award B. Venkateswarlu, Director of the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture here has won the Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Award of the

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for the year 2012. The award is in recognition of the research done by the scientist along with three of his associates — Mohd. Osman, Sreenath Dixit and K.V. Rao for developing and popularising water harvesting technology in tribal areas of the country. The award will be presented in New Delhi on the occasion of the foundation day of ICAR on July 16, a press release said.

Coconut Board institutes awards

Coconut Development Board has instituted national awards under the various categories for promoting excellence in coconut farming, product development, diversification, quality improvement, export and marketing. They include the best coconut farmer, the best coconut processor (conventional and non-conventional coconut products), the best research worker (product development / new applications and uses for coconut / nutritional and biochemical findings), the master craftsman manufacturing coconut-based handicrafts, the best exporter of coconut products etc. The last date of receipt of filled-in applications for the best coconut farmer award is July 15 and for all other categories is July 20. Applicants may log on to the board's Web site or contact its offices for details. – Our Bureau

Business Standard

Agri-varsity courses for farmers without age, qualification bar

The widely travelled Chancellor said it will tie up with leading agriculture universities for knowledge transfer and field visits

The country's first and only private open agriculture university, which began functioning here in January this year, has opened its doors for farmers offering them courses without any age bar and qualification restriction.

"Our syllabus and curriculum are entirely different than other universities and are innovative. We are conducting classes on out-demonstration farms near here in Katol and the response is good," Chancellor of Arvind Agricultural (Open and Virtual) University, Dr Mukund Gaikwad said.

The Arvind Agriculture Open and Virtual University will use high-technology involving experts of various agro-produce in the world for sharing their experiences and teaching farmers directly here in virtual classrooms, he said.

The widely travelled Chancellor said it will tie up with leading agriculture universities for knowledge transfer and field visits.

He said that marketing, one of the basic bottlenecks in agriculture, is being addressed by the university.

"This summer we have started with exporting 700 tonnes of mango from Western Maharashtra. Now, plans are afoot to help Vidarbha farmers by exporting vegetables from this region. As a pilot project we have been growing vegetables at our demonstration field at Wadvihira in Katol (Nagpur rural). We plan to export 500 tonnes of vegetables," he said.

"Farmers of Vidarbha need to take up innovative measures like diversifying to vegetables and pulses besides cash crops like cotton and soyabean to increase their income. Only if they do this, the economic distress that has led to the

suicide crisis can be resolved," Gaikwad said.

Arvind University aims at a paradigm shift in farm education by offering tailor-made courses and that's why we have chalked out 50 courses that would range from a daylong workshop to four-year Ratna without any bar for age or qualification, he added.

"One of the basic objectives behind starting the first open agriculture university in the suicide-crisis-hit Vidarbha region, is to root out despondency among young farmers about ills of agriculture. If technology and best practices are adopted, farming can be a boon and not a bane," the senior academician asserted.

After three decades of teaching in conventional farm colleges, he took voluntary retirement to tour world as a visiting professor.

Now, he has accepted the assignment to build the open university promoted by Maharashtra's former Agriculture Minister and also former Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Ranjeet Deshmukh.

Gaikwad says in last four decades, traditional agricultural universities have failed miserably. "They are white elephants and have hardly done any path-breaking research that could be implemented by farmers. These farm colleges have become factories churning out degree holders," he lamented. Most of the development in agriculture sector is through private enterprise and not through the government-aided farm universities' agriculture department, he pointed out.

Coriander down 1.4% as demand declines

The prices of coriander in July delivery declined by 1.36%

Coriander futures today fell by Rs 94 to Rs 6,623 per quintal, as demand declined in the spot market against the excess supplies.

The fall in the price of coriander was also supported by the profit booking of the commodity by traders at higher levels.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, coriander for delivery in August fell by Rs 94,

or 1.40%, to Rs 6,623 per quintal with an open interest of 18,010 lots.

The prices of coriander in July delivery declined by Rs 90, or 1.36%, to Rs 6,540 per quintal with an open interest of 15,880 lots.

Market analysts said besides profit-booking by speculators at existing higher levels, sluggish demand in the spot market led to the fall in coriander prices.

Crude palm oil futures up 0.1% on firm spot demand

Crude oil for delivery in August moved up 0.07%

Crude palm oil futures prices today rose by 0.19% to Rs 502.50 per 10 kg, as speculators created fresh positions on expectations of pick up in spot demand amid low stocks.

A firming trend in overseas markets also supported the oil prices in futures trade.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude palm oil for July delivery rose by Re one, or 0.19%, to Rs 502.50 per 10 kg, with a trading volume of 141 lots.

Similarly, crude oil for delivery in August moved up by 40 paise, or 0.07%, to Rs 502.50 per 10 kg, with a business turnover of 66 lots.

Analysts said fresh buying by speculators on hopes of pick-up in spot market demand mainly led to a rise in crude palm oil prices at futures market.

They said, palm oil rebounded from the lowest level in almost six weeks on speculation that inventories in Malaysia, the world's second-largest producer, may drop for a sixth month on increasing exports.

Meanwhile, the crude palm oil advanced 0.80% to \$745 a tonne on the Malaysia Derivatives Exchange

Mentha oil down 1.9% on profit-booking

Mentha oil for delivery in the August traded lower by 1.82%

Mentha oil futures prices today drifted by Rs 19.30 to Rs 976 per kg as speculators locked-in gains at prevailing levels amid slackened demand at spot markets.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, mentha oil for delivery in July declined by Rs 19.30, or 1.93%, to Rs 976 per kg in business turnover of 792 lots.

Likewise, mentha oil for delivery in the August traded lower by Rs 18.10, or 1.82%, to Rs 990 per kg in 156 lots.

The fall in mentha futures prices was mostly due to profit-booking by speculators after recent gains and sluggish demand from pharmaceutical units, analysts said.

Cardamom futures down on profit-booking

Cardamom for delivery in August declined by 0.7%

Cardamom futures prices today fell further by 2.68% to Rs 713.30 per kg as speculators booked profits at prevailing levels amid subdued spot demand.

At the Multi Commodity Exchange, cardamom for delivery in July declined by Rs 19.70, or 2.68%, to Rs 713.30 per kg, with a business turnover of 1,456 lots.

Likewise, cardamom for delivery in August declined by Rs 5.90, or 0.76%, to Rs 764.70 per kg, with a trading volume of 945 lots.

Market analysts said besides profit-booking by speculators, subdued demand in the spot market against adequate stocks position also kept pressure on the cardamom prices at futures trade