

THE HINDU

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When Leelabai runs the farm

In a region of poor yields, a gritty woman farmer succeeds even in years of crop failure. But high costs are depleting Vidarbha's success stories

"I am the farmer, he did no farming. He only moons over his cattle, he loves those cows (even if they yield just a litre of milk each). Men hang around the village, women are in the fields."

Leelabai is speaking of one of Yavatmal's most famous farmers, Ashanna Totawar. He is something of a legend, a man credited with record yields in cotton and soybean even in years of major crop failure in Yavatmal. Ashanna is a gentle, experienced man who has closely observed farming in the Vidarbha region across 50 years. He is also Leelabai's husband. The couple live in Pimpri village adjoining Panderkauda town, a major cotton market in Yavatmal district, Maharashtra.

Leelabai holds her husband in great respect and affection. She has little formal education, but is highly-skilled and trained by her own experience. On farming, she believes in telling it like it is. Especially when it comes to who really does the farming. "*Bai* (women)," she says. "And they do it better."

Her knowledge, having been the main farmer on a highly successful holding for decades, is impressive. Also because she was the decision-maker in both farming and finances.

We met Leelabai at the home of Lalita Anandrao Gandhewar. Lalita's husband, Namdeo committed suicide on May 20 this year, another digit in Maharashtra's frightening farm suicide numbers. (No less than 3,786 last

year, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.) Ashanna was there at the Gandhewar home, too.

After speaking to Lalita on what drove Namdeo to suicide, we chatted with Ashanna, the legendary farmer. Leelabai was squatting on the floor, almost in the next room in the darkened house, so we couldn't even see her. But she made herself heard, butting in freely to address our ignorance.

ON THE FIELD

"We desperately need to go back to more sensible farming. The costs of cultivation and the lack of proper price for produce — that's killing us."

Later, in their own home, Leelabai told us her story.

"When we started, it was possible in some places to acquire 40 acres of land for Rs.10,000. Today, you won't get one acre for Rs.40,000 anywhere.

"The kind of inputs we now use invite serious problems. Weedicide, for instance, is not controlling the grass, it is damaging the plant and soil. It and other chemicals are eroding soil fertility. We are killing the soil.

"Ten years ago, we used much less pesticide. Now, even when yields are higher, the profit is less.

"Either we change many of the things we are doing or we will destroy agriculture."

They were still children when they got married in 1965. He was a homeless orphan related to her family and chosen by her grandparents to be Leelabai's husband. She dropped out of Class IV before marrying him. Today, she is 63 and he 67, she thinks, though both could be older. No one can be sure, though, since few kept records in those days. Neither had an inch of land to their names. Leelabai set about changing that after marriage, slaving in the fields to build both an income and a top-class farm.

SCANT RECOGNITION

In a society where the man is always regarded the farmer and “head of the household,” the credit inevitably went (and still does) to Ashanna. As with women cultivators across most of India, Leelabai is seen as a “farmer’s wife” and not a farmer in her own right. Like anywhere else, women do the bulk of farming work here too, with little recognition of their massive contribution. Ashanna is a symbol of success in agriculture in these parts. But Leelabai is the architect of that success. To his credit, he recognises it. As for Leelabai, she is clear about it.

“I was always the farmer. Ashanna was a petrol pump attendant earning Rs.70 a month for a long time.” (Ashanna agrees that he only left that job some 15 years ago. By then his wife had built a thriving farm.)

“First, from the money I saved from all the work I did, I bought four acres for Rs.1,000 each. That was in 1969.”

Not just any acres — but excellent black cotton soil, land she chose herself.

“Those four acres are now worth Rs.50 lakh. (This plot is along a highway that has sent land prices soaring.) Then in 1971, I selected and bought 20 acres for Rs.9,000.

This she followed up with the purchase of 15 acres for Rs.25,000 in 1973 and four more acres for Rs.35,000 in 1985. And finally, another 10 acres for Rs.70,000 in 1991.

“I also sold off some acres along the way. So today we have 40.”

“All our food is from our own fields. I grow paddy on one acre, wheat on two, and *jowar* on 10. (Giving 10 acres to *jowar* is a very rare thing here.) The remaining land is equally divided between *kapas*(cotton) and soybean.” On the farm, Leelabai decides what to grow where, and when.

And she is in the fields much of the time, most days, working. Which has a lot to do with their regularly hitting the 10 quintal-per-acre mark in both cotton and soybean. The average in this region is far lower.

She has built a beautiful house — and carefully constructed a lot of storage space around it. This enables her to preserve her cotton safely and for much longer than others, and so hold out for a better price from the traders. While most growers sold their crop for around Rs.3,800 a quintal here late in 2012, Leelabai's family was able to hold on to its cotton until February this year. She finally sold at Rs.4,200 a quintal.

“We also have some 14 head of cattle. That includes six bullocks, five cows and three buffaloes.

“He looks after those,” she smiles in the direction of her husband. “He really loves those animals (even if they are not highly productive). We don't need to ever visit the doctor because we drink only this milk and eat only food we have grown on our own lands.”

But on agriculture: “Something has to happen. Farming cannot continue as it does now. These costs of cultivation, no one can bear. We must have cheaper inputs. And we must get a better price for our cotton and soybean. If there is no change, we'll all be lining up in the queue after Namdeo Gandhewar.”

Nanjangud rasabale makes a comeback

UAS-B's efforts to revive this exotic banana show positive results



There is some good news for the lovers of the exotic Nanjangud rasabale – a unique banana variety grown in and around Nanjangud near Mysore – UAS-B's (University of Agricultural Sciences Bangalore) efforts to revive this variety, which is on the verge of extinction, have borne fruit.

This is a significant milestone, says UAS-B Vice-Chancellor K. Narayana Gowda.

The Nanjangud rasabale, which was given a Geographical Indication tag, was facing serious problems right from the 1960s due to fusarium wilt, a fungal disease. Now, the variety is estimated to be under cultivation in less than 10 acres of land. UAS-B entered the scene around three years ago and took the fight to the fungus.

B.N. Sathyanarayana, head of the Department of Horticulture and the Plant Tissue Culture Lab, says: “the entire process had three phases – identifying as well as collecting disease-free plant material from the fields around Nanjangud, replicating the plant through tissue culture, and helping farmers grow them on their fields in tune with the package of practices developed by the University to ensure that plants were not affected by the wilt disease.”

Though the University produced about 20,000 saplings of these banana varieties in 2012 itself, not many farmers came forward to take them, owing to the serious drought that gripped the State at that time. “Cultivating bananas, especially Nanjangud rasabale, calls for a regular supply of water. It is a daunting task to grow them during drought,” he noted.

UAS-B gave about 12,000 saplings to as many as 30 enterprising farmers who were willing to cultivate the bananas. Several of these farmers, including those from Challakere, Bharamasagara and Chitradura, have got encouraging results on fields. The good yield has triggered a demand for these saplings. The university has decided to cater to the demand based on the indent placed by farmers.

Three different voices

Monkeys are often a big nuisance to farmers. But that doesn't mean they're always treated like enemies...

SCENE 1: NAATHU BORA'S FIELD

“ *Aaha, aaha, kunu bhoi nai!*”(Come, come! No need to fear!). Naathu Bora invited a troop of rhesus macaques that was approaching his paddy field located next to the Hollongapar forest in Upper Assam. I was studying this group of monkeys to understand their survival strategies and interactions with other monkey troops that lived nearby.

It was an early, misty morning in November. The troop had left the bamboo grove, their usual sleeping site, and had crossed across a tea garden to reach the paddy field.

The paddy was almost ready to harvest; therefore, I found Naathu Bora's invitation most unusual. Curious, I asked, “Why do you want them to come

and destroy your crop?” He replied, “There are no fruits in the forest in this season and if they don’t eat, they will starve. Moreover, they will take only a little — the rest will be enough for us.”

His voice was full of empathy for these animals.

I was very surprised as farmers and cattle-herders often bear huge losses because of wild animals and, in retaliation, kill them.

The troop spent nearly an hour on Naathu’s land and left it once their cheek pouches were bulging with paddy grains. When they had eaten what was stuffed into their cheek pouches, they moved to another field nearby and started raiding it.

At such times, I was always in a dilemma about whether to drive them off or inform the farmer. If I chased them away, my hard-earned efforts to habituate (getting them used to my presence) them so that I could study them at close quarters, would go in vain as it would be hard to regain their trust and confidence. And if I informed the farmer, the monkeys would be chased away anyway and I would have to stop my work.

SCENE 2: KHABA RAM DAS’S FIELD

As I was weighing these options, Khaba Ram Das, the owner of the land, came rushing and in a most polite way asked the monkeys to leave his field at once, “If you behave like this, what shall we do? How shall we survive?”

His voice carried aggression, desperation as well as sympathy. He gently shooed them away. The troop was completely scattered by then and I had a tough time spotting all of them. When I finally found them late in the afternoon, they were busy feeding on yet another paddy field.

SCENE 3: BIPIN BORA'S FIELD

That was the third time I saw them raiding crops and again I felt uneasy standing there and watching them. Bipin Bora, the owner of the land, came to my rescue and chased them away with all his energy. But this time not a single word was uttered.

Only a stern glance thrown at the retreating monkeys and then at me — that was all! There was no voice, only aggressive action! It was now almost futile carrying on with my observations, as the troop had scattered completely. Nevertheless, I hung around and followed the monkeys I could still see until they retired for the day in another bamboo grove at the edge of a village.

As I headed back to my field camp, I thought about the events of the day. All three farmers had faced the same problem, but the way they responded was different.

Was Birin's aggression unjustified? That parcel of land was possibly his only source of livelihood. Could he afford to lose his crop? Perhaps not.

What explained Khaba Ram's controlled aggression and Naathu's extreme tolerance towards the monkeys and his deep empathy towards them?

These diverse reactions might have come from their different economic backgrounds, personalities and attitudes, making some of them more tolerant and some less so. Still, we will never be in a position to judge who was right and who was wrong.

We can understand humans, animals and the conflicts between them much better if we respect the many voices that we hear, and more importantly, even those that we do not!

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HR-ARREST

AGRICULTURE DEPT. OFFICIAL HELD FOR GRAFT

An agriculture department official was caught on Tuesday by the Haryana Vigilance Bureau while accepting Rs.3,000 as a bribe from a farmer for releasing subsidies under the National Agriculture Development Plan (NADP).

A case under the Prevention of Corruption Act has been registered against Charanpal Singh Chauhan, who will be produced before a local court on Wednesday, police said. According to the complainant, Rajkumar, he had applied for subsidy under NADP but the officer demanded a bribe. — PTI

Govt to consider compensation for potato crop loss

MINISTER'S DRAWS FLAK FOR CROP LOSS REMARK

The Opposition took Minister for Horticulture Shamanur Shivashankarappa to task in the Legislative Council on Tuesday for his reply on crop loss of potato growers in Hassan district. During Question Hour, Mr. Shivashankarappa replied that the crop loss was due to unscientific sowing methods adopted by farmers. This angered Janata Dal (Secular) member Patel Shivaram, who said farmers had been growing potato for years and the Minister need not doubt their sowing knowledge. The crop loss was solely due to substandard seeds supplied by the government, Mr. Shivaram said, and demanded suitable compensation. The Minister said the government would consider the request.

— Special Correspondent

Satnala Project Engg. repatriated

Adilabad Collector A. Babu on Tuesday repatriated Satnala Irrigation Project Deputy Executive Engineer P. Limbadri to Irrigation Department for unauthorised absence and non-compliance of orders. The official disregarded the order of the Collector with regard to executing repairs to the left canal of the project which suffered a breach causing loss to standing crops belonging to some 20 farmers in Jainad mandal recently.

- Staff Reporter

Panel to study extent of deemed forest



The Forest Department has prepared a list with 10.11 lakh hectares deemed forests in the State.— File Photo

Minister for Forests B. Ramanath Rai told the Legislative Assembly on Monday that an expert committee will be set up to study the extent of deemed forests in the State. The government will then file an affidavit in the Supreme Court based on the committee's recommendations.

In reply to C.T. Ravi of the Bharatiya Janata Party during Question Hour, Mr. Rai said the government would protect the interests of the poor and the farmers while determining the extent of deemed forests. Earlier, BJP and

JD(S) members demanded withdrawal of a list declaring 10.11 lakh hectares deemed forests across the State.

The Department of Forests has declared Kans, Kumki, Bane and Kharab lands as deemed forest and thousands of farmers would lose their lands if the list is implemented, said Jagadish Shettar (BJP), K.G. Bopaiah (BJP) and B.S. Yeddyurappa (Karnataka Janata Paksha).

In the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, Mr. Rai said a revised affidavit would be submitted to the Supreme Court. Wherever required, lands which do not come under natural forest category would be left out and if necessary alternative land would be given to the Forest Department.

Speaker Kagodu Thimmappa, who hails from forest-rich Shimoga district lent support to the debate. He said “kaanu” land, which is used either for agriculture or buildings would have to be declared as deemed forest, if one goes by the affidavit. The members alleged that the Forest Department had prepared the list of land to be included in the deemed forest in their chambers, violating the procedure.

Mr. Rai said Forest Settlement Officers would be appointed in each district to settle all such issues

Sowing completed in 1.2 lakh ha

Farmers expect an early harvest this year

With an early onset of monsoon and early release of water into the canals of Tungabhadra reservoir, sowing for the current kharif season in Bellary district has touched 40.4 per cent of the target within the first fortnight of July.

The district recorded a little excess rainfall in the past three months. In May, the average actual rainfall was 72.5 mm against the average normal of 63.2 mm. During June, the actual rainfall was 84.7 mm against the normal of 65.3 mm and up to July 15, it was 46.5 mm against the normal of 85.5 mm.

“Perhaps for the first time in recent years, agricultural operations in the rain-fed and irrigated tracts have commenced simultaneously because of the early onset of monsoon and release of water into canals, at least by a month.” K. Ramappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* .

World Bank promise on funding projects

Farmers in the command areas of Lower Bhavani Project (LBP) irrigation system who are concerned over the revival of the planned project by PWD to lay concrete flooring along the irrigation canals in the region, can now heave a sigh of relief. Sensing that authorities were trying to go ahead with the project through funds from World Bank, the agrarian community had written to the bank, a few days back, asking the organisation not to fund the project against the interest of the farmers. In the reply (copy available with *The Hindu*) addressed to Karthikeya Sivasenapathy, a coconut farmer in the area, the World Bank’s Country Director (India) Onno Ruhl had stated: “At this moment, it was yet to receive any formal proposal for the said work from the Government of Tamil Nadu, whose efforts are supporting under Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water-bodies Restoration and Management (IAMWARM) project.” The letter continued: “.....I would like to assure you that if such a proposal is received, we will undertake a full review of its social and environmental implications In

that event, comments and inputs from all stakeholders will definitely be considered.”

‘Thanks for free animals, but what about fodder?’

Dry weather conditions prevailing in some parts of the southern districts in the State are creating a problem for those who received milch cows or sheep/goat from the government under its welfare schemes.

A visit to some villages in Madurai, Virudhunagar, and Tuticorin districts shows that many beneficiaries find it difficult to get the required feed for the animals.

S. Sathiyammal of Muthalapuram village in Virudhunagar district said the dry condition prevailing in her place forced her to buy cattle feed for the cow and a calf she received from the government. “We have to buy cattle feed from Virudhu Nagar, which is sold at Rs. 20 per kg. So whatever the revenue from the milk that we sell to the societies is not even enough to buy cattle feed,” she said.

Majority of the beneficiaries in these districts, where no monsoon has set in, feel that the government should provide free fodder for those who received the milch animals.

Another issue the beneficiaries raised was that there was no standard amount paid by the milk societies for the milk taken from the beneficiaries. It varied from district to district. The beneficiaries get Rs. 17 in Madurai and Virudhu Nagar districts, while the price is Rs. 16 per litre in Tuticorin and Rs. 20 in Tirunelveli district. Majority of the beneficiaries feel that the government should fix a standard price for the milk they sell to the societies. Ms. Sathiyammal said, “Only when the government increases

procurement price for milk and distribute free fodder in drought hit areas, the rural poor would really benefit”.

Similarly, those who received goats/sheep under the scheme also feel the same way. R. Ramalakshmi of Muthalapuram village in Virudhunagar district said: “Every day we have to take the goats for nearly five kilometres for grazing. Similarly, due to the dry condition prevailing in our village, water for the animals has also become scarce.”

Sources said the deficit of green fodder in State has been worked out at 25 to 30 per cent. In order to overcome the fodder shortage in the State, the government had implemented fodder development scheme under which approximately 50,000 acres of land belonging to farmers have been brought under cultivation. In the current year also the government proposed to raise fodder in 12,000 acres of lands belonging to farmers. As per the guidelines of the scheme, the beneficiaries must maintain the animals for specific period of time.

Majority of the beneficiaries in districts where no monsoon has set in feel government should also provide free fodder

Medical camps



The Animal Husbandry Department will organise 140 special medical camps under the cattle protection scheme during the period between July and September. Special veterinary teams will visit the villages and screen the cattle for various disorders. Medicine will be given free of cost. These camps are expected to benefit about 10,000 cattle, District Collector S. Natarajan said while inaugurating the camp in Moongilkudi village near here on Tuesday. The Collector distributed prizes among the people of the villages for the best maintained cattle, and also fodder azolla to farmers. Devarajan, regional joint director of animal husbandry, and Subbian, assistant director, were present. — Special Correspondent

Scanty rain spells gloom for green gram growers

Sowing undertaken only on 9,240 hectares in the district

: Scanty rainfall from June till the first week of July has seriously affected the sowing of pulses, particularly green gram, in Yadgir district. As per the latest details available, sowing of green gram had been completed only in 9,240 hectares (ha) as against the target of 37,900 ha.

Sources in the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that although there were some showers in the second week of July, there was no chance for farmers to take up sowing of green gram now, and they have to look at shifting to red gram or cotton in the unsown areas.

Sources said farmers have completed sowing in 81,630 ha out of the total target of 2.68 lakh ha fixed by the agriculture department for all the khariff crops in Yadgir district.

Sowing of red gram was done on 32,955 ha as against the target of 70,600 ha and as per the indications available now, the area under red gram

cultivation is likely to increase due to several reasons, including good price available.

The sowing of cotton has been completed in 12,650 ha as against the target of 47,500 ha and there was still time for farmers to achieve the target.

The district had received 89.5 mm average rainfall so far as against the average rainfall of 153 mm for the month of July. While Shahapur taluk recorded the lowest rainfall of 75.8 mm as against the normal rainfall of 161 mm for July, Yadgir taluk had recorded rainfall of 88.4 mm so far as against an average of 177 mm for July, and Surpur recorded 104 mm rainfall as against an average of 121 mm for July.

Proliferation of agri varsities flayed

The draft agricultural policy for Kerala unveiled last week has come down on the proliferation of agricultural universities through the bifurcation of existing institutions to create new campuses.

The drafting committee chaired by K. Krishnankutty has termed the trend to create new universities as counterproductive and not in the interest of quality education. Urging the government to stop the practice, it calls for consolidating and downsizing the existing institutions for efficient utilisation of limited resources.

The policy document points out that the trifurcation of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) into the Kerala University for Fisheries and Ocean Studies and the Kerala University for Veterinary Sciences had only increased the burden of the KAU, though it was expected to shed the liabilities.

“The KAU had parted with some of its holdings and staff under the trifurcation package. However, it continues to foot the pension and other retirement benefits of around 4,800 staff including those who had served the fisheries and veterinary faculties of the undivided university,” says Mr. Krishnankutty.

Observing that the university was saddled with an acquired debt of over Rs.265 crore and massive financial commitment to salary and pension for staff, the draft policy calls on the State government for a one-time grant to support the KAU and an allocation of at least 15 per cent of the total budget of the departments of agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, social forestry and other related sectors.

It recommends a lump sum grant as core fund to be used for the maintenance and renewal of infrastructural facilities on the KAU campus. It also proposes a restructuring of the curriculum with the inclusion of new disciplines like agri business management, biotechnology, molecular taxonomy, environmental sciences, plant and animal genetic resources and intellectual property rights in relation to the World Trade Agreement, Biodiversity Convention and other international commitments.

New disciplines

KAU Vice-Chancellor P. Rajendran said the university had already initiated the process of including new disciplines in its curriculum. “Some of the areas have been covered and we are working on updating the curriculum with the latest advancements.”

The drafting committee has stressed the need to create a favourable environment to improve the quality of research in the university. It calls for reorienting research activities to the actual requirements of farmers and

technological advancements in areas like restoration of soil productivity, control of pests and pathogens including exotic species, crops and cropping systems that require less inputs like water and fertilizer, automation and mechanization of agricultural equipment, reducing chemical and microbiological contamination of food and development of hybrid crop varieties for tolerance to various climatic conditions.

The document also highlights the need to make the KAU goal-oriented and ensure the autonomous nature of the institution by making improvements in the general administration focusing on research accomplishments.

Dr. Rajendran said the 26 research stations under the KAU were working on a programme to improve the quality of work in their respective areas.

Ginger price soars ahead of Onam

Taking the gingered route to cooking is becoming costly even before the start of Onam with the prices of ginger soaring to Rs.162 a kg this week.

This is the third time in two months that the prices have gone up. While common people bear the brunt, farmers too are viewing the sudden rise with caution. A similar boom back in 2011 and the subsequent crash is a lesson they cannot easily forget.

Ajith Lal, a farmer into ginger cultivation for eight years now, in Nedumangadu, says one cannot trust on the fluctuating prices.

“Last year, I grew the spice on one acre of land but the price never went above Rs.30 a kg. There was no profit as a good amount of money was spent as labour charge. This time, I used only 50 cents for ginger cultivation,” says Mr. Lal.

Agriculture Department Assistant Director Sally V. Joseph told *The Hindu* that though there was a price rise the farmers were not very keen to take up commercial cultivation of ginger.

“There is very limited commercial cultivation of ginger in the district. The fluctuation in the prices has led many farmers to shift to other crops in previous years. The cultivated land is less than five acres in the Nedumangadu block which has eight panchayats,” she says.

Coconut growers plan agitation

An agitation is being planned by coconut growers against alleged covert moves being made to allow non-farmer agencies to manufacture “neera” sidelining coconut growers cooperatives.

It was decided at a convention of federation of coconut growers held here at Indoor stadium on Monday to convene a meeting in Kozhikode on July 25 to announce the agitation.

Coconut growers’ cooperatives had formed federations under the aegis of Coconut Development Board. These federations were engaged in floating companies to manufacture “neera” (soft toddy) so that coconut growers would get full monetary benefits from the government’s acceptance, in principle, for the demand to allow coconut growers to tap “neera” from their coconut palms.

The growers are however worried about reports that indicate other agencies are planning to manufacture “neera”.

Applications invited

Applications are invited from outstanding farmers to be honoured at the annual Farmers’ Day celebrations organised by the Krishi Bhavan,

Kudappanakkunnu. Farmers are to submit applications at the Krishi Bhavan before July 25. — Special Correspondent

Betel prices shoot north, but growers stuck in red

Lack of rains, shortage of farm hands, rising input costs devastate farms



trapped:It is estimated that at least 350 hectares was under betel vine till some years back but it has shrunk to less than 75 hectares now in Karur region.—File photo

Despite the produce costing the habitual consumer quite a fortune these days, betel-vine growers in Karur district are sore that they are not getting the right price. This at a time when the fields are devastated by the continuing drought like conditions, lack of rains, shortage of farm hands and rising input costs.

Betel vine is grown in gardens mostly along the banks of River Cauvery and also fields abutting Kattalai High Level Channel in the interiors of Kulithalai and Krishnarayapuram belt.

Areas such as Pugalur, Pungodai, Semangi, Muthanur, and Thalavapalayam along the banks of Cauvery and villages off Sithalavai,

Mahadanapuram, Lalapet, Kumaramangalam see a lot of farmers take to betel vine cultivation traditionally.

Though individual consumption of betel vine has seen a steady decline over the years, marriages and festivals were keeping them afloat all these days. The leaves plucked from the gardens in Karur district would be packed off to destinations including Velayuthampalayam and Velur shandies besides Erode, Dindigul, Madurai, Tiruchi, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts.

While betel vine cultivation flourished once, the adverse factors ranged against the growers forced a sharp decline in the area under betel vine in the past few years. It is estimated that at least 350 hectares was under betel vine till some years back but it has shrunk to less than 75 hectares now.

Naturally that has resulted in the price of the produce go up in the market . ``A *kowli* of betel comprising 100 leaves fetches the farmers Rs.15 at the shandies and for some other varieties even less. But the produce changes hands continuously to be sold at the petty shops for 75 paise a leaf depending on the size. See how much we are loosing,” points out S. Chelladurai of Lalapet.

Till a couple of years back, the growers were getting a good price except in days of glut when the price would not meet even plucking costs.

``We have to contend with pest attacks, diseases, inclement weather, lack of water for irrigation, short of manpower and dwindling returns.

Many times I have felt like doing away with the crop but could not do so as I have little option left,” rues P. Kumarasamy Gounder of

Velayuthampalayam who has been raising betel vine for more than three decades.

He admits to have reduced the area under the crop from three acres about six years ago to just half an acre now.

Both farmers concede that they could not look up to the governments for help as the market fluctuates menacingly. Reflecting the opinion of other betel vine growers they feel that something like establishing a proper regulated market for betel vine in Karur, Namakkal, and Tiruchi district could help farmers get a remunerative price.

Farmers protest against delay in repair of bund

Farmers in the command area of Anjanapur reservoir in Shikaripur taluk staged a protest on Tuesday against the negligence of the officials of the Department of Water Resource in repairing the bund near the left bank canal of the reservoir that had collapsed last year.

Addressing the protest meet held near the reservoir, Rudrappa, a farmer of Kalmane village said a portion of the bund near the left bank canal of the reservoir had collapsed last year.

Sand bags had been placed here to avoid the pilferage of water.

It was unfortunate that permanent repair work had not been undertaken in summer when the water level in the reservoir was low.

As the water level in the reservoir had reached the brim last week, the bund had again collapsed resulting in the wastage of water, he said.

The officials of the Department of Water Resource had been negligent in handling the problem. The weakened bund posed a threat to the safety of the reservoir, he said.

The officials of the Department of Water Resource, who arrived at the spot, assured the farmers that the problem would be addressed at the earliest.

Farm sciences college at Brahmavar remains a dream

The government had, on August 13, 2010, announced Rs. 10 crore grant

Although the State government announced three years ago that it would set up an agriculture college at Brahmavar in Udupi district, it has only remained a dream.

The announcement was made by the then Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa on August 13, 2010 during his visit to Brahmavar. He had said that the government would provide a grant of Rs. 10 crore for the college and release Rs. 5 crore for it. However, nothing has materialised.

The expectations that the recent Budget presented by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would allocate money for the agriculture college were also not met.

There is no agricultural college in the three coastal districts of Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada. An agriculture college is expected to give a boost to the occupation in these districts.

An agricultural college was expected to come up in 100 acres of land at the Zonal Agricultural and Horticultural Research Station in Brahmavar.

According to M. Hanumanthappa, Associate Director of Research at the research station, the research station has 348 acres of land. "Of this, 100 acres was expected to be given to the agricultural college," he said.

A full-fledged college would require Rs. 60 crore, which would include construction of the college building, hostels for men and women, and laboratory. A sum of Rs. 20 crore was required for the first phase works.

Since a new University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences had come up in Shimoga in April 2013, the new college could be affiliated to it.

Dr. Hanumanthappa said that agricultural and horticultural crops were being grown in 3.64 lakh hectares in the three coastal districts. Paddy was being grown in 1.90 lakh hectares of the 3.64 lakh hectares in these three districts.

“Due to lack of an agricultural college, 70 students from Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts are studying agriculture in agricultural colleges at Hassan, Mandya and Bangalore,” he said.

General Secretary of the district unit of Bharatiya Kisan Sangha Satyanarayana Udupa Japti said that an agricultural college would provide farmers with exposure to scientific methods of farming.

“Farmers in the coastal districts are still following traditional farming methods, which has made agriculture unprofitable. Following scientific methods will help increasing agricultural output,” he said.

MLA Pramod Madhwaraj said that he had given a proposal to the Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on this issue on July 15. “Mr. Krishna Byre Gowda promised to look into it. He was positive on it,” he said.

Project to help farmers

The Walmart Foundation has announced launch of ‘Sunhara Prayas’ project in five districts of Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The project aims at helping over 6,000 small farmers, including 80 per cent women, develop better production and marketing systems.

The Walmart Foundation partnered with the Agribusiness Systems International (ASI) for the implementation of the project.

Now, voice message service for farmers

Free service on mobile phones of farmers registered with the KVK in district

Farmers registered with the district Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) under the Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) can now receive on their mobile phones voice messages in the local language on a range of topics such as availability of planting material, time for fertilisation, details of possible pest outbreak, agricultural training programmes, and product market information.

The service will initially be available to the nearly 800 farmers who had been receiving text messages from the KVK on farm issues, a KVK spokesperson said.

The service, part of an Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) initiative called virtual Krishi Vigyan Kendra (vKVK), is aimed at empowering the KVKs to communicate with the farmers through voice, text, and e-mail messages.

“After rectifying the technical glitches that surfaced in the initiation stage, the voice message service was launched in July first week,” P.S. Manoj, horticulture subject matter specialist from the KVK, said.

The 30-second messages from agriculture officers, experts, and scientists will be sent from time to time to help farmers address concerns they face on a day-to-day basis. “There will be at least one message a week,” Mr. Manoj said.

vKVK makes use of the existing extension network of KVKs in the country, and allows agricultural extension officers to send voice-based agro-advisories in the local dialect to the farmers’ mobile phones.

KVK programme assistant C.K. Jayakumar said the service was receiving a good response from the farmers. “It’s especially so when it comes to messages pertaining to availability of planting materials,” Mr. Jayakumar said. Earlier, farmers received text messages from the KVK on almost all challenges they faced in the fields. But these were in English language, which most ordinary farmers found difficult to understand. “That difficulty has been overcome through the new voice message service,” Mr. Manoj said.

In case the phone is engaged or outside the coverage area when the voice message is sent, the call will be repeated later a couple of times to ensure that the farmer does not miss the message. Interested farmers can register their name and phone number with the KVK to avail themselves of the service for free. Ph: 0496 2662372.

Madagascar’s locust crisis

Locusts threatening livelihood of 60% of population, and have already destroyed a quarter of Madagascar’s food crops

Madagascar is in a race against time to raise enough money to tackle its worst plague of locusts since the 1950s.

Locusts have already infested over half of the island’s cultivated land and pastures, causing the loss of 630,000 tonnes of rice, corresponding to 25% of food consumption.

At least 1.5m hectares could be infested by locusts in two-thirds of the country by September, warns the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The food security and livelihoods of 13 million people are at stake.

“We don’t have enough funds for pesticide, helicopters and training,” said an FAO representative. “We need \$22.4m but we are quite short of that.

Discussions are going on with donors.”— © Guardian Newspapers Limited, 2013

Terrace gardening decoded

Bhoomi Network is organising an organic and terrace gardening workshop on July 20. The workshop will help participants understand the basic principles of gardening and then apply it to their own context – homes, apartments, or terraces. The focus will be on practical aspects, so that one gets a first-hand experience with earth, soil, compost, nutrients, on the field. It will also deal with pest and disease management. Rajesh Thakkar, committed to organic gardening and farming, will be the faculty for this workshop.

The idea is to learn to grow safe, flavourful, native, nutritious produce for our kitchens and in the process, learn a meaningful way of spending some of our leisure time. The kitchen garden has been an integral part of a complete home, where freshness and nutrition from a variety of vegetables were given significance. Due to migration of people to urban areas, fertile agricultural land has been converted into houses and other infrastructure, reducing land for cultivation. But there is a movement around the world today to transform this barren cityscape into a green and valuable contributor to health and ecological balance. Estimates show that as many as 20 million people are engaged in urban agriculture all over the world. Half of Latin American cities, 72 per cent of urban households in Russia and 14 largest cities in China produce 85 per cent of the vegetables not only from terraces but also on empty sites, un-built areas, parks, etc.

The workshop is on Saturday July 20 from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. at the Bhoomi Network, Prakriya School campus, Chikkanayakanahalli, off

Doddakannalli, Sarjapur Road, Carmalaram Post. The fee is Rs. 1,200 per person (lunch, snack included). There are a limited number of seats. Registration closes on July 17. Contact Santhi on 9449853834/ 28441173.

APMC president arrested, released on bail

Bangalore district Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Ltd. President was arrested on the charge of intimidating Kadabagere taluk panchayat members into not casting their votes against his wishes.

K. Srinivasa alias Kadabagere Seena was arrested and remanded in judicial custody five days ago. He was released on bail on Monday.

According to the police, Srinivasa, who was facing several criminal cases against him, including murder, riot and criminal intimidation, used to enjoy political patronage and got elected as district AMPC president.

In addition, he continues to control Kadabagere panchayat by nominating his men as members of the panchayat. He forced them to vote for the president and vice-president of his choice.

Srinivasa allegedly threatened a few members of the panchayat from the backward classes when they filed their nomination papers to contest for the president's post against his candidate.

Based on the complaint, the Madanayakanahalli police arrested him on the charge of criminal intimidation and under the SCs, STs Atrocity Act.

Farm labourers block roads, court arrest

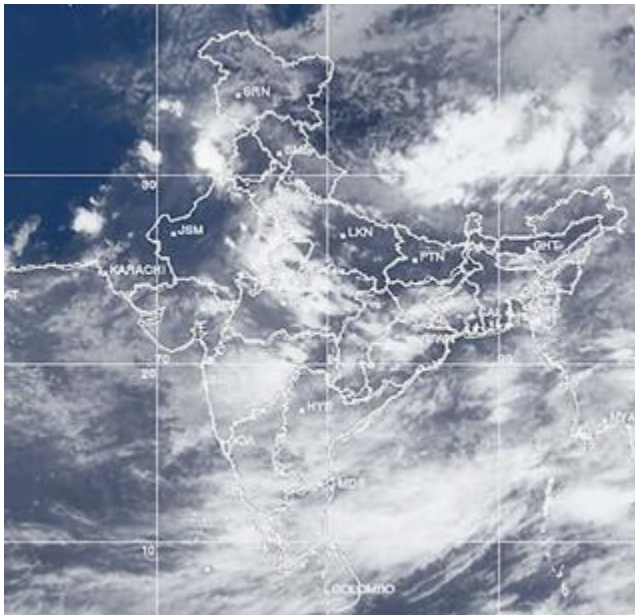
Seek implementation of regulated pension scheme

A total of 919 farm labourers, including 673 women, courted arrest at various places in the district on Tuesday after they blocked roads to highlight their various demands.

In a move to draw the attention of the State Government to their demands, farm labourers affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI) blocked roads at Ettayapuram, Kovilpatti and Kurumbur. S.Anandham, district president, Tamil Nadu Agriculture Workers Union, who led the blockade near Ettayapuram Taluk Office, sought the implementation of regulated pension scheme for farm labourers and extension of the eligibility to draw a pension of Rs.3,000 to those who had attained 55 years of age.

Mr.Anandham also demanded that drought relief assistance of Rs.10,000 should be extended to the labourer's families. Considering the economic conditions of landless labourers, the government should provide house site pattas to them, he said. L.Ayyalusamy, former MLA, led the agitation at Kovilpatti.

weather



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

MaxMinR TR

New Delhi (Plm)	37	28	0	233
New Delhi (Sfd)	36	28	0	221
Chandigarh	34	25	39	415
Hissar	39	27	0	183
Bhuntar	31	22	1	211
Shimla	25	17	3	418
Jammu	33	28	tr	279
Srinagar	30	20	87	87
Amritsar	34	28	8	223
Patiala	35	24	149424	
Jaipur	31	25	29	234
Udaipur	30	24	0	256
Allahabad	36	29	0	450
Lucknow	34	26	0	358
Varanasi	35	28	0	310
Dehradun	32	24	1	1366
Agartala	35	26	9	423
Ahmedabad	33	26	0	405
Bangalore	28	21	3	235
Bhubaneswar	33	24	11	354
Bhopal	27	23	5	599
Chennai	36	23	26	257
Guwahati	36	25	4	432
Hyderabad	31	22	1	305
Kolkata	33	28	17	451
Mumbai	31	26	7	128

Nagpur	28	24	3	722
Patna	35	29	0	154
Pune	27	22	2	353
Thiruvananthapuram	31	24	0	628
Imphal	29	23	3	392
Shillong	25	18	6	459

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

HEAT WAVE

The axis of Monsoon trough at MSL passes through Ferozpur, Narnaul, Gwalior and thence southeast-wards.

RAINFALL: Rain/thundershowers have occurred at many places over Himachal Pradesh, at a few places over Haryana, Punjab, east Rajasthan and Uttarakhand and at isolated places over rest of the region. The chief amounts of rainfall in cm are: (5 cm and above) HARYANA: Ambala 9, Karnal 7, HIMACHAL PRADESH: Baijnath 6, Palampur and Joginder nagar 5 each, PUNJAB: Patiala 15, Rajpura 6, Balachaur and Ropar 5 each, EAST RAJASTHAN: Shahabad, Aklera, Manohar thana and Nagrafort 8 each, Chhotisadri 7, Malsisar 6, Pachpahar and Neemkathana 5 each, EAST UTTAR PRADESH: Karwi and Safipur 5 each, and UTTARAKHAND: Mussoorie 5. **HEAVY RAINFALL WARNING** : Heavy rainfall may occur at one or two places over Uttarakhand on 17th and 18th July and over east Uttar Pradesh on 18th July.

FORECAST VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 18th July 2013 : Rain/thundershowers may occur at many places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and east Rajasthan, at a few places over Punjab,

Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir and at one or two places over west Rajasthan. Rain/thundershowers may occur at a few places over Uttar Pradesh during next 48 hours and increase thereafter.

FORECAST FOR DELHI AND NEIGHBOURHOOD VALID UNTIL THE MORNING OF 18th July 2013: Generally cloudy sky. Rain/thundershowers may occur in some areas



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Kerala nod to produce Neera on experimental basis

After much dilly-dallying, the state government has decided to grant sanction to produce Neera, a sweet juice from coconut tree, on an experimental basis.

The decision was taken at a meeting convened by excise minister K Babu here on Tuesday that was attended by various stakeholders, including the trade unions.

"A decision has been taken to grant permission to produce Neera, which will be on an experimental basis. The production will be undertaken at one unit in each district in a cluster of 1,500 coconut trees," Babu told TOI.

In the districts where there are no takers for toddy shops on lease -- Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Pathanamthitta -- the production of Neera will be undertaken at two units.

The permission to extract Neera will be given only to those federations and companies, which are affiliated to Coconut Development Board.

"The possibilities of setting up a Neera-Toddy board for protecting the interests of toddy labourers are being considered and a study will be undertaken by taxes secretary to make recommendations in this regard," the minister said.

The UDF government had declared in its manifesto that it would give sanction to commercial production of Neera in the state. On January 15, 2013, the government had constituted a nine-member committee headed by excise commissioner Anil Xavier to suggest measures to revive the sinking toddy business in the state and ways to tap Neera from coconut trees that could turn out to be a prosperous business for coconut farmers in the state, especially when the price of coconut is falling far below the remunerative levels.

For allowing the commercial extraction of Neera, the government needs to make necessary amendments in the Abkari Act, in which toddy -- which comes under the category of liquor -- is defined as fermented or unfermented juice extracted from coconut tree, date palm, etc.

Though Neera, which is a juice prior to the fermentation, has no alcohol content in it, the excise department still holds control owing to the fact that it comes under the definition of liquor as per the definition given in the act. While Karnataka has already begun the commercial extraction of Neera in two districts, Maharashtra and Goa are already in the business.

Seer, farmers happy over Posco's retreat

Farmers in Halligudi village of Gadag district where the Posco steel plant was to come up are happy that the South Korean steel giant has decided to pull out. The honorary president for Posco Bhuswadhina Virodhi Sangram Samiti, Tontada Siddhalinga Swamiji of Tontadarya Mutt in

Gadag, said that he was happy. He said: "It is a victory of farmers, people of the region and organizations which agitated against the steel plant."

He said that as the process was on for acquisition of the land, the farmers would not be able to take loans or avail other benefits. Now that Posco has pulled out, the government should delete KIADB's name from the land extracts, he added.

Posco Bhuswadina Virodhi Sangram Samiti convener Basavaraj Sulebhavi too said he was happy. He urged the government to cancel the previous government's anti-farmers' decisions like setting up a land bank. "Without seeking the opinion of the farmers and the people of the district, the previous government tried to acquire fertile land from the farmers in the name of Posco. Finally, people of the region and farmers have succeeded in sending back Posco from the state," he said.

Poor supply lifts tomato prices to a fresh high

Tomato prices in Narayangaon, the main tomato producing region in the country during this time of the year, has reached a record high. This will put pressure on prices in the consuming markets in the north and northeast. The prices are likely to remain high till Nashik begins supplies next month.

The Narayangaon region near Pune is one of the main suppliers of tomatoes to the country during the early part of the rainy season.

"Wholesale tomato prices in New Delhi came down after Himachal Pradesh started supplies a fortnight ago," said Subhash Chug, a trader in

Delhi's Azadpur mundi. Wholesale prices in Delhi are about Rs 30/kg to Rs 40/kg. They are likely to remain stable at this level if rains continue in Himachal.

Farmers have blamed seed failure for a fall in productivity which has spiked prices. "Most farmers in the region have been using a popular tomato variety of a leading MNC for the last ten years. However, it is necessary to change seed varieties after every few years. This year, this variety has suffered from diseases like leaf curl, wilting, black-spots and cracking. The yield has reduced by more than 50 per cent," said Sandip Dhole, a tomato farmer from Narayangaon.

Last year, farmers received the highest rate of Rs 25/kg for only a few days. This year, however, prices have been ruling above Rs 25/kg for more than a month now. Shreeram Gadhve, president, All India Vegetable Growers Association, said, "Despite a drought in the state, farmers increased area under tomato by 50 per cent last year. But production has decreased due to the high degree of pest incidence."

With tomatoes produced in Himachal Pradesh serving north India and a decline in supply from Maharashtra, eastern India is witnessing a sharp increase in the prices.

Sardar Patel award for ICAR-NEH region

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for Northeastern Hill (NEH) region, located at Umroi, near here was given the 'Sardar

Patel Outstanding ICAR Institution Award 2012'.

The award was conferred by President Pranab Mukherjee to institute director SV Ngachan at the ICAR foundation day ceremony at the National Agricultural Science Complex auditorium in New Delhi on Tuesday.

"The institute made a commendable contribution to agricultural research, extension and educational development of the region. During the last five years, the institute focused on strategic programmes on farming systems research and developed location specific farming system models for rural empowerment and livelihood improvement. The major thrust was on conservation of agriculture for various land uses, acid soil management and agro-forestry systems for sustainable hill agriculture," an official statement said.

"The artificial insemination technology for pigs, developed and refined by the institute, contributed immensely in improving the local germ-plasm in the most cost-effective way. The institute has been continuously upgrading the production technology of the various field crops, horticulture crops, livestock, poultry and fishery, including post harvest processing and mechanization," the release read.

With nearly 100 scientists at the headquarters and six regional stations, the institute generated 42 technologies, 5 five patents and many services for the region.

The institute alone collected a significant number of germ-plasm lines of rice and one of them collected from Nagaland was included in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth plans centre for excellence in agri biotech

After getting a College of Agriculture Biotechnology at Yavatmal, Akola-based Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth (PDKV) is planning to set up a Centre for Excellence in Agriculture Biotechnology in the university headquarters with the aim of conducting state-of-the-art research in the field as well as providing job opportunities to its own students.

The project, though in the nascent stage, is the baby of the new Vice-Chancellor Raviprakash Dani, who is yet to complete one year in office. A product of the university himself, he is striving hard to improve the quality of education and research. Speaking to TOI, Dani said that he is trying his bit to bring the university at par with some of the best universities in the country and world. "The centre will be a place for intensive quality research and education. I plan to involve certain major biotech industries in supporting education as biotechnology students will be associated with the centre for need-based research at both post graduate and doctorate level. We would even run MS degree courses here," he said.

Admitting that the project is at ground zero at present, it is one of his most ambitious projects. Dani categorically stated that he was sure that it would take off well soon. University already has bagged a massive research project costing Rs6 crore under the Centre's Rajiv Gandhi Krishi Vikas Yojna. These projects will have a snowballing effect in favour of the centre.

"It is a constantly evolving project and I am sure we will get the support we need. When there is a will there is way," said Dani.

To be developed in three phases at a cost of over 133 crore, the centre is being planned on a public-private partnership (PPP) model with the industry. It will rope in major agricultural industries which are in biotechnology. Dani says that since the industry also has its own problems to be solved, the centre will also concentrate on mutual R&D which will provide jobs to the students who will pass out from the university itself. "I plan to make the centre an ideal place for teaching and research in partnership with the industry. The university is already running masters and doctoral degree courses in agriculture biotechnology. So we would sign various MOUs with the industries in this regard. It will also act as a platform to create biotechnology-based entrepreneurship," said Dani.

The university is leaving no source untapped for funds. But the major contributors which it is approaching include the national departments of biotechnology, science and technology, the Rajiv Gandhi Science and Technology Commission in state and the union HRD ministry. The university is also trying to approach international agencies like the FAO and is open to even donations from all corners.

The project in first phase will focus on infrastructure establishment, execution of research projects and strengthening of education. Second phase will focus on networking and capacity building while third will focus on technology park on the lines of IIT Chennai and starting of diploma courses in various subjects.

Phase-wise development

First phase

Construction of building.

Setting up of tissue culture laboratory, plant transformation lab, molecular breeding, diagnosis and molecular cytology lab, plant genomics lab, biochemistry, bioprocess and bio-fortification lab and a molecular and computational biology.

Second phase

A technology park on IIT Chennai pattern.

Beginning of major R&D projects with industry.

Starting nano-biotechnology lab, molecular cell biology lab and a phytotron facility.

Third Phase

Future expansion in infrastructure-functional genomics and proteomics lab and molecular host plant interaction lab

Strengthening of education - starting PG diplomas in biotechnology, bioinformatics, IPR and biotechnology and bio-safety in plant biotechnology

HC orders to cancel 68 agricultural department appointments

The high court has directed principal secretary agriculture to cancel appointments of 68 persons as Up-Pariyojna Nideshak in the department. The appointments were made by the present Akhilesh Yadav government.

A bench of justices DP Singh and VK Mathur ordered the director of Vigilance department to constitute a special investigating team to inquire whether the appointments had been made for extraneous considerations and if so, register FIR and prosecute the guilty officials of the selection

committee.

The high court summoned status of probe report after every two months. The court directed the state to make fresh appointments as per rules.

The order came on a petition filed by Doodh Nath Mishra. The HC found that the state issued an advertisement on October 2, 2011 for making appointments on the posts of Up Pariyojna Nideshak .The state had fixed MSc (agriculture) with background of research work as minimum qualification for selection.

Later, a memorandum was issued on January 15,2013 lowering the criteria to BSc (Agriculture) while the selection process was already underway and made appointments on as many as 68 posts .

The court deprecated the department and said the selection committee abused the power blatantly. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the appointments had been made for extraneous considerations.

Kharif sowing expected to increase due to good monsoons: Sharad Pawar, Agriculture Minister

Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar said on Tuesday a good monsoon this season is expected to boost kharifsowing across the country. Expressing concern over rising vegetable prices, he hoped that this was a temporary phase andthe situation would improve by the next few weeks. "The monsoon position is quite encouraging. We have seen sowing on over 517

lakh hectare till July 12 compared to 341.49 lakh hectare in the previous year. If it continues at the current pace, we might break a two-year-old record," said Pawar on the sidelines of the 85th Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Good rains are likely to ensure a record production of food grains and other crops in the kharif season of 2013-14. However, below-normal rains — upto 40 per cent -50 per cent—in northeastern states, Jharkhand and West Bengal are unlikely to impact the standing paddy crop, he said. "The meteorological department is expect in grain activity to pick up in the eastern states in July-August and the situation may improve," he said.

Heavy rains across most parts of the country have led to a spurt in vegetable prices. The trend is expected to continue for the next few weeks before supplies pick up. "Due to excess rains, many states are facing problems because vegetables are not coming to the market. This situation will improve. It is a temporary phase," said the minister.

Retail prices of most vegetables from tomato, bitter gourd, capsicum to beans remained at Rs 60-Rs 80 a kg in Delhi while onion costs Rs 35-Rs 40 a kg. Pawar said he was looking at the availability of onions which come from Nashik. "In the next three weeks, onion produce from Maharashtra, Bhavnagar and Rajasthan will hit the market thereby easing prices," he said. He said the proposal of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) for a 10 per cent duty on imported pulses has been rejected. "For the time being, we are not putting any

import duty on pulses," he said. Currently, pulses like moong and tur have an import parity price that is below the minimum support price.

Endosulfan: Fixing financial liability use on manufacturers and user hits roadblock

The state government's move to fix the financial liability for paying compensation to the endosulfan victims in Kasaragod on the pesticide manufacturer and the user company has hit a roadblock. The endosulfan panel headed by former high court judge Justice K N Ramachandran Nair, has said this move can only lead to unending litigations and delay payment of compensation to the victims. The manufacturing firms and the user company will try to pass the blame onto each other and every claim for compensation will be challenged in the courts at different levels, Justice Ramachandran said.

Instead, he suggests that the government should bear the burden of paying compensation, as both Hindustan Insecticides Limited (HIL) which had supplied the major share of endosulfan used in Kasaragod and the user Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK) are public sector firms. The government can negotiate with the companies to secure some contribution to the compensation package, he said. He added that the PCK had already contributed Rs 27 crores to pay compensation to the victims.

The panel is set to hold its maiden meeting at Kasaragod on Friday to hear the views of the victims, people's representatives, and non-governmental organizations. Justice Ramachandran said the panel was of the view that

the benefit of doubt should go in favour of the victims even if it may not be possible to fully establish the damage they had suffered was caused by endosulfan.

"There had been reports of increased instances of congenital deformities, cancer, mental and physical ailments in areas near the PCK plantation. Barring the use of endosulfan, there have not been reports of any other chemical intervention in those otherwise clean rural areas. So there are reasons to believe that endosulfan had a role in those cases," Justice Ramachandran said.

Weather-Chennai

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Wednesday, Jul 17

Max Min

34° | 26°

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:50

Humidity: 70

Sunset: 06:39

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1005

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Thursday, Jul 18

Max Min

36° | 27°

Extended Forecast for a week

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Jul 19

Jul 20

Jul 21

Jul 22

Jul 23



36° | 27°

36° | 26°

36° | 26°

36° | 26°

37° | 26°

Partly Cloudy

Overcast

Overcast

Overcast

Overcast

Airport Weather

Rain: 0

Sunrise: 05:50

Humidity: 70

Sunset: 06:39

Wind: normal

Barometer: 1005

THE HINDU Business Line

Indian wheat loses to cheaper Black Sea produce

Wheat exports have slowed in recent weeks as buyers, mainly from the Far-East, have switched over to Black Sea Origin grains, which are cheaper by about 15-20 per cent over the Indian produce.

While there are no new contracts, exporters including the public sector entities such as PEC, STC and MMTC are servicing the deals struck earlier. Exports in the current fiscal are estimated at around two million tonnes (mt). In the last financial year, wheat exports by the private trade stood at over 2.6 mt, while the public entities were estimated to have shipped out around three mt.

Wheat harvesting has picked up in the Black Sea countries such as Ukraine and Russia and prices for the grain range \$240-250 a tonne f.o.b, whereas the Indian produce is still priced at \$300.

The Government had fixed a floor price of \$300 for exports mainly for stocks held by Food Corporation of India in its warehouses. The prices have not been revised despite a drop in the market. The drop even led to cancellations of some tenders by the PSU entities as the offer they had received were lower than the floor price.

“If India wants to continue exports, then it has to be at international prices and not at above market prices. By not revising the price for exports, India has been helping shipments from the Black Sea,” said Tejinder Narang, trade analyst adding that the country has lost about two mt in exports.

Indian wheat was largely imported by Far-Eastern countries for feed purpose.

Earlier during harvest, the Government had offered about five mt for exports through private players, to make storage space for the new crop. However, there was no response from the trade as the price fixed by the Government was higher than global prices.

As on July 1, wheat stocks with Government stood at 42.3 mt, of which more than a fourth was stored in temporary sheds that could result in the grains getting spoiled due to rain.

The Government has procured about 25 mt this year, lower than last year. This is because production this year is estimated to be 80-84 mt. The Government is yet to come out with its final estimate for wheat output.

Mixed trend in pepper

Pepper prices were mixed on Tuesday in the futures market, while it ruled steady on the spot.

Active contracts August and October dropped, while September increased. Activities were limited.

Dealers based in Madhya Pradesh cities such as Gwalior and Indore were quoted as saying that they were getting Karnataka pepper at Rs 395 a kg delivered at their doorstep.

Karnataka low bulk density pepper was feared to be slipping into the hands of primary market dealers in Idukki, market sources told *Business Line*.

On the spot, seven tonnes of pepper arrived and 10 tonnes were traded at Rs 383 (ungarbled) and Rs 403 for MG 1.

August and October contracts decreased by Rs 96 and Rs 105, respectively, to Rs 40,500 and Rs 40,250 while September increased by Rs 525 to close at Rs 40,800.

The total open interest moved up by nine tonnes to 121 tonnes.

Total turnover went up by 4 tonnes to 37 tonnes.

Indian parity was at \$7,025 (c&f) for Europe and \$7,275 (c&f) for the US.

According to them, MG 1 remained out priced in the international market.

Cotton body pegs output lower

Indian Cotton Federation (formerly The South India Cotton Association – SICA) has estimated the 2012-13 cotton crop at 337 lakh bales.

ICF's estimate is marginally lower than the Cotton Advisory Board's (April 17 {+t} {+h}) assessment. (CAB has estimated at 340 lakh bales).

Speaking about the competitiveness of Indian cotton in global markets, ICF President J. Thulasidharan said Indian benchmark cotton – Shankar 6, which is ruling around Rs 43,000 currently costs more than 97 cents for an overseas buyer.

This is not a competitive price.

With December Futures hovering around 84 cents, an ideal price for Shankar 6 would be 89-90 cents.

This means, Indian prices will have to fall by seven-eight per cent. This can happen only if the rupee weakens and (or) the prices drop in India.

Else, export volumes will drop or be limited.

Firming of the rupee would also contribute to the adverse parity of Indian prices, he said.

Sharing the crop report for the 2013-14 season, Thulasidharan said timely monsoon in all the cotton growing areas have signalled good progress in planting. 'Farmers in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan are expected to maintain the size of the crop.

(ICF has estimated the 2012-13 crop at 57 lakh bales from these three States).

'Besides these States, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have also reported improved crop. This should ensure a comfortable supply position, particularly for the spinners,' he said.

On China, he said 'China is believed to hold 8.33 million tonnes of cotton in reserve. This is against their normal annual consumption of 8.02 million tonnes.'

Groundnut oil slips

Groundnut oil traded lower on Tuesday as demand from re-packers and brands dropped following sharp rise in prices last week.

According to market sources, groundnut price may decline further this week.

Groundnut oil loose traded Rs 20 lower at Rs 1,010-1,015 for 10 kg while *teliya* tin decreased by Rs 30 to Rs 1,557-1,558 for 15 kg and groundnut oil new tin declined by Rs 20 to Rs 1,745-1,750.

Hardly 2-3 tankers of groundnut oil were traded by mills in Gondal area in Saurashtra.

According to traders, re-packers had bought heavy quantity last week and the prices gained sharply.

After the price rise, demand in groundnut oil has slipped since the past two days.

On the other hand, cotton oil remained unchanged on stable demand.

Washed cottonseed oil quoted at Rs 620-623 for 10 kg and new tin of cotton oil was traded at Rs 1,105-1,115 for 15 kg.

About 10-15 tankers of cotton oil were traded.

The groundnut acreage has touched 15 lakh hectares in the State compared with 2.2 lakh hectares same time last year.

Usually, groundnut is sown in an area of 14.43 lakh hectares in Gujarat.

Mixed trend in spot rubber

Spot rubber prices were mixed on Tuesday.

The market opened weak but a partial recovery in domestic futures catalysed the sentiments later.

The gap between the domestic and international markets continued to put pressure on the local markets, raising import possibilities.

Meanwhile, latex improved further on fresh demand amidst low supplies.

Sheet rubber closed weak at Rs 191 (Rs 192) a kg after hitting an intra-day low of Rs 190, according to traders. The grade declined to Rs 190 (Rs 192) both at Kottayam and Kochi, according to the Rubber Board.

August futures recovered to Rs 186.90 (Rs 182.34), September to Rs 177.43 (Rs 173.03), October to Rs 168.50 (Rs 166.42), November to Rs 164.25 (Rs 161.84) and December to Rs 164.50 (Rs 164) for RSS 4 on the National Multi Commodity Exchange. RSS 3 (spot) dropped to Rs 152.46 (Rs 153.26) at Bangkok.

July futures closed at ¥229.3 (Rs 136.77) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange.

Spot rubber rates Rs/kgkg: RSS-4: 191 (192); RSS-5: 186 (186); Ungraded: 175 (175); ISNR 20: 176 (176) and Latex 60%: 145 (143).

Allay fears over GM crop, Pranab tells farm scientists

‘Address concerns through globally accepted procedures’



In what could be music to the ears for supporters of genetically-modified (GM) technology, President Pranab Mukherjee, on Tuesday said that development and introduction of GM crops had the potential to revolutionise agriculture.

“The concerns over their (GM crops) perceived risks should be addressed by following internationally accepted procedures for assessing safety parameters,” Mukherjee said in his address at the 85th Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). “ICAR, which is involved in developing useful products and technologies in this field, must contribute to the public discourse and provide clarity on this sensitive issue,” the President added.

Mukherjee said that agriculture should be made an intellectually stimulating discipline and a rewarding profession to attract talent. Agriculture education

should focus on the contemporary challenges of food insecurity, declining productivity, depletion of natural resources, increased risk from climate change, regional imbalance, rising input costs, changing food habits and post-harvest management.

“The quality and relevance of agricultural research must be enhanced to bring within its domain cutting edge technologies like biosensors, genomics, biotechnology, nanotechnology and alternative energy sources,” Mukherjee added.

Stating that agriculture retained primary importance in terms of value creation and employment generation in our economy, President Mukherjee called upon the scientific fraternity to work towards a technology-led path for development of agriculture and prosperity of the farming community.

Speaking on the occasion, Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, said apart from challenges such as shrinking land base, dwindling water resources, shortage of farm labour and increasing costs, climate change was threatening growth and sustainability of agriculture in India.

He felt that accelerating the growth of agriculture production was necessary not only to achieve the target of eight per cent growth in overall GDP during the 12th Plan, but also to realise ‘inclusive’ growth.

No plans to levy import duty on pulses now, says Pawar

The Government has no immediate plans to impose any import duty on pulses, Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said on Tuesday. He was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the 85th Foundation Day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

The confusion among pulses traders was triggered following reports that the Food Ministry was in favour of imposing a 7.5 per cent import duty.

The Commission for Agriculture Costs and Prices (CACP), in its recommendations, had suggested imposition of a 10 per cent on duty on imports to boost domestic production.

Currently, there is no duty and importers can bring in pulses duty free till March 31, according to a Finance Ministry notification issued in March.

The pulses trade has opposed any move to impose import duty.

However, the trade wants the Government to open up exports to help stabilise prices that are currently bearish and below levels of the minimum support price.

The recent 10 per cent decline in rupee against the dollar has made pulses imports costlier and has reduced the price differential between domestic and imported varieties.

'Pricey veggies worrisome'

India's pulses imports stood at around three million tonnes in 2012-13. In value terms, they were estimated at over \$1.5 billion. Pawar said the current trend of vegetable price rise was worrisome, but expects it to ease with improving supplies in the weeks ahead.

Prices of almost vegetables including tomato, potato and onion have shot up in recent weeks across the country on excess rains affecting crop in key-growing regions and disruption in supplies, mainly from Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

"This is a temporary situation about vegetable prices. It is definitely worrisome," he said.

Pawar said that the supply situation was expected to improve in the coming weeks.

The Minister said that onion supply was expected to improve after three weeks with the arrival of the new crop from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The recent rising trend in vegetable and food prices had fuelled food inflation, which rose to 9.74 per cent for June from 8.25 per cent in May.

Further, Pawar said the monsoon so far, has been favourable this year and the current trend in sowing of kharif crops could help the country break the last two year's records in food production.

This is provided the monsoon continues to be good as projected by the Indian Meteorological Department, he said.

Replying to a query on whether the Government would keep open the exports of rice and wheat in view of implementation of food security scheme, Pawar said that the stock position as of now was extremely good. "Unless we export, there will be problem and there will be damage," Pawar said, adding that foodgrains required for food security had been kept safely.

Another vigorous monsoon phase seen

Monsoon is forecast to enter another vigorous phase before reverting to normal during the rest of July, according to tracking models.

A low-pressure area over northwest Bay of Bengal and a western disturbance just pushing in over northwest India would be main weather-setting systems for now.

INTERACTIVE RAIN

Monsoon easterlies from the Bay of Bengal are seen predictably interacting with opposing winds brought in by the western disturbance to set off rains over northwest and adjoining central India.

But parts of interior peninsula (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and even Maharashtra) might witness indifferent rain even as it pours down heavily in the neighbourhood.

Climate Prediction Centre of the US National Weather Services sees possibilities for enhanced convection (cloud-building process) to continue over the Bay of Bengal during this week.

Causative factors for the resurgence in the Bay could also trigger activity in the Northwest Pacific, just across Myanmar-Thailand region.

PACIFIC BEHAVIOUR

On Tuesday, a tropical depression developed in the Philippine seas, close on the heels of powerful typhoon Soulik that had sped monsoon flows to a new peak across India last week. But the latest depression may not power itself into a major storm since it is endowed with much less elbowroom.

Given this, it would chiefly be the low-pressure area in the Bay that would guide the behaviour of the monsoon.

It could also help bring back the offshore trough along the West Coast, now a feeble formation, to full strength.

HEAVY RAIN ALERT

India Met Department said about as much in its warning issued on Tuesday. Heavy to very heavy rainfall would occur at one or two places over Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh on Wednesday. Heavy

rainfall could also lash Odisha, East Gujarat, Konkan, Goa, Telangana, Coastal Karnataka and Kerala.

On Thursday, heavy to very heavy rainfall may break out over Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh. Heavy rainfall is also likely over Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, East Gujarat, Konkan, Goa, Coastal Karnataka and Kerala.

Extended forecast valid from July 19 to 23 predict rainfall at many places over western Himalayan region, Gangetic plains, West Coast, Central, East and Northeast India.

Lack of bulk demand dampens sugar

Sugar prices ruled unchanged in spot markets barring Vashi - Mumbai on Tuesday as supply from producers continued to be higher and demand did not improve as expected.

Prices in the futures market extended small gain on speculation. The Vashi market was closed for the second day in protest against the Local body Tax.

Sources said that prices at upper level ruled steady as demand from stockists remains need-based. Lower than expected demand for festivals and closure of most of the wholesale markets in Maharashtra kept the volume at mill level thin. Producers are continuously selling to ease their inventory due to higher production this year.

Prices are ruling under pressure since long in absence of any major demand trigger. Demand from bulk users like soft drink makers eases during the monsoon season, said a commodity analyst.

A Vashi-based wholesaler said that due to bandh there was no loading – unloading or local dispatches.

The Vashi market carries 120-125 truckloads of inventory. On Monday, about 14-15 mills offered tenders and sold about 35,000-38,000 bags to the local traders at steady rates of Rs 2,930-3,000 for S-grade and Rs 3,030-3,110 for M-grade.

In Mumbai, **nominal sugar prices in spot were:** S-grade Rs 3,060-3,145 and M-grade Rs 3,190 - 3,310. **Nominal naka rates were:** S-grade Rs 3,020-3,070 and M-grade Rs 3,130-3,220.

Bumper output puts pressure on chickpea

Sluggish trend continued in chana with selling pressure outmanoeuvring demand. Weak demand in pulses also added to bearish sentiment in chana and other pulse seeds.

Chana (kanta) declined by Rs 50-75 a quintal, while chana (desi) ruled at Rs 2,900, chana (mausmi) at Rs 3,300, chana (kaktu) at Rs 2,800-Rs 2,900 and chana (vishal) ruled at Rs 2,700-2,800 a quintal respectively. Given large stock of domestic chana and large availability of 75,000-80,000 tonnes of imported chana in Mumbai port, sluggish trend in chana will continue in the coming days, said a trader adding that bumper production of dollar chana (chickpea) this year has also added to the bearish sentiment as millers prefer cheap varieties of dollar chana for the manufacturing of besan.

Chana dal (average) was at Rs 3,550-75, chana dal (medium) at Rs 3,650-75, while chana dal (bold) ruled at Rs 3,900-25 a quintal.

Improved buying support both in domestic and export market has also lifted dollar chana prices in mandis and container in the past one week.

Dollar chana on Tuesday ruled at Rs 3,400-4,500 amid an arrival of 6,000-7,000 bags. Dollar chana (42/44 count) was at Rs 5,600, 44/46 count at Rs 5,400, 58/60 count at Rs 3,700, while dollar chana (60/62) count ruled at Rs 3,600 a quintal respectively.

Short-term outlook bearish for edible oils

Bearish trend continued in edible oils market on Tuesday on slack demand and weak futures.

Malaysian palm oil futures extended their loss for the fifth consecutive day as worries over weak export demand and a higher production persisted.

At the domestic level, expectation of higher kharif crops and early arrivals of seeds in producing centres pulled futures .

Sources said that tracking firm domestic currency, weak futures and lower physical demand local refineries have reduced their rates for commodity by Rs 5.

Following that, in the spot market prices for soyabean, sunflower and rapeseed oil declined by Rs 5 for 10 kg each while palmolein and cotton refined oil dropped by Rs 2 each.

During the day, hardly 100-150 tonnes of palmolein were sold in resale at Rs 525-527.

About 80-100 tonnes of soyabean refined oil were sold by Ruchi at Rs 645. Edible oils are seen bearish in the near term given the higher plantings of oilseeds and the approaching of peak production season in palm oil growing nations.

Towards the day's close, Liberty was quoting palmolein at Rs 533-535, super palmolein Rs 570 for July-August and super deluxe Rs 590.

Ruchi quoted palmolein at Rs 538 for July-August-September, soyabean refined oil at Rs 645 for July, Rs 650 for August and sunflower refined oil Rs 810 for July-August.

Allana was quoting palmolein at Rs 533-536 and super palmolein Rs 570. Gokuls' palmolein's rates were Rs 535. Resellers were quoting Rs 525-526.

Soyabean arrivals at the national level were about 95,000 bags and its prices were Rs 3,500-3,600 ex mandi and Rs 3,725-3,775 for plant delivery.

Mustard seeds arrivals were 85,000 bags and the prices were Rs 3,070-3,600.

Malaysia BMD crude palm oil's August contracts was lower by 27 to MYR 2,258, September by 31 to MYR 2,242 and October by 36 to MYR 2,227 a tonne.

The Bombay Commodity Exchange spot rates (Rs/10 kg) were: groundnut oil 1,000 (1,000), soya refined oil 650 (655), sunflower exp. ref. 750 (755), sunflower ref. 810 (815), rapeseed ref. oil 685 (690), rapeseed expeller ref. 655 (660) cottonseed ref. oil 650 (652) and palmolein 528 (530).

Vikram Global Commodities (P) Ltd quoted Rs 570/10 kg for Malaysian super palmolein - July delivery.

Stockists begin building turmeric inventories

Spot turmeric prices remained stable on Tuesday even as traders are awaiting fresh upcountry orders.

“Arrivals increased slightly to 2,600 bags . But prices did not improve. Usually during the month of *Aadi*, arrivals will be low as also prices. This year for want of demand, prices are down,” said R.K.V. Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

He said that soon the arrival may improve, as many farmers require money for their agricultural operations. Similarly, traders too may buy the stock if they receive upcountry orders.

Of the 2,600 bags that arrived, 60 per cent was sold. A major portion of the buying was made by stockists. The price remained stable in Andhra Pradesh and Assam markets. Due to arrival of medium variety hybrid, the price of the finger variety decreased by Rs 500 a quintal.

At the Erode Turmeric Merchants Association sales yard, the finger variety sold at Rs 4,109-6,577, the root variety at Rs 3,831-5,734 a quintal.

Salem Hybrid Crop: The finger variety fetched Rs 6,365-7,391; the root variety Rs 5,527-6,117. Of the 316 bags that on offer, only 71 were sold. At the Regulated Market Committee, the finger variety was sold at Rs 5,399-6,689 and the root variety Rs 4,809-5,819. Of the 258 bags put up for sale, 228 found takers.

At the Erode Cooperative Marketing Society, the finger variety quoted Rs 5,211-6,611 and the root variety Rs 5,064-5,811. Of the 448 bags offered, 443 were traded.

Wheat, flour seen flat in the next few days

Moderate buying kept wheat and flour prices unchanged on Tuesday.

Wheat and flour prices are ruling stable on steady domestic demand and supply, said market sources.

Radhey Shyam, a commodity expert, told *Business Line* that since demand matched supply, prices were unchanged.

In the absence of any major market moving factors, dara and flour prices have been ruling firm since last week and may continue to rule around current levels for the next few days, too, he added.

Heavy rainfall earlier on Tuesday morning has also disturbed the trade.

In the physical market, dara wheat prices ruled flat and sold at Rs 1,470-75 a quintal.

Mill delivery was at Rs 1,470 while delivery at the chakki was at Rs 1,475.

Similarly, desi wheat variety ruled flat at Rs 2,600-2,700. On the NCDEX, a negative tone was witnessed on account of lack of buying interest.

Wheat for August contracts went down by Rs 4 and traded at 1,591 with an open interest of 14,010 lots. The grain had made a low at Rs 1,590 a quintal earlier in the day.

September contracts went up by Re 1 and traded at Rs 1,605.

While, wheat spot prices on the exchange improved by Rs 25 and traded at Rs 1,512.5 a quintal.

Flour Prices

Following a steady trend in wheat, flour too ruled flat and quoted at Rs 1,725 .

Similarly, Chokar ruled flat and sold at Rs 1,225 a quintal.

Copra traders await Govt's raw coconut buy

Coconut oil prices in Kerala and Tamil Nadu continued to slide due to low corporate demand and reduction in local consumption.

Though the market had gone up to over Rs 70 a kg in the last few weeks, it has dropped to Rs 67 in Kerala and Rs 63 in Tamil Nadu this week.

Copra prices also declined to Rs 4,675 a quintal in Kerala and Rs 4,550 in Tamil Nadu.

According to Prakash B. Rao, Vice-President, Cochin Oil Merchants Association, traders are expecting designated agencies such as Marketfed and Kerafed to commence raw coconut procurement at Rs 16/kg with immediate effect. In such a case, he said there will be a good demand for copra.

He pointed out that the surplus rain is a good sign for higher productivity and the market is expecting 5-10 per cent production growth next season. However, movement of coconut oil to upcountry markets has been affected by the continuous rain in the Kerala.

Imported edible oils such as palm oil and palm kernel oil also showed upward trend this week due to fluctuations in the rupee. Prices of palm oil stood at Rs 54.75 a kg while it was Rs 54 for palm kernel oil.

Thalath Mahamood, former President of the merchants association, said that the market is witnessing a steady trend with no signs of price variations. This is because of surplus availability of coconut oil in the market. The demand for coconut oil has come down due to cheaper import of edible oils.

Bharat N. Khona, former Board Member of the merchants body, said that the upcountry demand was less in spite of low prices for coconut oil. He said that speculators are trying to intervene in the market by hiking prices which will send a wrong signal.

He cited that prices for 15 kg loose coconut oil in Tamil Nadu two days ago was Rs 930. However, there was a sudden spurt of Rs 20 without any genuine demand on Tuesday, he said.

Business Standard

Prez asks ICAR to bring clarity on safety concerns of GM crops

He also suggested that safety concerns attached to GM crops should be addressed by following global norms

President Pranab Mukherjee today said introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops would revolutionise agriculture sector and asked agri-research body ICAR to bring clarity on safety concerns of these crops.

He also suggested that safety concerns attached to GM crops should be addressed by following global norms.

"Development and introduction of GM crops has the potential to revolutionise agriculture. The concerns over their perceived risks should be addressed by following internationally accepted procedures for assessing safety parameters," Mukherjee said at the 85th ICAR Foundation Day.

He said that the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), which is involved in developing useful products and technologies in this field, "must contribute to the public discourse and provide clarity on this sensitive issue".

The government has allowed commercial cultivation of Bt cotton, while moratorium has been put on Bt brinjal.

Permission has been given to private companies to conduct field trials of GM crops such as cotton, corn and maize in Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.

India has transformed from being a food-deficient to food -surplus country, Mukherjee said, but cautioned that climate change poses a major challenge to agriculture and the country must chalk out a climate resilient development strategy.

To achieve 4% farm growth per annum during the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17), Mukherjee suggested that the focus must be on productivity-driving measures such as diversification of crops, adoption of high yielding hybrid seeds, and improvement in water management practices.

The farm growth in the 11th Five Year Plan period was driven by improved farm prices. However, during the 12th Plan period the growth in demand for major crops is projected to slow down. "We have to achieve higher productivity levels to attain the agri-growth target for this Plan," he added.

Maize down 1.2% on weak spot sentiment

Current month July's contract prices fell by 1.15%

Maize prices fell by Rs 17 to Rs 1,398 per quintal in future trade today as speculators offloaded their positions on weak spot markets cues.

Marketmen said weak demand from bio-products making industries against increased stocks in physical markets mainly put pressure here on future price of maize.

Fresh supply of new crops into the markets too weighed on prices, they said.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, maize price for most active near August contract declined by Rs 17, or 1.20%, to Rs 1,398 per quintal, having an open interest of 67,730 lots.

Current month July's contract prices fell by Rs 16, or 1.15% to Rs 1,373 per quintal, with an open interest of 1,800 lots.

Turmeric slides by 1.03% on profit-booking

Profit-booking by speculators at prevailing levels amid subdued demand in the spot market influenced turmeric prices

Turmeric prices slide by 1.03% to Rs 5,970 per quintal in futures trade today as speculators locked-in gains at prevailing levels amid subdued demand in the spot market against adequate supplies.

At the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange, turmeric for delivery in August fell by Rs 62, or 1.03%, to Rs 5,970 per quintal with an open interest of 21,095 lots.

Similarly, the spice for delivery in July declined by Rs 30, or 0.50%, to Rs 5,918 per quintal in 1,505 lots.

Market analysts attributed the fall in turmeric futures to profit-booking by speculators at prevailing levels amid subdued demand in the spot market against adequate stocks position.

Chana rises by 0.10% as demand picks up

Fresh positions created by speculators following good demand in the spot markets, mainly led to rise in chana prices

Chana prices moved up marginally by Rs 3 to Rs 2,995 per quintal in futures trading today as speculators enlarged their positions, supported by pick-up in demand in the spot market.

At the National Commodity Derivatives Exchange, chana for delivery in July rose by Rs 3, or 0.10%, to Rs 2,995 per quintal, with an open interest of 1,630 lots.

Similarly, the commodity for delivery in August traded higher by the same margin to Rs 3,027 per quintal in 2,17,790 lots.

Analysts said fresh positions created by speculators following good demand in the spot markets, mainly led to rise in chana prices at futures trade

Surge in rubber prices continues; gap with global rates widens

The local market is higher by Rs 40/kg than in the international market

The gap between local and global prices of natural rubber (NR) has risen to one of the highest in the past four years. The local market is now higher by Rs 40/kg than in the international market.

Local prices were moving close to the international counters during 2012; these were even lower in January-April. However, in calendar 2013, irrespective of the price movement abroad, the Indian market is moving on its own. And, has risen substantially in the past five weeks.

Which is in marked contrast to major global markets, such as in Tokyo and Bangkok; there, prices have been dipping almost daily over the past four to five weeks. On Tuesday, for instance, the Indian price is Rs 192 a kg; Bangkok quoted Rs 152 a kg. There is a lack of demand abroad; India faces a shortage of supply, as reported earlier in this newspaper.

In fact, despite the Rubber Board saying the current quote is Rs 192 a kg, the commodity isn't to be had in Kottayam and Kochi (from Kerala comes 90 per cent of India's NR output) even at Rs 195 a kg. Saying it is rare for Indian prices to be more than Rs 15-20 a kg above global prices, non-economic factors are at play (meaning hoarding and speculation), Rajiv Budhraj, director-general of the Automotive Tyre

Manufacturers Association. Benchmark rubber contracts on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange for future delivery have dropped a little over 20 per cent this year so far; the trend continues. Weak demand across the globe is expected to remain for the rest of the year.

China's import of NR, for instance, dipped 18.8 per cent to 130,000 tonnes in June from the year before. Synthetic rubber import fell 3.7 per cent.

Tyre grade rubber is, in fact, at its weakest level since 2009 as concerns about global economic growth and uncertainty over demand sparked selling in the benchmark rubber futures on Tocom.

Budhrajia told Business Standard the government should allow duty-free import; else, rubber-based units would be in serious trouble. He said Atma would be pressing the issue with the Union government. Proponents of this view say crumb rubber, as good as the local RSS-4 benchmark grade, is available abroad even at Rs 130/kg. Thailand, the world's biggest rubber producer and exporter, is asking Malaysia and Indonesia, the other majors, to help prop up the export price, down by a fifth since its peak this year.