

Relief to farmers

After a gap of three months, Periyar dam, the life line of five southern districts, has started receiving an inflow of 105 cusecs bringing hope to farmers and a sigh of relief to town and village panchayat administrations that have been struggling till Wednesday.

However, there was no change in the storage level in the dam.

The water level in the dam was 112.4 feet. The Public Works Department engineers withdrew the entire inflow to meet drinking water needs of the district.

Rapid depletion of storage levels in Periyar and Vagai dams had created acute drinking water crisis in urban and rural areas.

Several municipalities and town panchayats could not supply drinking water even once in a week to residents.

Though moderate showers did not improve the storage level in Periyar dam, it would scale down illegal tapping of water from Mullaperiyar river, said PWD officials. Moreover, mild inflow would prevent rapid depletion of storage level in Periyar dam.

The water level in Vaigai dam stood at 47.05 feet. With no inflow into the dam, the discharge was 60 cusecs. But the dam received mild showers.

Dindigul

Moderate showers recorded in many parts in the district bringing down the mercury level sizably. Total rainfall recorded in the district was 168.77 mm and the average rainfall was 16.88 mm.

Bank gives away Rs 5.50-crore as farm loans

Vijaya Bank Chairman-cum-Managing Director H.S. Upendra Kamath disbursed farm loans to the tune of Rs 5.50 crore to as many as 150 farmers here on Wednesday.

At a function in Thirupadripuliyur here, Mr. Kamath said the thrust area of the bank has been agriculture sector all along. It was not just to comply with the government guidelines but in keeping with the ideals of the founding fathers of the bank as they were keen on helping the farming community, he said and appealed to the farmers to ensure prompt repayment of loans to enable the bank to extend assistance to more farmers.

On the occasion, Mr Kamath also gave a certificate of adoption to P. Divya, a Class V student and daughter of Pandiarajan - Lakshmi couple of Padirikuppam here, Here, adoption meant bank would meet all her educational expenses from Class VI till her graduation as part of its corporate social responsibility.

To improve the livelihood of members of the Self-Help Groups, the bank was extending financial support. The bank had exposure to a total of 4,569 SHGs.

Farmers leave for GAIL hearing

Over 50 farmers from Denkanikottai and Hosur taluks have left for Chennai to attend the public hearing of GAIL pipeline project by Chief Secretary Sheela Balakrishnan on March 7.

Farmers turn to new crops

They switch from cultivation of paddy to vegetables and fruits



New moves: Tirunelveli Collector C. Samayamoorthy at a farm at Karumpuliyoothu near Alangulam in Tirunelveli district on Wednesday.— Photo: A. Shaikmohideen

Drawn by Central and State government subsidies, farmers are switching from paddy to fruit and vegetable cultivation to offset losses.

Monsoon failure in the district since 2009 has taught the farmers to move from water-intensive paddy cultivation to crops that require less water and also give better income.

This has resulted in a significant increase in area brought under cultivation of these new crops.

In Tirunelveli district, mango (6,523 hectares), banana (9,700 ha), amla (2,600 ha), acid-lime (2,186 ha) and other fruits (1,136 ha) are being grown to give an annual yield of 5.69 lakh tonnes. Similarly, vegetables such as brinjal, tomato, ladies finger and onion are being grown on 4,544 hectares targeting an annual production of 73,385 tonnes.

Spices and condiments such as chilly, coriander, cardamom, clove, tamarind etc. are being cultivated on an area of 4,218 hectare with an annual production of 19,745 tonnes. Plantation crops such as cashew, coffee, tea, cocoa etc. are cultivated on an area of 6,102 ha and floriculture is being taken up on 1,630 ha to produce 13,382 tonnes of jasmine, rose and margold.

Central and the State Government schemes are being implemented in the district to support the farmers. The National Horticulture Mission (NHM) is being implemented with the view to further increase the area of cultivation and the yield as well. During the current fiscal, subsidy to the tune of Rs. 92.99 lakh has been disbursed to 1,320 farmers under NHM.

To minimize the dependence on water for irrigation, micro irrigation and other techniques have been introduced.

“Since Central and State Governments give attractive subsidy of 100 per cent to small and marginal farmers and 75 per cent to other farmers, micro irrigation is becoming popular among the farming community.

So far, we’ve disbursed subsidy to the tune of Rs. 1.54 crore as micro irrigation subsidy to 272 farmers, who have covered 516 hectares under this new technique,” said Collector C. Samayamoorthy, who visited farms covered by micro irrigation and fertigation in the villages of Maaraanthai, Karumpuliyoothu, Pudur, Sivalaarkulam and Odakkarai Thulukkarpatti on Wednesday.

He said hybrid seeds were being distributed to the farmers at 50 per cent subsidised cost and 2,750 farmers had benefited from this scheme to the tune of Rs. 73 lakh.

Joint Director of Agriculture K. Soundararajan, Joint Director of Horticulture Rajan Ravichandran and Project Director of District Rural Development Agency N. Amanullah accompanied the Collector during the inspection.

‘Protect interests of farmers’

Purushottamgouda, farmers’ leader, has urged the State government to assert its rights and protect the interests of farmers in the Tungabhadra command area, served by the low-level canal (LLC), in Hospet, Siruguppa and Bellary taluks.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, he said the Tungabhadra Board authorities had treated farmers unjustly. He alleged that the authorities had released only the State's share of 550 cusecs, knowing full well that it would not be enough to reach the fields. "Water from the canals reaches the fields only if 1,100 cusecs of water, being the quota of both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, is released. If only Karnataka's quota is released, the water flows below the distributory and cannot reach the fields. As Andhra Pradesh has announced that it did not need water now, the authorities have released only the State's share. Hundreds of acres could not be irrigated, resulting in the loss of the second crop," he said.

The government should take steps to prevent such a situation from happening again, he said. "If things continue to be the same, farmers would be forced to demand the closure of the Board," he added.

***'Second crop can
be lost if fields are
not irrigated'***

Farmers lay siege to CNNL office demanding water release



Airing their woes: Farmers' representatives talking to a Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Ltd. official in Mandya on Wednesday.

Farmers from different parts of the district have urged Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Ltd. (CNNL) office to immediately release water into canals dependent on the Cauvery so as to save standing crops and to cater to the drinking water needs.

Farmers, under the aegis of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), laid siege to the office of the CNNL on Wednesday and urged the officials to protect the interests of growers in the Cauvery basin.

The Irrigation Department stopped releasing water into the canals on January 1 owing to poor storage in the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) near Srirangapatna. A section of farmers also threatened to block a road demanding immediate release of water into the canals. They, however, gave up their plan after officials and senior leaders spoke to them. The farmers also urged the State government to waive all farm loans.

Farm research system lauded

Plantation crops research institute organises village seminar at Perumbala



Reaching out: P. Kunhiraman, MLA, inaugurating a seminar organised by the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) at Perumbala in Kasaragod on Tuesday.

The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) organised a 'village seminar' at Perumbala in the district on Wednesday.

The event was part of the three-week Field Experience Training (FET) programme for Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists of CPCRI which began on from February 23.

A team of newly recruited agriculture scientists presented a report on 'participatory rural appraisal.'

The presentation covered the agro-ecology of the area, cropping pattern, status of basic resources of soil, water and biodiversity, and steps to make farming remunerative.

K. Kunhiraman, MLA, who inaugurated the session, lauded the agriculture research system in the country.

He stressed the need to reorient agricultural research to develop appropriate farm technologies to suit diverse farming situations.

Ayisha Sahadulla, president, Chemnad panchayat, presided over the function. CPCRI Director George V. Thomas delivered the keynote

address.

Dr. Thomas also handed over the biodiversity document prepared by the new scientists to Ms. Sahadulla. Narayanan Nair, ward member, and Agricultural Officer Bashi offered felicitations.

C. Thamban and P. Subramanian, Principal Scientists, CPCRI; K.M. Sreekumar, Associate Professor, College of Agriculture, Padannakkad; and K. Manikantan, Subject Matter Specialist, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, attached to CPCRI; interacted with the farmers.

ICRISAT chief to address Assembly on farm sector

International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) Director-General William D. Dar, who was Secretary of Agriculture in the Philippines (equivalent to Minister of Agriculture) about two decades ago, will visit the State Assembly and present his ideas which could benefit the farming sector in the State.

This was announced by Assembly Speaker Nadendla Manohar during his interaction with the scientists of ICRISAT at its premises on Wednesday, along with a team of legislators as part of a three-day orientation programme held for them.

The Assembly will hear and examine the proposals being mooted by Dr. Dar and decide what has to be implemented in the State which would benefit the farm sector.

ICRISAT has been mooted four proposals, including Bhoochetana, increasing groundnut cultivation in Anantapur, capacity building measures in the farming sector and improving the cultivation of pigeon pea.

When one of the members, during the interaction with scientists, asked about the advantages Andhra Pradesh can have with ICRISAT, Dr. Dar replied that they were ready to extend any help to the State.

Responding to his gesture, Mr. Manohar announced that Dr. Dar could address the Assembly during the coming session and make a presentation on the proposals and the members would decide what proposal has to be taken up.

“This is a wakeup call. I feel sorry to hear that no legislator has visited ICRISAT so far to understand the research going on here,” he said told the legislators.

Assembly Speaker wants legislators to make use of research findings of the premier institute

‘Farmers will be denied crop insurance’

Farmers in the State will be denied crop insurance in the rabi season because the Trinamool Congress government has failed to pay its share of the premium amount, alleged the president of the West Bengal unit of All India Kisan Sabha, Madan Ghosh, here on Wednesday.

“The State Government has failed to pay the premium for crop insurance despite reminders from the Centre on the matter,” Mr. Ghosh said.

He explained that under the present schemes general insurance companies provide crop insurance to farmers, the premium for which is shared by the farmer, the State Government and the Centre. He alleged that the Trinamool Congress government had failed to pay its share of the premium for the rabi season, which will in effect deny the insurance cover to the farmers.

Mr. Ghosh said the Agriculture Insurance Company of India had issued a circular on February 11 stating that the West Bengal government had “not yet issued the complete notification and guidelines” for the Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS) for the rabi season in the Bardhaman, Hooghly and Paschim Medinipur districts.

In the circular, the company states that in the absence of the guidelines it is not authorised to accept premiums in respect to the potato crop in the three districts.

Mr. Ghosh also urged the State Government to simplify the process of payments for the paddy procured by the State.

The Trinamool Congress leadership has alleged that leaders of peasant organisations affiliated to the Left Front, including Mr. Ghosh, accepted kickbacks on the sale of paddy.

Mr. Ghosh replied, “Let them provide the evidence. If it can be proven, I am ready to face whatever punishment they have to offer.”

Leaders of four Left-leaning peasant organisations held a meeting during the day, where it was decided that a campaign will be launched in the rural areas of the State demanding food security, measures to control price rise and creation of employment opportunities.

RBI orders performance audit of farm loan waiver

Considering the serious nature of the observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on the gross misuse of the agricultural debt waiver and debt relief schemes, the Reserve Bank of India has asked all scheduled commercial banks and local

area banks to undertake a complete verification of the list of beneficiaries with priority being given to areas where indebtedness was high.

The RBI has told them to fix the accountability on those officials involved in the administrative/accounting lapses.

Banks have been asked not to spare the internal auditors and statutory auditors who were responsible for verification, certification, or for passing the claims. They must be identified, and full responsibility fixed at the earliest with no exceptions, the bank said.

“Cases of extending of benefits to ineligible beneficiaries must be dealt with on top priority, and full recoveries as per law must be made to ensure no loss to the exchequer. It will be the personal responsibility of the institutional heads to ensure that such recoveries are effected in full,” the RBI said in a strongly-worded notification to chairmen, managing directors and chief executives of banks.

Stringent action

“All cases of tampering of records or alteration and the like must be identified and scrutinised by higher authority. A decision on each such case in the form of speaking orders must be taken. Stringent action under relevant sections of law against those responsible must be initiated. This would be monitored by the CVOs (chief vigilance officers) of the institutions concerned regularly,” the RBI said.

The apex bank said debt waiver/debt relief certificates must be issued in all eligible cases immediately, and full records of such issuance must be kept ready for inspection.

Banks have also been directed to draw up a list of all eligible beneficiaries who were not extended the benefits. They have also been asked to examine and establish the reasons for the denial of the rightful dues of the eligible beneficiaries. “Action may be initiated in all cases where malafides or carelessness appears likely,” the RBI said.

For effective monitoring of the action being taken, the RBI has asked banks to report it on a monthly basis, latest 7th of every month so that the government would be informed accordingly.

The CAG in a report has pointed out that several ineligible farmers had availed themselves of the benefits under the government’s much-published Rs.52,000 crore farm loan waiver scheme.

‘Cases of extending benefits to ineligible beneficiaries must be dealt with on top priority’

Urban farmer with an army of assistants



Just can't get enough: Campaigner for solid waste management and Malleswaram resident Vani Murthy uses three different methods to make compost at home.— Photo: S. Mohan Prasad

“I’m hooked on composting, and I don’t think I can ever stop,” says Vani Murthy, minutes before she plunges her hand into a container of compost in her balcony to pull up a clump of fragrant earth and wriggling earthworms. She has a teeming terrace garden in which she grows herbs, flowers, fruits and vegetables, but she admits that it isn’t so much the gardening she enjoys as making compost — believe it or not, she makes three different kinds.

Vani is an extremely active campaigner for solid waste management, and is one of Malleswaram’s most recognisable faces. A member of We Care for Malleswaram, Yes in My Back Yard, the Malleswaram Swabhimana Initiative and the Solid Waste Management Round Table, spreading awareness about why and how waste should be segregated is one of Vani’s primary activities in the neighbourhood.

Grabbing eyeballs

“I believe in visual communication,” says Vani, who seizes the opportunity to provide creative displays that grab attention while driving home the message. So if it’s a campaign to segregate different kinds of household waste, for example, she’d be there as part of a demo with “funky hats with CDs and bottles hanging from them” or aprons explaining what waste goes where. Plenty of pictures and lots of colour are her trademark, something you notice even before you enter her tidy home, which has colourful decorations proclaiming the household’s commitment to waste right on the front door.

Vani says she has definitely seen a shift in attitudes towards solid waste management in recent years, even if this hasn't been on a large scale. Although Malleswaram is one of the first localities in Bangalore with a Residents' Welfare Association and an active network of residents committed to taking responsibility for the waste generated in their neighbourhood, Malleswaram's battle with waste has a long way to go in terms of building a sustainable system for managing waste. "We still don't have a dry waste collection centre," Vani points out. "We need to be able to manage our dry waste properly before we begin to handle our wet waste", she says, "decentralising management of wet waste is hard."

Tiny helpers

Moving on to the management of wet waste in her own home, out in Vani's balcony, she points to a partitioned container in which vermi-composting takes place. One portion of it holds compost that's nearly ready, while the other holds mud and food being broken down by fat earthworms having a field day. "I like to put in things they like, like coffee or tea powder, and guava," Vani says fondly, rummaging through the mud to expose pieces of guava and pea pods, "so no orange or lemon peel for them."

Green laboratory

On the terrace, Vani has the familiar stack of Daily Dump kambhas, where aerobic composting of her garden waste takes place, and in her kitchen, she uses the 'bokashi method' — which involves mixing microorganisms in with food waste — to break down kitchen waste.

"The first time I composted waste, I failed miserably. I had a stinking mess on my hands and didn't know what went wrong." Once she learned what she didn't do right, it took a year to get into the groove of things, and there's been no looking back since.

"I feel like I'm getting back to nature," Vani says, before listing the herbs, greens, fruits and vegetables she grows in her garden.

She regularly shares her experiments and adventures in her garden on Facebook, which she says has given her the opportunity to reach out to people. "I feel connected to friends I've never met. After 50, I've got something fresh," she laughs.

DEEPIKA SARMA

Vani Murthy's passion for solid waste management extends to the worms in her garden

Punjab takes lead in ornamental fish farming

To boost the field of ornamental fish culture in Punjab, Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, Punjab is playing an active role.

Different ornamental fish species are being cultured and their breeding is carried out successfully and sold on regular basis to hobbyists, fish sellers etc.

Training

Regular trainings on culture, breeding, aquarium fabrication and maintenance are arranged for farmers, unemployed youth, hobbyists, entrepreneurs and women so that they can adopt this venture as side business or full time activity.

“Our scientist have successfully developed the culture and breeding technology of various ornamental fish species like Gold fish, Comet, Shubunkin, Red head, Koi Carp, Molly, Guppy, Platy and Sword tail varieties,” says Dr. V.K.Taneja, Vice-chancellor.

The breeding trials of these species are carried out regularly at the College. Classes are taken on how to rear the fishes in small sized tanks, cement cisterns (in shady place), glass aquaria, nursery ponds (earthen or cemented) etc. Entrepreneurs are taught to make use of commonly available ingredients such as agricultural by products (groundnut cake, rice polish, wheat bran, maize bran, soybean meal) and animal by products (fish meal, meat meal) either in a powdered or pelleted form as feed for the fishes.

Importance of the physico-chemical parameters of water such as pH, hardness, temperature, dissolved oxygen, chlorine content, and carbon dioxide are also taught to participants to make them aware on the same.

Investment

By following proper rearing and management practices, 4-6 crops/year can be produced regularly.

With an availability of 300-500 sq feet area and an investment of Rs. 75,000 (capital and recurring investment of Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 25,000 respectively) if done properly can give return of Rs. 50,000 a year from a backyard culture unit.

(Dr. Vaneet Inder Kaur, Assistant scientist (fisheries), Department of aquaculture, College of Fisheries, Gadvasu, Ludhiana, Punjab, email: vinnygulati@gmail.com, Phone:0161-2414061.)

Water level

: Water level in the Periyar dam on Wednesday stood at 112.40 feet (136 feet) with an inflow and a discharge of 105 cusecs each. The level in the Vaigai dam was 47.05 feet (71 feet) with no inflow and a discharge of 60 cusecs. The combined Periyar credit stood at 2,185 mcft.

Thaniyamangalam received 28 mm of rainfall followed by Pulipatti 21, Kallandiri 20, Melur 18, Viraghanoor 17, Marudhanadi, Idayapatti and Sittampatti 15 mm each, Kodaikanal 14.6, Mettupatti 13, Sattaiyar dam 12, Peranai 11, Kuppanampatti, Andipatti and Tekkadi 10 mm each, Madurai 8.8, Manjalar dam 6, Gudalur and Uthamapalayam 5 mm each, Veerapandi and Vaigai dam 3 mm each, Sothuparai dam 2 and Periyar dam 1.2 mm. Madurai city received intermittent drizzle for the second day on Wednesday.

Water level in the Papanasam dam on Wednesday stood at 44.05 feet (maximum level is 143 feet). The dam had an inflow of 1,835.22 cusecs and 329.75 cusecs of water was discharged from the dam.

The level of Manimuthar dam stood at 80.60 feet (118 feet). The dam had an inflow of 344 cusecs and 30 cusecs of water was discharged.

Kanyakumari

Water level in Pechipparai dam stood at 3.75 feet feet, 32.10 feet in Perunchani, 4.89 feet in Chittar I, 4.99 feet in Chittar II and 5.60 feet in Poigai dam.

Now, high-protein puffed rice



A super-nutritious, protein-rich form of puffed rice could make it to the breakfast table soon, say researchers in New York.

The current process of making puffed rice by steam can destroy heat-sensitive nutrients. So Syed S.H. Rizvi, professor of food process engineering at Cornell University, New York, looked for a way to avoid that loss and enrich rice with protein and other nutrients during the puffing process.

Rizvi and colleagues turned to a process that uses supercritical carbon dioxide, which has been used for making decaffeinated coffee and in other applications.

The process helped them make puffed rice with three times more protein and eight times more dietary fibre. The puffed rice made also contains calcium, iron, zinc and other nutrients that conventional puffed rice lacks. It was also crispier than commercial products, giving it better taste and crunch.

The new rice is “ideally suited for consumption as breakfast cereal, snack food and as part of nutrition bars for school lunch programmes,” the report said. IANS

Will rice prices see a rise?

Can there be an upsurge in the price of rice? It seems so.

The price tag of most rice kinds in the domestic market sports around Rs 40 a kg, which is Rs 10 more than last year's average price. And there are chances that the prices can move up to Rs.50 or even beyond

The reason: Keralites depend heavily on neighbouring States for their staple food, and they can dictate prices, despite the State and union governments offering subsidised rice in large quantities through public distribution system.

Any time is ripe for the rice prices to climb up. It is the net result of a host of factors linked to lifestyle. Between sunup and sundown, Malaylis' platter will mostly have rice and its offshoots, but efforts to expand paddy acreage have been wobbly.

Keralites' love for '*matta*' or long brown grain variety of rice is one of the important reasons behind the climb in prices, says Varkey Peter, Secretary of Kerala Rice Mill Owners' Association. Paddy cultivation has shrunk over the years and the taste for a particular variety of rice has been counterproductive.

'Jyothi' and a few other varieties of paddy used in the production of *matta* come from Karnataka. Many of the farmers who cultivated Jyothi in the past have switched over to '*Uma*' and other varieties that yield more.

Farmers shifted to the high-yielding variety because the government-sponsored agencies that procure paddy offer the same rate for all varieties of rice.

The fallout: the demand-supply gap for *matta* widened, spiking the rates.

In recent times, paddy tillage in Kerala has fell from 6 lakh hectares to about 2 lakh hectares, says P.K. Pushpangathan, retired agricultural officer. “Farmers ought to get more help from the government to ensure higher acreage under paddy cultivation.”

“There are problems right from the availability of seeds, irrigation and pest control measures. They need a coordinated scientific approach, which is absent today. The government seems to be more focussed on horticulture than paddy,” he says.

Surge in cotton export registrations

The volume of cotton registered for exports is said to have crossed 80 lakh bales, though confirmed data is not available.

CAB estimate

The Cotton Advisory Board (CAB), which met in January this year to estimate the domestic cotton production, consumption and exports, had said that the exportable surplus this year (October 2012 to September 2013) would be 80 lakh bales.

An official source told *The Hindu* that, by mid-February, export registrations had crossed 70 lakh bales and it was expected to be more than 80 lakh bales now.

Rise in prices

Meanwhile, cotton prices have increased by nearly 10 per cent during the last one month.

The price of Shankar-6 variety of cotton, used widely by the Indian textile industry, was Rs.34,000 a candy (355 kg) one month ago and Rs.37,200 a candy on Wednesday.

Mohit D. Shah, Vice-President of the International Cotton Association, said that Indian exports were mainly to China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Turkey and exports were in line with expectations. Other cotton producing countries such as the U.S., Brazil and Australia have also exported “healthy volumes”. China had started releasing its stock into the market.

Trade and industry sources say that actual shipment was estimated to be over 45 lakh bales and the entire registered quantity was likely to be shipped. Cotton arrivals so far were 260 lakh bales, as against the production estimate of 330 lakh bales for the year. Prices might not remain high for long as the purchase by the domestic textile mills had already slowed down and there might not be shortage in availability.

Procurement

The Southern India Mills Association and the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry have appealed to the Cotton Corporation of India to sell the cotton that it had purchased.

This would help stabilise the cotton prices, they say. An official of the Corporation said that it had procured 22 lakh bales through MSP operations this season. "We are in the process of taking a decision regarding sale of the procured cotton," the official said.

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Weather

INDIAN CITIES

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

Chennai

Chennai - INDIA

Today's Weather



Cloudy

Thursday, Mar 7

Max Min

31° | 24°

Rain: 0

Humidity: 100

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:21

Sunset: 06:18

Barometer: 1014

Tomorrow's Forecast



Partly Cloudy

Friday, Mar 8

Max Min

29° | 23°

Extended Forecast for a week

| Saturday Mar 9 | Sunday Mar 10 | Monday Mar 11 | Tuesday Mar 12 | Wednesday Mar 13 |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | |
| 30° 23° | 29° 21° | 29° 20° | 30° 20° | 30° 20° |
| Partly Cloudy | Overcast | Overcast | Overcast | Overcast |

Airport Weather

Delhi

Delhi

Rain: 0

Humidity: 94

Wind: normal

Sunrise: 06:40

Sunset: 06:24

Barometer: 1017



Guilty in farm loan waiver will not be spared: PM

With the opposition launching a scathing attack on government on the alleged irregularities in the farm loan waiver, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday put a strong foot forward, saying "stringent possible action" will be taken against the guilty, if irregularities are found in the scheme.

The PM's assurance came in the Rajya Sabha after the BJP created an uproar over the issue.

"The reference is to the CAG report on loan waiver scheme. This is a matter which should be entrusted to the Public Accounts Committee as per the practice. If there are any irregularities, which have been shown, I assure the House that we will take stringent possible action against the defaulters," Singh said.

His statement came after BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad raised the issue during the Zero Hour. Dissatisfied by the PM's reply, the BJP members rushed into the well after which the House was adjourned for a while.

Prasad said the CAG report points out that 34 lakh people who should not have got the loan waiver benefit got it while 24 lakh actual beneficiaries were left out. "It is a case of clear scam," the BJP leader said.

The Lower House also resonated with the demands for arraignment of swindlers in the farm loan waiver scheme in the wake of CAG report, prompting the PM to promise "stringent possible action" against defaulters, if any. The House saw an hour-long adjournment over the issue after which the government agreed to have a debate on it.

No fraud, says Jharkhand bank

Ranchi: Jharkhand Gramin Bank, which has been accused by the CAG of R1.62 lakh irregularity in UPA's 2008 farm debt waiver scheme, has said there is no scam but simply mistakes due to flaws in the scheme. The bank categorically denied crediting debt waiver amount as reported by the CAG, but accepted granting excess benefit in some cases. "This has happened due to several gaping holes in the scheme. There is no fraud," said a senior officer of the Gramin Bank.

Good money after bad

The UPA's huge farm loan waiver, as fiscal hawks saw it, was always going to be about "bad economics". The Comptroller and Auditor General's criticism of the scheme now makes it a political failure too. For a government facing a general election in about a year's time, this is really bad news.

The UPA, as part of its budget proposals in 2008-09, had announced a "debt waiver and relief package", of around Rs. 71,000 crore. The very idea was to spread cheer all around. The scheme sought to write off, partly or wholly, the loans of 42 million largely small-time farmers. Debt forgiveness has two main objectives.

The social goal is to promote "well-being". The financial objective, in this case, was to make "blacklisted" farmers eligible for "fresh loans" to get going again.

As with most of the government's well-intentioned schemes, this one too has not delivered on its promise. One in five farmers who got the benefit was ineligible for it.

Providing fresh loans to blacklisted farmers only promotes financial irresponsibility. The waiver turned a large amount of private debt into public debt. If the government cannot pay off its own loans, many might ask, whom does it turn to for funds. Why, it goes back to the people and makes them pay through higher taxes and other means.

Yet, a lifeline was desperately needed. Millions of farmers had fallen on hard times. The crisis was triggering off suicides. Small farmers, those owning less than a hectare (2.5 acres), face bigger challenges: they spend more on cultivation, but earn less, unable to match the scales of big farms. By many international standards, debt relief isn't such a dirty word.

President Clinton had signed a historic legislation for \$435m (about Rs. 2,600 crore) in debt relief for HIPC nations (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries). But generosity gone to waste only strengthens the case against freebies. India's inability to manage or finance large schemes efficiently could endanger future proposals.

The failure this time lies in a shocking structural disconnect. India's financial agents, employed to execute the farm loan waiver, simply did not seem to share the sense of national urgency for financial discipline. And so another scheme fell through the cracks.

Distressed Andhra Pradesh farmers selling organs to escape debt trap



Several marginal and small farmers in Andhra Pradesh were denied the benefit of farm loan waiver scheme and hence continued to remain in agricultural debt trap.

NEW DELHI: Almost five years after the UP government allocated the lion's share of its Rs52,000 crore [farm loan waiver scheme](#) to Andhra Pradesh, reports are emerging from the state that distressed farmers are selling their organs to come out of the agricultural debt trap.

Three states - Andhra Pradesh, UP and Maharashtra - had got almost 57% of the Rs 52,000 crore package meant for all 35 states and Union Territories. Disbursal in Andhra Pradesh was Rs 11,000 crore while it was Rs 9,095 crore in UP and Rs 8,900 crore in Maharashtra.


The farm loan waiver has been cited as one of the main vote-catchers for the Congress in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls and this was vindicated in the party's handsome performance in the three states with the largest allocations. While Congress bagged 31 seats in Andhra, it got 22 in UP and 16 in Maharashtra, a performance which facilitated formation of the second UPA government at the Centre.

In Andhra Pradesh, around 77 lakh farmers cornered more than Rs 11,000 crore, almost 21% of the total farm loan waiver package. But as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report reveals, a huge number of ineligible farmers were allowed waiver while many marginal and small farmers were denied the benefit and they continued to remain in a debt trap.

[CAG](#) detected tampering with loan records, alteration in ledgers and changing records where non-agricultural loans were converted into agricultural loans.

In one such instance, the auditor pointed out how the AP Grameen Bank in Ballikurava had altered land holdings of at least 17 loanees so as to alter their category and make them eligible for full waiver in the marginal farmer category. These irregularities were noticed not just in Andhra Pradesh but across several states where sample study was carried out by the auditor.

| IN THE DOLDRUMS | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| States | Beneficiary farmers | Waiver (₹ cr) |
| Andhra Pradesh | 776L | 11,353 |
| Maharashtra | 42.5L | 8,951 |
| UP | 54.2L | 9,095 |



Source: CAG

The CAG's sample study was carried out over 715 bank branches in 92 districts of 25 states involving more than 80,000 farmers' loan accounts. The disbursement to these farmers amounted to Rs 330 crore.

In Andhra Pradesh, scrutiny of 3,200 loan accounts revealed that in at least 132 cases, ineligible benefits were allowed, highest among all states bar J&K where the sample study found ineligible benefits were allowed to 153 farmers. In close to 100 cases in Andhra Pradesh, the CAG found benefits extended to farmers on loans which were not disbursed in the first place.

RBI asks banks to scan farm loan waiver beneficiaries

MUMBAI: The [Reserve Bank of India](#) has asked banks to verify whether each and every beneficiary of [farm loan waiver](#) qualified under the scheme announced by the government. It has asked banks to immediately recover the full amount in cases where benefits were extended to ineligible beneficiaries.

"Considering the serious nature of observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General, it has been, inter alia, desired by the Government of India that: The beneficiaries' lists need complete verification with priority being given to areas where indebtedness was high," said RBI in a statement to bank chiefs.

RBI's communication comes a day after the [CAG report](#) on the Rs 52,000-crore

farm loan waiver schemes of 2008 was tabled in Parliament on Tuesday. The report highlighted irregularities in over a fifth of the cases audited by it. CAG had gone through over 90,000 accounts and found lapses in over 20,000 cases.

Bankers say that it is possible that there may have been unintended beneficiaries under the scheme. RBI's priority sector guidelines require banks to provide low-cost loans to farmers. In the south, many borrowers have taken advantage of the farm loan scheme to raise low-cost funds using gold jewellery as collateral. This helped banks achieve targets and enabled some people misuse the facility to raise cheap loans for consumption or purchase of non-farm assets.

"Administrative/accounting lapses on the part of officials, internal auditors and statutory auditors who were responsible for verification, certification, or for passing the claims be identified and accountability fixed for the lapses. Action needs to be initiated and full responsibility be fixed at the earliest with no exceptions," RBI said in its circular. The central bank said that cases of extending benefits to ineligible beneficiaries must be dealt with on top priority and full recoveries as per law must be made to ensure no loss to the exchequer. "It will be the personal responsibility of the institutional heads to ensure that such recoveries are effected in full," the circular said.

RBI has informed bankers that debt waiver/relief certificates must be issued in all eligible cases immediately and full records of such issuance should be kept ready for inspection.

Bank chairmen have also been asked to draw up a list of eligible beneficiaries who were not extended benefits and to examine qualitatively reasons for such denials.

"Action may be initiated in all cases where mala fide or carelessness appears likely," RBI said.

Banks have been asked to submit details of cases where reimbursement under the scheme has been granted to microfinance institutions rather than directly to beneficiaries as provided under the scheme.

Loan waiver fraud in the name of farmers

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on the massive loan waiver scheme confirms the suspicion that it was not properly implemented. When the UPA-1 government announced the scheme in 2008, it was widely believed that the intention was to influence the elections due in a year's time. The CAG has found that 22 per cent of the beneficiaries of the scheme did not deserve it. Not only that, a large number of farmers who should have benefited from the scheme were excluded because they did not have any powerful benefactors. Worse, those who wrote off the loans did not strictly adhere to the rules framed for the purpose. In other words, the scheme was grossly misused.

Since the total amount of loans written off is a staggering ` 52,000 crore, out of which 22 per cent was misappropriated, as calculated by the CAG, the loss to the exchequer is upwards of ` 10,000 crore. Unlike other scandals like the helicopter deal, where the beneficiaries of kickback are only a few people, there are a large number of people involved in this one. Only a proper investigation by the CBI will reveal the extent of the siphoning off of public funds and the persons involved in it. The politicians, bankers and the bureaucrats, responsible for the fraud, should be brought to book. Incidentally, the ruling Congress has a rich tradition of organising, first, loan melas and, then, loan waiver schemes.

This has, over the years, vitiated the atmosphere in the rural areas. The farmers have come to believe that loans obtained from government institutions need not be paid back. This has adversely affected their creditworthiness, which is not a welcome proposition. The incident also highlights the need to address the primary causes of the growing impoverishment of the farmers which leads to suicides. Neither loans, nor loan waivers will solve the problems the farmers face in these days of globalisation and urbanisation making farm labour prohibitively expensive.



Farm loan waiver: Stringent action against defaulters, says PM

With the opposition targeting the government on alleged irregularities in the farm loan waiver scheme, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today promised "stringent possible action" against defaulters, if any.

The Prime Minister's assurance came in the Rajya Sabha as BJP created uproar over the alleged "siphoning off" of farmers' money and a "scam" in the scheme in the wake of the CAG report.

"The reference is to the CAG report on loan waiver scheme. This is a matter which should be entrusted to the Public Accounts Committee as per normal practice. If there are any irregularities, which have been shown, I assure the House that we will take stringent possible action against the defaulters," Singh said in impromptu comments.

His statement came after BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad raised the issue during Zero Hour, alleging scam in the scheme and his colleagues attacked the government over it.

Unimpressed by the Prime Minister's reply, BJP members trooped into the well forcing Deputy Chairman P J Kurien to adjourn the House for a brief period.

Earlier, Prasad said the CAG report points out that 34 lakh people who should not have got the loan waiver benefit actually got it while 24 lakh farmers who deserved it, could not get it.

"It is a case of clear scam. Bank officials in connivance with the middlemen siphoned off the money of farmers," Prasad said recalling that the Prime Minister himself had visited Vidharbha in Maharashtra to launch the scheme.

"It is unfortunate that a scam is happening even in this scheme," Prasad said, adding micro-financing companies are the actual beneficiaries at the cost of farmers even as incidents of farmers' suicides are taking place in many states including Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

As BJP members rushed into the Well shouting slogans that the "anti-farmer government" would not be allowed to run, Kurien said it was "unfair" that they are obstructing the functioning of the House after expressing what they wanted to say.

"You had your say and now you are preventing others. The Prime Minister has responded, what more do you want? I will not adjourn the House," he said as BJP members continued to shout slogans.

But, as the members continued with slogan shouting in the Well, he adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

Prasad earlier said the "tampering of accounts" was done and non-deserving people were given loans.

He also read a circular of the Reserve Bank of India asking banks to take action against the guilty within a fortnight.

After the end of Question Hour, Kurien called Railway Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal to lay a statement correcting minor errors in the railway budget document after other papers were laid on the table.

However, as Bansal was not present in the House, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Rajiv Shukla said he would be in the House within 15 minutes.

RBI swings into action after CAG picks holes in farm debt relief scheme

Asks banks to take immediate action against officials responsible for lapses



A day after a Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report pointed out irregularities in the Rs 71,680-crore agricultural debt waiver and debt relief scheme of 2008, the Reserve Bank of India today swung into action. It asked lenders to verify all the accounts granted benefits under the scheme.

RBI said administrative and accounting lapses on the part of officials and auditors should be identified and immediately corrected and action initiated, without any exception.

The cases where ineligible accounts were extended benefits, RBI said, should be dealt with and recoveries made on priority to ensure there was no loss to the exchequer. Recovering such amounts fully would be the personal responsibility of institutional heads, it said. This implies, chairman & managing directors of public-sector banks and chief executives of private-sector banks would be held responsible for such recoveries.

All the cases of tampering of records should be identified and stringent action, under relevant sections of the law, initiated, RBI said, adding chief vigilance officers should monitor the action regularly.

In the cases where debt waiver certificates were not issued to eligible farmers, immediate issuance and proper record-keeping for inspection were asked for, indicating RBI planned to study those at the time of annual inspection of banks.

The central bank also asked banks to prepare a list of all eligible farmers not given benefits under the scheme and examine why. In the cases where action appeared to be with malafide intention or carelessness, action should be initiated, it added.

Action-taken information on all these points would have to be sent to RBI before seventh of every month.

CAG had, in its report tabled in Parliament yesterday, criticised the Department of Financial Services and RBI over lapses in the scheme. The central bank had told CAG its role was of a mere passthrough agency, and not a monitoring authority, in the scheme. The government auditor had, however, rejected this argument, saying: "Audit doesn't agree with RBI's response, as guidelines issued by DFS required RBI and Nabard to put in place a system for monitoring the progress and implementation of the scheme on a daily basis till July 2008 and on a weekly basis thereafter."

THE HINDU Business Line

Season's special



Luscious and juicy: A vendor sells red strawberry fruits in Mumbai on Wednesday. The fruits come from Mahabaleshwar near Mumbai. January-April is the yielding season for the fruit that sells at Rs 140 a kg in Mumbai. —

Paul Noronha

Sugar sector needs holistic policy



Mumbai, March 6: Sugar decontrol is on the cards. The least that is likely to happen is the abolition of 'levy system' (compulsory procurement of sugar at below-market prices) and withdrawal of the free-sale quotas.

In other words, sugar mills will not be required to surrender a part of the production to the Government and will be free to sell their entire production according to their own business plan.

To meet the requirement for the public distribution system, the Government will buy sugar from the open market; and the difference between such open market purchase price and PDS supply price will be absorbed as subsidy.

To meet the subsidy burden, additional revenue is proposed to be raised through a hike in excise duty on manufacture of sugar.

Decontrol does not just mean removal of some restrictions. In spirit, it means much more. There are a few more issues relating to the sugar sector that deserve close attention.

There is demand in some quarters that the statutory minimum price for cane should be abolished and free market pricing must be introduced. This damaging suggestion deserves to be rejected right away.

The statutory price is a critical support system for cane growers who should not be subject to the unintended oppression of a free-market system.

A more important aspect is cash flow for growers.

Because cane is a 12-14 month crop, cane growers have to wait for over a year to realise some income. Even here, more often than not, mills keep huge arrears of payment. This must stop. There is also a suggestion that growers should be free to sell to any mill irrespective of zoning restriction.

Keeping all these in mind, an equitable solution would be for the mills and growers to agree in advance on the quantity of cane to be traded; and the mill should provide an advance to the grower say half way through the crop production cycle or six months.

This will result in a formal arrangement, whereby, the grower has received an advance and the mill is sure of receiving the contracted quantity when harvested.

At the time of harvest, the grower may be free to sell to anyone the quantity, if any, not contracted for by any mill.

The next tricky issue is the cyclical nature of cane crop. This cyclicity has to be effectively broken; and sustained flow of raw material should be ensured season after season.

Climate change and risk of water shortage are likely to pose a serious challenge in future to cane cultivation. This calls for redoubling of research efforts to get sugarcane climate-ready.

Also needed are policy initiatives to infuse stability in the market. We need a stable and open foreign trade policy.

The government should keep export and import open and not tinker with the trade policy. Tariff measures (customs duty on export or

import) should be used to either encourage or discourage export trade depending on market conditions and prices.

With nearly 600 sugar mills dotting the country's landscape – many of them with modest or sub-optimal capacity for cane crushing – the industry as a whole is losing scale-economies. Fragmentation must give way to consolidation and modernisation.

Removing the levy system and free-sale quotas is critical; but they alone cannot lend competitiveness to this industry.

A holistic approach with a long-term perspective to sugar decontrol is necessary.

Cashew logistics meet opens today

Kochi, March 6: Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI), the apex organisation of Indian Cashew Exporters, is organising Logistikaju 2013, a two-day event in Kollam on March 7-8.

The Indian Cashew Logistics Meet will start on March 7 evening with sessions on international logistics, national logistics and individual presentations by service providers.

There will be facility for one-to-one business interactions for which networking tables will be available CEPCI sources said.

This event is being organised in the light of the present Raw Cashew season in West African countries, special availability of RCN shipping, sailings from African ports to Cochin, Tuticorin, Mangalore and Vishakapatnam and the local movement of cashews from Cochin and Tuticorin to Kollam.

Logistikaju 2013 would be an ideal opportunity for the processors /traders to address their special needs to the relevant shipping/logistics companies, K. Sasi Varma, CEPCI Executive Director and Secretary, said. It will also provide ample space for shipping /logistics companies, steamer agents/lines, CHAs/C&F

agents, brokers/suppliers, insurance companies, port agencies, freight operators, river - sea vessel operators, etc to interact with processors and exporters of cashew.

Year's lowest offer at Coonoor tea sale

Coonoor, March 6: The arrival for the auctions of Coonoor Tea Trade Association continues to decline following prolonged dry weather, limiting the harvest of the green leaf supplied as raw material to factories.

Most factories are working only for three days in a week and that too, a single shift.

The offer for Sale No: 10 of auctions to be held on Thursday and Friday have declined to the lowest volume offered so far this calendar.

Of the 9.60 lakh kg coming up for sale, about 88,000 kg comprise teas which had remained unsold in the previous auctions.

Fresh tea accounts for only 8.72 lakh kg – among the lowest so far this year.

This volume is as much as 1.37 lakh kg less than the hitherto lowest volume offered last week and some 86,000 kg less than the offer this time last year.

Of the 9.60 lakh kg on offer, 7.14 lakh kg belong to the leaf grades and 2.46 lakh kg belong to the dust grades. As much as 8.90 lakh kg belong to CTC variety and only 0.70 lakh kg, orthodox variety. The proportion of orthodox teas continues to be low in both the leaf and dust grades. In the leaf counter, only 0.40 lakh kg belong to orthodox while 6.74 lakh kg, CTC. Among the dusts, only 0.30 lakh kg belong to orthodox while 2.16 lakh kg, CTC.

Spot rubber improves

Kottayam, March 6: Spot rubber improved on Wednesday. The market continued to post moderate gains on fresh buying and short covering reacting favourably to the news and expectations specific to the commodity.

According to observers, sellers preferred to stay back despite a weak closing on the National Multi Commodity Exchange (NMCE). The trend was partially mixed.

Sheet rubber finished unchanged at Rs 159.00 a kg as quoted by the traders. The grade increased to Rs 159.00 (Rs 158.00) both at Kottayam and Kochi according to the Rubber Board.

In futures, the March series closed steady at Rs 158.40 (Rs 158.40) while the April series weakened to Rs 162.07 (Rs 162.94), May to Rs 165.40 (Rs 166.33) and June to Rs 168.42 (Rs 168.77) on the NMCE.

RSS 3 (spot) slid to Rs 164.17 (Rs 164.30) at Bangkok. March futures dropped to ¥271.5 (Rs 159.38) on the Tokyo Commodity Exchange (TOCOM).

The spot rubber rates Rs/kg were: RSS-4: 159.00 (159.00); RSS-5: 155.00 (154.00); Ungraded: 152.00 (151.00); ISNR 20: 155.00 (154.00) and Latex 60%: 102.00 (101.00).

No tea auction in Kolkata for want of stock

Kolkata, March 6: There will be no tea auction in Kolkata centre next week and also in the last week of March.

“Sale Nos 11 and 13 have been dropped as there will be no tea available for auctioning”, according to a spokesman for J. Thomas & Company Private Ltd, auctioneers.

“Precisely for the same reasons, there were no auctions last week in Guwahati and Siliguri and this week at Siliguri”.

The dry spell in Assam and Dooars has dealt a blow to the early crop.

Ideally, there should be 210 mm of rainfall between November and March but this year, it is estimated at around 70-75 mm so far. The last 10 years’ average (for the period) has been 180-190 mm. As a result, the plucking of first flush is being delayed this year.

Last week at Kolkata auctions, the prices of both orthodox and CTC varieties were up.

“There is nothing unusual about it as every year during this time of the year, the arrival of orthodox, including Darjeeling drops, this being end of the season”, he said.

The impact of the present dry spell on tea prices, it is pointed out, will be felt only in the first and second week of April when the new season tea is due to arrive.

If the arrival continues to be uncertain at that time, the auctions in all three North Indian centres might have to be dropped in the first week of April.

‘Govt move to hike rubber import duty will hit SME units’

Kochi, March 6: Protest is brewing among the rubber industry over the Government’s move to hike import duty on natural rubber. Small-scale rubber units, around 4,500 across different clusters, have represented to the ministers of Commerce, Finance and MSME to reconsider the proposed duty hike. All-India Rubber Industries Association (AIRIA), the representative body of small and micro rubber units, has pleaded with the Government that the proposed 70 per cent increase in duty on import of natural rubber will severely hit the SME rubber units and around 4.5 lakh people

working, therein. There is no significant differential in the current domestic and international rubber prices which should warrant a drastic action on the lines proposed, it said.

According to Rubber Board data, the price differential between domestic and international rubber prices is currently less than five per cent. The main concern of rubber growers and their representatives that there was significant price differential to the tune of Rs 20/kg necessitating import curbs was no longer the case, Niraj Thakkar, President, All-India Rubber Industries Association, said in a statement.

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Minimum import price may be fixed for cardamom



New Delhi, March 6: The Government is weighing the option of imposing a minimum import price on cardamom to check import of cheap varieties from countries such as Guatemala, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. This has local growers worried.

This will be in addition to the increased vigilance and crackdown on illegal imports of the spice at various customs stations.

The Commerce Department is looking at various ways to check import of cheap cardamom and barring imports below a minimum price is certainly one of the options, an official in the Commerce and Industry Ministry told *Business Line*.

“Several industrial groups and politicians, including Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy have raised their voices against cheap import of cardamom in their meetings with Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma.

“The Minister has asked his officials to look at all options to check cheap imports, including imposition of a minimum import price,” the official said.

falling prices

Cardamom growers have been complaining about falling prices but the Spices Board, the Government’s body for development and promotion of spices, says that the drop is not significant.

While imports took place in the latter half of 2012 and early 2013, there was no perceptible decline in auction average prices which were ranging between Rs 696 a kg and Rs 787 from June 2012 to January 2013, it said.

Imports of cardamom in the last nine months have also been moderate at about 200 tonnes, the Spice Board said.

Growers allege that a large amount of cardamom is also being illegally imported into the country via Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan that does not get counted in the import figures.

“The Spices Board is already in touch with the Customs commissioners in various ports where there are reports of smuggling happening and action would be taken against the offenders,” the official said.

The Commerce Department is looking at the option of putting in place a minimum import price to minimise the chances of cheap imports coming in from the legal channel, he added.

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Decision likely today on more wheat exports



New Delhi, March 6: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Thursday will decide on allowing more wheat exports from Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns, said Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar.

The Government has been contemplating allowing additional wheat exports of about five million tonnes (mt) as pressure builds up to clear stocks and make storage space for the new crop to be harvested from early April.

So far, the Government has allowed exports of 4.5 mt from the Central pool stocks, of which over two mt have been shipped out by the State-owned entities such as PEC, MMTC and STC.

“The proposal on wheat export is on the agenda of tomorrow’s meeting of the CCEA. Let’s see what will happen,” Pawar told reporters on the sidelines of the Kharif 2013 conference.

More on cards

The CCEA may also decide on giving the private trade access to the Central pool wheat stocks for exports.

As on February 1, wheat stocks in the Central pool stood at 30.80 mt, against the actual requirement of 11.2 m t.

The Government, which is expecting a bumper wheat harvest in the current year, aims to procure a record 44 mt in the 2013-14 rabi marketing year starting April.

Castor inches up on export offtake



Rajkot, March 6: Castor price was marginally up after witnessing a slide last week. However, mixed trend was prevailing on the NCDEX while prices improved on the RCX . According to market sources, export demand has emerged at this level leading to a rise in prices of the oilseed.

On the Rajkot Commodity Exchange, castor March contract rose Rs 3 to Rs 3,759 a quintal and June series gained Rs 4 to Rs 3,960. Spot castor was higher by Rs 10 to Rs 3,545.

About 75,000-80,000 bags of castor arrived in Gujarat quoting Rs 702-712 for 20 kg. Around 4,800-5,000 bags arrived in Saurashtra and price was Rs 675-706.

On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), castor March series gained Rs 16 to Rs 3,657 with an open interest of 4,840 lots. NCDEX April contract declined by a nominal Re 1 to Rs 3,754 with an open interest of 164,080 lots.

According to brokers, shippers demand emerged at this level and prices may not fall further as export demand is likely to rise in coming days. With this, lower production data may also encourage stockists to buy.
