January 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 23RD TO JANUARY 29TH 2017

SIGNS OF RECOVERY IN AGRICULTURE

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 23rd, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

DURING the first half of the current fiscal year, agriculture has braved some challenges while a few more need to be tackled to meet this sector's growth target of 3.5pc for this year.

The target for FY17 was set following a 0.2pc contraction in FY16 thus providing a humble base for this year's growth.

The key assumptions about the performance of various sub-sectors of agriculture are yet to be realised. One of them is a projected growth of 2.5pc in the output of ginned cotton. But that's not going to happen because cotton production looks set to miss the original target of 14.1m bales by a wide margin. By end-December 10.36m bales (of 170kg) had arrived in ginneries. According to the latest estimate of the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee the total production this season would be around 10.542m bales.

Cotton output, though 11.7pc higher on YoY basis (till December 2016) and despite higher per hectare yield, remains far off from the original target chiefly due to a 20pc fall in the area under cultivation in Punjab as farmers there and elsewhere in the country had lost some of their interest in the crop after heavy pest attacks and low domestic prices in FY16.

Now pest management and prices both have improved but only after cotton growers switched over to maize, sugarcane and some other minor crops.

That is why sugarcane output this year has reached 71m tonnes against the target of 67.5m tonnes, according to the SBP data. Sugarcane's long perceived edge in profitability over cotton led to an 8pc increase in the area under cane cultivation, also helped by adequate supply of irrigation water to cane fields that made up for shortage in rainfalls, officials and growers say.

The same is true for maize production that, according to the officials of Ministry of National Food Security and Research, could touch 5.2-5.4m tonnes, against the last year's 5m tonnes.

Production of rice, however, is being estimated at 6.64m tonnes during this fiscal year, down 2.5pc from 6.81m tonnes a year ago due to a slight fall in the area under cultivation primarily in Punjab but also in Sindh. Per-hectare yields of non-Basmati rice varieties have reportedly enhanced rice output by 3.6pc in Sindh owing to increase in the cultivated area.

Output of wheat is expected to remain up to achieve the target of 26m tonnes, officials and growers say, citing reasons like usage of high-yielding varieties, improved farming practices and the modest increase in its cultivation area.

In the first half of FY17 (July-Jan 2016), pest attack on cotton and insufficient rainfall for sugarcane and other crops plus high input prices emerged as big challenges. Pest management was improved, through awareness campaigns and irrigation water supplies were higher (owing to newly built small dams), thus offsetting the impact of lesser rainfalls.

Fertiliser subsidy was offered for kharif crops and has now been extended for rabi crops as well. Besides, more agricultural lending by banks in 1HFY17 also helped growers meet input costs. Growers will not be too tight on cash, officials claim.

However, such issues as mismanagement in supply of subsidised inputs and banks' tendency to ignore smaller provinces in farm credit distribution still pose challenges.

The agricultural sector's targeted growth of 3.5pc for this fiscal year also relies on a 4pc rate growth in livestock. People associated with livestock point out that in the absence of proper animal census (that was due in 2016 but has so far not been completed), cattle breeders and animal farmers remain clueless in drawing up business strategies.

At a recent meeting with the Punjab authorities dealing with livestock, it was pointed out by animal breeders that 30-40pc of cattle in Punjab are found suffering from pox (Mata). They also referred to a decreasing trend in animal population that cannot be verified without animal census.

In the midst of these issues, some positive developments have also taken place in the same period. Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Board (PLDDB) got a breakthrough in its efforts to show ways of boosting milk production of weak cows and buffaloes by obtaining a higher (8.4 litres per day per animal result) from as low as 5 litres a day.

Besides, PLDDB's programme for helping small farmers in storing green fodder without first drying it, through 60kg silage bale models, got adequate response from livestock breeders, officials claim. They say a large number of small cattle owners in Punjab are now benefiting from it.

Officials argue that livestock sector's performance reflects itself, partly in performance of food and milk processing companies and going by that, it seems that this sector did well in the first half of FY17. Unlike in the case of field crops where data collection is a regular affair, officials admit that even such key indices of livestock performance like, production of milk and meat are worked out on the basis of inter-census growth rate of animal census between 1996 and 2006.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1310064

RAINS BRING HOPE TO FARMERS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 23rd, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE current rain spell has improved the environment for the crops' growth. According to the metrological officials, Pakistan broke its 60-year record of hot December.

The combination of drought and high mercury levels during winter affected agricultural activity, especially for the rabi crops, across the country.

The January spell of rains has, by and large, put the cropping cycle back on its feet. Since the rains were widespread, slow and steady, crops in fields countrywide received clean environment, increased photosynthetic activity, required temperatures and water supply.

According to the crop watchers, wheat, which had lost around 5pc area, especially in barani (rainfed) lands, due to absence of rain, would get maximum advantage. The three districts falling under the rainfed category in Punjab saw a substantial drop in wheat sowing this season. Rawalpindi district lost 16pc, Attock 27pc and Chakwal 20pc. Farmers from the canal-fed areas had reported that wheat was only gaining height rather than branching out. However, with the current wet spell, the crop is washed, temperature is conducive for the soil to retain moisture. The crop is likely to make up for the recent weather-driven losses in its final yield this season.

The gram crop, which, almost entirely is cultivated in the barani-belt and is totally dependent on rains for its water needs, could be counted next in this benefit index.

Owing to the dry spell in the last four months, the crop had lost almost 100,000 acres in sowing, along with germination issues, this season. These factors had made the final estimated figures of production doubtful. The crop, still spread over 22,100 acres in the barani areas, should get more strength if the rains prevail for a while.

The sugarcane crop welcomes any amount of water, regardless of its source. So, the cane is sure to benefit. However, the return of wintery conditions accompanying the rains make the farmers fear about formation of frost in the fields.

The frost also delays the sowing of maize as it does not support conditions for its germination. Maize sowing starts by mid-January and extends into February, so the farmers are now keeping their fingers crossed.

Luckily, the potato crop, nearing harvesting, has escaped the weather-driven stress. Frost may not have much impact on it as early harvesting has already started and would surely gain momentum in the days to come. However, the country has a history of frost in early February; the farmers are not completely dismissing the fear.

Apart from the cropping cycle, the major benefit of the rains will be reaped by the irrigation system. Though these rains would not affect the river flows much, they have delivered some direct benefits. For example, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) had counted 1.2MAF conveyance between October 1, 2016 and January 10. They have come down to only 0.2m cusecs as the rains washed the river beds and slowed down seepage.

On the basis of these savings, the authority, as per its own record, now able to supply 20.30MAF of water against the promised 19MAF. The authority, for the first time in the last few months, now feels that it might have a chance to start the kharif season with some water in its kitty. Earlier, it had warned the provinces that they may face shortages by mid-February.

Irsa’s optimism is generated by the fact that the lower hills have received more snow than rain. This snow on lower altitudes would start melting at the first raze of warmth, probably by mid-February and increase flows in early risers like River Jhelum and Kabul.

The Irsa thinks that it would continue with the earlier warning of 17pc water shortage even if there is some relief and save the water for early kharif rather than releasing it now.

The stated logic for preferring to stick with 17pc shortage warning is that the provinces have already submitted their plans by factoring in the shortages, so it will be possible for them to spend their water share in a frugal manner.

Both the agriculture and water experts in Punjab agree that the current rains might have cut the field water shortage by 3-4pc only, given their small span but they have certainly engineered better conditions for the crops to benefit from during this season.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1310063/rains-bring-hope-to-farmers

GEN RAHEEL GETS 90 ACRES FOR AGRICULTURE
Dawn January 25th, 2017

Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: The allotment of 90 acres of prime land here to former army chief Gen Raheel Sharif sparks a lot of debate despite security establishment's explanation that there was nothing out of the ordinary about it.

The land in the Bedian Road area has been in focus since rumours first appeared about Gen Raheel being awarded the 90 acres. These were followed by news reports questioning the logic behind the grant of land.

On Tuesday a security establishment official told Dawn there was nothing unusual about the allotment. Over the last few years, the Bedian Road stretch, around where Gen Raheel's land is located, has turned into a favourite haunt of the moneyed people looking for a privileged farm-house living away from the humdrum of the city. This has sent prices skyrocketing there.

It is believed the entry of an ex-army chief like Gen Raheel Sharif, who had previously donated a plot meant for residential purposes to the army's martyrs, will enhance the profile of the locality.

As per rules, such allotments to army officials are decided at the General Headquarters (GHQ) and conveyed to the Border Area Committee concerned.

The official said there was "nothing unusual' about the land allotment. Gen Raheel Sharif was allotted the land "in accordance with the existing rules and purely on merit," he said.

"It is agricultural land and will be used for this purpose alone. It will not be used for commercial purpose as is the impression being created by some," the official said in an obvious reference to the stories carried in the media.

The commercial value does not affect the case of Gen Raheel's land since, as the security establishment officials insist, this agricultural land cannot be transferred.

"Every army chief gets a similar volume of agricultural land on retirement," the official said, adding the land allotted to Gen Raheel was located some 5km from Lahore's border area.

About the timing of the allotment of the land to the former army chief that is December 2014, he said: "The process of the allotment of agricultural land begins during the tenure of an army chief and he is given possession upon his retirement."

The Punjab government's role in it is minimal. All it does in such cases is register the allotment of property in its revenue record.

"It is the Border Area Committee which secures the land in the radius of 5km of the border and it is allotted to the army martyrs and officials. The Border Area Committee allocates land in collaboration with the General Headquarters (GHQ). The Revenue department of the provincial government maintains its record," Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah told Dawn.

"It is not the discretion of the Punjab government to allot this land to any one," he added.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1310568

WWF, AGRI DEPT SIGN MOU FOR BETTER COTTON PRODUCTION
Business Recorder, 28 January 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department, Extension wing signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan's (WWF-Pakistan) on 'Better Cotton Initiative' (BCI) here on Friday to undertake agriculture specific activities focused on widespread dissemination and promotion of the Better Cotton Standard System (BCSS) in the province.

The formal agreement was signed by Hammad Naqi Khan, Director General WWF-Pakistan; Dr Muhammad Anjum Ali, Director General AED-Punjab; and Lena Staafgard, Programme Director Global Supply BCI in presence of Muhammad Mahmood, Secretary Agriculture Punjab. The MoU forges a partnership of 5 years between the organisations starting from January 2017 and ending in December 2021.

To achieve BCI's main objective of mainstreaming Better Cotton standards, the plan is divided into 3 phases which may work in parallel in different project areas. The first 2 years will make up the first phase of the project whereas WWF-Pakistan will work as the main implementing partner with collaboration in field implementation from AED-Punjab.

The third and fourth year, the second phase of the project, will see a reduction in WWF-Pakistan's role in direct field implementation activities and the organisation will assume the role of a strategic partner. In the third phase of the project starting from fifth year, WWF-Pakistan will continue working as a BCI strategic partner in the province and AED-Punjab will take over all field related implementation activities, as core BCI implementing partner in order to mainstream BCSS in the province.

Talking on the occasion Hammad Naqi Khan expressed his willingness to partner with other provinces in the country to help making agricultural commodities like cotton and sugarcane part of a sustainable industry and make its production environment friendly and reduce its footprint on priority ecosystems. “WWF-Pakistan believes in collaborating with all stakeholders and working together towards a sustainable future. Our organisation is already in a formal partnership with AED-Baluchistan for the capacity building of organic cotton farmers and plans to extend these good practices to other provinces soon.”

Dr Muhammad Anjum Ali welcomed the opportunity to be partner with WWF-Pakistan and looked forward to a sustainable agricultural future for the province.

Organic cotton is grown without using any chemical fertilizers or pesticides and is cultivated on land that is detoxified from residues of chemical fertilizers and pesticides over a period of at least 3 years. The seeds used to grow organic cotton are not genetically modified and are kept clean from chemical impurities during processing and packaging. The transformation will take place under the supervision of WWF-Pakistan and an independent certified verifying body, which will carry out vigilant inspection on the quality of the cotton crop.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics agriculture contributes about 24 percent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for half of employed labour force. It is also the largest source of foreign exchange earnings for the country. Hence, agriculture plays a vital role in the economy of Pakistan and cotton is an integral part of it.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/28/8-page/845044-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 16TH TO JANUARY 22 ND 2017

BALANCING AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 16th, 2017

Khaleeq Kiani

It would have been an insensitive trade-off to lose rural support after substantial public investment in the agriculture package while winning over the urban political base with incentives to exporters ahead of the 2018 elections.

Therefore, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif moved swiftly, under widespread political pressure, to restore the subsidy on fertiliser 72 hours after the ministry of National Food Security and Research announced its withdrawal.

The latest decision was taken following a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet that noted surplus stocks, not only with private fertiliser companies but also imported stocks lying with the state-run National Fertiliser Marketing Limited (NFML).

The move meant diverting part of the subsidy to the NFML to clear around 300,000 stocks that would have otherwise led to the creation of another circular debt. Over the next few days, the government is expected to allow private sector export of substantial fertiliser quantities to improve cash flows on the back of enhanced international prices.

The NFML ran an advertisement campaign a day after the NFSR ministry notification, saying the subsidy would continue on imported fertiliser that was available in abundance throughout NFML countrywide outlets.

Although the ECC did not take a formal decision to suspend fertiliser subsidy, it had signalled to the NFSR ministry to do so based on a position paper that claimed it had become a challenge for the NFML to compete with private fertiliser producers who were not only using the subsidy but also other price competition tricks to get rid of their surplus stocks, built over the past few months, owing to continuous supply of Liquefied Natural Gas.

The ECC was informed that fertiliser prices had dropped by almost one-third to Rs1,200 per 50kg from Rs1,785 in August. While scaling down urea prices to Rs1,310 per 50kg in August, the ECC had empowered a secretarial committee to suggest measures to trigger sale of NFML's imported urea. The committee advised the price to be fixed at Rs1,100 per kg but it was set at Rs1,200per kg in the last week of September.

The ECC was also informed that the fertiliser industry had a surplus of almost 1.6m tonnes of urea in Rabi 2016-17 because of carryover inventory from Kharif 2016. Historically, urea was always imported to overcome any shortage in the domestic market and was never sold in a glut but the carryover stocks and better capacity utilisation by millers had compounded the problem.

Fertiliser producers also undertook marketing campaigns offering lower prices for various brands on credit and free transportation. Thus the NFML sold less than 15,000 tonnes between August and December.

The NFML also took a number of measures which included doing away with the historic condition of deposit-based registration of dealers, withdrawal of minimum uplift of 200bags — dealer's price for provincial agricultural departments — and sale of urea against a bank guarantee for the current stocks and imported stocks to dealers against their past deposits.

The ECC was also informed that the industry had sold about 2.2m tonnes of urea against an estimated off take of 3.3m tonnes for Rabi 2016-17. The NFML target for Rabi was 276,000 tonnes. Until March this year it would need to get rid of about 260,000.

As the current Rabi season was now nearing its completion, the ECC was requested to allow the sale of imported commodity at Rs1,000 per 50kg.

The government, instead of further reducing the price of imported products, announced the discontinuation of the fertiliser subsidy scheme for 2016-17 saying the allocation under the prime minister's agriculture package for subsidy — at Rs27bn, to be equally shared by the centre and the provinces — had already been exhausted.

The NFSR ministry said the discontinuation of subsidy would not adversely impact Rabi crops, which also include the major crop: wheat, because farmers had already taken full advantage of the reduced prices. The farming community, on the other hand felt threatened on the back of an incentive package announced by the prime minister for the major export sectors and noted diversion of funds allocated for agriculture to the exporters.

As the agriculturists announced protests and were supported by a major opposition party — the Pakistan Peoples' Party — with greater rural roots, the prime minister took no time in reversing the decision. Saying that farmers are the most important contributors' to the economy and declaring agriculture as its backbone, he ordered the continuation of provision of subsidy on fertilisers to facilitate farmers in achieving bumper crops for accelerated GDP growth.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308765/balancing-agriculture-and-industry

IMPACT OF ENDING CASH SUBSIDY ON FERTILISER
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 16th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE federal government last week abolished direct cash subsidy on fertiliser, touching the raw nerve of farmers. Most of the farmers' bodies, notably Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, reacted sharply and threatened to launch protests to force the government restore the subsidy.

The farmers say the sector was put on the road to recovery largely because of the fertiliser subsidy factor. As the subsidy brought the price down, urea application went up by 25pc. The DAP off-take was even sharper at 30pc. It brought cost of production down by almost Rs1,000 per acre on the fertiliser head alone. It also led to increase in output of almost all major crops and created an additional financial cushion for farmers.

With the cash subsidy withdrawn, the farmers think the recovery has been put at risk.

Farmers also fear the domino impact of this decision: if the government has discontinued the politically sensitive cash subsidy on fertiliser, who can stop it from ending the Kissan Package, like tax concessions on other inputs like electricity charges and interest-free credit.

The officials, however, have their own study of the market forces to justify the step. To begin with, they claim that subsidy on urea had three components.

The government revised the general sales tax from 17 to 5pc, which translated into Rs187 per bag. Another source of price reduction was the direct subsidy of Rs17bn, which brought the price down by Rs156 per bag.

Third, the industry reduced the price by Rs50 per bag, as a goodwill gesture. Two components (GST revision and the industry's reduction) still stand.

Only direct cash subsidy has been abolished because a massive increase in off-take in the last three months quickly devoured the entire financial allocation, leaving no money in this head.

Officials argue, even if the urea prices increase, it would only be Rs156 per bag. The current position of domestic stocks would not permit even that increase, even if the industry wants to.

The country has over 1m tonnes of stocks at present. They would swell by another 1-1.5m before the next application of urea in early kharif. With such a huge glut, the manufacturers would prefer to clear their stocks rather than increase the price. How can it risk withdrawing its own reduction of Rs50 bag?

For the DAP, the officials, however, concede that its prices would go up by Rs300 per bag due to subsidy withdrawal. The DAP prices have also started rising of late in the international market, and are governed by it.

The international prices have gone up from $315 to $335 per tonne, and are still rising. This will reflect in prices regardless of the subsidy.

However, the total impact of the cash subsidy withdrawal and global prices can take the cumulative price further up and magnify the increase. Official circles were mindful of the fact but ran short on money.

Both sides, it seems, have their own fears and calculations. However, the government should have simultaneously reiterated its commitment to all other provisions of the federal and provincial Kissan packages.

The industry was invited a day after the notification to debate Rs50 per bag issue where the industry was more interested in its stuck-up subsidy claims of billions of rupees with the federal government rather than Rs50 per bag reduction issue.

The farmers are threatening to take to the streets be back on the roads as a pre-emptive measure so that the government not only restores the direct cash subsidy scheme but also does not tinker with the rest of the concessionary regimen, it started with much fanfare last year.

Latest: Subsidy on fertiliser has been restored as of last Friday by PM Nawaz Sharif.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308670/impact-of-ending-cash-subsidy-on-fertiliser

CURIOUS CASE OF PAKISTAN’S FALLING COTTON PRODUCTION
The Express Tribune, January 16th, 2017.

Naveed Ahmad

The farmer may have died but the old myth is pretty much alive: Pakistan is an agrarian economy. After decades of discreet slow poisoning amid high-pitched rhetoric, the cotton crop is no more the same it once used to be.

They say reality is best served plain. At the risk of being condemned for being melodramatic, I would say the cotton produce has not just declined steadily over the years but also with the help of the high and mighty. Owing to complex produce statistics thrown in your face, the real story remains hardly spoken.

For instance, a recent assessment by the Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) Pakistan puts expected produce at 10.542 million bales (1 bale equaling 170 kgs) during the current season. Without being contextualised, the numbers make little sense for an average Pakistani.

To contexualise, the highest cotton produce recorded so far was in 2004 registered 11,138 million bales while the nearest spike was in 2014 at 10,600. Why on earth is the country's signature cash crop registering steady decline when technology and seed both should have helped otherwise. The year 2015 was the worst since 1998 as production fell to 7,000 million bales.

The decline in cotton crop production can be understood by examining certain key factors, for instance area of cultivation, impact of insect pests, disease situation, market pattern and above all role of the regulator (the state).

Here is the reason as to how and why: In 2016, cotton was sowed on 20% less area in Punjab given the consistent trend of lower prices, decreasing rate of return relative to other crops and of course overall weather forecast. If a not-so-scientific crop assessment criterion is to be believed, the CCAC estimate Punjab producing 6.903 million bales, Sindh 3.6 million, Balochistan 3,800 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 1,000.

The imminent affectee of discouraged cotton producers is the ginner who waits throughout the year for a bumper yield. The Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) is totally disappointed at the projected estimates. To them, 20,000 million bales will be at par not only with their needs but also for the country's economy.

Dr Jeso Mal who heads the association recently asked the government to take practical measures to be able to export the high value produce and value-added products while saving Rs40 billion otherwise spent to import some 4 million bales.

The industry as well as farmers disagree that climate change and erratic rainfall can be blamed for the cotton produce crisis. While they seek better seeds and better price, they remain extremely doubtful about outdated and untested genetically modified seed.

During the Zardari regime in 2010, the GM seeds legitimately entered the Pakistani market after being smuggled from India for almost a decade. While smuggling of cheaper and vulnerable GM seed sees its highs and lows, it is basically driven by weak pricing regime the cotton crop has been facing over the years. The trend raises questions about Pakistan's seriousness to evaluate GM or BT (Bacillus Thuriengisis) seeds from the perspective of its peculiar climate, soil and fertilisers etc.

Sans stringent GM seed evaluation criteria along with incentive to the farmers, the produce will increasingly become unpredictable and vulnerable. Moreover, local research on cotton seeds has been a crucial guiding star until funding crunch hit it hard. The ugly reality is that the existing GM seed is too weak against the pest and worms, which have evolved strong immunity to its toxins.

The issue of decline of cotton produce due to seed-related issues, lack of proper pricing and soaring cost and use of pesticides is here to stay, requiring urgent consultation and policy formulation.

The not-so-idealistic dream of doubling Pakistan's cotton produce can't be realised without restoring the growers' confidence, which not only begs boost by ensuring good price but also provision of quality seed.

The writer is an investigative journalist and academic with extensive reporting experience in the Middle East and North Africa http://tribune.com.pk/story/1296035/curious-case-pakistans-falling-cotton-production/

PM ORDERS UNINTERRUPTED SUPPLY OF FERTILISER TO FARMERS
Dawn January 17th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: With farmers hailing countrywide rains as good news for production of the Rabi crops, especially wheat, the demand for fertiliser is also expected to increase.

In order to meet needs for crop production, the prime minister has directed the ministry of national food security and research to ensure an uninterrupted supply of fertiliser to the farmers.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar chaired a meeting here on Monday to review the demand and supply situation of fertiliser during the ongoing Rabi season.

Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Shahid Khaqan Abbasi also participated in the meeting.

Industries Secretary Khizar Hayat Gondal and National Food Security Secretary Abid Javed apprised the finance minister of available stocks of local and imported fertilisers in the country.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308862/pm-orders-uninterrupted-supply-of-fertiliser-to-farmers

RICE CANAL WATER CAUSING DISEASES, JUDICIAL COMMISSION TOLD
Dawn, January 17th, 2017

LARKANA: The Supreme Court judicial commission that arrived here on Monday was informed that city’s sewage being released into the Rice Canal had made the water channel so contaminated that it was causing hepatitis, cholera and other deadly diseases among humans and cattle as well.

The one-man commission headed by Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro was formed over a constitutional petition filed by Advocate Shahab Usto about poor sanitary conditions and shortage of safe drinking water in Sindh.

Justice Kalhoro along with district and sessions judge of Larkana, Abdul Ghafoor Kalhoro, visited water disposal stations and a faulty incinerator in the Chandka Medical College Hospital and inquired about release of sewage into Rice Canal.

The petitioner who accompanied the commission informed the justice that unabated release of sewage into the canal had made its water highly poisonous.

He said that humans and animals equally consumed the canal water which was mixed with sewage and caused hepatitis, cholera and other deadly diseases, according to sources. He said that animals were also dying due to highly contaminated water while the reverse osmosis plants had developed faults because of criminal negligence by the public health engineering department.

The engineers told the commission that many people had encroached upon certain disposal pumping stations.

They said the management of North Sindh Urban Services Corporation was tasked to look after sanitation in the city. Of 28 disposals pipes, directions of 10 had been diverted while the rest of the drainage pipes [18 in number] would be diverted within five months, said the sources.

The commission asked the engineers to remove all encroachments from the disposal pumping stations and make R.O. plants functional within a month's time.

The commission is currently investigating lack of safe drinking water and sewage, solid waste management services in the province.

The justice also visited key pumping stations constructed at Mashori Sharif to drain out sewage into Manchhar Lake and inquired the medical superintendent of CMCH about the disposal of hospital waste, amputated parts of human body and faulty incinerator.

The MS informed the commission in the presence of district health officer and deputy commissioner that hospital waste was disposed of in the incinerator but waste was being burnt in the open for the past few days due to gas supply issues, said the sources.

Justice Kalhoro along with district and session judge visited different parts of the CMCH (city block), expressed concern over poor sanitary conditions and asked where special cans were kept which were used to dispose of hospital waste.

Later, the justice himself went to the incinerator room and found it had been lying faulty for years.

He expressed anger over the MS' misleading statement about the machine and remarked it looked as if the incinerator had been lying idle since years, said the sources.

Larkana Mayor Aslam Shaikh also briefed the commission on sanitation and sewerage issues. Different departments kept passing the buck to and from one another during the investigation, said the sources.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1308822

SUBSIDY CLAIMS OF FERTILISER IMPORTERS CROSS RS5BN
Dawn January 18th, 2017

KARACHI: The subsidy claims of fertiliser importers for diammonium phosphate (DAP) sales have crossed Rs5 billion from September 2016 till Jan 14, 2017.

On Tuesday, the Fertiliser Importers Council (FIC) said the pending amounts was not allowing importers to contribute to the subsidy scheme any more. Total subsidy claims from the above-mentioned period stand at Rs5.1bn.

The council informed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif through a letter that from Jan 13 this year, importers are not in a position to participate under the existing DAP subsidy scheme any more.

The FIC has urged the government to devise a DAP subsidy scheme where fresh subsidy can be given directly to the farmers instead of through importing companies.

Out of 2.2 million tonnes of DAP off-take in 2016, around 64 per cent was supplied to farmers through imports.

The importers ensured availability of DAP fertiliser at subsidised prices. However, the subsidy claims are being delayed in clear violation of the government's own notifications and process.

The FIC said banks are now blocking our financing lines which would not allow us to import DAP for the Kharif season which may result in shortage for the season.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1309102/subsidy-claims-of-fertiliser-importers-cross-rs5bn

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT OF PUNJAB TO LAUNCH LAND-SAVING PROJECT
Business Recorder, January 19, 2017

The Punjab Agriculture Department has decided to launch a land-saving project worth Rs 180.502 million in 10 districts of the province aimed for saving the arable land, storing the rainwater and avoiding land erosion from river or rainwater.

As per details, the government will set up 30 small dams, 62 ponds, 15 storage of water and other infrastructure in 10 districts of the province including Attock, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Chakwal, Khushab, Mianwali, Narowal, Gujrat, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur.

The project is being taken up under Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif's 'Kissan Package 2016-17' for the Barani areas of the province. The government will construct water and land infrastructures under this project which will prove helpful in avoiding land erosion but in taking advantage of stored rainwater.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/129841/

SMART TECHNOLOGY: PUNJAB PROJECT TO REVAMP AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, January 20th, 2017.

The Punjab government's project for 'Promotion of high-value agriculture through provision of climate smart technology' will change the fate of agriculture sector in the province, said Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmood on Thursday. He said that the project aimed at enhancing crop and water productivity through application of modern irrigated agriculture development technologies.

The Punjab government is revamping the agriculture sector to utilise its full potential for prosperity in the province and well-being of the farmers, said Mahmood. He said that interventions envisaged under the proposed project would entail promotion of hi-tech technologies including solar system and tunnel technology for enhancing crop yields and alleviating poverty in the province.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1301207/smart-technology-punjab-project-revamp-agriculture/

MINISTRY PROPOSES EXPORT OF UREA
Business Recorder, 20 January, 2017

Mushtaq Ghumman

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Commerce (MoC) has proposed the export of 0.3 million tons of urea after considering its likely impact on domestic price and gas supply situation, official sources told Business Recorder.

Giving details, the sources said an inter-ministerial Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) has been constituted in Ministry of Industries & Production (MoI&P) which periodically meets to review the supply-demand situation of fertilizer in the country. MoI&P revealed that a meeting of the FRC was held on October 19, 2016 to review the fertilizer demand & supply situation for Rabi Season 2016-2017 (October 16 to March 17).

The FRC was informed that there were 1.739 million tons (MMT) of urea stocks available with the fertilizer companies including 0.273 MMT of imported urea available with National Fertilizer Marketing Limited (NFML).

On the basis of the gas supply position reported by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources, the estimated production up to March 2017 would be around 2.585 MMT, which makes the total availability of urea around 4.324 MMT (1.739 MMT stocks + 2.585 MMT production).

The expected off-take for the Rabi season, as estimated by the FRC, after factoring in 11% excess demand owing to reduction in urea prices, would be around 3.3 MMT. The total surplus urea fertilizer would be around 1.0 MMT (4.324 MMT available – 3.3 MMT off take); after maintaining a strategic reserve of 0.2 MMT, around 0.8 NIMT surplus will be available for export up to June 30, 2017.

For the period beyond Rabi (i.e. April-June 2017), as per the findings of the FRC, the production of urea would be around 1.5 million tons whereas the off-take, on the basis of last three years' consumption pattern, will be around 1.1 MMT.

In view of the position relating to inventory, expected production, future off take and strategic reserves in the country, the FRC unanimously concluded that: (i) in ongoing Rabi season 2016-17 availability of urea will be comfortable and ;(ii) expected surplus urea fertilizer i.e. 0.8 million tons be recommended to the ECC of the Cabinet for export up to June 30, 2017.

According to sources, Ministry of Commerce approached the Ministry of Industries & Production mentioning the likely upward pressure of urea exports on domestic prices of urea and the advisability of generating a future surplus by utilizing subsidized gas while the export-oriented industries are facing gas shortages and running on expensive LNG.

MoI&P has "reiterated that 0.8 MMT urea fertilizer is likely to be surplus till June 30, 2017. However, the urea fertilizer manufacturers unanimously expressed that they will be relieved of the glut situation even if the permission is granted for the export of 0.5 MMT urea". On the matter of upward pressure on prices, the MoIP has stated that it is "not the domain of this Ministry".

Commerce Ministry is of the view under Sr. No. 13 of the Schedule-I of Export Policy Order, 2016, that export of urea is not allowed: It can however, be exported subject to the approval of the ECC of the Cabinet on a case-to-case basis.

The sources further stated that the urea export proposal was circulated amongst the Ministries of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R), Petroleum and Natural Resources (MP&NR), Finance, Industries and Production (MoI&P), Planning & Development & Reforms (MoPD&R) and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

The MoI&P has concurred with the proposal with the suggestion that 0.5 million tons may be allowed for export; FBR has supported the proposal subject to interagency safety/ coordination mechanism; National Fertilizer Development Centre, MoPD&R has proposed that subsidy of approx. Rs.570 per 50 Kg bag provided as feedstock to the urea plants and may be recovered from exporters.

MNFS&R has opined that the exports of urea should not lead to export of the subsidized fertilizer available with the dealers and must not cause a price hike. The MP&NR supported the proposal subject to the condition that priority for exports be given to the plants which are manufacturing urea by using RLNG.

Ministry of Finance supported the proposal to export 0.3 million tons of urea subject to the conditions that export would not affect the domestic price and there would be no subsidy on the said export.

After considering the viewpoints of all the stakeholders, Commerce Ministry has proposed that the ECC may consider allowing the export of urea fertilizer up to 0.3 million tons as recommended by the FRC, after considering the likely impact on domestic price and the gas supply situation subject to the following conditions: (i) the contract for export of urea will be registered with Trade Development Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) on first come first serve basis; (ii) export will be effected within 45 days of registration of contract but not later than 30th April 2017; (iii) the FRC will meet immediately after April 30, 2017 to review exported quantities, and if the originally estimated surplus materializes, the committee may recommend additional quantities for export; and (iv) FRC will monitor domestic prices of urea on a monthly basis and in case of abnormal increase in retail price as per weekly sensitive price index, the FRC will recommend to ECC discontinuation of further exports.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/20/1-page/841245-news.html

MEETING ON SUBSIDY ON FERTILIZER TOMORROW
Business Recorder, 20 January, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar has convened a meeting of Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Saturday (tomorrow) to formally approve continuation of subsidy on fertilizer for 2016-17 as decided by the Prime Minister despite the fact that three provinces have refused to contribute their share as agreed earlier, well-informed sources told Business Recorder.
Giving details, sources said, in continuation of the Kissan Package of 2015-16, the Government of Pakistan announced the fertilizer subsidy scheme 2016-17 in the budget speech of the Finance Minister for providing relief to farmers through a reduction in the cost of production. The total cost of

the scheme was Rs. 27.96 billion (Rs. 17.16 billion for urea and Rs. 10.80 billion for DAP) and was envisaged to be equally contributed by the federal and provincial governments.

Finance Division made necessary budgetary provisions accordingly. The notifications issued in consultation with the Finance Division for implementation of the scheme had an in-built provision that “the scheme will remain in force till the amount available in the Special Account is exhausted.”

On the basis of the information provided by fertilizer companies regarding their claims for subsidy up-to November, 2016 and projected expenditure for December, 2016, it was anticipated that Rs. 27.946 billion would stand utilized against the total allocation of Rs. 27.96 billion by the end of December, 2016.

In line with the provision for winding up of the scheme on expected exhaustion of funds, the matter was reported to the Prime Minister’s Office on January 02, 2017 through a summary moved through Finance Division. The Competent Authority was pleased to allow the discontinuation of the scheme and M/o NFS&R issued a “notification” on 09-01-2017 accordingly.

This reflected that the Prime Minister, or the Secretary to Prime Minister approved discontinuation of subsidy on fertilizer. However, pressure from Chief Minister Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, political parties and farmers compelled the Prime Minister to revert his earlier decision.

The sources said winding up of the scheme caused unrest within the farm community and the Prime Minister requisitioned the summary and decided as follows:

“In reconsideration of his orders, the Prime Minister has desired that the fertilizer scheme for FY 2016-17 will continue. Ministry of National Food Security & Research will engage the provincial governments afresh and re-determine the date till which the scheme shall continue during the CFY.”

In compliance with the order of the Prime Minister, the M/o NFS&R issued a notification on 13-01-2011 for withdrawal of the earlier Notification dated 09-01-2017 for continuation of the fertilizer subsidy scheme 2016-17.

Simultaneously, the process of consultation with all stakeholders, including Finance Division and provincial governments, was commenced to determine the additional financial outlay, contribution of the provincial governments and the date till which the scheme will continue. The process may take some time to conclude.

Finance Division, which has to arrange funds for the federal share in fertilizer provision, will share their views during the meeting.

The sources said Ministry of National Food Security and Research on Wednesday discussed the fertilizer subsidy proposal with the stakeholders and sent a summary for approval to the ECC for continuation of the fertilizer subsidy scheme 2016-17 as decided by the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/20/1-page/841244-news.html

APPAREL SECTOR: GOVT URGED TO WITHDRAW DUTY ON COTTON YARN IMPORT
The Express Tribune, January 22nd, 2017.

The Pakistan Apparel Forum (PAF) has urged the government to withdraw customs duty, sales tax and regulatory duty on the import of cotton yarn up to 32 single coarse counts, a major raw material of value-added apparel sector.

"The government has withdrawn custom duty and sales tax on import of cotton due to decline in cotton production. Since there is also shortage of yarn in the country, we request the government to do the same in the case of cotton yarn," stated a letter sent by the PAF to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday.

The apparel exports of Pakistan are to the tune of $5.3 billion per annum and the industry provides employment, directly and indirectly, to millions. However, this sector was not taken on board while formulating and finalising the Rs180-billion export package, it added.

"We believe that rebate on yarn exports will benefit our international competitors more who will get cheaper yarn than our local industries. This will support their business and would have a negative impact on local value-added industries.

"We suggest that rebate on yarn should be given to indirect exports (local sales) instead of direct exports of yarn," the letter stated.

"This 4% rebate on cotton yarn will further lead to unbridled exports of our precious raw material. In the conversion of cotton the major component is electricity after cotton, which means electricity is also being exported in the shape of export of yarn while the industries here are starving for electricity.

"Government grants 4% rebate on providing raw material – yarn to our otherwise competitors."

The PAF consists of Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Pakistan Knitwear and Sweater Exporters Association and Pakistan Cotton Fashion Apparel Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1302885/apparel-sector-govt-urged-withdraw-duty-cotton-yarn-import/

'STEPS TAKEN TO FILL GAP BETWEEN RESEARCHES AND EXTENSION WORKERS'
Business Recorder, January 22, 2017

Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmood has said that steps are afoot to remove disconnect between research, extension workers and marketing system that will help increase the productivity and fine-tune the research agenda to address the problems of farming community.

He was chairing a meeting at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF). UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University of Agriculture Multan Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Asif Ali, Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi Vice Chancellor Dr Rai Niaz, former DG Research Dr Noorul Islam, Director General Extension Anjum Ali Bhuttar, former DG Pest Management Khalid Mehmood, Registrar Muhammad Hussain, Dean Dr Allah Buksh, Dr Muhammad Ashfaq, Dr Jalal Arif Dr Nancy from University of California USA and other notables attended the meeting.

The Secretary said that conferences would be arranged twice in year in which extension workers and researches from all universities in the Punjab would be called to get about the latest information and into interact with each other. He said that the steps would help fill the gap between researches and extension workers. He said that the Agro Ecological Zones are being redefined that will help boost up the agricultural productivity.

He directed the committee of agrological zone to keep the latest methods in view and after the completion their work, send the report to the international agencies for evaluation. He said that the Research and Development Boards are being established in all crop research institutes in the province.

He said that the government would set up the Directorate of Agri Education and Extension He said that Punjab government was revamping agricultural policy with the special focus on farmers to address their problems that will untimely increase the productivity and help alleviate poverty.

http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/131599/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 9TH TO JANUARY 15TH 2017

VIABILITY OF UREA EXPORT

Dawn, Business & Finance Weekly, January 9th, 2017

Nasir Jamal

The resurgent global urea price offers Pakistan’s fertiliser companies what analysts call a ‘lucrative opportunity’ to export their excess urea inventory.

The international urea price has recovered to about $240/$250 a tonne, up by 42pc in last six months since July last year, on the back of increasing rate of coal used by Chinese urea producers.

The industry’s unsold stocks of urea peaked to 1.73m tonne in May last year because of poor farm incomes and uncertainty about the government’s Kissan package.

Stocks were estimated by AKD Securities to have eased to around 1.45m in November, or up by 56pc from a year ago and down by 15pc from a month earlier, on strong Rabbi demand and the announcement of urea subsidy in the Kissan package given in the budget for the ongoing financial Year.

Uninterrupted supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) — that had helped revive production of three major fertilisers — and weak demand are major factors blamed to have led to inventory build-up.

With unsold stocks of urea producers likely to grow to 1.8m tonnes by the end of 2017, the government is considering a request by the manufacturers to allow export of surplus fertiliser. The ministry of industries, according to industry sources, has already proposed that the producers be allowed to export 0.8m tonne urea (by June the year).

“The revival of three closed urea plants on the back of smooth LNG supplies has changed the dynamics of the domestic urea market,” argued Fahd Rauf, a senior analyst at Insight Securities.

“As a result, Pakistan instantly turned from being a urea deficit country into a urea surplus country with production rising to six million tonne against the demand of about 5.6m, thus, leading to inventory build-up and reduction in prices because of intense competition between producers,” he explained over telephone from Karachi.

Industry output grew by 14pc in 2016 from a year earlier and is expected to peak to 6.3m tonne during 2017.

The fertiliser sector had bounced back in the third quarter of last year to September after reduction in fertiliser product prices — urea rate was down by Rs390 per bag and DAP by Rs300 per bag — in the current budget after GST (general sales tax) on fertilisers was cut to five per cent from 17pc and cash subsidy.

AKD Securities analysts also expect the profitability of the manufacturers to improve “in the range of six per cent to 20pc at different export levels with Engro Fertiliser being the key beneficiary, on account of its low cost and healthy market share, followed by Fauji Fertiliser Corporation owing to its leadership in urea market.”

Fertiliser sales saw a decline of 32pc during first five months of the last year to May before rebounding by 28pc during June-November, according to the latest numbers.

On a cumulative basis, total fertiliser sales posted a growth of three per cent YoY to 7.83m tonne until November, with urea off-take dropping by four per cent to 4.59m tonnes.

The last AKD Security report on the fertiliser sector expects the rabi season to continue to drive demand.

It feels that the ruling from the Sindh High Court against Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) imposition and brightening of export prospects on recovery of global urea prices will have a significant favourable impact on the industry, triggering earnings.

Nonetheless, analysts insist, profits of urea makers will remain under stress going forward as they compete with one another for market share.

“Fertiliser sector dynamics have changed over the last one and a half year or so: producers have lost their pricing power, at least for the time being; gas rates are going up and the market is witnessing a glut because of higher production and lower demand,” said an executive of a major fertiliser manufacturing firm, refusing to give his name because of his company’s policy.

“Government permission to export about one million tonne urea in the near term can ease pressures on producers and drive their earnings without disturbing the local market or destabilising domestic prices.”

Analysts agree that fertiliser companies that have diversified into other businesses in view of their squeezing margins, reducing gas subsidies and saturating market will recover their profitability more quickly.

Over the last several years, fertiliser producers have invested in sectors like power, food, dairy, cement, banking, etc and their investments are expected to generate returns in the next 2-3 years.

“Companies like Engro had started diversifying into other businesses to cut their reliance on their core business because of acute gas shortages and cuts in gas subsidies in recent years.

“Now their decision to invest in other industries is starting to pay them dividends,” the anonymous executive said.

Indeed, 2016 was a challenging year for fertiliser producers who saw their margins and pricing power decline significantly over the last few years.

But 2017 will not be any less challenging even if the government agrees to their request to allow export of part of their unsold stocks.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307313

MAKING THE MOST OF NEW WHEAT VARIETIES
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 9th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

EXTENSIVE research in wheat varieties in collaboration with foreign institutions over the years has boosted per-hectare yield. But local markets are yet to find ways for the realistic price discovery of multiple varieties and a surer supply management.

The specifics of wheat varieties sometimes vary not only in cultivation, but in storage and inter-provincial supplies as well. And carelessness in any area affects pricing, both in the form of volatility and evenness.

“This becomes a little more complex because of the involvement of provincial governments in providing subsidised wheat to flour mills,” says an official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The fact that local markets now reflect international trends in pricing too quickly due to increasing online linkages ‘is another issue that calls for aligning the wheat research and development programmes with the entire wheat economy of the country’.

The per-hectare yield of wheat has risen from 2,519kg in 2005-06, to 2,753kg in 2015-16, showing an average growth of 234kg per hectare in last 10 years. This modest average increase in productivity does not reflect the actual yield growth obtained in certain wheat varieties.

In fact, the new wheat varieties have led to far higher yields per-hectare but lots of factors impact on the average national wheat yield including the scale on which new varieties are being used and their pre- and post-harvest care.

Officials say that the development of new wheat varieties has increased per-hectare wheat yield over the years more than anything else, adding, that dozens of new varieties have been introduced during last 10 years.

Some of these are: Sehar-06, Farid-06, Saasi-06, Khirman-06, Faisalabad-08, Mairaj-08, Lasani-08, Pirsabak-08, Hashim-08, Nia Amber-10, Nia Sunehri-10, Millat-11, NARC-11, Punjab-11, AARI-11, Bharabi-11, Nia Sunder-11, Galaxy-13, Benazir-13, Nia Sarang-13, Pirsabak-13, Shahkar-13, Lalma-13, Pakistan 13 and Ujala-15.

Besides, in 2015 the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) also released four new rust-resistant wheat varieties, one of them a bio-fortified with 50pc zinc content.

Sehar-06 and Faisalabad-08 have gained immense popularity among the growers of Punjab and are used in more than half of the total area under wheat cultivation in the province. But they point out that it took Sehar-06 three years to replace Inqalab-91, the variety that was used most widely there till 2008-09.

“One key factor in popular use of new wheat varieties is that growers don’t like to stop using their favourite varieties immediately. They take time to switch over to new varieties regardless of how good the new ones are,” says a former secretary of Sindh agriculture department.

But as news about the results of new varieties disseminate faster these days through social media and awareness sessions, growers now show a somewhat higher willingness to switch over to newly-introduced varieties.

The Benazir-13 and Hammal-13 wheat varieties of Sindh can be cited as an example which caught the growers’ attention soon after their release in 2013 and became widely used.

Progressive farmers have reported the per-hectare yield of these two varieties in excess of 5,000kg per hectare against the national average of less than 2,800kg per hectare. The same is true for Sehar-06 and Faisalabad-08, officials of Sindh and Punjab agriculture departments say.

But they point out that high-yielding, disease-resistant wheat varieties are not used effectively by all farmers. Only a fraction of them take proper care at each step of wheat growing and harvesting.

Sources in Parc say that in collaboration with CIMMYT — an international wheat and maize improvement centre — the local wheat research programmes are exploring varieties for not only higher yield but richness in nutrition value too.

Similarly, collaboration of local institutions with International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (Icarda) has led to development of wheat varieties suitable for rain-fed areas.

Local agricultural research institutes with Parc in the lead are now collaborating with CIMMYT, Icarda and the USDA to take wheat research to the next level and ensure that newly developed wheat varieties remain disease-resistant.

Growers say Shalimar-88 remained a rather favourite variety for some years due to its high per-hectare yield but it could not stand the attack of yellow rust and was accordingly discarded.

Similarly Watan-V87094 fell to oblivion after having ruled wheat fields for some years as this variety, too, could not resist yellow and brown rust. A small number of farmers still grow Watan on a limited scale as it is best suited for flat breads (chapati) making.

The Parc and Icarda are also working to improve technology and systems for crop observation so that not only new wheat varieties produce closer to the potential yield, but maximum yields could be obtained through older varieties.

Sources in Parc say a key reason why closer to the potential yield is not obtained is that growers do not observe the crops behaviour during various stages of maturity, adding, “Early detection of the plant’s vulnerability to certain diseases and their inability to gain full physical characteristics with the help of crop observation gadgetry can help in ensuring better yields.”

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307208/making-the-most-of-new-wheat-varieties

A YEAR FOR FARM SECTOR RECOVERY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 9th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

Last year was more of a recovery period for agriculture, especially in Punjab. After three years of miserable performance, negative growth and regular price crashes, things have ultimately started looking up. At least that is what the performance of the crop sector and market behaviour reflects.

Production: Despite additional production in almost all major crops, prices went up. For example, everyone feared a price crash in maize because of record acreage. Up from 167,000 acres in 2015 to over 2m in 2016 and production jumping by over 100,000 tonnes — from 3.97m tonnes to 4.93m tonnes — the price rather went up. In 2016, it ranged between Rs800-1,000 per maund which had dropped as low as to Rs550 in 2015.

Almost the same pattern was witnessed in the entire crop range, be it rice, cotton, cane or wheat. Rice production during the year increased to 3.50m tonnes, up from 3.39m tonnes of the previous year. The price also increased to around Rs1,200 per maund against Rs700 per maund a year earlier.

Acreage: Despite being a disastrous year in terms of acreage, a drop of 1.2m acres (from 5.5m acres to 4.38m acres), cotton production increased by a million bales: from 6.34m bales in 2015 to 7.3m bales in 2016.

The average yield was one of the best the country has achieved so far — 21.21 maunds per acre — against a paltry 14.60 maunds per acre a year earlier. The price also sustained a level of over Rs3,000 per maund against around Rs2,500, or below in the previous year.

Similar was the story of sugarcane, which achieved a record per acre average yield of 650 maunds and overall production of 48m tonnes against 42m tonnes the previous year. Barring some complaints, the price, by and large, sustained the officially declared figure of Rs180 per maund for the majority of farmers.

Wheat remained at 19.54m tonnes, with a slight increase in the provincial average — from 29.95 maunds to 30.54 maunds. Again, the price was not a big issue as the official procurement kept it stabilised around official line.

Minor crops like tomato and moong recovered well and helped individual farmers greatly. For example, tomato yield went up from 94,000 tonnes in 2014 to 10,6000 tonnes in 2016. In the pulses sector, moong recovered very well from 94,000 tonnes in 2015 to 116,000 tonnes in 2016. It is because of this addition that the price has dropped from Rs160 per kg to current Rs120 per kg.

Fertiliser: The farmers and the government agree that reduction in fertiliser prices plays a huge role in putting production back on its feet. Fertiliser prices were driven down by two factors: the international price trend followed by the government's subsidy.

During the year, prices of urea and the DAP dropped significantly and led to a massive increase in their application. The DAP price, which was hovering at Rs3,800 till the start of 2015, came down to Rs2,300 per bag in most parts of the country.

Similarly, the urea price came down to Rs1,300 per bag with a drop of around Rs500 per bag during the year. Because of this decline, the DAP's application, which is crucial for strength of plants' root zone, increased by 30pc in Punjab; from 0.95m tonnes to 1.25m tonnes. Similarly, urea's off-take, which leads to vegetative growth, swelled by 25pc — from 1.55m tonnes to over 2m tonnes. Their application during the rabi crop is still being compiled and it may take the figures and average further up.

The reduction in fertiliser price, by and large, set off the negative impact of climate change and water shortage. Both farmers and planners agree that had it not been for 55pc increase of fertiliser applixcation, both these factors could have spelled disaster for the crop sector.

Removal of GST: Another factor that helped the sector was the removal of GST on pesticides and machinery. According to the industry, the pesticides application went up by 7pc and tractor sale was up by around 30pc.

According to the farmers, the sector has certainly come out of the rut it was stuck in between 2013-15. During 2016, they at least started recovering their production costs because, firstly, the production cost itself came down owing to massive subsidy packages that both the central and provincial governments had been running.

Secondly, the burden of cost was shared as farmers and the government both contributed to the mark-up rates, coupled well with a drop in fertiliser and electricity rates.

This delicate balance between additional supplies and market forces kept the prices stable, helping the sector back on its feet. They wish that the same trend continues in this year as well, so the sector may move towards profitability.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307206/a-year-for-farm-sector-recovery

SPURIOUS PESTICIDE SALES NEED TO BE STOPPED
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 9th, 2017

Faisal Ali Ghumman

FARMERS across Punjab have reservations about the quality of available agro-chemicals and blame some substandard and spurious pesticides as one of the major factors for the declining agriculture productivity.

In 2016, the production of cotton, pulses, vegetables etc was hit because many of the pesticides turned out to be ineffective against major pests and diseases.

For example, during the cotton growing season in Kharif, pink bollworms could not be controlled by many branded pesticides available in the open market.

The federal government had to twice revise down the production estimates of cotton which reportedly consumes 70pc of total available pesticides.

Following a warning issued by the provincial Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif on July 31, 2016, at a cotton-related workshop to the provincial agriculture department to mend its ways and arrest the declining trend in agriculture productivity, the latter sprang into action.

An ‘extensive’ campaign against the adulterated and spurious pesticides since Sept 2016 has revealed the ‘abundance’ of such pesticides in the open markets.

The Pest Warning and Quality Control of Pesticides’ (PWQCP) directorate general has seized only a small bit larger quantity of spurious pesticides in 2016 as compared to 2015. The number of legal actions, arrests, and value of seized pesticides during the year were much more than the previous year.

Most of the dealers are involved in using names and packing of registered companies. Agriculture experts, whom Dawn spoke to, feel sample checking process appears to be unreliable because of weak laws and enforcements.

Farmers, especially in remote districts, have easier access to sub-standard pesticides, experts add.

The numbers of First Information Reports (FIRs) against individuals involved in manufacturing and selling substandard pesticides have increased, officials claim, owing to strict enforcements by the department’s authorities.

Official statistics available with Dawn show as many as 179 raids were conducted and 117 persons were arrested and booked in 401 cases under the Agricultural Pesticides Ordinance, 1971, in 2016. Pesticides inspectors with the help of local administration had conducted 133 raids in 2015, detained 95 persons and booked them in 260 cases.

The quantity of fake pesticides seized during 2015 is 73,038.017 litre/kg worth Rs13.079m against the seizure of 73,195.304 litre/kg valuing Rs23.863m in 2016.

Out of total 8,074 samples drawn in twelve months of 2015, the wing analysed 7,900 samples and declared 194 samples unfit with 2.46pc unfit ratio. Officials however drew 9,282 samples during 2016, analysed 7,934 samples and declared 284 samples unfit with 3.58pc unfit ratio.

A concerned official says the number of raids and seizure of spurious pesticides was carried out by 267 pesticides inspectors since June/July 2016.

He claims currently four laboratories working in the province are detecting 3pc adulteration in pesticides — a ratio which has significantly dropped from 6-7pc in the past few years.

The persons arrested in such cases seek the right of appeal and get away with a minor financial penalty.

He says the Punjab government has not made efforts to amend the relevant laws to make them stricter.

Agri Forum Pakistan's President, Ibrahim Mughal is of the view that up to 30pc pesticides being sold in the provincial markets are spurious/adulterated as their ingredients are not as per their label's specifications.

He says only those people who are unable to pay bribes to get their samples cleared from provincial and federal labs are getting their samples rejected.

Mughal says currently the combined use of poor quality fertilisers, adulterated pesticides and mixed seed are reducing the production per acre up to 40pc annually in Punjab.

He says the federal laws have yet to be amended and transferred to the provincial governments because individuals and companies involved in spurious pesticide businesses get their bails by bribing officials.

"I hardly see any field assistant or inspector visiting my fields to pick samples of pesticides to check their efficacy", says Muhammad Ali, a farmer from Lodhran.

He says the real headache for the department is to overcome some seasonal companies which appear through massive advertisements and disappear after the sowing period after selling substandard medicines.

Ali further says it is quite strange that the action is taken only against distributors and formulators of agri-chemicals are spared, being the real perpetrators.

However, the PWQCP of Punjab's official says their inspectors cannot visit any formulation plant for checking and ensuring SOPs because of the ongoing court litigation since 2010.

He says there are 92 registered formulating plants in the province which are manufacturing pesticides from imported raw material and the testing of random samples can only hold the distributor or unregistered formulator responsible.

The official says a high-level committee of the federal government after visiting formulation plants in Punjab had recommended lifting the ban on inspections, but the matter is still before a bench of the Lahore High Court.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307204/spurious-pesticide-sales-need-to-be-stopped

FERTILISER SUBSIDY ENDS AS RS27BN FUND UTILISED
Dawn, January 10th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The government on Monday discontinued its fertiliser subsidy scheme for 2016-17, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The subsidy was being provided on urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and single superphosphate.

Secretary National Food Security and Research Abid Javed told Dawn that the allocation of Rs27 billion for the scheme under the 2016-17 budget has been exhausted.

He said the agricultural sector, particularly the farming community, took full advantage of the scheme, hence the allocations were fully utilised.

The government has yet to refund the sales tax against the subsidy and two months bills were in the pipeline, he added.

In response to a question, he said the withdrawal of the scheme would not have any impact on wheat and other crops.

On the other hand, the farming community has lamented the government for withdrawing the subsidy scheme. President of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Khalid Mahmood Khokhar has described the decision as hostile towards farmers and the agriculture sector, and announced that farmers will gather in front of the Parliament House to launch their protest.

The new measure will not only increase the cost of production but also increase losses to farmers which they are facing for the past three years, he said.

Mr Khokhar believed that sugarcane and maize are the upcoming crops in the next season and would be badly affected. The application of urea fertiliser has yet to be completed for the wheat crop during the current Rabi season, he said.

Meanwhile, the Fertiliser Importers Council informed Finance Minister Ishaq Dar on Jan 5 through a letter that importers of DAP are in a serious financial crisis due to delays in forwarding of subsidy claims by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The council said claims for September, October and November have been received by the food ministry from the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), but have not been forwarded to the SBP for payment.

This delay by the Ministry in forwarding claims to the SBP for payment is in contradiction of the subsidy notifications issued in June 25 and August 23 last year.

Out of the 2.2 million tonnes off-take of DAP in 2016, around 64 per cent was supplied to farmers through imports. Importers ensured availability of DAP fertiliser at reduced prices, the council said, urging the finance minister to take urgent notice and send subsidy claims from September to November to the SBP for payment to DAP importers.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307417

WOES: ‘AGRICULTURE SECTOR NOT GETTING ATTENTION’
The Express Tribune, January 10th, 2017.

ISLAMABAD:

The agriculture sector is considered the backbone of the economy but it is not getting the due attention since long, said Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum (PBIF) President Mian Zahid Hussain on Monday.

Inputs are being increased to boost production, which was increasing cost of doing business while neglect continued to reduce share of agriculture in the GDP, he said. Hussain said it was next to impossible to ensure national development while keeping agricultural development on the backburner.

Reduced production was contributing to poverty in the rural areas and widening the gulf between rich and poor. Policies of the government continued to push farmers to prefer low cost crops over high value crops, he said, adding that different packages announced failed to achieve the desired results.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1289462/woes-agriculture-sector-not-getting-attention/.http://tribune.com.pk/story/1289462/woes-agriculture-sector-not-getting-attention/.

GOVT WITHDRAWS CASH SUBSIDY ON FERTILISER SALES
The Express Tribune, January 10, 2017

The government has withdrawn the cash subsidy on fertiliser sales, which was offered to the industry in the budget for fiscal year 2016-17 to provide support to the manufacturers, farmers and the overall agricultural sector.

However, it has not ended the General Sales Tax (GST) subsidy that amounts to Rs184 per 50kg bag of urea.

“Under the subsidy programme, sales tax had been reduced from 17% to 5%, estimated at Rs184 per bag of urea,” said an official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research while talking to The Express Tribune.

Overall, the government had announced a urea subsidy of Rs390 per bag including cash subsidy of Rs156, GST subsidy of Rs184 and price reduction of Rs50 by urea manufacturers.

The price of urea had gone down from Rs1,790 to Rs1,400 per bag following the announcement of the subsidy.

Now, a notification has been issued to end the cash subsidy of Rs156 per bag. “No, notification has been issued to withdraw the GST subsidy,” the official said, adding the fertiliser manufacturers would themselves decide whether to continue the Rs50 price cut, which they had been offering since the budget.

However, the government has also withdrawn the cash subsidy of Rs300 per bag on sales of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser. Now, the DAP price will rise from Rs2,500 to Rs2,800 per bag.

According to the official, farmers were relying more on urea and any increase in its price would have an impact on the sowing of crops.

He, however, was of the view that the government could have announced an increase in the subsidy but no proposal could be discussed so far as the Ministry of Finance did not back any rise in the subsidy than what was announced in the budget, fearing it may widen the budget deficit.

The agricultural sector is already suffering and withdrawal of the cash subsidy will exacerbate its problems. In fiscal year 2015-16, the performance of the agricultural sector, as a whole, remained dismal as it recorded a negative growth of 0.19% against expansion of 2.53% a year earlier.

An analyst of Topline Securities research house said in a report the reversal of cash subsidy would have a marginal impact on urea demand from the farmers. “However, if the subsidised GST rate of 5% is reversed to the earlier 17%, it can have around Rs390 per bag pass-on effect on the urea prices.”

The analyst pointed out that imported urea would be a threat for the time being as prices in the global market were on the rising trend and stood at around Rs1,920 per bag.

Criticising the withdrawal of subsidy, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Executive Committee Member and former vice president Fehmida Jamali said farmers were already suffering from the absence of appropriate policies and the fresh move would further hit them.

“I don’t see any logic why the (food) ministry has discontinued this subsidy with immediate effect,” she said.

Jamali emphasised that the agricultural sector was the foundation of Pakistan’s economy, however, its share in the total national output and its capacity to drive growth and development were diminishing. “In the last eight years, average agricultural growth has been 2.1%,” she said.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1290364/govt-withdraws-cash-subsidy-fertiliser-sales/

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGRICULTURE, FOOD & ANIMAL SCIENCES GETS UNDER WAY
Dawn, January 11th, 2017

HYDERABAD: A two-day international conference on agriculture, food and animal sciences began at the Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam on Tuesday. Around 300 delegates, including scholars, researchers and academics from leading universities of Pakistan and experts from the United States, Germany, China, Malaysia and other countries are participating in the conference.

Chairing the inaugural session, Sindh Health Minister Dr Sikandar Mandhro expressed his confidence that the event would contribute to the country’s development initiatives through research and expertise.

He noted that SAU had the strength to implement major research projects on agriculture, food security and animal sciences to help the country cope with emerging challenges.

The minister told the audience that he had discussed with the SAU vice chancellor a plan to launch joint projects in the fields of medical sciences, agriculture, animal and plants sciences etc for the benefit of Sindh.

He lauded the university's role in bringing together experts of different fields from around the country and abroad by organising the conference.

Dr Mandhro said such interactions would help resolve the problems being faced by citizens of states having agricultural economy.

The minister assured the university of all possible support in establishing a centre of excellence in agriculture science which, he said, would lead to the launch of more research projects and studies. He promised to make efforts towards granting of adequate funds for research and other projects.

SAU vice chancellor Dr Mujeebuddin Memon Sehrai told the conference that Pakistan was blessed with resources like fertile agricultural land, ocean, wind power and many natural resources but they were not being utilised for development. He hoped that the conference would help explore avenues and opportunities in this regard through discussions among leading experts and researchers.

Recounting various activities and initiatives undertaken by SAU for the benefit of farmers, students, researchers and other stakeholders of the agriculture sector, he said such conferences were also a regular feature.

Dr Mian Nadeem Riaz from the US, Dr Javed Aziz Awan from Malaysia, Dr K.B. Mirbahar, Dr M. Saffar Mirjat, Dr Noor Mohammad Soomro and Prof M. Ismail Kumbhar were prominent among those who attended the session.

Dr Sagheer Ahmed Shaikh, chairman of the conference organising committee, briefed the participants about the aims and objectives of the event.

Various companies dealing in food, agriculture, fertiliser, pesticides, handicrafts, etc as well as banks and NGOs have set up their stalls at an exhibition that also features at the international event. SAU departments have displayed agricultural products and equipment for public viewing.

A total of 210 oral presentations and 35 poster presentations are to be made during the proceedings of the conference.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307663/international-conference-on-agriculture-food-animal-sciences-gets-under-way

WHEAT SEEDS, FERTILIZER DISTRIBUTED AMONG MOHMAND'S FARMERS
Business Recorder, January 11, 2017

Political Administration and Agriculture Department Mohmand agency distributed free certified wheat seeds and fertilizer, among 383 small growers here on Tuesday. Mohmand Agency agriculture department with help of local administration distributed the seeds in a bid to boost crop productivity in the border region. The distribution event was held at the Biazai Sub-Division at Bahi Daag.

The farmers who were given the material were registered by the local administration after proper verification. Assistant Political Agent Baizai Pir Abdullah Shah told local journalists that we have distributed 383 certified wheat seeds and 766 fertilisers among the needy tribesmen in the border areas of the tribal agency.

"Most of the area peoples depend on livestock and farming therefore we have starts an integrated program of seeds and fertilisers for the locals tribesmen" said Shah. He said that the local administration with help of Agriculture department distributed seeds and fertilisers into two to three steps.

Assistant Political Agent said that as already fertilisers banned in the area due law and order situation and it's a golden chance for tribesmen. He said that Biazai is the most backward area of the tribal region and our first priority is to provide clean drinking water and for that purpose solar tube wells would be installed in the area by end of this month.

A local farmer of the area Niaz Muhammad Musa Khel told that its rainy areas we grows once in the year we are thankful to the agriculture and the local administration for providing free seeds and fertilisers. It's very low quantity we have huge land therefore agriculture department should provide seeds in a large quantity" said Niaz. He said that in early days these tribesmen were growing poppy crops in the border areas but now all the tribesmen voluntarily stop growing of poppy crops. He complained that neither the Narcotics department nor the local administration have provided alternative of the poppy crops to these tribesmen. The local farmer demanded of the government to provide more and more funds and incentives to these tribesmen.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/122312/

VILLAGE COMMITTEES TO OVERSEE WEED ERADICATION CAMPAIGN
Business Recorder, 11 January 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) will set up committees at village level to make the forthcoming weed eradication campaign a success. The committees will comprise lumberdar, patwaris, officials of the provincial agriculture department and notables from other segments of the society.

The committees will support the farmers in the process of eradication of weeds from the farms. They will also collaborate with other social welfare organisations to educate the growers about damages caused by weeds. The Punjab Agriculture Department will also launch the awareness campaign at its local offices, schools, colleges and public and private places. Seminars will also be arranged besides hanging banners at prominent places.

The decision to launch a six-day 'eradicate weeds-increase production' campaign in the province as part of off-season management formula was taken at a meeting the other day which was chaired by Punjab Secretary Agriculture Muhammad Mahmood.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/11/13-page/838502-news.html

PUNJAB WANTS CENTRE TO RESTORE SUBSIDY ON FERTILISERS
Dawn, January 12th, 2017

Faisal Ali Ghumman

LAHORE: After the chief minister took notice of withdrawal of subsidy on fertilisers by the federal government on Jan 9, the agriculture department on Wednesday put up a formal request for its restoration for Punjab-based farmers.

Punjab Agriculture Minister Muhammad Naeem Akhtar Bhabha told Dawn by phone that Shahbaz Sharif at a meeting showed his reservation over the withdrawal and ordered the department to write a letter to the federal government for restoration of subsidy.

He said according to information gleaned from the federal ministry of national food security & research, the subsidy was withdrawn because the allocated amount was consumed. The maximum amount of subsidy is Rs390 per bag.

The minister claimed: “The department is ensuring delivery of subsidised stocks of Urea, DAP, NP and SSP to farmers throughout the province.”

Sources in the agriculture department told this reporter that the provincial government had taken the decision only after the farming associations began criticising the Khadim-i-Punjab Kissan package 2016-17 under which the government agreed to share subsidy with the federal government for five fertiliser products.

The Shahbaz-led government in its official leaflet had allocated Rs7 billion for sharing subsidy with the Centre, but the agriculture department had not so far released the amount spent on the subsidy in the first six months of current fiscal year, the sources added.

They said it was the Punjab government that had shown its willingness to share subsidy while no other province made the commitment. They said it would be difficult for the federal government to accommodate Punjab-based farmers alone.

A senior department official, however, said all provincial governments were bound to share subsidy in GST, one of the three major components. He said Punjab had paid Rs3 billion to the federal government under GST.

He said the major reason for withdrawal of subsidy was presence of around 1.3 million bags stock of Urea, which is used maximum, and at present its demand is low.

The official further said the government had not withdrawn subsidy on GST component which is Rs187 per bag.

He said the federal government had allocated Rs42.9bn for Urea and CAN and Rs10.8bn for DAP/NP/SSP for fiscal year and all provinces are bound to share their chunk of subsidy.

He said according to his information, fertiliser companies had withdrawn Rs50 share they had committed under subsidy after official notification which means a 50 kilo bag will become costlier by Rs206.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1307921/punjab-wants-centre-to-restore-subsidy-on-fertilisers

HORTICULTURE SECTOR SEEKS SHARE IN RS 180B PACKAGE
The Express Tribune, January 12th, 2017.

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) will ask the government to also extend benefits of the Rs180-billion incentive package to the horticulture sector, FPCCI President Zubair Tufail said on Wednesday.

“I hope that the government and the FPCCI will finalise inclusion of the horticulture sector in the package in the next few days,” he said while talking to The Express Tribune.

“We raised the issue of non-inclusion of the fruits and vegetable sector on Tuesday when the government was about to announce the package. But we later mutually decided to resolve this issue later to avoid unnecessary confusion at the eleventh hour.”

Tufail said concerns of the All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchants Association (PFVA) were genuine and the FPCCI hoped that they would get government support soon.

Just after one day of the announcement of the package, the PFVA on Wednesday wrote a letter to Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, asking him to include the sector in the Rs180-billion package.

“We can immediately raise Pakistan’s horticulture exports to $1 billion if we get support of the government,” said PFVA Chairman Abdul Malik in the letter.

It said the sector could easily increase its exports to $6 billion in the next 10 years if the government and the private sector collaborated in short-, medium- and long-term plans that the PFVA had already sent to the relevant federal ministries.

Horticulture exports amounted to $641 million in 2015-16 when Pakistan exported a record number of fruit and vegetable varieties, according to the data collected by the PFVA.

The letter said the government should provide 5% incentive on freight-on-board (FOB) value and a three-year holiday from the 1.25% tax including withholding tax (WHT) and Export Development Fund (EDF).

“The incentives we are demanding will be directly transferred to the growers. This will create massive improvement at grass-roots level,” commented former PFVA chairman Waheed Ahmed.

Horticulture exporters say the government must admit that the horticulture sector has not received due attention that it deserves.

They say this industry is well-distributed amongst various climate zones that range from the sub-zero temperature of mountains in the north to dry and humid plains of Punjab and to the coastal areas of Balochistan and Sindh.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1291977/horticulture-sector-seeks-share-rs180b-package/

USE OF DIVISIBLE POOL FOR CPEC UNCONSTITUTIONAL: SINDH CM
The Express Tribune January 12, 2017

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that the proposal of allocating 7% of funds from the federal divisible pool for security arrangements for CPEC-related projects and for the development of Fata and other areas is unconstitutional.

"It will set a wrong precedent, therefore, all the provinces should oppose the proposal collectively," he said while discussing the National Finance Commission (NFC) award with Punjab Finance Minister Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha at the Chief Minister's House on Wednesday.

The federal government has recommended allocation of 3% of the divisible pool of taxes for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-related security force and 4% for the development of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. The centre has sought approval of the provinces in this regard.

"The divisible pool is only for the distribution of collected funds amongst provinces," Shah said.
He pointed out that the federal government had already earmarked 1% of the divisible pool for the maintenance of law and order in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.
The share of the four provinces in the divisible pool is 57.5% and the remaining 42.5% goes to the federal government. The Sindh government has established a force of 2,000 ex-army men to provide security for the CPEC projects and employees.
The province has also spent Rs300 billion on the maintenance of law and order from 2010-11 to 2015-16.
"I would request the Punjab government, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to develop consensus and oppose the proposal," Shah said.
He emphasised that provincial governments should have the right to collect sales tax on goods and then deposit the same with the federal government for onward distribution among provinces according to their agreed share.

"We have prepared the case and the Punjab government should also make a similar case so that it could be fought in the next NFC meeting," he said.
The chief minister called the unilateral wealth tax deduction at source from the share of Sindh government another illegal act.

"The deduction is made purely on presumptions. The federal government before making the deduction should reconcile figures with those of the Sindh government," he suggested.
The Punjab finance minister agreed that the reservations and grievances of the Sindh government were genuine and she would also support the province.

Views of the Punjab government on the issue the Sindh chief minister had raised was the same, she said.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1291909/use-divisible-pool-cpec-unconstitutional-sindh-cm/

COTTON IMPORTS OPEN!
Business Recorder,, 12 January 2017

With the announcement of the export package yesterday now comes duty free import of cotton something that the yarn manufacturers have been demanding for quite some time, particularly in light of another season of low cotton production.

This column regularly writes about the countrys situation regarding cotton production and imports. To recap (and to paraphrase the State Banks quarterly State of the Economy report), the final estimate by the CCAC puts the seasons production at 10.5 million bales only six percent higher than last years multi-year low; the lower output this season has been due to a sharp contraction in the sowing area in Punjab a decline of over 20 percent year-on-year. Exceptional losses from last years crop (due to pest infestation) and low domestic cotton prices at the sowing time pushed growers away from cotton to other crops.

Given this context, duty free cotton seems like a no-brainer. However, as per a statement issued by the PCGA last month, there were around two million bales of cotton (1.5 million now, as per an industry source) lying with ginneries as unsold stock, with textile mills reluctant to purchase!

As per industry sources, the ginneries had been holding the stock, waiting for a better price. Moreover, imports have already been coming in despite the four percent RD (Read: Indian cotton imports, published December 08, 2016); the majority of Pakistans cotton is imported from India, which, albeit equal or marginally more expensive, is of better quality. Cotton analyst Naseem Usman told BR Research that part of the existing stock in Pakistan, to some extent, is not of ideal quality, which can partly explain the unsold stock and the imports. Finally, he said Pakistan has imported more cotton from African countries this time around. This cotton usually takes a few months to reach, and so the orders that were placed back then are now arriving.

Since Pakistan has been importing cotton all along, its heartening to see the removal of the duty. However, something must also be done to address the existing stock that is going unsold. And to make matters worse for cotton growers right now, the fertilizer subsidy has also been withdrawn!

http://www.brecorder.com/arts-a-leisure/379-miscellaneous/334505-cotton-imports-open!.html

PPP SLAMS, GOVT DEFENDS FERTILISER SUBSIDY’S WITHDRAWAL
Dawn, January 13th, 2017

Amir Wasim

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Peoples Party has termed withdrawal of subsidy on fertilisers “a callous and inhuman decision and a conspiracy against poor and under-privileged rural population” while the government has defended the move, saying the subsidy had been withdrawn after the amount allocated for it exhausted.

Former president and PPP chief Asif Ali Zardari said in a statement issued by the party's media centre that the government would only compensate the farmers of Punjab, a measure harmful to inter-provincial harmony.

Only to "achieve cheap political mileage", he said, the government had on one hand withdrawn the subsidy of Rs400 per bag on fertiliser and, on the other, was secretly compensating farmers of their own political constituency.

"The federal government is playing with fire as such measures will create provincial rifts and disharmony," Mr Zardari warned.

It will create a sense of deprivation among the people of three smaller provinces with far-reaching consequences.

He demanded immediate reversal of the decision and said that the PPP would stand by farmers of the entire country. The news came as a big surprise for most in the agriculture sector as they were not expecting that the government under foreign pressure would go to such extent as to harm the backbone of the national economy, he said.

As a result of the withdrawal of the subsidy, he said, the share of the agriculture sector in the national economy and its capacity to drive growth and development in the country would diminish drastically.

Mr Zardari noted that agriculture experts pointed out that the upcoming crops of sugarcane and maize would be critically affected by the 'thoughtless' decision which, he warned, would severely affect the agriculture sector and drastically raise poverty level in rural areas.

Meanwhile, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Bosan told the Senate on Thursday that a request had been received from the Punjab government to continue subsidy on fertiliser. A meeting will be held on Monday to review the issue.

Responding to a point of order on the issue raised by Mohsin Leghari, he said that the subsidy scheme was launched in 2016 at a cost of Rs27.96 billion with equal share from the federal and provincial governments.

Under the scheme, he said, Rs300 and Rs156 per bag subsidy was provided to farmers on DAP and urea, respectively. The scheme was widely lauded by the farmer community and the use of DAP witnessed 23 per cent increase and urea 18pc after the subsidy was introduced.

Mr Bosan said that the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security had recommended that General Sales Tax on fertiliser should be waived to provide maximum relief to farmers.

In his statement, the PPP leader also rejected the exports incentive package announced by the prime minister for textile sector and termed it "too little and too late."

He said that during the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's rule, the country had lost its hard-earned competitiveness, which had been previously achieved through the industry-friendly policies of the PPP.

The former president said that Pakistan's textile exports had peaked during his tenure to 13.4 per cent of GDP, and had sharply declined to only 7.8 per cent of GDP during 2016.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308159/ppp-slams-govt-defends-fertiliser-subsidys-withdrawal

UREA PRICE INCREASED
Dawn, January 13th, 2017

KARACHI: Fauji Fertiliser Ltd has increased urea price from Rs1,400 per bag to Rs1,610.

According to Muhammad Saad at BIPL Research the price-hike includes the impact of withdrawal of Rs156 per bag subsidy and reversal of Rs50 per bag price cut that fertiliser manufacturers passed on to consumers in June 2016. The increase in prices is unlikely to impact margins of fertiliser producers, he added.

Following the price increase, the effective dealer transfer price of urea fertiliser has been increased to around Rs1,470 per bag from around Rs1,310.

Furthermore, DAP prices have also increased by Rs300 per bag in line with the reduction in cash subsidy.

He said the decision by manufacturers to increase urea prices would not have a significant negative impact on urea fertiliser off-take in coming months.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308041/urea-price-increased

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY: FOREIGN COMPANIES TO PARTICIPATE IN SINDH FAIR
The Express Tribune, January 13th, 2017.

KARACHI: Over 60 exhibitors are going to participate in the sixth edition of the Livestock, Dairy, Fisheries and Agriculture (LDFA) Exhibition and Seminar, according to Sindh Board of Investment (SBI) and Sindh Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) Chairperson Naheed Memon.

The exhibition would be held at the Sindh Agriculture University, Tando Jam on January 21-22, said a press release.

Memon said a number of foreign investors, foreign companies and international agricultural experts were expected to participate in the LDFA fair.

There will be 20 exhibitors promoting exotic birds, while 13 agricultural companies, 19 local and international companies and banks, two dairy and livestock companies, six poultry and fishery companies and 10 associated institutions and trade bodies will also participate. Sindh Agriculture University Tando Jam Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Memon Mujeebuddin Sahrai said the SEDF and SBI chairperson would launch on the inaugural day the 'Agri Business Challenge' for students of the university. In the competition, three best proposals will be sponsored by the SEDF for their implementation.

SEDF CEO Mehboobul Haq saw a huge potential in the livestock, dairy and fisheries sectors in Sindh as Pakistan was ranked the fifth largest milk producer with annual production of 38.69 billion litres. However, out of this quantity, only a small fraction is processed.

Discussing the livestock population, the CEO added, 28% of buffaloes, 27% cattle, 24% sheep, 28% camels and 40% poultry were found in Sindh.

"The potential of Halal meat exports and the ever-rising gap between the demand and production of meat and milk makes Sindh a very lucrative investment destination," he added.

SBI Director Projects Abdul Azeem Uqaili said the government of Sindh was committed to promoting the dairy sector not only for food security but also for improving value addition and the value chain.

The objectives of LDFA 2017 are to position Sindh as an economically viable province by identifying the areas and locations for investment, and to engage financial institutions and investors for promoting the agriculture sector.

Sindh Agriculture University Director Muhammad Ismail Kumbhar told the media that the last five exhibitions had cumulatively generated Rs1 billion worth of business and commercial deals and boosted the agrarian economy of Sindh.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1293108/agriculture-industry-foreign-companies-participate-sindh-fair/

CASH CROP UNDER THREAT: TEXTILE MINISTRY OPPOSES NEW SUGAR MILLS IN COTTON ZONE
The Express Tribune, January 13th, 2017.

Zafar Bhutta

Published: January 13, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Textile Industry has emphasised that provinces should stop granting permission for setting up new sugar mills in the cotton growing areas that has led to a decrease in cotton plantation.

Provinces may be asked to refrain from issuing no-objection certificates (NOC) for establishing, increasing capacity or shifting of sugar mills to the cotton growing areas, the Ministry of Textile Industry suggested in a presentation sent to the National Assembly Standing Committee on Food Security.

Sugarcane cultivation has widened in the wake of improved returns and timely supply of inputs. In the meantime, sugar prices have also gone up from Rs31 to Rs68 per kg in the last 10 years. The Ministry of Textile Industry argued that the price increase had encouraged the setting up of more sugar mills, which increased from 45 to 85 in the country. Of these, 45 were in Punjab, 32 in Sindh and eight in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Almost 70% of sugar mills are located in the core cotton zone of the country, especially in Punjab. The establishment of mills in the top cotton growing areas and increasing crushing capacity of the existing mills have led to 26% shrinkage in cotton areas, especially in south Punjab, including Rahim Yar Khan and Muzaffargarh.

“It is very likely that cotton production in the Mianwali district will also be affected after the installation of new sugar mills in that area,” the ministry said.

The issuance of NOC for new sugar manufacturing units is the prerogative of the provincial government. “Sugarcane cultivation in Punjab has risen 27% so far,” said an official.

Cotton area has also been squeezed by popularisation of maize and potato crops in the districts of Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Khanewal.

Cotton is a raw material that is used in textile industry which has a major share in Pakistan’s export earnings.

Weaker cotton prices were also a reason that farmers were opting for other profitable crops, the official said, adding cotton growers had been given no protection like producers of many industrial products as cotton imports from India brought down prices in the domestic market.

Owing to tensions between Pakistan and India, the government earlier slapped a ban on cotton imports from India. However, giving in to the pressure, it removed the curbs within three days.

“The government had earlier decided to accept only eight cargoes of Indian cotton, but it had to withdraw the decision following pressure from a powerful lobby,” the official added.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1293101/cash-crop-threat-textile-ministry-opposes-new-sugar-mills-cotton-zone/

AUSTRALIA TO HELP TRAIN 225,000 COTTON FARMERS IN PAKISTAN
The Express Tribune January 12, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Australian government, Cotton Australia and Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) have together launched a partnership to support the training of approximately 225,000 Pakistani cotton farmers commencing with the 2017 cotton-sowing season.

“This partnership will deliver practical tools and latest environmental and cutting-edge management practices aligned with internationally recognised quality assurance for sustainable cotton production,” said the Australian High Commission in a statement on Thursday.

The farmers will be trained in techniques for growing cotton with focus on improved environmental, social and economic benefits in line with the Better Cotton Standard System.

Cotton is an important export earner for Pakistan – the fourth largest producer of cotton in the world. The partnership has been established to support Pakistan’s ability to compete in premium international cotton markets.

The Australian government has committed AUD500,000 to this project, which will be supported through the Australian aid programme’s Business Partnerships Platform.

Australia's contribution will be matched by AUD2.4m from the BCI Growth and Innovation Fund. The matching funds come from the BCI Retailer and Brand members, such as Adidas, IKEA, H&M, Levi Strauss & Co, Marks & Spencer, Cotton On, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Tommy Hilfiger and Nike.

BCI Chief Operating Officer Lena Staafgard noted that the partnership represented an important step forward for the BCI in promoting cross-learning between cotton growing countries.

"This collaboration will deliver tangible value to cotton farmers in Pakistan as they gain access to the vast body of deep knowledge on good agricultural practices held by Cotton Australia (a body of Australia's cotton growing industry) as well as being able to participate in BCI training programmes to promote more sustainable farming practices.

"At BCI, we're excited to be able to link up our partners across the world, with the aim of benefitting the global cotton sector."

Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Margaret Adamson welcomed the launch. "The partnership will work closely with Cotton Australia and Australian cotton farmers who will share their world-leading practices, skills and experience with farmers in Pakistan. By promoting Australian cotton practices, we will aim to help improve the global reputation of Pakistan cotton, safeguarding cotton's future in Pakistan," she said.

Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay said, "Australian cotton farmers are happy to share knowledge and experience to assist other cotton producers (in this case Pakistani) improve their sustainability as this gives brands and retailers the confidence to use cotton in their products. More and more global brands and retailers only want to source cotton that has been responsibly produced."

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1292870/australia-help-train-225000-cotton-farmers-pakistan/

PM REVERSES DECISION ON SUBSIDY WITHDRAWAL
Dawn January 14th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Beating a rather hasty retreat in the face of fierce criticism from opposition parties, particularly the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday decided to reverse his government's decision to withdraw subsidy on fertilisers.

A statement by the PM's media office said Mr Sharif had instructed the officials concerned to continue subsidising the prices of fertilisers, for the benefit of the farming community and achieving agriculture targets.

"Agriculture is the backbone of our economy and farmers must be facilitated to achieve bumper crops for accelerated GDP growth," the statement quoted the prime minister as saying.

The federal government had allocated about Rs28 billion for subsidy on fertilisers. But upon consumption of this amount, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research and Finance Division had withdrawn subsidies on fertilisers.

The move evoked a tough response from the PPP, which characterised it as “a callous and inhuman decision and a conspiracy against poor and under-privileged rural population”.

In a statement issued on Thursday, PPP chief Asif Ali Zardari said the government would only compensate the farmers of Punjab, a step that was likely to adversely affect inter-provincial harmony.

Only to “achieve cheap political mileage”, he said, the government had on the one hand withdrawn the subsidy of Rs400 per bag on fertiliser and, on the other, was secretly compensating farmers of their own political constituency.

“The federal government is playing with fire as such measures will create provincial rifts and disharmony,” Mr Zardari said.

As a result of the decision, the share of the agriculture sector in national economy and its capacity to drive growth and development in the country would be affected drastically, he added.

Meanwhile, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Bosan told the Senate on Thursday that the Punjab government had called for continuation of the subsidy.

In response to a point of order raised by Mohsin Leghari, he said the subsidy scheme was launched last year at a cost of Rs27.96bn with equal shares from the federal and provincial governments.

Under the scheme, he said, Rs300 and Rs156 per bag subsidy was provided to farmers on DAP and urea, respectively. The scheme was widely lauded by the farmer community and the usage of DAP witnessed 23 per cent increase and urea 18pc after the subsidy was introduced.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1308362

NETHERLANDS KEEN TO HELP PAKISTAN GROW SALT-TOLERANT POTATOES
Dawn January 14th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Netherlands is exploring the possibility of starting a programme to grow salt-tolerant potatoes in Pakistan.

Ambassador of the Netherlands Jeannette Seppen met Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan on Thursday and discussed a project which would provide Pakistani potato farmers access to quality Dutch seeds, particularly the high-yield ‘paramount’ variety.

Mr Bosan informed the envoy that Pakistan was interested in acquiring Dutch technology and collaborating to produce certified potato seeds. Experiments in Pakistan show that it is feasible to cultivate potatoes in saline conditions. In Depalpur, Punjab, the first-ever yield of salt-resistant potatoes was experimented in 2015 under a joint project of Dutch agricultural innovation and Pakistani entrepreneurs.

The combination of salt-tolerant varieties, adapted agricultural practices and conjunctive water use has resulted in an acceptable expected yield of 20 tonnes of potatoes per hectare.

According to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, only one to two per cent of quality seed is available in the country. Despite this drawback, the country produced about four million tonnes of potato this season. The food ministry has found certain shortcomings in the potato crop in a recent evaluation.

The potato tuber seed has tremendous disease-carrying potential which poses serious crop health problems. Its marketing is not as efficiently organised as for grain crops despite the fact that it is the fourth-most important crop by volume of production. The future research thrusts will be development of true potato seeds (TPS) hybrid families and true potatoes seed production in addition to developing package of agro-techniques for TPS-based potatoes production.

Pakistan imports 10,000 to 15,000 tonnes of high-quality certified seeds from Holland. Potato seed is further multiplied by the national seed companies for distribution to farmers. The volume of certified seed potato is low and added reasons for non-availability of sufficient certified seed potato in the country. Punjab produces about 99pc of potato, while Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have nominal share in overall production mainly due to saline conditions.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1308239

FERTILISER RATES: CENTRE PROMISES RESTORING SUBSIDY
The Express Tribune, January 14th, 2017.

LAHORE: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has assured the Punjab government of considering its request for restoring subsidy on fertilisers. In response to a request sent by Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif for restoring the subsidy to facilitate farmers, the federal government has responded that it is looking into the matter.

The restoration of subsidy would benefit 22 million farmers with an amount of Rs77 billion, according to a statement issued on Friday. The chief minister has, however, ordered the provincial government to provide farmers with subsidised fertilisers from the available stock.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1294211/fertiliser-rates-centre-promises-restoring-subsidy/

FATE OF SURPLUS UREA HANGS IN THE BALANCE
Dawn, January 15th, 2017

Mubarak Zeb Khan

ISLAMABAD: After government's decision to reverse withdrawal of urea subsidy, the fate of surplus stocks hangs in the balance as the Ministry of Commerce is unwilling to allow exports.

However, the ministry has prepared a summary recommending the conditional export of approximately 200,000 tonnes of urea, a source said. Exporters will be required to refund the amount of subsidy consumed on the stocks they wish to export. The government is currently providing a gas subsidy of Rs526 on a 50-kilogram bag of urea.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet would decide the issue in its next meeting, the source said, adding that the subsidy was provided for the local market.

The government failed to foresaw a urea surplus when it improved the supply of subsidised gas to fertiliser plants and announced Kissan Package. To add to the problem, the government imported urea through the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) at a high rate anticipating shortage.

As a result, excess urea stocks are now lying with local manufacturers as well as the National Fertiliser Marketing Ltd (NFML).

As of December 22, 2016, the NFML could only sell 13,000 tonnes of urea, leaving 250,000 tonnes in stock.

There are suggestions that the government should divert gas to other industries, especially textiles, as urea has already been overproduced.

In November 2016, the Fertilisers Review Committee proposed the export of 800,000 tonnes of urea. However, this figure was later reduced to 500,000 tonnes.

The total availability of urea fertiliser for the entire Rabi season 2016-17 will be around 4.3m tonnes as against the expected consumption of 3.3m tonnes by end-March. Moreover, the production of urea is projected at 1.5m tonnes and consumption at 1.1m tonnes in the April-June period.

Based on these calculations, it was estimated that the surplus of urea will be 800,000 tonnes by end-June, while 200,000 tonnes will be maintained as strategic reserves.

A source said urea was in surplus primarily because of NFML stocks. “If the government allows export of the surplus urea, the next crop season might face acute shortage of fertiliser,” an official of the Ministry of Industries and Production said.

Under the Kissan package, the government pays Rs156 on a 50kg urea bag and offers a reduced sales tax rate of 12pc. As a result of cash subsidy, the government doled out Rs17.6bn on urea until December 2016, while it lost revenue of Rs9bn in just five months of the current fiscal year because of reduced sales tax rate. The full impact of this reduction in sales tax will be much higher.

The installed capacity of urea production was there but it could not be utilised due to non-availability of gas. As a result, the shortages were always met through urea imports.

This year, the government has imported liquefied natural gas to improve the supply to local urea manufacturers. This resulted into surplus production. Meanwhile, the federal government directed the TCP to import urea at a high price of Rs1,450 per 50kg bag.

The price of the imported urea was reduced to Rs1,200 in September 2016. On Jan 5, the Ministry of Industries and Production asked the ECC to reduce the imported urea price to Rs1,000 per 50kg bag.

An industry source told Dawn that further reduction in the price of imported urea would not only cause a huge loss to the national exchequer, but it would also benefit a selected few.

"The move will favour a certain lobby that will import urea by mis-declaring its price and sell it on the domestic market and pocket the subsidy," the source added.

The source said there was no proposal to re-export the imported urea to recover taxpayers' money despite the fact that global prices have risen recently. The current urea prices in the Middle East stand at $243 a tonne (free on board).

https://www.dawn.com/news/1308446/fate-of-surplus-urea-hangs-in-the-balance

MINISTER ACKNOWLEDGES POSITIVE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN AGRICULTURE
Business Recorder, 15 January 2017

MULTAN: The Punjab Minister for Agriculture, Naeem Akhtar Khan Bhabha, visited the bio-tech corn field trial being undertaken by Monsanto Pakistan. During the visit, the Minister was provided with a detailed briefing and overview of the technology features, crop characteristics, trial and testing parameters and agronomic practices.

The briefing was followed by a tour of the crop field for practical demonstration. Speaking on the occasion, Bhabha acknowledged the positive role of technology and innovation in the field of agriculture and emphasized the importance of a vibrant seed industry for the development and growth of agriculture in the Country.

Monsanto Pakistan's latest bio-tech corn seed incorporates technology that provides protection against pest attack and enables over the top application of herbicides for significantly improved pest and weed control. This cutting-edge technology will reduce cost of agriculture inputs and labour, whilst protecting crop yield for the farmer.

From 1996 till 2016 over 2 billion hectares of biotech crops have been planted by 18 million farmers across 28 countries. During this period (1996-2014) biotechnology was responsible for additional production of 158.4 million tons of soybeans and 321.8 million tons of corn, contributing over $150 billion in global farm incomes. The technology has also contributed production of an extra 24.7 million tons of cotton lint and 9.2 million tons of canola.

During the briefing, Aamir Mirza, Country Lead for Monsanto Pakistan, informed the Minister that Monsanto's new bio-tech corn received commercialization approval from the Federal Ministry of Climate Change in February 2016, following compliance with the bio-safety rules and regulation and rigorous field trials, first initiated in 2009.

He assured the Minister that Monsanto Pakistan is committed to providing the highest quality corn seed to the farmer and will continue to work closely with the farming community to ensure understanding of optimum agronomic practices, highlighting Monsanto's efforts towards building capacity of the farmers through "Farmer Field Day", "Learning Centre" and "Agriculture Academy" programs.

Muhammad Aasim also briefed the minister and audience about the pest attacks and diseases which badly hit the corn crop and remedial measures introduced by the company.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/15/5-page/839839-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 2ND TO JANUARY 8TH 2017

PEASANT DIES IN POLICE CUSTODY

Dawn, January 2nd, 2017

MIRPURKHAS: A peasant belonging to Thar died in Digri police custody under mysterious circumstances on Sunday morning.

Reports reaching here said Walho Bheel, 37, along with his family had come to work in the village of Ch. Tarique in taluka Digri from Tharparkar district some months ago.

A few days ago, his mother-in-law Shremati Youra, wife of Aalo Bheel, submitted a complaint to Digri police station SHO Muhammad Bux Majidano that Walho Bheel had tortured her daughter. On Saturday, the Digri police took him in custody and kept him in the lock-up of the police station without lodging any case against him.

On Sunday morning, the police brought his body in the taluka hospital of Digri and stated that the accused had committed suicide in the washroom of the lock-up with the help of rope.

After a post mortem in the hospital, doctors reported that a mark of the rope was visible on his neck, but said the post mortem report would be finalised later.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1305842/peasant-dies-in-police-custody

DROUGHT SITUATION PLAN

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 2nd, 2017, 2016

Amin Ahmed

In the wake of the drought-like situation prevailing across the country since October 2016, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research sees a negative impact on the rabi crops in 2017.

According to a ministry official, climate is unpredictable. Provinces are scheduled to submit their crop situation reports to the ministry this month, so as to have a clearer picture by February.

Water availability for 2017 rabi crops, estimated 16pc less than the previous year, is now feared to aggravate. Punjab and Sindh will be hard-hit provinces, facing 17pc water shortages.

Against the average usage of 19.751MAF in Punjab, the anticipated share from the system is forecast to be 16.311MAF. For Sindh, average usage is 14.912MAF whereas availability would be 12.306MAF; KP and Balochistan, however, will get their normal share of irrigation water, according to the statistics of the ministry.

Barani (rainfed) areas of the Potohar region, which account for 10pc of the total wheat crop, are under serious stress due to prolonged dry spell.

A two-member team survey by Suparco in various districts of Potohar at the end of November has observed:

The prolonged dry spell starting from October is developing into a drought situation.

Large areas have become unfit for sowing owing to inadequate soil moisture.

Germination of wheat and other crops is patchy in many areas.

In some areas wheat crop has germinated well, but is now in dire need of rainfall.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1305754/drought-situation-plan

CHINESE EXPERT OUTLINES MODEL FOR ENHANCING YIELD
The Express Tribune, January 3rd, 2017.

LAHORE: The Chinese nutrient management model could enable Pakistan to achieve optimum yield out of a comparatively lower agricultural land, said Dr Yuan Yongbing, Vice President of the Qingdao Agricultural University.

He made the suggestion while leading a delegation in a meeting with Wang Zihai, President of the Pak-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI), and Moazzam Ghurki, Vice President, at the chamber premises on Monday.

The delegates were of the view that Pakistan being an agricultural economy with vast arable land was still unable to utilise its maximum potential, particularly due to the lack of modern infrastructure, conventional cultivation methods and low-quality chemicals and fertilisers that badly affected the yield.

Yuan pointed out that China had only 10% arable land and had the challenge to feed 20% of the world's population. "With the help of nutrient management system devised by our agricultural research experts, we are able to get higher yields from minimum land," he said.

He also talked about the utilisation of non-hazardous, eco-friendly and pesticide-free microbial compound fertilisers that were effectively used in China to enhance crop yields. Similar microbial fertilisers should be introduced in Pakistan to get maximum yield from the fields, he suggested.

He said China was ready to collaborate with Pakistan for providing all modern agricultural facilities including equipment, experts and researchers.

In his presentation, PCJCCI Vice President Moazzam Ghurki informed the delegation that Pakistan's agricultural sector contributed about 24% of gross domestic product and employed 47% of the labour force.

"Most sub-sectors of agriculture have either remained static or have declined over the last three decades, with the exception of livestock. There is a considerable scope for improvement in the production and processing of primary output," he said.

Moazzam stressed that the government had already underlined the need for revitalising the agricultural sector by improving crop productivity and ensuring systematic application of advanced technology to enhance profitability and competitiveness.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1282208/agricultural-productivity-chinese-expert-outlines-model-enhancing-yield/

USHERING IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: BHARA BUND TO BRING GREEN REVOLUTION
The Express Tribune, January 3rd, 2017.

The measures being taken for construction of Bhara Bund would bring about a green revolution through agriculture development in the area, said Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Southern Areas Development Project (KPSADP) Director Ghulam Habib Marwat. Briefing Deputy Commissioner Ahmed Khan Wazir on the occasion of visit to the proposed site, of the multi-purpose reservoir at Rodi Khel area, the project director said it would irrigate about 9,000 hectares of land mainly owned by Jathathar, which had either been unproductive or barren due to scarcity of water.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1282238/ushering-economic-development-bhara-bund-bring-green-revolution/

CURRENT WEATHER SYSTEM TO HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT ON CROPS
Business Recorder, January 04, 2017
The recent dry spell followed by rains forecast from Tuesday (yesterday) onwards will have some positive impact on all major Rabi crops, including wheat and gram already negatively affected by prolonged dry spell in the country. “Currently wheat crop in the country is at the booting stage and requires a rain shower, therefore the current weather system will have a positive impact on the wheat crop,” said an official of Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

He said that expected rain for the next few days would also meet the water requirements of minor corps including gram pulses, barley and mustard. “The dry spell has badly affected wheat sowing especially in rain-fed areas which produce 10 percent of total wheat production but rains would benefit the crop”, he said. Another official said that the prolonged dry spell has badly affected wheat sowing in rain-fed areas and additionally the crop is not in a better position in irrigated areas due to lack of moisture therefore country may miss wheat production target by up to three to four million tons.

He said that the government had set wheat production target at 26.01 million tons for Rabi sowing season 2016-17 from an area of 9.12 million hectares. Out of 26.01 million tons, Punjab is projected to produce 19.51 million tons, Sindh 4.2 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhawa 1.4 million tons and Balochistan 0.9 million tons, he revealed.

According to Pakistan Metrological Department (PMD) statement, a westerly wave is likely to approach upper parts of the country from Tuesday. Under the influence of this weather system, intermittent rain/thunderstorm and snowfall is expected in upper parts of the country from Tuesday to Saturday.

Scattered rain is expected in Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), FATA, Upper Punjab (Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sargodha, Lahore divisions), Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. Isolated light rain and snowfall over the hills is expected in Quetta and Zhob divisions. Light to moderate snowfall is also expected over the hills of Malakand, Hazara divisions, Galliyat, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir.

Intermittent rain may trigger landslides in the mountainous areas of KP, GB and Kashmir. According to weather advisory issued for farmers those farmers obtaining crop water through tube wells are advised to schedule irrigation as per crop requirement. Farmers of irrigated areas should irrigate the crop as per requirement in accordance with the prevailing weather conditions. Normally first irrigation is given 20-25 days after sowing.

In areas like Potohar Region and adjoining areas of KP where rain water storages are available farmers are advised to irrigate crops by using available irrigation methods like sprinkler irrigation etc. Removing weeds from the standing crops is very important as weeds utilize moisture and food which must be utilised by the crop. As a result considerable loss in yield occurs every year. Due to further drop in temperature farmers of particular areas in the northern half of the country are advised to take precautionary measures to protect their crops from the expected frost.

http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/120024/

DOWNPOURS CONTINUE: WINTER RAINS REVIVE FARMERS' FORTUNES FOR NOW
The Express Tribune, January 5th, 2017.

Hidayat Khan

Peshawar: A late spell of winter rain continued to drench northern parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on Wednesday, reviving farmers' hopes of planting Rabi crops after a prolonged dry spell severely curtailed the sowing of Kharif crops.

Though the season for sowing wheat may be over, farmers still welcomed the downpour coming as it did after a month-long dry spell.

Farmers in the arid southern districts of the province, where growers are fully dependent on rain for irrigation, will not be able to sow wheat.

According to Met Office projections, light to moderate rainfall is expected in the province and the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) over the next 48 hours.

"With the potato crop under severe stress and wheat already sowed, the current spell of rain will have a positive impact," said Atlas Khan, a farmer.

Farmers in general feared the spectre of heavy losses and crop failures because of depletion of underground water.

"The current spell of rain will have some positive impact on the province's agriculture," says Khan "Farmers always need rainfall for growing crops even in areas irrigated by canals, as they never get sufficient irrigation water according to their needs."

People in the province's urban areas also heaved a sigh of relief after rain broke the prolonged dry spell, which allowed various diseases to spread.

Pakistan Metrological Department predicted light to moderate rain with snowfall over hilly areas in upper parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa such as Malakand, Hazara, Peshawar and Mardan divisions and Fata during the next two days.

Foggy conditions are also likely to continue over the country's plains.

Over the past 24 hours, the highest rainfall, 42 milimetres, was recorded in Dir district followed by Saidu Sharif 38mm, Malam Jabba 36mm, Kalam 31mm, Chitral 18.8mm, Balakot 12.2mm, Parachinar 11mm, Drosh 10.8mm, Cherat 4mm, Kohat 3mm and Peshawar 1.4mm. Heavy snowfall, recorded at Malam Jabba, Kalam, Dir, Shangla and Chitral, is expected to continue over the next few days.

Shangla's residents were overcome with joy over the first snowfall. But their happiness was short-lived because power breakdowns soon followed.

Deputy Commissioner Abdul Kabir Khan imposed Section 144 and ordered all motorists to drive with chains on their vehicles' tyres to avoid hazards on slippery roads.

Shangla received as much as two feet of snow, disrupting the flow of traffic.

In Chitral, the road connecting the district with Peshawar was closed for traffic after heavy snowfall hit the area. All vehicles on their way to Peshawar were stopped at Mirkhani checkpost while those en route to Chitral were stopped at Lower Dir because of road closure.

Local residents urged the government to open the much-awaited Lowari tunnel for traffic at least after heavy snowfall forced the closure of Lowari Top.

http://tribune.com.pk/story/1284833/downpours-continue-winter-rains-revive-farmers-fortunes-now/

WHEAT TO BE SOWN OVER 0.5M ACRES OF LAND IN SIALKOT
Business Recorder, 6 January 2017

SIALKOT: Over 5.10 lakh acres of land would be brought under wheat crop during Rabi crop season in Sialkot district.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Thursday on that in order to attain the fixed target of wheat crop, the Agriculture department has finalized necessary arrangements in the district.

The Agriculture department would provide full assistance and guidance to the wheat growers for attaining better output of the crop and enhancing the wheat crop acreage in the Province. Under the programme special attention will be accorded on bringing maximum land under wheat crop for attaining yielding results. The Agriculture department had initiated special training programme for wheat growers for creating awareness about the proportionate use of fertilizers for getting better yield of the crop, natural cultivation techniques and irrigation.

The Agriculture department has initiated "Farmers Training Programme" under which wheat growers of 1431 villages of Sialkot district imparted training about latest wheat production techniques, utilization fertilizer and pesticide aimed at attaining maximum per acre wheat yield in four tehsils of the district while Agriculture experts were visiting village to village for creating awareness about obtaining maximum output of the crop. The tehsil wise break of wheat cultivation is 1.44 lac Sialkot, 1.23 lac Daska, 71000 Sambrial and 1.63 Pasrur tehsil of the district.

Special step has also been taken for checking the sale of fake and substandard pesticides and fertilizer in Sialkot, Daska, Sambril and Pasrur tehsils of the district and Sialkot district administration has adopted solid measures for ensuring the provision of quality pesticides and fertilizers to the wheat growers in the district sources added.

Meanwhile, the sowing of wheat crop is in full swing in Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district. The agriculture department has directed the wheat growers that they should only recommended seeds for attaining better per acre yield of the crop.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/06/5-page/836628-news.html

PAD SPENDS RS113.6M TO IMPROVE SOIL PRODUCTIVITY
Business Recorder, 6 January 2017

Sarmad Mahmud

SIALKOT: Punjab Agriculture department (PAD) has launched a five year comprehensive plan costing Rs. 113.655 million in order to improve productivity and profitability through soil diagnostics for the promotion of balanced use of macro and micro fertilizers and soil amendments across the Province.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Thursday that under the plan special steps were being taken for farmers' facilitation through modernized extension service in Punjab. Under the programme Soil sampling kits had been distributed while motorbikes had also been provided to the extension agents including Sialkot across Punjab followed by training programme through specialists. It may be mentioned that as many as 55 motorbikes had been provided to extension agents in Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district to streamline the activities in befitting manners.

IT fortified programme will also be launched to connect soil sampling to laboratories however it has been decided that till the time the IT system is in place sampling process will be started to complete target of 600,000 soil samples from 32 districts of the Province by June 30 next year.

The village-wise sampling will be collected on 10 acre grid in most the districts. Staff will be assigned to collect village-wise samples according to given target.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/01/06/5-page/836630-news.html

'AGRICULTURE GROWTH RISING, BUT MAY NOT SUSTAIN'
Amin Ahmed

Dawn, January 8th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Agricultural production and productivity in Pakistan continue to rise, though the growth is increasingly on the back of unsustainable input intensification patterns rather than technological change, according to a report released by the International Food Policy Research Institute.

While the agriculture sector is still the foundation of Pakistan's economy, it is changing in terms of both structure and composition; its share in country's total output and its capacity to drive growth and development are diminishing.

Moreover, given its large share in the gross domestic product, it will be extremely difficult for Pakistan to achieve high overall growth without substantial agricultural growth.

Agriculture is no longer the largest sector of Pakistan's economy today, however, it remains a major source of income for the country's rural poor and an important driver of the rural non-farm economy where there is untapped potential for pro-poor growth, according to the IFPRI report titled 'Agriculture and the Rural Economy in Pakistan: Issues, Outlooks, and Policy Priorities'.

Researchers David J. Spielman, Sohail J. Malik, Paul Dorosh and Nuzhat Ahmad in the report examined what can be done to revitalise the country's agricultural sector and rural economy in light of recurring macroeconomic policy shifts and weather-related shocks.

The challenge for Pakistan's development strategy is how to take advantage of opportunities to continuously increase agricultural productivity and incomes, facilitating a smooth spatial and structural transformation of the overall economy, the publication said.

Economist Dr Ashfaque Hassan agreed that agriculture was no longer the largest sector of Pakistan's economy today. Its falling growth indicates that this sector is not on the radar of the government, he said.

On an average of 2.1 per cent growth in eight years, this key sector of the economy has slipped further to 1.6pc growth, he said. This sector is being grossly neglected in the absence of the public sector while the government's focus is only on the support prices and subsidies, he said.

Dr Hassan feared that the rural people will be hard hit as a result of this neglect, and gap between the rich and poor will widen.

According to the report, growth in rural infrastructure, transportation networks and urban agglomerations is reducing the time, effort, and cost of linking production to consumption, yet agricultural diversification into commodities that serve urban demand remain limited.

Public policy clearly has a role to play in addressing these paradoxes, but shifts in attention given to agricultural policy since independence are closely tied to the observed fluctuations in Pakistan's agricultural growth rates.

Agriculture has not performed to its full potential and functions in a low productivity trap. Scope for technological change exists, but the gains associated with the Green Revolution have long disappeared, indicating the need to redouble efforts to introduce farmers to new productivity-enhancing technologies and practices.

Scope for diversification also exists but current policies do not explicitly encourage a move out of low-value food staples and into higher-value crops and livestock where agro-climatic conditions and market infrastructure are otherwise conducive.

Furthermore, the continued fragmentation of cropped area from the economically viable medium-size farms into smaller and economically unviable farms continues unabated, with little chance of addressing the weak institution and high transaction costs found in local land markets or the political power issues that allow large landowners to protect their landholdings.

On the other hand, Senator Syed Muzafar Hussain Shah, who is chairperson of the Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, sees the revival of agricultural sector in the near future. He counted a number measures taken on government level, including the recently approved Seed Act Bill and Plant Breeders Bill in addition to reduction in the prices of fertilisers, support prices and increase in loans for farmers. He also hoped international seed companies will now enter into Pakistan.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1307023/agriculture-growth-rising-but-may-not-sustain

CATCHMENT OF FARMING HAPPINESS
The News, January 08, 2017

Jan Khaskheli

Hyderabad: Cultivation parameters on irrigation system are different in Sindh. Presently, on one side farmers are crying against the annual rotation started in the first week of January fearing loss of their standing kharif crops, mainly wheat, vegetables and pulses. On the other, small growers in catchment area of the River Indus are looking optimistic to have more yields of kharif crops this year, despite the fact they do not have proper irrigation system and mostly apply bosi cultivation methods.

Some influential growers in the catchment area pump water directly from the river by machines. They also sell surplus water to neighboring small growers against 25 percent of the harvest. These growers employ traditional cultivation methods. They use pre-sowing moisture to cultivate seasonal crops that too without having to invest in other modern agriculture aids.

That is why only growers of catchment area, in the entire province, produce organic food and do not apply pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals. Small growers in katcha area have their indigenous seeds for cultivation. Like for some varieties of wheat, they use their own seed, saying the genetically modified (GM) seeds are not reliable.

Qasim Khoso, a small land holder residing in Manjhand, Jamshoro District said he will have more yield from his crops mostly valuable pulses, coriander and wheat.

"We do not have more investment for fertilizer, pesticides and can't spend on removing weeds like farmers do in barrage areas. We can only spend onetime on tractors for ploughing the land and sowing the seasonal crops," he said.

"For irrigation we have to approach landlords to buy water against a 25 percent share of crops. On this condition, they provide us with water they pump through lifters from the river." This year, Khoso has cultivated pulses, wheat and coriander. Especially masoor (Red Lentil) is most profitable crop for growers in catchment area. Its average per acre yield is around 25-30 maund and is sold in the local market at around Rs5,000/mound.

Similarly, coriander is another valuable crop of the area, which gives a produce of 15–25 maunds/acre. Its price in local market is Rs6,000/maund.

"We do not take our produce to the urban center for selling. Traders pay us at our fields and take the produce away," he said.

All these crops were sown in November and will be harvested in March. They are ready for reaping in only five months. During the harvest, traders from Punjab throng the area to buy the produce. According to farmers, there is also a demand of dried fodder of pulse crops in international markets. Traders buy this fodder fondly.

Recalling the past, elderly growers said they had two major tributaries namely Sada Bahar Shakh and Makhdoom Sahar Shakh flowing directly from the river. But presently there is only one tributary, which is not accessible for them. These tributaries were damaged by the recent floods.

It is true that these farmers are exploited by the influential landlords, they have no other option but to use basic cultivation methods, they can't spend on modern agricultural aids, they are always facing shortage of water, etc. but are still happy. It is a message for the barrage area farmers on how to use water efficiently.

The growers, who depend on irrigation system in barrage areas, are unsure because the weather change has damaged earlier sown wheat and other crops, which required proper temperature at the very outset.

The growers in Katcha areas have been at risk as they are living at the mouth of the river Indus as there is no embankment. Whenever the river receives flood water it creates problems for the local communities. Where there used to be thick forests a few years back is now a treeless area. People enjoyed more resources of income, but now there is no forest. These people believe the flood is a natural phenomenon they have been facing through generations. Presently, they have built residences above six/seven feet high and are feeling safe with livestock and other assets from damages of the river floods.

During the floods, they always face crop damage, displacement, and joblessness for months, depending on the level of destruction by water. They have more horrible tales to tell from the recent years' floods.

Anyway, these katcha area people are happy because they produce organic food, they have their own milk and butter and are enjoying safe environment. The only problem they face is the unavailability or non-functional education and health facilities for their kids. Despite their contribution to agriculture economy, the government has done nothing to recognise their efforts and provide them with their basic rights of education and health.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/177494-Catchment-of-farming-happiness

February 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 20TH TO FEBRUARY 26TH 2017

FATA FARMERS HURT BY BAN ON TRANSPORTATION OF UREA FERTILISER

Dawn, February 20th, 2017

Sadia Qasim Shah

PESHAWAR: Ban on urea fertiliser may not have affected the bomb-making terrorist organisations as much as it has hit the agriculture sector in tribal areas where farmers are forced to use low quality smuggled urea to increase their crop produce.

"The urea (fertiliser) smuggled into tribal areas from the neighbouring Afghanistan is of very bad quality and yet very expensive," said Mumtaz Ali, who was forced to use a fertiliser being sold in Parachinar market at a high price. He was forced to buy a sack of urea for Rs3,500 for he needed it for his wheat crop.

"I hear it is being smuggled from Afghanistan where urea from Central Asia and Russia is easily available," said the farmer who was amazed that Pakistani urea which was cheaper and of better quality was banned for use in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but the smuggled one was available.

In settled areas of the country, a 50 kilogrammes bag of urea costs about Rs1,600 but since its transportation to Fata is banned the farmers are forced to use inferior quality urea being sold at a high price.

Agriculture sector in various areas, particularly in Bajaur, Kurram and South Waziristan agencies, has suffered due to the ban imposed by the government first in 2009 on supply of chemical fertilisers to Fata.

The ban was imposed when the US pushed Pakistan to implement thorough regulations on fertilisers as it has been directly responsible for killing of people in the IED blasts.

It was alleged that ammonium nitrate, an ingredient used in impoverished explosive devices (IEDs), is also commonly found in most fertilisers and most of the roadside IED blasts in Afghanistan and tribal belt had traces of nitrate. As such, the US government wanted a ban on its supply to the tribal areas.

Ironically, urea fertiliser is now being smuggled into tribal areas from Afghanistan. Sources said that urea smuggling from settled parts of the country to Afghanistan via Kurram and other areas was still going on. "Since we cannot get it from our own country, many dealers smuggle it or procure it from

Afghanistan and sell it here at high prices," said another farmer in Parachinar who requested not to be named.

Haji Rauf Hussain Turi, a fertiliser dealer in Parachinar, told Dawn by phone that farmers used the low quality urea, which had affected per acre yield drastically.

"We requested Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa during his recent visit to Parachinar to lift the ban which is affecting our crop production," said Haji Rauf, who is also president of the traders association in the town adjacent to the Afghan border.

He said that the traders and elders had earlier made the same request to the Corps Commander Peshawar and Inspector General of Frontier Corps to lift the ban and work out a proper mechanism for the distribution of fertilisers.

He said that all kinds of fertilisers were available in Afghanistan which was imported from Russia, Iran, and Central Asia.

"If you take the smuggled urea in your hand it is like powder and of very low quality," said a farmer who was forced to buy the smuggled urea as he could not bring it from nearby Kohat district due to ban on its supply to the tribal areas.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1315832

FARM CREDIT: SUB-SECTOR TARGETS ON THE CARDS
Dawn, 20 February 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

EOGRAPHICAL and subsectoral disparities in agriculture credit distribution may soon be addressed with farmers of smaller provinces and less-banked agri-businesses getting better access to finances.

On the advice of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC), the State Bank of Pakistan is considering setting sub-sector and district-wise targets for banks, sources in ACAC say.

While banks continue to follow an old pattern of agricultural lending, dictated more by their own preferences, this is now going to change.

The SBP gives banks monetary targets for agricultural lending, which they try to meet by lending more to old borrowers, or, by making fresh loans to new and influential borrowers. They seldom care about credit concentration in a particular region or in specific areas of farming, growers complain.

`Banks don`t bother to find out who needs more bank credit, where and for what,` an ACAC member told this writer, adding, that this issue was highlighted at a recent meeting of the committee in Multan.

State Bank Governor Ashraf Mahmood Wathra acknowledged this shortcoming at a briefing in this ACAC meeting. Sources privy to the meeting say the SBP officials reassured ACAC that geographic andsub-sectoral allocations of agricultural lending could be done after seeking banks` input.

`Banks do not discourage new borrowers or neglect farmers living in a certain region,` head of one of the top five banks told this writer. But he admitted that `due to several issues, not each segment of the sector gets its due share, and geographical unevenness in credit distribution also persists`.

Farmers` lobby groups keep pressing banks to end unjustifiable unevenness in credit delivery, whether geographical or sub-sectoral. But it is not quite easy to establish that banks` lending patterns point to `unjustifiable` geographic or sub-sector based imbalance, says a senior central banker.

`We have to look at the historical data of each individual bank, seek clarifications if we find anything wrong and then set region-specific and segment-specific lending targets for them after due consultation.

That is a huge, time-consuming task. It means that regional and segment specific lending targets cannot be assigned to banks anytime soon, some central bankers say. But it is easier to make improvements in a broader context.

For example, initially, a provincial breakdown of lending targets can be set. Or banks can be pushed for higher lending insome broad categories of agri-businesses that have been neglected thus far like minor crops and animal husbandry services, they opine.

Gross agricultural lending has been growing with an uptick in agricultural growth. In FY16, banks lent Rs598bn to the sector, up about 16pc from Rs516bn in FY15.

And in the first half of this fiscal, about Rs302bn have been disbursed against the year`s target of Rs700bn, official stats reveal.

`However, agricultural lending remains heavily skewed in favour of Punjab and even within the provincial credit disbursement there, lending activity takes place more briskly in some areas than in others` complains an official of Agri Forum Pakistan.

`But whether such imbalances are resulting from higher demand, quality of bank loans or banks wilfully neglecting some regions, has to be investigated, says a former SBP executive director.

Another common complaint of borrowers is that big banks neglect small growers and small dairy farmers. Bankers defend by saying that with very active involvement of microfinance banks, this issue has been addressed to some extent.

Besides, the SBP stats also reveal a gradual rise in lending to small and medium-sized growers over the past fewyears. `Two key issues, however, are worth examining. First, whether banks are offering adequate finance to agricultural SMEs and second, whether they are open to meeting credit demand originating from hitherto neglected areas,` according to a former secretary of Sindh Agriculture Department.

Bankers say, of late they have started focusing on lending to SMEs in agriculture and boast of a 16pc growth in it in the last quarter of FY16. They claim that the trend is in progress. (More recent data is not available).

But the very fact that the total number of such SMEs by end-June remaining below 9,000 suggests that banks are not entertaining credit demand originating from smaller SMEs in agriculture, the number of which runs into tens of thousands.

Complaints of imbalances in agricultural lending are bound to rise as high-tech start-ups in the agriculture sector keep coming up and, in an environment of traditional lending practices of banks, they feel left out.

So, there is a need to revamp the whole system of agricultural lending to align it more with the needs of the emerging market, ACAC sources say, adding that the committee has already been working on it.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=20_02_2017_604_001

SNAGS IN INTEREST-FREE LOANS TO FARMERS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 20th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB'S interest-free loan package, which started with much fanfare last October, seems to have run into serious problems.

The loan disbursement has been meagre compared to the targets. An amount of Rs100bn was to be disbursed among 600,000 famers during the rabi season.

With the rabi (read wheat crop) season now almost over, only Rs2.75bn have been received by 22,000 farmers. It makes less than 3pc of the loan target and just over 3pc of beneficiaries. Both figures sound pathetic.

The farmer registration data, however, gives some hope. Before getting loans, every farmer was supposed to get registered with the concerned department. Some 221,000 farmers, or just over 30pc of the target, have got themselves registered and may avail the loan this kharif. If that happens, the loan package may earn some respectability in the eyes of stakeholders.

While admitting that the loan and delivery process at a snail's pace can threaten the initiative, relevant officials pin their hopes on the registration data. They believe that first season of a five-year plan was bound to have teething problems, and it did.

Counting the initial problems, they say that the Land Record Management and Information System (LRMIS), which was supposed to be the basis of the whole loan delivery system, became the biggest snag.

In some districts, the record was not updated to stand banking scrutiny. In other cases, the processing officer had not been posted yet.

The banking rules and regulations came next. The banks were not geared to the kind of digitisation that the LRMIS had created as collateral The rules needed to be changed. To make things more difficult the authority for loan processing was centralised.

Since 70pc of the applicants were supposed to be new borrowers, checking the collateral took more time.

The official processes are cumbersome. The Akhuwat Foundation, which was enlisted to grant loans to landless people in rural areas, got a revolving fund of Rs2bn after three months, when half of rabi season was over.

Apart from these initial difficulties, some of the bankers think that targets were too ambitious. Take the example of 600,000 farmers. In the last 10 years, the entire banking system has issued less than 1m production loans — excluding industrial and value-addition loans.

Expecting the government departments to achieve 60pc of it (what the professional bankers did in a decade) was asking for too much. In this loaning process, only two banks (the National Bank of Pakistan and the Bank of Punjab) were involved and both had not developed, wherewithal to process such huge numbers of small loans in such a short period of time.

Historically, out of 5.5m farming families in the province, only 1.5m have been involved in dealing with banks.

However, some analysts think that there was nothing to worry about and the situation is bound to improve. Firstly, the government is committed to make sure that this scheme does not fail.

The chief minister directed everyone involved to keep him in the loop, and he was kept updated. When he saw things getting out of hands, he himself presided over a meeting in the second week of February and everyone guilty of any laxity was taken to task.

The LRMIS was told to fill seats where needed, the provincial bank was told to hire or spare manpower and the package managers told to speed up registration process for the next kharif.

Secondly, this kharif and next rabi would be last sowing seasons before the next general elections. The Punjab government would naturally be more sensitive to this package because it was an important initiative which caters to the farmers'l needs.

Some other initiatives like Farm to Market Roads and Saf Pani (clear water) have faced their own problems. The last thing this government can afford is failure, or even, slowing down of this initiative. With all bottlenecks now identified, the government is expected to go whole hog for removing them.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1315806/snags-in-interest-free-loans-to-farmers

SUBSIDY PACKAGE FOR FARMERS IN NEXT BUDGET
Dawn, 23 February 2017

ISLAMABAD: The government is considering a subsidy package for farmers in the upcoming budget, Secretary Finance Tariq Bajwa said on Wednesday.

He was briefing the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance.

The committee, led by its chairman Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, was informed that commercial banks were lending liberally to the agriculture sector. A suitable reduction in markup rates on farm loans was discussed amid consensus that it should be equal to mark up rate for industrial loans.

Mr Bajwa said the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) and Zarai Taragiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) have already reduced markup rates for the agriculture sector.

State Bank governor Ashraf Mahmood Wathra informed the committee that only 22 per cent of lending to the agriculture sector was made by ZTBL while 78pc was being done by commercial banks.

The free import of fertiliser in the country was also discussed and concern was expressed over urea exports.

An official from the Ministry of Industries and Production said the fertiliser sector was exporting urea while the government was supplying gas through the LNG to operate fertiliser units.

An of ficial of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research said the decision to export fertiliser was opposed by the ministry. Mr Sheikh recommended that higher gas prices should be charged from fertiliser plants for the volume of fertiliser that was exported and same should be provided to f armers as subsidy.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=23_02_2017_010_006

FARMERS ADVISED TO REMOVE WEEDS
Business Recorder, 23 February 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office on Wednesday asked the growers to remove weeds from their fields to help standing crops consume existing soil moisture fully for a full growth.

It said that wheat crop was growing to a maturity in different areas of the country, adding that farmers should stop irrigation ahead of expected rainy spell in the agricultural plains.

Farmers in the lower half of the country, especially those in central regions should take steps to ensure optimum temperature at the poultry rearing houses keeping in view the changing weather. With dropping temperatures, it said that the farmers of Northern Areas to take precautionary measures for protection of their crops and livestock from expected frost.

Mainly dry weather is expected in the most parts of Punjab with a light to moderate rainfall from Feb 26 to Feb 28. Dry weather is expected in the agricultural plains of Sindh till Feb 28.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, widely cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts over the period. Largely cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Balochistan with a light to moderate rainfall at scattered places of Northwestern Balochistan from Feb 24 to Feb 27.

Weather in Gilgit-Baltistan, mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of the province with a light to moderate rain with snowfall at scattered places over the period.

Mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Kashmir with a light to moderate rain with snowfall at Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/23/3-page/852347-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 13TH TO FEBRUARY 19TH 2017

ARE FARMERS SUB-PRIME BORROWERS?

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 13th, 2017

Muhammad Munir Ahmed

The current debate about different rural-urban lending rates has its roots in the 1970s when commercial banks were, for the first time, involved in agricultural financing.

Earlier, a bank's lending activities were almost entirely concentrated in financing trade and commerce along with lending to the government for procurement of certain essential commodities like wheat, rice and cotton.

The main purpose behind the policy shift was to make small farmers the chief beneficiaries of the monetary policy.

About 45 years ago, providing retail credit in small chunks to farmers in far-flung rural areas carried a more than ordinary risk. Therefore, the policy emphasis was on enhancing the quantum of credit to this neglected, but important, player of the economy. Cost considerations were left to be solved at a proper time.

Mandatory credit targets for agricultural production and the SBP branch licensing policy played a very positive role in this regard.

Mandatory credit targets helped divert the flow of available bank credit towards farmers. In case of failure, banks were forced to keep the undisbursed amount with the SBP (without any remuneration) till provision of the remaining loan amount.

Through the branch licensing policy, the SBP linked the opening of new urban branches with the opening of branches in far-off rural areas.

In the eighties, loans for small farmers were made interest-free where the federal government used to provide a subsidy of 10pc to commercial banks as against the conventional market lending rates of 14pc.

All banks being state-run, the question of cost of rural credit became a zero sum game, paying a subsidy on one hand and getting a profit from banks on the other.

With the dawn of the 21st century almost all mainstream banks (except the NBP) were denationalised and the SBP's credit ceiling discipline was replaced by indirect monetary control. Under a market-based banking system, rationalisation of deposit and lending rates was supposed to take place in line with importance banking services for different users.

Due to the 9/11 incident, there was a flux of excess liquidity in the banking system which adversely affected the country's interest rate structure. Conventional lending rates tumbled to 4-5pc whereas the export finance rate fell to 3pc.

In subsequent years, the SBP invented a yield curve, known as the Karachi Inter-Bank Offered Rate (KIBOR), to be used by banks for pricing their products. However, the cost of rural credit remained unchanged because banks kept financing the rural sector at more than 10pc.

After 5-6 years, when interest rates rose once again, banks immediately increased the agricultural credit rate to 18pc.

In 2017 we see a repetition of this pattern, the SBP policy rate is below 6pc and KIBOR, for the three months to around a year has been around 7pc, but poor farmers are still getting accommodation from banks at 14 to 16pc.

It seems that despite doing so for a period of around 45 years, banks still consider agricultural financing as cumbersome and small farmers as sub-prime borrowers.

Even a small farmer, who has never delayed or defaulted in any loan instalment during a decade long banker-customer relationship, has to pay the same high cost for getting a loan of a few hundred thousand.

The above attitude of banks is not understandable when they are mobilising a larger part of their very low cost deposits from rural areas.

Cost of funds for consumers and micro borrowers are even higher. Consumer loans generally carry an interest rate in the range of 18 to 20pc whereas micro finance — largely meant for weaker sections of the society — are provided loans at 22-24pc.

For on-line transfer of money, through banks or by third party service providers like Easypaisa, Mobicash etc, much higher rates are being charged as against a very negligible actual cost.

The quantum of agricultural credit increased from around Rs300bn in 2003-2004 to Rs600bn in 2017, yet the central bank did not consider it worthwhile to take up the issue of cost of rural credit.

The SBP's Quarterly reports and periodic banking sector reviews are almost silent about this important national issue.

It is very important to mention here that Rs600bn of rural finance caters to around one-third of total annual credit requirements of the rural sector. Farmers are forced to get around one trillion rupees from the informal sector consisting of shop-keepers, commission agents and local money lenders at rates much higher than those of commercial banks.

This perpetual neglect has adversely affected the country's rural life which manifests itself in a number of ways: much lower cotton production, delayed payment to sugarcane growers and the frustration of farmers trying to avail the current Kissan Package.

At a time when the issue has been echoing in the parliament, a great deal of pro-activity is required from the autonomous State Bank. A two-pronged policy is needed to resolve the long- cherished agenda of rural development.

Since banks are working in a market-based environment, they may first be asked to rationalise the pricing of agricultural credit. In case of non-response, the SBP should again resort to mandatory credit targets regime. And such targets should not only mention the quantum of credit but also the rate at which these funds are to be provided to the farmers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1314517/are-farmers-sub-prime-borrowers

NEW VARIETIES IN RICE OUTPUT AND EXPORTS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 13th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

Ustainable growth in food crops is crucial to feed the fast-expanding local food industry and boost export earnings.

`We`re conscious of such considerations and are trying to ensure that food crops output keeps growing consistently,` says a senior official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR).

And, since this objective cannot be achieved without increasing the perhectare yields, `emphasis is being placed on finding ways for it which also include development of new, high-yielding seed varieties and improving farm productivity by other means, like better pre-and-post harvest losses etc`.

In case of rice, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council approved in the middle of last year seven hybrid and four open-pollinated (OP) paddy seeds for cultivation, with the hope that these would help boost rice production.

Farmers say some of these varieties have come under commercial use and are giving higher per-hectare yield than traditional non-Basmati Irri varieties.

Hybrid varieties were expected to yield up to 3,450kg per hectare output but in most cases actual yields have not exceeded 3,300kg. Progressive farmers say, even at this level, these varieties are worth cultivating. But availability of certified seeds is a big challenge.

The four OP varieties of paddy, now under commercial cultivation in the second year in a row, are believed to be better than the existing Irri-6 and KSK133 varieties not only in per-hectare yield but also in submergence, salinity and water-stress aspects of the crop.

Officials of MNSFR say they hope that the output of non-Basmati rice would continue to grow largely due to the newly released hybrid and OP varieties.

Officials say total production of rice during the current fiscal year has been estimated at 6.64m tonnes, down 2.5pc from 6.81m tonnes a year ago due to aslight fall in the area under cultivation primarily in Punjab but also in Sindh.

Per-hectare yields of non-basmati rice varieties have reportedly enhanced rice output by 3.6pc in Sindh. Analysis of data reveals that is merely a reflection of as much increase in the area under rice cultivation there.

But officials of the provincial agriculture department also attribute it to the use of some of the newly developed non-basmati varieties.

Rice dealers say long-grain PK386, (the most popular non-basmati rice in the country), KS-82 and long-grain Irri-6 and Irri-9 continue to dominate domestic rice markets and also have a big share in exports.

And while non-basmati rice varieties developed in last few years have gainedgrowers` attention, their output has so far not reached the levels to excite traders particularly those who make bulk purchases on behalf of exporters.

But agricultural officials have something else to say: except for a few aggressive exporters, most of them are too lazy to introduce new rice varieties in international markets at feasible prices.

Discarding the notion that the newly introduced varieties never produce enough for domestic marketing, they point out that output of non-Basmati and non-Irri soared past 2.3m tonnes in the last fiscal year, from less than 1.7m tonnes in FY12. This huge increase of 600,000 tonnes in just four years owes greatly to new varieties of non-basmati varieties, they say.

Even per-hectare yield of non-basma-ti, non-Irri varieties rose faster between FY12 and FY16 (from less than 2850kg to well above 3400kg) compared with the average yield of basmati (from 1711kg to a little over 1800kg), officials of MNSFR say.

Average yield of Irri varieties, on the other hand, fell from 3184kg to less than 2800kg). The FY16 figures are estimated and yet to be finalised and released publicly. But these estimates are least likely to show any major variance, officials say.

They say that behind constant experiments on non-basmati new varieties lies the fact that our Irri varieties are not showing enough growth in per-hectare yield and all new non-basmati varieties are basically improved versions of Irri varieties in one way or the other.

`In some cases, they consume less water; in other cases they can be cultivated in saline water or in most cases their grains are more weighty or long and boost the yield,` according to one official familiar with rice research.

Larger production of non-basmati rice has also led to its increased exports and higher forex earnings. And had this not been the case, the rice sector would have been in real trouble due to declining exports of basmati.

As shown in the table, exports of nonBasmati rice have risen by over a million tonnes in the last five years whereas exports of Basmati have declined by 450,000 tonnes.

`Had there not been a phenomenal growth in domestic consumption of basmati (as dining out culture is growing), rice millers producing basmati brands would have felt the pinch of declining exports too hard,` says an official of Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan.

`This is one aspect. But, another aspect is that had we not been able to export more of non-Basmati rice in these years, it would have been a disaster for the industry.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=13_02_2017_604_002

STRAWBERRY: INCOME FOR SMALL FARMERS
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 13th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

Strawberry cultivation mostly by small farmers in riverine areas in the Sukkur and Khairpur region has remained stable over the past few years.

While strawberry growers are satisfied with farm productivity they complain about below expected market prices.

Strawberry cultivation started in Sindh about a decade ago. Usually the small growers take 2-10 acres of land under varying contracts to cultivate the fruit.

Grown in mid-October, the fruit is usually ready for harvest in January. By mid-February the harvesting gets in full swing only to end in April.

The provincial agriculture department counts strawberry among minor crops. Delayed official statistics showed that it was grown on 236ha in 2013-14. Last season, 767 metric tonnes of strawberry was produced from a nominally reduced acreage.

Currently, the farmers get Rs110-120 per packet of 0.5kg (almost 500gm) while the retail price ranges between Rs150-160 per packet.

Abdul Khaliq, a grower from Sukkur, sold his produce for Rs100-130 per packet initially in January fearing that price would drop as harvesting picks up pace. At the end of last season, he says, the average price had dropped to Rs50-70 per packet.

These small growers depend on middlemen for fruit's seed/plant. Seed reaches the growers via Karachi from Swat where it is mostly grown. For the current crop, say growers, they bought plants for Rs2 each, against the normal 90 paisas-Re1 per plant.

Since the fruit is grown in katcha area of the Indus, growers use tube-wells to lift groundwater for irrigation. Soil of katcha area is most suited to strawberry cultivation. Farmer Hidayatullah says, "Soil in riverine area has silt deposits due to annual flooding and suits strawberry cultivation as this land has different nutrients."

Farmers say that they don't use pesticides as strawberry is hardly hit by any pest. According to one estimate, per acre yield in Sindh is close to 8,000 packets in one season. Growers don't rule out the prospects of getting Rs300,000-400,000 per annum per acre after excluding per acre cost of production. Around 90,000-100,000 plants are grown in an acre.

Grower Raza Mahar estimates per acre cost of production varying between Rs175,000-200,000 given the expense on DAP fertiliser, tube-well and labour during sowing and picking of the fruit. A labourer charges Rs50 per hour for work.

Strawberry is mostly sold in big cities like Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur. Some growers transport the fruit in buses to Karachi immediately after harvesting to avoid losses as the fruit has a short shelf life.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1314442/strawberry-income-for-small-farmers

FARMERS ADVISED TO STOP IRRIGATING WHEAT CROP AHEAD OF RAINY SPELL
Business Recorder, 14 February 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office on Monday asked the farmers to stop irrigating wheat crop ahead of the expected rainy spell in the agriculture plains of the country.

It said that the farmers of irrigated and rain-crop areas should remove weeds from their fields with a view to helping the crops consume existing moisture in the soil fully.

Farmers in the lower half of the country, especially those in central regions should ensure maintaining room temperature at the poultry rearing houses keeping in view the rapid weather changes and humidity in the air.

It urged the growers, particular, the northern half of the country to take precautionary measures for protection of their crops and livestock from the expected frost.

In Punjab, it said that cold and cloudy weather was expected in its most parts with a light to moderate rainfall from Feb 17 to Feb 20. Weather is expected to remain dry weather in Sindh's agricultural plains till Feb 20.

Mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the period.

Largely cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Balochistan with a light to moderate rainfall at scattered places of northwestern parts of the province from Feb 14 to Feb. Weather in Gilgit-Balochistan is likely to remain mainly cold and cloudy across the province with a light to moderate rain with snowfall at scattered places.

In Kashmir, widely cold and cloudy weather is expected in its most parts with a light to moderate rain with snowfall in Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions till February 20.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/14/8-page/849536-news.html

GOVT RELEASES OVER RS3.18BN AS FERTILIZER SUBSIDY
Business Recorder, 15 February 2017

Rizwan Bhatti

KARACHI: The federal government has released an amount of over Rs 3 billion as fertilizer subsidy to the importers and manufacturers.

Industry source told Business Recorder on Tuesday that after physical verification form Punjab, the Ministry of National Food Security & Research (NFS&R) has finally issued instructions to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for release of partial (pending) payments against Urea and DAP subsidy.

The Ministry of NFS&R, on last Friday, had issued an advice for payment of fertilizer subsidy claims for the period from 25th June to 30th Nov 2017 to sixteen importers and domestic manufacturers. While, payment of three suppliers has not been released as their claims' verification is in progress.

According to M/o NFS&R letter sent to SBP, the ministry has requested SBP for payment of Rs 3.184 billion to fertilizer importers and local manufactures under the fertilizer subsidy scheme 2016-17 as government of Punjab has physically verified and fertilizer Cell of M/o NFS&R has reconciled the subsidy claims.

Overall some Rs 21.164 billion has been reconciled by the Fertilizer Cell of the ministry as DAP and Urea subsidy, out of which some Rs 6.546 billion have already been paid. While, recently the government of Punjab has verified another amount of Rs 6.5 billion, of which some 50 percent or Rs 3.18 billion is being released to the importers and domestic manufacturers. The released amount is likely to physical transfer into accounts of the fertilizer companies today (Wednesday).

Industry sources said the governments of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan have still not submitted physical verification report of fertilizer subsidy to the ministry, of which billions of rupees subsidy claims are still in pending. The fertilizer cell of ministry of national food has reconciled Rs 21 billion subsidy and cumulatively an amount of Rs 9.73 billion (including current Rs 3.18 billion) has been released, they informed.

"The agony is the funds were placed by the Ministry of Finance at State Bank since August 2016, however the payment was delayed due to unknown reasons", they said.

Fertilizer importers are facing financial difficulties due to delay in payment of billions of rupees subsidy and unable to further participate in DAP subsidy scheme. In addition, importers have an extra financial burden of interest payment to banks due delay in payments. While on the other hand the DAP prices in the world market are gradually increasing and surged by some $ 75 per metric tons to $390 per metric ton in the second week of February up from $315 per metric ton last month. "Delay in payment of subsidy and rising international prices is not allowing importers to contribute to the subsidy scheme anymore. Now, importers are not in a position to participate under the existing DAP subsidy scheme anymore", they said.

As the importers have stooped to place new import order, market is expecting shortage of DAP in March/April as the new prices will not allow the importers to import and sell the commodity at the government's announced prices with subsidy. DAP is deregulated item and in case the government want to continue with subsidy to farmers then they should reduce the GST from 17 percent to 5 percent like they did with Urea. In addition, the government should devise a DAP subsidy scheme where fresh DAP subsidy can be given directly to the farmers instead of through importing companies, they suggested.

They mentioned that out of the 2.2 million tons of DAP off takes in calendar year 2016, around 64 percent was supplied to farmers through imports.

It may be mentioned here that the government had announced fertilizer subsidy in budget 2016-17 and as per government's commitment the subsidy claims will be paid within 15 days of receipt. However, contrary to commitment, the Ministry of National Food is delaying payments.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/15/1-page/849709-news.html

FERTILIZER SUBSIDY: CENTRE TO PAY ADDITIONAL COST
Business Recorder, 16 February 2017

Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: The federal government is likely to pay-up the additional cost of Rs 12 billion for fertilizer subsidy after refusal by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Sindh governments to contribute 50 percent of their share for the scheme as envisaged in the federal budget 2016-17.

According to officials of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R), senior officials of ministry have held two meetings with the representatives of Sindh and KP but their efforts bore no fruit.

"We have submitted a proposal to Ministry of Finance for provision of Rs 12 billion for continuation of fertilizer subsidy scheme till June 2017 and hopefully the amount would be provided" the source further said.

An official of Finance Ministry said that the proposal to provide Rs 12 billion would be considered favourably.

Secretary MNFS&R, Abid Javed, while talking to Business Recorder confirmed that subsequent to the directives of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to continue the fertilizer subsidy scheme for the entire fiscal year, the Ministry held two meetings with the provincial governments to ascertain their views on the subsidy scheme. KP and Sindh refused to contribute but Punjab and Balochistan indicated willingness to share the cost. The outcome of the meetings was communicated to the Prime Minister through a summary and subsequently on the directive of Finance Division MNFS&R prepared an estimate of the cost required for the continuation of the scheme in all the provinces.

In the federal budget for FY 2016-17 a fertilizer cash subsidy of Rs300 per bag of Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Rs156 per bag on urea fertilizer was announced to be shared equally between the centre and the provinces. A total of Rs27.16 billion was allocated for the purpose, Rs17.16 billion for urea and Rs10.80 billion for DAP fertilizer.

However the federal government withdrew subsidy scheme on fertilizer on January 9 on the grounds that the amount which had been allocated in the budget for fertilizer subsidy had been consumed.

Following huge political pressure Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, on January 13 ordered the continuation of subsidy on fertilizers for the benefit of farmers.

According to an official document of MNFS&R subsidy claims for the period from June 25, 2016 to November 2016, pertaining to 19 fertilizer manufacturers amounting to Rs21.16 billion, have been reconciled by the fertilizer cell of Agriculture Policy Institute (API). Payment of Rs6.546 billion has already been made through State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), whereas the remaining payment is in the process of reconciliation.

The document further reveals that payment has been made after physical verification by the provincial governments and verification of sales tax returns by FBR. So far Punjab has provided the physical verification, whereas other provincial governments have requested more time to physically verify the subsidy claims.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/16/1-page/850208-news.html

RS6.5BN FERTILISER SUBSIDY RELEASED
Dawn February 17th, 2017

KARACHI: The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) has released Rs6.5 billion subsidy it promised in budget 2016-2017 against claims of Rs21bn.

A similar amount was released at the beginning of the scheme. The scheme is an incentive for farmers by federal and provincial governments and aims to reduce prices of various types of fertilisers including urea and phosphates.

Over Rs27bn had been allocated in the budget for the fertiliser subsidy, besides reduction of the GST on fertilisers from 17 per cent to 5pc. The manufacturers also came forward in support of this positive initiative and voluntarily absorbed the costs by Rs50 per urea bag.

The delays in disbursal was caused by the complexities of subsidy disbursement mechanism issued by MNFSR which demanded verification of sales from the provinces instead of relying on data provided by companies or that available with National Fertiliser Development Centre (NFDC).

Besides Punjab, other provinces have yet to respond while the companies are submitting sales reports to Provincial Agriculture Departments on daily basis. Resultantly, the fertiliser manufacturers and importers had to arrange costly funds to manage their routine expenditures as heavy amounts got stuck up, creating severe cash-flow challenges for the industry.

Executive Director of Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC), Brigadier (retired) Sher Shah Malik said the industry acted in good faith to make the scheme successful and has been passing on the subsidy to farmers in line with the spirit of Kissan Package since June 2016.

He urged all provinces to support the process of subsidy disbursement mechanism through timely reports of sales in the interest of respective farmers community.

Mr Malik said there is dire need to bring down the cost of inputs and ensure availability of gas to enable domestic industry in long term to sustain prices of locally produced fertilisers. The upward trend in international prices has already rendered the sale of DAP at present prices unviable, unless further subsidised. He added the federal and provincial governments should allocate adequate funds well in time if they wished the scheme to succeed..

https://www.dawn.com/news/1315185

10.68M BALES OF COTTON REACH GINNERIES
Business Recorder, 19 February 2017
MULTAN: Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) has issued the figures of cotton arrival up to February 15,2017.

Seed cotton (Phutti) equivalent to over 10,685,254 bales of cotton have reached ginneries across Pakistan as of February 15,2017, showing an increase of 10.30 percent compared to corresponding period last year when ginneries received 9,687,118 bales.

According to the 10th fortnightly report of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) issued here on Saturday, Chairman of PCGA Dr Jeso Mal, Ex-Chairman Shehzad Ali Khan and group Chairman Haji Muhammad Akram, Senior Vice Chairman Suhail Mehmood Haral briefed the media-men about cotton production and said out of the total arrivals, 10.68 million bales of cotton have been converted into bales so far.

Ginneries in Punjab recorded arrival of 6,889,312 bales recorded increase of 16.40 percent.

Sindh ginneries recorded arrival of 3,785,942 bales while last year Sindh received 3,759,746 bales merely 0.70 percent more. Ginneries in Sindh recorded an increase of 0.70 percent as compared to corresponding period last year. Textile mills have bought 9,721,932 bales while exporters bought 2,02,356 bales.

The total bales sold out so far were calculated at 9,924,288 bales.

While 7,60,966 bales are lying unsold . Multan received 2,94,482 bales 127.74 percent increase than last year, Lodhran 1,91,772 bales 96.82 percent increase, Khanewal 5,79,738 bales 43.88 percent increase of 15.69, Muzaffargarh 3,26,680 bales an increase of 24 percent, Dera Ghazi Khan 3,36,832 an increase of 15.41 percent, Rajanpur 3,36,632 bales, 17.71 percent decrease, Layyah 2,69,241 bales 6.86. percent increase, Vehari 3,82,727 bales 23.90 percent increase, Sahiwal 2,11,571 bales 16.87 percent less than last year, Pakpattan 41,909 bales 37.01 percent less, Okara 19,086 13.63 percent less, Toba Tek Singh 1,58,629 bales, Faisalabad 39,580 bales 26.64%less than last year, Jhang 30,102 showing decrease of 26.51 percent, Mianwali 2,64,342 a decrease of 22.15%, Bhakkar 61,641 (25.25 percent less) Sargodha 9,847 (12.07 percent less), Rahimyar Khan 11,44,954 bales (Merely 2.90 percent increase), Bahawalpur 9,81,352 an increase of 33.69 percent, and Bahawalnagar 12,21,615 an increase of 34 percent.

In Sindh: Hyderabad 2,27,486 bales 9.27 percent less than last year, Mirpur Khas (Thar) 2,69,933 bales one percent less, Sangarh, 12,30,041 bales 7.83 percent decrease, Nawabshah 3,27,157 bales (4.65 percent increase), Naushero Feroze 3,36,411 bales (18.84 percent increase), Khairpur 2,89,517 (9 percent increase) Ghotki 3,01,574 (3.88 percent increase), Sukkur 5,42,831 (19.26 percent increase) Dadu 44,791 bsales (25.26 percent increase) Jamshoro 1,12,036 bales (15.76 percent less), Badeen 27,027 bales 14.47 percent less) and Baluchistan 75,936 bales (an increase of 32,12 percent).

Total 44 ginning factories are operational in the country, of them 36 in Punjab and percent in Sindh. Total 7,60,966 bales are lying in unsold stock.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/19/5-page/853214-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 6TH TO FEBRUARY 12TH 2017

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE FARMING
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 6th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

THE Sindh government's move to set up an Agricultural Development Board is aimed at revamping provincial agriculture by removing its structural flaws and accelerating its growth to exploit emerging food export opportunities.

"The board has been set up with a futuristic approach," says a senior official of the Sindh government, referring to one of the terms of reference that talks about planning "for promoting agricultural trade through connecting points of China Pakistan Economic Corridor."

"There is no question of outsourcing the functions of the provincial agriculture department. There's no pruning in the powers of the department. No sharing of its responsibilities."

The board, according to the officials, would rather be a great support to agriculture department in discharging its responsibilities. Its composition is such that all kinds of issues of the agriculture sector can be discussed thoroughly at the board's platform and immediate responses can be obtained from the decision makers and the stakeholders. The purpose is to cut through the red tape in informed decision making and effective implementation, they say.

The 27-member board is headed by the provincial minister for agriculture, supply and prices. The director of the World Bank-assisted Sindh Agriculture Growth Project will act as secretary to the board.

"We want to make sure that all the stakeholders and officials whose role is crucial sit under and decide what must be done and how, for putting agriculture on the path of sustainable growth. That's the purpose of the board," insists a senior official.

The Agricultural Development Board is just one of the several independent boards that the Sindh government has decided to set up to promote various sectors of the provincial economy and governance, senior officials in Sindh government say.

"That's why you don't see livestock and fisheries representation on the agricultural board," one official said hinting that a similar board would be set up for livestock and fisheries.

Officials say that the purpose of creating independent boards is to get rid of the inefficiencies that have crept in, over the years, in provincial departments dealing with the economy.

“We have even hired a renowned economist to calculate provincial GDP under a joint project with one of the multilateral agencies and we’re even considering setting up a planning and development board,” says a source in the office of the chief secretary.

“We believe that in this phase of CPEC-spurred economic growth there is plenty for Sindh to benefit from but for that we need to put our administrative house in order.”

What makes this point obvious is the all-encompassing terms of reference (TORs) one of which says that the board will prepare yearly Provincial Agriculture Policy, strengthen agro-processing industry and related marketing functions and explore new international markets for export of the province’s agricultural products.

Another TOR says that the board will also explore possibilities for promoting agricultural trade through connecting points of the CPEC. Yet another TOR gives the board the mandate to evolve coordination mechanism between agriculture department and other organisations at provincial, federal and international levels.

The Agricultural Development Board ‘will establish agro-processing industries and agro SMEs near the hub of agricultural products clusters’. Besides, it will also ‘develop liaison with concerned foreign donor agencies to pool all relevant knowledge and resources, foster interaction and communication and provide high-tech training to growers and agricultural research and extension staff’. And, it will also ‘organise international exposure visits and…exhibitions in various countries with the assistance of TDAP’.

Some officials of Sindh agriculture department don’t appear to be happy with the idea of setting up an independent board to frame policies and oversee their implementation. “We fear that the board will use its powers to outsource some assignments of crucial nature to NGOs of their choice in the name of hiring expert advice and action” one such official said.

He said the TORs of the board are so wide-ranging that nothing seems to have been left for the agriculture department except for record-keeping and acting as a back office of the board.

The remaining members include, Sindh agriculture secretary; irrigation secretary; vice-chancellor of Sindh Agriculture University, directors general of Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, Agriculture Extension Sindh, Agriculture Research Sindh, Agricultural Engineering and Water Management Sindh and Sindh Enterprise Development Fund; chief agriculturist at Sindh Planning and Development Department; managing director of the Sindh Seed Corporation, director of Agriculture Credit Division, State Bank of Pakistan, director-general of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council of Pakistan, Southern Zone, vice chairman of Pakistan Central Cotton Committee, presidents of Sindh Abadgar Board, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture, Sindh Abadgar Ittehad, All Pakistan Sugar Mills’ Association, Pakistan Cotton Ginners’ Association, Pakistan Textile Mills’ ASSOCIATION, Sindh Zone, Rice Exporters’ Association of Pakistan, Sindh Zone, Fruits and Vegetables Exporters’ Association, representatives of fertiliser companies, pesticide companies and seed companies, and agro processing companies in the province.

“Whereas the board has been constituted, no fact finding exercise has been initiated to first look into why multi-billion rupees agricultural schemes, announced year after year, failed to achieve full results.”

Senior officials of agriculture department, however, admit that lack of the right-man-for-the-right-job culture has nurtured inefficiencies and an over-hauling of the department is due.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1312877/an-integrated-approach-to-sustainable-farming

SUGARCANE PRICES GO UP IN SINDH
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, February 6th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE decline in sugarcane area and output in lower Sindh has triggered an upswing in demand which has pushed cane price to Rs200+ per 40kg in this crushing season, due to end this month.

Not only this, but these mills are also purchasing cane from upper Sindh at the same rate to meet their requirements.

Over the last few years the acreage has declined in the cane growing belt of Badin, Tando Mohammad Khan and Thatta. The drop is attributable to late cane crushing (mostly in late December instead of Oct-Nov) and the perpetual miller-farmer conflict of interests in setting the cane price.

Notwithstanding a brief suspension of crushing in December 2016 by Pakistan Sugar Mills Association in lower Sindh for want of adequate cane supplies, 35 mills are continue their operations now. Farmers and millers confirm that cane is being purchased from upper Sindh areas like Ghotki by mills located in lower Sindh at Rs220-230 per 40kg to meet their requirements. Ghotki has witnessed a steep rise in sugarcane cultivation (25,000ha in 2013, 50,000ha in 2015 and 2016) as growers there avoid growing cotton owing to inadequate market price of the crop.

Ghotki-based sugar mills, five in all, however, are offering an official rate of Rs182/40kg to local sugarcane producers as sufficient sugarcane is available in the area to meet their mills' demand. These mills had, however, paid Rs180/40kg when the provincial government had fixed the price Rs172/40kg in 2015-16 season.

Growers expect that the cane rate would increase at the fag end of this crushing season. They even don't rule out a price of Rs280 or Rs290 per 40kg.

Abdul Majeed Nizamani claims that sugar recovery from cane will improve up to 12pc this season on account of late crushing. Colder winter, he says, always improves the sugar recovery.

He said higher cane rates would encourage sugarcane producers to cultivate more cane in the spring sowing season. Farmers, he says, had switched over to alternative crops in view of low sugarcane rate and controversy over sucrose recovery rate.

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has allowed the export of 225,000 tonnes of sugar while anticipating a surplus of 1.23m tonnes. But sugar prices in local market continue to increase. It costs Rs60/kg if one buys 50kg. The retail price ranges between Rs62-64/kg.

Initial estimates of the Sindh agriculture department's cane sowing in Oct-Nov 2016 show that 320,000ha were brought under cultivation. Farmers hope the shortfall in the cane area would be covered by 10-15pc in lower Sindh by the spring sowing time this year.

Sindh Abadgar Board Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah says international market price trends indicate that millers can export sugar even without seeking any official subsidy.

Consumers fear the price of sugar might increase in the month of Ramadan starting from third week of May as they allege market players are busy hoarding sugar stocks. Sugar's wholesale price is already up Rs58/kg from 45 days ago to Rs63.60/kg, according to a retailer.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1312880

DECREASING PRODUCTIVITY: FARMERS DECRY POOR SEED QUALITY CAUSING LOW COTTON PRODUCTION
The Express Tribune, February 6th, 2017.

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), a lobbying group of farmers, has attributed the drop in cotton production in the country to the supply of substandard seeds and some other factors.

A meeting of the SCA at its Hyderabad secretariat was held on Sunday, which was chaired by its president, Dr Syed Nadeem Qamar. The SCA opposed the inter-provincial sale of sugarcane, describing it as financially detrimental for Sindh.

"The supply of substandard seeds has adversely affected the crop yield," said Dr Qamar, who also heads the National Institute for Cardiovascular Diseases, Karachi. According to him, cotton farmers in Sindh buy the seed from Punjab. "There is no agriculture research organisation in Sindh that can supply [good] quality seeds to the growers in the province," he said.

The federal committee on agriculture had expected last year that cotton will be sown on slightly over three million hectares, bringing a yield of more than 14 million bales. However, against the estimation, the crop was cultivated on around 20% less area and the production constrained to about 10.4 million bales. "The situation is very worrying," Dr Qamar said.

The SCA's general secretary, Nabi Bux Sathio, claimed the government will have to spend billions of dollars to import cotton. "If the government had followed agriculture-friendly policies and had ensured that [good] quality cotton seeds are supplied to the farmers while also providing other necessary incentives, the need for importing cotton would never have developed," he observed.

The farmers also complained that sugarcane from Punjab is being sold in Sindh, which is causing financial loss to the latter's farmers.

Sathio said that 500,000 to 800,000 maunds of sugarcane from Punjab are being sold daily to the sugar mills in Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas divisions. "In addition to the monetary loss to Sindh, the 22-wheeler vehicles, which bring the cane crop from Punjab, are also damaging roads in Sindh," he claimed.

The SCA's vice-president, Zahid Hussain Bhurgari, asked the provincial government to provide gunny sacks and open wheat procurement centres as wheat harvest will soon begin in Mirpurkhas division.

The farmers' representatives from Karachi, Sanghar, Sukkur and Ghotki districts also attended the meeting through video link.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1317979/decreasing-productivity-farmers-decry-poor-seed-quality-causing-low-cotton-production/

EFOODS – A CHANGE OF HANDS AMID COMPETITON
Business Recoder, 6 February 2017

Engro Foods Limited (PSX:EFOODS) has emerged to take a leading position among the food companies in the country. The firm has seen exponential growth over its decade long life. However, its fianncial performance in CY16 has dwindled somewhat as competition in the industry intensifies.

EFOODS is engaged in the manufacturing, processing and marketing of dairy products, ice cream and frozen desserts with brands like Olpers, Tarang, Dairy Omung and Omore quickly becoming household names. It also has a dairy farm, which serves as the raw material for its dairy segment.

Last year (i.e. CY15), EFOODSs growth in volumes and earnings remained buoyant amid rising compeititon. The firm focused on consolidating its market leadership position within the UHT category. As per the companys 2015 Annual Report, EFOODS focused on strengthening its core competencies vis a vis product quality, communication differentiation and distribution expansion, which contributed towards robust topline and bottomline growth.

However, in 2016 (CY16), EFOODS has seen a drop in net sales and hence the earnings. 2016 has seen some volume and gross profit tightening as volumetric growth remained under pressure in the tea whitener segment due to changes in tax regime and increased competition. Budget 2016-17 included a change in the GST regime from zero rating to exempt that has apparently resulted in an increase in the cost.

Besides the squeeze in the tea whitener category, the dairy farm segment also contributed to lower bottomline in 2016 as international market prices of animals continued to fall. On the other hand, volumes of Olpers, Omung and the ice-cream business have been supporting the volumetric growth.

Unlike a constrained profitability picture, the firm announced hefty dividends for 2016 Rs10 per share including a one-time special cash dividend of Rs9 per share. Market believes that this is a one-off payout at the acquisition of EFOODS by FrieslandCampina.

2016 was a year of metamorphosis at EFOODS, marking the completion of the Dutch acquisition deal. The acquisition of EFOODs, countrys second largest milk producer in the formal sector after Nestle will help the firm in growing and diversifying its product portfolio; right now, the local milk producer is getting 90 percent of the revenue from only three products: Olpers, Omung, and its tea whitener Tarang which is in duress.

It is a fact that the demand for dairy products is rising in the country with expanding middle class, urbanization and increasing competition in the milk industry with formal UHT milk market, pasteurized market segment and the big informal segment fighting for market share. And EFOODs intends to accelerate volumetric growth and consolidate its market leadership positions via additional brand investment a key to counter intensified competition and increased commodity prices as well as the effects of changes in GST regime.

EFOODS – a change of hands amid competiton

AGRI FINANCE
Business Recorder, 8 February 2017

In an agrarian country like Pakistan, it is quite essential to provide the necessary incentives to the agriculture sector to maintain the vitality of the economy, the State Bank of Pakistan seems to have played an active role in this connection. Presiding over the annual meeting of Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) in Multan, SBP Governor, in his keynote address, urged upon banks to focus on agricultural financing as it is a viable business activity having huge cash flows, and a significant contribution to GDP with strong backward and forward linkages. As for the SBP, it has adapted to the challenge of playing the role of a facilitator and a developmental partner of financial institutions to accelerate the growth of agriculture finance in the country.

On their part, financial institutions need to strengthen their agriculture finance policies, increase dedicated human resources, simplify lending procedures, rationalize lending rates, work diligently for creating mass awareness and develop other prerequisites for the timely provision of credit to farmers and harness untapped potential of agri-credit demand. The meeting was also informed that banks disbursed agricultural credit amounting to Rs 598.30 billion during 2015-16, which was nearly equal to the target of Rs 600 billion during FY16 and 16 percent higher than the disbursement of Rs 515.9 billion a year earlier. During the first half of 2016-17, financial institutions had disbursed Rs 301.7 billion which was 43.1 percent of the indicative target of Rs 700 billion for the current year.

The efforts of the State Bank to motivate other financial institutions to provide increasing financial facilities to the agriculture sector and its success in this regard could only be appreciated. Of course, this sector is a very vital component of Pakistan’s economy and provides the raw materials to down the line industries in most of the cases. The sector also contributes about 20 percent to the country’s GDP and remains by far the largest employer absorbing over 42 percent of the country’s total labour force.

Keeping in view the importance of this sector in Pakistan’s economy, the government has lately been focusing on improving agricultural productivity by systematic application of better inputs and advance technology, etc., which is not possible without adequate provision of credit to the agriculturists who generally do not have enough resources of their own to buy seeds, agricultural implements, etc. It is undoubtedly a matter of satisfaction that the SBP has all along been motivating banks to adopt agriculture lending as a viable business line.

Some of the recent initiatives of the SBP are “credit guarantee scheme for small and marginal farmers”, “framework for warehouse receipt financing” and “guidelines for value chain financing”.

Also, it is encouraging to see that ACAC, where all the stakeholders like farmers, bankers and the government are represented, is working very well under the guidance of the SBP and reviews the relevant progress periodically. The fact that actual disbursements have nearly equalled to the targets over the years inspires the confidence that progress in this area is likely to be sustainable.

However, while the work of ACAC could be commended for raising the level of credit to the agriculture sector, there are still few weak links in the system. ZTBL, earlier known as Agriculture Development Bank, which has largely relied on the rupee resources of the State Bank for its lending needs which it cannot repay, needs to be made much more efficient to stand on its own feet like any other financial institution. Similar is the case with cooperative banks.

Besides, there is need to increase collaboration between banks and other stakeholders, enhance the necessary banks' infrastructure and the level of information in underserved areas and develop Shariah-compliant products and services for meeting the financial requirements of faith sensitive clients. Finally, there is a perception and probably for the right reasons that a large part of agriculture credit is disbursed to bigger landlords while the poor and average agriculturists are deprived of credit facilities because of various reasons.

Hopefully, the ACAC would take notice of such weaknesses in the system and try to overcome the shortcomings to improve the flow and quality of credit to the agriculture sector for the larger economic interest of the country.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/08/20-page/847744-news.html

SUGARCANE'S POPULARITY
Business Recorder, 9 February 2017

Earlier this week this column shed light on the area under major crops in Pakistan with an emphasis on wheat (published Monday). Today's column seeks to take the discussion further, this time with respect to sugarcane.

We asked the question, why has the area under sugarcane not increased by as much as wheat over the years? Surely, one of the reasons of the popularity of the wheat crop is the support price. The only other crop with a support price – sugarcane – has not seen the same drastic increase despite its support price being higher that wheat, at least in relative terms.

Firstly, taken in absolute terms, the CAGR of area under sugarcane is the highest of all crops (1.03%), followed by rice (0.89%) and then wheat (0.78%). The ongoing year has also brought a dramatic increase, with sugarcane and maize accounting for 35 percent of the area lost in cotton, as per SBP's quarterly report on the economy. Particularly, Rahimyar Khan has emerged as a new sugarcane-growing location.

Secondly, Pakistan is already producing more sugar than it needs. There are currently 90 sugar mills in Pakistan, all of which operate below their installed capacity. At 4.8 million tonnes consumption (as per the USDA), sugar production will be over 5.7 million tonnes this year.

So there has indeed been some increase in sugarcane plantation and sugar production over the years. However, as a percentage of total cropped area, sugarcane went from 4.36 percent in FY01 to 4.99

percent as of FY16, whereas wheat grew from 37.1 percent to 40.9 percent. BR Research spoke to a couple of industry sources, who highlighted possible reasons for this.

Firstly, sugarcane is a water-intensive crop. Over the years, water availability has declined and the country has officially become water-scarce.

This has restricted sugarcane cultivation in the country. Secondly, unlike conventional crops, sugarcane season is all year long; the crop grows for around a year before being harvested.

A full year means liquidity issues for the grower. Add to that the much-publicized issue of payments to growers and politicization of sugar and you have a relatively exclusive crop at the end of the day.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/09/2-page/848048-news.html

SC HALTS CRUSHING AT SHARIF-OWNED SUGAR MILLS
Dawn, February 10th, 2017

Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Thursday suspended cane-crushing at three sugar mills in Rahim Yar Khan — otherwise known as the cotton belt of southern Punjab — until a Lahore High Court decision on pending litigation concerning the mills.

The mills — Ittefaq Sugar Mills Ltd, Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills Ltd and Chaudhry Sugar Mills Ltd — are owned by the ruling Sharif family.

"We are suspending the crushing until the high court decides the matter," Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar observed while deciding a petition moved by JDW Sugar Mills Ltd. Located in Sadiqabad tehsil of Rahim Yar Khan district, it is believed the mill is owned by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Secretary General Jahangir Tareen.

The petitioner had challenged an Oct 24, 2016 order by an LHC division bench, which suspended an Oct 10, 2016 decision by LHC Justice Ayesha Malik by issuing 'status quo' against the restriction on shifting five sugar mills, owned by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif and their relatives.

A Punjab government notification had banned the establishment of a new sugar mill or the expansion of existing mills — including relocation to other areas — on Dec 6, 2006.

This fact was also pointed out by Aitzaz Ahsan, who appeared on behalf of JDW Sugar Mills.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court set aside the LHC division bench's order — declaring it a non-speaking order issued in a mechanical manner — because the high court did not take into consideration a number of documents and restraining orders issued from time to time against the relocation of these mills.

On account of the urgency of the matter, the chief justice ordered that a division bench of the high court, preferably headed by LHC Chief Justice Mansoor Ali Khan, should take up the pending matter on Feb 16.

The court turned down a request from Advocate Salman Akram Raja, who represents Ittefaq Sugar Mills, that the LHC division bench should not be headed by the chief justice, since he was party to several restraining orders issued by the high court in the past.

The counsel also asked that the mills be allowed to continue crushing until March, otherwise around 800 employees would be rendered jobless. He claimed that stopping crushing now would ‘waste’ Rs380 million worth of investments in the Ittefaq Mills, as well leading to the closure of the power plant being installed at the mills.

He recalled that the Chief Minister’s Committee, in 2015, had already amended the 2006 notification by allowing the relocation of the mills to different areas.

But the court observed that the amendment seemed to be meant for the benefit of the ruling family.

Justice Umar Atta Bandial also regretted that the chief executive of the province made the amendment, which seemed to be directly or indirectly benefiting his own family — a development that constituted ‘conflict of interest’.

Mr Ahsan argued that sugar mills were relocated on the pretext of setting up power plants, but on Oct 24 an LHC division bench allowed the relocation of new sugar mills in the province, contrary to the long-standing ban, through a notification on Dec 6, 2006, which was also upheld by the Supreme Court as being in the public and national interest.

By permitting the operation of a sugar mill in the prime cotton-growing area of southern Punjab, the high court has aggravated what can only be referred to as an emergency prevailing in the agricultural sector, i.e. diminishing cotton yields which have a knock-on effect throughout the wider economy, coupled with excessive sugarcane production, he maintained.

The relocation has opened up the floodgates, which was evident in the various stay orders granted by the division bench to other sugar mills seeking to fortify their illegal relocations in the southern Punjab, the counsel argued.

Mr Ahsan argued that the Oct 24 order of the division bench was “self-contradictory”, as it seemingly allowed the sugar mills to carry out business at the relocated premises.

The division bench had inadvertently and irregularly vacated interim injunctions granted in proceedings pending before a single judge of the high court.

The division bench also neglected to consider that these relocated sugar mills were set up without the mandatory permission required under the relevant law, the counsel argued.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1313951

USAID SIGNS MOU WITH BARI TO ESTABLISH ORC

Business Recorder, 10 February 2017

USAID signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Barani Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) to establish an Olive Research Center (ORC) and a grant agreement with the Olive Foundation to conduct research to facilitate private sector investment. The signing took place at a meeting with the Olive Development Group and was held at BARI in Chakwal. Agriculture Department Secretary Capt. (Retired) Muhammad Mahmood, Provincial Director for USAID Alyson McFarland, and sector stakeholders witnessed the signing, said information released by USAID here on Thursday.

“The Olive Development Group serves as a platform for the emerging olive sector in Punjab and represents an integrated approach to sector development based on quick decision-making, rapid advocacy for policy reforms, and investment mobilization and job creation avenues,” said Ms. Alyson McFarland and added “USAID is pleased to support the development of the Potohar region as an olive valley.” Secretary Mahmood said, “The Government of Punjab realizes the significance of the socio-economic opportunities offered by olive-producing regions in the Potohar Valley of Punjab. Today’s meeting of the Olive Development Group highlights the government’s commitment to facilitate private sector stakeholders in taking an active part in the olive sector development in Punjab.”

The Olive Development Group, created by the Government of Punjab with the support of USAID’s Punjab Enabling Environment Project, works with public and private sector entities to improve the business environment of the olive sector in Punjab. The ODG is chaired by Secretary Mahmood and is comprised of representatives from the olive value chain, academia, and industry associations. The Government of Punjab provides more than two million plants free of cost over five years to develop the Potohar Valley and catalyze 15,000 cultivated acres. USAID’s Punjab Enabling Environment Project is a five-year, $15 million project to improve the business environment in the livestock, dairy and horticulture sectors of Punjab.

BARI, Chakwal was established in 1979 to resolve the agricultural challenges of Barani [rain-fed] areas. In addition to establishing the ORC, PEEP is introducing international olive oil standards, developing standard operating procedures for registration of olive nurseries, and supporting a feasibility study on olive farming.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/story2pdf.php?id=630478&ed=2017-02-10

CAVING IN: PUNJAB STOPS COLLECTION OF AGRICULTURAL INCOME TAX
The Express Tribune, February 11th, 2017.

ISLAMABAD: In an unlawful move that is also in violation of a Supreme Court judgment, the Punjab government has stopped collection of the income-based component of agriculture tax through an executive order.

In a move apparently made under pressure exerted by big landlords and politicians, in addition to being contrary to the government’s claim of looking to expand the tax net, the authorities called for a provisional suspension of income-based tax collection from the agriculture sector.

"The income-based assessment and collection of Agriculture Income Tax under Second Schedule of the Punjab Agricultural Income Tax Act, 1997, should be withheld till further orders," according to the notification issued by the Punjab Board of Revenue in October last year.

The move puts a question mark over the authority of the Punjab chief minister who has succumbed to the pressure exerted by various lobbies. Against an estimated potential of Rs200 billion, the Punjab government collected a mere Rs1.6 billion in agriculture income tax in the last fiscal year 2015-16.

The provincial government was collecting two types of taxes from agriculture – income-based and land-based. The land-based collection of tax would continue, according to the notification.

The share of agriculture in the economy is about one-fifth but its share in total revenue is less than 1%, underscoring huge tax evasion in the sector. In the previous fiscal year 2015-16, Punjab received Rs901 billion from the centre as its share in federal taxes while generated a meagre sum of Rs143 billion through its own efforts, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Punjab Finance Minister Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha confirmed to The Express Tribune that the income-based agriculture income tax has been temporarily suspended.

The Punjab government took the decision during a meeting, chaired by Provincial Minister for Law & Parliamentary Affairs.

However, legal and tax experts termed the move unlawful and in violation of the Supreme Court judgment that binds the federal and provincial governments to take decisions on fiscal matters with prior approval of the respective cabinets.

The provincial government cannot suspend the Agriculture Income Tax through an executive order, said Dr Ikram ul Haq, a Supreme Court lawyer and an expert on tax matters. He said that after historical judgment of the apex court, the tax collection cannot be suspended even through a Governor Order. "It is a mockery of the law and the provincial government has gone way too far," said Haq.

In 2013, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) introduced an amendment in Section 111 of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001. The amendment was aimed at cracking down on those who evade income tax by hiding behind agriculture income.

Under the Constitution of Pakistan, income from agriculture is a provincial subject – a lacuna that almost every influential landlord and industrialist exploits to evade taxes by claiming income from the land.

According to the 2013 amendment, money or valuable article owned or funds from which the expenditure was made, by way of agricultural income, such explanation shall be accepted to the extent of agricultural income worked back on the basis of agricultural income tax paid under the relevant provincial law.

Sources said that after this amendment, all the big landlords came on the radar of the tax authorities, either provincial or federal. Even the income of an important member of the ruling family came under question, the sources added.

The authorities served tax notices on big landlords and many of them went to Lahore High Court and sought relief.

These people started pressurising the provincial government that, like the other three provinces, the Punjab government should only charge land-based agriculture income tax. The sources said that now the provincial government was working on a legal amendment that it wants to introduce retrospectively.

The amendment, which will be enforced either through an ordinance or through next budget, would nullify all the tax assessments made against these influential people in the past.

The agriculture sector is passing through difficult times and the provincial government is trying to revive this important sector by providing it various incentives like subsidies and relaxation in taxation, said Pasha. She said that at the time of revival of the sector, the provincial government temporarily suspended income-based tax. She said that the provincial government also needed some time to put in place proper mechanisms for actual assessment of the incomes generated from the agriculture sector.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1322986/caving-punjab-stops-collection-agricultural-income-tax/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JANUARY 30TH TO FEBRUARY 5TH 2017

RISE IN BALOCHISTAN’S FARM PRODUCTIVITY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 30th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

Balochistan’s agriculture sector is performing better than before — despite the perennial water shortage problem — as the law and order situation has improved and farmers are taking advantage of agricultural research and innovation in technology.

In the last four years, signs of improvement in farm productivity have been most visible in the production of fruits, vegetables and fodder though some key food crops have also recorded a nominal rise.

Farmers and officials of the agriculture department attribute the rise to adoption of better farming techniques, economised use of irrigation water and, to some extent, rain harvesting in rain-fed farming areas.

Total output of fruits in the province increased from 1.08m tonnes in FY12 to an estimated 1.21m tonnes in FY16, showing a cumulative 12pc growth in four years. Higher production of apples has been a key contributor to this growth, officials say, adding that intensive research in the fruit seed-line and better orchard care made this possible.

Production of all vegetables (including potato) in Balochistan had begun faltering after touching a peak of 525,000 tonnes in FY12 but officials claim it is estimated to have returned to the same level in the last fiscal year.

They say that output of other smaller crops, most notably castor seeds, has also been on the rise with improved cropping methods and availability of better marketing opportunities.

Extensive research in castor seed farming in the 2000s had boosted its per-hectare yield, thereby attracting an increasing number of farmers to the crop in the last four, five years. Production of vegetables and other smaller crops has been showing promising signs because many farmers now prefer hydroponic cultivation of vegetables, officials say.

Balochistan's share in major food crop production is very nominal although the province does produce all of them on a limited scale. In their case, too, a fluctuating growth trend remains in sight.

The production of wheat has risen from 843,000 tonnes in FY12 to about 900,000 tonnes in FY17. This has happened not just by bringing more land under wheat cultivation but also due to increased per-hectare yield that went up from 2170kg to about 2270kg in the last four years, official stats reveal.

Wider use of the high-yielding varieties, better distribution of irrigation water and trimming of pre and post-harvest losses are said to be behind this achievement, media reports suggest.

Owing to water shortages rice and sugarcane production remains erratic in Balochistan. Nevertheless, the per-hectare yield of rice has gone up from 3,089kg in FY12 to about 3,280kg in FY16 and its production has also increased from 529,000 tonnes to about 580,000 tonnes, according to the estimates that are yet to be finalised.

Basmati growers have switched over to more profitable activities including fodder cultivation. Since late 2013, with an improved security situation and a greater availability of irrigation water, animal farming in the province has started showing progress. This has led to more demand and production of fodder crops. Output rose from 986,000 tonnes in FY13 to about 1.1m tonnes in FY14.

The production of gram and some other pulses is, however, not picking up markedly because of improper timing of switching of crops and an inadequate supply of certified seeds.

Despite the annual increase in agricultural budget outlays in the last few years, investment in research and development is still limited. In the past four years, the bulk of the agricultural development budget went to projects in agri-infrastructure, livestock and fisheries. But part of it has also been employed in conducting research on food crops.

The Balochistan government, in collaboration with federal agencies, is also carrying out agricultural research projects with the help of foreign agencies.

The provincial agriculture department's own research wing has also recently conducted extensive research on soil fertility and soil health. Once the findings of the research are finalised, it will help improve soil conditions in the province and would lead to higher yields of cereals, officials say.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1311461/rise-in-balochistans-farm-productivity

BAN ON COTTON SOWING BEFORE MID APRIL
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, January 30th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

IN the second week of January, the Punjab Government imposed Section 144 to stop farmers from sowing cotton before April 15. The official notice came with the warning to destroy the crop sown before this deadline.

How far it succeeds in administratively imposing the restriction remains to be seen. However, the odds are in favour of the government. Stung by bad results of early sowing, the growers are already backing off.

The crop has lost acreage in non-core areas and the core cotton belt farmers were, by and large, not part of the early sowing streak anyway. Nevertheless, the ban reflects the provincial government’s efforts to save the crop from the avoidable problems.

According to farmers, academia, extension workers and policymakers, it was a step long overdue. They think that it will restore the original cropping pattern, break the pest cycle and help integrated pest management round the year, being the main factors responsible for cotton crop decline in the last few years.

The craze for early cotton sowing was born out of researchers’ preference and persuasion who argued that it could help the farmers to reduce cotton’s production cost.

By the time temperatures rise in June and July, and pests start attacking, they advised: the crop would be old and strong enough to endure the pest pressure. Early sowing, it was thought, would also reduce the number of pesticide sprays.

Secondly, it could increase the yield: since the crop keeps yielding output as long as it stays in the field, it could be given more time, especially when it is robust as well.

Some farmers started sowing the crop early, even in February. It paid them as well. For next three years, they produced more and made money between 2010-13 before the production decline started.

However, the longer the crop stayed in the field, it faced more pest invasions. But the entire planning was riveted on escaping the cotton leave curl virus (CLCV), and little attention was paid to other equally damaging ones.

The CLCV used to claim 1m bales, the pink bollworm destroyed much more of the crop in 2014-15, scaring the farmers away from their choice of crop. Punjab lost 2m acres with 1.2m acres lost in the last one year alone.

The more pests hit the crop, the more sprays it needs to survive. Since the current crop has now had a nine-month (February to December) life cycle, the farmers have reported up to 23 sprays against the pink bollworm attack this year.

An additional problem came when most of the BT varieties, which had very low gene expression and covered over 90pc area, started becoming an easy host to the pest in just 100 days in the field.

The planners tamed the pink bollworm in 2015. With slightly better pest management, Punjab saw its yield jumping by 37pc. Despite huge acreage loss of 1.2m acres (from 5.5m acres to 4.38m acres), the production went up by 1m bales: from 6.34m bales in 2015 to 7.34m bales in 2016.

The average yield was one of the best the country ever had: 21.21 maunds per acre against a paltry 14.60 maunds per acre in 2015.

The planners are convinced that all residues of the crop that play host to the pest should be burnt (for cooking and heating) by the end of February. By taking sowing to the second half of April, the pest would not find any host to nest into for the next 45 days — a sufficient period to break its life cycle.

February sowing was perpetuating the cycle by shifting from residual to fresh crop. Planners feel that even a month could have been enough to kill the larvae, but another 15 days would provide an additional insurance.

The farmers have agreed to this official logic, but with some doubts: what if the pest still returns? Or another old pest reappears as did the pink bollworm after a hiatus of years? They want to be assured that the provincial agriculture department has a contingency plan to combat these probable situations.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1311464

COTTON PRODUCTION TO FALL FURTHER, WARNS MINISTRY
Dawn January 31st, 2017

Mubarak Zeb Khan

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Textile Industry has predicted decline in cotton production to accelerate, which could compel farmers to shift to other crops if no corrective measures are taken by the provincial governments, officials told Dawn.

The warning has come at a time when the federal government is considering allowing the import of cotton to bridge the shortfall in local production.

Cotton acreage has already shrunk by 22 per cent over the last 10 years because of low yields, according to the ministry. Another major reason behind the downtrend is better returns in growing sugarcane because of policy incentives offered by the government for that crop.

Climate change also has indirectly affected the cotton crop since 2010. Devastating pest attacks have been another factor in declining cotton productivity over the years.

All that resulted in price crash for cotton farmers as they got Rs2,200-2,500 per 40 kilograms against their production cost of Rs3,000. As the dilemma persisted for many years, the farmers felt compelled to shift to other cash crops, such as sugarcane, rice and maize, which offered better returns.

Official data compiled by the textile industry shows the acreage of maize increased 24pc, rice 7pc and sugarcane 14pc from 2005-06 to 2016-17, mainly because of reduction in cotton area.

A senior official of the textile ministry said low cotton yield had a direct impact on textile and garment exports, 75pc of which are based on cotton. “Any variation cotton yield has a direct impact on exports of textile and clothing,” the official said.

Pakistan aims to cultivate cotton on 3.2 million hectares annually, including 72pc (2.6m) hectares in Punjab, 27pc (600,000) in Sindh and less than 1pc in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Another official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research said the per-acre yield of cotton has stagnated since 1991, which has left the country with no choice but to import cotton to meet the domestic demand. The only reason for this was non-introduction of new varieties and new technology.

The issue will mostly be now resolved after the promulgation of the much-awaited Plant Breeder’s Rights Act 2016 in December. The law will now encourage the development of new plant varieties and to protect the rights of breeders of new varieties as well. The act will help in establishing a viable seed industry in the country.

Unlike cotton, government’s support to the sugarcane crop has helped increased its cultivation by 14pc. The price of sugar also more than doubled to Rs68 per kg in 2016 from Rs31 in 2005-06. The price of sugar in the domestic market is almost 80pc higher than the international market.

Moreover, the number of sugar mills went up from 56 in 1995-96 to 84 in 2015-16. Of them, 45 mills were in Punjab, 32 in Sindh and eight in KP. Almost 70pc of the country’s sugar mills are located in core cotton zone of the country, especially in Punjab.

Analysts say that this unexplained protection to sugar and unprecedented expansion of sugar industry were posing threat to cotton and other crops.

To look into all these issues, the government has tasked Pakistan Central Cotton Committee to study the sector and come up with some concrete recommendations. The committee has evolved a report and submitted to the textile industry in November 2016.

The report also mentioned the impact of climate change on cotton production. Heavy floods and rain caused a loss of around Rs14.409bn to cotton crop in 2015, according to the report. A similar trend of loss was also seen in the previous years with the worst impact of Rs98.091bn in 2010 due to floods.

In Punjab, the number of sugar mills in cotton-growing areas is rising, posing a threat to cotton output. There are now five sugar mills in Rahim Yar Khan, two in Muzaffargarh, and one each in Bahawalnagar, Khanewal, Rajanpur and Layyah.

As per the law, the provincial government is empowered to issue a no-objection certificate (NOC) for the installation of new sugar mill or enhancing the crushing capacity of the existing mills. The installation of new sugar mills in Mianwali is expected to affect the growing of cotton in the area.

The report recommended that provinces should stop the practice of issuing new NOCs or allowing the expansion in the capacity of the existing sugar mills to save previous resources of irrigation water and cultivating cotton, which is a highly valued-added crop. The KP government should be persuaded to give due emphasis to the development of cotton in the district of Dera Ismail Khan and not issue NOC for new sugar mills or for expansion in crushing capacity of the existing mills, the report said.

It was suggested that efforts should be made for reduction of input cost of cotton production. Campaigns may be initiated for the development of cotton with some targeted and result-oriented schemes in KP and Balochistan.

Besides, introducing new technology in seed will also help increase production per unit area and increase profitability. A support price system for cotton crop has also been recommended, as in the case of wheat and sugarcane, to maintain the acreage.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1311726

SMALL FARMERS FEEL LEFT OUT AS PM'S PACKAGE FAILS TO DELIVER
Business Recorder, 31 January 2017

Imran Kazmi

Fazal Sher & Zaheer Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: The much-publicized September, 14, 2015 Prime Ministers Kissan Package has failed to benefit small farmers as the government has released only Rs 25 billion out of the envisaged Rs 40 billion cash assistance while progress on other aspects of the package has been slow.

An official of Ministry of National, Food, Security and Research – monitoring and implementing entity of the Prime Ministers Kissan Package of Rs 341 billion – acknowledged that there were major hiccups in implementation of the package. Procedure is very difficult for small farmers and only influential people have been able to benefit from it, he added.

He said the issue was also discussed in the standing committees of parliament where members from opposition parties accused the government of favoring their blue eyed people especially in areas of cash assistance and subsidy on fertilizer.

The package, he said envisaged a direct benefit of Rs147 billion to small farmers across the country and Rs194 billion through easy loans to the agriculture sector.

President Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Punjab said only Rs 25 billion out of the Rs 40 billion earmarked in the Prime Ministers Kissan package as cash assistance of Rs 5000 per acre to the cotton growers and Rs 5000 per acre to the rice growers in order to compensate them was disbursed.

Sadly the Government has provided Rs 25 billion cash assistance to influential farmers of rice and cotton and stopped the scheme, he claimed.

He further maintained that Kissan Ittehad has brought corruption in the disbursement of package into the notice of high ups but deplored that no action has so far been taken.

He said that there was no progress on the interest-free loans promised to the farmers of 12 acres or less for the installation of solar tube-wells.

President Sindh Abadkar Ittehad Nawaaz Zubair Talpur said that farmers of Sindh province have got nothing under Prime Ministers Kissan Package and accused the federal government of making the package Punjab centric. He claimed that Rs 25 billion cash compensation was distributed to the farmers in Punjab alone.

President Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Itteha-e-Zamindaran Arbab Jamil stated that in the package subsidy on fertilizers benefited farmers.

He added that the concerned department was approached many times regarding package for installation of solar tube wells but got no response from them.

As cotton and rice are not cultivated in the KP therefore the question of cash grant did not arise for the farmers of his province, he stated.

Prime Ministers package envisaged a Rs20 billion subsidy to reduce the price of fertilizers to be equally shared by the federal and provincial governments. The package was aimed at reducing the price of potassium and phosphate fertilizers by Rs500 per bag.

The package also included supply of LNG to urea fertilizer plants, payment of interest against the loans required for crops with an earmarked expenditure of Rs2.5 billion and Rs7 billion concessions in electricity tariff.

The package further envisaged a Rs14 billion subsidy on tariff on tube wells, Rs14.5 billion for installation of solar tube-wells, relaxation in turnover tax to rice millers as compensation to minimize their losses as well as tax holiday on income tax for the cold chain industry trading in agricultural products, fruits, vegetables and fish. Reduction in sales tax from 17 per cent to 7 percent on local purchase or import of farm machinery used for tilling, seed sowing and harvesting as well as storage and irrigation, etc., was also part of the package.

The Kissan package also envisaged a 50 percent guarantee scheme on loans provided by commercial and micro-finance banks to farmers which would benefit 300,000 small farmers at a cost of Rs 34 billion. Under the scheme the farmers with five acres of irrigated land and 10 acres barani land can get a loan of Rs100,000 without any collateral.

http://www.brecorder.com/2017/01/31/336023

WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE FIXED AT RS1,300 PER 40KG THIS YEAR, PA TOLD
Dawn, February 1st, 2017

KARACHI: The federal government in the Economic Coordination Committee fixed the support price of wheat crop for this year at Rs1,300 per 40 kilograms before the harvesting season, Food Minister Nisar Khuhro informed the Sindh Assembly on Tuesday.

He was replying to a question asked by Muttahida Qaumi Movement lawmaker Rana Ansar during the Question Hour. The minister said the food ministry operated the scheme of state trading of wheat and purchases wheat from the growers as per targets fixed by the government on announced or declared support price of wheat.

Explaining the procedure of wheat procurement, Mr Khuhro said every year before the harvesting season, the food ministry fixed the procurement targets according to the production of wheat in the respective districts of the province. For fixation of targets, he added, a summary was moved to the chief minister and after its approval, targets were fixed in view of the production of wheat crops on the basis of figures obtained from the agriculture ministry.

Mr Khuhro said once the target was decided, the ministry declared the wheat procurement centres according to wheat growing assessment of the particular area. Last year, he added, the ministry had declared 442 wheat procurement centres. Twenty five of the centres were in Benazirabad division, 119 in Sukkur, 80 in Hyderabad, 69 in Larkana and 49 in Mirpurkhas division, he added.

He said the food ministry, after fixing the targets, made arrangements to ensure supply of bardana to the procurement centres accordingly. The growers were duly informed about start of wheat procurement process through publicity, he added.

“Generally harvesting starts from the third week of March every year and lasts up to June 30,” he said.

The minister said growers were issued bardana on the basis of revenue receipts and copy of Form-VII. The growers bring their wheat bags at the declared wheat procurement centre and payment was made through the nearest bank to them, he said.

In reply to another question by the same lawmaker, the food minister said Thar district was a non-producing area for wheat. The Sindh government, through its own arrangements, shifted wheat from various surplus districts to Thar to meet the requirement of the area, he claimed, adding that Thar received relief quota apart from regular releases because of the drought conditions that the desert district had been facing for years.

He said it was given relief quota of 24,000 metric tonnes in 2010, 22,382.3 metric tonnes in 2012, and 24,000 metric tonnes in 2013.

In reply to a question by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf lawmaker Khurram Sherzaman who asked if there was a humanitarian crisis in Thar, the food minister said the question pertained to the relief ministry. He said it was the relief ministry which assessed the situation on the ground through their relevant field formations, ie Mirpurkhas division commissioner and deputy commissioner of Thar. He explained that his ministry only provided wheat to the district administration through the relief ministry.

“The food ministry has been supplying wheat for relief operation over the years,” he said, adding the food ministry had provided wheat in 10 phases between the financial year 2013-14 till date. In the first three phases in 2013-14, 380,064 bags of wheat were provided to Thar. In the next seven phases, 960,668 bags were supplied to the area, he explained.

In response to a question asked by MQM lawmaker Naheed Begum, Mr Khuhro said his ministry received no complaint against flour mills or atta chakkis during the past five years.

Replying to yet another question, he said that an additional district food controller of grade-16 of Karachi food region facing graft charges was 'compulsorily retired' from government service in April 2014.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1311946/wheat-support-price-fixed-at-rs1300-per-40kg-this-year-pa-told

RICE EXPORTERS: COMMERCE MINISTER PROMISES 50% SUBSIDY FOR BRAND PROMOTION
The Express Tribune, February 1st, 2017.

LAHORE: Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir has stated that the government is willing to give a 50% subsidy to those rice exporters who are exporting rice under their own brand name.

Speaking at ceremony held by the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP), he said that the ministry is working on geographical indication law, which will be implemented soon.

"Rice exporters should work on branding and marketing Pakistani rice in order to compete with Indian rice in international market," said Dastgir.

REAP Chairman Mahmood Baqi in his speech demanded that the government include rice exporters in zero rated sales tax regime on utility bills and withholding tax on supply of electricity.

The chairman said that rice exporters have been facing unprecedented challenges for years and consequently, their capacity has been severely impaired. "Exports, both in quantity and value terms, could not pick up pace and have stood below targets. Withdrawal of the zero rating facility and imposition of sales tax would be detrimental to business activities."

We request the government to declare rice exports as an industry and include it in the zero rated regimes, said Baqi.

Rice export sector is the second largest export commodity, but despite earnings of about $2 billion in foreign exchange annually, rice exporters are not given the benefits extended to textile, leather, carpets, sports goods and surgical instruments sectors, he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1313170/rice-exporters-commerce-minister-promises-50-subsidy-brand-promotion/

A TALE OF TWO PACKAGES
Business Recorder, 1 February 2017

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, during his ongoing tenure, announced two major packages to promote two poorly performing critical sectors of the economy; notably, farm and export sectors. The farm package was announced in September 2015 at an estimated cost of 341 billion rupees, and the export package had an estimated cost of 180 billion rupees which was announced this month.

Data suggests that the farm package was the need of the hour but did not succeed in fuelling output. The Economic Survey (2015-16) reported that in 2015-16 (in comparison to the year before) agriculture growth was negative 0.2 percent with important crops registering a growth of negative 6.3 percent, other crops at negative 7.2 percent and cotton ginning at negative 21.3 percent.

A Business Recorder exclusive reveals that the reason behind the failure of the farm package to achieve its objective is due to the failure of the government to release the cash assistance announced in the package by the Prime Minister with only Rs25 billion disbursed out of the Rs40 billion earmarked for the purpose. In addition, cash assistance of Rs5000 per acre to cotton and rice farmers excluded those provinces where these two crops are not grown notably Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan; while Sindh has accused the federal government of not extending any cash assistance to cotton and rice growers of the province.

Fertilizer subsidy that as per the federal budget of the current year envisaged equal share by the provinces and the federal government suffered a serious setback as the provinces refused to pay their share due to paucity of funds attributed to the insistence of the federal government to generate ever larger provincial surpluses.

Farmer groups also informed Business Recorder that the package was hijacked by influential farmers and almost completely bypassed poor farmers. In this context it is relevant to note that the rich farmers' yield is many times more than that of small farmers – a fact which explains why the total yield per acre in Pakistan is much lower than in India.

The question is whether the package is generating higher growth rate in the farm sector today? State Bank of Pakistan's website updated on 27 January 2017 notes that the crop output grew by 3.39 percent during the current year in comparison to the period last year when growth was negative while agriculture growth rate that includes crops, livestock, fishing and forestry registered negative 6.7 percent growth. Critics also point to the penchant of the Sharif administration to manipulate data to argue that the crop growth rate may have been manipulated to show a better performance than is in fact the case.

Pakistan's exports have been steadily declining for the past several months and the reasons cited by economists are four-fold: (i) an overvalued rupee that is making our exports uncompetitive in world markets; (ii) inordinate delays in disbursing sales tax refunds which is creating severe liquidity issues for exporters prompting many to borrow which, in turn, is raising their costs of production, (iii) continuing energy issues, and (iv) taxes on raw material which are negatively impacting on exports.

The export package itself focuses on allowing duty drawbacks only to the textile sector (thereby creating anomalies with respect to other export sectors) and as per the Chairman Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association there are ambiguities in the package for the textile industry as well which need to be removed; and he has requested a meeting with the Federal Board of Revenue to discuss the issues and remove them.

To conclude, it is worrying that the Prime Minister announced packages that have not been fully implemented nor carefully thought out to iron out all ambiguities. This is indeed reminiscent of Donald Trump's recent executive orders that have mobilized hundreds of thousands of protesters and have also been challenged in a court of law. But while one can overlook Trump's decisions as he is a novice in government this is Nawaz Sharif's third tenure as the country's Prime Minister. One can only hope that he takes the relevant ministries to task for failing to implement the two packages that have been named after him.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/01/21-page/846077-news.html

GROWERS WARN SINDH GOVT OF AGITATION FOR RIGHTS
Dawn February 2nd, 2017

NAWABSHAH: The Sindh Growers' Association has announced to stage a 'long march' and lay siege to the Chief Minister House in case their demands for saving the agriculture sector of Sindh were not accepted.

The announcement was made at a meeting of the growers' body held at Nawabshah on Wednesday, presided over by its chairman Raza Mohammed Chandio.

Members of the association were of the view that agriculture of Sindh was almost destroyed because of 'poor policies' of the government.

They said 'influential' landlords and politicians had encroached on forest land and illegal tree felling was on the rise whereas hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural land was turning barren due to salinisation and water logging.

Tail-enders were unable to cultivate land due to unjustified distribution of water by the irrigation department, they added.

They said growers were forced to live miserable lives due to criminal silence of the people and departments concerned.

They informed that initially the growers' organisation was holding seminars and rallies to spread awareness on the district level and if the government failed to take action, they would initiate a 'long march' and surrounded the Chief Minster House.

They also urged the higher judiciary to take notice and save the agriculture of Sindh.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1312170/growers-warn-sindh-govt-of-agitation-for-rights

8PC DECREASE IN BASMATI RICE EXPORT
Business Recorder, 2 February 2017

ISLAMABAD: Eight per cent decrease in the export of basmati rice has been registered due to non-competitiveness in prices in the international market.

The National Assembly was informed this here on Wednesday during the Question Hour. The assembly was also informed that the exports have not been decreased due to quality issues.

Replying to a question, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Chaudhary Jaffar Iqbal informed the House that a number of dams are under construction across the country which will be completed next year.

He said the under construction dams included 100 delay action dams in Balochistan, 20 small dams in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, small storage dams and delay action dams in Sindh. He said these dams are at various stages of completion.

Pakistan is currently importing 74MW of electricity from Iran. He said a contract has also been signed with Iran for import of 100MW electricity for Gwadar, he said, adding the Kisan Package announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif earmarked many concessions and incentives for the progress of the agriculture sector.

Replying to a question, Jaffar Iqbal said Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) has registered more than 1,500 drug molecules with more than 70,000 registered products. He said the directions have already been given to the firms concerned for uninterrupted availability of life-saving and essential medicines.

Parliamentary Secretary for Ports and Shipping Mian Imtiaz Ahmad said that the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation is intending to start passenger-cum-cargo ferry service within the country.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/02/3-page/846146-news.html

RICE SECTOR: 'IMPORT OF MACHINERY TO BE DECLARED ZERO RATED IN BUDGET'
Business Recorder, 2 February 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: Federal Commerce Minister Engr Khurram Dastgir Khan has assured the rice exporters to address their demand of declaring import of machinery for rice sector as zero rated in the budget 2016-17.

The Minister said this while addressing a dinner reception arranged in his honour by the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) here the other night.

"I have been your advocate in the past and will be advocating for your rights in future too. All the machinery and inputs needed by the exporters of all sectors should be zero-rated and it will be reflective in the next year's budget."

Regarding setting up of a formal banking channel between Iran and Pakistan, the Minister claimed that the exporters will be listening a good news shortly. He said this issue was being negotiated with Iran after lifting of sanctions and we are very near to a breakthrough on it.

He also assured the rice exporters that all out support would be extended to them for marketing and branding of their product and now ball was in their court that they should make their place in the international market.

He said 50 percent rebate to the expenses made on branding and marketing was also available for rice exporters. He promised that the mechanism of this rebate, which was a part of strategic framework announced last year, would be made clear to the rice exporters. He invited them to take full advantage of it as nobody could fetch premium price without branding and value addition.

The Minister said the exporters had been participating in the Gulfood festival in the past and they had seen the effort of the Pakistan government in shape of a big pavilion there. “This year you will see a stall of Pakistan at this important food fair in a much better position focusing on branding of the Pakistani food products,” the Minister said.

He said all the commercial officers posted abroad in the year 2016 were selected purely on merit. “You will not find any relative of mine or any other minister in this batch as they are purely selected on merit,” he claimed.

Khurram on the occasion also counted achievements of the present government which, according to him, include restoration of peace in Karachi, Balochistan and FATA. He said that on average 5.6 incidents of terrorisms were held daily in year 2012 which fell by 85 percent in year 2016. However, he said that peace had return to Pakistan after sacrifices of thousands of civilians, army, police and Ranger jawans.

Chairman REAP Mahmood Baqi Moulvi in his address claimed that the rice sector whose exports were about 2 billion dollars was not treated like other export sectors as textile and leather etc. He demanded to include rice export sector in zero-rated exporting sectors and exempt it from sales tax and income tax on utility bills.

The Chairman said the rice exporters have been facing unprecedented challenges for years and consequently their capacity has been severely impaired. Exports, both in quantity and value terms, could not pick up pace and have stood below targets. Withdrawal of the zero-rating facility and imposition of sales tax would be detrimental to business activities.

The function was also addressed by LCCI President Abdul Basit, REAP Founder Shahzad Ali Malik and its Patron in Chief Pir Nazim Hussain Shah.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/02/13-page/846259-news.html

SINDH PA ADOPTS THREE BILLS: CENTRE URGED TO GIVE 80PC COMPENSATION TO SINDH GROWERS
Business Recorder, 3 February 2017

Anwar Khan

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly legislators on Thursday dubbed the Prime Minister’s farmers’ package ‘untrue’ and demanded of the federal government to pay a compensation of 80 per cent on the electricity bills of the Sindh’s growers using tube-wells.

Debating a resolution of ruling PPP’s lawmaker, Ghulam Murtaza Baloch in the house, other lawmakers said that the federal government should introduce a single slab electricity tariff for growers across the country.

Through a resolution adopted unanimously, the house demanded of the federal government to pay 80 per cent compensation to the Sindh’s growers on running their tube-wells on highly expensive electricity.

Murtaza Baloch said that the government should provide Sindh's growers with electricity for agriculture purposes at a tariff being offered to the farmers in Punjab i.e. at Rs5 per unit.

He said that the federal government was charging Rs17 per unit from Sindh's farmers, whereas growers in Punjab were paying Rs5 per unit.

He asked his party's government to approach Islamabad also for supplying power to the agriculture sector on discounted rates on the pattern of Punjab.

Syed Sardar Ahmed of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) asked Islamabad to introduce single slab power tariffs for agriculture purposes across the country. He said that the power utility rates being offered to Punjab on concessionary rates was 'unfair'. He said that electricity rates should be same in all the four provinces.

Senior Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Nisar Ahmed Khuhro said that a huge publicity of the prime minister's growers' package was made and questioned the scheme's viability to Sindh. "We are deceived by the growers' package," he said, adding that the neighbouring country's government provided electricity to its growers free of cost for running tube-wells, fertilizers on a low price and other subsidies.

PTI's Khurrum Sher Zaman Khan asked the PM to look beyond Punjab. He said that it was unjust to provide electricity to Sindh at Rs17 per unit and Punjab at Rs5 per unit. The house also adopted resolutions, including 'The Sindh Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2017″, "The Sindh Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2017" and "The Sindh Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill, 2015".

The Sindh Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2017, will make the DNA test mandatory in rape cases. "The Sindh Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2017″ will now permit the residents of other provinces and the federal government officials, living or serving in Sindh, to acquire gun licence". "The Sindh Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill, 2015," envisages an increase in compensation amount for different categories of casualties and fatalities in road accidents.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/03/5-page/846397-news.html

WATHRA ASKS BANKS TO RATIONALISE LENDING RATES FOR AGRI SECTOR
Dawn February 4th, 2017

MULTAN: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Ashraf Mahmood Wathra on Friday urged banks to rationalise lending rates for the agriculture sector.

While chairing the annual meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC), the SBP governor said banks met their agriculture credit target in 2015-16 and have achieved 43 per cent of the indicative target for the current fiscal year. This reflects thriving business and huge cash flows in the agriculture sector, he said.

Earlier on Thursday, National Assembly members demanded agriculture credit at interest rates that are on a par with ones being offered to traders and industrialists.

The benchmark interest rate is 5.75pc. While banks are extending credit to industrial clients at single-digit interest rates, farmers have to pay the cost of funds at 14-16pc per annum, MNAs said.

According to the SBP governor, banks disbursed agricultural credit amounting to Rs598.3 billion in 2015-16 against the annual target of Rs600bn. It was 16pc higher than the disbursement of Rs515.9bn made in 2014-15.

For the first six months of 2016-17, financial institutions have disbursed Rs301.7bn, which is 43.1pc of the indicative target of Rs700bn for the fiscal year.

Mr Wathra urged banks to understand the needs of the economy and focus on agriculture financing. The sector involves huge cash flows and contributes significantly to GDP with strong backward and forward linkages, he added.

Senior SBP officials, bank CEOs and representatives of the federal and provincial governments and farmers' associations attended the meeting.

The governor said the SBP has taken on the role of a facilitator and developmental partner of financial institutions to accelerate growth in agriculture finance.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1312525

COTTON CROP RECOVERS TO 10.6M BALES
Dawn February 4th, 2017

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: Cotton production has increased 10.6 per cent year-on-year to 10.634 million bales this season, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) said on Friday.

During the outgoing fortnight (Jan 15 to Feb 1), however, cotton output fell 28pc to 98,785 bales.

Cotton analyst Naseem Usman believed the growth of 10.6pc was not enough and it only represented a short recovery. The previous PCGA report (for the fortnight ending Jan 15) reported the growth at 11.2pc.

Due to short crop, spinners are striving to meet their consumption demand which stands at around 14.5m bales. Tariq Saud, former chairman of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association, said the country would have to import around 3.5m to 4m bales.

Punjab's cotton production has risen 17pc to 6.849m bales this time around. The province has made significant improvement this year as its output plummeted 44pc last season. Sindh's production almost stayed flat at 3.784m bales this season.

Spinners have so far purchased higher quantity of cotton this season which stood at 9.515m bales as against 8.032m bales a year earlier. In contrast, exporters have booked only 202,356 bales compared to 358,418 bales during the comparable period of the last season.

At present, ginners have 916,793 bales of cotton in stock compared to 1.221m bales a year ago.

During past two months, cotton output has sharply declined in as many as 21 districts of Punjab, the PCGA report said. The drop was between 13.83pc and 100pc. District Kasur is said to be the region where 100pc decline was reported.

In Sindh, six out of 11 districts have witnessed decline in production; the fall ranges between 1.45pc and 15.76pc. The districts are: Hyderabad, Mirpur Khas, Sanghar, Jamshoro, Badin and Ghotki.

http://www.dawn.com/news/1312529/cotton-crop-recovers-to-106m-bales

GROWERS ADVISED
Business Recorder, 4 February 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office has alerted the farmers of upcountry about dropping temperature with rains and snowfall, saying that the growers should step up protecting their livestock and crops from frost.

Alert stated that the cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Punjab with light to a moderate rainfall from Feb 4 to Feb 6. In Sindh, light to a moderate rainfall is expected in its most parts on Feb 4.

Largely cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Khyber Pakhtunkwa till Feb 10. Weather in Balochistan is likely to prevail as mainly cold and cloudy with a moderate rainfall at scattered places till Feb 6.

Mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with light to a moderate rain with snowfall at scattered places till Feb 10.

In Kashmir, widely cold and cloudy weather is expected to prevail in its most parts with light to a moderate rain with snowfall at Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions till Feb 10.

The Met warned the farmers of yield loss from weeds growth in the standing crops, asking them to start removing the unwanted plants to ensure a health production.

“Removing weeds from the standing crops is very important as weeds utilize moisture and food which are to be utilized by the crop. As a result considerable loss in yield occurs every year,” it said.

It said that farmers obtaining water by tube wells should schedule the crops irrigation according to the expected rainy weather.

In the next 24 hours: The Met forecast rain-thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills at a number of places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, Upper Punjab, Islamabad, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

At scattered places in Balochistan and isolated places in Southern Punjab and Sindh. Fog is likely in a few plain areas of Punjab and Upper Sindh during the night and morning hours.

"A western wave is affecting Pakistan and is likely to persist till Sunday," it said, adding that the rainy weather is expected to continue in the next 48 hours.

Temperature in Parachinar reached minus 6 degrees Celsius, Astore minus 5, Gupis minus 3, Bagrote and Malamjabba minus 2 each and Kalam minus 1, in the last 24 hours.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/04/2-page/846619-news.html

SBP DIRECTS BANKS TO FOCUS ON AGRI FINANCING
Business Recorder, 4 February 2017

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan Ashraf Mahmood Wathra has urged the banks to understand the needs of the economy and focus on agri financing as it is a viable business activity having huge cash flows, and significant contribution in GDP with strong backward and forward linkages.

He was addressing the annual meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) which was held under his chairmanship in Multan on Friday.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of SBP, presidents and executives from commercial banks, specialized banks, microfinance banks and Islamic banks, representatives of federal and provincial governments and farmer chambers/ associations.

While delivering his keynote address, Wathra highlighted the active role played by the Central Bank for promoting agri finance in the country. He emphasized that over the years State Bank of Pakistan has adapted itself into the role of a facilitator and developmental partner of financial institutions to accelerate the growth of agriculture finance in the country.

He further stressed that financial institutions need to strengthen their agricultural finance policies, increase dedicated human resource, simplify lending procedures, rationalize lending rates, work diligently for creating mass awareness and develop other prerequisites for building lending portfolios and timely provision of credit to farmers and harness untapped potential of agri. credit demand in the country.

The keynote address was followed by a briefing wherein the performance of banks on key indicators relevant to agricultural financing was reviewed. The briefing also covered important initiatives taken by SBP to improve the access of financial services to marginalized farmers. The participants deliberated on the way forward for credit enhancement in the underserved provinces/regions.

The ACAC members proposed, amongst other things, the need for collaboration of banks and government departments for promotion of agri credit, enhancement of agri. credit infrastructure in underserved areas and development of Shariah compliant products and services for meeting the financial requirements of faith sensitive clients.

The meeting was informed that during FY 2015-16, banks disbursed agricultural credit of Rs 598.3 billion which is nearly 100 percent of the overall annual target of Rs 600 billion and 16 percent higher than the disbursement of Rs 515.9 billion made during FY 2014-15. Moreover, for FY 2016-17, during the first six months (July-December, 2016) financial institutions have disbursed Rs 301.7 billion which is 43.1 percent of the indicative target of Rs 700 billion for the year.

The ACAC proposed the following key actions:

1. Allocation of geographical and sector wise targets and enhancement of agri. credit infrastructure particularly in underserved area;

2. Expediting the loan approval process by delegation of authority at branch/regional level;

3. Development/adoption of digital innovations to improve financial services of the small farmers;

4. Devise mechanism to provide wholesale lending products to microfinance Banks/Institutions to strengthen outreach of small farmers;

5. Development of long term financing facility for the promotion of fruit orchards;

6. Creating financial awareness among the masses to make informed choices for improving their livelihood.

While concluding, Governor reiterated the SBP's vision on financial inclusion and the ongoing efforts for broadening access to finance to the least served segments of the country. The financial institutions were encouraged to explore new markets, develop innovative products, increase use of alternative delivery channels, value chain financing, and create more linkages for improving livelihoods in the country. He thanked the participants and hoped that all stakeholders will play their part in development of country.

In Multan, Governor also chaired a meeting with the senior representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Multan, Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Bahawalpur and D G Khan. The Governor highlighted various initiatives taken by SBP for the promotion of exports, SMEs and agricultural activities. The representatives of various chambers apprised about the issues faced by them regarding banking services and made suggestions to improve them. The Governor assured them that SBP would resolve their issues in consultation with the banks.—PR

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/04/20-page/846815-news.html

PUNJAB GOVT TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF GROWERS
Business Recorder, 4 February 2017

LAHORE: Secretary Agriculture Punjab Muhammad Mahmood said on Friday that the government would protect the rights of the growers and nobody would be allowed to exploit them.

Mahmood was talking to a delegation of 'Anjuman-e-Kashtkaran' which called on him led by its President Rana Iftikhar Muhammad, General Secretary Javed Iqbal Khan and others.

Talking to the farmers, the Secretary admitted that the growers' organizations were playing an important role in highlighting the hardships being faced by the farming community.

He claimed that the government had taken solid and revolutionary steps for prosperity of this community.

He said that the government was trying to promote mechanized farming by setting up hi-tech machinery centers which can benefit the farmers a lot and add to the per acre yield of different crops.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/04/9-page/846705-news.html

FERTILIZER INDUSTRY
Business Recorder, 5 February 2017

Syed Fakhir Ali

Traditionally, Pakistan's fertilizer production capacity is over 6 million tons per year, little over the national demand. Over the past years, this sector has been facing several challenges due to insufficient gas supplies, high gas tariffs and heavy taxation.

As the present government started to focus on strengthening the agricultural and fertilizer sectors – a special "Kissan Package" was announced to benefit farmers and support the agricultural sector by providing subsidies on fertilizers, along with soft loans to small farmers. The FBR has also announced a big reduction in sales tax on fertilizers, bringing it down from 17% to only 5%. Moreover, the government is also working towards ensuring gas availability and large-scale LNG imports whereby all urea manufacturers are able to optimize their productivity to meet the local demand.

Reciprocating to the government's support and incentives, the fertilizer sector in Pakistan has already paid over Rs 109 billion as Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC), till October, 2016. It has emerged as the highest contributor to GIDC, among all industrial sectors across the country. The industry experts are also expecting that improved farm-economics will lead to a substantial rise in domestic urea sales – driven by lower prices, gas-subsidy and tax-reduction in the local market. The industry faces cash flow problem due to unnecessary delay in payment of subsidy besides incurring financial cost.

The government must encourage this robust sector to capitalize on these opportunities and avoid knee-jerk decisions. Like withdrawal and restoration only recently. The fertilizer market usually also gets distorted due to delays in government's decisions on prices or other critical aspects. The unexpected changes in prices make it extremely difficult for farmers to make decisions and optimize their harvest. Important decisions must be followed by concerned authorities and implemented in a timely and equitable manner.

If the government continues its support to fertilizer sector, an opportunity will emerge through which Pakistan will once again become the exporter of locally produced urea to earn substantial amounts of foreign exchange for the country. A recent BMA research shows an increase of 17% month-on-month in international urea prices, due to higher coal prices; however, the high cost of production in Pakistan does not make it an economical of proposition for export. The government will have to offer incentives to allow export of piled up urea inventory, which stood at 900,000 at the close of 2016.

The government must appreciate that the fertilizer industry has always looked beyond profitability, while serving, educating and empowering the farming community, through valuable developmental initiatives, besides passing on the benefits of tax incentives and gas subsidy, to farmers. These enterprises pursue an elaborate philosophy to share their success with the community around them, by fulfilling their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and contributing towards the prosperous growth of the nation.

The key players in Pakistan's fertilizer industry spend generously on improving the healthcare and educational facilities in many deprived regions. They install renewable power projects to reduce the energy crisis and provide relief during major calamities or disasters in the country. They have always followed traditions of good-governance and transparency, while paying all their taxes prudently as they absorb the substantial part of taxes or GIDC levied on the industry, Thus helping to revive the poor farming community. They have played a key role in reducing imports to save precious foreign exchange and improving food security in the country.

So the government is expected to work with this essential industry by forming a joint committee and chalking out both short-term and long-term plans to gain maximum output, improve food security and farmers' wellbeing that promises higher agricultural productivity and growth for an agrarian economy like Pakistan. The governmental support in shape of more incentives will strengthen the valuable developmental initiatives that the fertilizer industry has already launched.(The writer is a fertilizer distributor. The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the newspaper)

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/02/05/16-page/847045-news.html

March 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 27TH TO APRIL 2 ND 2017

UNCERTAIN PROCUREMENT POLICY HAUNTS WHEAT GROWERS

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 27th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

AS Punjab prepares for wheat harvesting next week, a sense of optimism has gripped farmers and policymakers alike. Both feel that achieving the target of 19.50m tonnes should not be a problem, despite a setback in the rain-fed areas and a slight fall in acreage.

These negative factors, they believe, have largely been neutralised by the huge jump in fertliser off-take, and weather, by and large, being favourable for the crop.

The sowing and germination processes in the barani (rain-fed) farmlands, almost form 12pc of the total wheat area of the province, have been affected by persistent drought.

Drought persisted right up to tillering, until the January rains brought some relief.

However, according to the early assessment, it may have cost a 25-30pc loss in production. These areas contribute just over 1.5m tonnes. The loss of an estimated 0.5m tonnes would surely be compensated by the output recovery from irrigated areas.

This season, the province has sown wheat on 16.68m acres, against the target of 16.80m acres. Last year, total sowing was on 17.08m acres.

The jump in fertiliser application may prove crucial to boosting output. In the first four months of this season (Oct-Jan), urea application went up by a whopping 27.50pc — owing mainly to the official subsidy package, which brought down its price to Rs1,400/bag.

In the same way, the DAP application increased by 12.20pc over the same period. This increase was over and above 36pc DAP use last year. Since the subsidy on DAP started a year earlier than urea, farmers availed it much more and reaped the benefit with a slight increase in the provincial average yield per acre from 29.95 maunds to 30.54 maunds.

The only concern that the farmers now have is the crop's procurement issue, especially given the robust crop size. Punjab is still to come up with any procurement plan.

Another source of growers' concern is the carryover stocks of around 3m tonnes. If another 4m tonnes are added to the tally this season, it would become a huge financial burden for the provincial government, which will also need to look for more storage facilities.

The third source of concern for farmers is the uncertain government policy. A World Bank team recently held meetings with farmers in Punjab to assess the possible scenario in case the provincial government reduces its role in procurement. Punjab has not clarified its position. Reported substantial crop size only adds to their fears about the procurement policy yet to be announced.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1323071

SINDH'S COTTON ACREAGE LIKELY TO INCREASE
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 27th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

Having failed to achieve cotton sowing targets for the past few years, Sindh's agriculture department estimates that 650,000ha may be brought under cotton cultivation this year. The last season's cultivation target was 660,000ha.

However, the Multan-based Pakistan Central Cotton Committee's Director Dr Mohammad Ali Talpur says last year's provincial target is likely to remain unchanged.

He, says, Sindh's cotton sector has performed better and its per-acre yield is higher compared to Punjab. He admitted that the province's cotton producers did briefly face price issues but, given the average yield, they still ended-up managing their crop economy.

Sindh agriculture officials and cotton growers agree that the acreage may increase owing to the crop current price of average Rs3000/40kg.

Progressive cotton growers like Nadeem Shah and Mahmood Nawaz Shah feel that the cotton acreage would increase. "Since farmers faced problems in sugarcane crop this season, they will certainly maintain or add to last year's cotton cultivation level now, expecting a better price", Mahmood Nawaz Shah stated.

Agriculture officials are worried about adequate availability of quality seeds while the concerned seed regulation body has yet to assert itself to check the sale of substandard variety in the market.

Punjab-based companies are selling mixed seed in place of Bt cotton seed which is being excessively used in the province by growers but they end up complaining about lower per acre yield.

Federal Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah agrees that lack of quality seeds does hamper growth in Sindh's seed cotton productivity yet its cotton production has remained consistent despite all negative trends. On the other hand, Punjab has lost cotton growing area from 2.5m ha to 1.7m ha owing to pink bollworm attack.

He observed that the federal bodies are working on proposals of meeting challenges facing cotton as it contributes enormously to the national economy.

Sindh's cotton growers said the government should look into why the Bt variety is now prone to pest attacks which forces growers to invest more and more in pesticides. Thus, the threat to cotton still looms large despite last year's edge in price, he added.

Dr Talpur expects the cotton market to witness a steep rise in prices as China's cotton stocks will deplete and its imports will rise. He said cotton's demand in market has increased with lower production.

He said last year Sindh produced 3.6m bales against the target of 4.5m bales, but the actual phutti production must have been no less than '4m bales. Sindh's early crop is purchased by Punjab's ginners from Sanghar, amounting to at least 0.4m bales and is counted in Punjab's ginning factories' production and supplies.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1323068/sindhs-cotton-acreage-likely-to-increase

PROVINCES ASKED TO DELAY KHARIF SOWING AMID ACUTE WATER SHORTAGE
Dawn, March 28th, 2017

Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: After many years, Pakistan is heading towards a major water shortage of up to 35 per cent and would delay crop sowing in early part of the Kharif season to partially cope with the situation.

A meeting of the technical committee of the water regulator, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa), on Monday estimated total water availability of 108-113 million acre feet during Kharif.

The season lasts from April to November, and rice, sugarcane, cotton and maize are some of the key crops.

Because of higher conveyance losses, the water availability for irrigation could come down by almost 35pc and would affect agriculture output.

Irsa's director operations Khalid Idrees Rana, who headed the meeting, said the regulators' advisory committee would finalise the estimates on March 31. However, the early Kharif (April 1 to June 10) was estimated to witness 40pc losses in the Indus river system which would come down to 20pc during late Kharif (June 10 to December), he said.

He said the losses in Jhelum-Chenab system were estimated at 10pc in the early Kharif and no shortage in the latter part of the season.

Mr Rana hoped the water shortage would not be as acute as previously anticipated at up to 40pc at the start of current month.

During the meeting of the technical committee, the Sindh province requested that water flows should not be stored in dams in case of shortage and its discharges be made in line with the provincial irrigation requirements.

The Irsa director said the request would be presented to the advisory committee, but usually the regulator has been following the same pattern as requested by Sindh, i.e. giving priority to irrigation over building storage.

On the positive side, there has been healthy snowfalls in the northern parts of the country and temperatures were also rising which could hopefully improve river flows, he said.

Mr Rana said Irsa expected river flows to rise in the latter part of the season, hence it would request the provinces not to go for sowing before April 15.

Informed sources said the regulator was expected to adopt a three-tier water distribution mechanism for Kharif due to water shortage. This means water sharing among the provinces will be based on historic uses of 1977-82 under which Punjab will have access to higher water quantities, reducing Sindh's share.

Under the same mechanism, water distribution among the provinces should be strictly in accordance with the second paragraph of the 1991 water apportionment accord in case of no shortage and flooding irrigation in case of surplus water.

The water shortages are generally shared by Sindh and Punjab while Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are exempt from cut in their share because of their infrastructure constraints.

An official said there was no water shortage in Kharif in the past two years which led to bumper agriculture output, and it was only once in the last 16 years that shortage went beyond 30pc.

Irsa's directors regulation of Sindh and Punjab, chief engineer irrigation Balochistan and director of the Water and Power Development Authority also attended the meeting.

Because of repeated water shortages, Irsa has over the years adopted an ad hoc three-tier distribution plan that works out provincial shares in three stages — early, middle and late watering — through a formula based on a combination of historic uses and shortage sharing.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1323239/provinces-asked-to-delay-kharif-sowing-amid-acute-water-shortage

PUNJAB'S LOST COTTON
Business Recorder, Mar 28th, 2017

Yesterday, This Column Discussed The Prospects Of A National Cotton Policy Amid A Weak Cotton Outlook (Read: "Cotton Policy?"). Looking Further At The Decreased Cotton Production, Today's Article Explores The Reduction In The Area Under Cotton, Specifically With Respect To Punjab.

The Area Under Cotton In Punjab Has Been Falling Over The Years, With The Most Recent Year Bringing A Precipitous Fall Of 20 Percent. The Province Has Gone From Accounting For Almost 90 Percent Of The Total Area Under Cotton In 2011 To Just 72 Percent This Year. In Terms Of Production, Punjab Accounted For Just 65 Percent Of Total Cotton This Season, As Against 82 Percent In 2011. Meanwhile, The Area Under Cotton Has Gradually Increased In Sindh, Where Cotton Production Has Remained Steady Over The Years.

A Large Part Of The Missing Area In Punjab Can Be Accounted For By Sugarcane (For Area Under Sugarcane, Read 'Sugarcane's Popularity,' Published February 09, 2017). As Per The Sbp's Quarterly Report On The Economy, The Reasons For This Shift Are "Exceptional Losses From Previous Year's Crop (Due To Pest Infestation) And Low Domestic Cotton Prices At The Sowing Time." Industry Sources Have Also Confirmed The Sugarcane Epidemic, Which Has Been Around For A While And Not Just This Year. No Surprise, Then, That The Pcga Is Demanding A Ban On Sugarcane Sowing In Core-Cotton Zones.

Chairman Pcga, Dr Jassumal Told Br Research That The Shift Away From Cotton Has Been Due To The Government Protecting And Facilitating The Sugar Industry, Giving Support Price, Export Subsidy, And Import Tariffs. He Said There Is Already A Ban Of Sowing Sugarcane In Cotton Zones But It Is Being Violated.

As For Sindh, Alternate Crops Like Sugarcane Or Rice – Which Are Highly Water-Intensive – Are Generally Uncultivable There. This Has Automatically Preserved The Cotton Areas There. Districts Like Sukkur And Sangarh Have Emerged As Major Cotton-Growing Areas In Sindh. Generally, Weather Is More Favourable In Sindh, Where The Incidence Of Cotton Leaf Curl Virus Is Also Relatively Low.

To Make Matters Worse For Punjab, The Provincial Government Earlier This Year Banned Cotton Sowing Before The 15th Of April To Avoid Pink Bollworm. The Effect Of This, As Per Various Media Reports, Has Been An Increasing Shift Towards Other Crops, Further Exacerbating The Situation. Is A Support Price Needed To Bring Punjab Back On Track?

http://www.brecorder.com/2017/03/28/340469/punjabs-lost-cotton/

GOVT TO SPEND RS225BN ON WHEAT PROCUREMENT
Dawn, March 29th, 2017

Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: The government on Tuesday decided to purchase Rs225 billion worth of 7.05 million tonnes wheat, allow export of 200,000 tonnes of sugar and to pay one-month salary to Pakistan Steel Mill (PSM) employees.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. The meeting also allocated 200 million cubic feet per day (mmcfd) gas to Guddu Power Station, extended 0.4 per cent withholding tax on non-filers and changed testing parameters for oil products.

The meeting was informed that the federal cabinet had approved minimum guaranteed price of wheat at Rs1,300 per 40 kg in December 2016 for 2016-17 crop for strategic reserves and supplies to deficient provinces and areas. Last year too, the government had set wheat procurement target of 7.05 million tonnes but actually the public sector could procure only 5.8 million tonnes because of previous year's carryover stock and low exports despite rebate offered by the government.

It was also reported that around six million tonnes wheat was still available in public sector stock and hence all the stakeholders have again agreed to a procurement target of 7.05 million tonnes. This would include Punjab's 4.5 million tonnes at a cost of Rs130.4bn, followed by Sindh's 1.2 million tonnes for Rs39bn and Passco's 0.9 million tonnes for Rs37.5bn. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would spend Rs10bn to procure 350,000 tonnes of wheat while Balochistan would purchase 100,000 tonnes at a cost of Rs8bn.

The ECC approved the summary presented by Ministry of National Food Security and Research for public sector procurement of wheat and set a target of 7.05 million tonnes involving financial requirements Rs224.86bn.

SUGAR EXPORT: The ECC finally budged to an advertisement campaign of the sugar industry and allowed export of 200,000 tonnes of the commodity within two months.

An announcement said the ECC approved a proposal of the Ministry of Commerce for further export of 200,000 tonnes of sugar without any subsidy. The export of sugar would be made within 60 days after approval of export quota by State Bank of Pakistan or by May 31 whichever is earlier. Export would be allowed to only those mills which have cleared outstanding dues of farmers relating to last season and have crushed at optimum capacity.

It may be recalled that ECC in December 2016 had allowed export of 225,000 tonnes sugar till March 31, 2017 with the condition that the Inter-Ministerial Committee led by commerce minister, constituted by the Prime Minister's Office in November 2015 to monitor sugar prices and recommend to ECC stoppage of further export if domestic price of sugar was negatively impacted.

The ECC also approved extension in applicability period of reduced rate of withholding tax ie 0.4pc, for non-filers up to June 30.

Approval was also accorded for disbursement of one-month's (December 2016) salary amounting to Rs380m for PSM employees.

The ECC also approved supply of 200mmcfd of natural gas to refurbished Thermal Power Station Guddu. It approved the allocation of 150mmcfd to Guddu, including 100mmcfd directly through Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL) and 50mmcfd through Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited which expired on May 7, 2013.

Further, PPL will supply 50mmcfd additional gas along with 150mmcfd, directly to Guddu plant from June 17 or the date of commissioning of new pipeline whichever is earlier. The entire 200mmfcd direct gas supply would be subject to minimum 72.5pc take-or-pay quantity. The meeting also directed reconciliation and payment of outstanding receivables against supply of gas to Guddu forthwith.

The meeting also approved petroleum ministry's request for changes in existing procedures for sampling and testing of imported petroleum products. The quality of the product for all importers shall be tested by Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan (HDIP) laboratory prior to unloading.

Sampling of the product for quality analysis would also be carried out by HDIP in the presence of importer's surveyors. In case of quality dispute if the sample testing by HDIP fails, re-sampling would be made by a third party surveyor in the presence of authorised representatives of concerned stakeholders including HDIP.

The fresh sample, so taken, would be tested in the presence of nominate representatives of the importer and HDIP by another independent laboratory, pre-approved by the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra). Test results of fresh sample would be final and binding.

Further, Ogra shall also independently carry out random sampling from vessels carrying imported petroleum products for testing through any of the approved laboratories for effective monitoring, quality assurance and greater transparency in the process.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1323427

NA COMMITTEE REVIEWS AGRICULTURE RESEARCH BODIES' PERFORMANCE
Dawn, March 29th, 2017

MULTAN: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Textile Industry on Tuesday reviewed the performance of agriculture research bodies and prepared a set of recommendations to boost research activities and enhance cotton production.

The meeting, held at the Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI) Multan, was led by committee chairman MNA Khawaja Ghulam Rasool Koreja.

The committee members received an elaborate briefing from agriculture scientists (agronomists) on the working of research bodies, procedures for developing new varieties, improving soil health by using modern techniques and the funding issues.

Responding to a query by MNA Jamshed Dasti regarding the ban imposed on cotton sowing till April 15, Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah explained that early sowing triggers higher infestation of pink bollworm and other pests. Most farmers usually embark on cotton sowing after April 15, he added.

To another query by MNA Rasheed Godial about 24 per cent reduction in cotton-sowing area, the agronomists said the support price of cotton should be announced regularly and Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) must be asked to procure cotton to encourage farmers towards cotton sowing.

The NA committee members also sought details about the research budget. They said they would recommend that budget for research purposes should be increased further.

The NA Committee was informed the lease agreement of the land CCRI Multan was utilising has not been extended as yet.

The NA committee asked the Ministry of Textile Industry to coordinate with the provincial government for extending the lease agreement.

The NA committee chairman appreciated the performance of research bodies and sought more efforts from the scientists to extend the benefits of research directly to farmers.

The committee observed it would recommend recruitment of experts and scientists, and steps for promoting value addition in textile sector. The committee observed that it would also ask the ministry to operationlise TCP to facilitate the cotton farmers.

The NA committee members also visited different sections of CCRI Multan including the technology transfer, plant protection, plant breeding, and the rest.

The meeting was attended by MNAs Sardar Muhammad Shafqat Hayat, Ms Ghulam Bibi Bharwana and Abdul Ghaffar Dogar. Senior agronomists and textile ministry officials were also present at the meeting.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1323419

RICE EXPORT BLUES
Bussiness Recorder, Mar 29th, 2017

Rice exporters seem to be in deep trouble, as the latest PBS numbers spell out disaster; for the eight months ended FY17, Pakistan's total rice exports are down 11 percent year-on-year to $2.41 billion. It is pertinent to mention here that rice is Pakistan's second-largest export earner, after textile.

For 8MFY17, Basmati exports are down 13 percent in quantity and a whopping 17 percent in value. As for non-Basmati, exports are down 11 percent year-on-year in terms of volume, and 14 percent in dollar terms.

This column has highlighted the falling Basmati exports numerous times in the past (Read: "Low price weighing down rice," published June 22, 2016). However, now it's the non-Basmati variety that has become a cause of concern. This decline is a relatively recent phenomenon, as Pakistan had been doing exceptionally well to capture markets for its cheaper, non-Basmati varieties of rice in FY16. Indeed, the once booming non-Basmati varieties are now suffering the same fate as their premium counterpart.

A well-placed source from REAP told BR Research that the main reason for the decline has been a higher price; local stockists/middlemen have been hoarding rice and shoring up the price. Now Pakistani rice is around $25-30 more expensive than Thailand or Vietnam.

Furthermore, there has been a drop in the quality of this rice as well; where previously the non-Basmati rice was 35-40 percent broken, it is now around 50 percent broken.

One ray of hope is that banking channels with Iran are finally opening up and Basmati is showing some signs of improvement. For the month of February, Basmati exports inched up by 25 percent over last year. The source added that Basmati rice is now getting a better price and the reopening of Iran could bring much-needed reprieve for the industry.

http://www.brecorder.com/2017/03/29/340632/rice-export-blues/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 20TH TO MARCH 26TH 2017

PUNJAB’S POLICY DRAFT ON FARMING

Dawn, Economic & Business, March 20th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE sub-committee on agriculture policy, formed under the Kissan Commission last year, has come up with a 15-page executive draft of the Punjab Agriculture Policy.

Led by erstwhile Iqrar Ahmad Khan, VC Agriculture University (Faisalabad), the committee has made brief recommendations covering all vital areas of farming.

The executive draft says that three more documents will follow: a medium-sized document of about 100 pages for helping development projects, PC-I-based proposals on these recommendations, and finally, a full volume policy document consisting of 40 chapters as a future reference text.

Defining its vision, the draft says it aims at “making agriculture competitive, profitable and sustainable through enablement, efficiency and value-addition for food and nutrition security and socio-economic development.”

It sets its mission in these words: “Reform the sector as a profitable industry by promoting investment in infrastructure, research, outreach, skills, value chains, agro-industry and rural development. The economy of scale is to be achieved for land cultivated by the small farmers to narrow the productivity gap.”

“The application of Information and Communication Technologies should become integral to the value-chain management. The distortion of terms of trade against agriculture and the rural economy must be stopped. The agriculture-led growth of the economy shall bring prosperity for the masses.”

Importantly, the document calls itself only a step in 'evolving process' called policy formation and calls for a regular review of policies in changing circumstances and continuous production of policy papers.

"This farmer centric document should be treated as a base to establish a continuous review of the policy. There should be a 1-3 years plan as a departmental operations manual with implementation plans.

"At present, the Agriculture Sector Development Framework of 2015 and a livestock policy paper are in place which must be rewritten by 2018. That can only be effective if position papers on issues and commodity analysis are written within the next six months."

Dilating upon its objectives, the document sets out three areas, which are: technology up-gradation (to the level of precision technology), institutional reforms and infrastructural development.

Most vitally, the document bestows due importance to malnutrition and, for the first time, forces a province to link food security to nutritional security. "Micronutrient deficiency known as hidden hunger is wide spread in Pakistan with major indications from the rural areas. The National Nutrition Survey (2011) revealed that 43.7pc of the children are stunted while 15.1pc are wasted and 31.5pc are underweight.

The survey data showed that stunting and wasting in 2011 has increased over the past decade. These problems are higher in rural areas as compared to the urban centres. The suffering is higher in women and children i.e. anemia (61.9pc), iron deficiency (43.8pc), zinc deficiency (39.2pc), vitamin A deficiency (54pc) and vitamin-D insufficiency (40pc)."

This situation demands nutritional interventions to combat the threat of hidden hunger. There is a need to launch school nutrition programmes. It is pertinent to include food and nutrition as a subject in school curriculums. The greater good could only come from a social and behavioural change towards food.

The draft also identifies social disparity and gender mainstreaming as part of the problem, which the policy should set right. "Agricultural growth reduces poverty on a much larger scale than growth in other segments of economy.

The contribution of women to the enterprise largely goes unacknowledged. The income of farm households is usually a mix of on and off farm engagements.

Migration from rural to urban centres has led to erosion of skill and transfer of resources to urban areas. The critical issue is how to retain healthy and skilled workforce in the farming sector while promoting investment available from the income of immigrants."

Suggesting both short- and long-term policy measures, the draft also recommends that canal water theft must be stopped. Medium to long-term plans should be devised for land and water resource management (fragmentation, on-farm water storage, rain water harvesting, water pricing). The grain markets are insufficient. Infrastructure and legal frameworks are needed to enhance the capacity and promote transparent and competitive business systems, minimising the role of middleman.

Investments should be made in skill development to reduce post-harvest losses and to add value. A comprehensive market reforms programme is needed.

The investment in R&D should be linked with the institutional reforms for the integration of education, research and extension. Commodity research boards should be institutionalised.

Establishment of two research centres, one each on policy and governance are highly recommended. Long-term research experiments be launched to model sustainability of the cropping systems.

Rural development must include infrastructure for farm to markets at a much bigger scale than the present. The rural life must be made attractive to arrest migration by introducing women and youth development programmes along with alternate income propositions at small town centres.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1321627/punjabs-policy-draft-on-farming

FARMERS ADVISED TO CARRY OUT SPRAY
Business Recorder Mar 23rd, 2017

The Met Office has asked the farmers to step up carrying out prophylactic fungicidal sprays to safeguard vegetable crops from diseases. It also said that the farmers should also ensure field sanitation to protect standing crops from viral attacks. It said that wheat crop is at a maturity stage in different areas of the country, asking farmers to schedule irrigation keeping in view the weather conditions.

“Farmers in the lower half of the country especially those in central regions are advised to take up poultry rearing houses to maintain optimum room temperature and take care against the rapid changes in air temperature and relative humidity,” the Met said.

It warned that the weeds cause a considerable yield loss to farmers every year and recommended them to remove the unneeded plants with manual practice or herbicides.

In the next 10 days: The Met said that mainly dry weather is expected in the most parts of Punjab with a light to moderate rainfall from Mar 28 to Mar 30. In Sindh, it said that mostly dry weather is expected.

Weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is likely to remain mainly cold and cloudy. Mainly cold and cloudy weather is also expected in the most parts of Balochistan with a light rainfall over the most places of the province from on Mar 23 and from Mar 25 to Mar 28. In Gilgit-Baltistan, widely cold and cloudy weather is expected in its most parts with a light to moderate rain/snowfall at scattered places till Mar 30. Weather in Kashmir is expected to be largely cold and cloudy with light to moderate rain and snowfall over Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot Regions over the period.

In the next 12 hours: Cloudy weather is expected to prevail over the most of upcountry. However, rain-thunderstorm (with snowfall over the high mountains) is expected at scattered places of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, while at isolated places of Quetta, Zhob, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, and Gujranwala Divisions and Islamabad. Dry weather is expected elsewhere in the country.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/03/20170323157282/

COTTON GROWERS SWITCHING TO MAIZE, SUNFLOWER CROPS
The Express Tribune, March 25th, 2017.

Islamabad: The decision of the Punjab government to ban cotton sowing before April 15 has forced farmers in many districts to shift to planting other crops, which has sparked fears that the country may miss the cotton production target in the new season.

According to Cotton Ginners Forum Chairman Ihsanul Haq, the Punjab government has put restrictions on cotton sowing before mid-April under Section 144 believing that it will save the crop from pink bollworm.

Owing to the curbs, farmers in the cotton producing districts of Sahiwal, Multan and Faisalabad have decided to plant maize, sunflower and potato on idle arable land, which may hurt current season's cotton production target.

In the 2015-16 season, cotton production had gone down by around 30%. However, in the current season, the harvest has so far been up 10%.

Meanwhile, many organisations representing the growers have asked the provincial government to allow cotton cultivation from March 20 or 25 as it will ensure the achievement of production target.

They argued that high temperatures at the time of cotton flowering would reduce chances of pink bollworm attacks.

However, the Punjab government has not accepted the request, according to Haq.

He pointed out that annual meeting of the Federal Cotton Committee, which works under the Ministry of Textile Industry, was normally convened in February in order to fix the production target, but this year the sitting had yet to be held, which alarmed the cotton industry.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1364975/cotton-growers-switching-maize-sunflower-crops/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 13TH TO MARCH 19TH 2017
25PC DROP IN TARGETED COTTON PRODUCTION
Dawn, Economic & Business, March 13th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE cotton production target has been missed yet again this year by around 25pc. The actual production so far stands at 10.5m bales against the original estimate of 14.1m bales.

Cotton watchers think that the final figure may reach 10.6m bales by the end of this month as some farmers are still persisting with the crop.

The current output, however, has improved by 800,000 bales when compared with the last year's arrival figure of early March at 9.7m bales. The season ended with 10m bales and the gap between target and production was then 30pc.

Last year, total production target was 15.49m bales from an area of 7.7m acres. This year, these targets were revised downwards to 14.1m bales from 7.4m acres. But the actual sowing went down steeply, especially in Punjab, and it lost 21pc area. Sindh's acreage, however, improved by 2pc.

The Cotton Crop Assessment Committee (CCAC) revised downward production estimates thrice during the season, and ultimately, Punjab was told to produce 6.903m bales (against original 9.5m bales), Sindh, 3.6m instead of 4.5m bales, Baluchistan, 0.038m bales against initial estimate of 0.098m bales, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 10,000 bales against 15,000 bales.

According to the official estimates, the total loss of area in Punjab was 20.82pc — 4.388m acres against a target of 5.7m acres. The core cotton areas lost 18pc area to competitive crops, while the non-core belt lost over 38pc area and sub-marginal areas suffered a loss of over 26pc. And the last year's 30pc crop loss, according to the federal finance minister, had reduced GDP growth by 0.5pc.

Almost all variables remained relatively positive for the crop but final figures still showed that massive loss. Last year, three adverse factors — erratic weather, strong pest attack and lower prices — had resulted in the 30pc less production.

This year, all three factors were relatively contained. The weather remained comparatively favourable overall, barring some occasional heat shocks. Similarly, pink bollworm and white fly did hit the crop, but were, by and large, managed well. The price also hovered around Rs3,000 per maund, against Rs2,200 to Rs2,400 a year earlier.

The input prices also helped the crop and increased per acre average yield by almost 34pc. Fertiliser prices were substantially subsidised and their off-take was roughly 30pc more than last year.

The pesticide prices came down because of withdrawal of GST and their application, which according to the manufacturers, went up by almost 25pc. All these factors put together took per acre average yield from 14.72 maunds last year to 20.23 maunds this year. However, despite all these positive factors, the overall cotton output was lower than the target.

Some of the missing links this time were the non-availability of performing seed, marketing issues, official neglect and loss of area. Revival of cotton crop needs a concerted strategy and effort by the federal and provincial governments, and industry and market managers, as the crop contributes over 70pc to the country's exports.

Some other crops (corn, cane and rice) have emerged as powerful alternatives to the cotton crop. This is evident by the loss of over 18pc area in the core cotton areas.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1320013/25pc-drop-in-targeted-cotton-production

SMART AGRICULTURE AND BEYOND
The Express Tribune, March 13th, 2017

Hasaan Khawar

Imagine a farmer calling a toll-free number to seek help regarding a pest attack on his farm. The call gets routed to an agriculture expert, sitting in the farmer's own district. As soon as the expert picks up the farmer's call on his tablet computer, a window pops up showing specific details including farmer's education level, size of his farm and the cropping history.

The expert clicks more buttons and can even view the soil characteristics of the farm, based on a soil test conducted recently, besides customised weather information and tube-well data. Based on all this information, the expert then offers suitable advice to the farmer and even sends a field extension agent to his doorstep for on-farm inspection and further support.

This is not a story from Australia, Europe or the USA and instead manifests the ultimate goal of an extension services modernisation project commissioned by Punjab's Agriculture Department, through support from Punjab Information Technology Board. The ambitious Rs4 billion Extension 2.0 project, if successful, can make this dream come true in Pakistan.

Role of technology in agriculture is changing quickly, promising a revolution in agrarian economies, if harnessed effectively. SMART agriculture, a commonly used term for marriage of information and communication technology with agriculture, is not limited to this flagship project in Punjab.

The Agriculture Department has also launched another project for providing e-credit to farmers, using their mobile phones, so that they can timely procure agriculture inputs. With free smartphones and internet data plans given to farmers, the whole disbursement and collection of credit undergoes through mobile wallets. Mobile applications are also being developed for farmers' advisory services.

The agriculture sector contributes 27% to Punjab's GDP and employs 40% of the labour force, providing a vital foundation for Punjab's economic base. Punjab has 5.2 million farming families and 28 million acres of cultivable land spanning over 23,000 villages. Given the scale, only technology can help cover this vast base effectively.

However, it is easier said than done. In order to fully benefit from this paradigm shift, the government must explore use of technology throughout the agriculture value chain. While ICT-driven extension services and e-credit provide excellent starting point towards promoting SMART agriculture, these should be supplemented in future through embedding technology within areas like food and crop traceability improving readiness for exports, downstream market operations and electronic exchanges to fetch better value for farmers and digitised irrigation systems leading to precision agriculture.

Use of rapidly evolving Internet of Things may lead to more efficient designs of ICT-extension services, avoiding the need for physical inspections and manual soil testing. At a broader level, the government should aim towards provision of integrated online public services, making it easier for citizens to interact with the government through digital interfaces and avoiding proliferation of isolated platforms and technologies.

On farmers' end, digital illiteracy can play havoc with all such remarkable efforts. Without farmers being able to use smart phones, even the best of e-government services are likely to fail. While this aspect has been addressed by the Agriculture Department in some ways, the agenda of bridging the digital divide goes beyond the mandate of an individual sector, like agriculture, and must be owned and driven by the government across all sectors.

Last but not the least, the policymakers must realise that ICT itself is not going to provide answers to some of the fundamental challenges faced by the agriculture sector. While technology can be a strong enabler, the government would still need to undertake agriculture market reforms, improve the quality of its extension workforce, avoid untargeted subsidies, create an agile ad responsive organisational structure to respond to farmers' needs and put in place an effective regulatory regime to exploit the agriculture sector's potential.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1353599/smart-agriculture-beyond/

VEGETABLE GROWTH PLAN FINALISED
Business Recorder, Mar 13th, 2017

Punjab government has finalised necessary arrangements for plan for launching "Vegetable Growth" in Punjab shortly. Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder here Sunday that the basic concept of this proposed programme was to provide fresh and quality vegetables to the consumers on reasonable rates.

The plan will enable the growers and brokers to earn suitable profit which will be supportive in improving the economic conditions of growers and brokers. Special steps would also be taken for improving the existing marketing system for resolving the problems being faced by growers and brokers as well as under the programme efforts would be made for improving packing and grading system according to international standard, sources added.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/03/20170313153544/

HONEYBEE FARMING TRAINING WORKSHOP IN PU
Business Recorder, 14 March 2017

LAHORE: Punjab University Department of Zoology's Honeybee Research Program has organized 13th National Honeybee Farming and Management Training Workshop in which master trainers, extension officers, university teachers, progressive farmers and women entrepreneurs from all the four provinces, AJK, Gilgit-Baltistan and various federal and provincial organizations are participating.

Inaugurating the 5 day training workshop, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naeem Khan, Dean, Faculty of Life Sciences, appreciated the efforts of the Department of Zoology for initiating industrial linkages with honeybee sector for training and transfer of modern research technology for the socio-economic development of the country.

Dr. Naeem Khan said that the workshop will help in creating more employment and business opportunities for farmers, rural development and economic empowerment of household rural women through training and transfer of modern beekeeping technologies. Chairman Zoology Department Prof Dr Javed Iqbal Qazi, Incharge Honeybee Research Program Dr Nasreen Muzafar and Zoology faculty members were also present on the occasion.

The workshop will have 5 technical sessions and trainers will be given extensive on-hand practical training in PU apiary and honeybee farms.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/14/3-page/857400-news.html

TCP SEALS DEAL FOR SUPPLY OF RICE TO SRI LANKA
Rizwwan Bhatti

KARACHI: The Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) has finalized a deal for supply of 5,000 tons Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) with two parties as first lowest was not agreed to supply the complete quantity.

Sources told Business Recorder Monday that as the first lowest bid was for 2,500 ton and the supplier was unable to enhance the quantity, on the TCP's offer, the second lowest party agreed to match the lowest rate and accordingly, another deal for 2,500 tons of rice was got matured with second lowest bidder.

Some 9 parties participated in the second rice tender floated by the state-run grain trader for export of rice to Sri Lanka. The tender was issued on Feb 7, 2017, under clause-42(d)(iii)of the Public Procurement Rules, 2004, on Cost Insurance and Freight (CIF) basis from companies/partnership/sole proprietors dealing in the export of rice, for donation of 5,000 tons of Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) to Sri Lanka in the shape of containerized bagged cargo packed in 50-kg polypropylene (PP) woven bags.

The lowest bid was received from M/s KK Rice Mills for supply of 2,500 tons at a price of Rs 40,350 per ton. M/s Marvell Agri was the second lowest with a price of Rs 40,650 per ton for supply of the same quantity. M/s Hasan Ali Corporation submitted the bid for 2,500 ton at Rs 40,739 per ton.

M/s Gharib Sons quoted Rs 40,750 per ton for supply of Rs 2,500 tons and it also submitted another bid of Rs 40,950 per ton for the same quantity. M/s Reliance International offer was for 2,500 tons at Rs 40,775 tons. M/s Chappal Traders and M/s Baba Enterprises quoted Rs 40,798 per ton and Rs 40,940 per ton, respectively for 2,500 tons each.

In addition, M/s Bulk Management and M/s Asif Rice Mills' bid were Rs 42,400 per ton and Rs 43,490 per ton, respectively for maximum 2,500 tons each.

The lowest bid is even higher than the first rice tender in which some 5,000 tons was procured at two different rates from M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills. A deal for purchase of 2,500 tons Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) was finalized at Rs 39,494 per ton and another quantity of 2,500 was procured at Rs 40,307 per ton.

As the first lowest bid was responsive, TCP finalized a deal for export of 2,500 tons of rice with M/s KK Rice Mills at Rs 40,350 per ton, while another deal with M/s Marvell Agri was also finalized at the same rate as it was agreed for price matching of lowest bid.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/14/8-page/857446-news.html

PUNJAB STOPS COTTON SOWING BEFORE APRIL 15

The Express Tribune, March 15th, 2017.

Lahore: The government of Punjab has issued directives, telling farmers to refrain from cotton sowing before April 15 and complete cultivation by May 15, a time frame, if followed, will shield the vital cash crop from attacks of pink bollworm.

However, industry players apprehend the decision will eventually lead to a reduction in cotton-sowing area, bring down overall production and hurt the national economy.

In a statement, Cotton Ginners Forum Chairman Ihsanul Haq rejected the Punjab government’s ban on cotton sowing prior to April 15 under Section 144 on the grounds of saving the crop from pink bollworm.

He argued that pink bollworm butterflies attacked cotton flowers only and the Punjab government should allow sowing from March 25 so that flowers could open by May 10.

“By that time, the temperature remains high enough, which kills emerging pink bollworm adults, so the cotton crop will be safe and overall national production will not be impacted,” he said.

Haq pointed out that in Punjab most of the cotton crop was supplied canal water and it was impossible to provide water for all growers in one month because of the alternative supply system.

He asked the provincial government to permit cotton cultivation from March 25 in order to enable all farmers complete sowing easily and avert any hit to the production target.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1355329/punjab-stops-cotton-sowing-april-15/

FARMERS BORROW AT ‘MUCH HIGHER RATES THAN INDUSTRIALISTS’
The Express Tribune, March 16, 2017

Shahbaz Rana

Islamabad: A National Assembly panel on Wednesday unanimously approved a resolution, asking the ‘pro-industry’ government to end discrimination against the agriculture sector and bring down its borrowing cost close to the industry level.

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue also decided to write a letter to the anti-graft watchdog chairman over the delay in filing a corruption reference against National Bank of Pakistan’s (NBP) former and current top officials, who were allegedly involved in a Rs18.5-billion credit scam.

Committee members unanimously requested the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) chairman to put his signature on a reference awaiting approval since September 2016, which may eventually seal the fate of half a dozen top bank executives.

The National Assembly members came down hard on the government for ignoring the agriculture sector that had been brought to its knees in the past three and a half years due to adverse policies and plunge in commodity prices in the global market.

They approved a resolution, asking the federal government to bring down interest rates on agriculture loans, which currently ranged from 13.8% to 18%, to single digit.

Contrary to that, the industrial sector was borrowing in the range of 6.5% to 7.5%, according to the committee members.

“What kind of government is this that is extending loans to the agriculture sector at 13.8% when key policy rate of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) is just 5.75%,” asked Rana Mohammad Hayat of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), an MNA from Kasur. If the cost of borrowing was not brought down, the committee members would lodge protest against the government and banks, he cautioned.

Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) was compelled to give agriculture loans at 14% interest due to its high cost of capital, revealed Syed Talat Mahmood, the bank’s president.

He said the SBP had given Rs56 billion in loans to ZTBL at 7.5% and in addition to that the bank’s administrative cost stood at almost 5%.

“ZTBL was subsidising the finance ministry by charging higher interest from the farmers,” claimed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s MNA Asad Umar.

The parliamentary panel expressed its dissatisfaction over “slow progress” in investigation into the case in which NBP officers were accused of abusing powers in the processing and sanctioning of credit limits, willfully avoiding proper valuation of securities offered by the borrowers and causing losses of $185 million to the national exchequer.

“NAB investigation is complete and it is a matter of a couple of weeks before the chairman approves the reference for sending it to the accountability court,” Zahir Shah, NAB Director General Operations, told the committee.

However, it was the fourth deadline that NAB had set. Last month, its officials told the standing committee that the reference would be approved within two days.

Shah pointed out that a legal question about Bangladeshi borrowers, who were residents of another country, became one of the reasons behind the delay.

At the management level, he said, NAB had decided that it would proceed only against its employees, whether they were Pakistanis or Bangladesh nationals.

“We feel that NAB is reluctant to move against powerful people,” observed Qaiser Ahmad Sheikh, Chairman of the standing committee.

NAB had launched an investigation into the conduct of Syed Iqbal Ashraf, who recently retired as NBP president, along with former NBP chief Syed Ali Raza and half a dozen senior executive vice presidents, NAB documents showed.

In addition to that, NAB also investigated the conduct of six Bangladeshi nationals.

The Express Tribune reported the fraud on January 1, 2014, which prompted the standing committee to take up the matter and refer it to NAB.

NAB inquiry has named Zubair Ahmad, regional chief of Bahrain operations that also included Bangladesh, and QSM Jehanzeb, general manager, as the main accused.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1356401/farmers-borrow-much-higher-rates-industrialists/

ALL 'BASMATI' RESEARCHERS MUST FOCUS ON DEVELOPING VARIETIES
Business Recorder, 16 March 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: The recently constituted Research & Development (R&D) Board of Rice has recommended that all future 'Basmati' research should be focused on development of varieties having average grain length of more than 8.00mm with good taste, aroma and yield potential of 60-70 maunds per acre with acceptable milling recovery.

The recommendation was floated at the 1st ever meeting of the Board held the other day at the Kala Shah Kaku Rice Research Institute (KKRI) with Dr Muhammad Yusuf, National Coordinator (Cereal), Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Islamabad in the chair.

Others who attended the meeting were Shahzad Ali Malik, Guard Agri Research & Services (Pvt) Ltd, Dr Fahad Rasul, Assistant Professor, Department of Agronomy, Univ. of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Sarfraz Khan of the Kissan Board, Ch Hamid Malhi, President Basmati Growers Association, Masood Akhtar Malik and Sohial Asghar (Growers), Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan's representatives Shahjahan Malik and Kashif-ur-Rehman and Dr Muhammad Ishfaq, Agri Chemist, representative of Director, Institute of soil and environmental Science, Faisalabad.

Sources told Business Recorder here Wednesday that Shahzad Malik during the discussion suggested that yard stick of average grain length of Basmati varieties should be above 8.0 mm as per demand of International market. He said success of any variety is mainly determined by three factors i.e. farmer acceptance, miller acceptance & International acceptance.

Director Rice Research Institute Dr Muhammad Akhtar in response said that research institute had advance Basmati rice lines having AGL of 8.00 to 9.00 mm.

Ch Hamid Malhi stressed the need for increasing horizon of Rice Research Institute, taking care of all kinds of issues including MR levels and mechanization of rice. He also suggested changing the name of newly approved rice variety "Punjab Basmati" as India already had approved one of the Basmati varieties with the same name. The house agreed with the proposal.

He also stressed the need to increase the collaboration with International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines and China for importing rice germplasm and hybrid technology.

The Director Rice explained that direct seeded rice (DSR) is a successful technology to overcome the burning issue of labour and water shortage. However, the only issue in the success of DSR is the non-availability of chemical control of weeds specifically Madhana grass, Bansi grass and Kallar grass. New chemistries, for the control of these weeds, are being tested and evaluated through private sector collaboration, he added.

On mechanization of rice, Shahzad Malik claimed that rice transplanters were not cost effective in our situation. Hamid Malhi stressed the need to do more work on DSR and mechanization.

The participants recommended for more efforts on development of special varieties having low tillering with high yield potential suitable for direct seeding method. It was further suggested to enhance endeavours to control incidence of hopper attacks in traditional areas as well as blast incidence in non-traditional rice growing areas through management and resistant varieties. It was suggested to chalk out a plan to collect paddy/rice samples for MRL detection and develop technologies to cope malnutrition through Zinc and Iron fortification in rice.

The meeting suggested strengthening Agricultural Engineering section of Rice Research Institute besides making efforts to further promote rice combine harvesters for harvesting rice crop by giving subsidy, and strict imposition of ban on using wheat combine harvester for rice harvesting. It was also agreed for making efforts for further refinement and dissemination of resource saving and environment friendly rice production technologies such as Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR), the recommendations concluded.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/16/13-page/858037-news.html

REGIONAL, INTERNATIONAL MARKETS: PFMA FOR EXPORT OF SURPLUS WHEAT, FLOUR
Business Recorder, 16 March 2017

KARACHI: Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) on Wednesday called for better export policy for flour and wheat so that the big surplus stock can be exported in regional and international markets.

The export rebate be increased to dollars 185 per ton of wheat or flour exported from $ 120. Due to low price in international market, wheat or flour's export by sea was not affordable. The rebate rate for the exports via land routes may be revised upward, said Central Chairman PFMA.

PFMA's Chairman Central Committee Badar-ud-Din Kakar, along with other representatives of the association, was speaking at a press conference here.

The price of wheat in international market was Rs 150 per 40 kilograms, whereas in Pakistan the price was fixed at Rs 340. The subsidy being given to the growers was Rs 120, which was likely to increase to Rs 143 per 40 kg of wheat. The federal and concerned provincial government was to bear this burden equally. Thus, Pakistan could not compete in flour and wheat export.

Kakar urged that instead of giving subsidy to the growers, the government should reduce the cost of inputs and utilities to make the wheat and the flour price computable.

The PDMA's Central Chairman called upon the government to revisit its policy on export of wheat and flour. The flour mills owners be given ninety days instead of sixty days for export of wheat or flour after signing an agreement with the government for the same. Similarly, he said, the period of submitting rebate claims with State Bank of Pakistan be enhanced to 120 days against 90 days.

Badar-ud-Din Kakar, former chairman of PFMA Central Committee Muhammad Naeem Butt and former chairman PFMA Punjab Chaudhry Muhammad Iftikhar Ahmed Minto said, new crop was due within couple of weeks. The production was expected up to 250 million tones.

“We are given old what stock 2014 and 2015 due to back-log of wheat stock,” the PFMA leaders claimed.

They also demanded for a Wheat Export Regulatory Authority.

They mentioned that Kazakhstan, which was a major wheat exporter country with its export up to 4 million tones, had changed its agriculture policy. She was cutting cultivation of wheat by 5 percent every year and it was being replaced with oil seed crops. This, they said, would provide a good opportunity to Pakistan to capture Afghanistan’s wheat and flour market.—APP

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/16/5-page/857916-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 6TH TO MARCH 12 TH 2017

ON BUYING TECHNOLOGY FROM MONSANTO
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 6th, 2017

Ahsan Rana

FORCED by a decline of 2m bales in cotton production last year, the Punjab government is again negotiating with the multinational company Monsanto to purchase its genetically modified cotton seeds, hoping that these new seeds will improve cotton production in the province.

The company is ready to sell its GM technology for an adequate price. It is not clear, however, the technology will have to be coupled with institutional and governance changes in the seed provision system.

Globally, GM crops have been in large scale cultivation since 1996. In Pakistan, GM crops were first introduced in 2002, with the arrival of Bt cotton in Sindh, and now approximately 95pc of cotton in Pakistan is GM cotton. Bt cotton is insect resistant, i.e. it produces a protein that is toxic to certain categories of bollworms.

Bollworms have been a major problem for cotton farmers. As such, Bt cotton came as a relief for farmers, and was fast adopted by them.

Bt cotton in Pakistan contains Monsanto’s genetic transformation event. It was available for free to Pakistani breeders and seed companies, as the company had not sought patent protection here for this particular transformation event.

It was expected to give a substantial boost to cotton production, but it failed to yield the expected results, due to low quality of seed containing toxins.

Seed production is mostly done in the informal sector — outside the regulatory purview — hence quality control has been problematic.

Seed provision continues to be chaotic. Scores of seed producers provide farmers with seeds of low germination, mixed varietal composition, and having a low level of expression of Bt toxin. Consequently, farmers end up receiving less than adequate return on their labour and investment.

Another problem is the development of resistance in bollworms against Bt toxins. Due to lack of precautionary measures and use of low-toxin expressing seeds, some bollworms have developed resistance to Bt cotton currently in use.

Farmers have to use conventional pesticides to control population of this resistant pest.

One solution to the resistance problems is to use Monsanto's second-generation GM cotton seeds (called Bollgard II or BG II for short), which produce two, instead of one, toxins to provide protection against bollworms.

Eventually, bollworms will develop resistance against this second-generation technology as well, but for the time being, they are effective. The available window of opportunity for BG-II effectiveness against bollworms is approximately 8-10 years.

BG-II also comes in combination with herbicide-tolerant GM trait, i.e. in addition to insect resistance, the seed is also tolerant to certain herbicides, thereby enabling application of these herbicides by farmers without causing any damage to the crop. This herbicide tolerant cotton is called RoundUp Ready Flex (RRF).

Monsanto has obtained patents in Pakistan on both BG-II and RRF. These rights extend until 2021 and 2023. Therefore, unlike the first-generation Bt seeds, Pakistani breeders and seed companies cannot use these second generation technologies without a licence from Monsanto until the expiry of their patents.

Two research institutes (CEMB in Lahore and NIBGE in Faisalabad) also claim to have developed second generation GM seeds for cotton. There is no reason to contest their claims. However, their products are untested and their commercial competiveness is obscure.

Similar technological development in other developing countries gives little cause for optimism. Often such local technology development has been hardly anything more than poor copies of Monsanto's technology and remain unable to create any space for themselves in their domestic seed market.

Pakistan' experience with the first generation cotton has been similar. Both CEMB and NIBGE have claimed to have Bt cotton since 2007-08 but these products have remained limited to their laboratories. Not even a single acre of cotton is cultivated using CEMB/NIBGE technology. In other words, their technology has barely any acceptance by the farmers.

It is these BG-II and RRF technologies whose acquisition is currently under negotiation between the Punjab government and Monsanto. The company is reluctant to enter into the Pakistani market on its own, as it is afraid its technology will be copied by local seed companies without a licence, thereby causing financial loss to the company.

Hence, it wants the Punjab government to pay a technology fee, after which Monsanto will make its technology freely available to local seed companies for use in their seeds.

However, a crucial link is missing here: the quality of seed. As it so happened with the first generation GM seeds, new technology failed to live up to expectations simply because it was contained in low-quality seeds.

The same is likely to happen again, if the technology is purchased without making concomitant arrangements for better quality standards in cotton seed market.

As such, the government runs the risk of paying to Monsanto without reaping any benefit for its farmers. Reportedly, the company is demanding a very large sum. The government's apparent willingness to pay such a large sum — reflects lack of its understanding of the cotton production issues in the country and to negotiate commercial deals.

Monsanto's patents on the second-generation technologies expire in a few years. Even if the government purchases the technology today, the same will not be available in Pakistani seeds for another 2-3 years, which is the minimum time required for technology's introgression into local cotton seeds.

That will be quite close to the patent expiry period. The commercial logic of buying something, which will be available for free soon enough, is not self evident.

However, a significant contribution that Monsanto can make to the local cotton seed market is the uplifting of overall seed production standards.

If the government must ask Monsanto to specify yearly seed-sale targets directly or through its licencees, any payment to the company should be linked to meeting these targets. Otherwise, the Punjab government runs the risk of incurring huge financial liability without bringing any benefit to the farmers..

https://www.dawn.com/news/1318668

UPGRADING WHEAT STORAGE FACILITY
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 6th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE Punjab Food Department plans to build high-tech silos for 2m tonnes and modernise its wheat storage system — from bag to bulk, as they call it.

As the plan goes, 200 silos of 10,000 tonnes capacity each would be built near farms — aiming to facilitate farmers transport and store their produce nearby and cheaply. Individual investors, with the technical help of the USAID, would build the silos and the Punjab government would take them on renewable10-year lease.

According to financial analysis, the private sector would recover its original investment within six years and make profit for the next four. The silos, having a technical life of 25 years and constructed on BOO (build, operate and own) basis, will become commercially viable even if the lease is not renewed.

Punjab badly needs to modernise its old storage system. This is the third attempt by the province in the last 20 years. First one was made jointly by Punjab and the USAID in the late 1990s. Punjab even sent some millers to the US for first-hand experience of the bulk-handling process. The plan, however, never even took off.

At the turn of the current decade, Punjab, with much fanfare, made another attempt when it hired an international consultant in 2012 for modernisation of storage facility.

The study established financial viability of the project relating to construction and operational and service standards for silos. The initiative, however, fizzled out. Five years down the line, the Punjab government is at it again.

The authors of the new plan are optimistic for two reasons. First, Punjab had borne so much financial cost that it could not afford to continue with this outdated storage for this reason alone. Second, they have drawn lessons from past experiences and failures and have covered their flanks.

Punjab needs to upgrade its archaic storage system, and reduce its heavy costs. For example, the consultant reported 7.5pc supply chain losses in 2012. The Punjab governmwent buys wheat worth around Rs150bn every year. That means only annual supply chain losses are just under Rs11bn. This is one dimension of the price the province pays for failure to build modern silos.

Since these silos would be bulk storages — they would free the food department from shopping gunny bags worth Rs30bn every year. Though the department recovers this cost from millers, it still pays mark-up for the difference of time between its purchase and recovery.

The millers, on their part, sell the gunny bags in open market at half the price and pass on the rest — around Rs15bn — to consumers.

Modern silos have information technology that measures impurities and moisture content in the stored commodity and take human discretion out of weighing and storage process.

If weighing, impurities and moisture can be controlled through technology, it would be a paradigm shift for the entire faulty procurement process.

But the bulk handling system is an integrated concept and upgrading silos is one part of it. The other two parts are receiving and selling wheat in bulk. That means the farmers bringing the commodity in bulk — without gunny bags — and millers receiving it in bulk.

More investment is needed for technological and logistical requirements on both ends. The millers can afford to invest in modern crane-fitted trucks.

For farmers, transporting wheat in bulk to silos would still be a uphill task. If they remain stuck with gunny bags, the full benefits of the system would be hard to realise. The government now needs to provide enabling environment to the private sector, or individual farmers, to have a transport system that could bring wheat to these centres in bulk.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1318667

NO SHIFT IN VEGETABLE CULTIVATION
Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, March 6th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

DESPITE the rich potential for increasing farm income through vegetables, growers remain mainly interested in major crops. Those who regularly cultivate vegetables often end up suffering losses owing to market surpluses or the import of commodities in case of shortages.

Owing to lack of required technologies and good agriculture practices, perishable vegetables' potential cannot be realised, although there is a large market base in Gulf and Middle East for Sindh's vegetables.

Collectively, during 2015, summer vegetables — lady finger, Indian squash, bittergourd — were grown on 12,500 ha in 2015 and 12,200ha in 2014 and 41,665ha were brought under cultivation of winter vegetables like turnip, carrot, tomato, cauliflower, up from 40,456ha in 2014.

The area excludes vegetables like chilli, potato and onion which remain major vegetable commodities. In Sindh, onion production continues almost throughout the year. Production figures, by and large, do not reflect any major shift.

For lack of supply chain and value-addition, growers cannot capitalise on foreign markets. They produce commodities without having knowledge of actual consumption in the domestic market. When they suffer losses due to market surpluses, they reduce their acreage of the crop.

However, under the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project, onion and chilli growers are educated about international market trends which need to be replicated elsewhere too.

Waheed Ahmed, patron in chief of All Pakistan Fruit, Vegetable and Merchants Association pointed out that vegetable exports cannot be increased unless quality commodities free of issues of fruit fly, thrips and maximum residue limit (MRL) are produced as buyers in foreign markets are sensitive about it.

Currently, he said, it is European and the UK's markets that attach great importance to these factors but in future even markets in Gulf and Middle East regions would also start strictly adhering to it as well. He said, producers and exporters would sit together to address these problems through collaborative approach and to cut cost of production for adding value to the produce.

Some of Sindh's growers have been exporting mangoes to European supermarkets successfully for the last four years. According to growers, vegetables generally don't face quality issue which could be controlled if exporters and government agencies like Trade Development Authority of Pakistan help them.

A Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) teacher Dr Noorulnisa regretted that the university's teachers and scholars have produced countless research papers but this research is not reaching the end users — the farmers. Resultantly, she said, farmers don't get benefit of it and keep working in isolation.

After investing close to Rs70,000-80,000 per acre, an average grower expects to at least earn Rs150,000 from his produce. Often, in case of surpluses, growers find it hard to meet their production cost, as vegetables are a perishable commodity and growers cannot preserve them for want of storage facilities.

Vegetable commission agents have set up their cold storages but they buy commodities at cheaper rates to earn windfall profit from short supplies in the market.

Sindh Abadgar Board Vice President Mahmood Nawaz Shah stated that exporters should outline quality parameters for vegetables so that farmers were encouraged to strictly adhere to it. He said mostly commodities, be it vegetables or fruits end-up being dumped in ethnic (foreign) markets. He agreed that farmers lack a market-driven mindset.

Waheed Ahmed emphasised the need for increasing the shelf-life of vegetables to capture the Gulf and Middle East markets through cheaper sea shipments. The cost of freight on board on air shipments is Rs82/kg against Rs5/kg for sea shipment.

He says the vegetables sector has immense potential for value-addition given the higher demand for pulp, tomato paste, dry and frozen commodities in foreign markets and carrot, lady finger, tomato if produced in sufficient quantities.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1318666

FPCCI SEEKS PERMANENT MARKET FOR PAKISTANI KINNO IN IRAN
Dawn, March 7th, 2017

KARACHI: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Regional Standing Committee on Horticulture on Monday urged concerned authorities to help turn the existent two-month arrangement of local kinno exports to Iran a permanent feature.

Chairman of the horticulture committee, Ahmad Jawad said under the current scheme, approved by Exports Trade Promotion Organisation (TPO) of Iran, import of Pakistani kinno will continue till April this year.

"Pakistan kinno is in great demand and exporters may tap some good volumes of around 10,000 tonnes before the Iranian national festival – Nouroze," he said.

The senior FPCCI official said the arrangement can be made a permanent feature and help enhance bilateral trade volume between the two countries.

Noting that Iran is a huge market with a consumption capacity of 60,000 tonnes of kinno, he said, "Both governments must understand that it will take no less than a year once a permanent arrangement is approved. To execute kinno trade, many formalities have to be fulfilled between the buyers and the sellers."

The FPCCI office-bearer also suggested that the two countries can grant special tariff concessions to each other under the Free Trade Agreement proposal.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1318812

TCP FINALIZES DEAL FOR EXPORTING RICE TO SRI LANKA
Business Recorder, 8 March 2017

Rizwan Bhatti

KARACHI: The Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) Tuesday finalized a deal with M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills for export of 5,000 tons of rice to Sri Lanka as a gift from people of Pakistan.

Sources told Business Recorder that in response to the second rice tender of 10,000 tons, some 7 parties showed their interest in supplying Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) for export to Sri Lanka. However, TCP finalized a deal for 5,000 MT rice as the remaining bidders refuse to match the lowest price.

Following the directives of federal government, on Feb 28, 2017, the state-run grain trader invited sealed bids on Cost Insurance and Freight (CIF) basis from companies/partnership/sole proprietors dealing in export of rice, for donation of 10,000 tons of Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) to Sri Lanka in the shape of containerized bagged cargo packed in 50-kg polypropylene (PP) woven bags.

The rice tender was opened on Feb 6, (Monday) at the TCP Head office and overall, some 7 traders/exporters participated in the tender. The interested parties submitted bids for different quantities and rates ranging from Rs 39,494 per tons to Rs 47,145 per ton. All the bids were responsive and following the tender's terms and conditions, suppliers also submitted bid security of the total contract value.

M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills was the lowest bidder. It offered a quantity of 2,500 metric ton (MT) at a price of Rs 39,494 per metric ton (PMT). M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills was also the second lowest bidder as it submitted another bid for supply of 2,500 MT of Long Grain White Rice (IRRI-6) at Rs 40,307 PMT.

M/s Asif Rice Mills offered to supply 2,500 MT rice at Rs 41,000 PMT, M/s Hasan Ali Rice Mills quoted a price of Rs 41,260 PMT for the same quantity and M/s Chappal Traders submitted a bid for 2,500 MT at Rs 41,292 PMT.

Similarly, M/s Bulk Management Pakistan (Ltd) quoted Rs 42,935 PMT for 2,500 MT and Al-Hamza Trading Co's offer was Rs 44,294 PMT for 2,500 MT and M/s Owais Rice Mills submitted bid for 2,500 MT at Rs 47,145 PMT.

As both the bids of lowest bidders – M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills – were responsive and much lower than prevailing market rates, the state-run grain trader decided to finalize a deal for purchase of 5,000 tons of rice and accordingly, the contract was awarded.

Sources said other bidders were also asked for price matching of lowest rate, however they declined saying that as the tender was for a quantity of 10,000 MT and the TCP has procured 5,000 MT, another tender will be released today (Wednesday) for the remaining quantity.

A TCP high official also confirmed that finally, rice export deal with M/s Jhulay Lal Parboiled Rice Mills has matured for a quantity of 5,000 tons and soon export to Sri Lanka will be initiated.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/08/8-page/856074-news.html

PAKISTAN TO JOIN HYBRID RICE SEED EXPORTING COUNTRIES
Business Recorder, 10 March 2017

ZAHID BAIG

LAHORE: Pakistan will join the hybrid rice seed exporting countries club in the year 2018 as a local agricultural seed production company has struck a deal with a Philippines company.

"We are increasing our area under cultivation for production of hybrid seeds and hopefully we will be able to export 50 metric tons of hybrid seed to Philippines by next year," said Shahrukh Malik, Executive Seed Division of the Guard Agricultural Research and Services Private (Limited) while talking to a selected group of journalists on Thursday.

Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) Senior Vice Chairman Shahjahan Malik and Head of the Company Shahzad Ali Malik were also present on this occasion. Shahrukh said they had already increased their area under production to 900 acres to meet both national and international demand.

Responding a query that why Philippines is buying seed from them while having a large bank of rice varieties, Shahrukh Malik said, "Our proceed is cheaper than the seed being produced in Philippine and our seed is less labour intensive."

He disclosed that they have expanded their seed production farms to 900 acre this year for production of hybrid seed. The climate situation of hybrid rice seeds developed in Sindh is similar to that of Philippines and their experts have visited our farms in Sindh to check the procedure of seed production after which they have made deal with us, he added.

Shahrukh believed that export of hybrid rice seed will open new opportunities in the international market for Pakistan's seed sector besides improving local research and development. "We are working in the agricultural research and seed development business since 1989 with a vision to bring innovation in seed industry by variety development which should consequently lead to poverty alleviation in rural areas as a result of more yield per acre," he said.

Besides developing coarse variety of hybrid seed, our organization is also working on developing a Basmati hybrid seed with both parents from traditional basmati to produce extra-long grain aromatic rice with higher yields. We have been working on it for the last four to five years besides working for introduction of heat and drought tolerant rice and seed tolerant to salinity.

He said this year they are starting field trials of their basmati hybrid and it will be available for commercial usage by the year 2019. The Basmati hybrid is targeted to give a production of 80-100 maund per acre.

“We started hybrid seed production in 2005 with 20 acres which has increased to 900 acre in 2016 and we are the only company doing seed production in Pakistan,” Shahrukh added.

He suggested that the government should make it binding on all the 45 seed importing companies to at least produce 20 percent of their total seed in Pakistan. This will revolutionize the seed development and agriculture sector of Pakistan as a result of technology transfer, he hoped.

Shahrukh Malik acknowledged the absence of public-private partnership for seed development and claimed that their company had forwarded their suggestions to the government but the public sector had its own inherited problems. Thus the pace of the private sector is fast as compared to the public. Besides, trust deficit also exists between the public and private sector researchers which need to be ended through coordinated initiatives, he suggested.

Talking about the results of introduction of hybrid seed by their company, he said that introduction of hybrid rice has doubled the production and area under IRRI sowing which was 560,000 hectares in the year 2008-2009 and came down to 423,000 hectares in the year 2014-15. While the area under hybrid cultivation was only 84,000 in the year 2008-2009 jumped up to 302,000 hectares in 2014-15.

Similarly, IRRI production was 1,949,000 tons in 2008-09 and it came down to 1,161,000 tons in 2014-15 while hybrid rice production was 454,000 tons in 2008-09 but it increased to 1,416,000 tons in 2014-15. This is also reflected in the rice exports as Basmati rice export was 1,137,943 tons in 2010-11 which reduced to 676,630 in 2014-15 while non-Basmati was 2,563,664 in 2010-11 which has increased to 3,054,680 tons in 2014-15.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/10/13-page/856606-news.html

CURRENT RAIN SPELL BENEFICIAL FOR RABI CROPS

Zahid Baig

Business Recorder, March 11, 2017

The current rain spell has not created any issue for the Rabi crops, especially wheat and grams, as it has fulfilled the shortage of water being experienced in some parts of the province. Nevertheless, it may cause problems if the situation prolongs.

Director General Agriculture (Extension & AR) Dr Anjum Ali Buttar while talking to this scribe said that the department was watching the crop situation, especially keeping in view the current rain spell and forecast issued by the Pakistan Meteorological Office that 3-4 weather systems are likely to pass across the country in the month of March which may result into slightly above-normal rainfall over upper KP, GB, AJK, Northern parts of Punjab and normal rainfall in rest of the country.

He said that farmers are being guided by the department for any necessary precautionary measures. He said if the temperature falls below normal during March it may cause more damage to gram crop as cooler nights are not good for its growth. It is pertinent to add that wheat had been sown over an area of 16.6 million acres of land in the province against the target of 16.9 million acres while grams had been sown over an area of 2.15 million acres against the target of 2.4 million acres. Wheat Growers Association Chairman Chaudhry Hamid Malhi said these rains were welcoming as lower temperature would help wheat grains get more weight.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/03/20170311153027/

NEED FOR IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE TO FARMERS STRESSED
Business Recorder 11 March 2017

LAHORE: University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha has said that livestock sector is rapidly growing and there is a dire need for extending new knowledge to farmers for solving the problem of their livestock.

He was addressing the concluding session of a five-day workshop on “Reproductive Ultrasonography in Domestic Animals” arranged by the Society for Animal Reproduction of Pakistan (SARP) in collaboration with Department of Theriogenology, UVAS.

Prof Pasha asked the workshop participants to use social media to remain in contact, share their experiences and keep on learning the latest techniques used in animal reproduction. He also congratulated organisers for arranging such a useful workshop.

Prof. Dr. Nasim Ahmad said that modern diagnostic tools like ultrasonography have greatly helped in reducing economic losses in cows, buffaloes, equines, sheep and goats. He said that the workshop participants came from Gilgit-Baltistan, AJ&K, Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, KPK and internationally from Bahrain and Dubai.

He said the participants took keen interest in the workshop as it provided hands-on training on early pregnancy diagnosis and reproductive disorders in farm animals. He said that the workshop covered five species and created awareness among the stake holders about use and benefits of ultrasonography in animals through arranging interactive sessions between industry representatives and practitioners.

The companies which are marketing relevant products and ultrasound machines also showcased their products and held interactive sessions.

A visit to the stud and a dairy farm was also part of training.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/11/9-page/856812-news.html

ATT KILLING POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE, TRANSPORT SECTORS
Business Recorder,11 March 2017

Muhammad Riaz & Hamid Waleed

LAHORE: Trade under the Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) is killing the potential of agriculture and transport sectors, as exorbitant duties and taxes on imported tyres to check the smuggling under it has increased the cost of doing business by and large.

The total impact of duties and taxes on agriculture-relating radial tyres is over 60 percent of the total price including 20 percent Customs Duty, 20 percent Sales Tax, 6 percent Income Tax, 2 percent further tax which is sheer injustice to the consumers.

On the transport side, the total tax impact costs over 50 percent. Similarly, the government has levied 15 percent regulatory duty in addition to 20 percent sales tax, 6 percent income tax and others despite, a free trade agreement (FTA) with China.

The market sources 80 percent of shipment under the ATT culminate at Landi Kotal near Peshawar to re-enter Pakistani market. They said the Customs officials were compromising with their duties by letting enter illegal products, including tyres.

The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry Executive Committee member Awais Saeed Piracha said the smuggling of radial tyres under the ATT has distorted the economic outlook of agriculture as well as the transport sector.

Piracha further claimed that only 20 percent tyres are legitimately imported while the indigenous industry caters only 35 percent of the domestic need. He said the tyres illegally brought into the country are not only cheaper than the locally produced tyres but also have good quality to satisfy the customers. The local industry is self sufficient in production of two and three wheelers' tyres and the bias tyres. However, the bias tyres are considered to be low quality, he claimed.

He said reliance on the smuggled radial tyres has reached to 45 percent of total domestic consumption. The local manufacturers are yet happy with the 35 percent share in the market by supplying poorly manufactured bias tyres.

The industry circles have urged the government to abolish Customs duty on the imported radial tyres to bring down the cost in agriculture and transport sectors. He has further suggested for increasing duty and taxes on the import of two wheeler and three wheeler tyres which would not only protect the local industry but also fetch revenue to the government.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/11/9-page/856804-news.html

PUNJAB SEEKS $130M FOR IMPROVING WATERCOURSES
Dawn, March 12th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Punjab government is seeking additional financing of $130 million from the World Bank to improve 5,500 watercourses under the Punjab Irrigated Agricultural Productivity Programme.

The bank is scheduled to approve Punjab government's request later this month.

Out of the total 59,500 watercourses, about 43,700 have been improved in various projects and government's national programme for improvement of watercourses. Still, 10,300 watercourses need to be improved in the province.

The total cost of the project is $200m. The beneficiary local farmer organisations will contribute $70m towards the project.

An estimated 40 per cent of water is lost in the unlined watercourses due to seepage, spillage, side leakage and evapotranspiration. Agriculture in Punjab is affected by water-logging and salinity. In central and southern Punjab, rainfall is more sporadic and agriculture is entirely irrigation dependent.

The new World Bank financing would support installation of high efficiency irrigation systems, introduction of modern technologies and methods in irrigated agriculture, assistance in crop diversification and training.

The project will lead to improving productivity of water use in irrigation agriculture. This will be achieved through improved physical delivery efficiency and irrigation practices, crop diversification and effective application of inputs that will translate into greater agricultural output per unit of water used.

Analysis concluded that high efficiency irrigation results in reduced need of farm inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, as well as reduced vulnerability of crops to pest attacks and proliferation of weeds, leading to less use of pesticides and herbicides.

In addition, fertigation (application of fertilisers or other soil additives through the irrigation system) is done through drip and sprinkler, which results in increased effectiveness of fertilisers with reduced quantities needed.

Similarly, through high efficiency irrigation systems, chemigation (application of pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides) is also done through drip and sprinklers, resulting in effective use of chemicals with reduced quantities needed.

Pakistan's agriculture sector is heavily depends on irrigation — more than 90 per cent of production is from irrigated lands. However, per capita availability of useable water is decreasing with population growth, pollution and inefficient use of water.

The Director-General Agriculture (Water Management) will continue to be responsible for the implementation of the project, while the Directorate of On-Farm Water Management has demonstrated that it has the capacity to implement such programmes in the Punjab, World Bank says.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1319929

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 27TH TO MARCH 5TH 2017
MILLS' PLEA FOR CANE CRUSHING REJECTED
Dawn, February 28th, 2017

LAHORE: A Lahore High Court division bench on Monday turned down a request of Chaudhry Sugar Mills' counsel to allow cane crushing, and adjourned hearing of a case regarding shifting of three sugar mills belonging to the Sharif family.

Advocate Ali Sibtain Fazli stated before the bench that the matter of Chaudhry Sugar Mills was not identical to the other two mills so they should be allowed to start crushing. The other two mills were Haseeb Waqas and Ittefaq.

However, the bench headed by Chief Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah did not entertain the request and put off hearing till today (Tuesday) for further arguments of Advocate Khawaja Harris on behalf of the Punjab government.

The bench also sought a fresh report from the Muzaffargarh district and sessions judge about compliance of a Supreme Court stay order by Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills.

JDW Sugar Mills of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Secretary General Jahangir Tareen and other mills had challenged shifting of the mills belonging to the Sharif family.

However, a division bench had suspended the single-bench decision. JDW mills approached the Supreme Court against that order and the apex court suspending cane-crushing at Chaudhry Sugar Mills (Rahim Yar Khan), Haseeb Waqas Sugar Mills (Muzaffargarh) and Ittefaq Sugar Mills Bahawalpur. It also remanded the matter to Lahore High Court with a direction to decide the pending appeals.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1317445

FARMERS ASKED TO REMOVE WEEDS FROM FIELDS
Business Recorder, 3 March
KARACHI: The Met Office has asked the farmers to remove weeds from their fields to help standing crops especially wheat to consume maximum moisture from the soil.

Wheat crop is at maturity stages in different areas, it said that farmers should stop irrigating crops keeping in view the expected rain in agricultural plains of the country till Mar 10.

Dry weather is expected in the most parts of Punjab with a light to moderate rainfall till Mar 3 and then from Mar 7 to Mar 10. Weather in Sindh's agricultural plains is likely to remain dry over the period.

In KPK, mainly cold and cloudy weather is expected in its most parts till Mar 10. Mainly dry weather is expected in the most parts of Balochistan with a light rainfall at scattered places in the province northern parts from Mar 5 to Mar 6.

Widely cold and cloudy weather is expected in the most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan with light to moderate rain and snowfall at scattered places. In Kashmir, largely cold and cloudy weather is expected in its most parts with light to moderate rain with snowfall at Muzzaffarabad and Rawalakot regions during the period.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/03/8-page/854753-news.html

AGRI EXPERTS CALL FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT VARIETIES
Business Recorder, 5 March 2017

FAISALABAD: Agriculture Experts & Scientists' consultative meeting have called for building dams, farm mechanization, climate resilient varieties, mitigation strategy of climate changes, demonstration of modern agricultural practices at farm level, usage of Information and Communication for agriculture sector and measures to control deteriorating ground water quality.

The meeting titled prioritization of research areas was organized by US Pakistan Center for Advanced Studies (USPCAS) in Agriculture and Food Security, University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) at New Senate Hall.

Addressing on the occasion, former National Assembly speaker Fakhar Imam said that at the time of inception of the country in 1947, agriculture sector had been contributing 50 percent to the Gross Domestic Product whereas now, the sector was taking 21 percent share in the GDP. He added that India was providing heavy subsidy on the sector compared to our homeland. He said that like wheat, support price mechanism for the maize, cotton, and other crops need to be initiated.

He lamented that per capita water availability had declined to 800 cubic meters which was 5000 cubic meter in 1947. The water scarcity is hitting our economy. But unfortunately, we had failed to build a big dam for the last 42 years. He added that floriculture had gained immense importance but the country share in international markets is negligible. He added that investment on floriculture would bring development and prosperity.

He showed his concern that we were importing machineries and could not produce our own machineries. He maintained that by promoting the seedless kinnow, we can bring sell it at the international market with good profit margin. He added that the four decade ago per acre productivity of the cotton of India and Pakistan was near to each other. But now India is getting 40 mounds and China 35 mounds compared to 10 mounds in Pakistan.

UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan stressed upon the need to develop the heat tolerant germplasm of the different crops. He said that climate changes were posing the serious threat to the agriculture and the lives of the people. He said that we have to develop the strategies to mitigate the effect of climate changes and carbon. He added that the world was using the precision agriculture that increases the productivity from less resource.

Our farmers have to move towards the mechanization. He urged the scientists to develop the seed which are suitable for mechanization farming. He said that the agriculture lands were being converted into the residential colonies that are matter of concern.

He said that Punjab government was giving the interest free loan of Rs 100 billion to the farmers that is a hallmark step. He added that ever-increasing population was causing serious challenges for which we have to educate the people about the population control.

PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi Dr Rai Niaz Ahmad said that we must have the demonstration place for the modern technology in order to guide the farming community about the trends. He said that agricultural graduate internship at rural schools will help address the issue of the agriculture with the awareness among the school students.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/03/05/5-page/855204-news.html

April 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 24TH TO APRIL 30TH 2017

RAIN AFFECTS MANGO, WHEAT CROPS

Dawn, April 24th, 2017

LAHORE: Dust-thunderstorm and rain continued to occur at scattered places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir on Sunday, keeping temperatures low but damaging crops.

Lahore continued to receive intermittent rain throughout the day. It was drizzling at 9pm. The day's maximum temperature was 35 degrees C and comfortable for braving power load shedding and breakdowns.

Agriculturists said rain and dust storms were unusual at this time of the year and were either delaying wheat harvesting or damaging the crop. There had been considerable damage to the mango crop in Multan and other adjoining areas, said Pakistan Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Khokher.

The Met department said Malamjabba recorded 50mm of rain, Pattan 32, Kohat 30, Kalam 23, Cherat 13, Balakot10, Peshawar and Dir 9, Lower Dir 8, Bannu, Saidu Sharif 7,Chitral 6, Kakul 03, and Drosh 2.

In Punjab, Sahiwal recorded 27mm, Toba Tek Singh 15, Kot Addu 12, Faisalabad, Lahore and Shorkot 7, Sargodha, Multan 6, Gujranwala , Kasur, Jhang, Joharabad 4, Mandibahauddin, Okara 3, Rawalpindi 2, Mangla, Kamra, Sialkot, Mianwali, D.G.Khan, Bahawalpur City 01 Gilgit-Baltistan's Astore received 21mm, Bagrote 14, Bunji 12, Chillas 7, Gilgit 5.

The Met department forecast dust-thunderstorm/rain (associated with gusty winds / few hailstorms) at scattered places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Islamabad, FATA, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan and at isolated places in Quetta , Zhob, Sibbi, Naseerabad divisions in the next 24 hours.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1328835

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY IN AGRICULTURE

Dawn, 24 April 2017

Amin Ahmed

A NEW FAO study released last week has suggested development of supplementary basic spatial information on the distribution of various crops in digital form, better known as ‘crop masks’.

The study is in the second phase of ‘Crop Mask Development’ for major seasonal crops, in Punjab and Sindh, It is designed to develop the crop masks, showing spatial distribution of rabi (wheat and potato) and kharif crops (rice, sugarcane and cotton).

The report says the crop masks developed within this initiative are useful for monitoring changes in areas of kharif crops cultivated in Punjab and Sindh. The digital information on kharif crops will serve to understand the crop rotation system through satellite remote sensing data by applying spatial query with seasonal crop masks.

This will also outline the well differentiated cropping patterns of rice-wheat, cotton-wheat and sugarcane areas. In addition, these masks will support the estimation of cropping intensity in various regions of Punjab and Sindh.

These masks will also be expedient for other geo-spatial studies regarding climate change variables leading to floods, droughts and other disasters.

Last but not the least, the development of crop masks integrated with an adequate information dissemination strategy will assist in minimising duplications of work and increasing working efficiency by optimising manpower used and time consumed, the FAO says.

The major cultivable area of Sindh is on the left bank of the Indus. This is a multiple cropping area, growing cotton, sugarcane, coarse grains, vegetables, chillies, tomatoes and rice. This is a more diverse cropped area than the right zone.

During the first and second field surveys of Sindh’s right zone, eight districts covered were: Kashmore, Larkana, Qambar Shahdad Kot, Shikarpur, Dadu, Jacobabad, Jamshoro, and Thatta.

The first survey for ground truthing of the filed data was undertaken during July 2016. The second survey for validation of the classified data was done during September 2016.

This right zone is a fertile tract with a pattern of highly intensive crop production. The summer (kharif) season in this region is predominated by the singular crop of rice.

Wheat is a secondary food crop of this area, grown in winter (rabi). Most of the remaining area is used to grow high value cash crops as vegetables and spices that are in high demand in metropolises as well as in the upcountry.

Crop masks were developed for kharif crops in Sindh and coverage included cotton, rice and sugarcane. The distribution of cultivated area varied under these crops. Rice was estimated at 1.23m hectares followed by cotton 0.77m hectares and sugarcane 0.29m hectares during the crop season of 2014-15.

The overall contribution of Sindh’s left zone at provincial level is 60.76pc rice, 17.9pc sugarcane and 4.54pc cotton.

Crop contribution to the overall crop masks at provincial level was estimated at rice (53.6pc) followed by cotton (34pc) and sugarcane (12.9pc).

Punjab is the basket of food and industrial crops as wheat, rice, sugarcane, cotton, maize, vegetables, fruits, pulses and a large number of high-value crops are cultivated here.

Suparco has distributed Punjab into four zones: north-east, central, south and Potohar zones on the basis of their cropping patterns. The Potohar zone consists of Attock, Rawalpindi, Jhelum and Chakwal districts.

Using high resolution data, masks were developed for 2014-15 kharif crops in Punjab. Cotton, rice and sugarcane crops varied in terms of area under cultivation.

Cotton was observed to be at the highest side with 2.38m hectares followed by rice (2.06m ha) and sugarcane (0.61m ha).

Punjab's north east zone is the smallest and characterised by the dominance of basmati crop. The central Punjab has a mixed cropping pattern where all the three crops are sown and sugarcane is the most dominating in terms of area under cultivation.

Punjab's south zone is more dominant in terms of cotton crop. Being rain-fed region, cotton, rice and sugarcane are not grown in the Potohar zone.

Contributions to the provincial crop mask were observed to be 47pc by cotton, followed by rice (40pc) and sugarcane (12pc).

Keeping in view the increasing population pressure in Pakistan, there is a need for improved management of the agricultural resources.

For this purpose, it is imperative to gather reliable data related to agricultural land use by crops and adaptive strategies can be fine-tuned through availability of reliable information at the local, regional and country wide levels.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1328781

CALL TO LAUNCH OPERATION AGAINST SEED MAFIA
Business Recorder, 25 April 2017

MULTAN: Save the cotton growers from Economic Terrorism and launch an operation against seed-mafia, adulterators of fertilizers, pesticides and sellers of spurious inputs.

A Permanent and constant National Cotton Policy (NCP) be announced immediately to safeguard the interest of farmers/growers ,ginners and APTMA and a bailout package be announced for ginning sector for its survival besides providing electricity on cheaper rate and declaring this sector tax-free for the period of three years.

It was demanded at a meeting of Central Executive Committee of Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) chaired by its Chairman Dr Jesso Mal and attended by Suhail Mehmood Haral, Senior Vice Chairman, Prem Chand Kohistani, Vice Chairman, Haji Muhammad Akram group Chairman Ex-Chairmen Shahzad Ali Khan, Mukhtar AhmedBaloch, Sheikh Muhammad Saeed, Khawaja Muhammad ilyas, RaoSadaruddin, Sheikh Fazal Elahi, Khawaja Muhammad Arshad, Tariq Amir Khan Baloch, Mehtab Ahmed Cheema,Muhammad Saleem Bhullar, Ramesh Babu, Khalid Pervez Khan, Ashiq Ali Babar Rehmani, and Asif Khalil Secretary General.

CEC has demanded of the government to exempt the ginning industry of all taxes for the period of three years, General sales tax on electricity bills should be waived besides reducing the power tariff to the level of Rs.5 per unit for ginneries. All incentives, concessions and facilities be allowed for ginning sector as admissible for agro-based industries and National Ginning relief package be announced like Textile package for the revival of this industry. Presiding over a CEC meeting its Chairman Dr Jesso Mal stressed the need for announcement of a comprehensive and long-standing cotton policy which could protect the interest of all stake holders including grower, input supplier, ginner, spinner, weaver, power loom owner.

CEC demanded to waive the withholding tax on banking transactions as recommended by SBP in its budget proposals or it should not be more than 0.1 % for ginning industry as admissible for Rice and flour industry.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/25/13-page/869895-news.html

GOVT FOR SMART AGRICULTURE POLICIES
Dawn, April 27th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The government is focusing on implementing smart agricultural policies but climate change remains the biggest challenge so far, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the third ‘International Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Bio-technology’, Mr Bosan said only collaborative efforts would lead towards a golden era of agricultural development.

All modern techniques should be applied to the agriculture sector while safe use of bio-technology is on the agenda of the government, he added.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research will continue to help to boost sustainable agricultural development in collaboration with all stakeholders.

Through the exchange of our young scientists between partner countries, the country can achieve its goals, Mr Bosan added.

He said Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is very keen for the development of agriculture sector. An amount of Rs20 billion has been allocated for the livelihood uplift and betterment of the country’s farmers, he added.

Former chairman of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) Dr Kausar Abdullah Malik said the country was at the forefront in bio-technology research in the 1980s but that edge has been lost.

“Our scientists would have to work hard to implement the new technology-based research results at the farm level. Our farmers would be able get more yield and enhance per capita income only when they use new technology”, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1329417

GOVT URGED TO ERADICATE CORRUPTION IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Dawn, April 28th, 2017

SHIKARPUR: Former MNA and a leading agriculturist Dr Mohammad Ibrahim Jatoi has said that farmers have become disappointed in the Sindh government and felt compelled to launch a protest movement against rampant corruption and irregularities in the agriculture and irrigation departments.

Talking to journalists at his residence late on Wednesday evening, Mr Jatoi said the Sindh government had not paid any attention towards improving agricultural and irrigation systems and failed to facilitate farmers with provision of seeds, water, farm equipment and gunny bags.

He said the government had set up wheat procurement centres in all talukas but no small grower could get gunny bags nor sell wheat to the centres without recommendation of the MPAs and officers concerned, including district food controller.

He claimed the gunny bags were being sold to grain merchants and traders in return for hefty commission agreed upon between the officers and the traders.

He urged the Sindh government to ensure gunny bags were provided to genuine growers and wheat was purchased from them at government-fixed rate.

Mr Jatoi demanded the irrigation department should immediately carry out an operation to de-silt canals and repair all regulators installed at various big and small canals in the district before the onset of flood season. He said the departments concerned should improve the irrigation system in order to enable growers to cultivate Kharif crops without facing shortage of water. Majority of the population of the district was dependent upon agriculture to feed their families, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1329658

PFMA URGES GOVT TO FORMULATE POLICY FOR DISPOSAL OF WHEAT STOCKS
Business Recorder, 28, April 2017

LAHORE: Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) Central Executive Committee has urged the government to devise a solid policy for disposal of large wheat stocks lying in the country and immediately pay the amounts withheld under the head of exports by the Punjab government.

The demand was raised by the CEC of the flour millers held at Quetta the other day with the PFMA Central Chairman Badar Uddin Kakar in the chair. All the four provincial chairmen Chaudhry Nasir Abdullah, Riaz Ullah Khan, Haji Yousaf Afridi and Syed Zahoor Agha were also present on this occasion. Former central chairmen Asim Raza Ahmad, Muhammad Naeem Butt, Mian Mahmood Hassan and many others participated in this meeting which reviewed the overall situation of wheat and flour in the country.

According to the information reached here on Thursday, the meeting expressed its concern over presence of large quantity of wheat reserves and decaying of two years old wheat lying in warehouses of the food departments. They alleged that Pakistani wheat could not be exported because of its higher rates as compared to the international prices.

They said the government in the year 2015 decided to export surplus wheat and announced rebate on wheat and wheat flour export. Under this policy, flour mills and other exporters succeeded in dispatching 650,000 tons of wheat and export fetching precious foreign exchange. They said though exporters from Punjab, KPK and Balochistan exported wheat under this policy, the Punjab government and Punjab Food Department had stopped payments to the exporters.

They demanded that the Punjab government should immediately pay the stuck up amounts to the flour millers and exporters and devise a policy of exporting wheat and wheat products through sea and road with rebate of 170 US dollars per ton.

The flour millers warned that if the stuck up amounts were not released at the earliest and the government did not allow wheat through sea and road, the flour milling industry would stage a sit-in in front of the National Assembly and the Senate. They said they would even go for a country-wide strike to press the government for acceptance of their demands.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/29/46-page/870698-news.html

SMALL CULTIVATORS TO BE PROVIDED INTEREST-FREE LOANS: SHAHBAZ
Business Recorder, 29 April 2017

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has said that Pakistan Muslim League-N government has given historic Kisan Package for the development of small cultivators and promotion of agriculture.

He said that small cultivators will be provided interest-free loans of Rs.100 billion first time in the history of the country. Similarly, historic Kisan package of 100 billions of rupees is leaving a positive impact on development of agriculture sector. Small farmers are benefiting from subsidy on agriculture implements and fertilizers, he added.

He expressed these views while talking to Federal Minister for National Food Security Skindar Hayat Bosan who called on him, here Friday. Shahbaz Sharif said that they were blessed with excellent crop of wheat by Allah Almighty immeasurable grace and diligent work of cultivators. Additionally, he said that there is an increase in per acre production of wheat due to government’s efforts and subsidies on agricultural inputs.

Punjab government has set a target to purchase four million tons of wheat this year and ensuring to protect the rights of farmers during wheat procurement campaign. He said that ongoing wheat procurement campaign is moving forward with full swing and cultivators are provided with best facilities at centers in Punjab also gunny bags are being distributed among farmers through transparent and latest system. Shahbaz Sharif said that he is personally monitoring this campaign and won't allow anyone to exploit interest of cultivators.

He said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, PML-N is already protecting farmers' interests and will continue to do so in future as well. It is our aim to empower small cultivators and we have provided relief to farmers through Kisan Package worth billions of rupees, he added.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/29/5-page/870817-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 17TH TO APRIL 23RD 2017

MAKING WHEAT PROCUREMENT TRANSPARENT, LESS BURDENSOME
Dawn, Economic & Business, April 17th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB started its procurement drive on April 15 for buying 4m tonnes of wheat and has entered the market with a ready cash of Rs130bn, which should keep the commodity price stable in harvesting season.

To curb malpractices and ensure transparency, it has inducted the district administration. Assistant commissioners would look after each tehsil and the additional deputy commissioners (revenue) have been put in charge of all districts in the province.

Owing to an expected bumper crop, the basic question being asked is: will the target of 4m tonnes be big enough to stabilise the price and satisfy the farmers? The provincial government, despite declaring the target, is keeping its position open — 'we can always increase the target if the price crashes', is the official response to its critics.

Punjab hopes to achieve its target of 19.50m tonnes even with its rain-fed (barani) areas losing 25pc yield to drought condition during sowing time and in the first 70 days of its life cycle.

Given this crop size — which could throw anything between 6.5-7m tonnes of tradable surplus in the market — the current target of 4m tonnes seems to be on the lower side.

The Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) would be buying another 900,000 tonnes, making the total official target of 4.9m tonnes.

It would still leave an estimated 1.6-2.1m tonnes in the market, which may destabilise prices. Even if the private sector that normally purchases, albeit on its own terms conditions, and measured crucially pace, around 800,000 tonnes of wheat, there would still be 0.8-1.3m tonnes stuck in the market.

This is the emerging scenario that worries the farmers right now. The private sector's role is determined by a host of variables: expected cop size, final position of the official stocks, official release price and policy for the next season and, finally, when the price is at its lowest ebb. The crop size is big enough to allow the millers and traders to wait for the most opportune moment, or in other words, let the market fall before moving in.

The Punjab Food Department is starting the next procurement with a carry-over of around 2.6m tonnes. Another addition of even 4m tonnes, will take the total to 6.6m tonnes — the second biggest stock ever.

The first one of 6.7m tonnes at the turn of the decade and the second would be very close to its record stocks. And if the procurement target goes up by another 500,000 tonnes, as the officials hint, the department will literally be burdened with over 7m tonnes of stocks.

Punjab government made gunny bags free last year and also gave additional 1kg wheat with every 40Kg — bringing effectively the release price down to Rs1,272/40kg against declared release price of Rs1,300/40kg.

The election year's compulsions would also come into play: to keep farmers in good humour. That is what the farmers are relying upon — once the price starts falling, the government, fearing a political backlash, would increase its procurement targets and help keep the market stable.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1327374

REVISITING WHEAT PRODUCTION AND EXPORT POLICY
Dawn, Economic & Business, April 17th, 2017

Muhammad Ashraf

Official forecasts reveal that a fourth consecutive bumper wheat crop is expected in 2016-17 with an estimated production of 26.1m metric tonnes over an area of 9.1m hectares.

With an annual consumption of around 24.5MMT, a surplus of 1.6MMT will add to the existing stocks of nearly 5MMT held by the provincial food departments and Passco.

These cumulative stocks of 6.6MMT worth Rs250bn are a source of genuine worries, as the cost of merely keeping them in warehouse is backbreaking — more than Rs60bn annually.

Wheat is a unique crop in Pakistan's economy in multiple ways. It is the dietary staple and accounts for 72pc of daily caloric intake. Around 80pc of farmers grow it on an area of around 9.1m hectares. It contributes 10.3pc to the value added in agriculture and 2.2pc to GDP and is one of the two crops (besides sugarcane) for which the government notifies a minimum procurement price and the only one which the government procures.

The wheat crop moves into three separate marketing channels — an estimated 50pc of the harvest is consumed on farm or within the village where it is produced. Usually 25-30pc is procured at a set purchase price (currently Rs1300/40kg) by the government and then provided to the flourmills at the fixed issue price. The remaining 20-25pc is purchased by the private sector.

The government's purchase of more than half of the traded produce is aimed at maintaining strategic stocks, incentivising production and protecting farmers from price depressions due to post-harvest gluts.

The World Bank forecasts that the current depressed prices would not regain the 2013-level till 2025. The offloading of Pakistan's expensive 6.6MMT surplus stocks in a depressed global market will remain challenging.

A dispassionate look at Pakistan's wheat economy reveals that the issue in the wheat sector is a systemic rather than short-term glut. Pakistan is ironically quoted by the FAO as an example of those countries which are self-sufficient, yet food insecure. The Pakistani consumer currently pays nearly double the international price of wheat.

The procurement of wheat by the public sector has systemic inefficiencies in terms of price and quality. The procurement price of Rs1300/40kg translates into $360PMT (FOB Karachi), which is twice the current global price of $181-193PMT.

A subsidy of $110PMT could not bridge the gap with the global price and government-to-government exports could not materialise despite best efforts of Ministry of Commerce and provincial food departments.

Around 1.9MMT subsidised wheat flour was exported during the last three years, out of which 99.6pc to Afghanistan. Such exports have a history of returning to Pakistani market after subsidy has been claimed.

A revisit of wheat production and pricing strategy is essential to address the dual problem of competitive over-production induced by self-sufficiency notion and offloading the surplus stocks.

In the short term, a difficult business decision has to be made to jettison the dead stock at its salvage value instead of waiting endlessly to recover the costs.

The writer is director general, Trade Dispute Resolution Organisation, Ministry of Commerce.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1327375

BALOCHISTAN TO FOCUS MORE ON AGRICULTURE
Dawn, Economic & Business, April 17th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

ENCOURAGED by increased farm productivity but irked by water shortages, the Balochistan government is set to allocate more funds for irrigation and agriculture in the next fiscal year.

"Our next year's agricultural development budget would be higher than this year's and we will roll out several new schemes in such key areas as on-farm crop management and monitoring, orchard caring, solar tube-wells, tunnel farming, agricultural extension and value-chain upgradation," a senior official of Balochistan agriculture department told this writer.

For the current fiscal year, Rs7.4bn was earmarked for ongoing and new farm development schemes in agriculture sector. And, Rs1.8bn was set aside for irrigation development.

Officials say on both heads, development spending would be increased, adding, that the provincial government has identified lack of adequate water supplies and absence of proper value-chain as two key constraints to agricultural growth.

In recent years agriculture in Balochistan has shown some progress in farm yields. The output of rice, cotton, fruits (particularly apples) and vegetables has increased. But the agriculture sector is still beset by complex structural problems.

"Water shortages, collapsing prices of farm produce, issues in payment of minimum support prices, inadequate farm-to-market infrastructure and near absence of proper storage and marketing facilities make it difficult to put agriculture on a higher growth trajectory," according to a top official of the provincial government. In the last 10 years (between FY06-FY15), annual growth in Balochistan's agriculture averaged at just 2.6 pc.

Farmers say the performance of provincial authorities is also wanting on many counts but most notably in their failure to persuade banks to meet the borrowing needs of the farming community.

Against the annual agricultural lending target of Rs7bn for FY16 actual lending in the province remains half a billion rupees. Provincial officials say that in addition to taking up this issue with the State Bank of Pakistan, they are also working on setting up the Balochistan Bank with the provincial government being its largest shareholder.

"Hopefully, we may be able to give good news in this regard in the next budget," one senior official of the provincial finance department told this writer.

Despite limitations, the province's farming sector is doing reasonably well, officials claim. Cotton output in Balochistan has increased 33pc to 76,000 bales (up to April 3) from last year's 57,000 bales, thanks to improved pest management, they say.

Cotton growers say the output is expected to touch 1m bales next year, pinning their hopes on such factors like the province's partnership with Better Cotton Initiative of the WWF Pakistan increased awareness among farmers about fixing cotton crop issues on time.

Wheat production in the province is also expected to reach the target of 0.9m tonnes this year, despite a 5pc decline in wheat sowing areas and shortage of drought like situation in rain-fed areas.

According to officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, wheat was sown over 3.6m hectares in Balochistan against the target of 4m hectares.

"Still we can reach closer to the target of 900,000 tonnes on the basis of higher per-hectare yields," says an official of provincial agriculture department boasting of how the province's wheat yield has been showing a consistent increase for some years.

Per-hectare yield of wheat remained range bound between 2,100-2,200kg in the last 10 years, but officials claim this year it is set to surpass this level.

Officials and growers say that drought like situation in Balochistan had an impact on rice production in the last season adding that the production target of 0.61m tonnes could not be met. Actual output data will be announced by the federal committee on agriculture in its meeting on April 20.

Provincial officials and growers claim, however, that the per-hectare yield of non-basmati Irri rice (that has already been on the rise in the province) is estimated to have risen further to about 3,400kg in the last season from less than 3,200kg four years ago, largely due to adoption of new techniques for growing paddy with less water.

The per hectare yield of basmati rice remains a shade below 3,000kg per hectare and its production above 0.5m tonnes. Officials and rice growers say no big improvement is in sight in these numbers.

Total output of fruits in Balochistan has also shown a rising trend in the last four years, from 1.08m tonnes in FY12 to an estimated 1.21m tonnes in FY16, a cumulative 12pc growth.

Production of all vegetables (including potato) had begun faltering after touching a peak of 525,000 tonnes in FY12 but this, too, is estimated to have returned to the same level in the last fiscal year, officials say.

Output of other smaller crops, most notably castor seeds, has also been on the rise with improved cropping methods. Extensive research in castor seed farming in 2000s had boosted its per-hectare yield, thereby gradually attracting farmers to the crop in the last four, five years.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1327372/balochistan-to-focus-more-on-agriculture

LOWER AGRI OUTPUT MAY MAR OVERALL GROWTH PROSPECTS
Business Recorder, 18 April 2017

Zaheer Abbasi & Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: The government is likely to miss the GDP growth target for the current fiscal year with a considerable margin due to lower than estimated growth in agriculture sector.

Sources on condition of anonymity told Business Recorder that 5.5 percent GDP growth for the current fiscal year based on 3.8 percent growth in the agriculture sector, 6.4 percent in the industrial sector and 5.7 percent in the services sector was very ambitious and unlikely to be achieved.

All the estimates so far received from the provincial governments suggest that the growth of agriculture would be considerably lower than the target set in the budget for the current fiscal year. Farm output growth would not be higher than 2.5 percent due to lower than projected production of cotton and wheat and this is an extremely optimistic estimate, sources maintained adding agriculture sector growth has not been over 2 percent during the past 5 years.

Sources further stated that wheat production is expected to be 25.5 million tons against the target of 26 million tons for the current fiscal year, as wheat crop especially in rain-fed areas suffered badly at germination stage due to drought conditions and consequently 20 to 35 percent lower production is expected in rain-fed areas which contribute around 1.6 million tons per year to the total production.

According to an official document of Ministry of National Food Security and Research, wheat crop was cultivated over an area of 8.8 million hectares against the set target of 9.1 million hectares owing to drought conditions in early Rabi season.

The government had estimated 26 million tons of wheat production for Rabi crops 2016-17 with an estimated 19.51 million tons production by Punjab, followed by 4.2 million tons by Sindh, 1.4 million tons by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 0.9 million tons by Balochistan.

The cotton production is expected to be around 10.6 million bales against the projected target of 14.1 million bales because some cotton areas was substituted by sugarcane crop in addition to adverse weather conditions, less sowing due to low cotton price in 2015-16, and usage of uncertified seeds.

Federal Committee on Cotton (FCC) presided over by Commissioner Ministry of Textile Industry held on April 2, 2017 expressed concerns over lower production of cotton in the current fiscal year and unanimously decided that Punjab will have to cover 2.429 million hectares to produce 10 million cotton bales, Sindh will have to cover 0.650 million hectares to produce 4 million cotton bales, Balochistan will have to cover 0.038 million hectares and produce 0.038 million bales and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will have to sow cotton on 0.001 million hectares to produce 0.002 million bales of cotton.

The production of sugarcane is estimated at 71.71 million tons against the target of 60 million tons with Punjab contributing 47.959 million tons, followed by 18.159 million tons in Sindh and 5.592 millions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/18/1-page/867691-news.html

COTTON PRODUCTION EDGES HIGHER
Dawn, April 19th, 2017

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: For the second consecutive season, the country produced more than 10 million cotton bales, with the current output of 10.727m bales showing a slight increase of 9.81 per cent from last season’s 9.766m bales.

Overall, around 958,739 more cotton bales have been produced so far.

With lesser area coming under cotton cultivation, the crop size has been shrinking — from 15m bales recorded in cotton season 2013-14 to round 10m bales for the last two seasons.

The fortnightly (April 1-15) phutti (seed cotton) arrivals data of the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association show improvement in cotton production in Punjab.

During the period under review, Punjab produced around 937,665 more bales or 15.62pc higher over the corresponding period of last season. In total, Punjab produced 6.940m bales as against 6.022m bales produced in the same period last year.

Improved cotton production in Punjab helped the overall production by 9.81pc at 10.727m bales.

Sindh also recorded nominal growth of 0.56pc in cotton production at 3.787m bales as against 3.766m bales recorded in the same period last season.

It was encouraging to note that the textile industry substantially purchased higher quantity of cotton at 10.259m bales compared to 9.058m bales lifted in the corresponding period last season. However, exporters managed to lift around 202,356 bales as against 362,141 bales in the previous season.

The fortnightly flow of phutti from cotton fields into ginneries also remained slow and only 1,445 bales were recorded to have reached the ginning units compared to 6,299 bales in the same period last season. Thus a shortage of 4,854 bales was recorded.

The ginners are currently holding around 262,597 bales of unsold stocks which are less than 349,776 bales held by them in the same period last year. Three ginning units are operational in Sindh while another four units are working in Punjab.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1327827

EXPERTS CALL FOR BALANCED USE OF FERTILIZERS
Business Recorder, 19 April 2017

FAISALABAD: Experts at an International seminar have called for ensuring balanced use of fertilizers to overcome decreasing soil fertility, and increasing productivity.

They were addressing an international seminar on potassium arranged by Institute of Soil and Environmental Sciences, University of Agriculture Faisalabad.

Chairing the session, UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that imbalance usage of fertilizers was not only decreasing soil fertility but also causing a damage of billions of rupees to the national economy.

He said that the balanced fertilizer use could result in increasing productivity of major crops.

He added that the university had developed models for proper prediction of fertilizer doses. He said that almost all the soils had become deficient in potassium, nitrogen and phosphorus. He said that situation demands meeting the requirements of crops due to which agriculture production had decreased considerably.

He added that the agriculture sector was under the grip of different problems including low per acre production, water scarcity, stagnation in the major crops, high post harvest losses, lack of mechanization, and reducing soil fertility. He added that the Punjab Agriculture policy was being revamped that will uplift the sector and alleviate the poverty.

Institute Director Dr Javed Akhtar called for raising awareness among the farming community about the balanced use of fertilizers that will help achieve food security. He said that all out efforts are being made in this regard. He said that balanced use of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers could give additional income worth billions of rupees.

International Plant Nutrient Institute Consulting Director Middle East Munir Al Rusan called for enhanced efforts and tangible research work to overcome the issues of imbalance usage of fertilizer. IPNI has taken initiatives addressing the world's growing need for food, fuel, fiber, and feed. There is widespread concern for issues such as food security and the relationship of crop production to the environment and ecosystems. IPNI programs are achieving positive results in many areas.

Asif Ali from Engro Fertilizer said that climate changes were posing a serious threat to the people and food security. He said that the balanced use of fertilizers would help address the issue of the farming community, increase the productivity and to make the sector profitable.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/19/11-page/868044-news.html

PAMA DEMANDS DUTY CUTS ON TRACTORS
Dawn, April 20th, 2017

KARACHI: The Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (Pama) has urged the government to abolish the customs duty/additional customs duty and reduce the rate of input tax on tractors.

Making a case for duty cuts in its pre-budget proposals, it said the industry is facing a liquidity crunch that is compromising its expansion plans.

The Engineering Development Board (EDB) had earlier allowed the zero-rated import of components not available locally for the manufacturing of agricultural tractors.

In 2015-16, the government imposed an additional customs duty of one per cent on the import of such components. Furthermore, 1pc customs duty was imposed in 2016-17, stated Pama in a press release on Wednesday.

The levy has jacked up the cost of production, it said. Additional duties on input items, like raw material, components, sub-components and completely knocked down units, have hurt the cost-sensitive auto sector, it said.

It said a cut in the government levies will bring down tractor prices within the buying power of small and medium-scale farmers. Agricultural tractors are subject to sales tax at the rate of 5pc against components purchased locally as well as imported to manufacture tractors that are subject to sales tax of 17pc. This has resulted in the accumulation of legitimate refunds with the FBR. "The entire industry is facing a liquidity crunch affecting the trust of foreign investors/shareholders," said Pama.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1328029

FCA DISCUSSES COST OF AGRI PRODUCTION
Dawn, April 21st, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) in a meeting on Thursday discussed the imposition of general sales tax (GST) and duties on agricultural inputs, terming these as key factors resulting in increasing the cost of production.

FCA discussed the duty structure on inputs and measures that would help the government in reducing duties on agricultural inputs.

Speaking to provincial agricultural ministers and key officials from the federal and provincial agricultural and related departments, the Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, said the agricultural sector for the last few years has not been profitable for resource-poor farmers who are suffering from economic losses in almost all crops.

The cost of production of all crops has never been in favour of farmers and it has gone up sharply whereas the output prices remained very low, he said. The price of wheat is seemingly crucial at this stage of crop harvest, he added He said the government is trying its best to help the farmers by providing affordable inputs and is making efforts for better pricing of their produce to bridge the gap between cost of production and output prices.

"To ensure food security, we must enhance domestic agricultural production through increasing yield per acre. Generally, availability of food commodities in the country is satisfactory. However, affordability for the poor segments of society is a major issue," Mr Bosan said.

He emphasised the agriculture sector requires 'ownership' from the provincial governments. The investment in agriculture has been declining in all provinces, he said.

He urged provinces to increase investment in the agriculture sector as a major share and assured the federal government would help to fill the gap.

The food ministry is striving to enhance productivity of the agriculture sector. The FCA should come up with strategic recommendations to help find solutions for problems farmers face due to lack of resources, he added.

As from the previous year when the historic 'Kissan Package' was announced by the prime minister on the recommendation of the ministry, this year a subsidy of Rs 27.96 billion has also been announced in fiscal year 2016-17 budget for reduction of the cost of production in agricultural sector. The subsidy included allocation of Rs17.16bn for urea and Rs10.80bn for diammonium phosphate and other fertilisers.

He informed that in addition, an export rebate on wheat has been provided since the last two years for creating physical and fiscal space for public sector food departments. The scheme of $120 per tonne of wheat and wheat products has ended on March 15 this year. For further extension of export of wheat, the matter is in process with the prime minister's office, he said.

"Pakistan has rich production potentials in agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors ,hence it will not face a menace of hunger. However, for sustainable economic growth and prosperity the development of these sectors and food security on long-term basis is of fundamental importance," he said.

This calls for efficient use of production resources by adopting modern technologies and establishing a realistic marketing system, well-linked with domestic and international markets.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1328182

INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE GOING DOWN, SAYS BOSAN
The Express Tribune, April 21st, 2017.

Islamabad: In a bid to improve the country's socio-economic prosperity, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan on Thursday called on provincial governments to increase investment in the agriculture sector.

Speaking at a meeting of the Federal Committee on Agriculture, he noted that investment in agriculture had been declining in provinces for the past few years.

"Provinces must increase their investment in the agriculture sector. If required, the federal government can help fill the financing gap," he said. The minister asked for efficient utilisation of agriculture resources by adopting modern technologies, besides establishing realistic marketing systems and well-linked domestic and external markets.

Bosan called for establishing distribution networks and framing liberal market policies with minimum trade barriers and limitations.

He was of the view that agriculture for the past few years had not been so profitable for the resource-poor farmers, adding they were suffering from economic losses due to the drop in prices of commodities in the international market.

He stressed that provincial agriculture departments must strengthen their research and marketing system for the growth of minor crops, which would ensure prosperity of farming communities.

The government, he said, hoped that the economy could grow with the help of agriculture and it must benefit the poor and should be nutrition-sensitive in order to reduce various forms of malnutrition.

He insisted that the Ministry of National Food Security was extending all possible support to provinces for creating an enabling environment to achieve food security in the country.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1389489/investment-agriculture-going-says-bosan/

ADB-FUNDED PROGRAMMES SHOW SLOW IMPLEMENTATION
Dawn, April 22nd, 2017

Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has reported slow implementation and utilisation of its funds provided for programmes and projects in Pakistan over the last five years.

"The past five-years trend in active loan portfolio shows that more than half of the loan amount remained uncommitted and two-thirds undisbursed," said a Country Portfolio Review (CPR) submitted to the government last month.

It said the government and the ADB had agreed in last year's CPR that project implementation required fast tracking and extension or cancellation of surplus loan amount, especially at mid-term. As a result, the ADB approved $193.6 million cancellations from loan proceeds in 2016.

Giving a break down, the ADB said the net loan amount for year 2001 amounted to $3.355 billion, of which $7.9m amount was disbursed that year. Uncommitted balance stood at $1.9bn or 57 per cent while undisbursed balance stood at $2.53bn or 75pc.

The trend generally remained unchanged in the following years. In 2016, net loan amount stood at $6.4bn, of which cumulative disbursements amounted to $1.75bn, leaving behind an uncommitted balance of $3.6bn or 56pc and undisbursed balance at $4.63bn or 73pc.

The remaining undisbursed and uncommitted amount was attributed largely to approval of 10 new investment projects worth $1.31bn in 2016 and weak procurement, contract and construction management – an issue in larger infrastructure projects and contracts mainly in energy and urban sectors.

Executing and implementation agencies' "delays in decision-making, inherent problems of administering the contracts and performance of supervisory and management consultants undermine economy and efficiency in delivery", it said.

The volume of ADB project portfolio remained stable at an annual average of $3.5bn during 2008-2012, increased significantly to $4.5bn in 2013 and to $6.4bn in 2016. Programme lending reduced from about $3bn (20 loans) in 2006 to zero by the end of 2011 as the standby agreement negotiated with the IMF in 2008, governing policy-based lending, lapsed in September 2011.

In 2014, policy-based lending resumed and ADB approved $400m of programme lending for the energy sector reform programme.

In the following years, ADB approved $399m and $299m for the energy programme and public sector reform programme in 2015 and 2016, respectively. As of Dec 31, 2016 the total active portfolio increased to $6.68bn including $5.94bn project lending, $298.6m in programme lending, $342.6m in grants and $100m in co-financing.

At the end of 2016, more than 55pc of all ongoing projects were implemented by four Executing and implementing agencies including National Transmission and Dispatch Company, National Highway Authority, Energy Distribution Companies, and the Punjab Irrigation Department.

Over the period 2006-2016, the multi-tranche financing facility (MFF) has been the predominant modality of loans in the Pakistan portfolio. The volume of energy sector investments grew many-fold from 2006 to 2016, to about $2.9bn under six multi-tranche financing facilities (MFF). At the end of 2016 more than 56pc of active energy projects were comprised of MFF projects.

The performance of the MFF portfolio remained mixed. Except for the MFF in the ANR sector, more than half of the MFF amount remained uncommitted. A substantial under-utilisation was in the transport and energy sectors, however, contract award and disbursement (CAD) performance for approved tranches in the transport sector was relatively better as compared to the energy sector.

In 2016, ADB approved another $800m MFF for the Second Power Transmission Enhancement Investment Programme.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1328440

PAK-CHINA COTTON BIOTECH LAB TO BE SET UP AT PU
Business Recorder, 22 April 2017

LAHORE: Scientists from Chinese Academy of Agriculture Sciences (CAAS), China visited Punjab University (PU) Centre of Excellence in Molecular Biology (CEMB), Lahore to discuss establishment of "Pak-China Cotton Biotechnology Laboratory" at CEMB.

In continuation of developing strong ties, CEMB and China Science and Technology Exchange Centre (CSTEC), China jointly organized one day workshop "Pak-China Young Scientists Exchange Program" at the centre.

PU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zafar Mueen Nasir, Dean Faculty of Life Sciences Prof. Dr. Naeem Khan, CEMB Director Prof. Dr. Tayyab Husnain, Prof. Dr. Idrees A Nasir, Prof. Dr. Chang Li, focal person Pak-China joint Cotton Biotech Project, Mr. Ge Pu, Deputy Director General of CSTEC; Mr. Zhang Nan, Project Officer for CHINA-MOST's young talent mobility program and senior faculty members were also present on the occasion.

Deputy Director General of CSTEC Mr. Ge Pu talked in detail about Pak-China Young Scientists Exchange Program. He said that Chinese government would offer attractive subsidy for selected talented scientists. He expressed his good wishes for joint cotton biotechnology project between CEMB, Pakistan and CAAS, China.

Director CEMB Dr. Tayyab Husnain gave a detailed briefing on the on-going research projects at CEMB. He said Pak China young scientists' talent hunt program by CSTEC was an excellent addition in collaborative efforts for both countries towards promotion of research culture. He hoped that this scientific endeavor would help equally able research teams from both countries to meet diverse challenges currently being faced in cotton crop production and might lead to post-product-development working strategies to meet the bilateral economic interests. Later, souvenirs were presented to the Chinese delegates.

Dr. Zaffar Mueen NasIr thanked the delegates from China for taking this initiative in collaboration with Punjab University. He said that PU would play its role in development of nation and the country and that's why the administration was encouraging such initiatives in order to promote research culture. He said that PU had internationally acclaimed scientists who had earned good name not only for Punjab University but also for Pakistan.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/22/9-page/869214-news.html

K-P GOVT SET TO EXTEND LAND, AGRICULTURE TAX ORDINANCE TO PATA
The Express Tribune,22 April 2017

Sohail Khattak

PESHAWAR: The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government is preparing to extend the K-P Land Tax and Agricultural Income Tax Ordinance to the previously tax-exempt Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (Pata), a move that could stir protests.

"Personally, I support the move, but the government doesn't want to get itself involved in controversies that may affect its vote bank," said a K-P law department official.

"The summary comes to the law department for vetting while the home and tribal affairs department prepares the summary, which is then sent to the governor via K-P chief secretary," he added.

The K-P Land Tax and Agricultural Income Tax Ordinance 2000, imposes taxes on land and agriculture income tax on the owners at specified rates in the areas of the province excluding PATA.

But now, the K-P Home and Tribal Affairs Department has formulated a summary for the K-P governor on the requisition of the K-P agriculture department to extend the ordinance to Pata areas.

In April last year, the K-P governor extended the Custom Act to Malakand Division, but it was withdrawn after protests. According to Pata residents and political parties, the federal government has agreements under which Malakand division is exempted from taxes.

The laws legislated by the K-P assembly need the approval of the President to be extended to Pata, while the governor extends the law under the article 247 of the Constitution with the president's approval.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1390272/k-p-govt-set-extend-land-agriculture-tax-ordinance-pata/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 10TH TO APRIL 16TH 2017
MAKING AGRICULTURE WORK FOR PAKISTAN
The Express Tribune, 10 April 2017

Shahid Javed Burki

For decades, formal and organised agriculture sector worked for Pakistan. I use the term "organise and formal" to differentiate it from subsistence agriculture. The latter only produces enough output to sustain those who work on the land.

No surpluses reach the market. But for a century and a half agriculture in Pakistan was able to provide food for the people living in distant areas that were food-deficit. It also provided cotton for the rapidly growing textile sector.

As we point out in the 9th annual report of the Lahore-based Burki Institute of Public Policy, agriculture growth averaged well over four per cent a year during 1960-2000, a record matched by few countries over such a long period of time. For two years, the rate of growth was well over six per cent. It was 6.5 per cent in 2004-05 and 6.3 per cent a year later.

This remarkable performance was the consequence of a combination of factors. The most important of these were a three-fold increase in the supply of irrigation water over the period 1960-1990, a speedy adoption of new high-yielding seed technologies, rapid use of fertilisers and a major breakthrough in cotton productivity in the second half of 1980s. Of these the first, a sharp increase in the supply of irrigation water, was by far the most important contributor.

There are few parallels in world history to Pakistan's performance in increasing the availability of irrigation water from 50 million acre feet in 1960 to 125 million acre feet in 1990. Assured supply of water resulted in increasing the amount of area under crops; it went up from 10.5 million hectares in 1970 to 15.4 million hectares three decades later. But this performance was not sustained.

Agricultural growth slowed down sharply in the last decade. It was only two per cent a year in this period, one-half of that achieved earlier. In 2015-2016, the rate of increase in agricultural output was -0.2 per cent. This was first negative growth rate ever in Pakistan's history. What was the reason for this slowdown? According to the World Bank, history caught up with the sector. "There is also evidence of long-term deterioration in water and soil quality.

Reduced effectiveness of agricultural research and extension services also played a role. But it must be added that limited growth in agricultural productivity also reflects the fact that, over time, there has not been much diversification to higher value crops partly because the government's policies have been preoccupied with major crops, especially wheat."

What can be done to address the situation? One important answer is to carefully redefine the role of the state in managing agriculture. As I wrote in the article published in this space last week, the Pakistani state has been intrusive. Initially its role was positive. For decades it invested heavily in making more water available to farms, increasing the supply of fertiliser and insecticides, and picking up output surpluses so that in the years of plenty price-drops did not hurt the farming community.

Over time, however, this intrusion began to weigh heavily on the sector, slowing bringing down significantly the rate of growth in agricultural value added. If we want agriculture to play the role it could and should, the state has to get out of the way and let the farmers take the decisions that are good for them. Aggregated, they will be good for the country. In this context the state needs to do two things: properly price water and let the markets work freely.

The farming community pays practically nothing for the water it uses. If it had to pay to cover the full cost of getting this important input to their farms, they will use it in the way that maximises the return from what they are paying for it.

That alone will bring about a fundamental change in the pattern of framing. The farmers will grow the crops that are less water-intensive. I once visited a large farm in an arid part of Brazil.

When I got there by helicopter sent by the owner to fetch me, he told me that he did some research on Pakistan in order to prepare himself for discussion with me. He said he was surprised to learn that Pakistan had the largest contiguous irrigated area in the world and yet was still dependent on food imports. His farm of several thousand acres had only a trickle of water flowing through in a small stream.

He had Israeli engineers install an intricate system of drip irrigation. He was now producing large quantities of fruits, vegetables and flowers. A 747 plane landed every day on his strip and carted away his surplus to Florida in the United States. "If I can do it with such limited resources, Pakistan could do it on a massive scale," he told me. Pakistan, he said, should be the orchard of the Middle East.

The other major decision the state in Pakistan needs to take is to get out of the business of agriculture marketing. Let the markets set the price for various agricultural products and let traders handle all produce. The government should neither procure, nor store, nor sell. Once the market gains efficiency it too will affect the pattern of farming in favour of high-value crops.

Some pain will be caused by these policy changes. These could be handled by the state easing the process of transition by instituting some form of insurance. The net result will be enormously positive and agriculture will begin to play the role in pushing forward the economy.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1379376/making-agriculture-work-pakistan/

OICCI ASKS SINDH GOVT TO TAX ACTUAL AGRI INCOME
Dawn, April 11th, 2017

KARACHI: The Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) has asked the Sindh government to tax actual agriculture income, and also reduce sales tax rate from 13 to 10 per cent over the next three years for registered entities.

The OICCI, a representative body of foreign investors, in its taxation proposals for the Sindh budget 2017-18 also urged the provincial government to cut sales tax on telephone usage and bring it on a par with GST rate on services.

While appreciating the provincial government over reduction in sales tax the president OICCI Khalid Mansoor said, “The OICCI members highly appreciate the action of the Sindh government for reducing the rates of sales tax on services, from 15pc to 13pc in last two years.”

He noted that it was highly encouraging that despite cut in sales tax rate the Sindh Revenue Board (SRB) managed to collect more tax on services by 21pc in the first six months of 2016-17.

However, he urged the provincial government to zero rate exports and services of pharmaceutical industry and proposed to remove stamp duty on purchase of orders as it is a tax on ‘instrument’ and not on a transaction.

The OICCI taxation proposals for Sindh also stressed upon the need for a better coordination between all sales tax authorities of provinces and with Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

They should also have a uniform definition of taxation of services and jurisdiction be agreed to facilitate the taxpayers. Since both life insurance and health insurance, which do not fall within the scope of definition of service, should be exempted from the category of services as was the case in Punjab province.

The foreign investors’ chamber also wanted the federal and provincial governments to immediately address the issue of jurisdiction of Workers Welfare Fund/Workers’ Profit Participation Fund and give clarity to taxpayers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1326162/oicci-asks-sindh-govt-to-tax-actual-agri-income

DISPOSAL OF SURPLUS STOCK A PROBLEM: KP AND B'STAN GOVTS NOT BUYING WHEAT FROM PASSCO: MINISTER
Business Recorder, 12 April 2017

Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: The governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan did not purchase wheat from Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Supplies Corporation (Passco), which is creating serious problems in the disposal of surplus stock of the commodity, said Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan here on Tuesday.

He said this while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, presided over by Senator Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah. The minister said that under the law the provinces are bound to purchase wheat from the Passco, but despite repeated requests the governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan did not purchase wheat.

The minister said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has issued directives to purchase wheat through private people. "The procurement of wheat is the responsibility of federal government but it has also to be disposed of," he said, adding that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not cooperating with the federal government in fertilizer subsidy scheme, he mentioned.

He said the Prime Minister had issued directives to Passco to procure 100,000 tons of wheat in Sindh.

The committee issued directives to the chief secretaries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan to brief the committee about this matter in the next meeting.

Managing Director Passco Muhammad Khan Khichi informed the committee that food department of Sindh has selected tehsils and talukas to purchase wheat without consultation of the PASSCO which is not appropriate.

He further told the committee that for Sindh and Balochistan, 100 percent bardana has reached the designated purchase centres and dispatching bardana to purchase centres of Punjab will be completed till April 30.

Additional Director Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Ahmad Latif told the committee that 13 people are involved in embezzlement in the Olive Cultivation Project and the agency has arrested 10 people so far in this regard. "The agency will submit the final charge-sheet regarding the scam within 20 days," Latif added.

The committee directed him to submit a detailed report before it after submitting the final charge-sheet.

The committee also took serious notice of not holding seminars in the areas identified by standing committee in Sindh province by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC). The committee also constituted a subcommittee to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

The meeting was also attended by Senators Muhammad Mohsin Khan Leghari, Gul Bashra, Mukhtiar Ahmed Dhamrah and Hari Ram, and officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/12/3-page/866343-news.html

ZTBL HOSTS FIRST BELARUS-PAKISTAN AGRICULTURE FORUM
Business Recorder, 12 April 2017

ISLAMABAD: Zarai Taraqiait Bank Ltd hosted first Belarus-Pakistan Agriculture Forum; a Business to Business Interactive Conference here on April 11th, 2017 at Marriott Islamabad. The event was graced by a high powered delegation of Belarrussian Parliament, headed by Andri Ackenehenko, Speaker of the House of Representatives, National Assembly Republic of Belarus. Along with him a delegation of agri-business community was also present there headed by H.E Lnoid Zayats, honourable Minister for Agriculture and Food Republic of Belarus.Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikaner Hayat Khan Bosan was also present at the event.

Delivering the welcoming address, Syed Talat Mahmood thanked the honorable delegation for providing ZTBL the opportunity to serve as a bridge in building agri-business relationship between both the countries, Belarus and Pakistan

Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan while thanking the honorable Parliamentarian and agri-business community delegation of Republic of Belarus appreciated the efforts of Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd. for hosting this event and emphasized the foregoing of long lasting cooperation to agriculture and allied sectors of both the countries. He further said that heavy mechanical industry for agriculture, Pakistan's high potential for Dairy and Livestock products and major crops along with the need for mechanization of agriculture fields of Pakistan offers great potential to the agribusiness community of Belarus.

At the event two Memorandum of understanding (MoUs) were signed for extension of cooperation among both the countries. One was signed between Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited and Gomselmash an agriculture machinery manufacturer of Republic of Belarus, for extension of cooperation by ZTBL to Gomselmash. The other MOU was signed between Agriculture University Faisalabad and Belarus State Agrarian Technical University for extension of cooperation in various fields of agriculture which includes bio-technology and Genetic Engineering.

Various agriculture products were also placed at the event for providing first hand introduction of Belarusian dairy, milk, meat and poultry products to Pakistani agri-business community. The event envisages to go a long way for future expanded cooperation in various fields of agriculture among both countries.—PR

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/12/11-page/866438-news.html

WHEAT PROCUREMENT POLICY: PUNJAB GOVT TO PURCHASE 4M TONS OF WHEAT FROM FARMERS
Business Recorder, 14 April 2017

Khalid Abbas Saif

FAISALABAD: Provincial Minister for Food Bilal Yasin has said that Punjab govt. would purchase 4 million metric tons wheat from farmers throughout the province and Rs.130 billions have been earmarked for this purpose; all administrative machinery would be made active for complaint free wheat procurement campaign.

He was presiding over a meeting at Commissioner Office to review the arrangements of wheat procurement campaign. Secretary Food Punjab Shoukat Ali, Director Food Asif Bilal Lodhi, Deputy Commissioners of Division Salman Ghani, Mudassar Riaz Malik, Moazam Iqbal, Ayub Khan, Addl.

Commissioner Coordination Khadim Jilani, Deputy Director Food Muhammad Javed, DFC Sufyan Asif Awan, ACG Mehr Shafqat Ullah Mushtaq and farmers of wheat were also present in the meeting.

Provincial Minister for Food Bilal Yasin directed the Food Officers to follow the policy of wheat procurement campaign set by Punjab govt. He said that no irregularity or corruption would be tolerated in wheat procurement and disciplinary action would be taken against the officials showing negligence in this regard.

The Minister said that wheat will not be procured from any middlemen and dealer. He said that real time data entry software has been prepared by Punjab Information Technology Board in which particulars of farmers would be entered in detail and monitoring will also be done through it.

He said CM Punjab Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif would also monitor the whole process of campaign personally and he would pay surprise visits to check the procurement campaign. He welcomed the farmers and said that wheat procurement policy had been formed after consultation with farmers' organization like previous years.

He assured that interest of cultivators would be protected and all out resources would be utilized to facilitate them at the procurement centers. He directed the DFCs that arrangements should be made to facilitate the cultivators at procurement centers and any complaint in the procurement of wheat will immediately be addressed.

Director Food Asif Bilal Lodhi highlighted the salient features of wheat procurement policy and said that price of wheat has been fixed to Rs.1300 per maund while delivery charges will be paid at the rate of nine rupees per maund to the farmers. He said telephone numbers of Minister, Secretary and Director Food have been displayed at wheat procurement centers. He said distribution of gunny bags would start from April 20 and protection of farmers interests will be ensured at all cost.

Representing Divisional Commissioner Momin Agha, Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani assured the Minister Food that during the wheat procurement campaign the middlemen would not be allowed to exploit cultivators in the procurement of wheat. He told complaint cells had been set up at divisional, district and tehsil levels for the redressal of any complaint of wheat farmers.

Mian Rehan ul Haq and others appreciated the wheat procurement policy of Punjab govt. and highlighted some issues.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/14/11-page/866915-news.html

AGRI DEPT, PAD BOSTON SIGN MOU
Business Recorder, 16 April 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department and Precision Agriculture for Development (PAD) Boston have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide weather forecast to the growers through their smart phones.

Speaking on this occasion, Director General Agriculture (Extension) Zafar Yab Haider said that the growers would be provided latest information on contemporary production technologies and weather patterns. This would help the growers to manage their crop in a better way to achieve more per acre yield. He said the growers had to learn the latest technology to get advantage of this facility.

Meanwhile, a spokesman of the provincial agriculture department has claimed that the province would achieve the wheat production target of 19.5 million tons this year. The growers brought about 16.6 million acres of land under wheat sowing during the season 2016-17 and despite all weather odds chances are bright to achieve the production target.

He said 382 procurement centers had been set up in the province for wheat procurement so as the growers could get full compensation of their labour. The spokesman urged the growers to use combined harvester for harvesting and threshing of the crop to avoid the post harvest losses.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/04/16/5-page/867353-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 3 RD TO APRIL 9 TH 2017
SINDH EYES A GOOD MANGO CROP
Dawn, Economic & Business, April 3rd, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

AN exceptionally good flowering in mango trees indicates a healthy outlook for the crop in Sindh, provided it is able to sustain the windstorms that usually strike during April-May.

Orchard owners, researchers and contractors agree that the fruit setting, in full swing, is now in the final stage since temperatures rose in the third week of March, touching 40oC. Water shortage in lower Sindh, however, may pose a threat to the mango crop.

A progressive orchard owner, Ghulam Sarwar Abro, suggests that mango orchard owners need to apply potassium in trees for better fruit bearing. The orchard owners must, however, avoid overdosing of nitrogen which overripens the fruit and causes jelly formation in pulp. To avoid jelly formation, calcium could be helpful.

Orchard owners have secured a better deal from contractors. According to Abdul Haleem Nizamani of Matli, he just gave a contract for the sale of his 85-acre orchard crop for Rs177,000 per acre against last year’s rate of Rs95,000 per acre.

Sindh Abadgar Board President Abdul Majeed Nizamani points out that exceptional flowering is being reported across the province and orchard owners just need to manage farms properly to ensure a bumper crop this season.

Similarly, Matiari district's mango orchard owner Nadeem Shah concluded a deal for his crop on his 16-acre orchard for Rs140,000 per acre against last year's rate of Rs100,000 an acre. Shah, however, fears that the non-availability of water could result in shedding unripe mangoes in orchards of lower Sindh which is fed by Sukkur and Kotri barrages. Both barrages are currently experiencing severe water shortages.

An early flowering, according to researcher L. K. Sharma of Sindh Agriculture Research department, was witnessed during Dec-Jan. But 90pc flowering was seen in February.

About 70pc fruit setting has been witnessed in orchards located in Matiari, Tando Allahyar and Mirpurkhas districts — the provincial mango hub.

The initial phase of flowering this year in trees was hit by powdery mildew — a fungal disease — but, according to Sharma, preventive sprays of pesticides were sufficient to take care of the problem.

The agriculture department's mango farm in Mirpurkhas was auctioned for Rs2.2m against last year's figure of Rs1.2m. Better prospects of crop this year are prompting contactors to offer better deals.

Mango harvesting would coincide with Ramazan, when Muslims would start observing fasting, from the last week of May.

Farmer, Imdad Nizamani, says chaunsa variety would record a decline this year as it gave good production last year but sindhri is in full bloom with adequate fruit setting, thanks to the extended winter season this year.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1324560

NO PROCUREMENT CENTRES YET IN DADU
Dawn, Economic & Business, April 3rd, 2017

Qurban Ali Khushik

GROWERS are forced to sell their wheat crop at Rs2,800-2,900 per 100kg bag in the market which is lower than the official support price.

Traders from various cities like Karachi, Hyderabad, Peshawar, Quetta and Lahore have set up camps at different places in districts Dadu and Jamshoro, purchasing wheat from growers and supplying it to other parts of the country and Afghanistan.

In this ongoing season, the wheat crop is of good quality but for recent heavy rains and dust storms that have hit the crop in the Khudabad, Jhaloo, Amniani, Moundar, Chhhandan, Kakar, Khanpur, Phulji and Dadu.

"Wheat procurement season has started and thousands of tonnes of the crop are stocked up in different places in District Dadu, but the SIndh food department has not established wheat procurement centres there" says Mohammad Omer Jamali, President, Sindh Abadgar Board, Dadu.

"It was rainy season and growers were worried about around 0.4m tonnes of their stocks lying under the open sky", said Mohammad Omer Jamali.

Mr Jamali says: "The official rate of a 100kg bag should be increased from Rs3,250 to Rs3,400".

Some seven days back. according to Urz Mohammad Lund, a local grower from Chhandan area, heavy rains and strong winds had damaged 10-15pc of the standing wheat in Chhandan , Pipri, Khudabad, Jhaloo, Moundar, Kakar, Khanpur, Phulji areas of Dadu.

"If the food department government delays providing gunny bags to the growers, thousands of acres of standing crop and thousands of tonnes of wheat stock in fields would be further damaged, rendering growers a huge loss" said affected wheat grower Urz Mohammad Lund.

He adds: "In this season, wheat production is good and it was 100-120 maunds per acre but the Sindh government has not started to purchase wheat from growers. Thus, small growers are now selling wheat to traders of Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and other towns of Sindh at very low rates.

Faqir Ghulam Mohammad, another small grower of Kandi Village of Dadu, complains that his 150,000 maunds of wheat are lying in the open and food officials are not providing him gunny bags.

Ghulam Qadir Rind, Chairman, Action Committee of Small Growers Association of Johi, has demanded that at least 40 wheat procurement centres should be established in Dadu and wheat purchase should be started immediately from growers in the district.

A local grower of Taluka Sehwan, Sharif Ahmed Bux Otho said that wheat procurement has not started yet. He said local growers are compelled to sell their crop to the traders at cheaper rates.

"It is the corruption in the Sindh food department in District Jamshoro. The local food officials charge Rs200 per gunny bag which is earmarked for their preferred growers.Over 80pc of the bags go to political big wigs", said Ahmed Bux Otho.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1324559/no-procurement-centres-yet-in-dadu

OVER AMBITIOUS COTTON OUTPUT TARGET

Dawn, Economic & Business, April 3rd, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB'S plan to revive its cotton area and production to its historical level this season seems to be running aground. Normally, the province cultivates cotton on 6m acres, harvesting around 10m bales.

Over the last few years, however, the acreage has dropped sharply and hit a historically low of 4.3m acres. Last year production fell to 6.9m bales, which alarmed the officials, industrial and farming sectors.

Punjab made a serious effort to restore the crop output to the previous record level in a single year — 6m acres and 10m bales. The basis of this optimism, as stated by the officials, was the price recovery of around 25pc over the last year and a plan to combat — what had become a limiting factor — the pink bollworm attack on the crop.

The province banned sowing before April 15 in order to break the life cycle of the pest. It was thought that the price recovery will bring the acreage back and pest control help restore production to its historical level.

The debate now in the province is that whether both these factors can provide a sound basis for such a recovery plan.

However, the climate, which has always been of crucial importance to cotton, has started becoming unfavourable even before sowing. The water stress is making sowing even harder.

The climate change is unprecedented. The usual March temperatures are absent; first half of the month brought a cold wave like February, and its last two weeks had high temperatures (close to 40oC in the plains) normally experienced in late April — setting in the summer season much earlier.

With this change arrived the massive water stress. Though early kharif is normally the leanest period anyway, the late March and first two weeks of April are going to be exceptional for water shortages.

Both dams hit the dead level on March 10, leaving the entire irrigation requirements to run off the river supplies.

According to the Indus River System Authority, the current shortages are over 40pc and would persist right up to April 15 before they start declining, slowly.

The scale of this shortage was not foreseen. Otherwise, the province could have held its horses. In order to ensure the ban, Punjab ploughed up around 200 acres and booked over 60 farmers violating the ban in March.

This ban has squeezed the sowing period by almost two months with water not available now — when it is most essential for land preparation and sowing.

The emerging scenario is thus threatening the official revival plans. Both, the farmers and planners, now believe that the province would miss the acreage target by a huge margin — possibly 1m acres, if not more.

Can a single year's marginal improvement in price pull the farmers back to cultivating cotton and become a basis for such over-optimistic targets? Land gone to crops like cane (around 2m acres) is locked for the next three years and cannot be retrieved regardless of any incentives.

Cotton production is a result of multiple factors — staring from seed, management, pest control, weather and marketing. Thus, planning and projecting production on rigorous pest control or price factor hardly makes sense.

Though conceding the over-optimistic content of the targets, officials maintain that targets are supposed to be like that. They are kept high to gear efforts for better outputs. The current targets should be taken in the same spirit and be appreciated, they say.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1324557/over-ambitious-cotton-output-target

AGRICULTURE AND AN INTRUSIVE STATE
The Express Tribune, April 3rd, 2017.

Shahid Javed Burki

Pakistan has one of the world's most impressive agricultural systems but it has not used it well. Agriculture could become the main driver of economic growth and poverty alleviation but for that to happen policymakers at the federal level as well as in the provinces will have to appreciate the sector's potential as well devise public policies to realise it.

From about the late nineteenth century to the present, the state has had a heavy hand in guiding agriculture to produce for the market. The main point I will make in the article today is that the government should ease its hold over the sector and let the private sector have a freer hand.

To understand the state's role, we should look at the influence on policymaking of what economists call "path dependence." This is the impact history has on the decisions governments take.

It was during the time of the long British rule of India that the state got heavily involved in all aspects of agriculture in the areas that now make up Pakistan. Then this part of British India was lightly populated even though it was traversed by the Indus River system that carried an enormous amount of water and dumped it mostly unused into the Arabian Sea. In the second half of the 19th century, the eastern provinces of British India faced a number of famines that took hundreds of thousands of lives.

Having been hit by the 1857 Mutiny, the British were concerned that these repeated famines could cause a serious problem for their rule. Seriously hurt by the famines, people of eastern India could turn their anger at the Raj.

The British administration in New Delhi was anxious to find a durable solution. This it did in the mostly empty lands of west Punjab and upper Sindh. The government decided to invest heavily in tapping the waters of the Indus system for cultivating the virgin land in these areas, produce large quantities of food grains and transport these to the food-deficit region.

A vast system of surface irrigation supported by an equally large road and railway network was developed by the state. Within a decade, surplus food grains had begun to arrive from Punjab and Sindh to the United Provinces (today's Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. The government's involvement did not end there. It also built dozens of "mandi" towns in the area to which the farming community brought its surplus to be sold.

Those who purchased the farmers' output were designated middlemen who then sold what they had bought to the government. Since the farmers needed money at the start of the growing season they went to the local moneylenders to obtain credit by pledging the land they owned as collateral. Since agriculture is subjected to the vagaries of nature, some of the loans went bad. Some land thus passed to the moneylenders who were mostly Hindus operating from the mandi towns.

This transfer of land from the Muslim peasantry to the Hindu moneylenders worried the British; it could lead to political and social instability. The government responded with the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901 that classified the provinces population into two categories: agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists.

Land could not be transferred from one class to the other. Agriculturalists were mostly Muslims and Sikhs; non-agriculturalists were Hindus. Thus excluded from owning land, the Hindu community became resentful. Once again the British adopted a legal solution. By promulgating the Punjab Marketing Act, the government regulated the entry and exit of the middlemen operating in the mandi towns. Those protected were mostly Hindus.

It was this intrusive state that Pakistan inherited from the British when it became an independent state in 1947. However, from a couple of decades after independence the government's attention was turned away from agriculture. The sector was neglected and consequently suffered. From the age of plenty in the first of half of the 20th century, the area that was now Punjab went though the age of food scarcity.

Production of wheat at the end of 1950s was lower than a decade earlier. By 1956, large-scale food imports became a permanent feature of the Pakistani economic landscape. Most imports came from the United States for which Pakistan paid in rupees rather than in dollars.

The rupee payments went into a fund from which the United States financed a number of development programmes. These included the highly successful Rural Works Programmes that provided the Pakistani countryside with some of the needed infrastructure.

The state came to the rescue of agriculture in the late 1960s and the 1970s. With the completion of the Mangla and Tarbela Dams, there was a sharp increase in the availability of irrigation water. The area under major crops went from 10.5 million hectares to 15.4 million acres. At the same time, with encouragement by the government the farming community adopted new technologies that ushered in what came to be called the "green revolution."

In the four decades that followed the 1950s, growth in agricultural output averaged four per cent a year, a record matched by few countries over such a long period of time. However, since the year 2007-08, the rate of growth in agricultural output has averaged only two per cent a year.

This poor performance has pulled down with it the rest of the economy. Why this sudden transition from four to two per cent in less than a decade and what can be done about it? I will answer these questions next week.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1372641/agriculture-intrusive-state/

BAN ON COTTON SOWING LIFTED IN PUNJAB
The Express Tribune, April 4th, 2017.

LAHORE: A ban imposed on cotton sowing in the province has been lifted and farmers can start its cultivation without any delay.

This was stated by Punjab Agriculture Department spokesperson on Monday. The ban was imposed till April 15 to avoid dangers of early sowing to the cotton crop, he said, adding now the department has lifted the ban as the desired results had been achieved.

The department had prepared a plan to offer various free of charge services to cotton growers to enhance the crop production. The growers will get friendly pests, facility of pest scouting, PB-ropes, gadgets to arrest enemy pests, training opportunities and consultation services under the plan, he added.

He advised growers to use certified varieties of cotton seed. He added that spray of recommended varieties of pesticide should be launched in the first phase of cultivation process of the cotton crop.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1373516/ban-cotton-sowing-lifted-punjab/

PUNJAB TO HAVE MODERN TECHNIQUES IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Business Recorder, Apr 5th, 2017

Sarmad Mahmud

Punjab government has evolved a strategy for introducing modern techniques for tracking agriculture sector on modern lines to make it profitable. Under the directives of Punjab Chief Minister, the Agriculture Department has formulated a well-knitted three-year plan costing Rs 4.76 billion for introducing new techniques in agri sector to enhance per acre yield and to improve the economic conditions of farmer community in Punjab.

Sources in agriculture department told Business Recorder that under the programme special attention will be focused on introducing ultra modern technology of Solar Drip Sprinkler Irrigation system in the Punjab. The hallmark of the programme was to install Drip Sprinkler system on 20,000 acres land for better and effective utilization of available irrigation water to enhance agriculture productivity in the Province.

In addition to this, special step will also be taken with installation of Tunnel Farming Technology on 3000 acres of land for growing vegetables in the Punjab. The tunnel farming will help to promote the growing off-season vegetables around the year which will be supportive in improving the economic conditions of the growers of the Province.

The programme will pave the way for introducing modern and profitable farming, enhancing productivity, lessening the productivity expenditures, better utilization of fertilizers and pesticides and save the water.

The government will provide 80 percent subsidy on installation of Solar system while growers will contribute 20 percent for the installation of the system while government will also provide 50 percent subsidy on the installation of Tunnel Farming Technology in the Province, sources added.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/04/20170405164303/

PAY FARMERS BEFORE EXPORTING SUGAR, SBP TELLS MILLERS
Dawn, April 8th, 2017

KARACHI: No sugar mill can export sugar unless it has cleared outstanding dues of farmers up to the last season and has started crushing at full capacity, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said on Friday.

In the wake of surplus sugar production in the country, sugar mills have been seeking government permission to export the commodity while its prices on the local market are rising.

The government allowed the export of 200,000 tonnes of sugar for this season.

But the SBP came out with a number of conditions to make the exports possible. For instance, exporters now have to obtain a clearance certificate from the cane commissioner. They also have to obtain an export contract to carry out the procedure through banks.

Sugar prices continued to increase in March despite a surplus. A sugar expert said the recent increase in sugar prices was the outcome of the opening of the Afghan border.

The director of Foreign Exchange Operations Department (FEOD) will allocate sugar export quota to sugar mills on a first-come, first-served basis, circular issued by the SBP said on Friday.

Authorised dealers, i.e. banks, will ensure receipt of a minimum 15 per cent of total contract value as advance payment or obtain an irrevocable letter of credit from the buyer.

“All exports including those destined for Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics will also be subject to receipt of export proceeds by wire transfer through banking channel,” the SBP said.

Exporters must ship the sugar within 60 days from the date of FEOD’s approval regarding quota allocation or by May 31, whichever comes earlier, it said.

The State Bank made it clear that there will be no export subsidy or cash support for the exports. In case of non-performance within the stipulated time against the quota allocated by FEOD, authorised dealers will recover a penalty of 15pc of total contract value from the exporter and deposit the same with the FEOD.

The government has extended the deadline for the shipment against sugar export quota up to April 30. Accordingly, it has been advised that all exporters must ship the sugar within 45 days from the date of SBP approval regarding quota allocation or by April 30, whichever comes earlier.

In December, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet allowed export of 225,000 tonnes of sugar until March 31 with the condition that a commerce minister-led inter-ministerial committee, constituted by the Prime Minister’s Office in November 2015, will monitor sugar prices and recommend the ECC to stop further export in case of a negative impact on domestic sugar prices.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1325585

KP EYES CHINESE FUNDING FOR CHASHMA IRRIGATION PROJECT
Dawn, April 9th, 2017

Manzoor Ali

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is looking to Chinese investors for funding the much-delayed Chashma Right Bank Canal irrigation project in DI Khan district.

The project is among several others to be highlighted during the investment road show to be held in China later this month.

Around 78 projects of 14 sectors and valuing billions of rupees will be presented during the event slated to take place on April 16 and 17 to attract Chinese investors.

The CRBC, a lift-cum-gravity project, will provide perennial irrigation discharge of 73.98 cumecs (cubic meter per second) to irrigate 115,846 hectares of land in DI Khan district.

The project has seen persistent delays over past several years due to lack of funding. Though the project continued to appear in the federal Public Sector Development Programme for many years, allocations for it were nominal.

A project brief available with Dawn says work on the scheme will begin from Chashma barrage and feeder channel and that it will run parallel to the existing Chashma Right Bank Gravity Canal up to 59 kilometers where a pumping station will be installed.

The overall pumping capacity will be 71.72 cumecs of water and that it will be lifted to 19.50 meters for irrigating the land situated at higher elevation on the right side of existing CRBC Gravity Canal up to the border line of Punjab province.

The length of main canal will be 111.25 kilometers and the distributaries network 410 kilometers. Besides, 26 floods carrier channels will also be constructed having a total length of 306 kilometers.

The estimated cost of the project is said to be Rs119.6 billion, while it will be executed in around five years.

The project brief says the KP government can’t finance the project on its own due to shortage of funds and therefore, it is looking to donors for assistance to complete the project.

The details show that the ‘payback period’ of the project will be around eight years.

It says that the feasibility of the project has already been conducted and after completion it would increase agricultural produce in the area and also generate employment opportunities.

It says that the project provides an opportunity for the donor agencies/investors for investment and to recoup the capital investment with healthy profits.

It can be executed through preferably Public Private Partnership (BOOT/BOT) or any other mode mutually agreed by both the parties and this project is open for all the state-owned, state-supported and private entities.

KP will facilitate investors for interaction with relevant agencies and is committed to be the partner of investor by providing all basic infrastructures in execution of the project, it added. On Feb 25, 2016, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and federal governments had signed a memorandum of understanding to resolve several contentious issues, including the one about the CRBC project.

Under the agreement, the federal government is to provide 65 percent of the project's funding, while the rest will come from the province's own resources.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1325873

POLICY DEMANDED TO AVOID REPEAT OF COTTON CROP FAILURE
Dawn, April 9th, 2017

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: The government has been urged to formulate a new cotton policy to avoid losses suffered due to crop failure over the last two consecutive years.

Analysts say the key crop failure should be taken seriously also because it did not occur in any of the cotton-growing countries except Pakistan.

The cotton crop failure has far-reaching impact in the country where 60 per cent population lives in rural areas.

A short crop resulted in job losses to rural workforce, particularly women cotton pickers.

Pakistan's cotton production stood at 15 million bales in the 2013-14, which dropped to around 10m bales during the last two seasons. It translated into a shortfall of 10m bales in the last two years which, according to experts, cost the country around Rs500 billion. Moreover, the country also had to foot a huge import bill to meet the demand.

Dr Jassu Mal T. Leemani, chairman of Pakistan Cotton Ginners' Association (PCGA), told Dawn the biggest problem facing the cotton crop was the absence of support price for cotton.

"The government was giving support price and subsidy to other crops such as sugar cane and wheat, but not cotton. It encouraged growers to shift to those crops which ensure fixed and secured income", he said.

The sugar cane support price fixed by the government is Rs182 a maund (around 37 kilograms); besides, the government gives subsidy on the export of sugar.

Mr Leemani, who is also the country's biggest cotton exporter, said that around 30pc cotton area in Punjab has gone under sugar cane or maize cultivation. At the time of independence, around six million acres of land used to come under cotton cultivation, which has now shrunk to 4.5m acres.

In Sindh, the area under cotton cultivation remains unchanged at 1.5m acres.

He also admitted that poor ginning was also causing huge loss to the country as the 1952 technology of saw-gin was damaging cotton quality and the length of its fibre.

The new cotton policy should also come up with incentives for ginners so that they could be encouraged to shift to modern ginning technology.

The electricity to the ginning industry should also be given on minimum rates as was being offered to the textile industry, he added.

Karachi Cotton Brokers Forum chairman Naseem Usman Osawala also warned that any delay in giving incentives and support price or subsidy to the next cotton crop would be detrimental.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1325841/policy-demanded-to-avoid-repeat-of-cotton-crop-failure

May 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 29TH TO JUNE 4TH 2017

PEASANT LEADER GETS BAIL IN SOME CASES

Dawn, 29 May 2017

SAHlWAL: Anjuman-i-Mazareen Punjab (AMP) leader Mehr Abdus Sattar was granted bail in some cases against him late on Saturday by Anti-Terrorism Court Special Judge Malik Shabbir Hussain Awan.

The judge told Sattar to submit Rs200,000 surety bond, though he would still not be released.

Sattar had been granted bail in a couple of cases, but there were over a hundred other cases against him due to which he would remain imprisoned in the high-security prison here.

Sattar had been arrested and booked in 150 criminal cases by the police and security agencies. He was also booked under high treason charges. In April 2016, Sattar had given a call for an All Punjab Peasant Convention in village 4/4-L of the Okara Military Farms. The then Okara district coordination officer Sucrat Aman Rana had ordered for his detention for 30 days for violating Section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order.

District Police Officer Faisal Rana and others booked him in more than 150 cases on directions of law enforcement agencies. At that time he had claimed that Sattar had been taken into `preventive custody` and these measures were taken under National Action Plan.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=29_05_2017_002_002

PROVINCES: PRE-BUDGET 2017-18: WHAT’S IN STORE FOR BALOCHISTAN’S AGRICULTURE?

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 29th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

LIFTING up agriculture despite resource constraints while entering a new phase of economic expansion is quite challenging for Balochistan’s government.

Next provincial budget will show how well the authorities meet this challenge, more so because provincial agriculture growth has averaged at just 2.6pc in the last ten years.

“Development spending on provincial agriculture in FY18 would be most likely higher than in FY17 (Rs7.4bn), despite resource constraints,” a senior official told this writer. He gave no exact figures but hinted that agriculture development could get “as much as Rs8.5bn (against Rs7.4bn earmarked for FY17).”

Officials of the Balochistan government say the next year’s budget will envisage a number of new initiatives for provincial agriculture. But enough emphasis will be laid on completion of ongoing schemes and identification of the areas where inflows of foreign investment and public-private partnership can help revolutionise farming and livestock.

Lack of water is number one impediment to growth in agriculture and livestock sector. In the next budget, “two schemes for addressing this issue are likely to be announced,” an official told this writer. Development spending for irrigation is also expected to be enhanced from Rs1.8bn in FY17 to somewhere by Rs2-2.5bn.

One scheme will focus on water resources development and the other on integrated water resource information system for efficient use of water. Authorities expect to launch both schemes with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank.

In FY17, both provincial revenue generation and transfer of funds to Balochistan from federal divisible pool have remained below the expectations of Balochistan government. “So, in FY18 budget we’ll come up with several initiatives that can get foreign funding.

But provincial planners say they feel encouraged by opportunities offered by the CPEC as well. “China is interested in our agriculture sector. Leasing of land for corporate farming, public-private partnerships projects for farm production and marketing and Chinese assistance in farm innovation and productivity all are on the table. We’ve been in touch with the federal government and hope inclusion of some of our agricultural development schemes in the federal annual development plan with the Chinese assistance,” says a senior provincial government official.

Officials say that the plan to digitalise Balochistan’s land record which is going to get adequate resources in the next year’s budget is one of the several initiatives would contribute significantly to development of farming and livestock. Official records of up to 85pc of Balochistan’s farmland are fraught with discrepancies.

“Their gradual digitalisation will not only enable us to sort out issues in land ownership titles, facilitating land users to get bank loans but will also help in developing analytical geo-economic models to guide people on how best they can benefit from a particular piece of land,” says an official of Balochistan agriculture department.

Without disclosing the specifics, officials say that the next year’s budget will introduce a number of initiatives to uplift agriculture. These initiatives will cover such priority areas like wider availability of solar-powered tube-wells for farmers, setting up of dates processing plants, exploiting full potential of wool production in the province (that is home to around 15m sheep), increasing productivity of cotton, wheat and fodder crops. Adequate allocations are expected to be made for schemes in the agricultural storage and farm-to-market transportation. Public-private partnership funding would also be sought in modern silos building, tunnel farming and in dairy and meat processing.

The much-talked-about plan for setting up Balochistan Bank on the pattern of the Punjab Bank and Sindh Bank could also be made part of the new budget, they say.

Banks meet only a fraction of agricultural lending target in Balochistan (less than 7pc as of FY16) that keeps the province's total share in farm loans at below 1pc of the total. Whereas SBP is considering assigning district-wise lending targets to banks to ensure judicious distribution of loans across Pakistan, it has also encouraged the provincial government to establish Balochistan Bank to end financial woes of local farmers.

Officials and agriculturists in Balochistan say the province's image of Pakistan's fruit basket is gradually fading chiefly because of lack of modernisation of horticulture.

"In next year's budget we're going to introduce some schemes to boost fruit production with financial assistance from the federal government and technical expertise and project sharing agreements with foreigners," one provincial official told this writer.

He said that special emphasis would be laid on production of apples adding that farmers would be provided help in seed selection, orchard management and technology for boosting per-hectare yields of fruits including apples.

The total output of fruits in Balochistan has shown a rising trend in the last four years, from 1.08m tonnes in FY12 to an estimated 1.21m tonnes in FY16, a cumulative 12pc growth Such ongoing and new research projects like those aimed at camel and sheep farming, development of new pest-resistant, seeds of cereals, crop-raising with least amount of water, promotion of olive plantation and sustainable fodder cultivation would also get budgetary allocations in the next year.

Officials say that an ongoing capacity enhancement scheme for provincial agricultural scientists would be further modified and would get additional funding.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1336084

FARMERS' BUDGET DEMANDS
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 29th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

With the collapse of pre-budget negotiations between farmers and the federal government, the situation looks tense.

The most active farmers' body — the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) — had presented a number of demands through advertisements in national papers and was invited to the federal capital for talks with the federal government.

The farmers wanted removal of the general sales tax (GST) and the Gas infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) on fertiliser prices in the budget, withdrawal of all taxes on inputs and farm machinery, a stop to agriculture trade with India and declaration of agriculture as an industry. “All of them have been rejected by the federal government,” tells Khalid Khokhar, chief of the PKI.

Farmers and policy analysts think that the federal government should prioritise four issues — bio-tech, farm mechanisation, storage and marketing — and come up with a clear policy and incentive package for them.

This is also necessary because federal policies over the last two years have helped start a revival process, which now needs to be taken to the next level.

During 2016, almost the entire range of crops benefited from the low price of fertiliser and relatively better marketing strategies. It is time to concentrate on major problems that can put the sector on the road to long-term recovery.

The policy direction on bio-tech has been missing for too long; for the last twelve years the National Bio-safety Committee, which has to spearhead the national initiative, has been in hibernation.

Pakistan has 51 bio-tech institutes, 27 of them high-tech institutes with an investment of billions of rupees. All of this is rusting as there is no policy direction, nor an answer to the question of whether bio-tech is a boon or bane for Pakistan.

No research institute has been able to deliver a single uniform variety of seeds that could withstand the emerging climatic variations. Wheat is one such example, where per acre yield is stuck at around 30 maunds.

“The government needs to have a policy direction on bio-tech if it wants to revive the sector and ensure food security,” says Iqrar Ahmad Khan, vice-chancellor of the Agriculture University, Faisalabad. It should come up with the necessary incentives to revive research, he says.

Similarly, farm mechanisation which is essential to improve farming is in a shambles. The last few governments have only helped tractorisation by directing all subsidies to it instead of promoting mechanisation.

The soil needs three kinds of implements: primary (for soil preparation), secondary (agronomic practices) and tertiary (harvesting).

Though tractors have a role to play in all three categories, their utility, however, is compromised in the absence of other implements.

Here again, the major issue has been a lack of policy direction and incentive, low bank lending and the poor state of local machinery manufacturing. All these areas need intervention and taxation and duty incentives, which fall in the federal jurisdiction. The budget is the time to provide it all.

Another vital area is the lack of adequate storage (including the cold chain) facilities in the country, which results in a 40 to 50pc loss of produce post-harvest.

There have been numerous attempts in the last few years to develop a storage infrastructure in the country but none of them succeeded because of the policy vacuum. More than 60pc of Punjab's wheat is being destroyed in the open owing to lack of storage.

With the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) taking shape, it may be easier for Pakistan to construct a cold storage corridor along major trading routes.

Finally, marketing represents the fourth challenge, especially because of previous attempts of the federal government — like denting the price of fertiliser through subsidies and investing on farm to market roads.

The government now needs to invest, or incentivise investment, in marketing and push the provincial government to improve the governance of these markets.

Focus on these four issues is not meant to underestimate the importance of other areas, but only to argue that prioritisation brings them to the top, making them starting points. After devolving the sector to provinces, the federal government's responsibility has only increased to clarify policy regimes and push provinces to follow then in letter and in spirit.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1336082/farmers-budget-demands

PUNJAB MULLS ENHANCED KISSAN PACKAGE
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 29th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

RECOGNISING agriculture as a major growth vehicle, the Punjab government has approached the federal government for seeking exemption from general sales tax and import duty on farm inputs to meet one of the major demands of the farming community.

To support the demand, a provincial government report notes that major crops registered a growth of 4.12pc against the target of 2.5pc during one year because of the subsidies offered to farmers on fertiliser and pesticides.

The Punjab government is also willing to bear the cost of GST on electric tubewells on behalf of the farmers and an announcement to the effect is expected to be made in the next budget.

Around Rs20bn is also proposed to be allocated for developing land and farm irrigation network, and Rs15bn for promoting crop diversification and high-value agriculture, and over Rs10bn for climate change resilience activities.

Under the Kissan Package — the province's flagship intervention in the sector — Rs40bn is proposed; Rs100bn will be earmarked for kissan empowerment through a Digital and Financial Inclusion scheme of interest-free loans. The banks' markup to the tune of Rs7bn will be paid by the government.

To promote private investments, matching grants will be offered for agri-businesses and post-farm value-chain segments. At least Rs2bn is proposed to be apportioned for the scheme.

"We've proposed to the federal government to exempt farm inputs like fertiliser and machinery from GST and import duties and bear the expenses which are likely to be over Rs40bn," an official privy said, requesting not to be named.

A letter to the effect has been sent to the federal finance ministry on May 5, he says.

The tube-wells' power bill, according to him, will also be made 'GST-free'. The provincial government will bear the cost that is likely go up to Rs5bn. The steps will reduce the cost of production and encourage investment and development in the agriculture input industry, the official believes.

The Farmers Associates Pakistan (FAP), a representative body of medium-size land holders, welcomes this proposal to make farm inputs GST-free. FAP Chairman Malik Afaq Tiwana attributes this year's bumper wheat crop to the earlier relief in the form of subsidised fertiliser and pesticides and expects that other crops may also achieve growth targets if the growers are facilitated.

Kissan Board Pakistan's Sarfraz A. Khan seconds Mr Tiwana by saying the community won't seek subsidies for various crops if the government makes farm inputs tax-free. He argues that the step will enable export of current surplus output of four major product — wheat, rice, sugar and potato — by making them competitive in the foreign markets.

The former bureaucrat says that with just Rs45bn investment into cheap farm inputs provided to the farmers, the government will save Rs150bn for just, wheat, for which it has to seek bank loans to maintain the crop's support price.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad leader Khalid Mahmood Khokhar hopes that the provincial authorities can proactively convince the federal government to include farm subsidies in the forthcoming budget.

The farming community, however, doubts that the government has had enough resources for carrying on its interest-free loans scheme. "What I know is that the government lacks funds for financing its Rs100bn Digital and Financial Inclusion initiative," says Mr Tiwana.

Referring to the budget being allocated for climate change resilience activities, the FAP chairman hopes the provincial government will pay attention to on-farm water storages and small dams, particularly in the Potohar region, where hundreds of sites are available for the purpose.

Through on-farm water management, the government should encourage and finance ponds at village level for better utilising rain and flood waters as Punjab is a 'land-locked' agrarian economy and unlike KP has no natural water resources, he says.

Mr Khan says research on ensuring harvesting during rains and sowing during drought conditions should be one of the prime objective. And development of hybrid seeds that could better face erratic weather should also be a priority.

He also advocates projects to introduce and improve modern storage of surplus vegetables and fruits to prevent wastage. He demands that the receipt issued by the storage owner(s) should be used as a credit-card enabling the producer to purchase against it farm inputs for the next crop.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1336081

AGRICULTURE (2016-17): THE YEAR OF SUGARCANE
Business Recorder, 29 May 2017

While the Finance Ministry is patting itself on the back for the decade-high GDP growth, the 'up-to-the-mark' performance of the agriculture sector should be taken with a grain of salt.

As per the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2016-17, the growth of the agriculture sector has been 3.46 percent – in line with the target of 3.50 percent.

The better performance has been due to "better harvesting of major crops through greater availability of agriculture inputs like water, agriculture credit and intensive fertilizer off-take." This is all well and good, and overall the sector has indeed seen an improvement over last year's negative growth of 4.97 percent.

However, a look at the crop situation reveals some caveats in the story. Firstly, the growth in cotton (7.6%) and rice (0.7%) production in FY17 is not too impressive given last year's decline (-29% cotton, -2.8% rice). Wheat production, too, only grew by 0.4 percent over FY16. It seems that sugarcane and maize have been driving the growth, which saw phenomenal increases in production of 12.4 percent and 16.3 percent, respectively.

Secondly, the Economic Survey confirms what this column has been writing about over the past year: there has been a decline in the area under cotton and rice in favour of sugarcane, as well as maize.

Maize and sugarcane production have seen the most rapid growth over all other crops, particularly in the most current year. This has been due to the increase in their area, which has been the highest this year in recent memory (sugarcane 7.60%, maize 12.0%).

Meanwhile, the area under cotton declined by 14.2 percent year-on-year – the lowest it's been since 1986! The reasons for this are "exceptional losses from previous year's pest infestation and low domestic prices at the sowing time that pushed growers away from cotton to other competitive crops (sugarcane and maize)."

Same is the case with rice, which saw 0.55 percent decline in area in FY17, on top of the 5.23 percent decline last year.

Again, the reasons cited are "decline in domestic prices of rice which reduced the area under the crop and growers shifted to sugarcane and maize crop."

With sugarcane and maize seeming to be the only major crops driving growth in agriculture at the moment, and in fact replacing other major crops of cotton and rice, one wonder how long would this trend continue, and could it have implications on the country's exports?

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/29/21-page/878465-news.html

FERTILIZER MARGINS UNDER PRESSURE

Business Recorder, May 29, 2017

Farmers may not have gotten any relief protesting in Islamabad on the budget morning, but they surely must have gone home later in the day. As highly expected, the federal budget FY17-18 had a lot to offer for farmers, rightly and deservedly so too. The key decision is that the government has decided to maintain fertilizer prices at prevailing rates.

First and foremost is the decision to sell the existing imported urea stock with the National Fertilizer Marketing Limited (NFML) at concessional rates of Rs1,000 per bag. Recall that the existing urea price in the market is Rs400 per bag over and above the proposed rate. The existing stock with the NFML sits around 0.235 million tons and the move should result in a subsidy of Rs2 billion.

The amount itself is peanuts in the bigger scheme of things, but has the potential to impact overall urea off-take in an adverse manner. The move will certainly mean that the industry stock which sits at over 1.5 million tons, will be under immense pressure. It remains to be seen how much of the inventory is allowed to be exported, as government's clearance offer will certainly create an unwelcome distortion in the market.

The other step is maintaining the urea prices at current levels through reduction in tax rates and subsidy. The GST on urea has been maintained at the existing rate of 5 percent, despite calls from the fertilizer industry to abolish it and smoothen the subsidy mechanism and eradicate obstacles that arise in claim settlement.

The government had instead reduced the GST on sale of natural gas to urea manufacturers to 10 percent. This, in principal, should work well as far as smoothening the mechanism goes.

But the same cannot be said if this would prove sufficient enough to maintain rates at current levels without further contribution from the manufacturers themselves.

Recall that government was contributing to the tune of Rs180 per bag in form of cash subsidy, which has now been substituted with concessional GST rates on feedstock gas. But the impact of GST reduction on feedstock would roughly be around Rs120 per bag.

That leaves fertilizer manufacturers to face some margin erosion to the tune of Rs50-60 per bag in order to comply with the proposed rates.

Although, Ishaq Dar in his budget speech has mentioned subsidy in addition to GST reduction tools, it is nowhere to be seen in the documents.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/29/21-page/878464-news.html

15 WHEAT PROCUREMENT CENTRES SET UP
Dawn May 30, 2017

Dera Murad Jamali: The Balochistan government has established 15 centres in Jaffarabad, Nasirabad, Jhal Magsi, Subatpur and other districts to purchase 1.6 million bags of wheat this year.

"The Balochistan government has fixed a target of procuring 1.5 million bags of wheat this year," said Food Secretary Noor Ahmed Parkani, while talking to the media about the procurement centre in Nasirabad. Food Director Wali Muhammad was present on the occasion. Mr Parkani said the provincial government had fixed a rate of Rs1,300 per 40 kilograms and the purchase would be made in a transparent manner.

"There will be no compromise on the quality of wheat and no corruption will be tolerated in the procurement process," he added. The food secretary explained the purchasing process had already started in areas where wheat had been grown on the directives of Chief Minister Nawab Sanaullah Zehri.

He said bags would be provided to landowners. "No negligence or hurdles will be tolerated in this regard," he warned.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1336211/15-wheat-procurement-centres-set-up

GROWTH OF MORELS ON DECLINE IN CHITRAL
Dawn, May 30, 2017

Zahiruddin

CHITRAL: The production of morels is on decline in the forests of Chitral due to free grazing, climate change and deforestation, according to experts.

The record, maintained by a government organisation, shows that decrease in production of morels is 25 per cent per year. Morel is edible fungi, which is grown in different areas of the district. It is a major source of income for many families, who collect it in the forest.

The harvesting season of morels starts from April and lasts for two months.

The villagers throng forests and highland pastures to collect it and then sell it in the local market.

The black morel of the district was popular in the past when former rulers of Chitral collected it through their subjects and sent it as gift to the viceroy of India and the rulers of different princely states.

Roigar Khan, a resident of Karimabad, said that two of his sons collected morels in the forest during the season, which lasted for two months. He said that they brought about 1.5 to 2 kilograms morels from the forest and pastures. It was the major source of income of the family, he added.

Mr Khan said that he brought morels to Chitral city where it was sold at higher rate than the local shops situated in his valley.

Overgrazing of pastures, climate change and deforestation termed main causes of phenomenon

As per data available with an NGO working on livelihood, six to eight tonnes morels have been collected in Bumburate, Mulen Gol, Golen, Sheshi Koh and Ursoon.

However, the quantity of collected morels is on steady decrease while no data is available for the valleys of Lot Koh, Mastuj, Mulkhow and Torkhow.

Abdul Ahad Baig, an official of the NGO, said that despite the bumper production in the area, there was no system for marketing of morels as a result of which the collectors sold their assortment at throwaway price to the local traders.

He said that last year, fresh morels were purchased by the local shopkeepers at Rs1,000 to Rs1,200 per kilogram but the same was sold at Rs6,000 in the national market after dehydrating it. He said that an individual was recorded to collect about 30 to 40 kilograms morels during the season.

Mr Baig said that overgrasing of pastures was ruinous for the growth of morels.

Ejaz Ahmed, an official of the directorate of Non-Timber Forest Produce, said that training to the local communities on sustainable harvesting, processing and marketing of morels was started in Chitral during the past couples of years.

He said that the dry temperate forests of Chitral provided an ideal habitat for the production of morels while sensitisation of the communities flanking the forest areas was needed for its sustainability and arresting its degeneration.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1336272

AGRI FINANCING FY18: SHOOT FOR THE MOON
Business Recorder, May 30 2017

Rs1001 billion is the hot number in this budget; it is the surprisingly high PSDP allocation for FY18 and incidentally, it is also the target set for agricultural loans. Agriculture has received a lot of attention in this budget, but is this much credit too ambitious a target?

Historically, the flow of agricultural credit has exceeded the target by some margin. But in FY16, this trend broke as the target was just shy by less than a couple of billion rupees – nothing too criminal. As for the 9M figures for FY17, the target of Rs700 billion appears to be cutting it close as well. However, FY18's target of Rs1001 billion is entirely unprecedented – reflecting a 43 percent year-on-year increase as against an average increase of 22 percent in previous years. It's a tall order, and some complementary measures are there to encourage it.

For the upcoming year, Ishaq Dar has announced two million small loans of up to Rs50,000 per farmer to be provided by ZTBL and NBP. Moreover, a reduction in the mark-up has been announced – from the current 14-15 percent to 9.9 percent – for small farmers with holdings of up to 12.5 acres. These measures, along with lowered duty on machinery imports, suppression of fertilizer and urea prices at current levels, and continued subsidy on electricity for tube wells, are likely to encourage activity in the sector, resulting in higher credit off-take.

The SBP has done well in recent years in not only encouraging commercial banks to adopt agriculture lending, but also in launching its own initiatives such as the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Small and Marginal Farmers; Framework for Warehouse Receipt Financing; Crop Loan Insurance Scheme; and Guidelines for Value Chain Financing.

Moreover, last year saw the induction of 16 Microfinance Institutions and Rural Support Programmes, which are responsible for disbursing Rs34 billion – almost five percent of the total target of Rs700 billion in FY17. Going forward, these could play a significant role in increasing credit to the agriculture sector, particularly to small and marginalized farmers.

In conclusion, a trillion rupees is a lot of credit to disburse. However, the progress made in credit availability over the years is commendable and all the right policies are there. Shoot for the moon; even if you miss, you will land among the stars.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/30/2-page/878505-news.html

BALOCHISTAN DELEGATION: AGRICULTURE TEAM VISITS AARI
The Express Tribune, May 30th, 2017.

Faisalabad: A delegation of agriculture officers from Balochistan visited Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI), Faisalabad. AARI Director General Dr Abid Mahmood, briefing the delegation, said that AARI Faisalabad was playing an important role in the growth of agriculture sector. He said that 500 varieties of different crops have so far been introduced by the research institute.

Among them are 83 varieties of wheat, 62 of cotton, 27 of rice, 25 of sugarcane, 29 of maize, 31 of pulses, 32 of oilseed crops, 27 fodders, 65 of vegetables, 105 of fruits and three varieties of flowers. He said that AARI had also introduced high quality canola varieties to increase the production of oilseeds at a national level, and two best varieties of olive oil have also been introduced.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1422592/balochistan-delegation-agriculture-team-visits-aari/

SINDH GROWERS START MANGO EXPORTS, FETCHING BETTER DEALS
Mohammad Hussain Khan

Dawn, Jun 04, 2017

HYDERABAD: Mango growers in Sindh have started air shipment of consignments to the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates from May 20.

Around 21,000 kg of mangoes have so far been sent to these destinations and more shipments are in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, there is a mixed assessment of the crop size of mangoes this year due to water shortage.

In May, All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetables Exporters, Importers and Merchants' Association (PVFA) had set the mango export target at 100,000 tonnes for the current season.

Last year, the country shipped 128,000 tonnes fetching $68 million. Punjab shares 67 per cent of the total production of mangoes in Pakistan.

An exceptionally good flowering had taken place earlier in Sindh, raising hopes for a bumper mango crop. However, later assessment showed that water shortage in lower Sindh region — Nawabshah, Mirpurkhas, Tando Allahyar, Matiari — had impacted negatively.

"We have a good crop in our orchards this season," says Ghulam Sarwar Abro, one of the eight Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) certified mango growers in Sindh.

He is part of a group of progressive mango growers and exporters who have installed hot water treatment plants and other internationally required fruit processing facilities at their farms.

Talking to Dawn, Mr Abro, whose large farm is located in Thatta district says, "Water shortage did have a serious impact in farms where groundwater is brackish and such orchard owners found it hard to offset impact of irrigation water shortage by using groundwater due to its quality. Luckily, I have sweet groundwater reserves at my farm."

Irrigation water shortage during March-April — when fruit is at the stage of developing — has impacted negatively to a considerable extent.

Growers agree that this year's Sindhri crop remains undersized.

"The crop size is satisfactory but it is certainly not the 'bumper' which we had initially expected," says mango grower Mahmood Nawaz Shah.

Another mango grower Nadeem Shah, who let out his farm for Rs130,000 per acre to a contractor, says his farm had 15pc better production as compare to last year's yields.

Sindh's mango orchards stood at 154,040.553 acres last year as compare to 154329.666 acres in 2017.

Sindhri — the juicy variety of mango from Sindh — is currently available and market players are satisfied with the crop's arrival.

According to Nisar Ahmed, initially for export purposes Sindhri was sold for Rs2,500/40kg and now is being sold at Rs2,800/40kg.

"Last year we sold it for Rs1,800/40kg but then suddenly the price shot up to Rs3,000/40kg in a week's time. In local market mango is being sold of Rs2,600/40kg or Rs65/kg at the wholesale," he says.

Vendors in retail market are selling Sindhri at Rs100-120 per kg currently.

Noted Karachi-based exporter and Patron-in-Chief PVFA Abdul Waheed strongly believes that Punjab's mango production is badly hit this year and even Sindh's crop is less than what was reported last year.

"I don't rule out a 20pc drop in mango production in Sindh due to water shortage," he says.

Sindh Agriculture Research Institute's Pathologist Lehman Kumar is satisfied with the current mango crop.

“75pc of fruit bearing is seen in trees after second flowering in February. Early flowering in December-January period was not sustainable. Sindhri’s size, of course, is affected due to water shortage and lack of management practices by farmers,” he observes.

Mr Abro also shared information about non acceptability of fruits in Dubai due to use of calcium carbide for fruit ripening purposes which carries health risks.

“The consignments that reached Dubai initially didn’t get much appreciation and exports of such processed fruits to Dubai have dropped,” he adds.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1337230

PUNJAB ALLOCATES RS21B FOR AGRICULTURE, RS9B FOR ENERGY

The Express Tribune, June 3rd, 2017.

LAHORE: The Punjab government announced an allocation of Rs21 billion for the agriculture sector in the upcoming fiscal year. Under the aforementioned amount, the authorities will execute 34 ongoing and 25 new schemes in the sector.

The Rs21-billion figure also includes Rs10 billion under the Khadim-e-Punjab Kisan Package, which was announced two years ago under which a total of Rs100 billion will be spent on provision of different subsidies and small loans. This means that fresh allocation for the agriculture sector for next fiscal year remains around Rs11 billion.

Agriculture remains an important sector of Punjab’s economy and is considered as a driving force for growth and development as it provides employment to 43.5% of the province’s workforce. During the outgoing fiscal year, Rs20 billion was allocated towards the sector, which included Rs10 billion from the Kisan package.

Meanwhile, the provincial government claims that under the Kisan package, around 106,000 farmers have been sanctioned interest-free loans amounting to Rs11.5 billion till date and 92.5% belong to that category that availed this facility for the very first time from a formal sector. “This package helped increase crop sector growth from -4.97% to 3.03%, and the agriculture Gross Domestic Product climbed from -0.2% to 3.46% in just one year,” said Punjab Finance Minister Ayesha Ghaus Pasha.

For the next fiscal year, the provincial government will continue paying subsidies on Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and urea seed fertilisers. It will pay Rs6 billion general sales tax on agriculture tube well connections.

For livestock and dairy development sector, the provincial government plans to allocate Rs9.5 billion for the next fiscal year, under which it will execute 25 ongoing and 25 new schemes.

The proposed schemes include projects to promote export surplus and to create market pull, improve supply chain, production, processing, value addition and certification to link with the international markets.

Major initiatives to be undertaken during the upcoming fiscal year are improving productivity and fertility of small and large ruminants, enhancing livestock production and productivity, establishment of university of veterinary and animal sciences in Bahawalpur, livestock and access to market project.

The government, which has managed to complete a couple of energy projects this year under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has allocated Rs9 billion for the energy sector.

The department has launched the Khadime Punjab Ujala programme throughout Punjab and will convert 10,000 schools to solar power for which Rs3 billion have been allocated. The amount will be reimbursed by donor agencies.

Other major targets and initiatives for the fiscal year 2017-18 include completion of renewable energy development sector investment programme, hydel power generation project at Marala Pakpattan and Chianwali to add 20 megawatts (MW) to the national grid, along with the commencement of 135MW Taunsa hydel power project.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1426029/punjab-allocates-rs21b-agriculture-rs9b-energy/

RS 21 BN ALLOCATED FOR AGRI SECTOR
Business Recorder, May 6, 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: The Punjab government has allocated a sum of Rs 21 billion for the agriculture sector under the annual development programme 2017-18 with a plan to execute 34 on-going and 25 new schemes.

This also includes Rs 10 billion for Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package and Rs 2 billion for establishment of PAFDA Science Enclave. The same amount was allocated for agriculture sector in the current financial year under this package.

Major initiatives of 2017-18 are Punjab Irrigated-Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project (PIPIP)-World Bank Assisted, Optimizing Watercourse Conveyance Efficiency through enhancing lining length, provision of laser land levelers to the farmers/service providers on subsidized costs, establishment of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture, Multan, establishment of model farms linked with improved supply chain and value addition, extension service 2.0 – farmers facilitation through modernized extension, promotion of high value agriculture through provision of climate smart technology package, Establishment of Hi-Tech Mechanization Service Centre in Punjab, development of hybrid and OPVs in horticulture crops resilient to climate change, rehabilitation of salt affected soil through gypsum application, cotton seed reform project, establishment of PAFDA Science Enclave Main Building Premises, Lahore.

According to the budget document, 25 on-going schemes were undertaken by the department with Rs 8 billion on ongoing and the rest on 15 new schemes during the year 2016-17.

Agriculture is the mainstay of our economy. Although Punjab economy has witnessed a considerable diversification over the years, the agriculture still remains an important sector of the economy and a driving force for growth and development. It provides employment to 43.5 percent people in the province, and more than 61 percent in rural areas. It provides food, shelter, and livelihood to the inhabitants and raw material to the industry.

“The vision of agriculture department is to transform agriculture sector into a diversified, sustainable, modern and market-driven sector through knowledge-based empowerment, efficient resource utilization and revamping existing practices,” said the budget documents.

The documents claimed upgradation of Main Library, Ayub Agriculture Research Institute, Faisalabad, through IT interventions, provision of additional facilities for improvement in fruit yield and quality of guava, date and pomegranate, introduction and adaptation of advanced technologies to mechanize various farm operations for enhancing crop production, sustainable development and management of ground water with electric resistivity sounding survey in Punjab (Phase II), enhancing vegetable production in Punjab, promotion of agriculture mechanization in Punjab, establishment of export oriented floriculture centre at Pattoki, rehabilitation and improvement of Khadija-tul-Kubra Female Hostel Complex along with construction of sports facility at UAF as the main achievements of the current financial year.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/06/03/18-page/879574-news.html

FARM, ALLIED SECTORS GET RS 140 BN
Khalid Hasnain

Dawn, Jun 03, 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab government has proposed an allocation of around Rs140.5 billion for agriculture, irrigation, livestock, food and other allied departments in the annual budget for 2017-18 fiscal.

The government also claims to have achieved 8pc growth in the crop sector during the ongoing fiscal year.

“The Rs100 billion Kissan Package, which was launched in the ongoing fiscal year, has brought a revolution, as it gave loans to 106,000 farmers to date, increasing agriculture crop growth rate to 8pc that further led to converting 0.2pc negative agriculture GDP to positive 3.46pc GDP growth,” Finance Minister Ayesha Ghaus Pasha said in her budget speech in the Punjab Assembly on Friday.

She said the agriculture budget included Rs15 billion for Kissan Package.

According to the budget document, Rs20 billion had been allocated to development of the agriculture sector during the ongoing fiscal year 2016-17. This included Rs10 billion for the schemes identified under the Chief Minister’s Kissan Package.

“For FY 2017-18, it has been planned to execute 34 ongoing and 25 new schemes for which Rs21 billion is being provided. This also includes Rs10 billion for the Kissan Package and Rs2 billion for the establishment of Punjab Agriculture, Food & Drug Agency science enclave,” the budget document stated.

The other major initiatives the government plans to start in 2017-18 included Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project (assisted by the World Bank), optimising watercourse conveyance efficiency through enhancing lining length and provision of laser land levelers to farmers/service providers on subsidised costs.

The document mentions that the government will launch several irrigation-related projects, including Jalalpur Irrigation Project, Kass-Umar Khan Canal System in Tehsil Eisakhel (Mianwali), increasing capacity of the Mailsi Siphon, Greater Thal Canal Project Phase-2 (Chobara Branch) and Flood Protection Scheme at Nullah Dek.

The irrigation sector's total outlay for the year 2017-18 has been estimated at Rs41 billion. This allocation shows no increase from ADP 2016-17 and constitutes about 6.83pc of the core ADP 2017-18 budget under the Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF) 2017-20.

"About 173 schemes included in the MTDF 2017-18 — out of which 96 are ongoing and 77 new — have been targeted to be executed during 2017-18 with an allocation of Rs28.3 billion for ongoing and Rs12.731 billion for new schemes. Around 45 of the ongoing and 24 new schemes will be completed during 2017-18," according to the document.

The document indicates an allocation of Rs500 million to execute four ongoing and four new schemes in FY 2017-18. These schemes include construction of concrete silos of 30,000 metric tonne capacity in Bahawalpur and mobile food sampling and inspection infrastructure for strengthening anti-adulteration campaign in Lahore, Gujranwala, Multan, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi and establishment of Strategic Planning Unit in the food department.

The government has also proposed Rs2.70 billion for the Punjab Food Authority for accomplishment of its expansion plan in all districts of Punjab.

In the livestock sector, the government has proposed to execute 25 ongoing and 25 new schemes under the ADP for which Rs9.5 billion has been allocated for the fiscal year 2017-18.

"The proposed ADP includes a project to promote export surplus and to create market pull, improve supply chain, production, processing, value addition and certification to link with the international markets," the budget document states.

Major initiatives to be undertaken during 2017-18 include improving productivity and fertility of small and large ruminants through encouragement of bull keeping for natural mating, enhancing livestock production and productivity through strategic de-worming and vaccination and establishment of University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences in Bahawalpur.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1337110/farm-allied-sectors-get-rs140bn

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 22ND TO MAY 28TH 2017
WHEAT PRICE DROPS DUE TO SURPLUS STOCK
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 22nd, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

THE Punjab agriculture department has decided to complete its wheat procurement drive before Ramazan on the premise that handling a twin-assignment — managing subsidies of the Ramazan package and procuring wheat — would be too administratively demanding for the department.

The department, therefore, might stop distributing gunny bags by the end of the third week of May and stop receiving wheat by May 26.

Out of the total 4 million tonne target it has already purchased 2.5m tonnes and provided gunny bags for around 3m tonnes. With lists for gunny bag distribution ready and the arrival rate now over 150,000 tonnes a day, officials think that achieving the rest of the target is a week's matter, though the procurement drive may end even before the target is achieved.

With a carry-over of more than 2.5m tonnes, the department would end up with 6.5m tonnes — the second highest ever — of wheat stocks if the target for the current year is achieved.

Farmers fear a price crash once the government stops wheat procurement. Their fears are based on three factors: despite having a better crop — 19.65m tonnes according to the official estimates — the price has been at least Rs30/maund higher than last year.

This addition was the result of better procurement package by the Punjab government. One positive of the package was the mode of payment. This season, Punjab stopped direct cash payments and routed them through banks, directly into the account of concerned farmers.

This forced middlemen to keep farmers in their good graces till payments were received after completion of the process. However, aware of their dependence on farmers for payment, farmers also exploited the situation to their advantage.

Secondly, the department also made procurement conditional through the presence of concerned farmers at the time of purchase which further increased the farmers' importance in the process and enabled them to extract the price they preferred from buyers.

Thirdly, the lists for gunny bag distribution were prepared on first-come-first-served basis and bags were released as per those lists — making the department's discretion void.

Though there were sporadic complaints about rigging in the lists and farmers belonging to two districts; these complaints, for the first time, went to court. The situation did not escalate and the distribution of bags was delayed for only three days.

All these steps put farmers in a better position to keep the price around Rs1,200 per maund but with the official drive now ending, farmers see this advantage fizzling out and the price losing that additional topping.

Another source of fear is the Ramazan package, which the Punjab government has announced to be highly-subsidised. The amount of wheat likely to be released in the provincial markets is being mulled.

Since Punjab has surplus stocks, it would keep the price low and is expected to release maximum wheat in the market. This policy is likely to hurt market sentiment which in turn will bring the price further down.

Farmers also know that large quantities of wheat would still be left in the market after the official procurement ends and the private sector would then take advantage of this.

Millers normally purchase around 800,000 tonnes, depending on the position of the official stocks and the expected release policy and price. This year, they think ample wheat would be available, both in official stocks and the market, for the rest of the season.

“The millers, as they see things, might not seek the official release of stocks till Nov-Dec,” says Majid Abdullah of the Pakistan Flour Millers’ Association.

The wheat price has not increased as much as millers feared as a result of the official procurement; after the 4m tonne procured by the government, a substantial quantity still remains in the market.

Without ruling out the decline in price, as feared by farmers, Abdullah thinks that the slide may not be steep, especially if the government comes up with an export incentive package.

However, market mechanics are expected to change once the government announces a policy in this regard, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1334574

GOVT-FARMERS TALKS FAIL
Dawn, May 23rd, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, a representative body of farmers from across the country, on Monday said its talks with the government on reducing the cost of production in the agriculture sector have failed after Finance Minister Ishaq Dar refused to consider their demands.

“The finance minister told the delegation the government has given enough concessions to farmers and no more can be considered in the budget,” claimed Central General Secretary of Kissan Ittehad Mian Umair Masood. Mr Masood was part of the delegation which met with Mr Dar.

However, a press release later issued by the Ministry of Finance said the finance minister assured the delegation that the government would give consideration to their proposals.

Mr Dar said the government has already given a number of incentives to the agriculture sector. These include the provision of fertilisers on special subsidised rates which aims at boosting agricultural production. The farming community must make full use of this facility, he told the delegation.

Mr Umair told Dawn the proposal for uniform electricity tariff during peak and off-peak hours was not accepted by the finance minister. Currently, off-peak electricity charges for agriculture are Rs5.35 per kWh and Rs10.35 per kWh for peak hours.

The delegation led by Khalid Mahmud Khokhar also proposed the government to fix prices of three major crops – maize, cotton and rice – as done by countries like India and China.

If the cost of inputs is not reduced, the farmers of Pakistan would not be able to compete with their counterparts in India and China, and by this way prices in the market will not fall, Mr Khokhar said.

Another proposal suggested was the withdrawal of GST and GIDC on agriculture.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1334830

45 BONDED PEASANTS FREED IN RAID ON MIRPURKHAS FARMLAND
Dawn, May 23, 2017

MIRPURKHAS: Police freed 45 members of several peasant families, including women and children, from illegal captivity of landlords after raiding their farmlands in a number of villages in Kot Ghulam Mohammad taluka on Monday.

Acting on the directives of the district and sessions court Mirpurkhas, police of Kot Ghulam Mohammad and Degan Bhurgari police stations raided the farmlands in the villages of Rais Ahmed Khan Bhurgari, Aslam Dal and Deh 214 and got the detained peasantsreleased.

The court passed the order after receiving complaints from the relatives of the bonded peasants that the landlords had imprisoned their loved ones on the farmland.

They had deprived them of medical treatment, share in crops and daily wages and put curbs on their free movement, they said.

Police said theyhadkeptthe liberated peasants atpolice stations concerned and would produce them in court on Tuesday.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=23_05_2017_119_002

WAIVER OF GST ON AGRI INPUT: KISSAN ITTEHAD PROPOSAL TURNED DOWN BY GOVT
Zaheer Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: The government has turned down the proposal of Kissan Ittehad with respect to waiver of GST on agriculture input, instigating farmers to plan a protest in front of the Parliament House on the day of budget presentation.

President Kissan Ittehad after a meeting with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Advisor to Prime Minister on Revenue Haroon Akhtar, Chairman Federal Board of Revenue Dr Muhammad Irshad and secretary National Food and Security stated, “We will protest in front of the Parliament House against the government and budget.” The government is not serious about agriculture sector and has refused to consider a letter written to secretary finance by the Punjab government which included a comparison between cost of production in India and Pakistan.

A letter addressed to the finance secretary by the Punjab government, a copy of which is available with the Business Recorder, stated; "In order to achieve agricultural growth and enhanced farm-productivity and farm income, it is imperative that agricultural inputs are made available to farmers at affordable prices. However, Pakistani farmers are forced to buy inputs at much higher prices when compared to neighbouring countries. The government of Pakistan undoubtedly is facilitating farmers through different initiatives which include Prime Minister's Kissan Package 2015, and Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package etc.

"The government has also waived the GST on pesticides in current financial year. While GST on fertilizers, tractors, agriculture machinery and oilseeds is still charged at different rates, due to which local farmers are still not competitive with neighbouring country's farmers.

"The government collected Rs 25.1 9 billion as GST from fertilizer sector against estimation of Rs 45.1 billion and provided Rs 20 billion subsidy on phosphate fertilizer which accounts for only 20% of total agriculture inputs. The GST being paid on inputs has increased the cost of production as well as commodities.

"Therefore, in order to enable Pakistani farmers to compete with farmers of regional countries, it is proposed that the government may waive off GST on all agricultural inputs. Total estimated financial implications of this intervention will be Rs 26.10 billion. Debit against tax collection may be adjusted by removing all ongoing subsidies schemes which are to the tune of Rs.37. 960 billion," the letter concluded.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/23/12-page/877043-news.html

PUNJAB ASKS CENTRE TO WAIVE TAX ON FARM INPUTS
Dawn, May 24, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: Punjab has asked the federal government to waive general sales tax (GST) on agricultural inputs in the upcoming budget to achieve agricultural growth and increase farm productivity at affordable prices.

In a submission to the Ministry of Finance, the agricultural department of Punjab wrote that "it is imperative that agricultural inputs are available to farmers at affordable prices". However, Pakistani farmers were forced to buy inputs at much higher prices when compared to neighbouring countries, the Punjab government said.

The provincial government's letter pointed out that GST paid on inputs has increased the cost of production as well as commodities. In order to enable Pakistani farmers to compete with farmers of regional countries, it is proposed that the federal government waive off GST on all agricultural inputs. Debit against tax collection should be adjusted by removing all ongoing subsidies schemes worth Rs37.97 billion.

An agricultural department's data sheet explained that the cost of production of basmati rice in India was Rs901 per 40 kilograms compared to Rs1,371 in Punjab.

In terms of wheat, the production cost in India was Rs763 per 40kg while in Punjab it was Rs912. The production cost of cotton per 40kg in India was Rs1,076 against Rs2,533 in Pakistan. The cost of production of gram in India was Rs1,359 per 40kg against Rs2,037 in Punjab. Likewise, the production cost of onion in India was Rs380 per 40kg and compared to Rs694 in Punjab.

The department argued that GST on fertiliser, tractors, agricultural machinery and oilseeds was still c which rendered local farmers uncompetitive.

Calling for reduction in the cost of production, the Punjab government letter stated that an amount of Rs25.19bn under GST from the fertiliser sector was collected against estimation of Rs45.1bn, while Rs20bn was spent as subsidy on phosphate fertiliser alone which constituted only 20 per cent of total agricultural inputs.

It said that the government on the one hand was trying to facilitate the agricultural sector by giving different subsidies to make it more competitive, and on the other, huge operational and human costs were being incurred to collect GST.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1334962/punjab-asks-centre-to-waive-tax-on-farm-inputs

UNIDO DEVELOPING PROJECT ON AGRO-INDUSTRY FOR GILGIT-BALTISTAN
Dawn May 24, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) has developed a project proposal for Gilgit-Baltistan on agro-industry development programme, targeting fresh and dry fruits, trout fish as well as dairy sector.

The project was developed following the conclusion of a need assessment mission to Gilgit-Baltistan for which UNIDO contributed $50,000 as seed money for developing the project. The anticipated budget will be around $3 million for the first phase to be mobilised by the federal government, international donors and UN funds.

According to UNIDO, the concept for value addition was conceived in close collaboration with the ministry of national food security and research as well as active participation of the provincial agriculture department.

The project team was led by UNIDO representative in Pakistan Esam Alqararah, which undertook field visits to Peshawar and Gilgit-Baltistan for details. The team includes an international food expert from Lebanon and a UNIDO project manager based in Vienna.

The main objective of the mission was to assess the selected value chains relevant to providing assistance in processing, packaging, branding, certification as well as establishing links with national and international markets.

The mission also interacted with farmers and women associations to seek the problems faced by them and to identify the gaps where UNIDO could provide assistance for further strengthening selected value chains.

The mission also held a meeting with Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister and informed him of UNIDO's assistance with the uplift of poor communities in the area as well as assisting the government to establish a certification system of various perishable commodities like cherry and apricot, enabling these products to meet compliance and compatibility for export to China and minimize post-harvest losses. The Gilgit-Baltistan government is also helping to fund the project from local government resources.

A follow-up meeting reiterated that through this project UNIDO was working on much needed interventions that come under priority areas for the government.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1334951

FPCCI SEEKS INCENTIVES FOR HORTICULTURE SECTOR
Dawn, May 24, 2017

PESHAWAR: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Tuesday demanded the Ministry of Finance to announce an incentives package for horticulture exporters and agriculture sector in the upcoming budget.

In a statement, FPCCI Regional Chairman on Horticulture Exports Committee Ahmad Jawad said the measures could include 10 per cent of invoice value (FOB) to be reimbursed to exporters; 15pc of the invoice value (C&F) on successful exploration of new market be reimbursed to exporter for a three-year period to meet the marketing costs; and import duty on horticultural processing machinery be exempted. Also a single digit mark up on agriculture loans in order to provide relief to small farmers, he added.

These include irradiation treatment unit; hot water treatment; vapour heat treatment; pack house; cold storages and bulk scanners at export terminals including Gwadar Port may be announced by the government in the upcoming budget.

Mr Jawad said horticulture exports contributed $641 million in 2015-16.

"Room for improvement is there if we get a proper policy from the government. We should admit our major chunk of exports is linked to agriculture sector which needs special attention in budget," he stressed.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1334950/fpcci-seeks-incentives-for-horticulture-sector

UREA EXPORT INCREASES TO 0.6 MILLION METRIC TONS
Business Recorder, May 26, 2017

KARACHI: In order to facilitate the domestic fertilizer producers, the federal government has enhance urea quota 100 percent to 0.6 million.

According to State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) EPD Circular Letter No. 12 of 201 in terms of Ministry of Commerce's Office Memorandum No.6(1)/2015-Exp-III dated May 23, 2017 , Government of Pakistan has allowed increase in quantity for export of urea from 0.3 million metric tons to 0.6 million metric tons. Further, it has also extended the deadline for export of urea from April 28, 2017 to October 31, 2017.

All other terms and conditions for the export of urea shall remain unchanged. SBP has advised authorized Dealers to bring the same to the notice of all their constituents and process the case of exports.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/26/8-page/877471-news.html

RS1 TRILLION FARM CREDIT TO BE GIVEN UNDER BUDGET FOR 2017-18
Dawn, May 27th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The government on Friday announced new measures in the federal budget for 2017-18 to boost the agriculture sector.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced in his budget speech that all schemes and initiatives announced under the Prime Minister’s ‘Kissan Package’ in 2015 would continue during 2017-18. As a result of these measures, a stagnant agriculture sector has grown by 3.46 per cent.

Under the new measures, the volume of agriculture credit is being enhanced to Rs1,001 billion from the last year’s target of Rs700bn, showing an increase of 43pc. This target matches the federal development budget of Rs1,001bn.

As many as two million small loans of up to Rs50,000 per farmer will be provided by the Zarai Taraqiati Bank and National Bank, while the State Bank will monitor the implementation of the new scheme.

From July 1, the ZTBL and the NBP will launch the new scheme for farmers with holdings of up to 12.5 acres who will be provided agricultural loans at a reduced mark-up rate of 9.9pc per annum. The rates currently charged range between 14 and 15pc.

In order to create ease of disbursement of subsidy on DAP (diammonium phosphate) fertiliser, the government decided that it would be subject to fixed sales tax. As a result, general sales tax (GST) was reduced from Rs400 to Rs100 and this measure will have a subsidy impact of Rs13.8bn.

The government has already decided to sell the existing stock of imported urea fertiliser available with the NFML at a concessional Rs1,000 per bag.

Through the reduction in tax rates and subsidy, the price per bag of urea will be maintained up to Rs1,400, with a subsidy impact of Rs11.6bn.

The prices of NP, NPK, SSP and CAN fertilisers will also be maintained at their current levels through tax adjustments.

To encourage the import of new machines, the government decided not to charge customs duty and sales tax for five years on up to five-year-old combined harvester machinery. There has been a growing trend of using combined harvesters, but those currently being imported are 20 to 30 years old. As a result, the harvesting losses can be as high as 10pc.

Imported and local agricultural diesel engines of three to 36 horsepower for tubewells were exempted from the 17pc sales tax.

The government decided to remove GST on imported sunflower and canola hybrid seeds.

It decided to reduce sales tax on certain imported machinery and equipment for the poultry sector from 17 to 7pc.

Beneficiary families of the Benazir Income Support Programme willing to launch their own businesses will be provided training and a one-time cash grant of Rs50,000.

Initially, the grant will be provided to 250,000 families to help them graduate out of the scheme.

The poverty incidence in the country was previously measured under the food-energy intake methodology in which the headcount that was 34.7pc in 2002 that declined to 9.3pc in 2014.

It has now also adopted a new methodology based on the ‘cost-of-basic needs’ formula of the World Bank. Under this methodology, the poverty headcount was over 64pc in 2002 and has dropped to 29.5pc in 2014.

In order to facilitate provision of electricity to remote areas and small towns where there are no transmission lines, the government, in partnership with the World Bank, will introduce solar-powered off-grid electricity systems for residents of sparsely populated areas with a special focus on Balochistan.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1335730/rs1-trillion-farm-credit-to-be-given

GOVT LOOKS TO CASH IN BY SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE SECTOR
The Express Tribune, May 27th, 2017.

KARACHI: A popular move for most governments in Pakistan is to announce support for the agriculture sector, given that a majority of its vote bank comes from the rural areas.

The PML-N government also looked to appease the farmer community.

It enhanced the target of agriculture credit to Rs1,001 billion for fiscal year 2017-18 from last year’s target of Rs700 billion in 2016-17, an increase of 43%.

The target is exactly equal to the amount the government has allocated for the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for 2017-18. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, in his budget speech on Friday, said that the current mark-up rates are in the range of 14% to 15%, but from July 1, 2017, Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) and National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) will launch a new scheme for small farmers with holdings of up to 12.5 acres at a reduced rate of 9.9%.

Other such schemes include small loans of up to Rs50, 000 per farmer. ZTBL, NBP and other banks will disburse 2 million loans, said Dar, adding that the State Bank of Pakistan will monitor the implementation of this new scheme.

Analysts say the agriculture sector would get a further boost due to the incentives announced in the budget 2017-18.

The agriculture sector bounced back strongly in fiscal year 2016-17 by posting a growth of 3.46% – its highest in the last five years, which greatly helped the government in achieving the overall economic growth of 5.3%.

The government's support to the fertiliser sector is also expected to help the agriculture sector.

In order to create ease of disbursement of subsidy on Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP), the government has decided to fix general sales tax (GST) on DAP. As a result, GST is being reduced from Rs400 to Rs100.

Dar said that this will have a subsidy impact of Rs13.8 billion. The reduction in tax rates and subsidy provided for a bag of urea shall be maintained at Rs1,400 in fiscal year 2017-18, which will have a subsidy impact of Rs11.6 billion.

The finance minister said that there is a growing trend of using combined harvesters in the country. However, the combined harvesters currently being imported are 20 to 30 years old, and many of them have been reduced to almost junk.

Due to the use of old machinery, harvesting losses can be as high as 10%, he said, adding that to reduce these losses, the government has decided to encourage the import of newer agriculture machinery.

He said that it has been decided to reduce the customs duty and sales tax at the import stage to 0% for five years on new and up to five years old combined harvesters machinery.

The agriculture sector met its growth target of 3.5% mainly due to the increase in disbursement of agriculture credit in 2016-17. During July to March 2016-17, the disbursement was observed to be 23% higher compared to the previous year.

"These developments, along with the Prime Minister's Kisan Package together with other relief measures, have started yielding positive results," stated the Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-2017 released on Thursday.

Increased production of important crops – wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize and cotton that have a share of 23.85% in the overall agriculture sector – massively supported the growth of the sector in 2016-17.

"This was made possible by better harvesting of major crops through greater availability of agriculture inputs like water, agriculture credit and intensive fertilisers off-take," the survey noted.

The growth in crops was registered at 3.02% against negative growth of 4.97% during the same period last year.

This growth is also highest in the last five years, pointing to an important aspect that the agriculture growth is mainly dependent on the performance of crops because the performance of livestock – a sector that contributes 58% in the agriculture sector – has remained quite stable in the last five years.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1420433/govt-looks-cash-supporting-agriculture-sector/

FPCCI UNHAPPY WITH GOVT OVER NO INCENTIVES TO AGRI SECTOR
Dawn, May 28, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) on Saturday criticised the federal budget 2017-18 for not providing incentives to promote the agriculture sector.

It blamed the policies of the government for regular protests by farmers and agriculturists.

"All agriculture input should be exempted from sales tax," said Ahmad Jawad, the regional chairman of the FPCCI committee on horticulture exports. "It is a sheer injustice that farmers have to pay huge amount on basic function of farming."

He said the government should have announced a support price for cotton as the farmers found no incentive for sowing to huge losses in the recent years.

Mr Jawad said no special announcement was made in the budget to cover the import-export gap, adding the situation showed that exports would remain the same next year.

He also noted that the proposal to increase the withholding tax rate on non-filers was an incorrect move as it would affect traders. The benefits of the move cannot be achieved until and unless proper tax reforms are executed.

The FPCCI standing committee chief said once again no incentives were announced for the horticulture exports in the budget.

"Globally, Pakistan's horticulture export share is 0.3pc only. We expected the government would give incentives to establish value addition infrastructure in order to increase the exports of fresh fruits and vegetables sector under the public-private partnership." But he regretted that no funds were earmarked to promote nontraditional products such as horticulture.

"The government should understand that the horticulture sector has the potential to make a maximum contribution in the export sector if some support is provided," he added.

However, he welcomed the incentives given in the prices of urea and DAP fertilizer, adding the zero rated import duty on used agricultural machinery was a good step towards mechanised farming.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1335838/fpcci-unhappy-with-govt-over-no-incentives-to-agri-sector

DESPITE SOME RELIEF, AGRICULTURE SECTOR UNHAPPY WITH BUDGET
Z Ali

The Express Tribune, May 28, 2017

HYDERABAD: With the agriculture sector recording a five-year high growth of 3.5% in the outgoing fiscal year, the government in the Federal Budget 2017-18 has increased bank credit ceiling manifold, reduced tax on fertilisers and waived import duty on combined harvesters.

According to the new budget, around 43% increase in agricultural loans, up from Rs700 billion in the outgoing fiscal year to Rs1,001 billion for the upcoming year, has been proposed.

Additionally, Zarai Taraqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL) and National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) will offer loans of up to Rs50,000 to small farmers with landholdings of up to 12.5 acres at a lower interest rate of 9.9%.

Similarly, general sales tax (GST) on di-ammonium phosphate has been slashed from Rs400 to Rs100 and customs duty and GST on agricultural machinery – combined harvesters – have been removed.

Nevertheless, not many were happy with the government’s moves, saying that more was required by the industry.

Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Vice President Mehmood Nawaz Shah said that while the allocated amount for agricultural credit was good and substantial, the requirement for loans was much higher in the country.

“The Rs1,001-billion credit is disproportionate to the Rs6,000-billion agriculture economy,” he said. “The utilisation of credit in Sindh remains low, unlike in Punjab, due to complications in the processing of loan applications.”

He added that in the outgoing fiscal year, against a credit allocation of Rs89 billion in Sindh, only Rs53 billion was utilised.

The Economic Survey 2016-17 states that the agriculture sector is also benefiting from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects. But the SAB official questioned the claim, pointing to a lack of budgetary allocation for CPEC-related agricultural projects.

“The federal government should develop a strategy with provincial governments about how to link the agriculture sector with CPEC,” he said. “We also need a policy for the export of agricultural commodities to the countries that are part of China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative.”

Ghulam Mustafa Saand – a Sanghar district-based small farmer – said loans of Rs50,000 for small farmers were insufficient for cultivating 12.5 acres of land.

Hyderabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice President Ziauddin Ahmed decried that the new budget provided no direct tax relief for the city’s two-wheel and three-wheel auto industry.

He added that some 14 industrial units in Hyderabad’s SITE area were engaged in the assembly and manufacturing of motorbikes.

"Many units have started manufacturing almost all parts except the engine and some electrical components which are imported from China," he said. "Some have even begun exports to countries like Afghanistan and Nepal. Therefore, this industry deserves some tax relief."

On the other hand, the Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industries (HCSTSI) viewed the budget as balanced. However, it objected to the taxes on non-filers of tax returns.

"Non-filing traders and their businesses will continue to be adversely affected by the taxes," said HCSTSI's Doulat Ram Lohano. "The budget has also ignored small industries as no support like low interest loans and tax relief has been announced."

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1421132/despite-relief-agriculture-sector-unhappy-budget/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 15 TH TO MAY 21ST 2017
CROPS AND EXPORT POTENTIAL OF NEGLECTED FRUITS AND VEGGIES
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 15th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

FRUIT and vegetable production and their exports continue to suffer owing to the absence of a comprehensive policy capable of balancing domestic needs with challenges in export growth.

Exporters say fruits and veggies' exports can fetch $1bn a year if investment is made in technology to boost their production and trade missions abroad provide support in marketing.

Forex earnings from fruits and vegetables totalled $440m in nine months of this fiscal year. Officials and exporters say full year earnings would remain close to the last year's level of $630m.

In last five years, exports of fruits and veggies have averaged below $600m, with no big change over the FY12 figure of $540m. This is the situation despite the fact that mango and citrus fruit producers have made some improvements in orchard management, while tunnel farming has given boost to production of all veggies.

There are some missing links, however. Absence of timely flow of credible data on production and lack of information of exportable surplus takes a toll on exports' growth.

"Last year, our mango crop was good at 172,000 tonnes but exports did not exceed 65,000 tonnes due to gaps in timely informtion on the crop size," says a leading Karachi-based exporter.

Traditionally mango, citrus fruits and apple have dominated our fruit exports. And, among veggies, cabbage, cauliflower and red chilli have topped the list. Exports of potato, onion and tomato have remained uncertain.

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) officials say lack of a comprehensive policy on horticulture production and exports is responsible for most of the miseries in domestic availability of fruits and veggies and their exports.

"We're happily eating apple imported from New Zealand and the US without even thinking for a moment why a country surplus in apple output is forced to import the fruit, particularly at a time when food trade deficit keeps growing?"

Provincial agriculture departments do not collect data on actual production of fruits and vegetables but rather make projections on sample data obtained from a couple of progressive farmers, exporters allege.

This, according to them, creates uncertainty about the crop size leaving traders unable to make realistic projections about export surplus or import requirements.

"People either follow guts or keep doing whatever they have been doing without taking stock of what is changing around," says a leading trader at Karachi's wholesale fruits and veggies' market, who has lately been importing Kiwi fruits and has long been exporting mangoes.

"In agriculture, changes are taking place of such nature and magnitude and so rapidly that inefficient players would eventually be out of the game," says a former FPCCI chief, referring to recent $43bn takeover of the Swiss pesticides and seeds group, Syngenta, by a Chinese company, ChemChina.

"Such mega developments do have far reaching impacts on the regional economies. One of the reasons why you see our horticulture sector in trouble is that lots of things like this either go unnoticed or their impact is analysed only when we are hit hard."

Progressive tunnel farmers, users of agritech for crop monitoring and others who stay in tune with and make the most of latest research or technology development always get benefit of being the prime movers. "But we don't have many of this lot in the horticulture sector."

In case of mango and citrus fruits, first class studies on practical ways of boosting output are gathering dust in libraries. But of late, some initiatives have been taken with technical assistance from foreign countries to raise per-hectare production or cut post-harvest losses.

Small wonder that production of citrus fruits has increased from about 2m tonnes in FY13 to $2.4m tonnes in FY16, officials of Ministry of National Food Security and Research say. Exports of citrus fruits have, accordingly, gone up from about $150-200m during this period, exporters say.

Increased output of seedless kinnow (currently estimated around 500,000 tonnes) has played a big role in it, officials say. It is hoped that disease-resistant varieties of kinnow being promoted by Sargodha-based Citrus Research Institute will give exports a further boost.

Mango production has remained range-bound between 1.7-2.0m tonnes in the last five years. No major breakthrough has come in production techniques and even issues like fruit losses due to strong winds and falling of unripe fruits wait for permanent solution.

Agriculturists say new techniques in orchard caring and fruit picking via machines, as is being experimented in citrus fruits' picking on a limited scale, can increase production.

"Besides, we need urgent support particularly in the context of hot water treatment (HWT) plants and controlled atmosphere (CA) storage under equity sharing arrangements and incentives on freight-on-board (FoB) value," says Ahmad Jawad, chairman of FPCCI's standing committee on horticulture.

He, and other horticulturists, say exporters of fruits and vegetables lament the role of our trade missions abroad in promoting exports.

A news report in Dawn in January pointed out that expenses on foreign trade missions increased 27pc to Rs1.7bn in FY16, but the bulk of the expenses went into payment of salaries and repair and maintenance of mission offices.

Thus, Pakistani exporters take longer time than their competitors in exploiting new export markets or sustaining the existing ones.

In case of fruit and vegetable exports, dependence on Afghanistan, the European and the Middle Eastern markets also keeps exports growth low. "Due to political tension between Kabul and Islamabad and between Islamabad and New Delhi, exports of vegetables to India and Afghanistan have fallen drastically," says a leading Karachi-based exporter.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1333263

MODERN CONTRACT FARMING MODELS
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 15th, 2017

Moazzam Ali Tarar

MODERN agricultural supply chains aligned with farming practices and the market are required for the provision of food staples to the rapidly rising urban population.

This benefits big farmers with higher physical and financial resources to meet the requirements of multinationals. However, the small scale farmers are unable to develop links with the agro-based supply chains due to their weak resources.

Contract farming fills this gap by offering financial resources and technical guidance to small scale farmers to grow agricultural products for the investors.

The contract farming is an emerging technique that establishes the conditions for quantity, quality and production pricing of production between the farmer and contractor.

Even large multinational firms enter into contract farming. These include the tomato production of Hindustan Unilever in India, sugarcane production in Thailand, fruit production in Colombia and coca production in African countries etc.

Developing countries as a whole are witnessing an increased use of contract farming to enhance the income and skills of small scale farmers.

Global best practices available on contract farming can be studied to apply the most suitable model in Pakistan. A brief snapshot of the models of contract farming employed around the world is presented in the table.

The small landholdings, rising urban population and growth of food processing firms are three decisive factors that may drive Pakistan towards the adoption of contract farming.

The average size of agricultural land is 6.4 acres and small scale farms constitute 64pc of the total agricultural farms.

Similarly, the growing urban residents — constituting more than 40pc of the population — in urban centres who require continued supplies of vegetables, fruits, wheat, rice etc.

To cater to the food-related needs of this growing segment of urban population, food processing firms, supermarkets and department stores are coming up in cities and towns for supplying fresh and packed food items to consumers.

This opens up avenues for entrepreneurs, investors and food related firms to explore the various options for entering contract farming.

Contract farming benefits small farmers in acquiring agricultural input and technical guidance to cultivate a particular crop. There is a pre-agreed price for the purchase of a commodity.

The investors/contracts define the quality standard of the crop and the sale of the farmer is assured. Likewise, contractors also offer an opportunity to small farmers to cultivate new varieties of agricultural commodity and learn the use of new agricultural methods.

Contract farming also brings much-needed credit for small scale farmers to ensure the efficient production of the agricultural produce.

However, there are certain points of caution that need to be observed in overseeing contract farming development such as the design of legal clauses in the contract that should not impose too much financial obligations and conditions on small farmers should be clear and transparent.

The government should develop partnership models with food processing firms, supermarkets and multinational food firms to protect weaker stakeholders.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1333261

POLITICS OF THE KISSAN PACKAGE
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 15th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

PUNJAB could utilise only around 57pc of its revised annual development plan allocations for the agriculture sector during the first 10 months of the ongoing financial year. Or only 60.56pc of the released ADP funds were utilised.

Ironically, the utilisation rate was only 3.17pc for the Kissan Package, the flagship intervention of the provincial government in the farm sector. The ratio slightly improves to 5.87pc when compared with the funds released between July 2016 and April 2017.

The Kissan Package was designed as ‘an intervention to support incomes and improve agricultural output’, says the Consortium for Development Policy Research, which was a part of the project design discussions.

The government revised downwards the ADP for the agriculture sector almost by half, from the original allocation of Rs20bn to Rs11.32bn, reveals official data. The main cut was made in the Kissan Package by nearly Rs10bn to just over Rs817m.

The share of agriculture research has been lowered to Rs612.7m from over Rs1.44bn announced in the budget. And the utilisation for new research schemes stands at 2.22pc of the revised allocations and 9.5pc of the released funds.

The downward ADP revision and gross under-utilisation of available funds has raised many eyebrows in the wake of the negative growth the sector registered in the previous year.

“It seems that the government is diverting funds towards such development projects which will be visible to the electorate,” says Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, a progressive farmer.

He alleged that not only agriculture but also the health and education sector budgets are been being diverted towards the Orange Line Metro Train project in Lahore.

Sarfaraz Ahmed Khan, another progressive grower and a retired bureaucrat from the Federal Board of Revenue, endorses Mr Khokhar’s views. He claims that under the broad guidelines of the chief minister an officer in the CM Secretariat regulates the finance department for release of funds to various sectors while the funds of other departments are diverted towards the Metro Train.

“Agriculture has never been a priority of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz as even the Kissan Package is the result of sit-ins staged by the farming community more than a year ago who were hard hit by government policies for the agriculture sector,” says Mr Khan, who is also one of the directors of the Punjab Agricultural Research Board, an autonomous body formed by the government to foster an integrated approach for research planning and efficient allocation of research resource.

He complains of corruption and political pick-and-choose in the distribution of relief funds among farmers under the Kissan package and other schemes.

“Hardly 30pc of the cash relief under the Kissan Package, Rs5,000 per acre for cotton growers and Rs3,000 per acre for paddy growers, was distributed while the beneficiaries were chosen on the basis of the lists prepared by the local PML-N leadership with the help of patwaris (revenue officials).”

An official of the agriculture department, who asked not to be named for not being entitled to talk to the media on policy issues, claims that being a new project officials are yet to grasp the nitty-gritty of the Kissan Package. The utilisation ratio will pick up in the coming years when the officials dealing with the project become acclimatised to it.

About 9.5pc utilisation of the meagre Rs60.73m funds were released for new research schemes. Mr Khokhar laments that the government is trying to destroy the existing research institutes by allowing development of residential colonies and commercial establishments on their lands in Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Multan and elsewhere.

“Farmers are calling to save the existing research institutes instead of asking for new ones,” he says referring to the community’s protest in 2015 against the government’s attempt to develop a housing scheme at the lands of the National Agricultural Research Council in Islamabad.

The agriculture department official holds the finance department responsible for delaying the release of funds thereby affecting various schemes. About the issue of doling out research institutions’ lands for activities other than research, he says the department can do nothing once ‘political’ decisions are taken on certain matters.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1333260

HORTICULTURE EXPORTS CAN GROW TO $7B WITH R&D SUPPORT
Farhan Zaheer

The Express Tribune, May 15, 2017

KARACHI: Punjab – the most populated province of Pakistan – is often called the food basket of the country. It is not just because of its sheer size in agriculture production, but also because of a variety and quality of grains, fruits and vegetables that it produces.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Pakistan’s economy. It accounts for about 20% of gross domestic product (GDP), but since 50% of the labour force depends on this sector, its importance is much more than just its size in the economy.

Punjab contributes a major share in the agricultural economy of the country. It has about 57% of the total cultivated and 69% of the total crop area of Pakistan.

It provides about 83% of cotton, 80% of wheat, 97% of fine aromatic rice, 63% of sugarcane and 51% of maize to the national food production. Among fruits, mango accounts for 66%, citrus more than 95%, guava 82% and dates 34% of the total national production of these fruits.

Over the years, Punjab’s economy has been diversified considerably, but the agriculture sector is still the largest and driving force for growth and development. It still provides employment to 45% of people in the province and over 65% in rural areas.

It also provides food, shelter and livelihood to the people and raw material to the industry. The farming community also contributes to growth by providing market for industrial products. Therefore, the Punjab government gives top priority to this sector.

Pakistan exports about $2 billion worth of rice and Punjab plays an important role mainly because of its basmati rice – a long-grain variety – that is popular globally because of its aroma and taste.

Basmati rice is mainly produced by India and Pakistan. In Pakistan, Punjab produces more than 95% of basmati rice. Since the variety fetches high prices in the international market, exporters say Pakistan should develop more varieties of the aromatic rice to step up foreign exchange earnings.

Pakistan exported $641 million worth of horticulture products in fiscal year 2015-16. Industry officials say the country is gradually increasing exports in this sector, but it can considerably do better if federal and provincial governments frame new policies.

After the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, agriculture has become a provincial subject, but provinces are still struggling to make their own policies.

“There is so much potential that can be tapped by provinces, but right now only Punjab is better utilising its dormant potential compared to other provinces,” said Ahmad Jawad, Regional Chairman of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry’s (FPCCI) Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports.

Experts say horticulture exports could grow to iconic proportions and touch $7 billion in the next decade if research and development (R&D) is vigorously pursued and required infrastructure is built.

Unfortunately, Pakistan’s share right now in global horticulture exports is just 0.3% despite being an agricultural economy.

Sargodha is the hub of kinnow (orange) production in Pakistan with an overwhelming share of over 90% in annual output. The city not only provides oranges for the domestic market, but also helps fetch over $200 million from exports every year.

This northern city of Punjab is ideal for kinnow production because of its fertile land and cold weather. Horticulture industry officials say the city can earn over $1 billion every year if the public and private sectors collaborate in R&D work.

However, years of neglect have compounded the problems of Sargodha farmers and exporters and now various diseases (especially canker) are threatening the very existence of orange farms in the city.

Punjab plays an important role in mango production, too. In recent years, experts often warned federal and provincial governments about the growing threat of crop diseases.

In March 2014, the European Union slapped a ban on Indian mangoes and some other vegetable imports, which badly hurt Indian mango farmers and exporters.

Sensing the threat, Pakistan’s Department of Plant Protection took stern measures to avoid such restrictions on its fruit imports in the 28-nation EU market.

Fortunately, exporters and growers fought back and did relatively well by acquiring technology to protect mangoes from fruit flies and other diseases.

The government of Punjab took the looming EU threat seriously and fruit exporters are now treating fruits and vegetables before exporting to Europe.

Compared to just a few hot water treatment plants in 2014, the country has now dozens of such plants in different districts. Most of these are in Punjab.

Leading fruit exporters say growers have responded well in a crisis situation. If growers and exporters continue to adopt new technologies, the country will be able to increase its horticulture exports sharply in coming years.

Industry officials say a little support from provincial governments can further accelerate the pace of exports for mangoes, kinnows, guavas, onions, potatoes, etc. This is how the country could create more job opportunities, especially in rural areas.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1409953/horticulture-exports-can-grow-7b-rd-support/

FEDERAL BUDGET: FPCCI URGES GOVT TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON AGRI DEVELOPMENT

Business Recorder, 15 May 2017

Lahore: The Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Sunday asked the government to pay special attention to the agriculture development in the upcoming budget.

Pakistan's economy is based on agriculture and this sector is providing majority of jobs but its share in the GDP is just 22 percent which should be enhanced, Chairman of FPCCI Regional Committee on Industries Atif Ikram Sheikh demanded He said that this sector deserves special attention as eighty percent of the national exports are linked to this critical sector. "Development of agriculture sector is linked to prosperity of farming communities which should not be ignored," he added.

Agricultural development is linked to reduce input prices, quality seed and pesticides, and loans for which we lack a transparent and effective system that put growers on the mercy of loan sharks, he said.

The business leader was of the view that despite farmers' package and other initiatives the agricultural production and quality of farmers' life have not improved therefore the whole matter should be revisited.

He noted that urea companies keep local prices more than international market discouraging farmers, loans are uncommon, market is flooded with substandard seeds and fake pesticides while landed elite have hijacked the system. Thus the exports of rice and textiles continue to fall while cotton crop has failed necessitating imports.

Atif Ikram Sheikh said 69 percent of cultivable land is located in Punjab where 80 percent cotton, 63 percent sugar cane, surplus wheat and rice and other products are produced but it gets over 90 percent share in agricultural loans.

He noted that provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK get less than ten percent share in the loans which is discrimination.

These issues will keep the agricultural sector from development unless addressed properly, he warned.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/15/17-page/875249-news.html

CPEC'S LONG TERM PLAN IS NOT PROJECT DOCUMENT, CLARIFIES MINISTER
Dawn, May 16th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Apropos a story titled "CPEC master plan revealed" appearing in Dawn on May 15, Minister for Planning, Development and Reform Ahsan Iqbal has said that CPEC's Long Term Plan is not a project document, rather it "delineates the aspirations of both sides".

"It is a live document and both sides [China and Pakistan] have an understanding to modify it as per the need besides reviewing it periodically," Mr Iqbal claimed on Monday.

While describing the news item as "one-sided and factually incorrect", he said it was based on a "redundant document".

He did not elaborate on what was factually incorrect in the story.

Explaining the process, the minister said that China Development Bank (CDB) and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) study referred to as Long Term Plan (LTP) was basically meant for consultations only. "Pakistani side has developed a Transport Monographic Study to complement the CDB and NDRC work. Afterwards, the two sides mutually developed an abridged version, which was shared with all provinces, concerned ministries and departments and their input on LTP was sought."

Mr Iqbal said that input from the stakeholders was incorporated in the LTP after an extensive consultative process and final version was shared with the cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office.

LTP has been approved by the cabinet and shared with the Chinese side for developing a mutual agreement on it.

"Any version of Long Term Plan prior to the approved abridged version stands redundant and irrelevant," he said.

However, the minister did not say why only an abridged version was shared with the stakeholders, and whether the final draft taken up with NDRC in Beijing on Monday will be made public.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1333380

WHEAT PROCUREMENT CENTERS: DCS DIRECTED TO PROVIDE BEST FACILITIES
Business Recorder, May 16 2017

LAHORE: Chief Secretary Punjab Capt (retd) Zahid Saeed has directed all the deputy commissioners of the province to provide the best possible facilities to farmers at wheat procurement centers besides ensuring to resolve the complaints about 'bardana' (gunny bags) on priority basis.

He was presiding over a meeting of administrative secretaries' committee at Civil Secretariat here on Monday.

Law and order, annual development programme, wheat procurement campaign, steps to eradicate dengue, complaints of Overseas Pakistanis Commission and other matter were discussed in details during the meeting.

The Chief Secretary said that administrative secretaries have been assigned duties in different districts in the wheat procurement campaign. There is a need to work with commitment and dedication to make wheat procurement campaign a success, he added.

He ordered that guidelines about dengue be implemented in letter and spirit and vector surveillance and other anti-dengue activities be continued throughout the province in a vigorous manner. He said all relevant departments should play active role in enhancing awareness about dengue. He directed the Secretary Primary Health to adopt an effective strategy to deal with the deadly disease. He said anti-dengue activities be expedited in the districts which are prone to cause this disease.

The Chief Secretary mentioned that record funds have been allocated for health, education, agriculture and housing sectors in the annual development programme. He ordered that all development schemes be completed on time, adding that no delay would be tolerated in this regard. He directed the administrative secretaries to personally review annual development programme on regular basis so that 100 percent utilization of funds could be ensured. He also ordered early disposal of pension cases and departmental inquiries. He directed that security arrangements in educational institutes be rechecked and a fresh security audit of schools and colleges be conducted.

He said all departments should extend full cooperation to Punjab Overseas Pakistanis Commission for resolving problems of Pakistani expatriates.

Additional Chief Secretary Punjab, Additional Chief Secretary (Home Department), Senior Member Board of Revenue, Commissioner Overseas Pakistanis Commission Punjab, administrative secretaries of different departments and officers concerned were also present on the occasion.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/16/5-page/875335-news.html

GOVT LOOKS TO CONTINUE US-ASSISTED COTTON PROJECT
Dawn, May 17th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The 'Enhancing cotton germplasm, improving resistance to cotton leaf curl virus disease and supporting cotton best management practices for small farmers project' has enabled researchers in Pakistan to work under one umbrella with the aim of overcoming the leaf curl virus, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan said on Tuesday.

He was addressing a sustainability meeting of the project which comes to an end next month. The project is being run in Pakistan by the US Department of Agriculture through International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA).

Mr Bosan said the importance of cotton was magnified when last year's short cotton production affected growth figures by 0.5 per cent.

Though Pakistan is keen on the continuation of the project, USDA officials indicated the extension is based on the fact if it created a positive impact on the country's cotton production.

USDA Research Leader, Dr Brian Scheffler said the project is now on sound footing and we plan to work further in Pakistan.

Chairman of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Dr Yusuf Zafar said though the project is ending, discussions are underway for the continuation of the project.

"The government is ready to finance some projects since cotton is a major cash crop for farmers. The government will support cotton projects with loans worth Rs85 million," he said.

Country Manager ICARDA Dr Abdul Majid emphasised the need for developing awareness of leaf and plant diseases.

Research leader of USDA in Pakistan Dr Jodi Scheffler also called for best management practices to reduce the chance of viral infection.

Cotton Commissioner, Dr Khalid Abdullah termed the project successful, stressing its positive impact.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1333635

GROWTH RISES TO 10-YR HIGH ON AGRI OUTPUT
Business Recorder, May 18 2017
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has achieved 5.28 per cent GDP growth against the projected target of 5.7 per cent for current fiscal year, mainly because of positive output of agriculture sector, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

A meeting of the National Accounts Committee met on Wednesday under the chairmanship of the secretary PBS to review the projected growth for current fiscal year as well as to finalise growth of previous year. The growth of 5.28 per cent is the highest in the last 10 years.

As per provisional estimates, growth in agriculture sector was 3.46 per cent in the current fiscal year as compared to 0.27 per cent growth in last fiscal year. The growth in agriculture sector helped achieve 5.28 per cent GDP for the current fiscal year.

The major crops in agriculture sector grew by 4.12 per cent, minor crops, 0.21 per cent; cotton ginning, 5.59 per cent; livestock, 3.43 per cent; fishing, 1.23 per cent; and forestry by 14.49 per cent.

The industrial sector's growth was recorded at 5.02 per cent with growth of mining & quarrying at 1.34 per cent. The manufacturing sector grew by 5.27 with large scale sector's contribution of 4.93 per cent and small scale's 8.18 per cent contribution.

According to data, growth of slaughtering sector stood at 3.61 per cent, construction, 9.05 per cent; and electricity & gas distribution, 3.40 per cent.

Growth in services sector was recorded at 5.98 per cent subsequent to wholesale & retail trade growth of 6.82 per cent, transport storage & communication, 3.94 per cent, finance & insurance, 10.77 per cent, ownership of dwelling, 3.99 per cent, growth in public admin & defence, 6.91 per cent, and community services, 6.28 per cent.

An official said that the growth figure would be submitted for the current fiscal year and proposed target for the next fiscal year would be submitted to a meeting of the National Economic Council, to be presided over by the Prime Minister and attended by all the chief ministers as well as other members, will be held on Friday (tomorrow) for review and approval of the target.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/18/1-page/875790-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 8TH TO MAY 14TH 2017
IS THERE A NEED FOR WHEAT FUTURES CONTRACTS ON PMEX?
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 8th, 2017

Fahim Adil

THE Securities and Exchange Commission approved the listing of wheat futures contracts on Pakistan Mercantile Exchange Limited on April 24th, subject to cabinet approval.

Settlement through Electronic Warehousing Receipts and hedging against price risk are reported to be the main objectives for listing of wheat futures on PMEX.

The government already has a mechanism in place to fix the support price of wheat, and therefore there is no need of futures contract in wheat to hedge against price risk.

In general, the inclusion of derivative products in the Eighth Schedule of Finance Act 2016 along with legislative and infrastructural inadequacies are inhibitors to flight of commodity market derivatives.

In terms of prices, domestic farmers and private traders face relatively little price risk as the government determines prices. Farmers and millers have little incentive to manage risk on their own behalf under current price stabilisation policy.

The government undertakes the risk by buying at a variable international price and selling at a fixed domestic price.

The price of wheat has always been a political issue, even a small change in its price and availability is perceived to have profound effects on national economy. The government policies regarding support price, release price, and ex-mill price are least likely to go away any time soon.

Listing of wheat future contracts on PMEX may be an addition to the trading ecosystem but apparently, it will not have an impact on price stability. The government fixes and announces a support price each year before the harvest; and provincial food departments release wheat to flour mills at fixed release prices on the basis of a quota system.

Future contract is a risk mitigating tool where the hedger takes same but opposite position in future market compared to spot market; successfully eliminating the price risk in theory.

A hedger should cover all cash transactions with futures contracts however, in practice the prices on the spot and future markets do not move exactly together due to unpredictability of actual price movements.

Since the effectiveness of hedging depends on the difference between the future price and actual price, controlling the actual price reduces the effectiveness of hedging and the futures contracts will not serve the intended purpose.

Federal and provincial food departments procure about 60pc of the total marketable surplus of wheat. The government procurement with imported volume is sufficient to influence market prices and create an effective price floor in the domestic wheat market.

In case of wheat futures the market would be pitted against giants; while the wheat support price is a major driving force on the supply side, high tariffs have prevented wheat imports.

Futures are either settled against delivery or cash but in the case of the PMEX wheat futures contracts, a compulsory delivery is one of the salient features of the instrument.

Wheat procurement and storage offers huge business opportunity for private sector. The private sector, primarily wheat traders and flour millers, have less than 1m MT of grain storage capacity against purchases of 2m MT of wheat from the farmers each year.

Thin and outdated public sector storage with no loss policy on storage encourages slack storage practices and a lucrative financing and storing activities to banks and private sector.

Many banks and private parties have shown interest in investing in the collateral management companies and wheat storing silos, which is a critical component for putting in place electronic warehousing receipts.

The State Bank of Pakistan has consulted with Pakistan Bankers Association and with other stake holders regarding building contractual framework on Electronic Warehouse Receipt system (EWR) through consensus.

Warehousing is good for commercialising and financing agriculture activities. Warehouse receipts are the negotiable instrument which can be used as a form of portable collateral to request loans from banks, and are issued by the licensed and regulated warehouse operators, when the commodities are stored.

Many countries have bitter experience regarding EWR without a warehouse receipt law. Relevant laws like Agricultural Produce Market Act, 1939, Punjab Agricultural Produce Markets Ordinance, 1978 and Sindh Registration of Godowns Act, 1995 do not address the issues related to warehouse registry.

The contractual framework will not enable parties to pass good title under the prevalent legal framework. For the futures to be traded the receipts must be freely transferable by electronic delivery and return on storage will be market based.

The concern here is implementation of EWR without the enactment of Warehouse Receipt Law. The development of regulatory authority and slow adoption of system by all parties will make the underlying objectives redundant.

Slow capacity building on financial awareness is an impediment to adoption of Electronic Warehouse receipt specifically in farming community. Subsequently low penetration will lead to speculating activities rather than hedging.

Listing of Wheat futures on PMEX may be another feather in the government's cap or it may be part of financial inclusion strategy 2020, but it cannot yield dividends as risk hedging tool.

Creating a warehouse registry cannot merely be done by including collateral management companies in the draft of company's ordinance 2016. Viability of the electronic warehouse receipt registry does not depend on cost alone; the system must be based on legislation, rather than on private contracts among its parties.

Issuing credit is simplified as the banks have access to pledges but in the case of changing ownership of receipt where a position is hedged against other position the issue does not remain so simple.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1331731

TIME TO PROMOTE CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 8th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

Conservation agriculture can boost crops' productivity and help ensure food security while keeping environmental degradation in check.

But not much is being done in this regard.

The current 2.5 tonnes per-hectare yield of paddy is lower than 4.5 tonnes in Bangladesh; the national average wheat yield of around three tonnes per-hectare is way behind four tonnes per-hectare in Ukraine.

And, our below- five tonnes per-hectare average yield of maize pales in comparison with 12 tonnes in Chile, according to the latest published stats.

The FAO defines conservation agriculture as a concept for 'resource-saving agricultural crop production that strives to achieve acceptable profits together with high and sustained production levels while concurrently conserving the environment'.

Minimising mechanical soil disturbance, ensuring maintenance of permanent organic soil cover and diversifying crops via rotation/association are three pillars of conservation agriculture.

Zero-tillage practice has gained some currency in Pakistan but it must be expanded. More work must be done on development of bio-pesticides to keep arable lands rich and healthy for long. And crop rotations and growing of two crops simultaneously must be incentivised, officials and progressive growers say.

In early 2000s, the Punjab government had initiated sowing of wheat after rice with zero tillage drill in the rice growing areas of the province. “Since then the practice in on but delayed announcement of minimum support price for wheat often makes it difficult for farmers to continue it,” complains a rice-wheat grower.

One main concern regarding this practice was that it might increase rice borer attack on the following rice crop and expand weed population in wheat crop sown after rice. Later on, these concerns were addressed and as a result, paddy yields in Punjab have shown a rising trend.

“Had successive governments ensured timely announcement of minimum support price, wheat yield, too, would have increased,” says an official of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad.

Progressive growers and officials say that the use of bio-pesticides in Pakistan is very limited due to the lack of research and investment in this area. Officials of National Institute of Organic Agriculture, however, claim that many farmers in the country now use a mix of chemical-organic fertilisers and pesticides.

Farmers find this estimate highly exaggerated. “Had this been the case, our per unit export value of food items would have soared as the world grows crazier of organic food”, challenges an official of Agri Forum Pakistan.

Use of bio-pesticides helps in maintaining permanent organic soil cover and mitigating such environmental hazards like soil degradation and excessive emission of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. And, application of organic fertilizers enhances the per-hectare yields of crops besides resulting in production of more nutritious and disease-free food-grains.

But investment in this area, in particular, and generally in overall agricultural research and development is a key impediment to progress. “Most bio-pesticides, fungicides or bio-insecticides that are used on a limited scale in the form of sprays, dusts, liquid drenches and concentrates, powder and granules come from foreign sources, either in finished or semi-finished form.

Wide-scale local production is too difficult without a proper policy on it and enough support from the government” says an official associated with a supplier of these items.

Diversification of crops through rotation or simultaneous planting and via switchover from one crop to another or from one crop to multiple crops which is the third key feature of conservation agriculture, has relatively been an established practice in the country.

But that, too, continues to suffer from inadequate research, inconsistent policies and lack of overall agricultural growth vision.

In Sindh, for example, agronomists have been suggesting that gram and sorghum be considered as alternate crops to wheat and rice respectively to reap ecological and economic grounds.

"But landholding pattern is such that wheat and paddy cultivars belong to elite political class and they don't want to come out of their comfort zones. They prefer short-term economic gains and status quo over sustainability in agriculture and higher productivity of land," complains a former secretary of Sindh agriculture department.

But he admits that in addition to this, some other factors also hinder smooth progress of conservation agriculture in Sindh and elsewhere in Pakistan. In Balochistan and Sindh, sufficient availability of irrigation water itself has long been a problem.

"Now, economising of water uses naturally becomes a secondary concern. Similarly, small farms across Pakistan are run in primitive ways of cultivation. For them talk about mechanical soil disturbances is all Greek."

Low level of of fresh investment in agriculture sector and reinvestment of the returns that are gained in agricultural activity is the real culprit of all agricultural woes, analysts say.

In past three years, gross fixed capital formation (at current market prices) in this sector grew at annual average rate of below 8pc — too low to encourage extensive research and development.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1331727

AGRI EXPORTS FROM CPEC ROUTE TO CHINA URGED
Business Recorder, May 10 2017
LAHORE: Planning Commission should devise a comprehensive business plan so that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) may open new doors of cooperation in the agriculture sector, which would help in transfer of technology pertaining to agro-chemicals, pesticides, seeds and fertilizers.

Head of FPCCI Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports, Ahmad Jawad said: "The size of Chinese economy is many times higher than Pakistan and yet it is not clear what the CPEC polices will be, if agriculture is included. The gut feeling is that it should be left alone. The corridor is already very intrusive and there is a clear feeling of dependency on China."

He was of the view that the membership of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) would provide Pakistan an access to a large market for its exports, and attract investments in the energy and infrastructure sector. However, there was a difference between Pakistan gaining new markets for growth, he said.

He said Pakistani Kinnow, dates, mangoes, guavas, bananas green chillies, tomatoes and cauliflower, among other fruits and vegetables had a good potential in those countries once CPEC operational.

Jawad said with the setting up of the agro-business development centres, Pakistan would be able to enter the Chinese market with finished agricultural products, besides adding more value to its own commodities, as Pakistan had the eye catching opportunity to promote their horticulture products through CPEC route on economical rates.

Unfolding the details, he said "Pakistan produces precious fruits starting from Gilgit Baltistan (GB) to Balochistan. What we need is to set up controlled atmosphere (CA) stores through public private partnership mode on the way of CPEC route to facilitate fresh produce exports especially in GB and Balochistan areas.”

FPCCI Standing Committee Chief also suggested to setting up agro-business centres that may be developed on the way of Kashmore, Shikarpur, Jhal Magsi and Khuzdar, where a variety of agro-commodities are marketed. Similarly, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur — which has a potential market for crops like wheat, pulses, cotton, sugarcane, rice and fruits such as mango, watermelon, besides vegetables, livestock and dairy.

Jawad further said “yet we have not benefited from the free trade agreement signed between the two countries, but the Chinese have taken full advantage of the concessions it got under FTA from Pakistan.” In 2015 figures were around $16 million for China’s reported exports to Pakistan; Pakistan, however, reported imports of around $11 million from China, an “unaccounted for” gap of around $5 million. Similarly, Pakistan reported exports to China of $1.9 million while China reported imports from Pakistan around $2.4 million in 2015.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/10/13-page/873879-news.html

PUNJAB PROPOSES ABOLISHING SALES TAX ON ALL TYPES OF FERTILISER
The Express Tribune, May 10th, 2017.

Shahbaz Rana

Islamabad: In a bid to provide meaningful relief to the farming community in the upcoming budget, Punjab government has proposed to abolish sales tax on all kinds of fertiliser, terming the existing regimes of sales tax collection and subsidy prone to leakages.

However, getting its proposal approved will be an uphill task for the provincial government, as the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is not in the mood to accept the demand. Not only that, the FBR is collecting sales tax even on the subsidy amount the federal government is paying to lower the prices.

It is currently collecting Rs8 in sales tax on the subsidy amount given on a 50-kg bag of diammonium phosphate.

In the last budget, the federal government had announced a subsidy of Rs300 on a 50-kilogramme bag of DAP.

“The most efficient and cost effective way of lowering the cost of production for the farming community is by way of reduction in the GST on the fertilisers,” according to an official communiqué the provincial authorities have sent to the federal government.

The Punjab government has proposed that the federal government should completely waive off the General Sales Tax (GST) on all fertilisers. In return, it should end the subsidy. The other proposal it has given is that the rate of the GST should be set at a flat 5% for all types of fertiliser and subsidy should be abolished.

At present, except for urea fertiliser that is subject to 5% sales tax, all other types of fertilisers are liable to 17% standard GST rate.

However, the Punjab government documents revealed that the FBR collected about half of its total estimated Rs45.1 billion on account of GST from the sale of fertilisers in the last fiscal year, showing huge leakages. The sales tax collection from fertilisers stood at only Rs25.5 billion, which implies that the fertiliser companies paid only this much against Rs45.1 billion of FBR estimates.

In comparison, the cost of subsidies was Rs20 billion, according to the provincial government. It said that the federal government should adopt a mechanism that is more cost-effective for the farming community.

The Punjab government has said that the mechanism of disbursing the subsidies to farmers through the fertiliser companies has led to various complexities, which have been difficult to administer both at the provincial and federal levels.

The provincial government has also demanded clearance of pending fertiliser claims of the companies, saying any delay may carry implications for import of the commodity. In June 2016, the federal government had announced subsidy on DAP fertiliser. At that time, the prevailing price of DAP was Rs2,858 per 50 kg and the total amount of subsidy calculated per bag was Rs300. However, later on the prices started coming down and DAP was generally sold on either less than or around Rs2,558/50 kg bag.

The fertiliser industry is also supporting the demand of reduction in GST rates besides seeking immediate clearance of its subsidy claims. The fertiliser industry has warned that if the pending subsidy is not cleared, the companies will be unable to import DAP that may lead to shortage of the commodity.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1405622/punjab-proposes-abolishing-sales-tax-types-fertiliser/

CORRUPTION MARS TRACTORS SUBSIDY SCHEME
Business Recorder, May 11, 2017

KARACHI: Corruption to the tune of billions of rupees was unearthed in the tractor subsidy scheme of the Sindh Agriculture Department, according to a statement issued by the Sindh Information Department on Wednesday

Thorough enquiries were conducted into the matter after the record was obtained from the Agriculture Department.

The enquiries revealed that the CEO of Shahzad Trade Link, Shahzad Riaz, who is an agent of Belarus Tractors, worked as a dealer delivering tractors to growers who emerged successful under the subsidized tractors scheme from 2009 to 2012. Shahzad Riaz was supposed to have delivered tractors to growers and to claim a subsidy of Rs300,000 per tractor. As many as 5,780 tractors were supposed to have been delivered by him to growers, although there was no sale. However he succeeded in receiving a subsidy of Rs1.45 billion through fraud.

Shahzad Riaz received cash payment and generated invoices in the names of growers and claimed huge subsidies from the government, apparently in connivance with three directors of the Sindh Agriculture Department officials.

The Anti-Corruption Establishment sent the matter to the ACC-I for further legal action.

After obtaining approval from the ACC-I, the ACE had an FIR registered against Shahzad Riaz and three directors of the Sindh Agriculture Department.

Further investigation into the matter is underway. However in case No. 29/2017 the investigating officer conducted a raid at a house in DHA residential area and took custody of two men busy destroying evidence related to the case.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/11/5-page/874040-news.html

PUNJAB BOARD, WOMEN CHAMBER LOOK TO EMPOWER FEMALE FARMERS
The Express Tribune, May 11th, 2017.

LAHORE : Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Board (PLDDB) and Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bahawalpur (WCCIB) on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at empowering female farmers in livestock and related fields.

The two organisations agreed to work together for building capacity of female livestock farmers in rural areas for the development of integrated livestock value chain.

The PLDDB will conduct training sessions on good livestock practices, cultivation of fodder varieties and providing subsidised feeding resource for registered female farmers.

It will also provide small animals, animal vaccination and fodder seed for the registered needy female livestock farmers. The board will explore joint venture opportunities for the Women Chamber with local and international donors in various projects.

On the other hand, the WCCIB will provide basic infrastructure for the PLDDB for establishing its sub-office in the chamber. The WCCIB will conduct preliminary field research to find and register needy female farmers.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, PLDDB Chairman and Punjab Minister for Labour Raja Ashfaq Sarwar said the provincial government was striving to empower female farmers and the MoU with the Women Chamber was a big achievement.

PLDDB official Saira Iftikhar said the collaboration with the Women Chamber would strengthen female farmers in the livestock sector.

WCCIB President Shireen Arshad Khan appreciated the PLDDB’s cooperation in providing a useful podium to female farmers.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1406581/punjab-board-women-chamber-look-empower-female-farmers/

300 FARMERS BOOKED FOR TAKING OVER REGULATOR
Dawn, May 12th, 2017

BADIN: Pangrio police on Thursday registered an FIR against 300 farmers and three of their leaders on charges of forcibly taking over Sangi regulator and diverting flow of water to the channel which irrigated their lands.

The FIR lodged by Abdul Majeed Channa, sub-engineer in Khairpur Gumbo irrigation subdivision charged that about 300 farmers, most of them armed with lethal weapons, led by Manzoor Ahmed Chandio, Rajab Ali Sirai and Zahid Gujjar, stormed the regulator near Malkani Sharif and diverted the flow of water into Sangi Minor after closing gates of other minors on Wednesday.

Mr Channa said that when the irrigation staff, including himself, tried to stop them, the farmers threatened them with dire consequences.

Pangrio police station SHO Aftab Ahmed Rind said the FIR had been lodged under Sections 430 and 34 of PPC against three identified suspects and over 300 unidentified people.

He said that police were conducting raids to arrest the main suspects and their accomplices.

Pir Fayaz Hussain Shah Rashdi, chairman of Sindh Abadgar Association, said that irrigation officials were themselves responsible for the situation as their actions were forcing farmers to take the law into their hands and ‘steal’ the share of water for tail-end growers at gunpoint.

He said that the irrigation secretary had visited the regulator on April 26 and directed his subordinates to ensure transparent distribution of water among farmers but to no avail.

Mr Rashdi said the nagging water crisis was forcing farmers to opt for extreme measures and feared the nexus of irrigation officials and influential landlords was making the situation worse.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1332522

GROWERS ASKED TO COMPLETE SOWING OF KHARIF CROPS AT THE EARLIEST
Business Rcorder, May 12, 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office on Thursday asked the growers to complete sowing of Kharif crops at earliest to help the seeds attain existing soil moisture fully.

It also alerted the farmers about the sandstorm in areas of fully grown wheat crop; asking them to take steps to protect the yield from the hostile weather accordingly.

Farmers of Southern Punjab and Sindh should prepare land for cotton crops timely. It warned that weeds can scale back yield so the farmers should remove the unwanted plants from their crops at first.

Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country in the next 24 hours. However, dust-thunderstorm/rain with gusty winds is expected at isolated places in Quetta, Zhob, Makran, Sukkur, Larkana, Faisalabad, Sargodha, D.I. Khan, Malakand and Hazara Divisions, besides FATA and Kashmir.

“A shallow westerly wave is affecting upper and central parts of the country and it is likely to remain for the next few days,” the Met said. Maximum temperature was recorded 44 degrees Celsius in

Turbat, 43 in Larkana, Hyderabad and Chhor, 42 in Jacobabad, Sibbi, Sukkur, Noorpurthal, Shaheed Benazirabad, Mirpurkhas and Rohri.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/12/21-page/874640-news.html

FAO EXPECTS 25.1M TONNES WHEAT CROP IN PAKISTAN
Dawn, May 13th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The overall prospects for the 2017 wheat production are positive, with a current forecast of FAO pointing to an output of 25.1 million tonnes.

This is slightly below last year's bumper level but above the five-year average. The small decrease is the result of a contraction in planting in the rain-fed (barani) producing areas which accounts for only ten per cent of the national output, following dry conditions during the planting period from Sept-Dec 2016, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations said in a report on Pakistan published on Thursday.

Wheat harvest in Sindh is coming to an end but it will continue till mid-June in Northern Punjab.

Meanwhile the Ministry of National Food Security and Research expects wheat production to exceed the target of 26.1m tonnes over an area of 22.2m acres.

With last year's leftover stock of 4.3m tonnes, total availability of wheat in the country will be about 30.4m tonnes. However, a clear picture will emerge when the harvesting season in Punjab is complete and final figures of production are available.

Rain-fed areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were the most affected by dry weather. However, adequate water supplies in the irrigated areas, coupled with the increased use of fertilisers and herbicides, boosted overall yield prospects and partly offset the decrease in plantings.

Planting of 2017's main 'kharif' crop — maize — is currently underway in the main growing areas of Punjab and Sindh. The total area planted to maize this year is officially forecast at 1.2m hectares, an increase of 5pc compared to the 2016 high level in response to sustained demand from the feed industry.

Assuming good weather conditions, FAO tentatively forecasts the 2017 maize production at 5.5m tonnes.

FAO preliminary forecast for this year's rice output is 10.3 million tonnes, a three percent recovery from last year's above-average level, assuming that plantings return closer to average after 2016's reduced levels, supported by recoveries in local quotations.

FAO forecasts Pakistan's rice exports in calendar year 2017 at 3.9m tonnes, 4pc below last year's high level but remaining above the five-year average. The year-on-year decline reflects reduced exportable availabilities, following the smaller crop obtained in 2016.

Wheat exports in the 2016-17 marketing year during May to April are estimated to have increased by 13pc from the previous year's low level to 850,000 tonnes, in line with the 2016 overall good output and large carryover stocks.

Prices of wheat grain and wheat flour, the country's main staples, declined in most markets in April when the new supplies from the 2017 harvest started to reach the markets. Overall, prices were above their year-earlier levels.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1332760

GORANO RESERVOIR WATER FIT FOR GROWING CROPS, CLAIMS MINING FIRM
Dawn, May 13th, 2017

Hanif Samoon

MITHI: The Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company (SECMC) claimed on Friday its pilot project to grow crops by using the saline waste water being dumped into the controversial Gorano reservoir had succeeded as the water had been found fit to grow vegetables and pulses.

The SECMC officials told Dawn on Friday that under the pilot project executed by Thar Foundation (TF), a subsidiary of the SECMC, seedlings of cluster beans, melon, lentil and other local crops were initially grown on a two-acre plot in Thar Coal Block-II.

The crops were being watered by underground saline water pumped from a level of 180 metres from the open-pit coal mine, which had up to 5,000ppm TDS level, they claimed.

Chando Bheel, one of the two farmers the TF had deputed to take care of the plot, said that they had planted seeds of almost all local varieties of vegetables, fruits and pulses on the plot a month ago and they were delighted to see most of the saplings had survived and seedlings of cluster beans, melon and lentil were growing normally.

Shamsuddin Shaikh, chief executive officer of TF and SECMC, said the water being supplied to the plot was the same water being stored in Gorano reservoir.

He said that his company had inked an agreement with the Institute of Sustainable Halophyte Utilisation (ISHU), University of Karachi, to grow green fodder on the plot on experimental basis.

ISHU's Prof Dr Bilqees Gul said that at the first stage, seedlings that had grown on the plot would be planted at a nursery in ISHU and later they would be transplanted to Thar.

"We have made significant progress in the research and believe if it is implemented, it could contribute significantly to rehabilitating saline land in arid areas like Thar," she said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1332767

MINISTRY PROPOSES SEED COTTON SUPPORT PRICE OF RS 3000
Tahir Amin

Dawn, May 13th, 2017

The Ministry of Textile Industry has proposed support price for seed cotton (phutti) at the rate of Rs 3,000 per 40kg as well as cotton crop insurance scheme to encourage farmers to plant more cotton crop, as production came down from 14 million bales to around 10 million bales during the last two years, it is learnt. Official sources revealed to Business Recorder that in case of bumper cotton crop, there is no guarantee that the government would procure it and this situation is prompting reduction in cotton cultivation area, and hence this is negatively affecting its production.

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Textile Industry has already endorsed the proposal and directed the ministry for presenting a proper framework which would be discussed at the highest level. The ministry has prepared the framework which would be presented at the highest level after completion of consultation with all stakeholders.

Textile Ministry maintained that there has been witnessed a tendency of lower cotton prices at the time of harvest of cotton crop which badly affect, especially, the livelihood for small farmers. Moreover, the small farmers (90%) have neither the capacity to stock seed cotton for longer period and sell when prices are high.

The immediate relief in shape of support price is required for safeguarding livelihood for the farmers. The government may consider announcing support price for seed cotton (phutti) at the rate of Rs 3,000 per 40kg through Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP). The ministry has also proposed devising a mechanism in collaboration with the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) and various farmers" organisations for disbursing cash payments and providing direct support to the designated agency which will buy seed cotton at Rs 3,000 per 40kg from the farmers.

The difference between prevailing market prices of seed cotton and the support price (Rs 3,000) will be directly paid to the ginners or designated agents. For this purpose, proper record of farmers (name, ID card number, address and contact number) will be maintained and counterchecked by the Ministry of Textile Industry for maintaining transparency in disbursing cash payments.

Moreover, the direct cash support can also be provided to the farmers on the pattern of last year during 2015-16 in which the government disbursed Rs 40 billion as direct cash support to the farmers involving agriculture extension department, land revenue officers and local district governments. Database of small farmers is already in place with agriculture extension department and land revenue officers which could be utilised for the purpose.

The ministry has further proposed complete ban on import of cotton at the time of arrival/harvest of the crop. Cotton-picking period is very crucial for setting the prices of cotton. The industry continues to import even at the time of harvest and arrival of new crop which suppress the cotton prices resultantly posing losses to the farmers. It is, therefore, proposed that there should be imposed complete ban on import of raw cotton and yarn at the time of harvest of cotton crop and arrival of new crop from the month of September to December. This will help stabilise the domestic cotton prices.

Textile Ministry maintained that cotton crop badly suffered due to heavy and prolonged rains, high temperatures (sunscald/leaf burning) and onslaught of insect pests and diseases. Small farmers are the main victim for such vagaries. Small farmers having less than 5 acres of land have limited access to agricultural credit and other government schemes. The government may consider launching of specified Cotton Crop Insurance Scheme through National Bank, State Bank, Zarai Taraqiati Bank, commercial banks and post offices.

The inspection of cotton crop may be made with the assistance of agriculture extension and land revenue officers of the specific area and estimate of cotton crop losses due to insect pests/disease, environmental or other unavoidable elements and payment may be made accordingly.

The Punjab government has recently announced supply of free of cost cotton seed to the cotton farmers in the province. The same activity may also be initiated in other provinces. Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) may be allowed to provide free of cost delinted seed packed in 10kg each to the contracted farmers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces through its stations (DI Khan, Sibbi, Lasbella). Moreover, the PCCC can also involve Seed Association of Pakistan (SAP), and other agencies for supporting this purpose. The PCCC can easily provide seed for at least 20,000 acres at 10kg each from its own sources, the ministry has proposed.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/05/20170513178441/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 1ST TO MAY 7TH 2017
TWO ARRESTED FOR ‘ILLEGAL’ WHEAT PURCHASE NEAR MUZAFFARGARH
Dawn, May 1st, 2017

MUZAFFARGARH: A monitoring team of the deputy commissioner on Sunday arrested a middleman and his accountant and recovered 2,000 gunny bags from his godown at Head Bakaini, some 50km from here.

Bet Mir Hazar police have registered a case against Rana Matloob and his accountant under sections 468, 471, 419 and 420.

Deputy Commissioner Saif Anwar Jappa received complaints that some middlemen were purchasing wheat at Rs1,000 per 40 kilo against Rs1,300 price fixed by the government.

On the orders of the DC, Muzaffargarh Assistant Commissioner Dr Saif Bhatti raided the godown of Rana Matloob, seized 2,000 bags, arrested him and his accountant.

The DC has started an inquiry against food staff and revenue officials to ascertain as to how the middlemen got such a large number of gunny bags whereas a farmer could get a maximum of 100 bags from the food department.

According to an official, the the department would start [wheat] procurement from May 2 (tomorrow).

https://www.dawn.com/news/1330341/two-arrested-for-illegal-wheat-purchase-near-muzaffargarh

BOOSTING PULSES PRODUCTION
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 1st, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

WORRIED over the falling output of pulses and big forex spending on imports, authorities are drawing up a Rs2bn plan to attract farmers to boost pulses' production.

According to this plan, new varieties of seeds will be developed and farmers will be incentivised to grow more pulses, Minister for National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) Sikandar Hayat Bosan informed media in mid-April.

Pulses production has been on the decline for various reasons. And the most important of them is that even small farmers find it more profitable to grow key food crops like wheat, rice, maize and sugarcane, officials say. For past four years, the area under cultivation of pulses' crops including gram has averaged around 1.15m hectares, down from 1.25m hectares in FY13, officials of MNSFR say.

Low domestic production necessitates imports and every year hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on importing pulses. In nine months of this fiscal year, more than $721m have already been spent on imports of pulses and leguminous vegetables, trade data show. The annual import bill under this head for last four full fiscal years averaged $410m.

Officials and growers say that major food crops not only give higher returns to farmers but due to their better supply chain linkages, marketing of major crops is easier than that of pulses. Traders in key wholesale commodity markets, Karachi's Jodia Bazar and Lahore's Akbari Mandi, say that prices of local pulses often remain higher than imported ones, reducing their demand in domestic markets and thereby discouraging growers.

Growers lobby groups also cite this factor as a reason for decline in pulses' production adding that the cost of inputs on minor crops in the country is just too high. The solution is in innovative farming techniques and adoption of technological advances in cultivation and marketing process, analysts say.

But the problem is that due to traditional culture and small growers' lesser access to low cost formal finance it's not easy for them to acquire new irrigation technology or invest in marketing of their produce. Drip irrigation, and simultaneous cultivation of pulses alongside major crops, for example can cut costs of cultivation for farmers. But it is not done on a large scale.

Similarly use of bio-pesticides which is gaining currency in pulses cultivation in developed countries can keep the cost of pulses cultivation low and can attract farmers towards growing pulses. "But that is still unheard of, in our country," says a progressive pulses grower from Punjab. Bio-pesticides are bio-chemical substances found in agricultural soils and can be extracted and employed in pulses farming specially when pulses crops are grown on the periphery of major crops.

Weak price discovery system is another key problem being faced by growers of minor crops. And pulses are no exception. Growers say last year's contract prices with dealers or middlemen are no indication for next year. Most of the time, middlemen or traders dictate prices of the whole crop of a particular pulse in an area and that price could be off-market. Often the growers are indebted to the middleman and he is the sole buyer.

As a result, after suffering losses or earning a little profit in a year, the grower switches over to cultivation of other crops the following year.

White and black gram, or chickpeas of various varieties, are now grown over 900,000 hectares, officials say. But up till FY12, this particular crop covered slightly over 1m hectares. Small wonder then that, according to the Federal Committee on Agriculture, the production of gram fell to less than 360,000 tonnes in the last season from 750,000 tonnes in 2013. The combined output of moong, masoor and mash pulses declined to about 130,000 tonnes from 150,000 tonnes.

Federal food minister has informed the nation that a plan to boost pulses production will be carried out with a cost of Rs2bn. But except for saying that the amount will be spent on development of better seeds and incentives to farmers, he has given no other details.

Officials of Sindh agriculture department say they are not aware of any such plan but speculate that it might be announced in the next year's federal budget. Officials of Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) say they have been working on development of disease and pest-resistant seed varieties for pulses.

Recently Punjab Seed Corporation has launched an initiative to ensure supply of quality seeds of pulses to growers, officials claim.

Commodity market analysts stressed the need to boost pulses production must focus enhancing the per-hectare yield as the yield gap is just too big.

For example, the national average yield of chickpea is a little over 400kg, whereas in two main chickpea producing states of India (Maharashtra and Rajasthan), it is as high as 800kg. In some chickpea growing regions of Australia, the yield ranges between 1,500-2,000kg.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1330204

RESEARCH FOR REDUCING YIELD GAP
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, May 1st, 2017

Amin Ahmed

EIGHTEEN research organisations will be mobilised under one umbrella to pool their scientific tools to bridge the huge yield gap between the potential and national average yields of pulses crops.

The project — 'Promotion of Research and Mechanisation for Productivity Enhancement in Pulses' — is now all set to be submitted by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) for approval.

The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc) has prepared the project as decided by the high-powered Federal Committee on Agriculture.

The project envisages the collaboration with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (Icarda) for the import of germ-plasm to produce climate resistant high yielding varieties.

The basic seed of newly developed approved varieties and the high-yielding promising varieties will be provided to provincial seed corporations and Parc Agrotech Company (Patco) for producing and distributing certified seeds to farmers.

A paradigm shift is required to increase the pulses production by developing climate smart, high-yielding varieties, compatible with mechanisation to bridge the gap between production and consumption. Significant shortfall in Kabuli chickpea, mash and lentil has resulted in higher imports, the Parc Chairman, Dr Yusuf Zafar said.

This coordinated research, spearheaded by PARC, will take on board all pulses-related research institutes in all the provinces, to develop high-yielding disease resistant varieties of pulse crops, amenable to mechanical harvesting and tailor-made mechanisation.

The government wants to reverse the declining trend of legume production over a period of next five to 10 years to bring the cereal production at par with the major crops, Secretary National Food Security, Abid Javed said.

The Parc officials attribute this wide gap between actual yield and its potential to various biotic, abiotic and socio-economic factors. Specific year-wise work plan and activities of the coordinated units of the project has also been prepared.

Apart from the usual investment in research and development in agriculture, the project will be funded through PSDP for enhanced productivity and import substitution.

According to official data, the production of gram, which is the largest rabi pulse crop, has decreased by 42.2pc against the set target due to dry weather, excessive weeds, rains and termite attack.

The estimated gram production was reported at 357.9 thousand tonnes from an area of 0.935m hectares. The output of other pulses has also dropped.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1330202

‘HORTICULTURE EXPORTS NEED EXCLUSIVE PACKAGE URGENTLY TO EARN $1BN’
Business Recorder, May 2, 2017

KARACHI: Pakistan’s horticulture exports can easily fetch and also fulfil orders worth $1 billion through government support, said FPCCI Chairman for Regional Standing Committee on Horticulture Exports, Ahmad Jawad.

Talking to APP, he said an exclusive package was urgently needed to catapult country’s horticulture exports that amounted to $641 million in 2015-16 and holds every potential to grow further on strong and steady lines.

"We need urgent support in particular context of hot water treatment (HWT) plants and controlled atmosphere (CA) stores under equity sharing arrangements and incentives on freight-on-board (FOB) value," he said in reply to a question.

Mentioning that horticulture sector had gained immense significance in the world trade, during past two decades, he said developing countries have created a space for themselves in this market.

"Pakistan's share is, however, just 0.3 percent," he said reiterating that this can be markedly improved once the government extend needed assistance to the exporters. "Infact we may also perform well under CPEC trade route," said Ahmad Jawad.

To another query, he said horticulture was one of the areas identified to be explored under a short-term export enhancement strategy adopted by the Commerce Ministry however, concrete incentive was still awaited.

"This short-term export enhancement strategy is integral part of Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF) for 2015-18," said the FPCCI office bearer. Ahmad Jawad about a question, related to horticulture potential of Gilgit-Baltistan, said there was need to expand crop varieties there to ensure food security and produce export surpluses. "Community-run water management has led to over and under irrigation," he said mentioning that water channels display low conveyance ability and demand recurrent maintenance because modern engineering concepts have not been deployed during construction of water channels.

About policy recommendations to improve the potential of the horticulture industry, he said R&D capacity could be enhanced to produce pre-basic and basic seeds on commercial scale followed by a centralized e-platform for marketing of locally-produced certified seeds can be of great help.

The FPCCI office-bearer further recommended synchronising extension services of provincial agriculture departments and the private-sector.

He also suggested upgradation of the Gilgit Airport to an all-weather airport coupled with prioritising of construction and maintenance of Tajikistan Road.

"Then there is also need for setting up of functional and equipped processing units in all seven districts of GB, he said.

"It must also be ensured that the department of agriculture and relevant departments may have more of technical staff than non-technical support staff," stressed the senior horticulturist and exporter.—APP

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/04/12-page/871854-news.html

RABI SEASON SEES HIGH UREA OFF-TAKE
Business Recorder, May 5, 2017

Near six-year low urea prices finally seem to have started doing the trick. Urea off-take for the Rabi season concluded in March 2017 stood at 2.89 million tons – up 19 percent from last year. The numbers should bode well for the Rabi season agriculture output. Although, the off-take has been on the lower side in 2017, it is the heavy buying in the dying months of CY16 that has done wonders for Rabi off-take.

On a monthly basis, the urea off-take in March was barely 0.2 million tons, still significantly higher from the abysmal off-take of 0.11 million tons recorded in the same period last year. The urea prices have come done appreciably ever since the subsidy was introduced last year to help the deteriorating farm economy and put more life into the dwindling urea application.

Recall that urea off-take for the past five years has seen continuous slide year after year. It has been six years and counting that yearly urea off-take in Pakistan crossed 6 million tons. It has since come down by half a million tons. While, it is early days to predict if it will be a better year this time around, but signs so far have been encouraging. A lot will depend on the continuity of urea subsidy come the next heavy off-take season.

Market fears some drop in buying as the budget nears, in anticipation of subsidy continuation. Given the government is in election mode, it is highly plausible that subsidy on both urea and DAP will continue for the next fiscal year as well. There are reports that the Kharif season sowing may get delayed in some key areas, which could have a toll on urea buying as the season begins

So far the signs are encouraging in terms of agri output, and urea should see demand pick up once Kharif crops get in full swing. The best part in the whole scenario is that the price uncertainty that persisted for much of last year seems to have vanished, at least for now. There should be less anticipatory buying this year than there was last year.

A 27 percent year-on-year decline for February tells how much more accessible has the commodity become. That the off-take fails to grow by as much tells the very nature of fertilizer demand and farm economics. In all likelihood, the government would want to extend the cash subsidy on urea for another year, with the general elections round the corner.

International urea prices have gone up way beyond $230 per ton – and that should offer a cushion to the local manufacturers. Recall that international prices had slid down to as low as $200 per ton, compelling local players to sell at discount faced with pressure.

That said the inventories still sit at over 1.5 million tons which could be a cause of concern, as demand has struggled to keep pace. Local manufacturers may still have to release some of the inventory at discounted prices in the coming months, although the pricing power may not be tested as much as it was in the yesteryears.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/05/05/2-page/872520-news.html

UBL, PUNJAB GOVT MOVE FOR SUBSIDISED LOANS TO FARMERS
The Express Tribune, May 5, 2017

LAHORE: UBL, Pakistan’s Best Bank 2016, recently joined hands with the Punjab government for the provision of subsidised loans to farmers under Punjab’s ‘Empowerment of Kissan Through Digital & Financial Inclusion’ facility. A signing ceremony was held on April 20 at the Minister’s Block, Punjab Secretariat, Lahore to mark the occasion.

The participants at the signing ceremony included Punjab Finance Minister Ayesha Ghous Pasha, Punjab Secretary Agriculture Muhammad Mahmood, SBP Agri-Credit & Microfinance Department Additional Director Kamran Bakshi. The primary focus of this 'e-Kissan Farm Credit Facility' is on the empowerment of 'small kissans' through provision of financial and digital services..

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1401493/ubl-punjab-govt-move-subsidised-loans-farmers/

June 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 26TH TO JULY 1 ST 2017

LINKING UNSOLD SUGAR STOCKS WITH CANE PAYMENTS TO GROWERS

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 26th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

IN the cane crushing season this year, the industry produced a record, over 7m tonnes of sugar. However, as a result, farmers' outstanding dues against cane supplies have also skyrocketed to Rs25bn and have created problems for millowners and growers.

The total production, as claimed by the industry in the recent federal Sugar Advisory Board meeting, is a little over 7m tonnes. Add the carry-over of 996,000 tonnes to the figure, and the total national stocks touch a massive 8.039m tonnes.

Taking out 600,000 tonnes for strategic reserves, and, another 400,000 tonnes allowed for the export, the country is left with 1.88m tonnes of surplus stocks.

These huge stocks have become an excuse for the industry to delay payments to growers. As per farmers' estimates, and the industry does concede the figure, the total outstanding amount hovers around Rs25bn.

Though no law allows the industry to delay payments of raw material, the industry is doing so citing its own fiscal woes and has stopped the payments.

The industry suggests a solution: the government should subsidise sugar export, as it did last year, to bring parity with international prices and help it clear the surplus stocks and enable it to clear farmers' dues.

The industry maintains that the government fixes the price of cane and then forces the industry to keep crushing till the proverbial last cane. The resulting surpluses are not a choice but a compulsion.

So, the government must lend a hand to clear stocks. It wants a subsidy of Rs8/kg on exports because international prices have slid from $540 per tonne to $460 per tonne and are declining.

"The government forces the industry on two crucial points: the price of cane and crushing the entire crop regardless of national demand or consumption," says Javed Kiani, chairman of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA).

On top of it is the fixed tax regime, which charges Rs6/kg on the assessable value to registered companies and Rs10/kg to non-registered companies. With everything fixed — from cane price, crushing the entire crop and taxes — the industry has very little margin for maneuvering.

If the government has to decide everything for the industry, it should also get involved in hand-holding and help the industry export 1.2m tonnes of sugar by subsidising the differential between local and international prices, he demands, adding: "Some of the factories have already defaulted and opted out. More may follow if the situation remains the same."

The farmers, on their part, are demanding their money, regardless of sale of sugar or the official help.

In the last few years, the cane crop area has expanded briskly: Punjab alone now sows on over 2m acres, up from 1.5m acres five years ago. The per acre yield has gone up simultaneously from 550 maunds per acre to 635 maunds per acre in the province. Rahim Yar Khan Division boasts of 800 maunds yield per acre — one reason why factories are shifting to the area and causing legal battles.

The recovery of sucrose now stands just a little under 10pc against 7-8pc till few years ago. In RY Khan, it is close to 12pc. It was due to all these factors that the crushing season in Punjab this year extended well into April — making crushing almost half a year activity, from November to April. The crop is now the best cash option for growers, even better than cotton.

The situation now demands a fresh look. One of the options is deregulating the cane prices, which may force the crop output to adjust to market realities. In fact, the prime minister approved the deregulation of the cane price last year, but the move was not implemented as the farmers opposed the idea.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1341881

COTTON GROWING AREAS SHRINK: GOVERNMENT TO REVISIT SUGAR POLICY
Mushtaq Ghumman

Concerned with a sharp decline in cotton growing areas, the government has decided to revisit National Sugar Policy formulated during the PPP government, well informed sources told Business Recorder This decision was taken at a recent meeting presided over by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar during a discussion on de-regulation of sugarcane price and commitment of an appropriate percentage of subsidy for research and development.

Well-informed sources in the Commerce Ministry said that support price has been announced for farmers as a guarantee that in the event that their produce is left unsold in the market it will be bought by the government. The principal objective is to incentivise the farmer to produce more crops so as to ensure that sufficient produce is available in the market.

According to Commerce Ministry, an ideal scenario of fixing the support price is one in which market prices are higher than support prices. When new crop enters the market, it will be sold at market prices and a situation may arise when on fulfillment of needs of industry and consumers, a surplus is left with farmers.

The Commerce Ministry maintains that in Pakistan sugarcane price is generally believed to be more than its market price. This assumption is corroborated by the calculations of Agriculture Policy Institute (API) of Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) and is also part of the summary of Commerce Ministry sent to ECC in which the sugarcane price was recommended to be deregulated.

What happens when the government fixes the SP for sugarcane? (i) If the government fixes the SP (more than the market price) for sugarcane the farmer is incentivised and the crop yield and cultivation area increases. This fact was endorsed by the representative of the Government of Punjab in a meeting held at MoIP on January 28, 2016 as he stated that “Government of Punjab resorted to indicative/support price for sugarcane in year 2005 for the first time and since then the cultivation area of sugarcane has increased from 4-6%”; (ii) the over-priced and over-produced, sugarcane, due to fixing of SP higher than the market price, compels the sugar millers to procure more sugarcane and that too at a higher price which leads to increased production of sugar with potentially artificial higher cost of production.

Some millers may even manipulate prices leaving the domestic consumers at a disadvantage; (iii) the production outpaces demand leaving behind the surplus sugar stocks prompting sugar millers to request the government to export the surplus; and owing to depressed sugar prices in the international market, the millers demand proportionate export subsidies.

The situation is further embroiled due to absence of a proper mechanism to calculate the export subsidies. (Ministry of Commerce is already dealing with a National Accountability Bureau (NAB) inquiry on the subsidy given to sugar millers in 2013).

The Commerce Ministry further argued that the government is losing at both ends. Ultimately, it is the sugar millers who are better-off; the farmers who are still better-off and the domestic consumers who are worse-off. The perverse incentive to grow more sugarcane has resulted in a sharp decline of cotton acreage particularly in Punjab, with negative implications for the whole country.

The sources said, almost 70% of sugar mills are located in the core cotton zone of the country, especially in Punjab. The presence of mills in top cotton growing areas and their increasing crushing capacity have caused a 26 percent decline in cotton sowing areas, especially in south Punjab including Rahim Yar Khan and Muzaffargarh.

Commerce Minister Engineer Khurram Dastgir who has also angered the sugar industry by not recommending rebate for export of additional quantity of 0.6 million tons of sugar maintains that sugarcane plantation in the areas meant for cotton sowing has badly hurt the production of cotton. He expressed concern that the trend may eventually bring down exports of cotton products in the country.

During a recent ECC meeting, he insisted that a study should be undertaken to secure a balance between sowing of the two key crops and ensure that one crop was not cultivated at the cost of the other. Sugarcane cultivation has risen by 27 percent so far in Punjab. Cotton cultivation areas have been squeezed by the popularity of maize and potato crops in Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Khanewal districts.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/06/20170629193006/

FERTILISER MAKERS FOR SWIFT EXECUTION OF SUBSIDY SCHEME
Dawn, June 30th, 2017

KARACHI: The government announced in the budget a subsidy on fertilisers, but neither the Ministry of National Food Security and Research nor the Ministry of Finance has issued the notification in this regard.

The time for previously announced subsidy ends today (June 30). A further delay in the notification from the ministry concerned will result in lapse of a subsidy amount of Rs156 million. Fertiliser prices in Pakistan are the highest in the region despite the subsidy, said the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) on Thursday. It said the government has not been able to fulfill its promises over the past two years.

The subsidy announced in the latest budget will again prove to be a political stunt, if requisite administrative steps are not taken, it said. It might not deliver also because the government did little to reform the relevant institutions and ministries to improve their level of efficiency, the council said.

After the subsidy announcement in the recent budget, the relevant ministries were reluctant to take the responsibility of implementation without sufficient regulatory support, it said.

The officials concerned know that the government has been unable to resolve and clear the major backlog of previously submitted subsidy claims, worth nearly Rs20 billion. This major burden of delayed payments has hurt the fertiliser industry. These companies will also refuse to participate in a subsidy, which is channeled to reach farmers through fertiliser producers and importers, the FMPAC said.

The council said this time of the year is the best for fertiliser application to increase the yield. Farmers will be reluctant to buy urea due to the price increase. It reflects poor performance and weak planning by the ministry concerned and the finance ministry, which have failed to reach a consensus to devise a simple, fast and effective process for verifying the subsidy claims submitted by fertiliser companies.

This led to long delays in payments, creating major financial challenges for fertiliser producers and importers, it said.

“If the ministries are steering away from the scheme, how can fertiliser producers and importers be expected to take ownership of this scheme?” it said.

The government must quickly find a way to take ownership of this scheme and promptly issue a notification to avoid a surge in urea prices locally, the FMPAC said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1342227

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 19TH TO JUNE 25 TH 2017
BALOCHISTAN TO ENHANCE AGRI-CREDIT DISBURSEMENT
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 19th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

In a much-anticipated move, the Balochistan government has announced plans to set up a provincial bank, and set aside Rs10 billion for this purpose in its FY18 budget, unveiled on June 15.

The establishment of the Balochistan Bank, on the pattern of Sindh Bank and Punjab Bank, in the next fiscal year, should help local farmers have greater access to formal finance.

Advisor to Balochistan Chief Minister on Finance Aslam Bizenjo said in his budget speech that Rs8bn have been allocated for the agriculture sector for FY18. This is slightly higher than Rs7.4bn allocated in FY17.

Growers lobby groups in Balochistan were expecting the announcement about the creation of a provincial bank in the backdrop of their history of lack of access to formal finance.

Banks meet only a fraction of agricultural lending targets in Balochistan (less than 7pc as of FY16) that keeps the province's total share in farm loans at below 1pc of the total.

Whereas the SBP is considering assigning district-wise lending targets to banks to ensure judicious distribution of loans across Pakistan, it has also encouraged the provincial government to establish the Balochistan Bank to end local farmers' financial woes.

Creation of the Balochistan Bank is aimed at enhancing credit disbursement to agriculture and SMEs sector in the province in the first place, officials of the provincial agriculture department say.

"One of the reasons why the agriculture sector of Balochistan has remained backward is that banks have literally ignored this province," an official remarked.

It is not clear whether the Balochistan government will launch the provincial bank with 100pc of its own shares, as was the case with Sindh Bank, and if so where the amount would come from.

Officials in the provincial government say, without elaborating much on it, that they would likely find sponsors in addition to putting in part of the seed capital from the provincial exchequer.

In the next fiscal year, one more important thing planned for uplifting Balochistan's agriculture sector is the provincial government's plan to bring 57,000 acres of land under cultivation in Dera Bugti.

Mr Bizenjo said in his budget speech that part of the agriculture sector's Rs8bn allocation would be spent on this scheme. He informed that under another scheme, also to be financed via budgetary allocation, agricultural farms would be set up across the province but gave no further details.

One senior official in the Balochistan agriculture department says that the main thrust of the scheme is on promoting research in agriculture innovation for boosting farm productivity, introducing new ways of increasing horticulture yields and demonstrating the benefits of green farming.

"All of this would be achieved by setting up small-scale model agricultural farms and pilot orchard projects," he said.

The FY18 provincial budget has also allocated Rs2.81bn on the livestock sector, the bulk of which will be used for financing completion of 8 major projects.

One official familiar with these projects says these projects include establishment of two modern dairy farms, construction of facilities for a sheep and goat breeding farm, setting up of a camel research and camel milk processing unit, and construction of building for an artificial insemination centre.

Lack of water is the number one impediment to growth in agriculture and livestock sector. The growers' community was expecting an announcement of key initiatives in the FY18 budget to address this issue. But the budget speech of the advisor to the chief minister on finance did not shed much light on it.

Provincial officials insist, however, that the FY18 development allocation for irrigation sector is higher than Rs1.8bn set aside in FY18.

They also say that two schemes for the irrigation sector have got budgetary allocation — one is related to water resources development and the other on integrated water resource information system for efficient use of water.

One issue with provincial spending on agriculture and livestock in Balochistan, as in Sindh, is that not only are long-term development schemes continually appearing on budget documents but even the ones announced for a year or two are not completed on time.

The FY18 Balochistan budget is no exception. Officials involved in preparing uplift schemes for both agriculture and livestock sectors say that many of them are just ongoing schemes.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1340304

'FARMERS TAKING INTEREST IN ENHANCING MANGO CULTIVATION AREAS'
The Express Tribune, June 19th, 2017.

MULTAN: Despite cutting of mango orchards for residential purposes in suburban areas of South Punjab, the cultivation area of mangoes is on the rise.

This was said by Mango Research Station (MRS) Incharge Abdul Ghaffar Grewal on Sunday.

He said, "In the past, mango growers were not taking keen interest in improving mango cultivation but now they are enhancing cultivation areas as they are earning handsome amount by exporting this fruit."

According to official statictics, mango orchards were located at an area of 117,000 hectares in the province during the year 2011-12 while the cultivation area increased to 180,000 hectares in 2015-16. "The mango crop is turning into an industry and offering handsome returns to the growers," he added.

To a query about enhanced area of mango, the MRS incharge said that different programmes, including Australia Pakistan Agriculture Sector Linkages Programme, USAID, and Punjab agriculture department provided the much needed facilitation for quality fruit, imparted training to growers on managing orchards and follow export standards.

He maintained, “The income of growers has increased manifold and this is the basic reason behind increase in cultivation area.”

The expert pointed out that millions of mango plants were being planted annually in South Punjab. He said that there were over 35 mango nurseries in Multan, adding that almost every nursery sells more than 50,000 plants during the season.

Besides, he said the MRI was also providing nursery to the growers.

He said, “I know over 100 progressive growers who have enhanced mango cultivation remarkably. The future of mango crop is bright.” Grewal said China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will enhance export of mangoes while Pakistani growers will find large space in international markets.

Earlier, intense heat damaged mango crop in Multan triggering apprehensions of lower yield among the farmers of the region. Several farmers feared a dip in prices.

The ideal temperature for mangoes is between 32 degrees Celsius and 34 degrees Celsius, however, in most parts of Multan District, the mercury rose above 40 degrees Celsius in April. Though temperatures dipped a bit they continued to be on the higher side.

Experts said mangoes start falling off trees due to high temperatures and also develop spots on skin. They said the worst of them is a disorder called spongy tissue. It is a ripening disorder, which dries out the mango from inside, leaving a white dry mass.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1439049/farmers-taking-interest-enhancing-mango-cultivation-areas/

WHEAT DISTRIBUTION IN THAR TO BEGIN ON 24TH, SAYS KHUHRO
Dawn, June 21st, 2017

HYDERABD: Sindh Senior Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Nisar Ahmed Khuhro has said that the provincial government has increased the wheat procurement target from 1.2 million tonnes to 1.4 million tonnes at a rate of Rs1,300/40kg considering a bumper crop achieved this year.

He was speaking to reporters at the residence of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) district president Saghir Qureshi. MNA Ameer Ali Shah Jamote, Waqar Mehdi, Rashid Rabbani, Ali Nawaz Shah, Aftab Khanzada, Ahsan Abro and others were also present.

He said that Sindh government could procure only 20 per cent of to total crop. Since storages in the public sector are limited, hardly 1.2 million tonnes of wheat is usually procured by government at support price. But this year, the target was revised and 1.4 million tonnes of wheat is purchased from growers. A major wheat storage scheme was indeed needed, he said.

Mr Khuhro said that around 0.2 million tonnes of carry-over stock was lying with the food department so the total wheat storage would be around 1.6 million tonnes. He added that 0.3 million tonnes of wheat had already been exported as well. He expressed the hope that this year Sindh would be able to export 0.5 million tonnes of wheat after meeting domestic consumption needs of 1 million tonnes.

WHEAT DISTRIBUTION IN THAR
Dawn, June 21 2017

The minister observed that Sindh government would provide 100kg each to 276,000 households in Tharparkar where there was no drought at present. He said that these families were registered with government and distribution of wheat bags would start from June 24.

He pointed out that 80,000 bags were lying in Mithi. He said that erratic rainfall was reported in Tharparkar.

Mr Khuhro said that a major storage scheme was required to be set up to stock at least 1.1 million tonnes of wheat, adding that currently around 700,000 tonnes was stored in the public sector facilities. He said that spaces for silos would have to be created in government-owned godowns. He said that the government had also designed a scheme of covered godowns.

He said that Sindh government avoided announcing ‘Ramazan Package’ as it led to serious distribution issues and the same was the case with ‘bachat bazaars’. He said that if Punjab’s wheat was reaching Sindh despite imposition of 144 Cr.PC it was for Punjab government to check such transportation.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1340708

NAFISA DEMANDS SUBSIDY FOR DATE GROWERS
Dawn, June 21st, 2017

KHAIRPUR: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) MNA Nafisa Shah has said that Pakistan is the 4th largest producer and exporter of dates as the agriculture is like the backbone of its economy.

Date palm was cultivated on thousands of hectares in Pakistan and Khairpur district had distinction in the production of this crop, she said.

She said growers should be given subsidy and more steps should be taken to protect date palm from virus, rain, diseases and other adverse affects.

Ms Shah, who is also vice-president of the Sindh PPP, stressed the use of tissue culture labs and cold storage alongside other technologies for the benefit of the farm sector.

She was speaking at a meeting with date palm growers here on Tuesday. Khairpur Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Nawaz Sohu and other officials attended the meeting.

The growers complained at the meeting that rates of date were on the decline while growers were not trained to protect the crop from virus attacks. As such, they added, they were suffering heavy losses.

In response to the complaint, Ms Shah said she would ask the agriculture department and representatives of the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project to do planning in order to resolve such issues.

She said that during the tenure of Syed Qaim Ali Shah as the chief minister, 'Khajoor Festivals' were held in Khairpur for the promotion of this commodity at international level. She said the date palm growers should be given interest-free loans so that they could reap direct benefit.

She said official funds should be utilised in a proper manner; there should be a vibrant and united forum of growers so that their issues were properly highlighted and timely addressed.

She also called for improving marketing strategies to ensure the sale and export of date at competitive prices.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1340704

GOVT TO FRAME POLICY TO RESTRICT SPREAD OF SUGAR MILLS IN COTTON ZONE
The Express Tribune, June 22nd, 2017.

Economic managers of the country have decided to frame a national sugar policy to secure the cotton belt, which is under threat from the growing number of sugar mills and cultivation of sugarcane in such zones.

Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan and Planning and Development Minister Ahsan Iqbal have also fiercely opposed the setting up of sugar mills in the cotton zone.

Almost 70% of sugar mills are located in the core cotton zone of the country, especially in Punjab. The presence of mills in top cotton growing areas and their increasing crushing capacity have caused a 26% decline in cotton sowing areas, especially in south Punjab including Rahim Yar Khan and Muzaffargarh.

The ruling Sharif family had also shifted their sugar mills in south Punjab that led to filing of a case in the apex court, which ordered the mill-owners to stop sugarcane crushing.

A senior official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research told The Express Tribune that the issue was taken up in a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) held on June 7.

During the discussion, the commerce minister pointed out that sugarcane plantation in the areas meant for cotton sowing had badly hurt the production of cotton. He expressed fear that the trend may eventually bring down exports of cotton products from the country.

He insisted that a study should be undertaken to secure a balance between sowing of the two key crops and ensure that one crop was not cultivated at the cost of other.

Endorsing his views, the planning, development and reform minister emphasised the need for a review of the national sugar policy in consultation with all stakeholders.

The ECC directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to conduct a comprehensive review of the cropping pattern of major crops and make policy recommendations to ensure the sowing of important crops in line with requirements of the country and with support of the Ministry of Planning as well as in consultation with all stakeholders.

The Ministry of Textile Industry has already demanded that provinces should stop granting permission for setting up new sugar mills in the cotton growing areas, which are shrinking.

“Provinces may be asked to refrain from issuing no-objection certificates for establishing, increasing capacity or shifting of sugar mills to the cotton growing areas,” it said.

Sugarcane cultivation has widened in the wake of improved returns and timely supply of inputs. In the meantime, sugar prices have also gone up from Rs31 to Rs68 per kg over the past 10 years.

The Ministry of Textile Industry pointed out that the increase in sugar prices had encouraged the setting up of more sugar mills, which went up from 45 to 85 across the country. Of these, 45 were located in Punjab, 32 in Sindh and eight in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

“It is very likely that cotton production in the Mianwali district will also be affected after the installation of new sugar mills in the area,” the ministry said.

Sugarcane cultivation has risen 27% so far in Punjab. Cotton area has also been squeezed by the popularity of maize and potato crops in Sahiwal, Faisalabad and Khanewal districts.

Cotton is a raw material that is used in the textile industry, which has a major share in Pakistan’s export earnings.

Weaker cotton prices were also a reason why farmers were opting for other profitable crops, the food ministry official said, adding cotton growers had been given no protection like producers of many industrial products, though cotton imports from India had brought down prices in the domestic market.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1441563/govt-frame-policy-restrict-spread-sugar-mills-cotton-zone/

DRIED FRUIT UNIT TO BE INSTALLED IN SWAT
The Express Tribune, June 22nd, 2017.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) is going to establish a Fruit Dehydration Unit in Swat, its general manager Javed Iqbal Khattak stated. Pakistan’s share of supply is only 8,000 tons of dried fruit out of a global demand of 0.95 million tons, according to Khattak.

The unit will have an installed capacity of 175 tons of fruit and vegetables per year along with washing, slicing, packing and storing facilities. He said that technological advancement and adoption of modern farming practices will allow Pakistan to substantially increase its market share in the $2.5 billion industry. The project will cost Rs59.94 million and will boost direct and indirect employment in the region.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1441572/dried-fruit-unit-installed-swat/

PADDY TO BE SOWN OVER 4.448M ACRES OF LAND IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, 23 June 2017
SIALKOT: Over 4.448 million acres of land would be brought under paddy crop during Kharif season in various rice growing areas of the Punjab.

Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Wednesday that paddy would be sown over 16.60 lakh acres in Gujranwala division while 3.42 lakh acres land would be brought under paddy crop in Sialkot district.

The department had deputed training teams which are visiting village to village for providing proper guidance and assistance about the use of inputs, nursery sowing and transfer of plants into fields to the rice growers in the Punjab.

The basic concept of training programme was to create awareness among the growers about the use of recommended seed and proper use of fertilizer for attain better yield of the crop in the Province.

In Sialkot the Agriculture department had also initiated a well-knitted training programme for the paddy growers on the preparation of nurseries and cultivation of paddy crop aimed at attaining the fixed target in Sialkot district.

The local agriculture department had also initiated farmers training programme in 1442 villages of Sialkot, Daska, Pasrur and Sambrial tehsils of Sialkot district.

As many as 29 teams were busy in imparting training to the rice growers for enhancing per acre yield, sowing of paddy nurseries, utilization of irrigation water, pesticides and fertilizer as well as about the different verities of paddy in Sialkot district sources added.

It may be added that farmers community was reluctant and showing unwillingness to cultivate paddy crop in different areas of Sialkot district. The decline in paddy cultivation was the result of middle mans role and fast climatic changing conditions.

However, Agriculture department was making adequate efforts to motivate the growers that they should bring their land under paddy crop in Sialkot district.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/06/22/19-page/884352-news.html

RETURNING IDPS FIND AGRICULTURE IN FATA TOUGH TILL
The Express Tribune, June 24th, 2017

Khadi Khan smiles as his grandson Abdul Rehman plays under leafy trees which line a lush green field. The sight brings a tear of joy to his eyes since he had to abandon the fields a few years ago due to a military operation in the area against terrorists.

“You cannot imagine the pain of having to flee your home and having to live the life of an immigrant in your own country,” recalls Khadi, the pain briefly reflecting on his face.

But the smile soon returns to his wrinkled face as he glances up towards his grandson.

His village of Kalanga in Bara was among a host of settlements which were affected by the conflict. Between the militant strongholds in Khyber Agency and a full-scale military operation, Khadi's family had little choice but to leave their homes and lush fields for safer areas.

"We left our land because of the operation. There was no other option," recalls Khadi.

The wizened farmer finally returned to his village in 2015 along with his son Saeed Khan, daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren.

With nothing but the allure of home on their mind, they were thoroughly unprepared for what awaited them.

"I could not believe my eyes. My orchards and fields were barren and deserted," the once progressive farmer said, adding, "I had no clue from where to begin and secure a livelihood for my family.".

But with his 26-year-old son Saeed by his side, Khadi started to rehabilitate the six to seven acres of his land.

With thousands of families returning to their war-scarred homes and hundreds more still waiting to return, providing alternative livelihoods for temporarily displaced people returning has been a challenge for the federal and provincial governments.

However, the year Khadi returned home, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), with assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), began work on recovery and development of agriculture in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata).

Fata's economy is based on subsistence agriculture and livestock rearing, providing a livelihood to around 97 per cent of the population. However, less than nine per cent of the total geographic area of the tribal area is cultivated.

To make matters worse, 38.15 per cent of the cultivated land is irrigated while the remaining farms rely on rainfall to meet their water requirements. While yields per hectare for rice and maize are slightly lower than national averages, the yield per hectare for wheat in Fata is just 38 per cent of the national average.

"We were able to reclaim our land," Khadi says, adding, "We also received wheat seed, oat seeds for fodder, orange, plum and guava plants for the orchards and kitchen garden kits."

Khadi's 26-year-old son approaches carrying his daughter Sara. They watch as Khadi gets up to tend to their vegetable garden in one of the fields.

"We were given maize seeds," Saeed recalls of the assistance they received under the programme.

"From the crop we grew last year, we were able to grow maize again this year," he remarked.

Saeed has a bachelors' degree in business administration from a university in Peshawar, but he opted to help his father restore their lands.

Khadi returns, clutching some freshly picked out okra from his vegetable garden, sharing business strategy.

"We harvested 120 maunds of wheat this season and will sell it in the winter when the prices increase," he says.

The FAO project, which began in July 2015 and is scheduled to end on June 30, 2017, has supported as many as 21,192 farmers in the Khyber and Kurram Agencies of Fata, providing crop inputs to reclaim around 1,151 hectares of land.

For Khadi, while the progress has been visible, it remains slow.

Since Bara is close to the settled areas of Peshawar, the availability of inputs is more. However, in the more remote areas of Fata and when more internally displaced people return, the process of providing livelihood to people would have to be expedited.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1443490/returning-idps-find-agriculture-fata-tough-till/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 12TH TO JUNE 18 TH 2017
A LACKLUSTRE SINDH AGRICULTURE BUDGET
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 12th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

THE Sindh government plans to spend about Rs7bn on 28 agricultural development schemes in FY18. But most of them are long-term, ongoing, schemes slated for completion in FY20, budget documents reveal.

The Chief Minister, Syed Murad Ali Shah, spelled out development steps that his government will take in FY18 to boost agriculture. But he didn't give details. Nor did he give an account of actual utilisation of the funds allocated for farm development in FY17 to clarify reports of massive under-utilisation of these funds.

The CM, who also holds the portfolio of provincial finance minister, listed the following steps in this regard: Rs500m to help farmers purchase wheel type tractors; distribution of 555 agricultural implements to farmers; Rs100m for providing small agricultural tiller/paddy reaper and tillage equipment to farmers on subsidised cost; Rs100m for provision of power drilling rigs machines on renting basis; Rs200m for strengthening the capacity of staff of agricultural engineering.

Other measures included: a scheme to provide 141 solar pumps (presumably to small farmers); construction/rehabilitation of agriculture extension offices at a cost of Rs100m; allocation of Rs75m for provision of combined harvesters on 50pc subsidy; installation of two controlled atmosphere store and two hot water treatment plants on farmers' fields under a subsidy scheme for preservation and storage facility for fruits and vegetables.

These things are good but no details have been given "So, it's difficult for us to comment on who actually would benefit from them and how," remarked an official of Sindh Abadgar Association.

"Besides, the scales of these schemes are too small," he regretted. "We were expecting, big-scale, well-defined projects."

Of the total 28 agricultural development schemes for the next year, five are related to research, 12 to agriculture extension, five to mechanisation and six6 to farm water management. "But most schemes are long-term in nature. They were announced in the recent past and would be completed by FY20," concedes a Sindh government official.

For example, two out of the five schemes of agricultural research were approved in FY17, two were approved in FY16 and one was approved way back in FY12. "Two out of five schemes are to be executed by June 2018 and the remaining ones afterwards."

But this does not mean there is not a single new agricultural research scheme for the next fiscal year.

"There are a few. But these are at various stages of approval. That' why the CM didn't mention them in his budget speech," said an official of Sindh agriculture department adding that some or all of these schemes (that are to be completed by FY20) could be approved any time FY18. In that case those schemes would become part of the FY18 development plan. "Otherwise, their fate will be decided in FY19."

Among such schemes is a project for remedial improvement of marginal land, another for development of technology for off-season vegetables production through tunnel farming and yet another for provision of advance post-harvest tools, equipment and technology to farmers.

A fourth scheme is related to the strengthening of tissue culture laboratory for disease-free and high-yielding banana varieties. The total cost of these four schemes (to be completed by FY20) is Rs580m, against which an allocation of Rs145m has been made in FY18 budget, officials say.

Similarly, there are some new schemes in agriculture extension for which an allocation of Rs195m has been made in FY18 budget though their total cost (to be incurred till FY20) is Rs780m. These include, inter alia, construction of red chilies market at Kunri and establishment of solar dehydration plant through public-private partnership in Khairpur.

In the area of farm water management, too, there are a couple of new schemes that mostly relate to lining or additional lining of water courses. Their total cost is Rs997m but in FY18, only Rs316m has been earmarked against them. Officials say that the remaining cost would be accommodated in the budget of FY19, the year in which these schemes must be on.

"So far agriculture-specific development schemes are concerned farmers may right feel disappointed due to perceived shortages of new schemes and undisclosed details of ongoing projects," concedes a senior official of Sindh finance department.

But as far as indirect support to agriculture via big ticket development projects are concerned there's no reason for pessimism.

"A big Rs40.4bn irrigation budget includes several key steps including a project for installation of solar tube wells at a cost of Rs125m that must minimise water woes of farmers."

Similarly, in energy sector, the announcement for rolling out the World Bank-funded Rs13bn Sindh Renewable Energy Development Fund would greatly benefit the farming community by way of enhancing their access to solar power rooftop panels and off-grid power supplies in villages.

The Sindh government's share in this long-term project is Rs2.6bn of which Rs500m has been earmarked for FY18.

Three important areas of agriculture have, however, been ignored in the budget. These are: construction of farm to market roads; establishment of steel silos for grain storage and creation of a fund to support small farmers hit by natural disasters and climatic change.

Farmers lobby groups had pressed CM Murad Ali Shah, during pre-budget meetings with him, to allocate sufficient funds under these heads.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1338869/a-lacklustre-sindh-agriculture-budget

REDUCED SHARE OF AGRICULTURE IN ADP
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 12th, 2017

Mubarak Zeb Khan

THE Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's PTI-led coalition government has proposed a Rs3.99bn investment for the agriculture development for the next financial year, claiming to make the province self-sufficient in food.

However, the allocation for the agriculture sector as percentage of total provincial ADP FY2017-18 fell to 2.5pc from 3.9pc projected for the outgoing fiscal year. When compared withagriculture's share of 24pc of the provincial GDP and 50pc of the employed labour force, the sector's development spending is nominal.

In the last four years budget, agriculture got only 1.5-2.5pc of the amount earmarked for the province's ADP.

The budget documents show that almost a similar amount was allocated for agriculture last year, but later on it was revised downward by diverting funds to other sectors. In the year 2015-16, an amount of Rs1.829bn was utilised.

For FY2017-18, as many as 38 projects/schemes have been identified on which Rs3.99bn will be spent. Of these, the target share of Rs2.88bn or 72pc of the total outlay has been set apart for the ongoing projects. In all, 21 new projects worth Rs1.17bn are included.

The ADP aims to raise the capacity of seed production units, promote plantation of olive samplings, provide agriculture implements/machinery for small farmers and build high-efficiency irrigation system. However, no target is set to increase the crop yields or livestock development.

Out of the total 21 new projects, only four to five are related directly to crop farming while the remaining are for livestock development.

For FY2017-18, as many as 38 projects/schemes have been identified on which Rs3.99bn will be spent. Of these Rs2.88bn or 72pc of the total outlay has been set apart for the ongoing projects

To raise production capacity of seed units, an amount of Rs45m is allocated in the ADP, while for the establishment of an agriculture campus in the constituency of Chief Minister Pervez Khattak, a sum of Rs120m has been earmarked. KP is heavily dependent for seeds availability on Punjab.

Since over 90pc of the landholdings are below five acres, an amount of Rs425m has been earmarked for model farm centres to purchase 11,500 small agriculture implements for distribution among growers. An amount of Rs611m has been allocated for plantation of 5m olive samplings.

The highest amount of Rs1.8bn has been provided for Gomal Zam Dam Command Area Development and On-Farm Water Management. Under this project, an area of 163,000 acres will be brought under cultivation in districts of D. I. Khan and Tank.

The province has cultivable area of 2.96m ha, but only 1.87m ha are under the plough. The remaining 1.088m ha, or 37pc of the cultivable land, is culturable waste. A meagre amount of Rs45m has been provided to bring culturable waste under plough.

Water storage, conservation and management is another challenging area in the province, for which an amount of Rs135m has been earmarked for improving and lining of watercourses and construction of water storage tanks.

Under this project, 8,350 watercourses and 100 storage tanks will be constructed.

Market access is another challenge. Small holdings scattered all over the province are unable to have direct access to markets. The post-harvest losses are around 40pc of the total production or at Rs12bn per annum. There is no processing facility for value-addition or preservation of fruits and vegetables. The absence of a proper system for storage of agriculture produce results in sharp seasonal fluctuations in food prices. There is no provision in the budget to resolve these problems.

However, for agriculture research stations and institutes an amount of Rs75m has been allocated.

Under the new schemes, Rs137m has been allocated for land conservation and water harvesting, and Rs140m for agriculture technology enhancement activities.

The livestock sector will receive: Rs35m for characterisation of cattle genetic resources of KP through genetic markers and molecular techniques; Rs100m for construction of buildings for existing civil veterinary dispensaries; Rs50m for establishment of civil veterinary dispensaries.

It will also receive Rs50m for milk quality testing labs at divisional headquarters; Rs50m for pet clinics at divisional headquarters; Rs15m for setting up veterinary research and disease investigation laboratory at Torghar; Rs80m for Livestock and Veterinary Research and Disease Investigation Centre at Bannu and Rs40m for improvement of existing livestock breeding farms.

In the fishing sector, Rs20m have been proposed for introduction of cage fish culture on pilot basis, Rs15m for provision of academic and research facilities in fish aquaculture at the University of Agriculture Peshawar, and Rs50m for development of fish hatcheries. Similarly, to support women farmers in kitchen gardening and value-addition of fruits and vegetables, an amount of Rs10m is allocated.

To complete the ongoing projects in fisheries sector, Rs66m has been allocated for development of farm fisheries; Rs4.8m for establishment of 100 trout fish ponds under public private partnership in Malakand and Hazara Division and Rs5.6m for promotion of carp fisheries.

Other ongoing projects for which funds were made in the budget are Rs100m for mass vaccination treatment and artificial insemination; Rs25m for setting up of livestock research and development station at Swabi.

For expansion of purebred buffalo breeding farm in D.I. Khan and improvement and conservation of Azikheli buffalo breed with establishment of dairy technology facilities: Rs89m and Rs27m for genetic improvement of local goats through cross breeding with Saanen Goat in Malakand region.

Under the ongoing project, an amount of Rs100m is allocated for introduction of certification facilities for quality assurance and creation of market linkages for agriculture interventions; Rs62m for provision of pumping machinery for productivity enhancement.

For reclamation of degraded soils through soil conservation practices Rs56m have been allocated; Rs675m for small farmers land development/reclamation and Rs15m for strengthening and rehabilitation of Animal Husbandry Inservice Training Institute (AHITI), Peshawar.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1338868

RS1.45BN CORRUPTION DETECTED IN TRACTOR SUBSIDY SCHEME
Dawn, June 13th, 2017

Hasan Mansoor

KARACHI: Two Sindh ministers revealed on Monday that the government’s anti-corruption body had detected Rs1.45 billion corruption in the tractor subsidy scheme and the names of all those involved in it would soon be made public.

“The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had given a clean chit to a firm, but the same company is found involved in the scandal of subsidy on 5,780 tractors,” Information Minister Nasir Hussain Shah and Agriculture Minister Sohail Anwer Siyal said at a press conference at the Sindh Assembly building’s committee room.

They said the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) had on March 7 received a complaint alleging commission of massive corruption in the tractor subsidy scheme run by the agriculture ministry and private persons. Subsequently, the record was seized during raids at the agriculture ministry’s offices and houses of the suspects.

“The record showed that accused Shehzad Riaz, CEO of M/s Shehzad Trade Link, agent of Belarus Tractors, worked as a dealer to deliver tractors to the growers [who] emerged successful in the ballot under the subsidised tractor scheme from 2009 to 2012. The dealer was supposed to deliver tractors to the growers and claim subsidy of Rs300,000 per tractor from the Sindh government. As many as

5,780 tractors were purportedly delivered by him to the growers. But actually on ground, he did not do so. Rather, by issuing fake invoices as well as sale certificates, he received subsidy of Rs1.45bn, fraudulently," said Mr Siyal, who also holds the portfolio of the home ministry.

He said the accused had sold the tractors to other purchasers on the price of his choosing. "He engaged many dealers across Sindh through two dummy companies — M/s AR Enterprises and M/s MI Enterprises — which he had actually registered in the names of his employees Amir Rafiq and Mohammad Imran, respectively. He got the tokens from growers and used them coupled with fake invoices to claim subsidy fraudulently."

The ministers said the dealer was supposed to collect pay orders from the growers and deliver tractors to the same persons and collect subsidy from the government. However, the record revealed that Shehzad Riaz "deceitfully claimed to have received cash payments and generated invoices in the names of growers and claimed subsidy from the government".

"He had purchased tokens from the growers without delivering tractors. Upon verification during investigation hundreds of growers have admitted that they had never received tractors," the ministers said.

Besides, they added, out of 45 dealers, 29 had deposed under Section 161 and some under Section 164 of CrPC to have purchased tokens at the behest of Shehzad Riaz, without delivering tractors to the growers.

"The accused got subsidy by issuing invoices showing delivery of tractors to the growers in each case. He also issued parallel invoices bearing same engine and chassis numbers of tractors to routine customers, which he had indicated earlier while claiming subsidy.

"He got double profit of subsidy and sale of tractors at the price of his choosing, instead of the fixed rate of Rs1,035,000 per tractor, which he had agreed to charge in the scheme. A sizeable number of fake invoices have been seized, which were doubly used for feigning delivery of tractors to the growers on the one hand in Sindh, and the same invoices bearing the same chassis and engine numbers were sold to dealers in Punjab," said the information minister.

The ministers said the same invoices and sale certificates had been used by the accused to receive subsidy amounting to Rs.1.4bn.

"Evidence is on record showing as many as 1,200 fake pay orders purportedly issued from a single bank branch, from the account of the accused for receiving subsidy, illegally. Besides double invoicing fraud, he managed registration of the subsidy scheme tractors in the name of market purchasers in the excise ministry by issuing sale certificates bearing the same engine and chassis numbers, which he had given in the agriculture ministry in the form of invoice issued by him for claim of subsidy."

They said the excise ministry had, after verification, generated a report for the ACE. "So many witnesses have denied receiving tractors as shown in fake record furnished by the accused. His bank accounts show transactions from Punjab dealers confirming sale of the same tractors to Punjab, which were shown in subsidy claim," they added.

The ministers claimed that the links of the accused were strong, as the same case was closed by NAB for the reasons “best known to them”.

“Surprisingly, the accused has been praying in a court to refer the case again to NAB. However, it’s not possible under the ACE rules now,” Mr Shah said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1339103

COTTON GROWERS WARNED OF ‘HARSH WEATHER CONDITIONS’
Business Recorder, 14 June 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office has asked the cotton growers to irrigate their standing crops keeping in view the ‘harsh weather conditions’ ahead.

It said that the rice growers should sow the crop in accordance with the recommendation by the agriculture experts. “Removing weeds from the standing crops is very important as weeds utilize moisture and food which are to be utilized by the crop,” it added.

Growers should take measures to preserve the standing crops and vegetables from the damaging effects of varying weather patterns.

In the next 10 days: It said that light to moderate rainfall is expected in the most parts of Punjab while light rainfall is likely at isolated places in Karachi Division.

It said that light to moderate rainfall is expected at isolated places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, besides isolated places of Kalat, Zhob and Makran Divisions. Light to moderate rainfall is expected in the most parts of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir during the period.

Heat waves: The Met said that Karachi is expected to suffer from the hot weather with high humidity of 80 percent and 37 degrees Celsius of temperature on Wednesday and Thursday (June 14 and June 15). It said that weather is expected to remain partly cloudy with drizzle.

Maximum temperature was recorded in Sibbi as 48 degrees Celsius followed by Nokkundi, Dalbandin, Noorpur Thal and Bhakkar 46, each, Larkana, Jacobabad, Shaheed Benazirabad, Dadu, Turbat and Sukkur 45, each in the last 24 hours.

In the next 24 hours: Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country. However, rain-thunderstorm is expected at few places in Malakand, Hazara, Rawalpindi, Multan, Bahawalpur, D. G. Khan and D. I. Khan Divisions, besides Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir and its adjoining hilly areas.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1339103

BOR PUNJAB TO COLLECT RS61.4M AGRI TAX IN FY18
Business Recorder, 15 June, 2017
Hamid Waleed

LAHORE: The Board of Revenue (BoR) Punjab will collection Rs 61.40 million under the heads of agriculture income tax, land revenue, stamp duty, motor vehicle tax, urban immoveable property tax and professional tax during the Financial Year 2017-18, said budget documents.

Agricultural Income Tax (AIT) is an important direct tax of provinces, collected under AIT Act of 1997. It is levied as a payment of fixed amount per acre of land. Major amendments were introduced in this Act in 2001 whereby holders of 25 acre irrigated land (equivalent to 50 acre un-irrigated land) were required to submit their AIT return. An amount of Rs 1,280.250 million has been received during FY 2016-17 and BE 2017-18 has been fixed at Rs 1,530 million.

Land revenue is a broad category, and includes a number of receipts related to land revenue functions. This category of Provincial Tax Receipts has a lot of potential and it is expected to contribute Rs. 14,589.146 million to the provincial exchequer during FY 2017-18. During the last few years, government has tried to tap the buoyancy of this source by introducing structural reforms which include introduction of valuation tables to rural areas for the purpose of mutation.

Government has completed the automation of land revenue record under Land Record Management Information System (LRMIS). Punjab Land Records Authority has been established to reform and modernize the system of land records, to improve the land records service delivery; to contribute to long lasting tenure security; and, to deal with ancillary matters. The said project has since been taken over by Punjab Land Record Authority.

Government has reformed the existing system by introducing E-Stamps to facilitate taxpayers, plug leakages in this tax and to ensure greater transparency in the process of transfer of property. Budget Estimates of Stamp Duty for FY 2017-18 have been pitched at Rs 31,823.589 million.

The following pie chart shows the composition of taxes to be collected by the Board of Revenue as estimated for FY 2017-18.

Excise, Taxation & Narcotics Control Department provides services for collection of eight different levies/ taxes. The department aims to promote automation of its functions to optimize service delivery through reduced interface between public and government officials.

The UIPT for FY 2017-18 stands at Rs 12,000.465 million which is four percent higher than BE 2016-17. This is a tax devolved to Municipal Committees, Municipal Corporations and Metropolitan Corporation but for administrative purpose, it is being collected by the Provincial Government and passed on to the respective local governments as per the agreed distribution formula.

The main taxation reforms for UIPT are as under:

a) Property tax record is being computerized for providing the facility of self-assessment system. In the 1st Phase, property tax record of 18 districts has been computerized which covers 85 percent revenue of the province. The computerization of remaining 18 districts is under process. The specific pin code has been issued to the each tax payer by which he can know the description and assessment of his property unit.

The budget estimate for FY 2017-18 with respect to Professional Tax has been pitched at Rs 927.000 million against the Revised Estimates for FY 2016-2017 to the tune of Rs 720.250 million.

The following pie-chart shows the composition of taxes collected by Excise, Taxation & Narcotics Control Department as estimated by FY 2017-18.

The regulatory functions performed by the Provincial Government; and rates and fees charged for the provision of certain social and economic services, constitute the non-tax revenue. However, for the purpose of this chapter, grants received from Federal Government & multilateral partners and Development surcharges on Gas and Royalties on Oil and Gas are shown separately. The next table summarizes the Revised Estimates for FY 2016-17 against the BE for FY 2017-18. The budget estimate for FY 2017-18 has been estimated at Rs 37,637.885 million.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/06/15/13-page/882541-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 5TH TO JUNE 11 TH 2017
PUNJAB BUDGET 2017-18: BUDGET POSTS AN IMPROVED FARM ADP
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 5th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

THE Punjab government has proposed as much as Rs21bn Annual Development Plan for the agriculture sector for the financial year 2017-18, with the vision of ‘transforming the agriculture sector into a diversified, sustainable, modern and market-driven sector’.

The allocation is 5pc higher than what had been approved for the year 2016-17 and includes a foreign aid component of Rs2.761bn.

Going by the trend of allocations since the Shahbaz Sharif government came to power four years ago, the agriculture ADP is almost 75pc higher than Rs5.23bn set aside in 2013-14. It was increased to around Rs8bn in 2014-15, and to Rs10.725bn in 2015-16.

The ADP sets the goal of raising the agriculture growth rate from the existing 2.1pc to 5pc, improving service delivery to farmers with 75pc farmer access to evidence-based and diagnostic-driven extension services, and mobilising private investment of Rs75bn in the sector.

The Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package, included in the other development programme for the next year, has claimed a major share in the ADP. However, there is a discrepancy in the budget documents about the net worth of the Package as the whitepaper on the budget mentions its amount as Rs15bn, while the book containing the detailed development programme puts the figure at Rs10bn.

The previous year, the government had drastically revised the Kissan Package downwards from Rs10bn to just over Rs817m and, ironically, the utilisation rate of the released fund under the head was very poor at just 3.17pc.

The second biggest fund apportionment has been made for on-farm water management which amounts to more than Rs5.121bn. It contains the Rs2.761bn foreign aid component. A paltry sum of Rs50m has been allocated for new schemes, while the rest will be spent on the ongoing projects.

A sum of Rs2bn had been set aside to set up the Punjab Agriculture, Food and Drug Authority. An amount of Rs1.566bn has been allocated for ongoing and new agriculture education schemes.

A major chunk (Rs726m) of it will be for setting up the Nawaz Sharif Agriculture University in Multan, Rs240m for establishing the Punjab Bio Energy Institute at the Faisalabad Agriculture University and Rs200m to set up a sub-campus of Rawalpindi Arid Agriculture University in Attock.

Testing indigenous hydroponic greenhouses for vegetable growing at various locations in the province and 50 oversees PhD scholarships are other schemes of the sub-sector.

Like in the previous year, research remained at a low priority of the agriculture policy-makers as only Rs773.4m were earmarked in the ADP of FY2017-18 for the purpose.

The previous year, a sum of Rs1.44bn had been announced for research in the budget but it was lowered to Rs612.7m in the revised estimates, while only 2.22pc of it was utilised.

Major research schemes for the next year include the development of Pothohar into an Olive Valley (Rs200m), diversification to high-value cropping through horticulture promotion (Rs100m), commissioned research for the development of cotton seed (Rs100m), up-gradation of Faisalabad AARI infrastructure (Rs100m) and development of hybrid and OPVs in horticulture crops resilient to climate change (Rs100m).

There are four main schemes under the water management head in the ADP. The Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project will be assisted by the World Bank with a Rs2.761bn credit facility, while the Punjab government will allocate Rs619.7m for it.

A sum of Rs668.7m has been apportioned for providing laser land levellers to farmers at subsidised rates; Rs500m for optimising watercourse conveyance efficiency by enhancing lining length and Rs500m for promotion of high value agriculture through provision of a climate smart technology package.

The agriculture mechanisation could get only Rs174.8m from the budget makers. Out of it, the lion's share, Rs100m, will go to a hi-tech mechanisation service centre, while the introduction and promotion if hi-tech farm mechanisation technologies, and provision of GPS and tracking system in machinery of the field wing are other important schemes.

The ADP also sets 'outcome-based' targets for the year 2017-18. These activities include improvement of 1,200 water courses, installation of high efficiency (sprinkler/drip) irrigation system at 10,000 acres, provision of 3,000 laser units to service providers/farmers, training courses on improved water management practices to 150 farmers, rehabilitation of 450 irrigation schemes in non-canal areas, and provision of 1,000kg certified seed of lentil and mash to farmers at subsidised rates.

The policy paper that accompanied the ADP allocations claimed that the targets set for these activities during the previous year had been fully achieved.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1337524/punjab-budget-2017-18-budget-posts-an-improved-farm-adp

FARMER BODIES EXPRESS DISAPPOINTMENT

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 5th, 2017

Ahmad Fraz Khan

PUNJAB'S agriculture budget, announced last Friday, immediately drew sharp reaction from all.

Farmers' bodies, individual growers and experts in the province called it a total betrayal of promises made by the provincial government during the budget-making process.

The farm development outlay has been fixed at Rs21bn. Out of it, Rs15bn would go to the much-touted Kissan Package (read it as provincial contribution to the federal subsidy on fertilisers), leaving only Rs6bn for the entire development effort. For the World Bank-funded Punjab Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project (Pipip), Rs3.3bn have been proposed.

The establishment of the Punjab Agriculture Food and Drug Authority (Pafda) would take another Rs2bn. Farmers wonder what this authority has to do with the agriculture development budget. Such allocations are likely to affect the entire developmental activity.

The development budget lists another Rs3.3bn projects. They include Rs726m for setting up the Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture in Multan; Rs669m for subsidised provision of laser land levellers to farmers and service providers; Rs513m for extension service to farmer through modernised means; Rs500m for optimising watercourse conveyance efficiency; another Rs500m for promotion of high value crops; Rs200m for setting up of model farms, Rs100m for the cotton seed reform project and Rs100m for the development of hybrid and OPVs in horticulture crops resilient to climate change.

Farmers say that the limited scope of the package is evident as vital areas where the government was already committed have been left out. Punjab's chief minister had announced Rs100bn package for farmers in March 2016. Out of it, Rs50bn were given last year and Rs50bn was due this year, explains Naeem Hotiana — a grower from central Punjab.

"Instead, the total allocation under this head has come down to Rs15bn. Similar is the case of cotton seed development. Last year, the government spared Rs5bn for the effort, which could not be spent for different reasons. This year, the allocation is down to Rs100m."

Punjab's finance minister also claimed better performance of the crop sector in her speech, especially that of wheat. The minister claimed that the province had produced 22.5m tones of wheat, whereas the figure conveyed to the Federal Committee of Agriculture was 19.5m tones only.

For the last four years, wheat has not been on the government priority list because of huge surpluses that the provincial food department had been carrying. Why take credit of a crop that is no more the province's priority?

The farmers had been pleading for a level playing field with the Indian farmers, with whom they have to compete in the local market, when imports are allowed, says the Chief of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Khalid Khokhar.

This demand has been made to the federal and provincial governments repeatedly, but to no avail. Frustrated farmers are now seriously considering launching a country-wide movement for their rights, he warns.

Farmers say what they had been looking for was a concerted provincial effort to boost crops, like rice and cotton, horticulture and creation of cold chain and supply chain management as a local launching pad for exports.

Their hopes did not come from the thin air but were generated by official discussions and provincial ground realities. The Punjab government has been totally silent on these issues to the farmers' disappointment.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1337523

'PUNJAB SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM THE WHEAT MARKET'
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, June 5th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

THE World Bank has proposed a package of reforms to lower the price of wheat and wheat flour and incentivise farmers to switch to higher-value crops.

The reforms plan also suggests that the Punjab government should withdraw from the wheat market and allow the private sector to fill the trade gaps.

It estimates that the abolition of the current wheat procurement system would result in net annual savings of Rs26bn per year. In addition, the sale of excess wheat stocks would generate another Rs150bn, which could potentially be used to reduce the fiscal burdens being carried by the provincial government.

Wheat consumers would enjoy lower prices, producers would invest in value-added crops, and the provincial government would benefit from immediate cost savings overall lower costs

Nevertheless, farmers would no longer benefit from higher wheat prices. Besides, banks and manufacturers of gunny bags would also lose business.

The Punjab government operates the largest wheat procurement system in the country and releases it to registered flour mills. This system is financed with budgetary allocations and bank borrowing.

The World Bank report, circulated to the provinces' policy-makers and other stakeholders, envisages replacing the existing system with one that combines a targeted income transfer programme; reducing procurement quantity and stock limits to a level required for an emergency reserve; the private sector assuming a leading role in the wheat market; a liberalised trade regime; and an incentive programme for farmers to diversity crops that would be financed from freed-up fiscal resources.

Farmers, negatively impacted by the drop in wheat price, would be compensated by a direct income transfer, based on the difference between the prevailing market price at harvest and the Punjab government's previously announced procurement price. This transfer would be capped, both in terms of quantity and time duration, and would be made eligible to a broad range of farmers.

On the other hand, consumers of wheat across the country would enjoy lower prices, producers would be incentivised to invest in value-added crops, and the provincial government would benefit from immediate cost savings and the overall lower costs in the future.

Often deemed to be ineffective in stabilising prices and making wheat more affordable, the current wheat procurement system is plagued with patronage and rent-seeking, leaving the small farmers to bear the losses. The entire cost of the programme is enormous, with the direct costs of buying, storing and releasing wheat at a fixed price over the year estimated at Rs35bn annually.

Indirect costs are also substantial and include physical losses due to poor storage and high spoilage, pilferage, overproduction of wheat and under-production of other higher value commodities. Diversion of bank credit; and incentives for building storage facilities for other crops besides wheat is required.

Stating that the creation of a strategic wheat reserve would be adequate to meet needs during emergencies and disasters, the World Bank says the strategic reserve could eventually be held by the private sector on behalf of the government. But for the short-term, the government would need to build good quality silo storage.

Disposal of the existing wheat stock to the domestic market, either through open auction, setting a floor price or using a cascading price, would help avoid losses. With silo -based, and private sector managed near-farm storage of about 1m tonnes, the existing warehouses owned by the provincial food department would no longer be needed and could be sold or leased out.

The deregulation of the private sector wheat imports would allow traders to import wheat in times of domestic shortages. The government would not intervene in the domestic wheat market unless prices were to rise above the current level of Rs1,300 per 40kg.

In case of a sharp price rise, the Trading Corporation of Pakistan can import and release subsidised wheat into the domestic market. The current 60pc regulatory duty on wheat imports since September 2016 should be gradually phased out over a three-year period, which would coincide with the phasing out of the proposed compensation to farmers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1337522

MINISTRY OPPOSES DEREGULATION OF SUGARCANE PRICE
Business Recorder, June 5 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Industries and Production has reportedly opposed deregulation of sugarcane price as the three provinces are against any such move, well informed sources told Business Recorder.

Last year, Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet had recommended that price of sugarcane may be deregulated from next season (2017) so that the government involvement and provision of subsidy is eliminated as the whole issue arises due to fixation of sugarcane price and difference in the price of sugarcane by the provincial governments.

The sources said, Ministry of Industries and Production has held detailed consultations with the concerned stakeholders including provinces and sugar industry.

One of the stakeholders told Business Recorder that if sugarcane prices are deregulated, mill owners will fleece the growers and stated that the Chief Minister Punjab Mian Shahbaz Sharif has taken a strong position on this issue, arguing that he would not allow elimination of growers support system as any such mechanism would only be in favour of mill owners.

A senior official of the Ministry of Industries and Production confirmed that the three provinces i.e. Punjab, Sindh and KPK did not support the proposal.

Federal government wanted to deregulate sugarcane price but the issue arose that if the government fixes support price on its own and at some stage surplus is to be exported then who will give rebate.

On Saturday, Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) Sindh Zone, in a advertisement that appeared in Business Recorder, addressed the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Commerce Minister and Chief Ministers of Punjab, Sindh and KPK claiming that if 1.2 million tons of sugar is not urgently exported, sugar industry in the three provinces will not be in a position to pay Rs 120/ 40 kg to the growers during the crushing season 2017-18, which will badly hurt both growers and the industry.

Sugar industry has accused Commerce Ministry of playing havoc with the growers by not allowing export of sugar on the recommendations of Sugar Advisory Board (SAB) as growers are not being paid due to glut in domestic market and delay in export permission.

However, when contacted, Secretary Commerce, Younas Dagha said that the committee headed by the Commerce Minister will hold a meeting during third week of this month to approve export of additional quantity.

He maintained that if export permission was allowed before Ramazan, prices in the domestic market would have increased.

When contacted Chairman PSMA, Javed Kayani said that recently Ministry of Industries and Production had held a meeting on deregulation of sugarcane price with the stakeholders.

“There should be a fair system of sugarcane price, keeping in view international prices. With current prices, sugarcane growing areas have replaced other crops, especially cotton. Area under cultivation of sugarcane has increased by 10 per cent for 2017-18,” he said adding who will deal with 2.5 million tons of surplus sugar next year.

Ministry of Industries and Production has also opposed establishment of any sugarcane research and development board at the federal level, saying that similar institutes are already in place in Punjab, KPK and Sindh.

The sources said, Ministry of Industries and Production would submit its summary on deregulation of sugarcane prices to the ECC soon. —MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/06/05/3-page/879847-news.html

RS2B SUBSIDY MARKED FOR TRACTOR PURCHASE
The Express Tribune, June 6th, 2017.

Salman Siddiqui

KARACHI: The Sindh government has put aside Rs6.98 billion for improving agriculture produce, establishment of supply chain and building a stabilised pricing mechanism for fiscal year 2017-18 including Rs2 billion in subsidy for farmers on tractor purchase, according to budget documents.

"Without agriculture, it is not possible to have a city, stock market, banks, university, church or army. Agriculture is the foundation of civilisation and any stable economy," Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said while quoting Zimbabwean scientist Allan Savory in his budget speech on Monday.

The allocation of Rs2-billion subsidy includes Rs1.5 billion under previous year's schemes and another Rs500 million for new schemes.

The other subsidy scheme will help support establishment of two atmospheric control stores and two hot water treatment plants on farmers' fields under a programme titled "Preservation and storage facility of fruits and vegetables through hot water treatment and controlled atmospheric stores", costing Rs242 million.

The hot water treatment plants help remove insects and pests from fruits and vegetables, especially mango, and increase their shelf life.

Farmers will also be provided sour water pumps and tube wells at subsidised rates, which will cost the government Rs563.8 million.

The provincial government has allocated Rs75 million for the provision of combined harvesters for wheat and paddy crops at 50% subsidy to the farmers. It has earmarked Rs100 million for the provision of small agriculture power tillers/ paddy reapers and tillage equipment at a subsidised cost.

Another Rs100 million has been earmarked for the provision of power drilling rigs on the basis of hire charges.

For the next fiscal year 2017-18, the federal government has enhanced the agriculture credit target for the entire country to Rs1,001 billion compared to the outgoing year's Rs700 billion, an increase of 43%.

Nationwide, the agriculture sector has bounced back strongly in FY17 by posting a growth of 3.46% – its highest in the last five years, which greatly helped the government in achieving the overall economic growth of 5.3%.

The agriculture sector met its growth target of 3.5% mainly due to the increase in disbursement of credit to the farmers. From July to March FY17, the credit disbursement was 23% higher compared to the previous year.

The growth in crops was registered at 3.02% against negative growth of 4.97% in the same period of previous year. This growth is also the highest in the past five years, pointing to an important aspect that the agriculture growth mainly depends on the performance of crops because the performance of livestock – a sector that contributes 58% in the agriculture sector – has remained quite stable in the five-year period.

The provincial government has allocated Rs1.7 billion for livestock and fisheries and another Rs40 billion for the development of irrigation system.

"Faced with acute water scarcity, it is of utmost importance that water supplies are protected, water channels and canals are maintained and repaired regularly to avoid the loss of valuable water resources and existing resources are distributed efficiently in a sustainable fashion that is friendly to the environment," the budget document said.

"We have worked out foreign aid from the World Bank to the tune of Rs8.3 billion for Rs9.9-billion Sindh Resilience Project for Strengthening Flood Embankments and Construction of Small Dams in Sindh," Shah said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1428326/rs2b-subsidy-marked-tractor-purchase/

MQM FOR LEVYING TAX ON AGRI INCOME
Business Recorder, June 9 2017

Anwar Khan

KARACHI: As the Sindh Assembly opened the budget debate on Thursday, the MQM again asked the government to augment provincial revenues through enforcing an agriculture income tax to scale down federal financial dependence.

MQM veteran Syed Sardar Ahmed said that Sindh generates a maximum of 20 percent revenues from its resources, depending on the federal government for 80 percent of its financial needs to meet its budgetary spending every fiscal year.

He advised the government to enforce agriculture income tax to scale up the provincial revenues at by up to Rs8 billion a year. If the agriculture income tax is implemented, the province can have additional revenues of seven to eight billion rupees, he said. An agriculture income tax will also help the province attain greater financial stability, he added. He said that there are many ways for the government to achieve revenue growth.

He also called the fiscal budget "an accountant's budget." The Sindh budget is "accountant's budget and not a performance budget," he said.

“Karachi is a cosmopolitan city as scores of different ethnic community live here. The government should allocate a Rs30 billion special package for the city,” he demanded. The government should also announce a financial package for all district of Karachi, he said.

He also criticized Chinese companies for failing to ensure cleaning of the city’s roads.

Shaharyar Khan Mahar of PML-F rejected the Sindh government’s “reconciliation” claims, saying that the treasury members were provided with millions of rupees of funds for development, while the opposition were denied this. He said that the government completely ignored the constituencies of opposition members like these areas were enemy territory.

He said that the opposition’s constituencies have been left underdeveloped with no uplift schemes in the budget. He also called the PPP’s protest threat against the electricity load shedding as eyewash, saying that in the last three years the Sindh government had supported Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and it is only now that it has started raising a voice about the public’s problems.

The PPP’s Dr Sohrab Khan Sarki said that his party’s government carried out development across the public sectors with focus on healthcare and education over the last nine years of its tenure.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/06/09/8-page/881001-news.html

DESPITE ECONOMIC GROWTH, AGRICULTURE IS STILL A DISAPPOINTMENT
Shahram Haq

The Express Tribune, June 10th, 2017.

LAHORE: The state of agriculture in Pakistan remains a disappointment despite some improvements in the overall economic scenario as the country’s most important sector grows at a lower average rate due to random shock and structural weaknesses, says a report prepared by economist Dr Shahid Javed Burki.

The report, launched by the Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy, pointed to decades-old farming practices coupled with other core issues and said agriculture growth had clearly slowed down in the past one decade when output growth averaged only 2% per annum between 2006-16 and was -0.2% in 2015-16.

Excluding the negative growth, the overall growth of value addition in major crops over 2006-16 was only 1.5% per annum. The value addition in other crops, including fruits, vegetables and oilseeds, dropped from 14.5% in 2005-06 to 11.3% in 2015-16.

The key areas of concern were pricing and procurement policies, water pricing, seed policy, research and extension services, marketing and financial services.

The report suggested some solutions in order to move beyond traditional ways and fix the core issues with modern technologies to streamline the processes and behaviour of public and private-sector stakeholders.

The traditional solution to the financing constraints faced by farmers has been to develop public-sector credit facilities such as agriculture development banks. Such facilities have encountered several problems, which have limited their usefulness.

According to the report, efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and recent advances in information and communication technology (ICT) allow more private sector-oriented solutions to the financing constraints of agriculture economy, including small farmers, traders and input suppliers.

For example, microcredit schemes have been successful in providing access to small amounts of credit for the rural poor. Though such schemes have been started by the NGOs, these now involve private banks as well.

Mobile phones are among the most widely used technological devices and have enormous potential in the rural areas for promoting branchless banking.

Value chain financing eg trade credit, financing for input suppliers, contract farming, inventory credit, etc is yet another important tool to help commercialise agriculture.

The report suggested that despite traditional approach to rural infrastructure including roads, electricity and irrigation networks, Pakistan needed to go beyond to re-galvanise agriculture in the country.

Farm service centres or agri-malls may be the solutions in this regard. Agri-malls are one-stop shops that provide small farmers with agriculture and veterinary inputs, services, finances and technologies. These malls are successfully run in many countries, including Afghanistan and India, in one fashion or the other.

According to the report, reliable and up-to-date information on markets enable farmers to make better production decisions and governments to frame coordinated policy responses in situations of market volatility. This could help make use of the rich information base on prices and costs that is already available with some government agencies.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1431773/despite-economic-growth-agriculture-still-disappointment/

July 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 24TH TO JULY 31ST 2017

OILING THE OILSEED BUSINESS

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 24th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

OILSEED production in Pakistan remains too low, meeting only a fraction of the national demand. As a result, the country spends a huge amount of foreign exchange to import oilseeds to support the oil extraction industry.

That local edible oil production itself meets only a small part of our total requirements is a separate story.

Things may, however, begin to change now. “We are at an advanced stage of consultation with a number of countries and international organisations for developing the seed sector, and a greater focus is being placed on oilseeds,” says a senior official of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

In the previous fiscal year, output of oilseeds (cottonseed, rapeseed/mustard, canola and sunflower seeds) slipped to 313,000 tonnes from about 328,000 tonnes a year ago, according to official stats. A decline in cotton crop resulted in lower production of cottonseeds and that hit overall availability of oilseeds, officials say.

Historically, locally produced oilseeds have met only a tiny part of our requirements — below 10 per cent in the best-case scenario — and the country has had to rely heavily on imports year after year.

The import bill of oilseeds jumped 10 times to about Rs200bn in the fiscal year 2015-16 from nearly Rs20bn in 2000-01. One reason for the increase was rise in import prices, but the fact remains that we met 65pc to 80pc of our national requirements of oilseeds through imports in each of these 15 years.

Moreover, our national output of both traditional and non-traditional oilseeds during this time never touched the magic mark of 750,000 tonnes, or 25pc of our total requirement of around 3m tonnes, officials say. (Whereas cottonseed, rapeseed/mustard and canola and sunflower seeds make up the bulk of our oilseed output, we also produce other oilseed crops such as groundnut, sesame, linseed, soybean, castor seed and safflower on a limited scale).

Officials of the food ministry say that the need to boost oilseed output has got due recognition in the recently finalised food security policy. Pakistan Oilseed Development Board (PODB) is already busy finding ways to ensure adequate availability of oilseeds in the country, they say.

“We’ve been in touch with a dozen private-sector oilseed companies. Their feedback is being sought in implementing previous plans of increasing oilseed production and chalking out new plans,” according to a senior PODB official. “A number of progressive oilseed farmers from across Pakistan are also being consulted.”

Officials say that as part of a previous plan, land under cultivation of traditional sarson, or mustard, is being progressively used for cultivating economically more important canola crop. Canola inter-cropping with sugarcane and in fruit orchards is also going on, they say, adding that the twin measures are expected to boost the output of canola oilseeds in a few years.

In the past seven years, lack of a proper strategy has led to a sharp decline in output of canola seeds —from 76,000 tonnes in the fiscal year 2009-10 to just 15,000 tonnes in 2016-17, according to official stats.

Under another plan, the development of new and hybrid varieties of oilseeds has also got due attention. Food ministry officials say that a couple of new canola varieties and mustard hybrid varieties have been successfully developed in the past seven years. They say that three new canola varieties — including NFA Gold developed by the Nuclear Institute for Food Agriculture, Peshawar, in 2012 — are being widely used. Two mustard hybrid varieties — Coral 432 and PAC 438, also developed in 2012 by ICI Pakistan — are also doing well.

Officials of the food ministry and people associated with the oilseed industry identify a number of constraints to growth of oilseed production in Pakistan. Some key problems are: non-availability of quality seeds, the absence or limited availability of technology for development of new and hybrid varieties, and low support prices of oilseed crops and a dearth of affordable formal finance for small farmers engaged in cultivation of these crops. Besides, marketing and policy constraints and small budgeting for research and innovation are also cited as impediments to growth of oilseed sector in the country.

Executives of private seed companies say that in Pakistan the gap between potential and current yields of oilseed crops is too high — between 50pc and 70pc. “This has to be bridged efficiently if we want to move forward,” says an official of one of the private seed companies. “I hope that with the promised engagement of Chinese companies in developing our agriculture, this and similar issues of the oilseed sector would get some priority.”

Officials say that there are limits to horizontal expansion in oilseed crops, except cotton, due to higher rates of return on major food crops like wheat, rice, sugarcane and maize. The area under cultivation of some oilseed crops (such as linseed and sunflower) has declined in recent years for the same reason.

What we can do instead is to use marginal lands for growing more of oilseed crops, focus on vertical expansion of these crops and incentivise their growers. In addition to other things, vertical expansion requires faster development of high-yield varieties and promotion of non-traditional oilseed crops.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347140

SINDH LANDLORDS SOW ON KATCHA AREA AS GOVT LOOKS THE OTHER WAY
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 24th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

SINDH has a rich riverine area that sprawls across nearly two million acres, according to government data.

Riverine area, or katcha in local parlance, is famous for its soil fertility thanks to silt deposits the Indus river brings each year despite losing its historic flows.

It is this soil fertility that powerful families like Pirs, Jatois, Bhuttos and Syeds take full advantage of by cultivating hundreds and thousands of acres of land lying between the two embankments of the Indus River.

Crops like banana and sugarcane are cultivated there besides cotton crop in summer and wheat in the winter season.

Land inside the katcha area belongs to the Sindh revenue, irrigation and forest departments.

The Sindh Board of Revenue Secretary, Munawar Mahesar, discloses that the revenue department on its part levies Rs5 per acre, as local cess; Rs200 per acre on all crops (excluding orchards) and Rs500 per acre per annum on orchards' cultivation towards land tax.

Landholding worth 32 acres, however, is exempted from these taxes. The department charges Rs10 per acre per year on land it leases inside the katcha area, he adds.

However, Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) President Abdul Majeed Nizamani believes that the katcha area stands at 2.6 million acres, of which 500,000 acres is the path where Indus river's main current flows. "The rest of katcha land [i.e. 2.1m acres] remains under occupation of different people legally or illegally for agriculture and other purposes," he says.

It is soil fertility that powerful families take full advantage of by cultivating hundreds and thousands of acres of land lying between the two embankments of the Indus river

Wheat cultivation in Rabi season has been a norm in riverine area as the katcha dwellers (mostly peasants) sow the crop on residual soil moistures on small acreages after annual floods. These flows, however, have somewhat faded away due to a change in the weather. But due to large landholdings (known as ketis), cultivation by these peasants hardly matter now.

Over the years Sindh has lost its forest cover substantially. A senior official of the provincial forest department says that of the 575,000 acres of forest land, around 100,000 acres would actually be under forest cover. The remaining land is used for cropping or is under illegal occupation of influential people. "Past approaches [by the government] to get encroached areas vacated have either not produced results or worked only temporarily," he says.

Figures for crop cultivation in katcha area are not compiled by the government as it intends to look the other way. The forest department leased out the land for five years under a policy introduced in 2004-05.

An acre of forest land is leased out for as low as Rs1,600 to Rs2,000 annually. Comparatively, land for banana orchard given under agreement by private parties in settled and command areas of canals is leased for Rs80,000 to Rs100,000 per acre annually. Nearly 70,000 acres of forest land is leased, says the forest department official.

Policy requires that 80 per cent of the leased forest land should be used for agriculture while forests are to be raised on the remaining area. But the provision is hardly implemented.

The Sindh's agriculture department updates figures for major crops — such as cotton, wheat, sugarcane and rice — that are grown in settled or surveyed area. For instance, Kharif sowing area proposed by the agriculture department for 2017 is 3.5m acres. Crop cultivation in riverine area would certainly be in addition to it. However, it is difficult to determine how much acreage is brought under cultivation of crops annually in riverine area.

The contribution of crop cultivated in riverine area to the overall production is substantial. An official of the provincial agriculture department says while it doesn't collect figures for katcha acreage, its production is part of official figures as the crops are sold at the market.

"Gone are days when inhabitants of katcha used to cultivate land to make ends meet. Presently, the land there belongs to who's who of the province," says Mahmood Nawaz Shah, the vice-president of SAB.

He says that per-acre productivity assessed by the agriculture department on the basis of acreage in settled area alone becomes questionable in the absence of statistics of crops production in riverine area. This is bound to impact future planning.

Settlements, encroachment like private bunds and land cultivation in riverine area also obstruct the passage of river water flows. It was also indicated in the inquiry report of a Supreme Court-appointed judicial commission following the infamous Aug 7 dyke breach in 2010 super floods that wreaked havoc mostly in districts located on the right bank of the Indus River.

Inundation of riverine area in floods is essential for its ecology. However, the ecology is jeopardised as riverbed has been narrowed due to illegal structures, settlement, banana orchards and sugarcane fields, according to rice grower Gada Hussain Mahesar. In such a situation, the passage of floodwater builds pressure on barrages when flows get blocked.

"Only in 2015 we noticed sugarcane fields on hundreds of acres in katcha area were serving as obstacle to floodwater's passage Sukkur downstream, putting river dyke under constant threat of being broken, but luckily it was avoided," says Noor Mohammad Baloch, a former chief engineer at Guddu Barrage. "Riverine area is to be kept free of everything," he argues.

The Sindh government introduce a piece of legislation to get natural waterways restored after 2011 heavy rains coupled with breaches in the Left Bank Outfall Drain caused massive damages in lower Sindh. However, no progress has been made since to achieve this goal. It's time the Sindh government did something about it as changing climate has made extreme weather events more unpredictable.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347139/sindh-landlords-sow-on-katcha-area-as-govt-looks-the-other-way

FAO TO ADDRESS SEED SECTOR'S WEAKNESSES
Amin Ahmed

Dawn, Business and Finance weekly, July 24, 2017

IN view of the weaknesses in Pakistan's seed industry, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, at the request of the government, has launched a project to improve coordination and collaboration among key players of the sector.

According to FAO officials, there was a shortage of trained human resources, especially against the backdrop of challenges of emerging technologies and needs of a reformed seed sector after amendments to the Seed Act of 1976 and enactment of Plant Breeders' Rights law. Under these circumstances, the FAO launched the project at the request of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Under the technical cooperation programme, the UN organisation will build capacity of the Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department to facilitate seed and plant supply industry regulations, and help stakeholders to enhance their technical capacity.

The enhanced capacity-building of seed certification and registration department will help in carrying out Distinct, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) tests to support effective variety protection under Plant Breeders' Rights Act of 2016.

The project will also result in improving coordination and collaboration among key players of the seed sector, and facilitating inclusive value chain for wheat, rice, cotton and pluses and other crops to achieve increased availability of quality seeds.

In the early 80s, the first private sector seed company was allowed to start seed business while greater participation of private companies in the seed business was observed in 90s and 2000s. Major amendments to the Seed Act of 1976 were made during 2015 to give greater role to the private sector and enhance its scope in order to meet emerging needs of the seed industry.

Pakistan has also enacted Plant Breeders' Rights Act 2016 to ensure protection of crop varieties and promoting investment in development of new crop varieties by both the public and private sectors.

The FAO project entails formalising working arrangements with the stakeholders by focusing trainings in the identified areas of early generation seed production, DUS evaluation and seed certification and seed testing.

The project through capacity-building of the federal department as well as research institutes and public and private seed sector entities would achieve increased crops' yield through enhanced access to improved crop varieties and quality seed.

International seed sector expert Dr Dennis Thompson, who recently visited Pakistan for a dialogue on the project activity, emphasised to create greater sense of community within the broader body of stakeholders and heighten the collective realisation that a formative opportunity is available to public and private sectors of Pakistan through the project.

A more functional certification system can provide enhanced value to domestic industry participants and can instil greater confidence in the nation's seed production on a regional basis. Developing a vibrant and competitive industry (as opposed to a collection of competitive companies) can best serve stakeholders. Collaboration, not competition, between private and public sector stakeholders will be required to achieve the highest level of industry development, he said.

Salman Mahmood Khan, a former chairman of the Seed Association of Pakistan, says the country has a well-developed seed regulatory framework at federal level which needs to be further strengthened.

At a stage when the Seed Act of 1976 has been amended to meet the requirement of the seed sector and Plant Breeders' Rights Act of 2016 stands enacted, any changes or shifting roles and functions from federal to provinces would be unfair and counterproductive, he argues.

The Punjab agricultural research department feels that strengthening Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department and its capacity-building along with other participants of the seed sector is imperative for developing modern seed industry in the country.

The provincial agricultural research system would be actively participating in the project capacity-building activities and would extend support by providing necessary human resources in conducting various training programmes, says Director-General of Agricultural Research Dr Abid Mahmood.

Chairman of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Dr Yusuf Zafar believes that the importance of political will and government support for meaningful development needs to be mobilised in support of the agricultural sector. Since the implementation of the devolution of agriculture has adversely affected the overall performance of the sector, the government has to rescue the agriculture sector, which has a major contribution towards ensuring food security and economic progress of the country, he says.

Various working groups were formed for the launch of the project. One of the groups came up with the recommendation that foundation seed cells at public sector research institute and private sector seed companies should be created to handle early generation seed production. These cells should have strong linkages with the federal department to ensure total quality management at all levels across the value chain.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347138/fao-to-address-seed-sectors-weaknesses

NO ONE IS HAPPY WITH FERTILISER SUBSIDY
Ahmad Fraz Khan

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 24th, 2017

WITH Rs16.7 billion subsidy held up by the government, urea manufacturers are threatening to stop sales. This could create economic and social resentment in rural areas.

The subsidy regime, which generated these dues, ended in June when the government made tax adjustment to keep fertiliser prices low.

According to industry’s claims, the government owes Engro Fertilisers some Rs6.7bn, Fauji Fertiliser Rs6bn and Fatima Fertiliser Rs4bn.

The industry says it can no longer sustain these dues, and that its financial viability would remain volatile and the fertiliser market unstable unless the government pays up.

The accumulation of dues has a background rooted in the typical procedural hiccups of officialdom. The government announced the subsidy in the previous budget, setting aside Rs17.16bn to keep urea prices at Rs1,400 per bag.

This brought down prices by Rs390 on a bag, including a direct subsidy of Rs156, Rs184 relief coming from a cut in general sales tax (GST) from 17 to five per cent and Rs50 concession by the manufacturers.

The reduction of Rs156 per bag, which was expected to cost Rs17.16bn, was to be equally shared by federal and the provincial governments.

Out of the Rs8.58bn provincial share, Punjab was expected to contribute Rs6.26bn (73pc), Sindh Rs1.63bn (19pc), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rs420 million (5pc) and Balochistan Rs250m (3pc).

The trouble started when Sindh and KP — run by PPP and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, respectively — refused to be part of the new subsidy regime to avoid contributing towards political mileage the to PML-N running the federal government.

KP refused to pay its share because it never agreed in the first place and also did not authorise the federal government to deduct its share at source. Sindh also stopped disbursing the subsidy and verifying manufacturers' claims of sales.

So, with two provinces almost out, Punjab also started going slow on the verification of manufacturers' claims for money and the disbursals began to clog up.

The original notification issued by the government clearly stated the disbursal mechanism. It said the subsidy shall be paid after the sale of fertiliser on the basis of sales tax invoice and sales tax returns submitted to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) by the manufacturers.

The manufacturers shall submit invoice-wise details of the subsidised fertilisers sold to the FBR, specifying name of buyers, national tax or computerised national identity card number, description, number of bags sold and other relevant information.

The fertiliser companies shall also forward this information electronically, bifurcating the information on a provincial basis.

The FBR, after verifying the records, shall forward claims to the State Bank of Pakistan within 15 days under intimation to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The manufacturers were then supposed to submit claims on a monthly basis and the SBP was to ensure payment of due subsidy claims within seven working days.

However, the monitoring mechanism, where provinces were cast in the role of monitors with the Ministry of National Food Security and Research leading them, created confusion and delays. Both feared disbursal of billions of rupees on their recommendations, which could cause subsequent questions, and kept deflecting responsibility on each other for payment and its responsibility, taking the system down.

"The industry is in deep trouble for this carryover of dues," said an industry official, who did not want to be named. The matter was taken up at all relevant forums, but the buck didn't stop anywhere, he said.

However, it is also believed that a large share of this subsidy never reaches small farmers. Manufacturers eat up a large chunk, almost a third in some cases.

The food ministry insists that provinces must submit their assessment of sale and price to create the basis for subsidy recommendation. On the other hand, the provinces argue they couldn't do so without going through the relevant record that manufacturers provide with their claims to the ministry.

The ministry should do it on the basis of verifiable sale and tax record, rather than holding provinces responsible. When matter was taken up with the Finance Division, it said the food ministry had the money and authority and the division should only be approached if the ministry ran out of money.

The industry is thus running among them, only to be disappointed and absorbing additional cost of sustaining this loss, the official says.

Khalid Mehmood Khokhar, the president of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, believes that governments are only interested in political mileage, and the word 'subsidy' is best suited to it. Otherwise, they can simplify the system by removing taxes and bringing the cost down, without getting involved in cash transfers and its complicated results.

If the industry comes under any kind of pressure, it inevitably passes on to farmers — whether declared or undeclared. The industry is now getting pinched and so do farmers, only because of wrong political preferences, he says.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347137

FARMERS PROTEST GOVT'S FAILURE IN AGRI SECTOR
Dawn, July 25th, 2017

LAHORE: Farmers have protested the failure of the government to export rice, a large quantity of which is lying in the country.

Chaudhry Nisar, Kissan Board Pakistan president, told a press conference on Monday the government had failed to put the agriculture department under the control of deputy commissioners.

He alleged that the step aimed at using thousands of workers of the department for political motives by the government in the next elections.

He was flanked by Shaukat Chadhar, Haji M Ramzan Arsalan Khakwani and others.

Safdar Naul, Haji Mukhtar, Manzoor Luk and other leaders of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad on the occasion announced joining the KBP.

He also sought quashing all taxes on farm inputs, free electricity for agriculture tubewells, interest-free loans for small farmers and abolishing March 2012 notification of trade with India or they would stage sit-ins outside the assemblies.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347526

GROWERS GET MANGO GRADERS
Dawn, July 25th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani growers have been provided 'mango graders' by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to help boost production and export of the fruit.

At a Mango Gala held on Monday, USAID Mission Director Jerry Bisson and Chairman Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) Dr Yusuf Zafar said that at least thirteen mango farmers received mango graders worth more than $750,000.

Under the project's grant programme, USAID has provided state-of-the-art, custom-made, automated mango graders are being utilised for the first time to grade export quality mangoes during the 2017 season.

"The US government, through USAID, is determined to increase access to new markets for Pakistani mango farmers, while ensuring compliance with international grading standards and export protocols," Mr Bisson said. "We want to make Pakistani mangoes as competitive as they can be in the international markets," he added.

Mr Zafar expressed his appreciation for the generous contribution from the United States in supporting this sector of Pakistan's agriculture industry.

Nepalese Ambassador Sewa Lamsal Adhikari also attended the gala to learn more about the Pakistani mango sector.

The Mango Gala showcased USAID's commitment to supporting Pakistan's mango sector. The event also brought together public and private mango sector stakeholders to discuss export trends and explore new opportunities.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1347395

JUNE DATA: UREA SALES SURGE 79% AHEAD OF SUBSIDY CUT
The Express Tribune, July 25, 2017

KARACHI: Urea off-take stood at 1.06 million tons in June 2017, up 79% year-on-year and 103% month-on-month, according to data released by the National Fertiliser Development Centre.

"The numbers remained in line with expectations," JS Research said in a report on Monday.

Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) sales also came in line with expectations and were recorded at 112,000 tons, an increase of 161% year-on-year and 61% month-on-month.

Cumulatively, in the first six months of 2017, urea off-take showed an increase of 51% year-on-year to 2.75 million tons whereas DAP sales during the period recorded a rise of 21% year-on-year to 590,000 tons.

The industry ended June with an inventory of 1.08 million tons, down 35% year-on-year. Inventory levels are expected to pick up again as Kharif sowing season is going to a close. In June 2017, Fatima Fertilizer remained the star performer with urea sales of 152,000 tons, up 426% year-on-year and 107% month-on-month, followed by Engro Fertilizers with sales of 318,000 tons, up 168% year-on-year and 129% month-on-month.

Exports continued in June as well as all mainstream manufacturers – Fauji Fertilizer Company, Fatima Fertilizer and Engro Fertilizers exported 5,000 tons, 7,000 tons and 43,000 tons respectively.

Going forward, exports would continue, albeit at a slow pace, keeping current export market dynamics into consideration, it added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1465918/june-data-urea-sales-surge-79-ahead-subsidy-cut/

FERTILISER SUBSIDY PROCESS SIMPLIFIED
Dawn, July 30th, 2017

KARACHI: The government has simplified the process for disbursing pending payments to fertiliser manufacturers under the subsidy schemes of 2015-16 and 2016-17.

The decision to this effect was taken at a meeting held on July 25 at the Prime Minister Office between the relevant government officials and Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) to resolve the subsidy issue.

The meeting was chaired by Secretary to the prime minister Fawad Hassan Fawad and also attended by finance and food security secretaries, chairman FBR and chairman FMPAC.

It was decided that the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) would release all the pending payments expeditiously in accordance with originally notified mechanism through the State Bank of Pakistan avoiding any verification processes.

The secretary finance was directed to issue the new notification to ensure timely disbursement of subsidy claims in future.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1348449

PAKISTAN RANKED SEVENTH AMONG STATES GROWING BIOTECH CROPS
Dawn, July 30th, 2017

Faiza Ilyas

KARACHI: With the adoption of insect-resistant (IR) Bt cotton rising to an optimum level in Pakistan last year, stakeholders now look forward to the replication of the adoption percentage for IR biotech maize varieties by farmers for economic gains.

Pakistan stands seventh among the 26 countries growing biotech (Bt) crops in the world. The country had achieved optimal adoption of IR cotton varieties last year, with the adoption reaching 2.9m hectares, equivalent to 97 per cent of the total 3m hectares cotton crop area.

These figures are part of a report recently launched at the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) of Karachi University.

Titled Global Status of Commercialisation Biotech/GM Crops: 2016, the report prepared by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) contains latest information on the subject, global database on the adoption and distribution of biotech crops last year, country situations, trends in approval of biotech crops and future prospects of the technology.

The report says around 725,000 small-holder cotton farmers in Pakistan continued to grow IR cotton varieties in 2016, which was the seventh year of commercial planting since 2010. “The adoption of IR cotton increased from 75pc in 2010 to 97pc last year. This is indicative of farmer satisfaction with Bt technology that may be replicated with the upcoming adoption of biotech maize in the country,” the report adds.

It estimates that the economic gains from biotech crops for Pakistan for the period from 2010 to 2015 was $4.3bn, while it was $398m for 2015 alone.

Identifying factors hampering Bt cotton growth, the report says that supply of substandard and spurious IR cotton varieties and the continued reliance on old IR cotton technology held back desirable cotton output.

The threat of bollworms, especially pink bollworms, the report says, was growing due to farmer’s reluctance for timely insecticide applications. The cotton gains remained low due to repeated infestation of sap-sucking pests such as white fly and leaf hoppers spreading the cotton leaf curl virus in the absence of control measures.

“Despite these, IR cotton has proliferated in cotton growing provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and occupied almost the entire cotton crop hectarage in Pakistan,” the report says.

The National Biosafety Committee of the Federal Ministry of Climate Change had last year approved 32 single biotech cotton varieties out of 119 pending applications.

For the first time, the report says, the committee officially approved the commercial cultivation of single and stacked insect resistant and herbicide tolerant maize varieties developed by Monsanto Pakistan, subject to varietal registration by the Federal Seed Certification and Registration Committee.

“Pakistan planted over 1.2m hectares of maize, roughly producing around 5m tonnes of maize. Adoption of hybrid maize reached 90pc and 10-15pc of total maize area in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, respectively,” the report says.

According to the report, the year 2016 was significant as Nobel laureates released a statement for the first time in support of biotechnology and condemning critics for their critical stance against the technology and Golden Rice, a GM crop that had attracted major controversy in the past.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1348411

RS525.18M DISBURSED UNDER KISSAN PACKAGE
Business Recorder, 30 July 2017

FAISALABAD: Under CM Punjab Kissan Package, the interest free agriculture loans of Rs525.18 million have been distributed among the 7051 small farmers of the district so far and the registration of farmers under e-credit scheme is underway at the land record center of the district. It was revealed during a meeting held here under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani, in which the pace of implementation on CM Kissan Package was reviewed.

Director Agriculture Ch. Abdul Hameed briefed the meeting about the advancement of interest free agriculture loans, registration of farmers under e-credit scheme at departmental action against canal water theft incidents. The meeting was informed that the small farmers would be provided interest free loans of Rs80 billion throughout the Punjab province for which target have been set for registration of 25000 farmers of the district. Under Kissan Package, Rs40,000/= and Rs25,000/= per acre have been provided for the Khareef and Rabi crops respectively and Special Advisory counter have been set up at the land record center to provide free e-pass book to the farmers along with facility of registration. The meeting was informed that committees at tehsil level were working under the supervision of concerned Assistant Commissioner in order to check the canal water theft incidents.

District Public Prosecutor informed the meeting that 146 challans of canal water theft cases had been presented to the courts and 53 cases among these had been decided by the concerned courts. Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani, while reviewing the matters of Kissan Package implementation said that the farmers should be provided all out benefits and proper monitoring was being carried out for ensuring best departmental performance.

He asked the officers of Zari Taraqiati Bank, National Bank, Tameer Bank and Akhuwat Micro Finance to provide the entire data of advancement of loans and applications of farmers under process. He expressed his displeasure over the complaints of canal water theft incidents and directed the irrigation department officers to nominate those staff of members in the FIRs with whose connivance the crime of water stealing was committed. He said that proposals for making the measures against canal water theft more effective be devised for submitting to the government of the Punjab.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/30/3-page/893525-news.html

MINISTRY ASKED TO RELEASE PENDING PAYMENTS OF FERTILIZER INDUSTRY
Business Recorder, 30 July 2017

LAHORE: The prime minister’s office has asked the Ministry of National Food Security & Research (NFS&R) to expeditiously release all the pending payments of fertilizer industry in accordance with original notified mechanism.

The sources said that Secretary to Prime Minister Fawad Hassan Fawad issued the directions at a meeting also attended by Secretary Finance, Secretary FS&R, Chairman FBR and Chairman of the Fertilizer Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council Lt Gen Shafqaat Ahmed ® on July 25, 2017. He also directed the federal secretary finance to issue a new notification on fertilizer subsidy to ensure timely reimbursement of subsidy claims to the industry in future.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/30/3-page/893534-news.html

LOANS TO FARMERS DO WORK IF THE APPROACH IS RIGHT
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 31st, 2017

Mustafa Kamal Mufti

IT'S true that credit alone can't solve all of the farmers' woes. But a lack of credit would only aggravate the problems that farmers, particularly smallholders, face at the moment.

It's a sad reality that production loans provided to farmers sometimes don't work due to underutilisation and misallocation, social and cultural reasons and a lack of support from local shopkeepers. However, to say that timely and need-based loans don't play any role in helping farmers improve their productivity and living standards would be a sweeping generalisation.

There is little doubt that average yields of crops in Pakistan are below potential, and the country fares poorly even when compared to regional peers.

Evidence suggests that extending credit to farmers at rational rates leads to their well-being. The logic is simple: timely and affordable credit allows farmers to invest in the inputs necessary for sowing crops.

Every input that a farmer requires, including high-yield varieties and farm technologies, comes for a price, and a bank loan bundled with farmer education regarding resource utilisation and latest farming practices provides farmers with the independence to invest in such inputs and technologies that can improve yields and quality.

In the absence of such a loan from a financial institution, farmers' requirement for credit doesn't diminish; in fact, it is fulfilled through other informal sources such as arthis (middlemen or private lenders) or loan sharks who offer usurious loans on extremely exploitative terms. As a result, farmers find themselves trapped in a perpetual cycle of debt and poverty.

These loan sharks or informal money lenders have many faces, including local shopkeepers, who sell inferior quality input to farmers as some companies offer higher margins and other incentives to dealers and shopkeepers for selling their products. But such low-quality products hamper farm productivity.

On the other hand, the middleman also fills the financing void by offering quick credit to farmers on exorbitant rates and in return of a deal to purchase output at below-market prices.

It is true that farmers have credit needs that go beyond working capital, such as the need to pay for life events like child birth, and marriage, or for unforeseen events such as a death in the family or to meet other consumption needs such as paying for a child's school fee. However, to assume that working capital needs do not exist or such loan products provided by banks do not perform their desired function is a faulty premise.

Banks can and do offer consumption loan products, such as personal loans, to customers (including farmers) who can meet banks' lending criteria.

Most commercial and microfinance banks have recovery rates on agricultural loans that are just as good as those provided to retail customers and their performance and return exceed that of loans provided to the small and medium enterprises.

Some public sector banks do have above-average bad loans because of structural and operational inefficiencies and because loans from such state-run organisations are often taken as unilateral grants by farmers because of historical precedence of loan write-offs under the nationalised regime.

Rapid improvement in information and communication technology is also increasingly making it easier for banks to monitor if loans are properly utilised.

Moreover, by disbursing loans through mobile wallets banks can limit farmers' loan utilisation by permitting drawdown at certain registered vendors who offer quality input and farm advisory.

This will serve the double benefit by limiting misuse of loans and improving farm output due to the use of quality seeds, fertilisers, technologies and other inputs.

Another effective and promising approach is bundling financial services with real-side interventions, such as farm advisory and extension services.

The provincial extension departments have their own challenges, but this doesn't preclude the important role that financial services have to play. Many banks have started practising innovative lending approaches, such as value chain financing, that offer multiple benefits for all stakeholders.

In particular, farmers benefit from improved yields and better prices for their output which is helping them break away from the vicious poverty trap.

https://www.dawn.com/news/134871

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 17TH TO JULY 23RD 2017
CONTAMINATION-FREE COTTON: PUNJAB GOVT TO TRAIN 416,000 PICKERS
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 17th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

COTTON and its products play a key role in Pakistan's economy as they account for around 60 per cent of the overall exports. But the textile sector has been plagued with the issue of contamination for decades which is one of the major reasons for falling exports.

Contamination is any impurity in cotton which affects crop appearance, value addition, ginning, spinning, dyeing, etc.

Some experts believe that contamination — which may take place at farm level during picking and storage, during transportation, marketing or at ginning level — causes a loss of at least Rs12 billion to growers as it is sold cheap in the market.

In Punjab, which produces around 80pc of the country's cotton, the picking is done manually by women. The best thing about the tradition is that a large number of rural women get jobs. More than Rs5bn is paid to the pickers at the rate of Rs8 per kilogram of picked, clean cotton.

The flip side of the practice is that these women are untrained and the biggest source of contamination. To collect the produce, they use plastic bags or their silk dupattas, whose threads mix with cotton to become an impurity during spinning and dyeing. Their hair fall causes another impurity during all these subsequent processes. A number of other things like pieces of leaves, immature and empty balls, stems, flowers, sticks and weeds, trash and dust also get mixed with cotton.

Punjab is now considering a plan to train growers and provide them with grey cloth for picking and transporting the produce. Under the plan, the agriculture department will train at least 416,000 women cotton-pickers well before the start of the picking season.

“We’re selecting 20 women master trainers for each of the 11 districts in the main cotton belt (south Punjab),” a senior official of the department says. “These women, all from the department, will try to train at least 416,000 pickers by Aug 15.”

It will be one-day training on precautions a picker should take before entering a cotton field. The trainees will also be offered special cotton cloths for free to collect the picked produce instead of using dupattas or plastic bags.

However, a similar programme in 2002 failed because of a lack of interest by the government and inadequate funding.

The Central Cotton Research Institute of Multan has also printed a manual and prepared a video film for the trainers, says Institute Director Dr Sagheer Ahmad, the architect of the training programme.

Cotton also gets contaminated with dust, bird feathers, toffee wrappers and plastic bags during storage at home and while being transported to markets. To prevent impurities at this stage, the department will provide special pieces of cloth for 3,794 donkey-carts and 2,274 tractor trolleys during the upcoming picking season, the official says. More vehicles will be added to the list in the next phase.

Dr Ahmad says cotton growers are also being urged to pay extra to the pickers as an encouragement. He argues that pickers bringing neat and clean cotton deserve to be paid Rs10 instead of the general rate of Rs8 per kg. He also plans a competition among growers to encourage production of quality lint.

However, Hamad Khan Daha, a progressive grower from the Khanewal district, has asked the government to come up with solutions to more critical issues. “The real issue facing cotton growers and the textile industry is the cost of production, which is double in Pakistan as compared to India,” he says. “We can’t compete in the international markets as other countries have fully subsidised their agriculture sectors.”

On the government claims of providing subsidised fertiliser, Javed Iqbal of the Vehari district says this measure is not specific to cotton as the crop uses only 25pc of the fertiliser. “The government needs to take steps to boost the cotton crop as it contributes around 10pc to the gross domestic product and 55pc to the foreign exchange earnings.”

https://www.dawn.com/news/1345806

TRACTORS’ SALE INCREASED BY 70PC IN FY 2016-17

M Rafique Goraya

LAHORE: The production and sales of tractors increased by 70 percent during FY 2016-17 over the corresponding period of 2015-16 as the industry sold 54,992 farm tractors against last year's sales of 33,986 units.

Millat Tractor Ltd sold 34,506 Massey Ferguson tractors against last year's sale of 22,479 pieces from July to June. The sales of Fiat tractor manufactured by Al-Ghazi Tractor Ltd increased from 12,775 to 19,833 pieces during this period.

Executives of the industry told Business Recorder that the two main manufacturers Millat Tractors and Al-ghazi tractors Ltd worked in two shifts to produce 21,770 more tractors to meet the rising demand of the tractors across the country.

They attributed the brisk sale of tractors to the government's pro-local industry policies including reduction of GST from 16 to 5 percent, increased agri-credit loan, subsidy on fertilizer, better prices of agriculture commodities and improved buying power of farmers.

They said that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and construction of farm to market roads have also given a tremendous boost to the depressed tractor industry in Pakistan as farm tractor is being used for multiple purposes in rural areas, as an engine of economic growth.

A large number of farm tractors are also being utilized for the under construction CPEC projects, which are collection of infrastructure projects throughout Pakistan.

Meanwhile the Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (PAMA) has also released data of production and sales of cars, buses, trucks, motor cycles and three wheelers from July 2016 till June 2017.

According to PAMA data, 1,85,783 passenger cars were sold against last year's sales of 1,81,145 vehicles. There was a marginal increase of 4,638 units. The share of 1300 cc and above cars was 93,925 to which Honda civic and city contributed 37,004 cars and Toyota 52,676 cars. Honda cars sales increased from 25,000 to 37,000 in one year.

In bikes and three wheelers category Honda motorcycles sold a record number of 9,60,105 motor cycles against last year's sales of 8,10,539. In all a total of 16,25,080 motor cycles and three wheelers were sold during 2016-17 against 13,58,643 sales of corresponding period of 2015-16.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/18/13-page/889869-news.html

MODERN AGRICULTURE PRACTICES CAN HELP AVOID LOSSES: LCCI

The Express Tribune, July 21st, 2017.

LAHORE: The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has underlined the need for adopting modern technologies in the agriculture sector in an effort to avoid post-harvest losses and enhance crop production.

In a statement issued on Thursday, LCCI President Abdul Basit, Senior Vice President Amjad Ali Jawa and Vice President Muhammad Nasir Hameed Khan stressed that Pakistan had extensive fertile land, but its agriculture sector was suffering because of various factors.

“There is a dire need to add to the crop area as we cannot afford to stay where we are today in terms of crop area and per hectare yield because we are already running well short of per capita food availability,” they said.

Though almost 43% of Pakistan’s labour force depends on agriculture, the yield gap in four major crops is three times compared to best producers in the world such as China and Egypt.

The low yield has contributed to poverty in rural areas besides forcing the country to import agriculture produce to feed its population.

The LCCI office-bearers said this should be an eye-opener that China produced two times more cotton and wheat per hectare and Egypt produced around three times more rice and sugarcane per hectare compared to Pakistan.

Factors that are recommended to improve the yield include large-scale introduction of hybrid seeds and mechanised farming, highly efficient irrigation systems such as drip irrigation and reduction in crop wastage through privately owned storage facilities and cold storage facilities.

They emphasised that Pakistan had a tremendous potential to emerge as biotechnology leader, but to achieve the goal, private sector, scientists, researchers and the government would have to work hand in hand.

They were of the view that Pakistan’s agriculture sector was losing heavily because of insufficient utilisation of biotechnology as magic progress of the sector could only be due to Genetically Modified (GM) crops.

The agriculture sector has always faced two major problems – production per acre is lower than many countries and around 40% of production is wasted post-harvest.

They suggested that federal and provincial governments should give special attention to promoting research and quality crops as green revolution was only possible through genetic engineering.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1462755/modern-agriculture-practices-can-help-avoid-losses-lcci/

WEED CAUSES LOSS OF RS65BN TO MAJOR CROPS: CABB

Khalid Abbas Saif

FAISALABAD: The losses caused by weeds to our major crops are estimated to be about Rs. 65 billion. These losses can be reduced by means of weed prevention, eradication and chemical control, said Dr. Muhammad Sarwar Khan, Director, Center of Agricultural Biochemistry and Biotechnology (CABB), University of Agriculture, Faisalabad.

Chairing a departmental meeting on engineered weed management and perceptions, he said that engineered herbicide tolerance in plants provides a superior mechanism of weed control in crop husbandry using broad spectrum herbicides. Nevertheless, resistance development in plants particularly of weed, and the carcinogenic effects of glyphosate on human beings are reported as implications of herbicide applications.

He said chemically controlling weed is most effective method in the developed world. It constitutes about 55 % of the total pesticides used in these countries. In Pakistan, the herbicides are specifically imported from USA, Europe, Japan, or China and their usage is increasing rapidly. These herbicides are selective in nature and kill weeds with limited damage to crop plants. This also releases thousands of people from the drudgery of hand weeding. Being selective in nature, the use of these herbicides is species-dependent where dose of the chemical is determined, keeping in view the genetic makeup, age, growth rate, morphology, physiology and biochemistry of the plant. Hence, these are used as pre- or post-emergence and specific to broad or narrow leaf pants. Specificity of the herbicides necessitates the development of non-selective broad spectrum herbicides that do not discriminate plants based on their age, growth rate, morphology, physiology and biochemistry. However, use of non-selective herbicides demands a novel technology that allows desired plants to survive while leaving others susceptible.

He said glyphosate is the world leading herbicide as it is affordable and GM crops have been developed with a trait which can tolerate the herbicide dosage. About 80 % of the GM crops have resistance to glyphosate. However due to the over-reliance on glyphosate and glyphosate herbicide resistant crops, weeds are rapidly getting resistant to this class of chemicals, contrary to the pre-roundup ready arena when nearly 400 herbicides with 17 different modes of action were used. Further, global consensus is building due to its health related issues.

In this regard, glufosinate has been introduced in the market as an alternative to glyphosate. Glufosinate kills weeds as a contact herbicide and it must be applied to smaller plants. Development of glufosinate-resistant traits has been reported worldwide in corn, soybean and cotton until recently. Although glyphosate beats it in cost and more restrictive application timing relative to weed size, but it is found to be more advantageous as it kills all weeds and plants that have developed resistance against glyphosate. To add more in this account, no weed has been formally reported as glufosinate-resistant yet. The trait has also been developed in sugarcane in Pakistan, and is being tested for field dose applications.

He said the journey that was started from mechanical methods to chemical control; and then to genetically modified crops with post-emergence application of non-selective herbicides has paid off in the form of controlled losses. However, even today there are losses due to weeds, part of them being due to the evolution of herbicide-resistant weeds and reliance on a single commercial herbicide and limited number of genetically modified crops with diverse herbicide-resistant traits. Further, apart from resistance development in weeds against glyphosate there is an evolving story that glyphosate causes health risks in human beings. So, the scenario can become worse if new herbicides are not developed readily.

He said looking into details both agencies used different approaches to risk assessment. IARC has assessed the cancer hazard, considering the likelihood that a chemical might, at least in some circumstances, cause cancer in humans. Whereas, EFSA is principally concerned with whether there is sufficient confidence that a pesticide will not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment when used following the conditions of its approval. EFSA assessed some studies conducted by industry groups that were excluded from the IARC analysis. The IARC team looked only at evidence that is in the public domain and available to independent scientists to review (For details; an article by Daniel Cressey in Nature issue November 13, 2015).

He said herbicide resistant crops have a great potential in the simplification of weed management. Handled judiciously, these crops may be beneficial to the environment but these should be carefully evaluated prior to releasing into a cropping system, especially when GM crop possess weedy characters or may outcross to related weeds. Further, extensive and continuous use of a single herbicide should be avoided to exclude the possibilities of resistance development in plants and precautionary measures should be taken to safeguard human health.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/20/13-page/890525-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 10TH TO JULY 16TH 2017
SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 10th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

Locally produced seeds are now more easily available for crop cultivation than before which is why the yield of some major and minor crops is on the rise.

Officials of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNSFR) say that local production of seeds exceeded the target in the last fiscal year thanks to a revamp of the seed business's regulatory regime.

Locally available certified seeds of selected major and minor crops reached close to 520,000 tonnes in the first nine months of FY17 against the full year target of 411,000 tonnes, and up 29pc from 402,000 tonnes in the same period of FY16, officials say.

"Once final figures trickle in, seed availability in full FY17 would cross the 600,000-tonne mark," an official of the MNSFR told this writer.

Authorities take into account seeds of wheat, cotton, paddy, maize, pulses, oilseeds and seeds of vegetables, fodders and potatoes for calculating the total local output of certified seeds.

Despite higher than targeted local production of certified seeds, about 39,000 tonnes of certified seeds of fodder, maize, potato and vegetables had to be imported to meet farmers' requirements.

Paddy growers and oilseed growers also had to import a small amount of seeds (less than one thousand tonnes), official stats reveal.

"Larger local output of seeds saved millions of dollars that would have been spent on additional imports (of seeds) at a time when the country's trade deficit is already very high," said another official of the MNSFR.

Officials say that the enforcement of Seed (Business Regulation) Rules in September 2016 has provided an enabling environment for production of certified seeds in the private sector.

They say that other corollary measures taken by the MNSFR — like making testing and sampling of seeds more transparent — also had a hand in boosting local seed production. Within some years, the import of certified seed shall come down significantly, they claim.

But this does not mean that our growers would stop using uncertified or unregistered seeds altogether.

For that to happen, the current output of certified seeds will have to grow at a double-digit rate for many years to come. The reason is that our total requirement of seeds from all sources (for the above-listed major and minor crops) is about 1.8m tonnes against total local production of about 600,000 tonnes.

Pakistan's seed sector remained neglected for a long time and it was only two years ago that the authorities revisited obsolete laws governing the seeds business. The Seed Act of 2015 was promulgated in July 2015, setting the stage for a total overhaul of seeds regulatory framework.

Later on, framing of the Seed (Business Regulations) Rules 2016 streamlined the working of private seed companies. Besides, both federal and provincial governments also ramped up efforts to boost production of certified seeds in the public sector.

Still, less than 20pc of the locally produced certified seeds come from the public sector, growers and sources in the seed industry say.

They say that apart from a lack of investment in development of seed varieties of key crops, scant infrastructure for proper storage of seeds and missing focus on spreading awareness among farmers about seed preservation are key reasons for the low output of certified local seeds.

The Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) and other federal and provincial institutions continue to conduct research on seeds of key crops, often with the technical assistance of foreign agencies.

Periodically, they also succeed in developing better and high-yielding varieties, some of which also come under commercial cultivation and lead to greater output of crops.

But development of seeds and ensuring their sufficient availability for wide-scale commercial use are two different things.

"Lots of growers keep demanding newly developed seeds only to be told by the authorities that they don't have enough stocks. Private seed companies complain that they are not being involved in commercial production of newly developed seeds," laments an official of the Sindh Abadgar Board.

More than 500 seed companies are registered in the country, more than 85pc of them in Punjab and 10pc plus in Sindh. But just around 100 are actively involved in seed business, says an official of Seed Association of Pakistan.

After enactment of the Seed Act, the private sector can produce basic seeds and can also establish accredited seed testing laboratories of their own.

Seed companies, particularly those of foreign origin are likely to invest in both areas. That can give a real boost to seed development and output as currently the market remains flooded with fake and sub-standard seeds of all crops.

Officials say that the Plant Breeder Rights law that was promulgated towards the end of 2016 should also be helpful in further development of seed industry adding that in the presence of this law foreign companies would feel tempted to invest in the seed sector.

Earlier, companies were unsure of the legal protection of the seed varieties developed by them. Chinese and American companies have already shown an interest in investing in this area, they say.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1344388

PUNJAB'S NEW PLAN CAN SAVE MILLIONS OF TONNES OF WHEAT
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 10th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

PUNJAB, without doubt, is Pakistan's food basket. It produces nearly three quarters of the country's wheat, almost 70pc of rice and more than 80pc of maize, according to the Punjab Economic Research Institute.

But here's the catch: the province lacks the capacity to properly store these staples. This results in higher post-harvest losses and puts growers at a disadvantage.

According to a document of the Ministry of Food Security and Research, Pakistan's preventable post-harvest grain losses stand at 20 million tonnes a year, enough to feed 17m people (almost two-thirds of Karachi's population).

Though there are no exact figures for Punjab's storage capacity both in public and private sectors, the State Bank of Pakistan's data does shed some light on the large gap between the country's public sector storage facilities and grain yield.

The data suggests that nearly 16m tonnes of wheat and around 4m tonnes of rice and maize need proper storage facilities.

As the Punjab government lacks money and other resources to develop such facilities, the authorities, particularly the food and agriculture departments, are working to woo private investors, and even farmers, to increase storage.

Political and administrative authorities are also trying to take farmers on board and make them stakeholders in the initiatives the government is planning to overcome grain losses.

The initiatives will also improve the bargaining position of growers so that they get better prices for their produce.

The agriculture department is working on a warehousing concept under which farmers with sufficient land are encouraged to build grain stores that are larger than their needs so that they may rent out the facility to nearby small farmers.

The warehouses will be built under the public-private partnership (PPP) model, with the major share going to the landowner. The government will provide them with technical support in building and maintaining warehouses and the grain stored there, says an official privy to the development.

Those who will place their harvested crops or processed agricultural commodities in these warehouses will be offered receipts under a State Bank facility. These receipts will be acceptable as collateral to secure bank loans.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Secretary General Mian Umair says Punjab’s Law Minister Rana Sanaullah and the chief and agriculture secretaries are inviting selected farmers for briefings on the new farm warehousing concept and are seeking their input on the likely initiative.

However, Mr Umair says that though the concept seems attractive, it needs to explain certain aspects. For instance, how will it help settle likely disputes between the warehouse owners or contractors and the clients, for political rivalries and biradary differences that exist in almost each village?

To overcome such issues, an agriculture department official says, various measures are being considered. For example, the proposed warehouses will not be larger than a particular size so that there is more than one warehouse in an area to accommodate various groups.

Meanwhile, the food department has invited bids from private investors to construct steel silos to store 400,000 tonnes of wheat.

The department stores 2m tonnes of wheat in the open using a cover-and-plinth storage system which results in a qualitative and quantitative loss of thousands of tonnes of produce because of various factors.

The project was earlier launched in 2011 with financial and technical assistance of the International Finance Corporation, a World Bank unit that helps the private sector in developing countries.

The United States Agency for International Development also extended $1.5m to ensure 4m tonnes of strategic wheat storage and export of the rest of the produce.

But officials say the bidding was scuttled due to a change in priorities of the political government and indifference of some top bureaucrats.

As for the current plan, bids have been invited to construct 10,000-tonne silos in the first phase at 40 different points located within a one-kilometre radius of the existing temporary wheat godowns.

Interested investors will build and maintain the silos and the government will pay them rent for using the facility. The facility will then be taken to all 200 temporary godowns in the next phase.

Mr Umair of the Kissan Ittehad believes that, if truly implemented, the initiatives may help stabilise farm market prices as growers may retain their yields until a better price is available.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1344385

PAKISTAN NOMINEE ELECTED CHAIRPERSON OF FAO
Dawn July 11, 2017
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan`s nominee has been elected as the independent chairperson of the Council of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Foreign Of fice said on Monday.

Pakistan nominated Khalid Mehboob for the position. He was one of the six candidates for the post. The other candidates were from Albania, Bosnia, Cyprus, Slovakia, and Indonesia. Mr Mehboob is the Alternative Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the FAO. He is currently chairman of the FAO Finance Committee.

He won the election bagging 64 votes. The election was held on Friday on the occasion of the FAO`s governing conference. His tenure will run up till 2019.

Meanwhile, Pakistan`s Permanent Representative to the UN Environment Programme, Raza Bashir Tarar, has been unanimously re-elected as vice chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives Bureau from the Asia Pacific Group.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=11_07_2017_005_005

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 2ND TO JULY 9TH 2017

NEW VARIETIES TO KEEP SUGARCANE OUTPUT HIGH
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, July 3rd, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

Wider use of high-yield varieties coupled with better farming techniques and some progress in farm mechanisation has boosted sugarcane production from 65.5m tonnes in 2016 to peak 73.6m tonnes in 2017.

This is for the first time that cane output has exceeded 70m tonnes mark. Progressive cane growers say and much of the credit for this remarkable feat goes to use of high yielding varieties including Thatta-10 and LRK-2001 in Sindh and CPF-246 and CPF-247 in Punjab.

In May this year, Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (Parc) approved for commercial cultivation two new varieties developed at its research centre in Thatta. Once farmers begin to use these varieties (Thatta-326 and Thatta-2109) on a wide scale, the output of sugarcane would rise further. The two varieties, evolved through exotic fuzz of the bio-parental cross obtained from Louisiana, US, have high yield potential. Earlier in March, Punjab agriculture department had approved three new varieties i.e. HS-240, CPF-213 and CP-77-400.

All these varieties are said to be more resistant to disease and their potential yields are much higher than those already being used by farmers across Pakistan, officials say.

Officials say that experiments carried out in last one year at the sugar research centre of Thatta have established that locally collected sugarcane fuzz or true seed of one variety can be used for developing a higher-yield new variety after cross breeding with true seeds of a different variety.

They say the government is trying to involve the private sector in sugarcane research programmes under public-private partnership with local and foreign institutions shore up financial and technical resources required for conducting research.

Officials and growers say in addition to wider use of finer varieties of sugarcane in Sindh, Punjab and KP, improved ratoon or stubble cropping, better weed and disease control, increased availability of irrigation water and fertigation (or uniform application of fertiliser mixed with irrigation water) led to higher production in FY17.

Besides, use of more efficient harvesting machinery reduced post-harvest losses and thus boosted net output. "A number of cane growers in Sindh, Punjab and KP now use mini sugarcane harvesters that can reap up to five tonnes of canes per hour and their fuel consumption is also low," says a progressive can growers from Sindh.

"Similarly, whole stick sugarcane harvester and trash shredder are now in wider operation than a few years ago. Use of this machine is good in that it saves you from the hassle and consequent loss of output in separate harvesting of canes and shredding cane trash."

Authorities have fixed sugarcane production target for 2017-18 at 68.517m tonnes assuming that the crop would be cultivated over 1.1642m hectares and it would yield a national average of 58,824 tonnes per hectare.

Whereas the targeted area to be brought under cultivation is apparently realistic the projected national average yield is quite conservative and it'll l hopefully be exceeded, progressive cane growers say.

In 2016-17, sugarcane was sown over an area of 1.217m hectares, up 7.6pc from the previous year's 1.131m hectares, according to provisional official estimates. This increased area under cultivation plus a higher national average yield, 60.4 tonnes in FY17, up 4.4pc from about 57.9 tonnes in FY17, resulted in an all-time high output of 73.6m tonnes sugarcane in the last fiscal year.

(The latest Suparco report puts sugarcane output estimate even higher—82.6m tonnes but then it also shows the area under cultivation higher at 1.378m hectares).

The consequent increase in sugar output (to 7.1m tonnes up from 5.4m tonnes a year ago) amid lack of proper planning on exports created a sugar glut.

Millowners sitting on huge unsold stocks of sugar have allegedly blocked payments to cane suppliers. "Anticipating that this situation might force many cane growers to switch over to other crops and being mindful of the perils of another sugar glut next year, authorities have set a lower output target for 2017-18," explains an official of Agri Forum Pakistan.

Officials and growers attribute a larger area under cultivation of sugarcane in FY17 chiefly because cotton growers, upset with the previous year's output decline, switched over to cane cultivation.

"Cane cultivation is more profitable than cotton because costs of inputs of sugarcane are lower than that of cotton be it certified seeds or fertilisers or the labour employed in harvesting. And another reason is prices of sugar have risen very fast in last 10 years or so enabling sugar millers to pay premiums on sugarcane with higher sucrose content," says a Sindh-based cane grower.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1342852

FARMERS FARE BETTER DUE TO SUBSIDY ON UREA
The Express Tribune, July 3rd, 2017

KARACHI: The government's subsidy on urea has made farmers better off by Rs100 billion during July 2016 to March 2017 compared to the same period of previous year, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) calculations.

The support significantly improved the output of important crops like cotton, sugarcane, maize and rice during the first nine months (Jul-Mar) of fiscal year 2016-17 (FY17).

Important crops – wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize and cotton – have a share of 23.85% in the overall agriculture sector.

A typical grower involved in cultivation of important crops saved Rs2,485 per hectare on urea and Rs3,437 per hectare on di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) during the first nine months of FY17, according to the SBP estimates.

A combination of cash subsidy, reduction in sales tax and voluntary reduction in prices by manufacturers consolidated the recovery in fertiliser off-take in FY17. Urea and DAP sales surged by 18.8% and 11.1% respectively in Rabi season 2016-17 compared to the corresponding period of previous year.

Credit off-take also posted a steady gain while shortfall in water availability during Rabi 2016-17 was the only impeding factor that hit the sector during the period under review, according to the SBP's third quarterly report 2016-17 on the state of the economy.

The disbursement of agriculture credit during July to March 2016-17 was observed to be 23% higher compared to the previous year.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17 released in May 2017, Prime Minister's Kisan Package together with other relief measures yielded positive results for the agriculture sector. Due to better performance of important crops agriculture sector, contributing 19.5% to overall GDP of Pakistan, achieved its targeted growth rate of 3.5% during FY17. After an embarrassing slowdown in agriculture growth (0.27%) in 2016, the government decided to incentivise the sector through different schemes and the effort paid off this year.

Important crop segment posted a growth of 4.1% during the first nine months of FY17 compared to a contraction of 5.5% last year.

Apart from agriculture, industrial sector posted a slower growth of 5% in FY17 compared to a much healthier increase of 5.8%. However, just like the better performance of agriculture sector, services sector showed a growth of 6% compared to 5.5% in the period under review.

Poor performance of agriculture sector led to low GDP growth last year, however, this year it was the agriculture sector that mainly helped the country post 5.3% GDP growth rate – the highest in a decade – in FY17.

The real culprit that brought down the agriculture growth rate last year was the cotton crop. However, this year cotton crop posted a significant growth rate of 7.6% compared to a negative growth rate of 29% last year.

Sugarcane crop also showed a significant improvement in FY17 as it posted a growth of 12.4% compared to 4.2% in the previous year. Similarly, maize posted a growth of 16.3% compared to 6.8% last year.

Rice also recorded mentionable growth of 0.7% compared to a negative growth of 2.9%. However, wheat crop which showed a reasonable growth rate of 2.2% last year, posted a growth of just 0.5% in FY17.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1448858/farmers-fare-better-due-subsidy-urea/

FERTILISER SALES RESUME AFTER SUBSIDY ASSURANCE
Dawn, July 5th, 2017

KARACHI: Fertiliser manufacturers on Tuesday decided to resume sales of urea after the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Food Security and Research gave an assurance to issue a subsidy notification within the next 10 days.

The subsidy notification has faced procedural delays by concerned ministries and had to be issued before June 30, 2017 for disbursement of new subsidy scheme announced in budget 2017-18. The industry had earlier decided to stop the sales of urea. The industry hopes the government would fulfill its commitment and devise a simplified way of subsidy disbursement, a press release said.

Fertiliser prices in Pakistan remained capped, due to the subsidy programme – a costly and tedious exercise for the government and the fertiliser industry.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1343215

UREA SALES RESUME ON GOVT ASSURANCE
The Express Tribune, July 5th, 2017.

LAHORE: Fertiliser manufacturers will resume sales after receiving assurances of subsidy notification being issued by the ministries of finance and food security & research along with simplification of the claims verification process.

A sum of Rs27.96 billion was allocated for subsidies in the recently announced federal budget after which prices were capped by the government. However, neither of the aforementioned ministries issued notifications for initiation of the subsidy scheme due to which producers of urea, the most commonly used and produced fertiliser, suspended sales to farmers pending official recognition of the scheme

Apart from procedural delays in issuance of the notification, the process for verifying sales and subsidy claims was also deemed tedious since it was spread over several levels including physical verification by provincial officials.

In light of the importance of the fertiliser industry to national output, both directly and indirectly, the government has promised issuance of the notification within ten days. The verification process has also been simplified by limiting it to cross-checking sales with general sales tax (GST) returns filed by the companies.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is expected to take the lead in the latter task with the new leadership expected to facilitate the process. A backlog of Rs20 billion subsidy claims under the previous scheme still haunts the Ministry of Food Security along with causing cash flow problems for companies due to delayed payments.

Fertiliser prices in Pakistan are generally set at subsidised rates by the government, in accordance with similar policies of regional countries, to enhance agricultural production and provide relief to farmers. The policy, however, is a costly affair and consumes a significant portion of precious federal revenues which on a per capita basis are lower compared to regional governments.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1450361/urea-sales-resume-govt-assurance/

RS 100 CASH SUBSIDY TO KEEP UREA PRICES BELOW RS 1,400 PER BAG
Mushtaq Ghumman

Business Recorder, July 5th, 2017

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research has notified provision of cash subsidy of Rs 100 per bag on urea fertilizer aimed at keeping urea prices below Rs 1,400 per bag.

The estimated amount of subsidy for FY 2016-17 is Rs 11.54 billion which will be shared by the Federal and the Provincial Governments on 50:50 basis. The provincial contribution based on historical off-take pattern of urea will be as follows : (i) Punjab, 73 percent share, Rs 4.2121 billion;(ii) Sindh, 19% share, Rs 1.0963 billion;(iii) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 5% share, Rs 0.2885 billion; and (iv) Balochistan, 3 percent share, Rs 0.1731 billion. The total financial impact of subsidy would be Rs 5.77 billion.

According to the notification, a special account titled “subsidy on urea fertilizer” is already opened in the State Bank of Pakistan that will be used for continuation of the scheme. Initially, the Federal and the Provincial Governments will deposit 50% of their respective shares of subsidy in the Special Account. The remaining 50 percent share will be deposited after utilization of 80 percent of the funds initially deposited.

The Provincial Governments may also indicate their consent for at source deduction of their share by the Federal Government if so required. The amount so deducted will be deposited in the Special Account. The scheme will remain in force during 2017-18 or till the amount available in the Special Account is exhausted.

The notification says that all manufacturers of urea fertilizer registered with the Federal Board of Revenue under Sales Tax regime will be eligible for receiving subsidy under this scheme. Manufacturers will pack fertilizers according to the design given by the Government showing clearly retail price of Rs 1400and subsidy marketing monograms. Annual sale of urea by manufacturers will not exceed 115.4 million bags in 2017-18.

The subsidy disbursement mechanism will be as follows: (i) subsidy will be disbursed @ Rs 100/50 Kg bag to the manufacturers of urea fertilizer by SBP;(ii) subsidy will be paid after the sale of bagged fertilizer on the basis of Sales Tax Invoice and Sales Tax Returns submitted by the manufacturers;(iii) the facility shall be extended by the SSP on production of the following documents by the manufacturers concerned: (a) Sales Tax invoice duly attested by FBR-(b) sales receipts to dealers/agents-(c) cargo receipts and (d) application/undertaking on the attached format.

Release of amount of subsidy will be ensured within 15 working days of submission of claims after generating Sales Tax invoice. Necessary details comprising names of manufacturers (place of business) quantities, destinations and value etc will be maintained by SBP and reported to Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Finance and the Provincial Governments.

Ministry of National Food Security and Research will co-ordinate and monitor implementation of the scheme with the assistance of provincial governments who will be responsible for strict monitoring to ensure that fertilizer is sold at the notified prices. Fertilizers manufacturers will ensure wider public awareness about the fertilizer prices. They will also launch media coverage through print and electronic sources for this purpose.

Representatives from Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Ministry of Industries and Production, and National Fertilizer Development Centre will assist the State Bank of Pakistan on technical issues. Fines will be imposed on the dealers/agents if they fail to meet the performance requirements of the scheme. The manufacturers would immediately cancel the dealership if a dealer or sub-dealer is found to overcharge and shall pay a fine of 20% of the total sales receipts. The Federal Government will have the right to conduct third party audit of payment of subsidies if so required.

Meanwhile, fertilizer manufacturers have decided to resume sales of urea after Ministry of Finance and Ministry of national Food Security & Research have given assurance to issue subsidy notification within next 10 days. The Subsidy Notification has faced procedural delays by concerned Ministries as that had to be issued before 30 June 2017 for disbursement of new subsidy scheme announced in budget 2017-18. Thus the industry had earlier decided to stop the sales of Urea. The industry hopes that the Government will fulfill its commitment and devise a simplified way of subsidy disbursement.

The crisis escalated after the newly announced subsidy was disowned by the Ministry of National Food Security & Research which did not issue a follow up notification. It is learnt that unnecessary verification process is likely to be done away with, thus relying mainly on GST returns, filed by the companies. FBR, with new leadership is expected to facilitate the process, thus helping the industry which is one of the highest contributors to the national exchequer.

The backlog of Rs 20 billion subsidy claims of previous scheme remains still a headache for Ministry of National Food Security and Research, and financial burden of delayed payments has already caused serious concerns for the fertilizer industry. Under these circumstances, the manufacturer companies had been reluctant to participate in the subsidy scheme, which is channeled to reach to the farmers through the producers. Fertilizer prices in Pakistan remained capped, due to the subsidy programme – a costly and tedious exercise for the government and the fertilizer industry.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/07/20170705194878/

COTTON VERSUS SUGARCANE OUTPUT
7 July 2017
Successive Pakistani administrations, aware of the contribution of cash crops to gross domestic product (GDP) and exports set an attractive support price to ensure that those crops that contribute significantly to the economy are not deemed unprofitable by farmers due to the prevailing domestic and international market conditions. In this context, cotton contributes one percent to GDP and 5.2 percent to agriculture value-addition as well as exports while sugar contributes an estimated 0.7 percent to GDP and 3.4 percent to agriculture value-addition.

In this context, it is relevant to note that several extremely prominent political families, including the family of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and that of former President Asif Ali Zardari, have invested heavily in the sugar industry which, critics claim, is the reason behind its high support price even when there is a glut in sugar stocks as is the case at present.

The Economic Survey 2016-17 shows a disturbing trend with respect to the output of cotton. In 2013-14, the acreage under cotton cultivation declined by 2.5 percent in comparison to the year before with a production decline of 2 percent though yield rose by 0.6 percent. In 2014-15, area under cultivation rose by 5.5 percent, output rose by 9.3 percent and yield increased by 3.6 percent; in 2015-16, area under cultivation of cotton declined by 2 percent, output by 29 percent and yield plummeted by a whopping 27.4 percent which should have sent alarm bells ringing in the corridors of the Ministry of Finance. In 2016-17, the Survey with available data for the first nine months of the year notes a 14.2 percent decline in the area under cotton cultivation but projects, albeit unrealistically, an increase in output of 7.6 percent and a yield rise of 25.4 percent.

Area under cultivation of sugar as per the Survey increased by 7.6 percent in 2016-17 with a projected output increase of 12.4 percent and a yield of 4.4 percent due to a shift in area under cultivation “from other competitive crops facing frequent distress, on account of pest attacks.” Any surplus sugar stocks account for the industry seeking approval for exports which has been granted by the Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet headed by the Finance Minister in recent months subject to the proviso that domestic price does not rise as a consequence.

Be that as it may, a Business Recorder exclusive noted that Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar during a discussion on deregulating the price of sugarcane announced a support price for farmers that would be paid by the government in the event that farmers' cotton is left unsold. The Textile Ministry, it was further reported, has proposed a support price for seed cotton of 3000 rupees per 40 kg, a crop insurance scheme and a ban on imports at the time of arrival/harvest of the crop as it would provide the necessary incentives to farmers to grow cotton instead of sugarcane.

However, these proposals have not yet been approved by the Finance Minister and it is unclear whether he has taken other measures to ensure that cotton crop is made attractive enough for the farmers so that they do not feel compelled to divert area under cultivation to sugarcane (which has registered a rise in output by 33 percent over the past four years) and maize (registering a rise of 51 percent during the past four years).

Secretary Textile Ministry told Business Recorder that area under cotton crop has increased in the current season and further contended that this was due to stringent efforts and campaign by the Ministry – stringent efforts and campaign is hardly likely to achieve the desired results unless backed by appropriate policy measures which have yet to be announced. One would urge the federal finance ministry to take cognizance of these issues besetting the country's farmers and announce appropriate measures in consultation with the Textile Ministry and other stakeholders.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/07/20-page/887107-news.html

COTTON SOWING TARGET MISSED BY WHOPPING 12PC
Business Recorder, 9 July 2017

Tahir Amin

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has missed the cotton sowing target by a wide margin of 12 percent in the current crop season, which would compromise the production target of 14.04 million bales set for 2017-18.

Official sources at the Ministry of Textile Industry revealed to Business Recorder that cotton has been sown on 6.778 million acres against the target of 7.68 million acres. Cotton crop prospects for the current season (2017-18) are not very bright and the production is expected to remain at around 13 million bales.

Uncertainty of cotton prices, increased sugarcane cultivation in the cotton areas, and shortage of water in cotton sowing areas were some of the main factors responsible for failure to meet the target, sources added.

The government revised the cotton production target downward and set it at 14.04 million bales for 2017-18, after missing the production target of 14.1 million bales for 2016-17 by around 25 percent.

The Federal Committee on Cotton (FCC) fixed the cotton area and production target for the year 2017-18 according to which Punjab was expected to grow cotton on 5.97 million acres and produce 10 million cotton bales, Sindh on 1.606 million acres was to produce 4 million cotton bales, Balochistan was to grow cotton on 0.093 million acres and produce 0.038 million bales and Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa had targeted to sow cotton on 0.00247 million acres and produce 0.002 million bales of cotton.

According to the official figures, cotton has been sown on 6.778 million acres of land in the current season across the country against 6.05 million acres during the same period of last year. The sources said that a decline in cotton sowing was recorded in Punjab which was the major cotton producing province. Punjab which produces about 70 percent of the total cotton crop was hit hard with only 5.3 million acres under cotton cultivation against the target of 5.97 million acres – 88 percent of the target for the current season but higher by 18 percent compared to 4.48 million acres during the previous season.

Cotton Commissioner Dr Khalid Abdullah said that sugarcane crop had overtaken the cotton rich areas of the province including Rahim Yar Khan, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh and Lodhran. Cotton sowing also declined due to lower price of cotton nationally and internationally during the last four years that discouraged growers and they opted to cultivate maize, sugarcane and rice in some districts of Punjab due to their better market returns.

Cotton Commissioner said it would take around 3-4 years to recover cotton areas. However, he said that due to better availability of certified seed and dry weather cotton sowing improved in the current season (2017) compared to the last season 2016.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/07/09/1-page/886896-news.html

August 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 28 TH TO AUGUST 31 ST 2017

PUNJAB HOPES SOIL HEALTH CARDS WILL BEAR FRUIT

Dawn, August 28, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

Keeping in view these facts, the Punjab government initiated a plan last year for issuing farmers with “soil health cards”, which will have information about the deficiencies in the soil and the amount of fertilisers needed to create a balance in the soil texture for getting a better crop.

The soil health cards will provide farmers with information about the soil quality of their respective pieces of lands and how much fertiliser should be used for a particular crop.

Costing more than Rs4.176 billion, the five-year project was initiated last year. In the first year (2016-17), around 560,000 soil samples were collected, covering 20 per cent area of the province.

A total of 13 parameters have been set for analysing the soil samples, says Dr Mehdi Munawwar of the Soil Fertility Research Institute, Lahore.

"Eight parameters — salinity, pH, organic matter, phosphorus, potassium, calcium carbonate, saturation percentage and texture — are analysed at the district laboratories while eight divisional laboratories analyse the percentage of zinc, copper, iron, manganese and boron in the soil," he says.

Each of the 32 district labs can analyse 22,000 samples and each divisional lab can analyse 74,000 samples a year, adds Dr Mehdi.

Quoting Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmood, an official of the extension directorate says that just by adopting the recommended doses of fertiliser in accordance with the soil analysis of his/her land, farmers may get at least 120 kilograms to 360kg per acre more wheat without bearing extra costs.

An estimate shows that if 70pc of the total 17 million acres of land under wheat cultivation in Punjab shifts to the adoptability of soil-sample based recommended doses of fertiliser, the province will be able to reap 1.285m tonnes more produce at the minimum rate of 120kg per acre increase in yield.

For soil sampling, 28m cultivable acres of land of the province, excluding the four Potohar districts in the Rawalpindi division, have been divided into grids, each comprising 10 acres, Dr Mehdi says. One sample is to be collected from each grid, totalling 2.8m samples.

However, the number of samples may increase at the completion of the project because the authorities have decided to cover each farmer even if he holds less than 10 acres of land or if there are drastic production variations in different areas of a grid.

The standard set for collecting soil samples from the Attock, Chakwal, Rawalpindi and Jhelum districts of Potohar is that where there is at least five acres of land are levelled, Dr Mehdi says, adding that so far 17,000 samples have been analysed in the Rawalpindi division.

On keeping the data foolproof, he says a member of the field staff carrying a smartphone with a specific AgriSmart app would visit a farmer of a specific village, record his/her computerised national identity card (CNIC) number as well as cell phone number, note longitude and latitude of the piece of land in the grid, ask the farmer about the yield of last three crops, take his/her photo after obtaining consent and would send it to the lab through the mobile application.

The soil sample thus collected would be deposited with the relevant district's lab under the CNIC number.

After analysis under 13 parameters at the district and divisional labs, the soil health card detailing information/deficiencies in the specific soil is issued to the farmer concerned with free advisory service offer on use of fertiliser for optimal farm output.

This data will soon be available on the internet too from anywhere in the world as a Geographic Information System is being installed for the purpose, he says.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1354362

PUNJAB KISSAN PACKAGE: LOANS WORTH RS 580 MILLION DISBURSED AMONG 7,173 FARMERS

Business Reocorder, August 28, 2017

Under the CM Punjab Kissan Package, interest free agriculture loans of Rs 580 million have been disbursed to 7,173 farmers of the district through E-credit scheme. This was informed during a meeting of District Agriculture Advisory Committee which was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani.

Director Agriculture Chaudhry Abdul Hameed briefed the meeting about the incentive being provided under Kissan package and departmental measures being taken for the progress and development of the agriculture sector. The meeting was informed that the agriculture loan of Rs 193 million have been provided to the 1352 farmers by the ZTBL while National Bank advanced loan of Rs 100 million to the 809 farmers.

Similarly Tameer Bank provided Rs 28 million to the 475 farmers and loan of Rs 258.70 million were provided to the 4537 farmers through the Akhuwat Micro Finance. It was informed that 14230 farmers had been registered in the district under E credit scheme upto 30th June, 2017 while target had been fixed to register 10340 farmers under E Credit scheme during the current financial year.

Deputy Commissioner directed the representatives of banks for providing details of pending applications of the farmers for seeking the agriculture loans and said that no application should be delayed without any justification. He directed the concerned departments for playing active role to provide the benefits of CM Kissan Package to the farmers. He stressed upon controlling the canal water theft and providing the better facilities to the farmers at land record centers.

He said that the awareness programs for the tillers should be continued to apprise them of the modern technology of cultivation for raising the production of crops.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/08/20170828213049/

EXPERTS FOR FULLY OPERATIONAL OF ‘PLANT BREEDERS’ RIGHTS ACT
Business Recorder, August 29, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The government should ensure that the legal provisions of the “Plant Breeders’ Rights Act 2016 (PBR)” become fully operational and breeders, research institutes and seed companies begin to capture the true value of their research efforts, encouraging investment in latest plant breeding technologies.

Experts told Business Recorder here on Monday that the law protecting plant breeders’ rights was enacted late last year, in line with the federal government’s commitment to enhance agricultural productivity by promoting research, innovation and technology. The law provides much needed protection to individual farmer and commercial breeding operations, allowing for greater investment in research and development of latest plant varieties.

By allowing clear ownership of the intellectual property to the developer of a new plant variety, the “Plant Breeders’ Rights Act 2016 (PBR)” has addressed a key failing of the previous legal frameworks.

However, effective implementation poses the most formidable challenge in the months to come. Whereas the law provides the foundation for subsequent action and enforcement, details around the exact working and implementation of the law will need to be defined through subordinate rules.

Furthermore, the necessary institutional arrangement along with adequate resource allocation will also be required to ensure that the legal provisions of the Act are fully operational and breeders, research institutes and seed companies begin to capture the true value of their research efforts.

Dr Muhammad Afzal, Executive Director at CropLife Pakistan expressed similar views, explaining that in order to achieve the overarching goal of the PBR 2016 Act, the government will have to commit adequate resources for its implementation.

He remained optimistic about the implementation of the law in letter and in spirit, calling it a key milestone in strengthening legitimate rights of the local plant breeders and incentivize the international agencies for development of a vibrant local seed industry, in the country. “Once fully implemented, PBR 2016 Act will greatly incentivize investment in latest plant breeding technologies”, he added.

Protection of propriety knowledge is central to the sustainability of meaningful investment in research and development. Therefore, plant breeding is a fundamental part of the agriculture value chain and has an important role to play in terms of developing seed varieties that meet various considerations, including crop productivity, climate change, resource scarcity and pest attack.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/29/4-page/902347-news.html

SUBSIDY NON-PAYMENT IRKS FERTILISER MAKERS
Dawn, August 30, 2017

KARACHI: The Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) said on Tuesday despite the directives of the Prime Minister’s Office to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) almost a month ago, so far no headway has been made in the release of pending amounts.

In a statement, the council said billions of rupees in subsidy payments are stuck due to red tape and institutional lethargy.

On July 24, in a high-level meeting chaired by Secretary to PM, Fawad Hassan Fawad, it was directed that 80 per cent of the total subsidy claims would be immediately released and remaining 20pc would be paid within three months after third party validation.

The Finance Division has already released the requisite amount. However the payments are still pending with the official excuse being ‘non-availability of funds’, the statement added.

Similarly, for future subsidy mechanism, the government has included an unnecessary restrictive clause in the scheme where the National Tax Number (NTN) of every fertiliser dealer is required, the statement said.

This clause makes the scheme non-viable as it ignores the fact that majority (over 90pc) of smaller dealers are not registered with the taxation authorities and do not have NTNs, the association maintained.

"Moreover, the subsidy claims are based on sales tax which has no relationship with the NTN. Hence, such a step may ultimately hamper the distribution of urea denying the subsidy-benefits to the farmers," the council statement added.

The ministry has still not issued the Terms of Reference (ToRs) about this external audit of the fertiliser industry, the statement said.

The FMPAC said that although the fertiliser industry is facing numerous cash-flow challenges created by more than Rs 20 billion of outstanding subsidies, urea prices are being kept lower.

Fertiliser producers are cooperating with the government by absorbing Rs106 per bag to keep the prices low, although, the government has promised to pay Rs100 per bag as subsidy.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1354735

GOVT URGED TO ALLOCATE MAXIMUM FUNDS FOR AGRI SECTOR
Business Recorder, August 30, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research has recommended the government to allocate maximum funds for agriculture sector.

The meeting of the committee was held under the chairmanship of MNA Malik Shakir Bashir Awan. The committee was briefed by Senior Director National Institute for Genomics and Advanced Biotechnology (NIGAB), Ghulam Muhammad Ali, about the functioning of the institute.

He said that NIGAB was established at NARC under the umbrella of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC). The major functions of NIGAB are to give attention to the discipline of advanced agriculture biotechnology and genomics (crops and animals).

He added that currently this institution is leading the research for security, food sovereignty and food safety in the country.

The committee appreciated the role of the senior director NIGAB in making the institution more valuable for the country. The committee also emphasized that the research for development of new varieties of crops against disease, salinity and drought; selection of animal breed; and development of new drugs, etc, should be continued on priority basis.

The committee recommended that small farmers should be offered training/awareness programmes for the betterment of agriculture sector. The committee also recommended that government should provide subsidy to the farmers in this regard. The committee further recommended that the government should allocate maximum funds to this institution for growing and strengthening of agriculture sector in the country.

The committee also approved the minutes of the last meeting held on March 29, 2017.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/30/9-page/668191-news.html

FERTILISER INDUSTRY STILL WAITING FOR SUBSIDY RELEASE
The Express Tribune, August, 30, 2017

LAHORE: The government is still dragging its feet on the fertiliser subsidy claims as billions of rupees worth of payments are stuck because of bureaucratic hurdles and institutional lethargy, say players of the fertiliser industry.

In a statement, fertiliser manufacturers pointed out that an entire month had passed since the Prime Minister's Office directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to release all pending subsidy claims urgently, but nothing had been done to ease the industry's financial burden.

It was decided at a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, chaired by secretary to the PM Fawad Hassan Fawad, on July 24 that 80% of the subsidy claims would be immediately cleared and the remaining 20% would be paid within three months after third-party verification.

However, the payments were still pending, though the Finance Division had released the requisite amount, said the industry players.

For future subsidy claims, the government has included a clause in the scheme, which requires every fertiliser dealer to provide his National Tax Number (NTN).“This clause makes the scheme unviable as it ignores that a big majority (over 90%) of small dealers are not registered with taxation authorities and do not have NTNs,” they said.

Moreover, the subsidy claims are based on sales tax, which has no relationship with the NTN. “Such a step may ultimately hamper the distribution of urea, denying subsidy benefits to the farmers,” they said.

The industry decried that the authorities had not even started an external audit, required to resolve the subsidy crisis. In this regard, the food security minister has not yet issued terms of reference for the external audit.

Although more than Rs20 billion was outstanding in subsidy payments, the fertiliser manufacturers said they had kept urea prices down in the Pakistan market.

“Fertiliser producers are cooperating with the government by absorbing Rs106 per bag to keep prices low, though the government has promised to pay a subsidy of Rs100 per bag,” they said.

“We have not disrupted the supply of subsidisedfertiliser to the farmers, despite a major cash flow problem we are facing,” commented an official of the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1494430/fertiliser-industry-still-waiting-subsidy-release/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 21ST TO AUGUST 27 Th 2017
USAID'S CENTRE ON AGRICULTURE FACES THE AXE

Dawn, August 21, 2017

Ahmad Faraz Khan

AFTER some five years of planning, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2015 established three centres for advanced studies in agriculture and food security, water and energy at three different universities in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

These centres were connected to four universities in the United States through an elaborate scholarship programme.

However, with the new administration taking over in the US and cuts in the USAID budget, one of the centres, the Pakistan-US Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food, now faces the axe.

The centre, considered to be the most vibrant among the three, assumed added importance in the last two years due to some particular federal and provincial reasons.

At the national level, it was the only advanced studies centre working on policy that had over 250 scholars at its strength and connected to the outside world as well.

However, its real importance was for Punjab, which is in the middle of a major agriculture initiative of its own through the Rs100 billion Kissan Commission.

Coincidently, the initiative for the agricultural sector coincided with the advent of the centre in 2015. In the next two years, the centre helped the commission define all the major initiatives, including the balanced use of fertiliser, cattle and produce markets, statutory cover for research spending, etc. Moreover, for the first time the province had an agricultural policy of its own.

The scholars at the University of Agriculture, where the centre is located, helped develop a 700-page document, which became the basis for 26 policy (and position) papers at the centre. This ultimately resulted into an 18-page executive summary of the provincial agriculture policy that Punjab is now following, with the rest of the policy to follow.

The centre is also supposed to assess and update all policy initiatives every six months in order to modify them for better results.

Now, with the centre being told to wrap up due to paucity of funds, Punjab is feared to suffer the most as it depends heavily on the centre for policy guidance and because there is no alternative.

Besides, the future of more than 250 scholars being financed by the centre and over 90 applied research projects is also on the line.

Since funding such centres is an internal matter and discretion of the USAID, Pakistan or Punjab can hardly do anything about it. The only way left for them is to take over the centre and run it out of their agriculture budgets, experts say.

“Apart from the policy contribution, the centre should not be allowed to close down because the concept of three centres — agriculture, water and energy — was an integrated one,” says Dr Iqrar

Ahmed Khan, vice-chancellor of the Agriculture University and head of the centre on agriculture and food.

Both the federal and the Punjab government is considerate enough to sympathetically decide on the future of the centre, but the real issue is managing the “transition period”.

Even if they both take it over, it entails lengthy procedures to follow — feasibility, project cost (PC-I) estimations, approvals and so on.

Malik Afaq Tiwana, one of the board members, thinks that three chairs, which the centre created on precision agriculture, biotech and climate change, deal with future of agriculture in Pakistan.

They have come into their own now and their contribution in the next two years could have been equally immense, as was on the policy issue. The centre’s premature death would hurt the sector badly.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1352796

RS 4.76 BILLION PLAN CHALKED OUT TO INTRODUCE NEW TECHNIQUES IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR
Business Recorder, August , 21st, 2017

Sarmad Mahmud

Punjab government has evolved a strategy for introducing modern techniques for tracking agriculture sector on modern lines for making it profitable. Under the directives of Punjab Chief Minister the Agriculture Department has formulated a well-knitted 3 year plan costing Rs 4.76 billion for introducing new techniques in agriculture sector to enhance per acre yield and to improve the economic conditions of farmer community in Punjab.

Sources in agriculture department told Business Recorder on Sunday that under the programme special attention will be focused on introducing ultra modern technology of Solar Drip Sprinkler Irrigation system in the Punjab. The hallmark of the programme was to install Drip Sprinkler system on 20,000 acres land for better and effective utilisation of available irrigation water for enhancing agriculture productivity in the Province.

In addition to this special step will also be taken for the promotion of Tunnel Farming Technology would be installed on 3000 acres of land for growing vegetables in the Punjab. The tunnel farming will help promote the growing off-season vegetables around the year which will be supportive in improving the economic conditions of the growers of the Province.

The programme will pave the way for introducing modern and profitable farming, enhancing productivity, lessening the productivity expenditures, better utilisation of fertilisers and pesticides and save the water. The government will provide 80 percent subsidy on installation of Solar system while growers will contribute 20 percent for the installation of the system while government will also provide 50 percent subsidy on the installation of Tunnel Farming Technology in the Province sources added

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/08/20170821211155/

EXPERTS FOR EDUCATING FARMERS ABOUT LATEST AGRO TRENDS
Business Recorder, August 22, 2017

Khalid Abbas Saif

FAISALABAD: Adoption of modern trend in the agriculture was vital not only to increase per acre productivity but also to alleviate the poverty from the country, said Pro Vice Chancellor University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) Professor Dr Muhammad Iqbal Zafar.

He was talking to the delegation of member Punjab Public Service Commission Syed Ibne Hussain and Members of Parliament including Rao Kashif Rahim, Mian Tahir Jamil, Haji Khalid Saeed, and Zafar Iqbal Nagra.

Dr Iqbal Zafar said that agriculture was the backbone of our economy and majority of the population was associated with this profession. He added that quality seed and modern agriculture practices would pave a way to ensure food security in the country.

He added that the UAF was making all-out efforts to produce skilled manpower and to conduct demand driven researches that will bring the tangible result. He stressed upon the need to educate farming community about latest agro trends.

Talking about education, Dr Iqbal Zafar added that no nation can make development without the quality education. He said that we have to prepare the manpower able to fight the challenges of the modern era and to compete with the rest of the world. He further said that the UAF experts were also assisting parks and horticulture authority in the beautification of the city.

The MPs said that the Punjab Government was making the revolutionary steps to address the problems of a common man. They lauded the steps being taken on the part of the University for uplifting of the agricultural sector. They said that UAF was only institution of the country which ranked among top 100 universities of the globe in any category.

http://fp.brecorder.com/2017/08/20170822211344/

UVAS FINDS PARTNER TO BOOST QUALITY
The Express Tribune, August 26th, 2017.

LAHORE: The University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Lahore and M/S Four Brother’s Group (Agriculture Division) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to check the bio-equivalence of locally marketed product of 4B Group.

The aim is to enhance the results and quality production of agricultural crops. UVAS Vice Chancellor Dr Talat Naseer Pasha and 4B Group Chairman Engineer Jawed Salim Qureshi signed the MoU at the UVAS City Campus. Under the MoU, UVAS will provide all technical expertise regarding bioequivalence and complete technology, services and technology training of bio-equivalence laboratory personnel to 4B Group Pakistan.

The 4B Group will provide paid internships and facilitate UVAS postgraduate students in their research in terms of financial assistance and using lab facility on the recommendation of UVAS. It will also provide funds to UVAS technical staff/students for relevant trainings programmes.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1491120/uvas-finds-partner-boost-quality/

‘PAKISTAN CAN CULTIVATE TEA ON 64,000 HECTARES IN KP, AZAD KASHMIR’
Business Recorder, 26 August 2017

Fazal Sher

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan can overcome its tea import bill that now stands at around Rs 50 billion per annum if the crop is cultivated on 64,000 hectares of land found suitable for it in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Dr Farukh Siyar Hamid, Director National Tea and High Value Crops Research Institute (NTHRI) Shinkiari, Mansehra, told this to a group of journalists who visited the institute.

He said that research work on the tea crop is complete and now it is responsibility of the federal and provincial governments to commercialize it.

Hamid said that Pakistan imports black tea from seventeen countries and 72 percent of it is imported from Kenya, adding that green tea is imported from three countries and 66 percent of it is imported from China. Pakistan imported tea worth Rs 3.7 billion in 1986, Rs 12.035 billion in 2006 and of Rs 50 billion in 2015, he said while sharing the import data.

“It is estimated that at the end of this decade Pakistan would be the biggest importer of black tea in the world,” he said, adding that the per capita consumption of tea in Pakistan is about one kilogram annually and is continuously increasing due to increase in its demand.

He said that major tea exporting countries in the world include Sri Lanka, Kenya, China, India, Indonesia, Uganda, Tanzania and Bangladesh and major tea importers include Russia, United States, Pakistan, UK and Egypt.

“The tea cultivation is a labour intensive activity and growing tea over 64,000 hectares of land would not only overcome tea import bill but will also generate employment opportunities, besides reducing poverty in the tea growing areas,” he said.

Hamid said that the areas found suitable for tea cultivation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa include districts of Mansehra, Batagram, Shangla and Swat. He said that tea is a long duration crop and it takes five years to reach complete yielding stage.

“We have encouraged and trained many farmers for tea cultivation but due to lack of funds with them to install processing units, our efforts bear no fruits and, therefore, the government needs to take steps in this regard,” he said, adding that following plucking of tea leaves they should be shifted to processing unit within four hours.

The NTHRI chief said that tea crop remains productive for 70 to 100 years, generates employment opportunities, makes waste land productive, saves environment against pollution, protects soil against erosion and increases life of dams/reservoirs.

About NTHRI, he said that National Research Station was upgraded to the level of institute in 1996. In 2001 the institute set up black tea processing unit with a capacity of one ton per day and set up green tea processing unit in 2005 with the capacity of 80 to 100 kg per day.

The NTHRI was converted to National Tea and High Value Crops Research Institute (NTHRI) in 2013 and now the institute is working on fruits, vegetable, medicinal herbs, kiwi and olive plantation in addition to tae crops, he said.

He said that NTHRI is spread over 50 acres of land, of which 33 acres are marked for tea garden, 2 acres for mother fruit orchard, 4.5 acres for nursery of tea, fruit, vegetable and medicinal plants as well as 10 acres for processing unit, road and buildings.

When asked about the achievement of NTHRI, he said that it conducted screening of exotic tea varieties, establishment tea garden at Dively Battal, continuation of systematic research studies, demonstration of tea crop on farmers fields in different agro-ecological zone and preparation of manual green tea. Similarly, it also established black tea and green tea processing units, conducted training of growers and supervision of students from different universities.

Hamid said that the main objectives of NTHRI include identification of potential tea growing areas, establishment of mother blocks of high value crops and training farming communities for capacity building and transfer of technologies.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/26/21-page/901868-news.html

PAKISTAN'S YEARLY WHEAT CONSUMPTION 26.19 TONS, SENATE INFORMED
Zulfiqar Ahmad

ISLAMABAD: The Upper House of Parliament was informed on Friday that average consumption of wheat in the country on an annual basis is approximately 26.19 million tons.

The House was informed during the question hour that Punjab was at the top with consumption of 13.52 million tons wheat, followed by Sindh with 5.94 million tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 3.94 million tons and Balochistan with 1.29 million tons, while 1.00 million tons for strategic reserves and deficit areas and 0.50 million tons for seed and feed requirements.

Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif said that there was no condition attached to designation of the status of non-NATO ally for Pakistan. “It is a reflection of the desire of Pakistan and US to strengthen cooperation and maintain long-term closer and friendly relations,” he added.

He said former US Secretary of State Colin Powel during a visit to Pakistan in March 2004, had stated that he had brought a message from American people and the then president George W Bush and the US wishes to have long-term relations with Pakistan and also to further cement the bonds of friendship.

Asif explained that Colin Powel said that the US government had made a notification to the Congress that would designate Pakistan a major non-NATO ally and in June 2004, the US administration received the endorsement of the US Congress, which completed the legal procedure required to declare Pakistan a non-NATO ally.

PPP Senator Sehar Kamran had asked about under what terms and conditions Pakistan was granted the status of non-NATO ally and its present status.

A special committee of the Senate to be constituted by Chairman Senate Raza Rabbani in consultation with Leader of the House in Senate Raja Zafarul Haq and Opposition Leader Aetizaz Ahsan will look into the affairs of the sports federations.

During the question hour, Rabbani said this after senators questioned the performance of the sports bodies and expressed concern over the falling standards of various games.

“Sports are not making any progress but the officials related to the concerned bodies are enjoying. There are “qabza” groups sitting in many sports bodies. This is a big scandal, Chairman please take a suo moto notice of this situation. Retired bureaucrats, military men and others keep on fighting,” Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, present on the occasion, rose to say. The Pakistan Olympic Association, he pointed out, was one such example.

Senator Usman Kakar of PKMAP lamented that 70-80 percent top players were from Liyari and Chaman, still there were no facility was made available in those areas for development of football.

In a written reply to a question by MQM Senator Atique Sheikh, Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Riaz Hussain Pirzada said at the moment, Pakistan Football Federation is not operational due to a pending case in Lahore High Court and its affairs are being looked after by an administrator appointed by the High Court.

He added Pakistan Sports Board would continue to support the talent hunt programme in order to bring Pakistani football players’ talent on the forefront.

Senator Atique had asked whether it was an act that UK’s largest football league was going to start its operations in Pakistan, if so, the names of cities in which their operations were going to be launched and whether any talent hunt has been started in this regard by Pakistan Sports Board.

The minister confirmed that Leisure Leagues had already organised an event in Lahore in July this year.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sheikh Aftab Ahmad assured the House that he would place before the minister for overseas Pakistanis the issue of early issuance of NoCs to hundreds of Pakistani workers in Muscat.

Rabbani referred the issue of restrictions on movement of urea from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the House committee concerned for report within a month. Khawaja Asif confirmed this when Minister for Ports and Shipping Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo said that urea was used in making explosive devices. But Bizenjo insisted that its movement should be relaxed.

On not finding Minister for National Health Services Saira Afzal Tarar, Rabbani said she was seen but was not present in the House to answer the questions pertaining to her ministry.

He noted that there were over 50 members of the cabinet but the entire burden was on parliamentary affairs minister which is quite unfortunate. He asked if the Prime Minister could come to the House as per commitment, why not the other ministers?

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/26/21-page/901865-news.html

PANEL FOR TWO AGRI VARSITIES' VCS 'SEPARATELY NOTIFIED'
Dawn, August 23, 2017

Mansoor Malik

LAHORE: The Punjab agriculture department has finally notified search committee(s) for the selection of vice chancellors for two agriculture universities – the posts lying vacant for the past several months.

The government had finalised the members of the search committee(s) for PirMehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, and University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, over a month ago but did not notify immediately fearing that the committees' constitution may not violate the law and spirit of Lahore High Court division bench judgment.

After having second thoughts in different meetings called in connection with the issue, the Punjab government stood to its stance and separately notified the [search] committee(s) for both agriculture universities.

The committee(s) members are: LUMS Pro-Chancellor Syed Babar Ali (convener), IT University's School of Social Sciences dean DrAkmal Hussain, PDSCEA vice chairman Dr Zafar Iqbal Qureshi, LUMS' Dr Ali Cheema and Punjab agriculture department secretary, who will also act as secretary to the committee. These committees will stand valid for a term of two years.

According to terms of reference, the search committees shall follow procedure and criteria to be determined by the government and recommend a panel of three persons to the government for the final selection of a vice chancellor.

Sources say the search committees have been notified in the presence of a four-member Search Committee led by LUMS Pro-Chancellor Syed Babar Ali that has two-year term till June 30, 2018.

The chief minister had constituted a four-member Search Committee for a term of two years on June 30 last year. Besides Syed Babar Ali, the committee has Punjab Curriculum and textbook Board Chairman retired Lt Gen Muhammad Akram as member, while minister and secretary agriculture are the ex-officio members.

Responding to the argument, a senior official at the chief minister's secretariat said the earlier Search Committee of [June 30] was for all agriculture universities across Punjab but it became void after the

LHC decision since it decided that separate search committees be notified for each and every university.

Besides separate notifications, it may be mentioned, the LHC division bench headed by Chief Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah had also required the government "to form search committees for specialised universities e.g., information technology, computer science, medical/health, agriculture, women, and general, having members with requisite skill and expertise in the relevant area".

Wondering why had the chief minister not recommended any expert in the agriculture sector, but two economists, to be co-opted by the Search Committee, sources said the new search panels were against the spirit of the LHC judgment.

The officials at the chief minister's secretariat, however, said Prof DrAkmal Hussain is a well-known academic and an important member of the Punjab Agriculture Commission. They said Prof Hussain also authored reports on small farmers, which could guide future policy formulation in the agriculture sector.

The [senior] official said the other members of the committee are also persons of eminence, who may be helpful in identifying the best possible persons to head the agriculture university in the days to come.

While delays and mishandling in the matter of appointment of vice chancellors well in time has already damaged the working of both universities, sources said the search committees' members approved by the chief minister might land the government in a string of litigation again taking a plea that the committee members were not approved by the Punjab cabinet because as per Supreme Court judgement, government means "chief minister and cabinet". The official, however, did not reply.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1353318

BANKS ASKED TO DEDICATE ONE-FIFTH OF BRANCHES TO AGRI-LENDING
Dawn, Auust 27, 2017

QUETTA: The Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) has proposed that banks should dedicate at least 20 per cent of total branches to agri-lending, according to a press release on Saturday.

A meeting of the ACAC, which is a national-level consultative committee for setting annual targets for agricultural loans and their monitoring, took place in Quetta on Friday under the chairmanship of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Tariq Bajwa.

MrBajwa stressed upon four key areas that require special attention of all stakeholders. These include strategising the achievement of the Rs1 trillion disbursement target, increasing financial inclusion of smallholder farmers to address their credit needs, particularly for production loans, rationalising the markup rates on agricultural financing to pass on the benefit of historically low discount rate, and increasing the banks' footprint in underserved regions and provinces for reducing regional disparities.

MrBajwa said it is necessary to meet credit demand in order to successfully harness the untapped potential of agriculture. He highlighted critical challenges confronted by the industry, including the provision of finance to small and marginalised farmers, addressing geographical and sectoral imbalances and financing to non-crop activities.

In particular, financial institutions need to come up with new ideas and products for spreading their outreach to remote and underserved areas, like Balochistan. He also stated that there is a huge scope and demand for Sharia-compliant agri-financing products. He recommended that Islamic banks should increase their focus on Islamic agri-financing.

He informed the audience that due to joint efforts by the SBP and the industry for broadening access to finance, formal credit disbursement by financial institutions increased to Rs704.5 billion in 2016-17 from Rs391.4bn in 2012-13, showing an increase of more than 80pc in four years.

The SBP governor supported the idea of establishing the Bank of Balochistan to improve financial services in the province.

The ACAC proposed that the availability of agri credit officers in agri lending branches should be ensured.

It also proposed that advances should be linked with deposits mobilised from the province to ensure the supply of agri credit in the underserved provinces.

The committee also asked banks to make agri finance a key indicator of the banks' performance. It asked them to adopt automated land record management system and branchless banking channels to reduce operational costs and rationalise markup rates.

It asked them to ensure capacity building of banking officials in the underserved areas and use service-providers to support farmers in pre- and post-harvest activities.

The meeting was attended by presidents of commercial banks, specialised banks, microfinance banks and Islamic banks besides representatives of the federal and provincial governments, chambers of agriculture and farmers' associations.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1354166

BANKS ASKED TO ADDRESS IMBALANCES: RS1TRN AGRI CREDIT TARGET SET FOR FY18
Business Recorder, August 27, 2017

KARACHI: Setting a strategize target of Rs 1 trillion for agricultural credit disbursement for this fiscal year, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has advised the financial institutions to treat agriculture financing as strategic part of their overall credit growth policy.

Chairing the meeting of Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) in Quetta on Saturday, SBP Governor Tariq Bajwa urged banks to address geographical and sectoral imbalances by achieving Rs 1 trillion agri credit target for FY 2017-18

A statement was issued after the ACAC meeting. The meeting was attended by senior officers of SBP, presidents and executives of commercial banks, specialized banks, microfinance banks and Islamic banks, representatives from federal and provincial governments, and chamber of agriculture/farmers associations.

Bajwa also stressed upon four key areas requiring special attention of all stakeholders which included strategizing the achievement of Rs 1 trillion disbursement target, increasing financial inclusion of smallholder farmers to address their credit needs, particularly for production loans, rationalizing the markup rates on agri financing to pass on the benefit of historically low discount rate and increasing banks' footprint in underserved regions and provinces for reducing regional disparities.

Delivering his keynote address, Governor SBP also emphasized that in order to successfully harness the untapped potential of agriculture, it is necessary to meet the credit demand.

He highlighted critical challenges confronted by the industry that include provision of finance to small and marginalized farmers, addressing geographical and sectoral imbalances and financing to non-crop activities.

In particular, financial institutions need to come up with new ideas and products for spreading their outreach to remote and underserved areas such as Balochistan. He also stated that there is a huge scope and demand for Shariah-compliant agri financing products and recommended Islamic banks to increase their focus on Islamic agri financing, he added.

He said due to joint efforts by SBP and the industry for broadening access to finance in the country, formal credit disbursement by financial institutions has increased to Rs 704.5 billion in FY 16-17 from Rs 391.4 billion in FY 12-13, showing a steep increase of more than 80 percent in 4 years.

The key note address was followed by a presentation wherein the performance of banks on key indicators relevant to agricultural financing was reviewed. The participants deliberated on the way forward for credit enhancement in the underserved provinces/regions, especially Balochistan. During the meeting, the committee proposed that banks should designate at least 20 percent of total branches as agri lending branches and ensures availability of adequate Agri Credit Officers in such outlets, besides making agri finance a key indicator of banks' performance.

The ACAC proposed to link advances with the deposits mobilized from the province to ensure supply of agri credit in the underserved provinces. Banks should ensure the achievement of agri credit targets of underserved province particularly Balochistan, KPK, AJK and GB.

Banks also asked for adoption of automated land record management system and digital financial services and branchless banking channels to reduce operational cost and rationalize mark-up rates.

The committee also stressed on capacity building of banks' officials and farmers awareness in underserved areas and use of service providers to support farmers in pre- and post-harvest activities and to increase access to agri. finance and other banking services.

While summing up the meeting, Bajwa shown his confidence on the banks' commitment to achieve agri credit target of Rs1,001 billion for FY 2017-18 and increase the outreach for agri borrowers by one million during FY 2017-18.

The governor SBP advised the financial institutions to treat agriculture financing as strategic part of their overall credit growth policy and encouraged them to explore new markets, develop innovative products, promote Islamic agri financing and create more linkages for improving livelihoods in the country. He supported the idea of establishing 'Bank of Balochistan' to improve financial services in Balochistan.

He hoped that the financial institutions will achieve overall annual target for 2017-18 beside achieving their provincial/regional targets particularly in underserved areas such as Balochistan, KPK, GilgitBaltistan and AJK.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/27/1-page/667562-news.html

GOVT'S POLICIES FOR FARMERS LAUDED
The News, August 27, 2017

PAKPATTAN: MNA SardarMansab Ali Dogar Saturday said the Punjab government was very keen to resolve issues of farmers. Talking to reporters, the lawmaker said the government had launched interest-free loans scheme for farmers. He said Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif was very committed to the welfare of the growers, saying that some 600,000 farmers would get benefit of interest-free loan plan. He said according to the scheme Rs 25,000 for Rabi crop and Rs 40,000 for Kharif crop would be given to each farmer

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/226325-Govts-policies-for-farmers-lauded

SBP CALLS FOR RATIONALISATION OF MARKUP RATES ON AGRI FINANCING
The News, August 27, 2017

KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Tariq Bajwa stressed the need of rationalisation of markup rates on agriculture financing to pass on the benefit of historically low interest rate and increase financial inclusion of smallholder farmers.

Bajwa said it is necessary to meet the credit demand of farmers to harness untapped potential of agriculture sector.

"Financial institutions need to come up with new ideas and products for spreading their outreach to remote and underserved areas like Balochistan," he said in a statement on Saturday. "There is a huge scope and demand for Shariah compliant agriculture financing products."

Governor SBP, addressing a meeting of Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) in Quetta, recommended Islamic banks to increase their focus on Islamic agriculture financing.

He advised the financial institutions to treat agriculture financing as strategic part of their overall credit growth policy, urging them "to explore new markets, develop innovative products, promote Islamic agriculture financing and create more linkages for improving livelihoods in the country."

Bajwa said critical challenges, including provision of finance to small and marginalised farmers, geographical and sectoral imbalances and financing to non-crop activities need to be addressed.

He commended the ACAC members on surpassing the Rs700 billion agri-credit target for the fiscal year of 2016/17, asking them to strategise the achievement of Rs1 trillion disbursement target in the current fiscal year of 2017/18, meeting credit needs of smallholder farmers, particularly for production loans and increasing bank's footprint in underserved regions and provinces for reducing regional disparities.

The central bank's head said SBP is playing an active role in promoting agriculture financing in the country.

"Due to joint efforts by SBP and the industry for broadening access to finance in the country, formal credit disbursement by financial institutions has increased to Rs704.5 billion in FY16-17 from Rs391.4 billion in FY12-13, showing a steep increase of more than 80 percent in 4 years," he said.

Bajwa hoped that banks would meet the agri-credit target and increase outreach of agriculture borrowers by one million during the current fiscal year, particularly in underserved areas like Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, GilgitBaltistan and Kashmir. He also expected them to enhance farmer's productivity through availability of credit in extension services, farm mechanisation, storage facilities, marketing and procurement.

Governor SBP supported the idea of establishing Bank of Balochistan to improve financial services in the province.

ACAC proposed some measures to enhance credit in the underserved provinces/regions.

The committee said banks should designate at least 20 percent of their branches as agricultural lending branches and ensure availability of adequate agri-credit officers in such outlets. They should ensure achievement of agri-credit targets of underserved provinces.

ACAC said advances should be linked with the deposits mobilised from a particular province to ensure supply of agri-credit in the underserved provinces. Agricultural financing should be made a key indicator of banks' performance.

The committee also sought adoption of automated land record management system and digital financial services and branchless banking channels to reduce operational cost and rationalise mark-up rates.

Banks should build capacity of their officials and raise awareness in underserved areas, it said.

Farmers should be assisted in access to financing and other banking services.

https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/226184-SBP-calls-for-rationalisation-of-markup-rates-on-agri-financing

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 14TH TO AUGUST 20 Th 2017
THE 70 ERRATIC YEARS OF PAKISTAN'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, August 14th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

WITH a rich and vast natural resource base covering various climatic and ecological zones, Pakistan ranks eighth in the world in farm output.

It is one of the world's largest producers and suppliers of food and crops: chickpea (3rd), apricot (6th), cotton, rice and mango (4th), milk sugarcane and date palm (5th), kinnow or citrus (6th), and wheat and onion (7th).

The country's agricultural sector has three major roles in the national economy: provides food to consumers and fibre to the industry, earns foreign exchange, and provides a market for industrial goods/machinery.

However, the share of agriculture in gross domestic product (GDP) has declined since independence, falling from 53 per cent in 1949-50 to 19.8pc in 2016-17.

From 1947 to 1950, the country produced raw materials for the rest of the subcontinent as well as some other world markets.

But farm products then were compulsory procured at rates less than in the global markets. Inter-district movement and the export of major crops were banned, while wheat and sugar were subsidised for urban consumers.

The sector benefited from the Korean War (1950-53), but an overvalued rupee adversely affected agricultural exports.

Then came the 'Green Revolution' of the 1960s that saw agricultural policy considerably relaxed. The Ayub regime introduced land reforms putting a ceiling on individual holdings, the first agricultural university in the country was set up, liberal subsidies were offered for the import of tractors, and tubewells were installed to overcome water scarcity in the wake of Indus Basin Treaty. Moreover, compulsory procurement of farm produce was replaced by voluntary sales.

The average annual growth rate during the decade was 5.07pc. A major water reservoir, Mangla Dam, was also developed which helped bring more area under cultivation. Link canals were constructed for supplying irrigation water to the command areas of the three rivers given to India under the treaty.

The growth rate declined to 2.37pc during the 1970s when nationalisation programme of the government kept production and distribution of key farm products to itself. The benefit of the rupee's devaluation in the form of higher prices was not transferred to the agricultural sector hampered by export duties and government monopolies. The government also introduced second and third stages of land reforms.

In the 1980s, farm growth rate went up again, posting an annual average of 5.4pc. A new agricultural policy was introduced to bring domestic farm prices on a par with global rates. The Agricultural Price Commission was formed to help the government set support prices.

Through the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme, the farm input and output prices were brought to the prices prevailing in the world markets. Fertiliser subsidies were phased out.

In the 1990s, the growth rate fluctuated between 5.9pc and 4.4pc, as from now on the sector went into major structural changes. Livestock emerged as an important subsector contributing around one-third of the agricultural GDP.

Fisheries and forestry also grew rapidly. In the crop sector, cotton became as import as wheat in terms of value-addition, accounting for one-fifth share of total earnings.

The share of rice and sugar cane, however, fell from 20pc in 1970s to around 15pc in 2014. Export taxes were reduced, better support prices were introduced while efforts were made for timely provision of farm inputs.

In short, the sector covered many milestones as production of various crops — grains, fruit, vegetables — increased manifold in the past 70 years.

For instance, wheat output rose from 3.301m tonnes in 1947 to 25m tonnes in 2014, cotton 0.188m bales to 2.374m bales, mango 0.13m tonnes to 1.716m tonnes, citrus 0.088m tonnes to 2.396m tonnes, and onion from 0.056m in 1947 tonnes to 1.671m tonnes in 2014.

But this performance fails to satisfy some quarters who believe much could have been achieved through better policies.

Senior economist Prof Dr Faisal Bari argues that Pakistan's agricultural performance has been poor in comparison with neighbouring India, which has conditions similar to ours.

"We're lagging behind the Indian Punjab though the condition of soil, climate and other factors is almost same," he says. "Similarly, we have large produce of citrus and milk and many multinational companies in the domestic market, but we couldn't translate these factors into the export of processed or value-added by-products of the farm produce."

Prof Bari counts policymakers' apathy, poor institutional framework, unpredictable official policies, undue pressure by donor agencies and privatisation as major reasons behind the current situation.

Prof Dr Zafar Iqbal Randhawa of the Faisalabad Agriculture University asserts that a system that discourages talent and merit is the main factor, as the minds who work wonders abroad fail to deliver or get dispirited here.

"Ours is one of the most blessed countries in terms of climate, fertile land and other natural resources. But, unfortunately, those who lead us lack vision because they haven't come forward on merit," he says.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1351486

WITH RIGHT POLICIES, WE CAN STILL BRING ABOUT A GREEN REVOLUTION
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, August 14th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

THE agricultural sector has played a pivotal role in Pakistan’s economy in terms of capital formation, employment and external trade. It has helped put the country on a growth trajectory beginning as early as the 1950s.

The sector, however, is no longer the largest segment of the economy at present. Its underperformance in recent decades attracts the wrong kind of attention to its problems. The fact is that the focus in policy debates has shifted away from the agricultural sector, particularly at federal level.

Declining public investment over time, especially in infrastructure, irrigation and agricultural research, combined with changes in demographics, markets and international trade, has contributed to the stagnation in the agricultural sector.

Without sufficient policy attention, new investments in rural infrastructure (roads, irrigation, electricity, markets, communications) and rural public services (nutrition, health, education, and sanitation), the sector has performed much below its potential.

A vibrant agricultural sector is essential for improving the welfare of people, economic growth and development.

Much of the country’s initial economic success was due to the historical Indus river basin accord with India in 1960 which opened the way for the construction of Tarbela Dam and other major irrigation investments. These developments subsequently enabled Pakistan to take advantage of fertiliser-responsive high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice during the ‘Green Revolution’ of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Yields and output grew remarkably during this period, increasing both the availability and major food and cash crops. While wheat crop ensured food security, cotton drove substantial expansion in Pakistan’s textile industry, providing the country with a critical source of foreign exchange earnings. Despite all odds, it remains a major source of income for people living in rural areas.

The Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute has suggested that with a right set of policies it is still possible for Pakistan to boost agricultural growth.

However, growth can no longer rely on the intensive exploitation of the country’s natural resource endowment and market interventions. There is a need to improve and expand the application of modern technology to improve the performance.

Pakistan’s agricultural sector has enormous potential, which can be tapped with higher levels of investment and some major policy reforms. Policies should be designed to address long-standing issues relating to land ownership, irrigation infrastructure, fertiliser markets and the use of new technologies.

The development in Pakistan hinges not only on the volume crop production, but also on investments in human and social capital, institutions, and the quality of governance that empower people to make their own choices and pursue their needs and aspirations. These aspects have been overlooked in the discourse, experts have pointed out.

Long-term climate change and short-term weather shocks loom large in Pakistan, particularly because of the semi-arid climate in much of the country and the reliance of the agricultural sector on irrigation.

The Indus river basin system is in need of major investments in water storage and distribution, including canal rehabilitation and maintenance. Proposed investments, such as the Diamer-Bhasha dam, appear to have high economic returns.

Substantially greater investments in water storage, surface irrigation, drainage, and improvements in the efficiency of water use will be required over the next few decades to maintain the availability of water, minimise the devastation of major flood events, and increase the returns to water use.

Without investments, the agricultural output is likely to become increasingly erratic over time, and may experience an overall deceleration of growth, particularly if average temperatures gradually rise, the snow pack in the Himalayas diminishes, and rainfall variability increases, as is forecast in many climate change models.

Pakistan will also need to build up the resilience of the agricultural sector. The worst-hit areas may be the arid and semi-arid agro-ecologies of Fata, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan provinces; the flat and poorly drained flood-prone areas of lower Punjab and Sindh; and the coastal areas, where over-exploitation of underground water sources and intrusion of sea-water are creating salinity problems for aquifers along irrigated coastal areas.

With these threats looming, science and technology will need to play an even more significant role. Better regulation of seed markets and stronger incentives to encourage private investment in research and development could also speed dissemination of improved cultivars, hybrids, transgenics, and other products that could increase yields or the value of crops to consumers or could reduce yield variability, losses to biotic and abiotic stress, or costs of production.

Funding for these public initiatives could be secured by reducing expenditures on domestic procurement, storage, and distribution of wheat which accounted for Rs24.84 billion in 2012-13. It would serve better if the government decides to eliminate the subsidy on sales of government wheat to flour mills.

Similar funds could be found by significantly reducing the subsidies received by the fertiliser industry and reallocating those resources into research and extension efforts designed to improve soil fertility management.

Moving forward, the competitiveness of the country's agricultural products in domestic and international markets will, on the one hand, depend on a strategic combination of technology and infrastructure, and on the other, appropriate price incentives for investment and production.

This was partly demonstrated in the late 1980s with policy changes, exchange rate adjustments, changes in wheat and sugar cane prices, and the gradual withdrawal of the government from direct interventions in cotton and rice markets.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1351485

‘FALL OF OVER $5BN IN EXPORTS DAMAGED ECONOMY’
M Rafique Goraya

LAHORE: The Businessmen Panel of the FPCCI has said exports have registered a fall of over five billion dollars in the last three years which has pushed the country into a very difficult situation.

It said hundreds of industrial units have been closed, many exporters became bankrupt, scores of laborers lost their jobs while the government has to borrow extensively from foreign and domestic sources to save the country from default, it said.

Secretary General of Businessmen Panel of FPCCI Senator Haji Ghulam Ali, Vice President Sheikh Aslam, Ahmed Jawad and Mian Usman said in a statement that those who were responsible for the fall in exports should be brought to the book. They alleged one of the persons responsible for fall in the exports is former CEO of TDAP who failed to deliver in three years leaving the government with only option to show him the door.

“Muneer never paid attention to his job and used all his abilities as well as the resources of the government to gain political mileage and dominate the FPCCI, they added. They resented the government took a number of steps to reform external sector but Muneer failed to improve exports by taking stakeholders on board and resolve their issues.

They alleged that former CEO of TDAP used government’s money to buy loyalties, promoted selected businesses and chambers of commerce faithful to his person, arranged many useless exhibitions and organized many free foreign trips for the voters.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/14/2-page/898637-news.html

SINDH GOVERNOR SEEKS INVESTMENT IN AGRO-INDUSTRY
The Express Tribune, August 16th, 2017.

KARACHI:

Sindh Governor Mohammad Zubair has invited all major investors to invest in the agricultural sector, especially in horticulture, because of its untapped potential.

Zubair made the offer while talking to a delegation of the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers and Merchant Association (PFVA), which was planning to organise a national conference for the promotion of horticulture exports.

The governor assured the traders of his support to the conference, which would be held in collaboration with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

Zubair urged fruit exporters to prepare a comprehensive presentation for Commerce and Textile Minister Pervaiz Malik, who would be visiting Karachi next week.

He said the minister would be briefed on future plans for the promotion of exports of the horticulture sector. The idea of holding the conference will also be discussed with the minister.

Consultation process for these initiatives had already begun with provincial departments, agricultural experts, academia, research and development institutions and other stakeholders, he said.

The objective of the conference was to develop a long-term strategy for the horticulture sector on firm foundations based on recommendations from all stakeholders, Zubair said, adding subsequently a road map based on short, medium and long-term strategies would be developed.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1482398/sindh-governor-seeks-investment-agro-industry/

NEED TO REORGANIZE AGRICULTURE ON MODERN LINES STRESSED

Business Recorder, August 18,2017

FAISALABAD: CPEC is a golden opportunity for the overall development of this region and we should reorganize our agriculture sector to get a major share from $ 100 billion imports of agriculture produce by China, said Muhammad Mehmood, Secretary Agriculture Punjab.

He was addressing a launch ceremony of a Study Report on CPEC-Prospects & Challenges for Agriculture. He said that one fourth population of the world lives in China alone and most of their exports will be routed through Pakistan in the coming years after the completion of CPEC. The containers full of exportable surplus will be sent to various international markets but on return back, these containers will be empty and we must exploit this opportunity to export our surplus agriculture produce to China.

Muhammad Mehmood said that the per capita income of China is increasing substantially, bringing a visible change in their life style and food habits. “Like other affluent societies, they also prefer rich and costly food and fruits,” he said and added that we must brace ourselves to get maximum benefit from this emerging change. He told that the agriculture department of Punjab is fully aware of this situation and was taking necessary steps to harvest maximum benefits. “We are concentrating on high value crops and in this connection a 10 years comprehensive program has been evolved to develop a hundred thousand acres of land in Potohar region for the cultivation of grapes and other high value crops,” he said and added that major Chinese importers would also be invited to utilize this land for the cultivation of high value fruits in addition to developing agriculture processing sector on modern scientific lines. “Its trickle effects will provide an opportunity to our farmers to upgrade their technologies and develop agriculture as a profitable business by avoiding century old practices,” he added.

He told that foreign consultants have been engaged to analyze the reasons for Pakistan being unable to claim its due share in Chinese imports despite of its friendly relations and close proximity. He said that we should renegotiate bilateral trade agreements and in this connection a meeting is expected during this or next month; after these meetings we would be in a position to decide that which strategy is suitable for Pakistan to enhance its shares in the Chinese imports. “I have already talked with commercial consular of China on this issue” he said and added that more deliberations are needed to finalize the renegotiated bilateral trade agreements.

Responding to a question about a research project on “China-Pakistan Agricultural Technical Cooperation” proposed by the Research & Development Cell of FCCI, the secretary agriculture said that Punjab Agriculture Research Board (PARB) is extending liberal grants to the viable projects received from public or private sector and Initially Rs259 Million were allocated for this purpose. The funding was immediately increased to Rs.750 Million and it would be further enhanced to Rs.3 Billion within next three years. He asked President FCCI to submit this project to PARB where a group of experts will review its viability and allow the requisite grant.

Secretary agriculture also explained in detail the numbers of innovative E-projects to streamline our agriculture sector and make it fully compatible with contemporary needs with inherent ability to compete with the developed agrarian economies.

Earlier in his address of welcome, Engineer Muhammad Saeed Sheikh President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) expressed concern over the massive migration from rural to urban areas. This has not only inflicted colossal loss to the agriculture sector but also created multiple problems for the cities. He said that the concept of green belts around major cities has become redundant and fertile agriculture land is mercilessly used for commercial purposes. He demanded complete ban on the use of agriculture land for commercial purpose.

“The new and planned cities could also be developed at a suitable distance from the existing ones,” he said and added that green belts around cities must be preserved to cater to food related needs of each city. He said that everyone is getting food today and when the world population will swell to 10 billion even then Allah Almighty will provide food to all. He criticized the drastic increase in the price of wheat during Zardari era and said that the increase in wheat prices fomented a new wave of the price spiral.

He said that the Word Bank in its report had also warned that this step will certainly play a catalytic role in increasing wheat production but it will badly disturb the whole economy. He said that he was not against giving maximum relief to the farming community but the increase in the prices of agriculture produce is not in the national interest. “The option of giving subsidy to the farmers instead of increasing price of agriculture produce was also available but government intentionally ignored it,” he added.

He further said that we now have wheat stocks for many years. “Our wheat is costly as compared to other countries and hence we are unable to sell it in the international market,” he added. He said that we could import wheat at much cheaper rate from other countries to meet our domestic needs and instead of concentrating on traditional crops, we should switch over the high value crops which are in high demand in international markets. He also stressed the need to import high yielding seeds to increase our production. Similarly standardization of fertilizers and pesticides is also imperative and for this purpose government should set up laboratories in addition to taking severe action against the adulterators.

President FCCI said that textile is the mainstay of local economy but our members are also involved in agriculture. Hence the president FCCI or his nominated persons should be included in all BODs and BOGs falling under the administrative domain of the agriculture department.

Vice President Engineer Ahmed Hasan said that the Study Report published by the R&D Department of CPEC will help us to reorganize agriculture on modern scientific lines. He told that per Acre yield of China is almost double as compared to ours, hence we should exploit china’s experience through modern farming, technology up-gradation and by launching Joint Ventures for value addition in collaboration with Chinese entrepreneurs.

Hafiz Azhar gave an explicit, comprehensive and detailed presentation on the study report CPEC-Prospects & Challenges for Agriculture.

A question answer session was also held in which Abid Masood, Chaudhary Muhammad Nawaz, Usman Rauf, Sartaj Siddiqi, Engineer Asim Munir and Haji Muhammad Shafi raised interesting questions which were well responded.

Later, Vice President Engineer Ahmed Hassan offered vote of thanks. He also presented FCCI memento and books published by R&D Department of FCCI to secretary Agriculture Punjab.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/18/8-page/899781-news.html

APBF FOR HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DEVELOP AGRI, INDUSTRIAL SECTORS
Business Recorder, August 20, 2017

LAHORE: All Pakistan Business Forum's president Ibrahim Qureshi has asked the federal government to adopt a holistic approach for developing both the agricultural and industrial sectors to increase the country's exports.

He said Pakistan has an untapped export potential of $13 billion. He said this potential exists in home textile products, apparels, leather products and cereals that can double the exports within a year.

Qureshi said that there is a need to devise a comprehensive strategy to promote the industry on commercial basis which would not only support the manufactures but also increase export. He expressed hope that new cabinet would pursue radical economic reforms through a long-term stable administration.

He urged the Ministry of Commerce (MoC) to explore potential international markets to enhance exports. He said the MoC should work to find out new trade avenues and markets in different world regions, as the new trade policy focused on improving supply chain, enhancing use of technology and providing competitiveness in a bid to enhance volume of international and internal trade.

He demanded of the government to offer special package of power and gas tariffs for rapid industrial growth on the pattern of China. As a result of high tariffs and taxation, cost of production is increasing and cannot compete in global market hampering export badly.

He said it is essential to have an agricultural policy that increases the supply of raw material to agro-based industries and that can help domestic textile producers regain lost competitiveness in the world market.

"There is a need to diversify the range of value-added traditional industrial goods, such as consumer textile and leather products, as well as of non-traditional industrial goods," he said.

APBF president said that the government have to work on a plan to diversify internal trade and improve supply chains, which would ultimately enhance the exports. As the negotiations were underway for free trade agreements (FTAs) with Turkey, Thailand and Iran, they should be finalized as early as possible in the interest of Pakistan.

He urged the government to try to reach FTAs with the Latin American countries on the same pattern. He said the South American markets had great potential and by taking timely measures, Pakistan could tap them. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Cuba had huge import potential also, he said.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/20/5-page.html

FOOD SECURITY EXPERTS SHIFT FOCUS TO BIOTECHNOLOGY
The Express Tribune, August 20, 2017

Shahram Haq

LAHORE: There is a dire need for increasing the agricultural yield to feed an increasing global population, food security experts emphasised on Saturday, highlighting biotechnology and its sub-fields as the key to increasing the productivity per acre.

Remedies derived from biotechnology could allow crop adaptation to biotic and abiotic stresses arising due to massive climate change at the global level, they said, adding technologies like genetic engineering could transform agricultural practices massively to make the sector more productive.

“Biotechnology is playing an important role in mitigating adverse impacts of climate change on agricultural output by reducing emission of greenhouse gases,” said Professor of Biotechnology at FCC University Lahore Dr Kauser Malik.

He said the use of biofuels, for example, would help solve energy supply problems by providing renewable and cheap energy for farmers, apart from reducing the adverse impact of carbon dioxide emissions.

“Carbon dioxide emissions are reduced by using traditional and genetically modified crops such as sugarcane, oilseed and rapeseed,” he said, adding the need for tillage could also be reduced with the help of genetically modified crops.

“We can modify plants through genetic engineering so that they absorb relatively more carbon from the atmosphere and convert it into oxygen. Soil fertility can also be increased by mixing microbes in the soil. In this context, modern environmental biotechnology has gained immense importance in coming up with innovative ways of increasing productivity,” Malik said.

Experts claim that rainfall volatility, increasing drought conditions and drastic rises in temperatures – all symptoms of climate change – affect food production and are also responsible for pest, disease and weed outbreaks in crops.

Fast-paced climate change, experts claim, is not providing crops enough time to adjust to the changing environment, thereby stifling growth. According to an estimate, in 20 to 25 years, the world will get to a point where climatic conditions in most fertile areas will become too extreme for growing crops.

Malik said under the circumstances, increasing the area under production and improving productivity on the existing farmland were the only two choices to overcome food security challenges and adapt to changing climatic conditions.

"Transgenic canola and soybean have been modified to be resistant to specific herbicides. Fungi, bacteria and virus-resistant GM cassava, potatoes, bananas and other crops are also being developed with some having already been commercialised while others are undergoing field trials," he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1486265/food-security-experts-shift-focus-biotechnology/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 7TH TO AUGUST 13 Th 2017
INEFFICIENT FERTILISER USE DAMAGING SOIL FERTILITY IN PUNJAB
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, August 7th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

THE unsustainable management practices in Punjab have damaged soil fertility and health, leading to promotion of chemical fertilisers which too is inefficient to the desirable level, according to the Soil Fertility Atlas recently published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

These scenarios warrant adoption of best management practices to enhance fertiliser use efficiency and improve soil fertility for sustaining agricultural productivity, according to the atlas, published in association with the US Department of Agriculture and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The atlas reveals that the use of nutrients is skewed towards nitrogen and phosphorus while the proportional use of potassium is less than one per cent. The use of micronutrients and organic sources of nutrients is not common among most farmers.

The atlas observed five crops and found that 10pc of farmers use organic sources of nutrients, predominantly in wheat-occupied cropping systems, whereas 20pc of farmers across Punjab apply micronutrients regardless of the product quality.

The soil fertility atlas for Punjab is a comprehensive document that provides detailed information on cropping patterns, management practices, soil fertility status, and trends of fertiliser use, advisory services and facilities available to the farmers in the province.

It also suggests the strategies to maximise productivity while sustaining the soil health and environmental quality.

"The atlas will help understand the soil fertility management changes required for sustainable agricultural intensification in Punjab," said Mina Dowlatchahi, the FAO's representative in Pakistan.

Preserving soil fertility in production intensification is at the heart of any action that aims at protecting, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, and halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss, she said.

Nevertheless, the burning of crop residues and a lack of scientific application of both inorganic and organic sources of nutrients still remained a concern. Indeed, the district-wise disaggregation of the

National Fertiliser Development Centre's (NFDC) off-take data did not reflect the actual usage of the fertilisers at farm-gate level.

This divergence, when compared with the rapid fertiliser use assessment (RFUA), was attributed to the storage of fertilisers at various locations in Punjab. Overall, the cumulative usage of fertilisers in all of the regions for five crops followed the same trend: rice-wheat, pulse-wheat and maize-wheat-oilseeds, except one crop production region, i.e. mixed cropping of cotton and wheat.

A nearly 70pc higher nutrient use was figured out from RFUA for all crop production regions except in the rice-wheat based cropping system than the processed NFDC off-take.

Since the increased use of nutrients presumably enhanced yields in case of wheat, further investigations are required in the specific crop production regions to determine suitable nutrient use scenarios for improved efficiency and yield.

The atlas observed that soil-related constraints weighted 40pc in the problem-matrix that could hamper productivity was reported by the farmers at provincial level. However, the degree of soil constraints varied from 43pc to 50pc in regional scenarios.

In Thal and rain-fed areas, canal water shortage and high inputs prices emerged as the principal components impacting productivity and farmers' satisfaction.

The generation of soil maps for regional scenarios to identify the limiting soil constraints in the consistently poor performing areas may be helpful.

Although crop production in good quality soils is the priority, a simultaneous focus should be on agricultural constrained soils under the changing climate scenarios.

In a nutshell, the first 2Rs of the desirable 4R nutrient stewardship (i.e. right fertilisation at the right rate at the right time in the right place) are usually practised, but the latter 2Rs are rarely followed by the farming communities, which resulted in low nutrient use efficiency and economic returns.

This is the first step forward in the right direction and similar activities should be undertaken in other provinces of the country for achieving the food security and socio-economic uplift.

The atlas recommended that a network of soil, plant, water and fertiliser quality testing facilities for the benefit of the farming community should be established. The existing testing laboratories may not be enough to facilitate about four million farmers of Punjab.

Outreach linkages with the farmers should be strengthened for extensive surveys and assessments at farm-gate level and applying best management practices according to 4R soil constraint-based commodity specific packages. According to USAID's Mission Director Jerry Bisson, the atlas will help in understanding the soil fertility management changes required for sustainable intensification of Punjab, which is the bread basket of Pakistan and accounts for 60pc of the country's agricultural products.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1350115

LOANS TO AGRI SECTOR RISE, BUT DISCREPANCIES EXIST
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, August 7th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

AGRICULTURAL lending reached an all-time high of Rs704.5 billion in the last fiscal year. For this year the target is even higher at Rs1 trillion.

Recovery in agricultural output in the last fiscal year has emboldened banks to readily accept this target. Top bankers say they hope to meet the target as demand for farm loans are likely to remain high and as banks work upon improving lending practices.

But whether banks will also be able to remove geographical and other discrepancies — Balochistan gets about 0.1 per cent of total farm loans — in extending agricultural loans has yet to be seen. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) is making reporting requirements more candid to make sure they can.

Balochistan's contribution to national agriculture is around 3pc to 4pc.

"Geographical discrepancy in farm lending is a fact. But underlying factors are seldom highlighted by media," complains the head of agricultural lending at a leading commercial bank. "Expecting us to make more loans in regions where issues are insurmountable isn't fair. If those issues are not of our own making why should we feel embarrassed?" he said.

He and several other bankers say that years of political unrest, terrorism, militancy and poor law and order in Balochistan have resulted in less than adequate banking concentration in that province. But as things have started improving, banks are set to accelerate agricultural lending there, they say.

Balochistan gets only 0.1pc of total agricultural credit despite having a contribution of around 4pc to the national output

Besides, Balochistan Bank is going to be set up in this fiscal year and the provincial government has allocated Rs10bn for this purpose in its budget.

Once the bank begins operating, the pace of agricultural lending there must increase. "It'll be far easier for a provincial bank to make more agriculture loans in Balochistan than big commercial banks that remain focused on lending in Punjab and Sindh where 97pc of total farm loans are consumed," the banker says.

But things should be different, if banks stick to provincial break-ups of the agricultural lending, central bankers point out. Smaller provinces and federating units (Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan) are supposed to get 10pc of total agricultural loans and not 3pc that they eventually end up consuming.

In KP, agricultural lending remains below target for reasons similar to those cited in case of Balochistan, i.e. years of militancy, terrorism and poor law and order.

"These things deter banks from entertaining loan applications not only from farmers but even from small loan seekers of other sectors," says a senior executive of Habib Bank Ltd.

Another reason for low agricultural lending in KP so far is that the farming community there, just like in Sindh, has access to informal finance from middlemen and traditional loan makers who give loans on high interest rates, but are well rooted in the farming community, bankers say.

In case of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan, banks have never even bothered to assess the potential of agricultural lending, let alone exploiting that potential, they admit.

Small wonder then that KP gets less than 2pc of the total agricultural loans and AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan each get 0.1pc of it, official stats reveal.

Sindh, the second-largest recipient of agricultural lending, happens to be the second-largest contributor to national agriculture as well after Punjab. But whereas its share in the country's agriculture sector is no less than 23pc, it gets around 13pc of the total agricultural loans. Here, issues are multiple and mostly rooted in agricultural history, bankers and agriculturists say.

"Unlike in Punjab, farm land documentation is very poor [in Sindh]," says a senior executive of one of the five leading local banks. "Besides, the province is known to have misused agricultural loans of ZTBL [Zarai Taraqiati (Agricultural Development) Bank Ltd.] just as Punjab has done in the past.

"But the difference between ZTBL lending in the two provinces is that in Sindh recovery and loan settlement have remained more difficult than in the case of Punjab. That perhaps has kept other banks from accelerating agricultural loans here," he says.

Agriculturists in Sindh, however, allege that banks knowingly make more agricultural loans in Punjab under pressure from politicians and other powerful lobbies there.

The provincial break-up of loans quoted above has been taken from the SBP report of the fiscal year 2014-15. But sources in the SBP say no dramatic change has since taken place in geographical distribution of farm loans though they insist that in case of Sindh the share now is a bit higher than in 2014-15.

"That is why we are in the process of assigning district-wise lending targets to banks , and hopefully this year's agricultural lending will be much more judicious than in previous years," one of these sources told this writer.

"With Islamic banks, microfinance banks, institutions and non-governmental organisations now playing an active role in the agricultural loan distribution and with SBP well determined to remove all geographical and sectoral discrepancies, one can hope that agricultural lending from this year onwards would be much more qualitative," the source said.

Besides, central bankers point out that with the payment system undergoing some revolutionary changes and mobile and internet banking catching up fast, small farmers, even in the remotest areas of the country will soon have access to agricultural loans.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1350112

'BETTER AGRICULTURE PRACTICES, VARIETIES, WILL IMPROVE OUR ECONOMY'

Business Recorder, 8 August 2017
FAISALABAD: Federal Science and Technology Secretary Fazal Abbas Maken has said that problem-solving researches coupled with a mechanism of translating the knowledge into products and services are prerequisite to alleviate poverty and to compete with the rest of the world.

He addressed the appreciation ceremony for the winners of research productivity award and technology development fund. Pakistan Council for Science and Technology Chairman Dr. Anwar-ul-Hassan Gillani and UAF Vice Chancellor Dr. Iqrar Ahmad Khan also spoke.

The ceremony was organized by Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization, University of Agriculture Faisalabad at the meeting room, Center for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food Security, UAF.

Fazal Abbas Maken said that majority of our population was living in rural areas and economy of our country was depending upon agriculture. If we are able to better agriculture practices and varieties, it will better our economy. He urged experts to reach out to farming community about latest technologies and trends that will increase the productivity. He said that it was a challenge for the social scientists. He said that the strong academia-industry and society ties will pave the way to make the development and prosperity. He said that the quality and demand driven researches will help cope with the challenge facing the country.

Pakistan Council for Science and Technology Chairman Dr. Anwar-ul-Hassan Gillani stressed upon the scientists to conduct the goal oriented research. He said setting the goal in life was most important that pushed oneself toward the success and prosperity. He said that team work in the research was vital to bring the change on the face of science and technology.

He said that the efforts of yourself will reward you. He said that research productivity award and technology development fund is hallmark step to motivate the researches and flourish the economy. He lauded the efforts being made on the part of the UAF for the quality education, research and outreach program.

UAF Vice Chancellor Dr. Iqrar Ahmad Khan said that the country was importing the pulses and edible oil worth billion of rupees. If we promote its cultivation, we can not only overcome the import but also earn foreign exchange. He said that UAF was bringing strategically interventions to reduce the import bill of edible oil. He said that it is a matter of grave concern that 40 percent of the population was malnourished. He said that it was due to eating habit. If we bring the diversification in our food, we can overcome it.

The county can save 16 MAF of water, more than Tarbela and Mangla dams storage, by reducing two irrigation for wheat crop from five to three times, with the adoption of water efficient wheat varieties and its harvesting on latest trends countrywide. He said that UAF research portfolio had crossed Rs 2.5 billion.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/08/13-page/897138-news.html

HIGH COURT RESTRAINS UAF ACTING HEAD FROM FUNCTIONING
Dawn, 10 August 2017

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Wednesday restrained University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) acting Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan from functioning and directed its Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Zafar Iqbal to look after the varsity's affairs.

Prof Dr Sarwar had filed a petition challenging the appointment of acting VC at the university for being illegal.

Advocate Ahsan Bhoon represented the petitioner and argued that law did not allow appointment of an acting VC in the absence of a regular one. He said under the law Pro-VC was supposed to run affairs of the university till appointment of the permanent VC.

The counsel pointed out that the respondent, Prof Dr Khan, had already held the office of the VC twice.

The university's legal adviser told the court that the chancellor/governor had the power to appoint any professor as acting VC to look after administrative affairs.

Advocate Bhoon retorted that the chancellor could exercise such power but in the absence of Pro-VC. He reiterated that the appointment of acting VC was clearly in violation of the law.

Issuing an interim order, Chief Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah restrained the respondent (acting VC) from functioning and entrusted the charge to Pro-VC. The CJ observed that the acting VC would neither preside over syndicate meeting nor take any administrative decision.

CJ Shah adjourned hearing for a week and also asked the chancellor to decide the matter regarding appointment of a permanent VC of the university or the interim charge given to Pro-VC.

Hearing another petition, the chief justice sought reply from the provincial government regarding progress in the appointment of a permanent vice chancellor of the Punjab University.

Prof Dr Zaid Mahmood filed a petition questioning unnecessary delay in appointment of the regular VC of PU and eligibility of acting VC Prof Dr Zafar Moeen.

A law officer told the court that the process for the appointment of the VC was in process and fresh advertisement for the post would be made soon.

The CJ adjourned hearing till Aug 17 and directed the law officer to submit a written reply to the petition.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1350708

FARMERS URGED TO PROTECT VEGETABLES, STANDING CROPS FROM VAGARIES OF WEATHER
Business Recorder, 12 August, 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office on Friday asked the farmers to take steps to protect vegetables and other standing crops from the effects of changing weather during the monsoon season.

It also warned the growers of the negative impact of weeds, saying that the unneeded wild plants cause a sizeable yield loss every year. “Removing weeds from the standing crops is very important as weeds utilize moisture and food which are to be utilized by the crop,” it added.

As the monsoon weather system prevails, it told the farmers to schedule irrigation plans in line with the expected rainy spells till Aug 20. Warning the growers, it said that stagnant rainwater is feared to cause damage to the standing crops especially cotton.

“Accumulation of stagnant water in the fields due to heavy rains is fatal for standing crops like cotton etc.,” the Met said, adding that farmers should take suitable measures to resolve the problem. Farmers of rain-crop areas should also take steps to conserve rainwater for crops and livestock.

Punjab: A light to moderate rainfall is expected in the most parts of the province till August 20. Sindh: A light rainfall is expected at isolated places during the period. Khyber Pukhtunkhwa: A light to moderate rainfall is expected at the most parts of the province. Balochistan: A light to moderate rainfall is expected in isolated places of Zhob Division over the period. Gilgit-Baltistan: A light to moderate rainfall is expected in its most parts. Kashmir: A light to moderate rainfall is expected in its most parts.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/08/12/3-page/898228-news.html

PROJECT TO TACKLE AGRICULTURAL ISSUES IN BALOCHISTAN
Dawn, August 13th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations and the Australian government are launching the second phase of the Australia-Balochistan Agribusiness Programme (AusABBA) to tackle a range of problems in the agriculture sector in south western border districts of the province.

As part of project preparations, FAO and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Dfat) have held meetings with the departments of agriculture, cooperatives, livestock and dairy development. The FAO and Dfat have also signed the grant assistance project.

In the second phase, AusABBA will cover the Chagai, Kech, Kharan, Nushki, Panjgur and Washuk districts of south-west Balochistan, near the Afghan-Iranian border. These six districts are part of the arid dry western plateau agro-ecological zone.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1351333

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 1ST TO AUGUST 6TH 2017
SECRETARY PROMISES PRICE SUPPORT TO COTTON FARMERS
The Express Tribune, August 2nd, 2017.

MULTAN: Punjab Agriculture Department Secretary Muhammad Mahmud said on Tuesday that the provincial government would prevent farmers from losses being caused by instability in the cotton market and would intervene to rescue them.

Speaking at a seminar and exhibition on cotton in Mianwali's Piplan tehsil, Mahmud said the provincial government had sent recommendations to the federal government for announcement of the cotton support price, assuring stakeholders that the government would not let raw cotton price go below Rs3,000 per maund (40 kg).

Punjab Archaeology Minister Muhammad Asif Malik said the province was trying to improve agricultural exports in order to strengthen the country's economy and raise its global profile.

"Considerable foreign exchange can be earned through agricultural exports through proper crop planning, enhanced production and adoption of better post-harvest strategies," Malik said.

Mahmud informed the minister that the government had hired services of 4,000 agricultural graduates from the private sector in an effort to provide guidance to the farmers at their doorsteps.

"Cotton production contests are being held for the first time in the country's 70-year history and agricultural machinery worth Rs14 million will be distributed among the winners," a statement released by the agricultural department said.

Mahmud apprised the minister of the distribution of 10,000 Pheromone traps among cotton farmers of Mianwali, Bhakkar and Layyah within a week for effective control of pink bollworm, adding the Punjab government had already distributed PB ropes worth Rs96.232 million among farmers of 54 districts to counter the pink bollworm threat.

On the occasion, agricultural companies distributed spray machines, Pheromone traps and hollow cone nozzles among the farmers.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1471989/secretary-promises-price-support-cotton-farmers/

ACTIVE BUYING ON COTTON MARKET AS PHUTTI ARRIVALS IMPROVE
Dawn,August 04, 2017

KARACHI: Brisk activity was witnessed at the cotton market on Thursday as higher availability of quality lint attracted spinners running short of stocks.

However, the pace of phutti (seed cotton) arrival from cotton fields into ginneries has yet to meet the rising demand from the industry.

Cotton analyst, Naseem Usman, said currently around 80 to 90 per cent spinners have run out of lint stocks and are desperately looking for new crop.

In the coming days, demand would intensify with the improved flow of phutti and higher availability of quality cotton.

Due to limited supply of phutti, processed cotton is being sold on a daily basis and spinners are unable to build up stocks and inventory on long-term basis.

Leading cotton markets in the world closed steady, with New York cotton coming slightly under pressure owing to a weak dollar against the euro.

Reports from India indicate that some cotton growing areas are under pink bollworm attack.

The Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) kept its spot rates steady at overnight level.

The following deals were reported on Thursday: 600 bales, Mirpurkhas, at Rs6,350; 1,800 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs6,350 to Rs6,375; 2,000 bales, Tando Adam, at Rs6,350 to Rs6,400; 200 bales, Burewala, at Rs6,700; 200 bales, Haroonabad, at Rs6,700; 100 bales, Hasilpur, at Rs6,700; 200 bales, Fort Abbas, at Rs6,700; and 400 bales, Khanewal, at Rs6,700.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1349408

AGRI-OFFICIALS ADMONISHED OVER POOR FARM CONDITION
The Express Tribune, August 4, 2017

MULTAN: Punjab Agriculture Secretary Muhammad Mahmud expressed his displeasure over poor management of government farms by the officials concerned while visiting farms of the Punjab Seed Corporation and Agriculture Research and Extension on Thursday.

Mahmud criticised the lacklustre maintenance of these farms, which reflected negligence and lack of interest on the part of officials, a statement issued by the Punjab Agriculture Department's media liaison unit said.

"This situation has arisen despite repeated notices to get things in order and timely release of funds to follow up on the instructions and obtain the required equipment and material," he said, adding funds were released in accordance with the financing demanded by the agricultural officials.

The agriculture secretary emphasised that things could be salvaged within a short span of time with proper utilisation of resources. He said the purpose of government-managed farms was to convert them into models for other farmers to follow and replicate.

"Establishment of model farms is only possible if officials ensure a modern irrigation system, introduction of new varieties and speedy farm mechanisation," Mahmud said, deploring that productivity of the government farms was negligible at the moment.

He warned that those unwilling to be efficient in their duties would be removed from the department. He also instructed the officials to ensure transparency in the procurement of farm equipment.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1473506/agri-officials-admonished-poor-farm-condition/

September 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 25 TH TO SEPTEMBER 30Th 2017

MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF AGRITRADE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Business Recorder, 30 September 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Minister for Commerce and Textiles, Pervaiz Malik on Friday emphasized the importance of agritrade and agribusiness for developing countries like Pakistan that derive their livelihoods predominantly from agriculture.

While speaking at the World Trade Organization (WTO) public forum event organized by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) the minister stressed the importance of developing agriculture through access to newer technologies, said a statement issued by Ministry of Commerce here.

He stressed for focusing on the rural economy, integration of agrarian countries into global and regional value chains and providing a level playing field to farmers and agriculture exporters from small countries.

He also highlighted the significance of climate change and food security for developing countries as major challenges and called for agricultural productivity.

During his visit to Geneva, he also held a round table with the Friends of E-Commerce for Development (FEDs) a group of developing countries led by Pakistan and Costa Rica.

They also discussed matters surrounding connectivity and infrastructure for developing countries, and the possible outcomes in this area for the upcoming MC-11 WTO Ministerial Conference in December.

The Minister, along with a delegation of parliamentarians from Pakistan, amongst Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Commerce, Siraj Khan, Senator Saud Majeed and Senator Syed Tahir Mashhadi also met a Parliamentary delegation from the European Union (EU) Parliament comprising Bernd Lange, Helmut Schulz, Inmaculada Rodriguez-Pinero Fernandez, and Emma McClarkin for a discussion on matters of bilateral importance, primarily Generalized Schemes of Preference (GSP- plus).

The Minister explained the benefits to Pakistan and EU from the enhancement of bilateral trade as a result of GSP plus and appreciated the efforts of the EU in this regard.

He also showcased the progress made by Pakistan in social development including the progressive work on social and labour rights in the country. —APP

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/30/5-page/673688-news.html

CM'S WARNING FAILS TO HELP CUT TOMATO, ONION PRICES
Aamir Shafaat Khan

Dawn, September 29, 2017

KARACHI: The strict warning given by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Wednesday for bringing down prices of vegetables and taking profiteers to task did not provide any relief to consumers on Thursday.

Consumers continued to pay Rs70-80 per kg for onion while tomato price which was prevailing at Rs200 per kg on Tuesday crawled down to Rs160 much before Wednesday's meeting of the CM with the officials concerned.

On Thursday, retailers were seen selling tomato at Rs140-160 per kg depending on the quality.

The vice chairman of the Market Committee Karachi Division, Asif Ahmed, claimed tomato price in retail markets, including superstores and posh localities, were still ruling at Rs180-240 per kg despite drop in its wholesale price to Rs110-120 per kg on Thursday from Rs160-170 per kg on Monday.

He said the higher-ups in the Sindh government and the commissioner office have not taken any steps to ensure reduction in prices in the retail markets despite drop in the wholesale prices.

"The Sindh government has not played any role in bringing down the wholesale prices. Tomato's wholesale price has actually come down due to an increase in arrival from Iran, India and Balochistan," he said.

When asked about the closure of Iranian border on the eve of Ashura for security reasons and its impact on tomato and onion prices, he said the Iranian border was open till then.

"In case of Iran-Pakistan border closure, tomato and onion will continue to arrive from other areas," he added.

He said he could not confirm the actual arrival of imported tomato but it was estimated that some 15-20 trucks carrying 20 tonnes each had been arriving daily for the last three days at various upcountry destinations.

Asif claimed the wholesale rate of tomato at Karachi's main vegetable market had so far been the cheapest as compared to the wholesale rate prevailing at variousmarketsof various cities of the country.

He said the wholesale onion price had been pegged at Rs50 per kg for the last over one week and its retail price hovered between Rs70 and Rs80 per kg in the metropolis.

The new Sindh crop of tomato will hit the markets by the middle of next month followed by new Sindh crop of onion. Consumers are currently getting onions from Balochistan, Iran and Kazakhstan.

The Sindh government woke up late and it should have taken serious notice when retail prices of tomato rose to Rs50-60 per kg from Rs30-40 per kg prior to Eidul Azha followed by a jump in onion price to Rs60 from Rs30 per kg.

Consumers had paid up to Rs120 per kg for onion during the Eidul Azha days.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1360689/cms-warning-fails-to-help-cut-tomato-onion-prices

SINDH AND ITS PERENNIAL ISSUES
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, September 25th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE planning and development department of Sindh set up a special unit in May to ensure the Global Goals are achieved. Three of these goals — SDGs 2, 6 and 13 — are directly linked with the country's agricultural sector.

Sindh holds a special place as far as its contribution to the overall agrarian economy of the country is concerned, though the province is confronted by many issues ranging from poor governance, lack of support to small and medium-sized farmers and a fragile regulatory framework.

"Despite having a climatic advantage, Sindh's crop yields are decreasing. It's a serious issue," said Dr Fateh Marri, project coordinator of the multimillion-rupee Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP) being funded by the World Bank.

Sindh is also believed to have huge productivity potential, but it remains largely untapped.

Moreover, the province is faced with a large influx of people from other parts of Pakistan who put an additional burden on its resources and infrastructure.

Provisional results of the latest census have not gone down well with Sindh's political leadership. They believe that by showing a reduced population of the province the federal government wants to deprive it of its increased share in the divisible pool in the National Finance Commission Award.

Mahmood Nawaz Shah, vice president of the Sindh Abadgar Board, believes that the province comes up with an impressive output of wheat every year despite pre- and post-harvest losses at various stages.

Since the province lacks storage capacity, only a limited quantity is procured from farmers at support price and the rest is hoarded or sold in the market at lower prices.

Sindh's total official wheat storage capacity is close to 700,000 tonnes. Of the four million tonnes of wheat produced by the province, only 1.3m tonnes are procured every year after hiring rented premises.

"We need to look into these issues. Some baseline data and scientific studies can help us achieve the SDGs directly related to our agriculture sector," Mr Shah says. "We need to develop crops under a research-oriented approach. After all, it's the farm sector that has to ensure food security and zero hunger."

Another issue is the worsening quality of water. An inquiry report submitted recently to the Sindh High Court found that more than three quarters of water in 14 districts of the province was unsafe for human consumption.

In addition, the contamination of freshwater bodies, including major canals and lakes such as Manchhar, face a perennial disposal of effluent or domestic and industrial wastewater.

The lake awaits its rehabilitation that could revive economy of the thousands of fishermen whose livelihood depends on it.

The timely availability of water remains essential for achieving desired growth in the agriculture sector. However, being a lower riparian region, Sindh continues to face water shortage more often than not. The shortage of water in early Kharif season adversely affected the rice crop.

However, this time water flows were available timely, brightening the outlook for a bumper rice crop.

The provincial SDGs support unit has now started working to connect the dots at different level. Rehana Ghulam Ali Memon, the unit's project coordinator, says the provincial government has sped up work to streamline, localise and implement the 2030 development agenda. She believes that while the unit will oversee implementation phases, it is the departments concerned that have to play a proactive role.

The good news perhaps is that draft of the agriculture policy has been shared with stakeholders in Sindh under SAGP. The project also addresses the issues concerning onion, date palm, paddy and chillies. The livestock sector is a separate component of the project.

The policy is now being aligned with national food security policy being worked out by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Growers' bodies, private sector and the departments concerned are in the loop and officials hope that aligned departments would perform better under the unit's umbrella to ensure Sindh meets the global targets.

"Now there is a great emphasis that this policy should be framed in the light of the SDGs. We need to produce not only food, but it should be nutritious too," says Dr Fateh Marri of the SAGP.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1359726/sindh-and-its-perennial-issues

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 18 TH TO SEPTEMBER 24 Th 2017
MNA SLAMS GOVT FOR NOT FORMULATING POLICIES TO ENCOURAGE AGRI SECTOR
Mushtaq Ghumman

ISLAMABAD: A treasury Member National Assembly, Ch Asad ur-Rehman on Tuesday severely criticised federal government for not formulating policies to encourage agriculture sector and exporting surplus due to which farmers are suffering badly.

Presiding over a meeting of sub-committee of National Assembly's Standing Committee on Commerce and Textile in absence of Shazia Marri, he maintained that the government took a blatantly flawed decision to transfer agriculture affairs to the provinces by devolving Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MINFAL). Two other Members – Nazir Ahmed Bughio and Shahzadi Umerzadi Tiwana – were also absent from the meeting.

The agenda of the meeting was current trade deficit and reasons for the alarming decline in exports of Pakistan given that the sub-committee has been mandated to prepare a report on reasons for the decline in exports.

Most of the officials' representing Commerce Division and Textile Division agreed with sub-committee Member cum Convener with respect to ignoring agriculture sector. One of the officials also pointed out that other countries have an Agriculture Ministry at the federal level but Pakistan has devolved it.

It was also revealed during the meeting that Ministry of National Food Security and Research or any other Ministry cannot negotiate with Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as rules of business do not allow it to go for such negotiations. He said 18th amendment in Constitution has worsened the sector's affairs.

Ch Asad-ur-Rehman argued that presently, wheat, sugar and maize are surplus but the government has not formulated any policy to export these commodities. A Joint Secretary of Ministry of Commerce, Saroosh Alvi informed the committee that sugar export policy is in the final stage and will be ready within a week's time whereas policy on wheat is under process. None of the officials was aware that Pakistan is also surplus in maize.

Rehman stated that it is wrong to say that cotton cultivation area has declined due to sugarcane production, arguing that when farmers are not getting a return or facing financial losses, they will sow a loss making crops.

"We are surplus in sugar and wheat but it has become s headache for us. Our agriculture has been destroyed," he said adding that he was raising his voice for the agriculture sector but was not heard by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The Convener of the sub-committee snubbed the officials sitting in the meeting saying that "policies cannot be formulated while sitting in air conditioned rooms."

Additional Secretary Commerce Division, Anjum Asad Amin, stated that the entire world is extending substantial subsidy to its agriculture sector whereas the volume of subsidy in Pakistan is far less than our competitors due to which Pakistan is unable to export its agri surplus.

Ch Asad-ur-Rehman also criticised Finance Minister Senator Ishaq Dar, saying "Dar is a dishonest Chartered Accountant who made a lot of money," he maintained.

The officials of Ministry of Commerce and Textile gave a presentation to the "one man" sub-committee about trends of cotton crops in neighbouring countries including India and Bangladesh including use of different varieties.

The sub-committee also decided to call Provincial Agriculture Secretaries to the sub-committee so that they can be briefed on steps taken by provinces for agriculture sector because agriculture subject is devolved to the provinces.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/20/21-page/671947-news.html

DOMESTIC, INDUSTRIAL, HOSPITAL WASTES POSING HEALTH HAZARDS TO KARACHIITES
Business Recorder, 20 September, 2017

KARACHI: The managing director of the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB), Dr. A.D. Sanjnani, has said that there is absolutely no system for separate collection of domestic, industrial, and hospital solid wastes, which are being dumped at garbage spots in the city, causing serious environmental hazards.

Underscoring the need for scientific disposal of solid waste, he said at a meeting of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and industry that the Board is currently examining the possibility of segregating domestic, industrial and hospital solid wastes so that all types of waste could be safely treated or recycled, and be dumped separately at landfill sites.

He said that industrialists should grant the SSWMB access to the points of origin of industrial waste, so that the volumes and nature of wastes produced by the industries could be scientifically ascertained in order to ensure safe transportation and dumping of the wastes into landfills.

He gave the assurance that all details provided to the SSWMB about industrial units and their solid waste would be kept confidential.

“We don’t want to carry out the dumping and disposal process haphazardly, and we want to do it more scientifically. Support and cooperation from industries will help in devising an integrated industrial solid-waste management system, besides assisting us in analyzing as to how much waste is being produced by pharmaceutical, textile, leather, plastic and other industries situated in all seven industrial zones of the city,” he added

He said that two landfill sites at Surjani Town’s Jam Chakhro and Deh Gondal Pass near the Northern Bypass exist and a third landfill site is being established where domestic, industrial and hospital waste will be treated and disposed of separately.

Admitting the fact the situation is not good, Dr. Sanjnani said that all concerned will have to work collectively and take prompt remedial steps. If the situation continues to go on like this, he added, Karachi will not be a livable city in the future.

In his own address earlier, the president of the Karachi Chamber, Shamim Ahmed Firpo, expressed grave concern over the pathetic cleanliness conditions in different parts of the city, where colossal amounts of litter are seen lying unattended, many at some of the busiest streets of Karachi.

“It is really worrisome that even the offal of sacrificial animals of Eid-ul-Azha have not been cleared as of today from some of the garbage dumping spots in different areas,” he said.

He added that the stink, which is “extremely annoying and pungent,” is posing a threat to the health of local residents, particularly children.

Commenting on the initiatives undertaken by the SSWMB and comparing the overall cleanliness scenario of Sindh with Punjab, he said that everything was doable but unfortunately due to lack of willingness, Sindh lags way behind Punjab in cleanliness.

It is highly unfair, he said, that the attention of the federal government remains limited to Punjab, with Sindh being constantly ignored.

At the same, it is discouraging that the Sindh government remains unbothered by the need to ensure a clean, healthy and hygienic atmosphere for the citizens, he complained. They continue to suffer badly from poor infrastructure, broken sewerage lines, dilapidated roads, unattended garbage, debris and offal, which usually trigger several epidemic diseases.

The president of the KCCI assured Dr. Sanjnani that the Karachi Chamber was ready to cooperate with the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board in any of its initiatives for ensuring a cleaner Karachi.

“A more aggressively strategy and enhanced resources are required for a cleaner Karachi which, despite being the financial, commercial and industrial hub of the country, is constantly being neglected and is not receiving its due share”, he added.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/20/5-page/907202-news.html

BILAWAL SAYS PPP WILL SUPPORT TENANTS OF OKARA MILITARY FARMS
Dawn, September 21, 2017

SAHIWAL: Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto- Zardari on Wednesday announced his party’s support for the tenants of Okara military farms, and said that the PPP’s upcoming manifesto would centre on agriculture reforms and unemployment opportunities for the youth.

Addressing a large public gathering at Zafar Ali Stadium, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his family had only done politics to further their business interests. “What do they know of serving the masses?” he said, adding that the Sharif family had been trained in politics by dictators during the last three-and-a-half decades.

According to various estimates, around 20,000 PPP supporters, workers and divisional and district office-bearers from surrounding districts were present at the gathering. Several PPP leaders, including Mian Manzoor Wattoo, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Syed Kursheed Shah, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, Khurram Jahangir Wattoo, Samina Ghurki, Shahzad Cheema and Nadeem Afzal Chan, addressed the gathering.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari spoke about the problems faced by the tenants of Okara military farms, environmental pollution from the Sahiwal coal power plant, overall problems faced by small-scale farmers and how the PPP would address these issues in its manifesto for the 2018 general elections.

The PPP supported the landless tenants struggling for landownership in Okara, he said, while condemning the terrorism cases registered against the leaders of Anjuman-i-Mazareen Punjab. He stressed that ownership of the land lay with the tenants who tilled it. “The PPP will never deprive landless tenants of their right,” he said.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari said the recent restructuring of the Lower Bari Doab Canal and Pakpattan Canal had deprived small-scale farmers, situated at the tail end of the canal, of essential irrigation water. Farmers at the tail end of the canal water must be taken care of and they must have access to irrigation water, he said.

The PPP chairperson spoke about the need to set a support price for crops other than wheat. He said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had raised the per unit price of electricity for farmers. “The PML-N had announced [per unit charge of] Rs5 for farmers, but actually, farmers are paying Rs10 per unit of consumption.”

Lashing out at the government’s decision to construct the Sahiwal coal power plant, he said that in the future, Sahiwal would be known as “black Sahiwal” because of the environmental depredation it would cause by generating electricity through coal.

The PPP would focus on introducing agriculture reforms in its manifesto, he said. “We will introduce the Kisan Support Programme (KSP) and construct an Agriculture Support Centre (ASC).”

The support programme would ensure support price for farmers, while small-scale farmers could apply for interest-free loans to purchase agricultural inputs under the ASC, he elaborated.

The support programme would be meant for farmers who cultivated less than 20 acres of farmland, he said, adding that the PPP would also increase the budget for the Benazir Income Support Programme to help financially-distressed women.

The PML-N government had done nothing for the poor farmers of the country, he said.

The PPP leader said that Sufis had always fought against extremism, and that was the message the PPP had learned from the history of this region.

He said the upcoming manifesto would address unemployment as well. The PPP would form the government at the Centre and in the provinces, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said, adding that the state would ensure employment for the youth.

Speaking at the gathering, Mr Kaira lashed out at Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf chief Imran Khan for criticising Mr Bhutto-Zardari for his youth. “Bilawal was nurtured by his mother who trained herself and learned the art of politics in the company of Z.A. Bhutto,” he said.

Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Syed Khursheed Shah blamed the PML-N for creating a confrontational situation among state institutions, and cautioned that this was not healthy for democracy or parliament.

Earlier in the afternoon, the PPP chairperson landed at Mall Mandi in a chopper. He arrived at the Zafar Ali Stadium at around 8pm where he was warmly received by PPP workers.

This is the first time in 23 years that a member of the Bhutto family has addressed a political gathering in Sahiwal city. The late PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto had last addressed a gathering here in 1994.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1359071/bilawal-says-ppp-will-support-tenants-of-okara-military-farms

FAO TO AID FARMERS THROUGH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Amin Ahmed

Dawn, September 21st, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) will leverage synergies to support the implementation of the 2030 'Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals' through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The two UN entities under an agreement seek to facilitate the development of e-agriculture policies and regulations as well as ICT-centric innovation clusters that strengthen national and regional agricultural competitiveness. The agreement is also aimed at enhancing the capacity of rural communities to adopt and use ICTs in agriculture, climate change monitoring and disaster-prevention.

Last year, FAO and ITU jointly developed the 'E-Agriculture Strategy Guide' that suggests a framework for countries to develop their national e-agriculture strategy and master plan.

E-agriculture is seen as an emerging field focusing on the enhancement of agricultural and rural development through improved information and communication processes. In this context, ICT is used as an umbrella term encompassing all information and communication technologies including devices, networks, mobiles, services and applications. These range from innovative internet-era technologies and sensors to other pre-existing aids such as fixed telephones, television sets, radios and satellites.

E-agriculture continues to evolve in scope as new ICT applications continue to be harnessed in the agriculture sector. More specifically, e-agriculture involves the conceptualisation, design, development, evaluation and application of innovative ways to use ICTs in the rural domain, with a primary focus on agriculture.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1358953

IRREGULARITIES OF RS1.28BN FOUND IN AGRICULTURE DEPT
The Express Tribune, September 21st, 2017.

LAHORE:

The auditor general of Pakistan has uncovered misappropriation of funds worth more than Rs1.28 billion in the Punjab Agriculture Department.

The discovery was made as authorities audited the report for FY2015-16. A copy of the report, available with The Express Tribune, showed that the department had also failed to submit Rs12.8 billion of savings in a timely manner.

The report titled 'Audit Report on the Accounts of Government of the Punjab: Audit Year 2015-16′, showed that auditors wrote 1,343 paragraphs of irregularities, inappropriate use of funds, poor record management and lack of transparency. However, the department hardly complied with 62% of these objections.

Despite the tall claims of the Punjab government of fairness and merit in institutions, the report revealed that no record/vouched amount of Rs276.27 million was produced. According to the report, the audit could not authenticate the expenditure as a valid charge to the exchequer due to the failure to produce records.

During the audit of agriculture department, it was observed that an amount of Rs.230.93 million was spent on the purchase of agricultural machinery and spare parts, but there was no advertisement on the Punjab Procurement Regulatory Authority website or in the print media.

It was also observed that daily labour was hired at a cost of Rs16.72million without an approval of the finance department and without advertisement, which was in violation of the above-stated rules. A payment of Rs2.79million was made by drawing cash and distributing it to officers instead of a cheque.

The AGP report also showed that cultivatable land was not utilised properly which resulted in a loss to the tune of Rs15.49 in the shape of lost income. A water reservoir was constructed at Koont Farm without observing specifications and it cost Rs20.50 million.

It also revealed that some faculty members of various universities were sent for PhD studies abroad. However, they either did not return or were unable to complete their. programmes which caused a Rs8.70 million loss. During the period of 2008-15, it was observed that 2,676 acres of land was occupied by illegal contractors (pattadars) and a people are than them occupied 68 acres of land. An amount of Rs628.49 million was recoverable from these illegal occupants.

The audit of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, for the year 2014-15, revealed that one lecturer of university sub-campus Toba Tek Singh provided a fake MSc degree for appointment as a lecturer. As a result of the inquiry, his services were terminated by the syndicate on September 7, 2013. The syndicate decided to recover an amount of Rs1.62million from him, but the money is yet to be returned..

The audit of the agriculture department showed that a number of vehicles, bulldozers, and other store items worth Rs48.98million were unserviceable or unusable. In the absence of appropriate action, the condition on this machinery was further deteriorating.

Weak internal controls on management of assets and negligence in taking appropriate action could result in further deterioration and loss to the public exchequer. The matter was pointed out to the formations during the audit conducted from March 2014 to September 2015.

The matter was reported to the administrative department, but ultimately delayed. The audit recommended that the auction process be expedited and sale proceeds deposited into the government treasury.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1511822/irregularities-rs1-28bn-found-agriculture-dept/

AGRI BODY WANTS TIMELY START OF CANE CRUSHING
Dawn, September 22nd, 2017

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has asked the government to ensure start of cane crushing by November as it has allowed subsidised export of 500,000 tonnes of the commodity to sugar millers costing the national exchequer around Rs5.35 billion.

At a press conference, SCA General Secretary Nabi Bux Sathio and members Zahid Bhurgari and Ejaz Nabi Shah said now the millers should have no excuse to delay the crushing or paying less price to cane growers.

For the last six years, the government was fixing cane rate at Rs182 per 40kg, but it must increase it to Rs220 per 40kg for 2017-18 season, they demanded.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1359150/agri-body-wants-timely-start-of-cane-crushing

FARMERS ASKED TO DRAIN ACCUMULATED RAINWATER
Business Recorder, 22 September 2017
KARACHI: The Met Office on Thursday warned farmers of accumulated rainwater in fields which may damage standing crops, especially the cotton.

It said that rainwater accumulated in fields should be drained immediately, which can scale down yield, especially cotton crop. “Farmers may take suitable measures to resolve the issue,” it added. It also asked farmers to chalk out plans for irrigation of their standing crops as a dry weather spell in likely to hit the most parts of the country except Khyber Pukhtunkhwa.

It also warned farmers of growing threats to crops from weeds, saying that the unneeded plants in fields consume a major portion of food ingredients and moisture, scaling back a sizeable yield annually.

In the next 24 hours: Mainly hot and dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country. However, rain-thunderstorm with gusty winds is expected at a few places in Malakand, Rawalpindi and Gujranwala Divisions, besides Gilgit-Baltistan, Upper FATA and Kashmir. Maximum temperature was recorded in Turbat, Sibbi and Lasbela as 42 degrees Celsius, each, Gwadar, Chhor and Rohri 41, each, and Mithi and Sukkur 40, each.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/22/8-page/672218-news.html

SINDH’S AGRICULTURAL SLAVES
Dawn, September 24, 2017

Zofeen T. Ebrahim

As far back as his memory goes, Sajjan Oad, now 33, had only seen his late father, a farmhand, being rebuked, abused and kicked by the landlord’s men.

“As a child, I hated seeing my father being disgraced,” says Oad. “It was embarrassing that he did not stand up to them.”

He and his family live among the nearly 100 households in Azad Nagar, on the outskirts of Hyderabad, Sindh’s second largest city. All of them have, at one time or another, worked in bondage with no rights or privileges as peasants, haris (landless peasants) or labourers. They are now ‘azad’ or free of their crushing bondage.

Another of these emancipated haris is Sodho. Before him, he says, his father and also his grandfather underwent the same treatment. “We only saw cruelty and injustice meted out to us,” narrates the lanky farmer who remained in this life of perpetual fear for nearly five decades before he became a ‘free man’ in 2009.

“But no more!” beams Oad with pride. “We all still work either as farmhands at nearby farms or as brick workers at the brick kilns, but we work wherever we want and whoever we wish to work for.”

But even the story of their release is fraught with ordeal. Their zamindar (landlord) first kept them in chains on his land but when he was informed that the police were going to raid the place, he had them sent to Achro Thar, where they remained in chains for two months. This case (2009) was reported on internationally, and somehow Hillary Clinton, who was visiting Pakistan at the time and had a meeting with the president, brought the matter up with him. Pressure continued to be mounted on Pakistan by the US embassy, and subsequently, on the order of the Sindh High Court, another raid was carried out in Achro Thar. This time, the police succeeded in getting the peasants released.

Although those living in Azad Nagar may feel they have broken free to an extent, there are scores of haris (also sharecroppers), many from Oad’s tribe, who continue to live in bondage. “Their entire families including children (some as young as seven or eight) work without wages to pay off debts to their employers,” says Oad.

The trauma of such an abusive cycle tends to take its toll on haris. Describing life before and after bondage, Sajjan says: “We lived life on their [landlord’s] terms then; but today we live it on ours! The sense of freedom just cannot be described!”

Jumman Wasan, 45, is a landlord with five acres of land in a village in Tando Allah Yar in Sindh, on which he grows sugarcane and employs five haris. He explains the relationship between the hari and the landholding zamindar is based on sharecropping where the haris have to put in 50 percent of their share in seed, pesticide, fertilizer and fuel for running machines such as tube-wells and tractors. “The haris cultivate and harvest the land and once the produce is sold, the profits or loss are divided, equally among the field hands,” he says.

In theory, sharecropping entails the equal sharing of expenses and profits. But that never happens. The hari keeps borrowing money for inputs as well as to meet household expenses. The landlord, however, charges interest on the loan. And since the hari is completely unlettered, the munshi [executive assistant] can fudge the numbers on the expense sheet in favour of the landlord. By the end of it, the hari is given nothing as he is told everything he earned has gone into debt servicing.

As a result, the haris never have ready cash to buy their share of the inputs or even the groceries for home and they have no option but to borrow money the year round. This cycle of perpetual debt is called bondage — labourers are bound to their landlord as a slave would be to a master, for as long as they owe money to the landlord.

In some cases, when "ownership" of labourers is transferred (when another landlord "buys" the hari), the debt of the worker is also transferred. The buying landlord pays off the debt and saddles the hari that he has bought with the same amount.

Today, bonded labour is found in different shades and hues and can be bracketed under modern day slavery.

Bonded labour definition has changed over time as newer forms have been discovered. It's also used interchangeably with modern day slavery or sometimes comes under it. The latter includes those working in mines, as maids at home, people in fisheries etc. In a nutshell, it includes workers who do not fall within the realms of formal "labour." They are typically not governed by labour laws, rather their lot is decided by the master for whom they work. The crux of the problem is loans and debts that is the heart of the exploitation where people are forced to work.

A recent study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), says an estimated 40.3 million people are victims of bonded labour around the world. Of these, women and girls account for nearly 29 million or 71 percent. These new estimates were released during the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, September 19, 2017. For the first time, forced marriage is also included in bonded labour.

Without implementation of the law, the future of many little souls in Sindh is at stake.

The HRCP was the first to raise its voice against the practice of bonded labour and began working towards eradicating it in 1988 when lawyer and social activist Asma Jahangir filed the first-ever public interest litigation in the Supreme Court of Pakistan on behalf of brick-kiln worker, Darshan Masih, taking the State of Pakistan to court. A group of brick-kiln workers held in bondage had sent a telegram to the then chief justice of the Supreme Court pleading to be saved from the exploitation at the hands of their owners.

"The judgement by Justice Muhammad Afzal Zullah fell short of human rights standards, but provided relief to the poor," recalls Jahangir. "However, the publicity it received helped bring the issue on the radar of rights groups and a realisation dawned on a population largely ignorant or unaware of their rights as labourers."

Dr Lohana has been part of the anti-bonded labour movement since it began in the mid-1980s in Sindh. As a young man, Dr Lohana witnessed first-hand the raids carried out by the police to recover literally "thousands" who had been held in captivity for years, "even in chains", and he was part of the team that set up resettlement camps for the freed people. Today, the seven camps HRCP had initially set up continue to be used by the bonded labour on self-support basis.

In 1989, a Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, draft bill was presented and it was promulgated in 1992. But the law remained toothless because the rules and guidelines for its implementation were never drafted.

"The government must come up with a broad spectrum of bonded labour policies based on progressive lines as one-size-fits-all does not apply if they want to eradicate this form of labour," says Asma Jahangir, co-founder of the HRCP.

Bonded labour has "changed tremendously," she acknowledges, and there is less "oppression," but without engaging the peasants there will remain a disconnect and the "policy will be as ineffective as the law is in its present state," points out Jahangir, a recipient of the 2014 Sweden-based Right Livelihood Award, also called the 'alternative Nobel prize'.

Ghulam Haider, who heads the Green Rural Development Organization (GRDO) that has been working for the rights of workers and bonded labour for over 20 years now, laments that the state has turned a blind eye to the issue. A little bit of bad publicity internationally would be one way of getting the state's attention to curb bonded labour, in his opinion.

"Civil society needs to flag the issue of bonded labour and urge the European Union to remove Pakistan from the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Plus status," suggests Haider. Using the GSP as a tool, he says, the state may be arm-twisted into routinely conducting investigations into cases of bonded labour and prosecuting those responsible for perpetuating this practice. Haider continues to fend off threats — he's even been shot at — and warnings that he receives in the line of his work.

"During her second term as prime minister (1993-1996), Benazir Bhutto, brought the law to life by directing the deputy commissioners in Sindh to support the rights groups," says Jahangir, adding there was much opposition from the parliamentarians who were big landlords themselves.

Bhutto, she said, interacted with the HRCP directly and was personally committed to eradicating this form of bondage. "Once we had the support from the highest quarter, there was no looking back and we were able to get thousands of peasants and their families held in bondage, released," Jahangir narrates with a sense of euphoria. "This helped the peasants seek legal redress as well and the hari movement began in earnest. It was rewarding yet thankless."

As this issue drew more attention, some civil society groups jumped into the fray but they did so unmindfully, unclear about their goals, nor did they realise their "limited capacity". At the same time, she says, some miscreants infiltrated the ranks, on both sides — as bonded labour, exaggerating their losses and becoming "artificial leaders" of the victims as well as the so-called well-wishers of the oppressed. Even civil society groups cashed in and showcased the peasants only to gain publicity.

Jahangir cites the famous case of Munoo Bheel, who back in 2003, then in his 70s, went on a six-hour daily token hunger strike outside the Hyderabad Press Club because nine members of his family were forcibly abducted by men belonging to their former landowner, Abdul Rehman Marri, in 1998. Today, Bheel lives in one of HRCP's camps, in a life of anonymity and the same civil society that cashed in on his plight has lost interest in him and forgotten that his family members still remain missing.

an elderly woman relates that oppression isn't merely meted out to men but women face the brunt of it

When Sodho and his family were in bondage, the landlord's guards would bang at the door of their living quarters and call them out at all odd hours after work, sometimes even in the middle of the night. "Whoever opened the door would receive kicks and punches for not opening the door instantly," he recalls.

But an event in 2008 was a turning point not just for Sodho's family but for 25 other families.

Sodho narrates the story of his fight to freedom with pride: “Like every year, that year too [2008], our landlord Zubair Sahito, refused to give us our share of the profit saying we had used it all up. His accountant showed us a long list of things we had spent our share on — loans for seeds, water, fertilizer as well as personal loans.”

But that year, unlike the years before when he felt resigned to accept his fate, something snapped inside Sodho.

“I spoke to other farmhands and we decided to protest and, with the help of activists, filed a petition in court,” he says. “I was warned that if I did not withdraw I’d have to face the consequences as even the police were on the landlord’s side.”

Defiant, Sodho was like a man possessed.

The landlord decided to teach all of them a lesson for their act of rebellion. He kidnapped 89 members of the 26 families working at the farm and threw them in the middle of nowhere, in the desert of Achro Thar, in Sanghar.

“Many of the women were routinely whipped, the kids drugged to keep them quiet, and nine of the girls gang-raped,” says Soomri, Sajjan’s mother. Her husband died during incarceration and they suspect he was tortured to death. “We were shown his face in a shroud and the body was taken away immediately.”

It took the police two months to recover them and the landowner was put behind bars. “He served a sentence in jail for six months,” says Sodho. During the next six years, the small farmers who had sided with him were threatened and bribed. “In the end there was nobody by my side for support and so in 2015, I, too, relented and agreed for an out-of-court settlement for which the landlord gave 20 lakh rupees and which was distributed among the 25 families.”

Last November, Ghulam Abbas, a hari, managed to take 136 men and women from his village in Odero Lal to work as farmhands on a 500-acre farm in Rahim Yar Khan to harvest sugarcane.

Dressed in an ironed cream kameez over a white starched shalwar, and sporting a fashionable pair of glasses, he looked more like a middleman than a farmer. He had previously taken bigger groups of workers to southern Punjab for the last 12 years and had never faced a situation like the one he did last winter.

“The rate that was fixed for us was 20 and 25 rupees per maund [one maund = 40kg],” says Abbas taking out a scrap of paper from his pocket. It had some numbers written by hand which he explained was the daily rate of harvest he had been promised. But these numbers could have been written by anyone and denied by those who actually quoted them; the rates were not on any bond paper nor signed and stamped, having little legal status.

“When we started work, last November, the contactor gave us 24 lakhs as advance. From then to the time we completed the harvest in May, we were not given a single rupee,” he says, adding that the total harvest that they did was worth Rs 90 lakhs. “Not only were we swindled of 66 lakh rupees, but he told us we owed him 10 lakhs.”

Abbas with the help of GRDO has taken the contractor to court. But the landlord has also filed a counter-suit, alleging that the peasants had to return his 10 lakh rupees. “I have become quite unwell,” says Abbas, helplessly adding: “On the one hand are these powerful people I am fighting a court case against with practically no money and on the other are these villagers who hold me responsible for the fraud, and keep sending police after me to return the money I owe them.”

Ghulam Haider of GRDO comes across such cases all the time. “Landlords do not pay dues to the share-croppers and peasant labourers and instead lodge fake cases against them when they demand their due share,” he says.

For the past several years a booming business has surfaced in Sindh where a group of lawyers and middlemen with support from police officers secure bonded labourers’ freedom, but at a fee.

“Even the manner they release [them] is similar to the operation conducted by police, complete with getaway vehicles, armed men both in plainclothes and in police uniform,” narrates Dr Lohana of HRCP. “The only difference is the raids are conducted without a court order and are therefore an illegal exercise.”

The landlord is threatened that he would be produced in the court and put behind bars since he was involved in a crime for keeping people in bondage and a certain sum of money extricated from him. The lawyers and middlemen also take a fee from the peasants in the form of livestock or cash — which the peasant would have to borrow from other peasants. At times, soon after the fake operation, the peasants are hauled back or sold to another landlord and their plight in bondage continues.

Holding people in bondage has been deemed a crime since 1990 but campaigners such as the GRDO’s Ghulam Haider say the government has done little to enforce the anti-bonded labour law and the handful of inefficient reforms that were brought in have failed to properly address the issue.

Additionally, there is no one to speak on their behalf in parliament. According to Lohana, “These stateless people without a national identity card are not a vote bank so why would parliamentarians be interested in helping them?”

Skewed statistics present a clear picture of why people such as Sodho will likely never come out of poverty: five percent of the country’s population owns almost two-thirds (64 percent) of arable land and 45 percent of those linked to agriculture remain landless. And while new roads and highways make it possible for the exceptional case of running away from the landlord’s chains, the norm is that if a peasant decides to ‘run away’ his wife or kids will be held back or even kidnapped.

That said, after the 18th constitutional amendment, resolving the issue of bondage falls under the purview of provincial governments: Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have already come up with their bills, but Sindh’s has been ready for the past two years gathering dust. Balochistan has not done anything on this front.

Jahangir insists mapping as the first step to get a clear picture for formulating policies, for example for the distribution of arable government land in Sindh and coming up with attractive farming packages for the peasants. “The government has acres and acres of land and I’m sure those in bondage are just in thousands and can easily be given small tracts they can cultivate and eke out a living from," she says.

Former hari Sodho Oad scoffs at such a suggestion saying: "Those who can give us state land are the same people who treated us with cruelty for generations. Do you think their hearts are big enough to share it with us?" He further says the legislators who could take those decisions were the big landlords who were often land grabbers themselves.

The labour perspective is that even if a peasant gets land, he has to be given a package to support him in cultivating the land, at least for some time. There is therefore an urgent need to take such points into account when a policy is being formulated.

Lohana also points out that the agro-economy has changed so radically that, in order to come up with robust policies in favour of bonded labour, it was important to realise the new challenges that beset the agriculture sector. "For example, the price of hybrid seeds, the water distribution as well as shortage faced by those at the tail-end of canals and the rain-dependent agriculture needs to be taken into account and included when drafting policies," he argues.

Many former cultivators have left the occupation, moved to urban centres and have become engaged in miscellaneous work or as daily wagers at farms. He says climate change should also be taken into account that has rendered arable land unfit for agriculture.

Meanwhile, Soomwar Bhagat, a former bonded labourer, has been living in the 11-acre Azad Nagar which has been set up by GRDO with help from Action Aid, where Sodho and Sajjan live. Today, he runs his own shop selling everything from candy to cigarettes. He also looks after the small temple near his home and hopes his seven children are able to educate themselves as that was the "only way to turn their fortunes".

"If they are educated, nobody will be able to cheat them since they will be able to read what and how much is owed," he says simply. Sadly the nearby one-room school started by the NGO is padlocked as the teacher hardly ever shows up.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1359304/sindhs-agricultural-slaves

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 11 TH TO SEPTEMBER 17 Th 2017
WOMEN FARMERS
Dawn, September 17th, 2017

Nadia Agha

WOMEN the world over perform productive roles in all spheres; the agriculture sector is no exception. Globally, women produce 50 per cent of food and provide 43pc of agriculture labour. Asia in particular has a family farming system in which women's roles are central as they supplement the family income by working the fields. In the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, for example, women perform half the labour in rice production. This goes up to 80pc in India and Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, there is scant information on the gender system of each region and the constraints women farmers face. What is known is that in developing economies, most rural women carry heavy burdens of limited literacy, malnourishment and violence, which bars them from improving their conditions.

Pakistan's agriculture sector is said to be the backbone of the economy because of its contribution to GDP. Rural women are central to this agro-based economy; they are major participants in food production in rice- and wheat-growing regions, as well as in cotton-picking processes. Despite this, Pakistan's social indicators present a very alarming picture: rural women are caught in a web of chronic poverty due to little access to productive resources and credit, which limits investment in technology and impedes farming productivity.

They usually engage with agriculture in two ways: they either work on landlords' farms as peasants or manage their families' farms. Working for landlords is largely based on payment in kind. For example, farmers, including women, in northern Sindh are paid 40 kilograms of wheat upon the harvest of half an acre, which is used up in household consumption and is central to the family's survival. This, however, takes its toll.

Much of the work involves manual labour that consumes time and energy. And since their work is not registered, women face extreme exploitation. The mode and value of payments are decided verbally, and there is no concept of meeting the national minimum wage. And while 72pc of working women are involved in agricultural activities, most are not involved in post-harvest activities, such as processing or grading of fruits and vegetables.

Those working on their families' farms lack knowledge of modern farming techniques to boost productivity. In the event of a pest attack, poor farmers prefer setting the affected area on fire to save the remaining crop because they cannot afford pesticide, let alone quality fertiliser. As a result, they yield only enough for subsistence living.

The absence of social capital and well-integrated social community networks — generally associated with women's empowerment — also affects women's ability to bring change to their lives. These groups not only enhance access to loans but also help women bargain and sell their labour. In most cases, women's ability to obtain loans for agricultural production is determined by their association with community networks. Once a network is formed, it can be used for multiple purposes: sharing produce from livestock, selling and buying from each other, etc. Some NGOs in Sindh have started this to ensure flow of credit to rural women as well as the smooth return of credit, but on a larger scale such networks are practically nonexistent.

In this regard, women's access to and control over capital and finances is very important because it helps them form social networks. Financing in the formal and informal sectors has increased over the years, yet farmers' access to financial services in developing countries is limited. The absence of a well-integrated credit system specifically for women farmers has reduced social capital and networking opportunities.

Farm labour that women are engaged in plays a vital role not just for the economy but also for their families' wellbeing; studies show that women invest more in children's education, health and nutrition than men. Given the rigid patriarchal norms that constrain their lives, it's no wonder that women continue to be the poorest of the poor. Their engagements with farm labour only helps them access enough food for survival — the vicious cycle of poverty remains intact.

Empowering and facilitating women will have a durable positive impact on agriculture productivity and families' food and social security.

It is necessary to study gender systems in different regions and explore rural women's constraints. As long as they remain unexplored, it is difficult to narrow gender gaps and empower rural women. The government should introduce gender-sensitive agricultural policies. Engaging women in targeted trainings and enabling them to access flexible loans will also improve livelihoods. These initiatives can only be compatible and effective when we know the gender system of each region.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1358150

ADOPTION OF HYBRID RICE PAKISTAN, CHINA TO LAUNCH JOINT AWARENESS PROGRAMME
Business Recorder, 15 September, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China to work together to conduct joint awareness programme on adoption of Hybrid Rice for productivity enhancement, profitability and extra surpluses for increasing exports.

The revolutionary rice seed was recently developed by the Chinese researchers. The new rice variety would help Pakistani farmers to significantly increase per acre yield and hence the country would be able to export more rice to other countries, said a press release.

A travelling seminar has been arranged by Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and China Yuan Longping High-tech Agriculture Co Ltd. China to travel in all the four ecological zones of the country in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan to understand exact Hybrid Seed requirements of Pakistan for different regions and showcase the Hybrid Rice varieties in addition to capacity building of the Pakistani experts from all over Pakistan. High level China team will be part of this travelling seminar.

Ch Nasir Iqbal Bosal, Special Assistant to Prime Minister of Pakistan on National Food Security inaugurated the opening session of this month-long activity at National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) Islamabad. Speaking on the occasion, the chief guest highlighted the farmers friendly initiatives of the government and appreciated Chinese support to improve rice productivity in Pakistan.

Dr Yusuf Zafar, Chairman PARC stated on the occasion that Chinese companies can team up with their Pakistani counterparts to develop agriculture sector by introducing new and innovative technologies for the food security of the two countries and Pakistan being agriculture country, Chinese companies could join Pakistani entities to develop the agriculture research and development sector for our common food security.

Dr Wang, Commercial Counsellor China Embassy showed his full support and commitment for the betterment of Agriculture Sector in Pakistan. Zhou Dan, Vice President, Yuan Longping High-Tech Agricultural Co Ltd China, Dr Anjum Ali Member Plant Sciences, PARC and Dr Muhammad Azeem DG NARC also spoke on the occasion.—PR

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/15/5-page/670870-news.html

HYBRID RICE CULTIVATION: CHINESE TEAM ARRIVES TO TRAIN SCIENTISTS
The Express Tribune, September 13th, 2017.

ISLAMABAD: A group of Chinese agriculture experts, comprising 12 hybrid rice scientists, arrived on Tuesday to train local scientists and farmers in hybrid rice cultivation technologies to improve per-acre crop productivity.

The Chinese scientists are scheduled to train 30 Pakistani agriculture scientists, selected from all the four provinces. Apart from this, they will also impart training to members of the provincial field extension departments in hybrid rice cultivation.

They will organise road shows and field visits across the rice-growing areas to address the issues and challenges in the promotion of hybrid rice seeds.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1504778/hybrid-rice-cultivation-chinese-team-arrives-train-scientists/

ADVISORY FOR PADDY GROWERS
Business Recorder, 13 September, 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department (PAD) has advised paddy growers to use pesticides in consultation with the agri-experts to avoid harmful effects of fungicides and pesticides.

It urged the growers to be aware of harmful aspects of Tricycalzole (TCA), Carbendazim and Thiophanate methyl in rice crop, as residue of these agricultural medicines may negatively impact the export of rice.

In a message issued to the rice growers, the department said on Tuesday that rice is a cash crop which is not only meeting domestic food requirements but also earns foreign exchange through export. Pakistani Basmati rice is liked because of its aroma and quality all over the world but residue of fungicide may hurt the exports.

The message said that Tricycalzole is used against the blast disease of rice in Pakistan but the EU has brought down its residue level in the crop from one-milligram per kilogram to 0.01 milligram per kilogram.

President Basmati Growers Association Hamid Malhi, in a meeting of the Rice Research & Development Board had raised this issue too in the recent past and proposed to create awareness among the rice farmers about the harmful aspects of Tricycalzole and carbendazim/thiophanate methyl. He also asked for promoting the alternate fungicide brands.

In the same meeting, Dr Muhammad Akhtar, Director Rice, Kala Shah Kaku, informed the participants that 118 rice samples collected from rice areas of Punjab were tested for the detection of pesticides residues and none of the tested sample showed the presence of TCA. Though, he added, Carbendazim residues were observed in 10 samples. The meeting agreed that MRLs of TCA, carbendazim or any other fungicide should be taken in consideration for not only safe rice export but also to ensure public health.

The meeting had recommended for conducting master trainings with special emphasis on PHI and MRLs of TCA/Carbendazim fungicide to put prominent red labels showing PHI value of pesticides being marketed in Pakistan as a mandatory requirement, creating awareness among the pesticide dealers about TCA/Carbendazim marketing keeping in view the EU revised MRLs and for promoting alternate fungicides for the control of rice disease instead of TCA and Carbendazim.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/13/9-page/905560-news.html

FARMERS TO GET SUBSIDIZED LASER LAND LEVELERS
Business Recorder, 13 September 2017

FAISALABAD: One hundred laser land levelers would be provided to the farmers of Faisalabad district in the next phase with the subsidy of Rs.22.50 million.

In this connection balloting of the farmer's applications was held at DC Office in which Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani was the chief guest and carried out the draw of 100 applications out of 202 eligible applicants.

Deputy Commissioner Salman Ghani greeted the lucky farmers of the balloting and hoped that the farmers would bring revolution in cultivation by using scientific and modern technology. He said that Punjab government is following a number of policies for the welfare and betterment of the small farmers as the agriculture is the back bone of the national economy.

He said that district administration would mobilize all out resources to provide technical guidance and support to the farmers for increasing the crop yield. He advised the farmers to utilize the laser land levelers for increasing agriculture production for their own prosperity and supporting other farmers too.

Deputy Director Water Management Dr. Muhammad Asif informed that the irrigation water could be saved by leveling the agriculture land with laser land levelers which would ultimately help increase the agriculture production. He informed 480 laser land levelers had already been provided to the farmers. He said that all the process of receiving, scrutinizing and balloting of the applications for laser land levelers had been made transparent. He informed that under the directions of Punjab government the applications were invited from the small farmers.

The local Water Management department invited applications from the farmers in order to provide them laser land levelers on subsidized prices and balloting was carried out for 202 eligible applicants. He added that the Punjab government would provide subsidy of Rs.225, 000 on each laser land leveler out of its total price of Rs.450, 000. The laser land levelers allocated for Faisalabad district had been distributed on tehsil level as per cultivated areas.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/13/13-page/905611-news.html

SINDH SUFFERS 31 PC CROP LOSS ANNUALLY DUE TO WATER LOGGING, SALINITY

Dawn, September 12th, 2017

KARACHI: While waterlogging and salinity are serious issues across Pakistan, the situation in Sindh is critical with 53 per cent of the total irrigated area experiencing their debilitating effects. An effective solution, however, is available in the shape of tile drainage technology that has many success stories in the country.

These points were highlighted during a workshop held on Monday at the regional office of Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR).

The event's aim was to acquaint and take feedback from researchers and scientists on a project titled 'Integrated approach for control of waterlogging and salinity in low-lying areas of Sindh', which has recently been approved by the ministry of science and technology.

The project's objective is to reclaim, increase land resources and improve livelihood by introducing tile drainage technology among farmers on capital-cost sharing basis. The PCRWR is to execute the Rs55.262 million project over three years.

Presenting some statistics on waterlogging and salinity during his presentation, project director engineer Abdul Salam Arain, a senior scientific officer at PCRWR, said that waterlogging and salinity had become a burning issue in Sindh which caused crop loss of 31pc every year.

The total waterlogged irrigated area in the province, he pointed out, stood at 50pc whereas the total irrigated area affected by salinity was 56pc.

"The irrigated land experiencing the effects of both waterlogging and salinity is around 65pc to 70pc," Mr Arain said, adding that the problem was more serious in low-lying areas.

According to him, obstruction in natural water flow, flat land topography, seepage from unlined irrigated channels, questionable performance of Left Bank Outfall Drain and Right Bank Outfall Drain, over or deficit dosing of irrigation, are among the factors which have led to waterlogging and salinity in Sindh.

Sharing the project's details, Mr Arain said that it would be implemented in low-lying areas on the left side of old riverbeds; research and demonstration of tile drainage units would be provided at two sites comprising more or less 100 acres each.

"The problem of waterlogging and salinity is very serious here. High water table associated with build-up of soil salinity has also converted productive land into wasteland," he said, adding the project's aim was to popularise an integrated drainage and water management concept among land owners to control water table and reclaim land.

"It will engage farmers having low financial status. They would be required to pay 20pc of capital cost in the shape of either labour or operation and maintenance charges during installation of drainage units."

The project, the audience was told, would also involve a detailed topographic survey of selected sites. Reclamation of soil would be carried out through reuse of drainage effluent through different techniques.

According to Mr Arain, the tile drainage technology has been in use in Pakistan since 1970s but there is not a single case of failure. The whole system is buried underground and doesn't require any repairs. It's only the system's pumping which, he said, at times developed problems.

The units installed in Khairpur and Mirpurkhas in Sindh, Rahim Yar Khan and Faisalabad in Punjab, and Swabi and Mardan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been working smoothly for a long time whereas the recent installations include sites in Sukkur, Nawabshah, Hyderabad and Sujawal, he said.

Earlier, Mohammad Khan Marri, former PCRWR director currently heading Baanhn Beli in Tharparkar, spoke about how the tile drainage technology was introduced in Pakistan. He regretted that though the technology had many success stories, it couldn't be popularised in the country owing to lack of government interest and political will.

In the end, senior scientists and researchers representing the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, National Institute of Oceanography, Karachi University, and NED University of Engineering and Technology were asked for feedback on specific questions related to project improvement.

According to them, factors like reduced flow of freshwater linked to increasing sea intrusion, high underground water extraction, rapid urbanisation and lack of awareness among farmers had also aggravated waterlogging and salinity.

Chairman PCRWR Mohammad Ashraf, Vice Chancellor Dadabhoy Institute of Technology Prof Shahana Urooj, also the chief guest, and Zamir Ahmed Soomro of PCRWR also spoke.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1357033/sindh-suffers-31pc-crop-loss-annually-due-to-waterlogging-salinity

NEED TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURE SMES IS GROWING
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, September 11th, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

SMALL and medium enterprises (SMEs) producing and processing farm products are doing well in Pakistan. We can also add to this list those SMEs that provide agricultural inputs and that are involved in the wholesaling and retailing of agricultural products.

"But we don't see a good number of SMEs that are exclusive providers of agricultural technology or those that exclusively cater to logistics, trade and distribution services in agriculture. These areas offer a lot of scope for growth to agricultural SMEs," says a senior executive of one of the top five banks.

In cotton and rice sectors, SMEs enter at ginning and husking stage. In the livestock sector, cattle breeding and the processing of milk or meat remain separate or at least both functions are not run by

SMEs. Some large milk processing companies get supplies from well-knit networks of milkmen, whereas two leading meat processing companies boast of their own cattle farms.

The trading of fertiliser, pesticides and insecticides is carried out chiefly by manufacturing firms through their agents. But some SMEs also trade farm inputs, both local and imported.

Edible oil extraction and the manufacturing and trading of leather and its by-products are largely in the hands of SMEs. Carpet weaving is almost entirely the business of SMEs across the country.

SMEs can be divided into three broad categories: trading, manufacturing and services. There's no separate classification for agriculture and non-agriculture SMEs. It could be beneficial for entrepreneurs and policymakers alike if relevant institutions can compile separate data on SMEs operating in the value chain of agricultural products.

The need to promote agriculture SMEs is growing with changes in demographic and economic dynamics of the country. The average annual growth rate of the rural population of Pakistan between 1998 and 2017 stood at 2.23pc against that of urban population's 2.7pc, according to provisional results of the latest census.

This indicates a looming shortage of rural workforce, more so because labour wages in rural areas are far less than that in urban areas. Besides, a higher growth rate in urban population is also an indicator of accelerated pace of urbanisation between 1998 and 2017.

So, in order to decelerate urbanisation (that is putting too much pressure on urban infrastructure) and to promote job creation in rural areas, we must have a detailed mapping of job markets in rural areas.

"Segregating agriculture-based SMEs from the rest can be a beginning of this process," says an official of Sindh's Planning Commission.

Such important developments like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Chinese interest in our agriculture sector, politico-economic changes in our traditional food export markets in the Middle East, new prospects of economic growth opening up fast and Pakistan's efforts to accelerate e-commerce call for new policy initiatives in SMEs-led growth in the agricultural value-addition.

For that to happen, a physical survey of the SME sector is a must. "Such a survey can help identify which SMEs fall in the agricultural value-chain and the existing gaps that can be filled in by promoting subsector-specific SMEs," says a central banker.

Take, for example, the huge economy of sacrificial animals which is transforming, but no big policy initiative has been taken to identify the room available for the growth of regulated SMEs.

Individual farmers breed sacrificial animals with funding from investment-hoppers, middlemen, online sellers of sacrificial animals and cattle farms that put on display pricey animals during Eidul Azha.

"If groups of individual farmers are encouraged to set up SMEs to run the business of cattle breeding, farmers will get far better economic returns," the banker said. "Monitoring the developments in, and even predicting price trends of sacrificial animal markets, will become easier. The interaction of other

SMEs like those in transportation, animal feed manufacturing and allied businesses with cattle-breeding SMEs will become natural and it'll help us in documenting the Eidul Azha economy."

Officials of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Smeda) say that benefited by some pre-feasibility reports (prepared in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation), a lot of SMEs have sprung up in the agricultural sector in recent years.

These SMEs doing apple gardening, waxing and packaging, apple treatment, dates and fresh fruits processing, fruit dehydration, grapes farming, greenhouse farming of cut flowers, off-season vegetables farming, olive and strawberry cultivation and olive oil extraction, seed processing and hay farming.

The officials, however, stress that there is a need to expand the network of agro-based SMEs as they are concentrated mainly in Punjab and Sindh. Moreover, clusters of agro-based SMEs in inland fish farming, animal breeding, milk and meat processing, wool processing and carpet weaving should be set up to expand their sub-sectoral network.

A senior Smeda official said there are many opportunities for SMEs in technology upgrading and innovation, agricultural knowledge transmission and application, and transportation, wholesale, retail, online marketing and sales.

In the previous fiscal year, banks lent Rs82.3bn to SMEs, which was 11.7pc of their total lending to the private sector.

However, the total stock of SME loans accounted for only about 8pc, or Rs379.7bn, of the total stock of private sector loans as of June 2017, according to the data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

Unless SMEs' share reaches and stay at 20pc of the total private sector loans, they cannot overcome their financial constraints and no breakthrough is likely in terms of skill enhancement and technology innovation, Smeda officials say.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1356957

FARM MODERNISATION IN SINDH
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, September 11th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

THE pace at which Sindh's farmers have adopted modernisation has been pathetically slow. As a result, the desired per-acre productivity has not been achieved despite the fact that Sindh has huge potential.

It is only some progressive farmers or those with large landholdings who tend to adopt advanced practices.

But small and medium size farmers are not able to keep pace with changing agricultural practices for one reason or the other. They cite lack of finances as one of the main reasons that hampers their growth potential.

Advanced farm practices are an essential prerequisite to ensure better productivity. Among them are the lining of watercourses, use of laser land levelling technology, high-efficiency irrigation systems, preparation of raised beds in land, mechanised harvesters, etc.

The use of laser-levelling equipment or lined watercourses is quite common in other countries, but in Sindh it has only been introduced in the recent past.

The lining of watercourses started on a large scale a decade and half ago when the National Programme for Improvement of Watercourses (NPIW) was launched to line 65,000 watercourses. Nearly 16,000 watercourses were lined in a single project against Sindh’s share of 29,000. The remainder were dropped due to resource constraints.

A lined watercourse saves 30 per cent water losses and improves the speed of flows.

Sindh started a foreign-funded project in which 30pc length of 1,421 watercourses were lined until January 2014 on a cost-sharing basis. Around 47,000 watercourses exist at that time in Sindh. Newer ones have added as well. Now, additional lining is planned for 739 watercourses whose 30pc length was previously lined under the annual development programme (ADP) for the previous fiscal year.

Separately, 5,500 watercourses would be lined by 2021 under the Rs18.7bn World Bank-funded Sindh Irrigated Agricultural Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP). Officials say that against the target of 800 in the 2016-17 season, 817 new watercourses were lined with 76pc-to-24pc cost-sharing between farmers and the government.

In the current season, 1,035 watercourses are to be lined. Climate change factor has placed Pakistan among water-stressed countries and Sindh, being a lower riparian province, faces severe water shortage more often than not. This makes watercourse lining all the more essential here.

“I remember that when I started lining at my farm, labourers resisted it on various grounds. Today they press me to have watercourses lined first,” says Imdad Nizamani, a progressive mango and banana orchard owner. “If development in other countries like Australia is any yardstick, we are far away from technological advancement.”

Likewise, laser land levelling was not preferred by farmers in Sindh until a decade ago despite the fact that it was a precursor to soil and crop management because it enhances productivity.

As compared to conventional land-levelling practices, laser levellers reduce time, save irrigation water in land preparation, ensure uniformity water distribution, help increase per-acre productivity, lead to better germination ratio and fertiliser application, etc.

Under conventional land levelling practices, the land remains uneven, whereas the decades-old practice of flood irrigation leads to over- or under-irrigation of land.

"We are slow in adopting technology. Developed countries have now started using satellite-based technology for fertiliser application and water, getting information for weather patterns driven by climate change," says Mahmood Nawaz Shah, a progressive farmer and growers' leader from the lower Sindh region.

Laser levellers are being distributed under the SIAPEP on a cost-sharing basis. Around 890 of levellers were distributed until August 2017 against the target of 1,100. These 1,100 were to be distributed until 2021 and it shows that farmers have started using this equipment. Given its increasing demand, project authorities are seeking finances for another 400 levellers.

According to them, demand for levellers is mostly coming from areas like Mirpurkhas, Badin, Sanghar, Tando Allahyar and Matiari districts which are left-bank areas and fed by the perennial system of irrigation.

"In upper Sindh, landowners have yet to show inclination for it. Unfortunately, we have absentee landlords in Sindh and their lands are managed by others or their managers," says a senior agriculture engineering officer.

Ahmed Zeeshan Bhatti, an Islamabad-based official of the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources, says farmers in Punjab have made levellers' use mandatory as they save 50pc water and give equal moisture to soil and reduce farmer's cost of production.

Similarly, drip and sprinkler system also saves water to a considerable extent because it provides water. However, farmers believe that one reason why growers are not using it is perhaps its operation and maintenance cost. Drip system's provision is a part of the SIAPEP for 35,000 acres in Sindh, but farmers believe that their share of cost is unrealistic.

Haji Nadeem Shah, a farmer from Matiari, installed the drip irrigation system on 14 acres around seven years ago at a cost of Rs1.4m on a cost-sharing basis under a project. However, he had to discontinue it on account of energy crisis, electricity tariff and cost of wear and tear.

"We can't afford it. Sometimes there's no electricity for 16 hours on an average and we also don't get spare parts," he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1356956/farm-modernisation-in-sindh

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 8 TH TO SEPTEMBER 10 Th 2017
FAO LAUNCHES PROJECT TO ARREST DEFORESTATION
Dawn, September 9, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations launched on Friday a project to reverse the deforestation and forest degradation through chilgoza pine in Pakistan. The five-year project, which will be implemented in collaboration with theMinistry of Climate Change and provincial forest departments, will contribute towards improving the environment and enhancing resilience through chilgoza pine.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is the largest public donor for projects aimed at improving the global environment, will provide financial supportfor the projectthat will cover chilgoza forests in Balochistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan.

As part of the consultative process, a two-day national validation workshop concluded on Friday with participation from federal and provincial governments, forest departments and local and internationaldevelopment partners.

According to the FAO, the chilgoza ecosystem in Pakistan is subjected to negative impacts of climate change. Chilgoza pine is an important member of the unique ecosystem of the dry temperate ecological zone andhasthepotentialtocontribute billions of rupees to the economy by providing non-timber forest products and fuel wood. The selling season of chilgoza will start from October.

Commenting on the project, FAO Representative in Pakistan Mina Dowlatchahi stated that the `collection and processing of chilgoza have a tremendous potential to provide a good source of income by supporting local livelihoods. This project will provide a mechanism to achieve successful restoration of forests.

Under the project, the FAO and its partners aim to strengthen the regulatory and policy environment for integrated and sustainable management of chilgoza forests, conserving and restoring chilgoza forest landscape and building capacity of local institutions.

http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=09_09_2017_011_006

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 1 ST TO SEPTEMBER 7 Th 2017
MONSOON RAINS DAMAGE 10-15% OF COTTON, ONION CROPS IN SINDH
The Express Tribune, September 2nd, 2017.

SALMAN SIDDIQUI

KARACHI: “Wednesday’s widespread rains in agricultural fields have damaged 10-15% of cotton crop and up to 10% of onion crop. If the downpour persists, it will badly impact the standing crops,” Sindh Abadgar Board Vice President Syed Mehmood Nawaz Shah said while talking to The Express Tribune on Friday.

The province produces 24% of the total agriculture produce of Pakistan. Its share in agriculture stands close to 20% in the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) of over $300 billion, according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2016-17.

Shah said Sindh produced 20% of cotton in the total production of around 14 to 15 million bales. Similarly, it produces 55% of onion in a year.

Other Kharif crops of Sindh include paddy (raw rice), sugarcane and banana. They are initially rain-resilient crops, which are currently at different stages of cultivation and harvest.

“Accumulation of rainwater beyond a certain level and a few days may harm these crops as well,” Shah added.

Sindh produced 50% of paddy, 30% of sugarcane and 85% of banana, he said.

Talking about the impact on price levels, Shah said, “The 10-15% damage to the cotton and onion crops may not trigger price hike in the country. A disaster-like situation in the fields may trigger inflation, which is not the case at present.”

The Met office has forecast no more rains in the province while the current monsoon season is nearing its end on September 15.

Shah said Sindh cultivated onion over 200,000 to 250,000 acres of land in different districts and divisions including Hyderabad, Tando Allahyar, Matiari, Mirpurkhas, Nawabshah and Tando Muhammad Khan.

“The standing crop is about 80% of what is produced in Sindh. In the near future, the rest of the 20% will also be planted.”

The cotton crop is at multiple stages of cultivation and harvest in different parts of the province, which sows the crop on a big scale.

Farmers were engaged in the first picking of cotton in some parts while its flowers had appeared in other parts for second picking, he said.

Major areas where cotton is cultivated include Khairpur, Ghotki, Jacobabad, Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Tando Allahyar, Matiari and Tando Muhammad Khan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1497149/monsoon-rains-damage-10-15-cotton-onion-crops-sindh/

BALANCED FERTILISER USE KEY TO ENSURING FOOD SECURITY
The Express Tribune, September 2nd, 2017.

LAHORE: Owing to a variety of reasons, Pakistan’s agriculture economy is diminishing with each passing day.

According to some experts, the government is not very active and there is a gap between its policies and ground realities. Others believe that the poor pace of agricultural growth is due to uneducated farmers, who lack the vision to adapt to changing global trends.

By adopting modern practices like use of genetically modified (GM) seeds, countries such as India, China and Bangladesh have succeeded in increasing their per acre yield.

part from technological advancement, they are also giving high subsidies on agriculture inputs to protect the farmers and allied industries, enabling them to compete at the international level.

Unfortunately in Pakistan, the scenario is not very much encouraging and majority of the farmers are using decades-old farming practices. The use of GM seeds is limited to cotton and that too on a small scale.

Experts have now started warning the government of a possible food crisis in coming years, if steps are not taken to improve the situation.

Besides the price mechanism, infrastructure and subsidy issues, there is a dire need for the farmers to know how they can enhance their per acre yield under such tough circumstances.

For instance, a balanced intake of fertilisers for any crop can enhance the per acre yield up to 50%, but very few farmers are adopting this advice due to lack of awareness.

The Economic Survey of Pakistan 2016-17 reveals that Pakistan's land is 100% deficient in nitrogen, 90% deficient in phosphorus and 40% deficient in potassium. It is imperative that the farmers understand the need for balanced use of fertilisers for better crops. However, a hurdle is that fertiliser costs have gone beyond the reach of farmers, despite government subsidies.

Urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and potash are the major fertilisers used in Pakistan. Urea, which is more widely used, is the cheapest as it is produced locally and sufficient to meet all demand.

As per industry experts, Pakistani farmers use around 170 million bags (50 kg each) of fertilisers of different categories. Of this, 110 million bags are of urea, 30 million bags are of DAP and only 2.5 million bags are of potash.

Experts have urged government departments to reach out to the farming community and educate them about the benefits of balanced fertiliser intake. They said the government should take concrete steps to enhance local production by ensuring required supply of natural gas to fertiliser manufacturers and by further slashing the prices.

Sufficient energy supplies and other commitments made by the government to the fertiliser manufacturers might encourage them to further invest in DAP production. This may result in DAP prices stabilising in coming years, which will help farmers maximise productivity and tackle the food security issue.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1497165/balanced-fertiliser-use-key-ensuring-food-security/

WHEAT DISTRIBUTION YET TO MATERIALISE IN THARPARKAR
The Express Tribune, 2 September 2017

HYDERABAD: The Sindh government inaugurated the distribution of free wheat in Tharparkar on June 24, weeks before the desert region received early monsoon showers in July. But as the announcement, made by Sindh Food Minister Nisar Khuhro, is yet to materialise, there are unconfirmed reports about wheat stored in the warehouses that is becoming damp and rot. Thousands of families in Tharparkar, who confronted drought-like conditions before the rains, are awaiting the supply of wheat. Official sources attribute the delay to the transport contracts for the distribution whose process is still not completed.

In 2016, the transporters protested against the government for allegedly delaying payments, claiming of around Rs40 million unpaid dues. According to Deputy Commissioner Hafeez Siyal, the delay has been caused by re-tendering of the transport contracts to ensure transparency.

The minister had announced that each of the 287,946 families in the desert district would be given 100 kilogrammes of wheat. "An estimated 250,000 families or more are yet to be provided free wheat," an official, who requested anonymity, said.
According to him, around a hundred thousand wheat bags are lying in the warehouses of Mithi, Diplo and Islamkot awaiting distribution for over two months. So far only 31,000 wheat bags have been given away.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1497029/wheat-distribution-yet-materialise-tharparkar/

FIRST PICKING OF COTTON STARTS IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, 6 September, 2017
LAHORE: The first picking of cotton crop has started in different areas of the Punjab province while officers of the provincial agricultural department are also carrying out pest scouting in the fields to avoid any serious pest attack.

Spokesman of the department said it had provided training to women this year for clean picking of cotton crop which will ensure better payment to the growers.

Meanwhile, pest scouting officers are using latest software and technology provided on android cell phones for pest warning and monitoring. These applications help collect data about attack of any pest, number of pest on a plant, what damage they may cause and what steps are needed to tackle the pest attack.

The department would take steps in the light of information gathered by this application and will also carry follow up contacts with the growers.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/09/06/9-page/669135-news.html

FOOD SECURITY ENIGMA: AGRICULTURE SUFFERS LOW INVESTMENT, PM TOLD
The Express Tribune, 6 September, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The prime minister on Tuesday received a briefing on agriculture sector in Pakistan from Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan and senior officials of the ministry.

The officials told the PM that presently the agriculture sector was contributing 19.5 per cent to GDP and employed around 42 per cent labour force of the country.

The sector provides 57.5 per cent share in the total exports of the country but its growth rate has remained 3.46 per cent in fiscal year 2016-17, the premier was told, according to an official statement

Abbasi later directed to bring the issue of current low investment in the sector before the CCI to ensure allocation of greater resources by provincial governments as well as the federal government.

The premier also directed the ministry to work on a policy framework for putting in place optimal methods for ensuring food security in the country. During the briefing, proposals to increase productivity and crop diversification were also discussed.

It was decided that local demands and other challenges including climate change should also be made part of the framework. It was agreed that research and development functions of various organisations of the ministry should also be promoted.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1498877/food-security-enigma-agriculture-suffers-low-investment-pm-told/

SINDH AGRO-SCIENTISTS ADVISED TO DEVELOP YELLOW RUST-RESISTANT WHEAT SEED
Dawn, September 7th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (IMWIC) has advised agricultural scientists in Sindh to develop new wheat seeds which are resistant to yellow rust — a new strain which has emerged in all types of wheat in the province.

This disease has existed in the cold areas previously, but due to changes in the climate, the strain has changed its pattern and is moving to other areas.

The environment for this type of rust had now become favourable in wheat crop in Sindh where it was travelling, IMWIC country representative for Pakistan Mohammad Imtiaz said here on Wednesday while giving his presentation at the annual wheat planning seminar.

The wheat crop in Sindh had been affected by the yellow rust over the past two to three years since the seed was not pest resistant. Agricultural scientists in Sindh had been provided with the germ plasm to develop new yellow rust-resistant varieties of wheat seeds for distribution to farmers in the province, he said.

The official warned that a strategy had to be evolved, otherwise wheat farmers in the province would have to battle with the new strain and if not controlled, the future of wheat crop in Sindh would be threatened.

The strains of yellow rust had also been found in some areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, northern Punjab and central Punjab, he disclosed.

Dr Imtiaz listed four challenges during his presentation: spreading of stripe rust to Sindh and high diverse population in Pakistan, and stem and leaf rust; increasing occurrence of high-infection ‘Karnal Bunt’ (KB) disease; wheat blast threat, moved from Bangladesh to India and on the move; and increasing climate variability — more rain in late season.

He called for establishment and making operational rust research facilities in Pakistan to increase focus on stripe and leaf rust with further enhancing base for stem rust-resistant varieties.

Since it was emerging as a regional problem, there was a need for establishing a hub for KB-resistance breeding and management which could serve as an international platform for screening as the disease was important for Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, he said.

During 2016-17, 439 yellow rust, stem rust and leaf rust observations were made. At the national wheat rusts research facility, samples of 400 yellow rust, 200 leaf rust and 150 stem rust were analysed, with 2,000 rust samples obtained during 2012 and 2017, he said.

According to details shared at the wheat planning seminar, some 144.8 tonnes of nine varieties of early generation seeds will be available during the 2017-18 Rabi season. These are: Pakhtunkhwa-15, Pirsabak-15, NIFA-Insaaf 2015, Nifa-Aman, Ujala-16, Borlaug-16, Gold-16, Jauhar-16 and Ihsan-16.

Dr David Marshall of the US department of agriculture also addressed the seminar, highlighting the achievements of USDA-supported 'Wheat Productivity Enhancement programme (WPEP).

Later, he told newsmen that almost half of the wheat seeds available in Pakistan were rust-resistant.

Rust disease was a major challenge in Pakistan, but the country had done a great job in developing rust-resistant wheat varieties, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1356028

October 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 23rd TO OCTOBER 29th 2017

SWITCHING TO CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 23rd, 2017

Amin Ahmed

PAKISTAN has been asked to fully adopt the climate-smart agriculture (CSA) approach to achieve food security and broader development goals under a changing climate and increasing food demand.

The proposal has been incorporated in a study carried out by the World Bank in association with the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the CGIAR Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), and the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID).

The study provides a snapshot of a developing baseline created to initiate discussion, both within countries and globally, about entry points for investing in CSA.

Commenting on the new initiative, Dr Muhammad Azeem Khan, director general of the National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, says that concerted efforts have been made over time to develop technologies to address climate-change issues.

The technologies developed for rainwater harvesting include site-specific hill torrents management, soil and water conservation and groundwater recharge to improve crop productivity.

However, situations differ under wet, dry, deserts and coastal agro-ecological systems. The solutions developed so far are not compatible to address specific issues of all diverse situations, he says.

Dr Azeem says that the successful models practised the world over could be studied for better understanding about the technological choices, social acceptance, scalability and accessibilities.

The potential areas of collaboration could be water harvesting techniques, watershed management, groundwater recharge techniques, water use efficiency, integrated land use, compatible germplasm and microbial collections, he says.

An analysis of the state of agriculture in Pakistan was carried out using the International Model for Policy Analysis of Agricultural Commodities and Trade (IMPACT) for the selected key production systems in Pakistan. It projects that the area under wheat cultivation would decrease while area under cotton, maize, rice, sugarcane, tropical fruit cultivation would increase under both climate-change (CC) and no-climate-change (NoCC) scenarios.

The study points out that the level of climate-related expenditure has been low over the past years, yet the new Pakistan Climate Change Act of 2017 sets the stage for the establishment of the Pakistan Climate Change Authority and Pakistan Climate Change Fund, which are expected to help mobilise domestic and international funds for mitigation and adaptation interventions in the country, including CSA.

Climate impacts may slow the economic progress of the country and roll back development advances of the last several decades. In particular, small holder farmers and the poor are heavily impacted by climate changes. Already, several CSA practices are being adopted across the country, but not in a systematic manner.

“In last few years FAO has worked with farmers on various projects that have implemented and compiled sets of localised CSA practices, including the use of improved seed varieties developed in Pakistan,” FAO Representative in Pakistan Mina Dowlatchahi says. “The CSA practices have proven their success in various different agro-climatic zones and socio-economic environments, improving the resilience of livelihoods by increasing yields and conserving soil fertility, with lower cost of inputs, and increased incomes.”

The challenge, however, remains how to reach smallholders on a large scale, to engage the private sector and to ensure that the investments are transformative. For this, a holistic rural development approach is needed, including access to concessional credit and markets for smallholders, creation of value-addition and incomes from activities in which women in agriculture are involved, and basic infrastructure such as electricity and drinkable water to poor rural areas of the country.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1365682/switching-to-climate-smart-agriculture

SUSTAINING PRODUCTION OF KEY FOOD CROPS
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 23rd, 2017

Mohiuddin Aazim

ALL major food crops are doing well at the same time after a gap of many years. The trend could be sustained by investing more in conducting production and productivity research.

According to the latest brief of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, the output of wheat, rice, sugarcane and maize increased in the outgoing crop year despite water shortage.

Two factors have been driving the production of key crops. First, more land is being brought under cultivation of these crops, and second, their yields are also rising, thanks to the development of new seed varieties in the recent past and the adoption of better farming techniques, food ministry officials say.

That is why the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) has set higher production targets for major and minor Rabi food crops for 2017-18, despite having factored in the possible negative impact of water shortage.

During a recent meeting, the FCA noted that in the 2017-18 crop calendar the output of rice, sugarcane and maize has been estimated at 7.3 million tonnes, 81.4m tonnes and 5.3m tonnes, respectively.

According to FCA sources, a measured increase in the area under cultivation of the above crops and a scientifically projected rise in yields have formed the basis for the above output projections that are higher than their actual production in 2016-17, except in case of maize.

They say that in 2017-18, per-hectare yields of rice and sugarcane have been estimated at 2.53m tonnes and 62m tonnes, up from 2.51m tonnes and 60.48m tonnes in 2016-17. However, the yield for maize crop has been projected to fall slightly to 4.27m tonnes per hectare next year from 4.59m tonnes this year.

The hopes for higher yields of rice and sugarcane are not misplaced, as during the past few years, some high-yielding new varieties of paddy and sugarcane have become popular among growers.

On the other hand, a rather cautious projection has been made about maize yield as no breakthrough has been recorded of late regarding the development of maize seed variety. Its production hit an all-time high of 6.13m tonnes in 2016-17 largely due to a big increase in the area under cultivation at the cost of wheat.

However, wheat output recorded a modest 0.5 per cent rise in 2016-17 despite shrinkage in the area under sowing, as its per-hectare yield went up due to the use of high-yield varieties and improvement in ways of wheat farming.

The FCA has fixed wheat production target for 2017-18 at 26.46m tonnes, up from 25.75m tonnes in 2016-17. The production target has been fixed higher purely on the basis of an increase in the yield as the area under cultivation for wheat is expected to shrink marginally to 8.95m hectares during 2017-18 from 9.05m hectares in 2016-17.

Authorities expect that the national average yield of wheat would be to 2.96m tonnes per hectare next year, up from 2.84m tonnes in this year.

Per-hectare national average yields of major food crops in Pakistan have shown a modest increase in the past five years, but are still lower than what they could be given the potential of the seeds.

In other words, yield gaps exist and need to be boosted year after year to ensure a certain level of production without expanding the areas under these crops, officials and farmers say.

The desired levels of food crop outputs are determined not only by keeping the growth rate of population (2.4pc per year between 1998 and 2017) but also in view of growing needs of the export sector.

It is true that exporting value-added food products should be made a priority to fetch higher per-unit value of exports. But we must have a larger base of exportable surplus of food grains to give an immediate boost to food exports in the near future alongside working on accelerating the process of value-addition, exporters of food grains say.

On the other hand, given the importance of minor crops both from the viewpoint of domestic consumption as well as exports, these crops, too, cannot be sacrificed for promoting our main food crops, they say.

This means, there is not much scope for increasing the aggregate area under cultivation of key food crops — at least in the near future (unless additional non-cultivable land is made arable on a wide scale).

That leaves us with just a few options: invest more in scientific research projects in search of better, high-yielding, weather-resistant, less water-consuming varieties of food crop seeds; continue to modernise agriculture in terms of use of latest machinery and technology to cut pre- and post-harvest losses; and develop better storage and transportation facilities and exclusive clusters of grain markets.

Officials of the food ministry say the recently introduced National Food Policy covers all these aspects, and the federal government is committed to ensuring sustainability of growth in crops sector.

Meanwhile, provincial governments of Sindh and Punjab are also working, on their own as well as in close coordination of the World Bank, on agricultural farm growth sustainability projects. "Hopefully, not only higher output targets (of major food crops set for 2017-18) would be met, we'll also be able to maintain a constant growth in the years to come," an FCA member tells this writer.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1365636

SLOW PROGRESS ON SINDH PROJECTS
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 23rd, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

A NUMBER of World Bank-funded agricultural and irrigation projects, primarily aimed at benefiting small and medium-sized growers, are under way in Sindh.

Small growers are considered the fundamental unit for increasing productivity. But this can only be achieved by enhancing their capacity, providing them with modern technology and ensuring their participation in decision-making relating to the projects' execution.

Currently, many projects going on in Sindh. The World Bank is pitching in finances in the province's agricultural sector through its Rs8 billion Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP).

Another major programme is the Rs18bn Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP). Separately, the 'Accelerated Action Plan of Livestock Sector for Reduction of Stunting and Malnutrition in Sindh' project is also under way in the province.

However, indicators point towards slow progress of the projects. More importantly, small growers — the primary stakeholders of the projects — are not satisfied. They have been expressing concern over their exclusion from policymaking of these projects.

An official says that it has otherwise been government's policy that any project costing Rs500m or above must be independent, but it is not the case either in the SAGP or SIAPEP.

Besides, almost unending appointments and re-appointments of project directors and the official tendency to give additional charges to sitting officers like directors general agriculture extension, who are already preoccupied with their routine official business, have hampered progress of projects.

The mid-term review of the SAGP by the World Bank is due next month. Officials associated with the project admit that since progress in this project has been considerably slow, complaints from farmers are natural.

However, the officials believe that the mid-term review can help fix the issues and overcome gaps in planning and policymaking.

The project is already facing court cases. Petitions have been filed in the Sindh High Court, questioning the performance, progress and transparency of the projects.

In one case, SAGP's project director of the livestock component has already been restrained from working after his credentials were questioned in a petition. The cases are still pending.

An expenditure statement for the livestock project shows that a balance of Rs354.82 million is available, whereas Rs573.16m was spent during July 2014 and June 2017 in terms of salary, allowance, technical assistance, consultancy services, training of farmers, technical assistance for civil works, establishment of artificial insemination training centre, strengthening of semen production unit and rehabilitation of flood and rain-affected institutions.

Advocate Ali Palh, who himself is a grower and is representing small growers in the court case, disputes the figures. "No mobilisation of small farmers has been done under the SIAPEP or SAGP," he says. "Only big landholders — who constitute hardly eight to 10 per cent — are being accommodated. For them, per-acre productivity doesn't matter much as they own hundreds of acres."

In contrast, per-acre productivity matters for small farmers, who have six to 16 acres of landholding, he says.

Most small farmers are not benefitting from the projects, Mr Palh says, adding that project directors of the SIAPEP, SAGP and the livestock programme have failed to deliver for one reason of the other.

And though project implementation consultants have been appointed for the livestock component, the situation of the crops sector is not encouraging, growers say.

A letter addressed to Sindh Planning and Development Board chairman Mohammad Waseem by World Bank's country director in May 2017 also explains that "good performance of the livestock component is overshadowed by agriculture component where despite evidence of early results overall disbursements are lagging behind. Out of the total IDA [International Development Association] credit of $76.4m, disbursements to date are $18m (26.5pc) and commitments are about $13.97m (18.2pc)".

However, ground realities even in the livestock component paint a different picture. The project has been extended to two more districts. Only two chillers of 500 litres each have been installed in Tharparkar under a pilot project.

Sources say that consultants for the component have expressed concern over the procurement of another 12 chillers for quality reasons, and have rejected two chillers. However, the pilot project has produced good results to some extent as far as milk's rate is concerned, sources say.

The consultants also rejected 83 generators for not being in line with due specifications. Eight chillers are lying in warehouses for want of construction of shops in Tharparkar to collect milk from community members registered with milk producers group.

Given the post-rain condition in Tharparkar which has sufficient fodder for livestock, it was otherwise an ideal opportunity to capitalise on milk production but this chance has been lost.

Besides, rooms for chillers' establishment have not been set up. Overall, 153 chillers are to set up in 10 districts that are covered under this component in Sindh.

"Contractor of these rooms says they will be built by December 2017," a source said, adding that the project's timeline would be over in 2019. Likewise, funds for competitive research projects (Rs18.417m for the agricultural and Rs10m for the livestock sector) have not been released yet; the research is to be supervised by the Sindh Agriculture University, Tando Jam.

Nabi Bux Sathio, the general secretary of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture, questions the credibility of reports shared with the World Bank by local project-related managements. "Project authorities' entire thrust is on holding workshops. But the situation is dismal and productivity is in fact declining," he argues.

He adds that officers who have done nothing as heads of their respective departments like agriculture extension and agriculture engineering are given additional charge of PDs with no exemplary progress even within departments to their credit.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1365623

SUGAR MILLS' RELOCATION DIVIDES FARMERS IN PUNJAB
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 23rd, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

SMALL farmers, particularly from south Punjab, have been staging protests in the provincial capital for the last many years to draw authorities' attention to their plight.

This previous week sugarcane growers from south Punjab descended on Lahore with plans to lay a siege to the Punjab Assembly in an attempt to make their voices heard on the relocation of some sugar mills.

The Lahore High Court (LHC) has recently ordered the transfer of Ittehad, Chaudhry and Haseeb Waqas sugar mills from Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Muzaffargarh, respectively, to central Punjab, where these units were originally set up.

The verdict was given on the plea that shifting the mills to cotton-growing areas in violation of the relevant law would hit the crop as the growing of the water-guzzling cane to meet crushing demand for the mills will increase moisture in the atmosphere and thus invite pest attacks.

However, the farming community became divided on the issue. One group led by Chaudhry Anwer of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), a representative body of small farmers, opted for coming on roads.

An advertisement was published in some Urdu dailies in Multan inviting cane growers to demonstrate outside the Punjab Assembly on Oct 16. They feared that relocating mills at the onset of the cane crushing season would hurt financial interests of the growers who had sown the crop.

The protesters blocked Multan Road, one of the main arteries connecting central Punjab with its southern part, creating pressure on almost all roads.

The farmers were demanding that the shifting of the mills should be delayed, at least for the time being, to prevent sugarcane growers from losses who had already sown the crop for this season.

The protest ended only on the assurance that Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif would give audience to a representative delegation of the demonstrators and would promise to do his best for resolving the issue.

Despite agreeing that the immediate relocation of the mills would ruin the cane growers, the main PKI leadership distanced itself from the protest.

Its president Khalid Mahmood Khokhar argues that "the mills relocation orders have been given by a court of law [i.e. the LHC] and not by any executive authority. Therefore, approaching the appellate authority [Supreme Court] is the right course of action while protesting on roads is against decorum of the judiciary".

Moreover, there's a group of farmers which doesn't buy the argument that the mills' relocation will harm cane growers' interests.

"The transfer of the mills won't cause any problem to the growers, as there is already a sugar mill every 70 kilometres in south Punjab," Agri Forum Pakistan's Rao Akhtar says. "Growers may easily transport their crop to any nearby unit. Moreover, the crop may also be hauled to sugar mills in Sukkur and Ghotki districts of Sindh."

There's also a political angle to the story. Mr Khokhar alleges that the demonstration had been organised at the behest of the mill owners, the Sharifs.

He claims that the son of Abbas Sharif — late brother of ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif — arranged the protest through funding and other facilities to create social pressure for keeping the mills where they are.

The PKI president apprehends that politicising the matter will ultimately damage the cause of the cane growers in particular and the agricultural sector in general.

The main problem troubling the farming community as a whole is the costly farm inputs, he says, and urges all groups to give attention to this issue and avoid diverting focus of the government, which "already lacks the will to reform the agriculture sector", one of the largest employers of the country's unskilled labour force.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1365621/sugar-mills-relocation-divides-farmers

TALKING ABOUT THE ECONOMY
Khurram Husain

The Express Tribune, October 26, 2017

LOOK at the state of Pakistan's economic conversation in the run-up to any major economic crisis and you will notice something. Very few are willing to talk about the real problems. Most of the conversation is saturated with politics, with those who are fishing for government posts or the attention of the overseers in Rawalpindi, directing all their attacks at the incumbent finance minister as if it is he who is personally responsible for structural defects in the economy that are decades old.

Of course, successive finance ministers should be accountable for their inability to act on the core dysfunctions in the economy. But at some point, the conversation has to move past the personal towards the larger picture.

Look at the reports of the State Bank, as an example, in the run up to the crisis of 2008 and 1998, the two most serious economic shocks to hit the economy in decades. One finds hardly any language to suggest that pressures of such enormous magnitude are building up in the economy. To some extent this is understandable, because the months leading up to these crises were enormously tense and any hint from the central bank of an impending disaster would aggravate these tensions. But then when the crisis does hit, it kills the credibility of the central bank, which has ramifications for its ability to manage speculative pressures, as well as assuage foreign investors and creditors, who look to the IMF instead for their view on where the economy is headed.

The Fund is no less complicit in this. For one, Pakistan is an especially complicated case for any mission chief at the IMF, because the country is caught up in a massive geopolitical game involving the Americans, and there are instructions to not cut the country off until told to do so. Usually that instruction comes when the level of the reserves is deemed to be sufficient for a couple of years, with that calculation being made by some young officer at the treasury department.

Within these confines, the mission chief is hard-pressed to point out that the country's economic managers are not serious about addressing any of the underlying structural problems, and appear to be content taking superficial action to control the macroeconomic framework while trying to create the space to ramp up development spending and encourage consumption, particularly of imports.

These are the only markers of economic progress in this country, roads and malls, and rarely has a government had an economic agenda that goes beyond these.

The net result is that we have had only one economic conversation in this country since at least the 1960s: guns versus butter. There was a brief period in the Ayub era when it can be said that there was an economic conversation in the country. This was when a group of economists within the Planning Commission, from the eastern wing, were repeatedly trying to highlight the regional disparities in the resource allocation of the first three Five-Year Plans.

It would be generous to describe that episode, which spanned more than a decade, as a conversation though, since those raising the objections were largely ignored, and after the 1965 war, began to be labelled as 'enemy agents' in radio broadcasts. That conversation ended in blood and tears.

In the run-up to the crisis with the foreign currency deposits in 1998, when all withdrawals from this scheme were frozen, then governor State Bank, Muhammad Yaqub, had written a paper about the growing risks posed by the funds in these deposits since they were being treated as foreign exchange reserves under the assumption that they are here for good. Once withdrawals began in the wake of the nuclear detonations and the imposition of sanctions, and it dawned upon the government that there are not enough dollars in the country to honour all the withdrawals, the accounts had to be frozen.

That paper, which received a hostile reception wherever it was presented, was subsequently inserted as an appendix in the State Bank's annual report of the year, and stands more as an epitaph to the tremendous folly that the FCD scheme became rather than a serious warning of trouble ahead.

I am not aware of any document from 2008 that can be said to be a reflection on the weaknesses and vulnerabilities that brought Pakistan so close to such a massive calamity. That event has been suppressed in our memory, but it is worth recalling that the financial system was shutting down more comprehensively than it had in 1998.

The stock market was already shut, flight of capital from the country was under way in huge quantities, and rupee withdrawals from the banks were at such a level that the State Bank actually mentioned in one of its reports that companies were withdrawing their working capital deposited with banks to hold it in cash.

Yet not a single serious study has been done of that crisis, how it grew and what vulnerabilities in particular lead to it. The IMF has its take on what went wrong, which is heavily skewed to protect the interests of foreign creditors because that is largely what the Fund is tasked with: ensuring that the creditworthiness of the country is not damaged through its cycles of boom and bust. The State Bank's working paper series does not contain anything, nor did any independent economist or the myriad 'think tanks' that claim to work on economic policy produce a single study.

What happened was simple: we got a bailout, got up, dusted ourselves off, and went back to business as usual. One more time the cycle repeated itself, with reserves hitting an all-time-high peak within a few years, the finance minister boasting about this accomplishment, followed by a rapid depletion.

Back to bailout in 2013. No wonder there is a sense of déjà-vu today. What exactly have we learned from the many crises we have already been through?

https://www.dawn.com/news/1366332/talking-about-the-economy

PFA TO BAN WASTEWATER USE FOR EDIBLE CROPS
The Express Tribune, October 26th, 2017.

After hotels and restaurants, Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has decided to introduce food safety regulations in the fruit and vegetable supply chain. The authority has recently started issuing licences to food and vegetable shops and now it will bar wastewater irrigation for agricultural production.

A PFA spokesman told The Express Tribune that water is one of the most precious inputs in agriculture production. He said the maintenance of quality standards is highly critical to the provision of safe and healthy produce for the general public of the province.

Providing the background to the situation, he highlighted that many areas in the country are facing a major crisis as cultivators are resorting to the use of wastewater for irrigation. "This poses a direct threat to the health of consumers who are exposed to elevated levels of toxic and poisonous elements present in wastewater," he maintains.

He also underlines that while the challenge is being addressed directly by PFA, it needs effective cooperation from the Punjab Agricultural Department, Industry Department, private businesses, Water and Sanitation Agencies (WASAs) as well as social activists. The food watchdog spokesperson stressed that these steps are crucial to tackle the potential public health crisis.

He also points out that provincial regulations bind industries to ensure that all waste water is treated before it is disposed in any way. "It has been a common point of discussion for the past many years that industrial estates and zones should provide integral effluent water treatment plants to provide complete treatment of waste water. However, there have been hardly any practical steps taken in this direction.

The PFA aims to create an active liaison with industrial estates and government agencies to take action in an expeditious manner," he added.

Punjab Agriculture Department former director general Dr Anjum Buttar welcomed the move as a positive step, but underscores the need to back up the initiative with a comprehensive awareness campaign to highlight the danger posed to public health.

He is of the opinion that a straightforward ban will not be sufficient without such efforts. "It should be considered as a single step in a long-term strategic shift. This will include the assessment of water quality of different sewage lines, given there is a marked contrast between the water discharged from households and factory units. It will require considerable planning to execute properly, he stresses.

PFA Director General Noorul Amin Mengal highlights that a recent report of the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council has revealed that the use of sewage water for cultivation of vegetables as well as for wheat and other crops is hazardous to human health. It says sewerage water is not only hazardous, but the discharge of acids and chemicals from factories make it more dangerous.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1541375/2-another-lng-power-project-approved-punjab/

He said the authority believes this water can have alternative usages like irrigation of non-edible crops, e.g. bamboos, flowers and indoor plants.

PFA has been taking practical steps to improve the standards of edible items available to the public. The authority has also decided to restrict the quantity of trans fats (trans-fatty acids) up to 0.5%.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1541176/1-pfa-ban-wastewater-use-edible-crops/

GOVT URGED TO ALLOW UREA IMPORT

The federal government has been asked to take a quick and timely decision on urea import in order to protect the interests of farmers, National Fertilizer Marketing Limited (NFML) Managing Director Rao Manzar Hayat said on Friday.

“We have sent a request for importing 0.5 million tons of urea fertiliser. We are confident that Ecnec and other government bodies will take decision on the request and farmers will receive fertiliser at the time of sowing wheat and other important crops during the current planting season,” he said.

Hayat said experts in his organisation believed that availability of at least half a million tons of fertiliser in state reserves was necessary to ensure stability in prices of fertiliser in the market.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1543293/2-govt-urged-allow-urea-import/

FARMERS URGED TO SOW VEGETABLES TIMELY

Busness Recorder, 26 October 2017

KARACHI: The Met Office has asked the farmers to sow winter vegetables timely with a view to acquire a better yield.

It said that the vegetable cultivation will help the newly crop attain a complete soil dampness for a robust output. “Farmers of cotton crop areas are advised to prepare field for incoming Rabi crops and complete sowing in time,” it added.

Daytime temperature is likely to remain normal in the most parts of the country but nights in the agriculture plains are expected to remain cooler until Oct 31.

Normal wind is likely to prevail in the most of agricultural plains, however, dust/sand storms may occur in Southern Punjab and Upper Sindh. It urged the Farmers to schedule irrigation plans in accordance with the expected weather.

It said that farmers should remove weeds from fields with a view to helping the standing crops attain full moisture and ingredients. Dry weather is expected in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan over the period while light rain is likely in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir.

Temperature dropped to zero degree Celsius in Skardu, Kalam and Astore over the past 24 hours. Mainly dry weather is expected in the most parts of the country on Thursday.

Shallow foggy/misty weather conditions are likely in plain areas of Punjab and Upper Sindh during the morning hours. “Continental air is prevailing over the most parts of the country,” the Met said.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/26/8-page/678440-news.html

PAKISTAN NEEDS SOUND AGRICULTURE INVESTMENT POLICY: CHINESE EXPERT
Business Recorder Report, Oct 27th, 2017

Dr Siang Hee Tan, Executive Director, Crop Life Asia Thursday said that a very sound agricultural investment policy is needed in Pakistan for agriculture sector, benefiting both old age and young framers from biotechnology to reap the benefits of crop protection technology for encouraging exports.

Talking to Business Recorder, he said that Crop Life Asia is part of a global federation representing the plant science industry that advocates international developments with regards to crop protection, seeds and agricultural biotechnology. Its primary aim is to promote and advocate approaches that enhance sustainable agriculture in the interests of farmers, governments, consumers and the environment.

Recently, its Executive Director, Dr Siang Hee Tan, visited Pakistan to attend the Seminar on Advances in Agricultural Biotechnology and Regulatory Affairs jointly organized by Forman Christian College (A Chartered University) & Pakistan Biotechnology Information Centre. He shared his experiences in other countries of Asia Pacific and how Pakistan can benefit from these.

He said that the challenge in Pakistan is the that the whole value adding piece is missing in the Agricultural sector and the whole supply chain infrastructure needs to step up to capture the value. He said that there is a need of having a very sound government policy to really encourage the whole back bone of the system that all the farmers get benefit from the consolidation.

There are two kinds of farmers the old age farmers and they have their own methods and it is very hard to make them understand about the new technologies because they have been using their old ones all their lives and then there are young entrepreneur mind farmers who are scientifically aware of the technology and easy to mold.

Government needs to place a policy that benefit both of them and there is a need of restructuring them over the years as the generations change because new generation farmers will not get any benefit with the old policies in place.

To be an exporting country, Pakistan needs to change the whole situation and all elements need to work as one in the system to build a sound and solid infrastructure which benefits all. The small farmers are a political situation which no government can ignore and they need to be heard too.

For different commodities there should be different policies. Biotechnology is one component that needs to be working with other components like a functional regulatory environment, a sound Agricultural Investment policy and good scientific personal who continuously try to stabilize things politically and scientifically.

This is critical for country like Pakistan to reap the benefits with this technology like other countries who are gaining self-sufficiently to meet their food and feed demands, Dr Siang said.

Talking about agriculture infrastructure development in Pakistan, he said that we need to build strong and better infrastructure for irrigation, for poultry, for storage/warehouse etc and every sector needs to play its role in this development to reap eventual benefits. He said hopefully Crop Life and the member companies are going to be the gelling agents so that everybody comes together and have a very clear manifesto that how do the farmers with the technology in hand protect the crop and the product gets to the market in a timely manner and farmers make a better life by investing in Agriculture and it also propels the economy of Pakistan.

When asked about R&D activities in Pakistan Agriculture, he said that he has seen a lot of investment in Pakistan in the R&D and is glad to see multiple crops involved in biotech research which will benefit the country in long run. He said that there is a need to have a market driven R&D. Researchers don't see behind the scene of commercialization, a lot of the things are licensed for R&D only and not for commercialization. Most of the time they don't consider patents. The technology licensing needs to be very active and one should never forget good products to commercialize. Everyone in the agriculture industry needs to step up and become a value adding factor.

He said that capturing the farmer's hearts and customers is a very different story than your inspirational design so this gap needs to be gelled in. It is very important that the industry and Government work together and listen to the farmers as to what they need and then accordingly develop the technology.

Talking about the Crop Life role in promoting agriculture technology and sustainable agriculture around the world, he said that Crop Life represents seven major technology companies including DuPont Pioneer, Monsanto, Syngenta, FMC, Bayer, BASF etc. These companies, invest globally US$ 6.5 billion annually in R&D of agricultural technologies. They have a consistent pipeline to bring these technologies into the hands of the farmers, that includes 3.5 billion dollars alone in seed biotechnology & crop protection technology.

It is only possible with the help of advance technology and the crop protection technology that now without clearing more land to cultivate a lot more can be produced from the same land, and this way we are preserving the eco-system and bio diversity in the environment.

He said that all stakeholders need to be aligned to adopt these technologies and reap their benefits as in other countries. He said that developing a product and introducing it into the market is one piece while the other piece is that whether the infrastructure provides the financial capability for the transaction cost, the farmers cost. He highlighted that our member companies are working in Pakistan to introduce biotech corn with events that are approved in other countries for many years.

However, they face a lot of challenges in terms of comprehensive biotech commercialization policy and alignment among multiple ministries to implement the biotech commercialization Rules. He mentioned that a lot needs to happen and their role is to see that how a lot of people come together and overcome the gaps and streamline the regulatory policies and government initiatives to achieve high levels of agri productivity, Dr Siang added.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/10/20171027229898/

WORLD BANK SEES SLIGHT FALL IN AGRICULTURE PRICES
Dawn, October 29th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank says that global agricultural prices are forecast to recede modestly in 2017, but will largely stabilise in 2018, while most food markets are well-supplied and the stock-to-use ratios of some grains are forecast to reach multi-year highs.

According to the 'Commodity Markets Outlook' released on Thursday, grain prices are projected to remain broadly stable in 2017 but are anticipated to increase one per cent in 2018 because of a projected tightness in maize supplies.

Over the medium term, agricultural commodity prices are expected to increase only a cumulative 3pc through 2020, a very small gain compared to the post-2011 decline, the World Bank report says.

It says that disruptive weather at a global level is not expected, and earlier fears in the year of a La Niña cycle have not materialised. Subsidies to crop producers facing lower prices were isolated events and did not skew prices at a global level. The impact of bio-fuel production, which had a major effect on prices during the boom years, is diminished as well. Fertiliser prices are expected to strengthen 3pc on moderate demand growth, but new capacity could weigh on prices.

The report says that global production of wheat, which has been revised upward throughout the crop season, is projected to reach 751 million metric tonnes, marginally lower than last season's 754m metric tonnes, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Conditions for the global wheat crop are generally favourable. All three Central Asian wheat producers (Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine) experienced favourable weather conditions, while the winter crops in North America and the Southern Hemisphere proceed as expected.

With global wheat consumption projected to remain largely unchanged from last season, the stocks-to-use ratio for wheat is forecast to exceed 36pc, 3-decade high.

Maize production is projected to decline more than 3pc this season. Although crop conditions in the US, the world's top maize supplier, are favourable, dry conditions are causing concern in the European Union and Ukraine.

In Argentina and Brazil, global maize consumption is anticipated to expand 2pc, pushing the stocks-to-use ratio to 19pc, 3 percentage points below last season but much higher than the 2010-12 lows.

Rice production is expected to recede marginally to 489m metric tonnes in 2017-18 mainly in response to mixed growing conditions in some Asian producers, notably China, northern Thailand, and Vietnam.

The oilseed supply outlook during October 2017-September 2018 is also healthy, with global supplies for the ten major oilseeds projected to reach a new high of 562m metric tonnes.

A small drop in soybean production is expected to offset increases in cottonseed, palm kernels, and rapeseed.

The agricultural price outlook assumes that bio-fuels will be a source of demand for key food commodities. Bio-fuels currently account for a little over 1.5mbpd, or 1.6pc of global liquid energy consumption.

Most bio-fuel production is not profitable at current energy and agricultural prices, is supported through various forms of mandates and trade measures. Bio-fuels come principally in the form of maize-based ethanol from the US, sugarcane-based ethanol from Brazil, and edible oil-based biodiesel from Europe.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1366920/world-bank-sees-slight-fall-in-agri-prices

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 16Th TO OCTOBER 22nd 2017
TAPPING POTENTIAL FOR AGRI TRADE
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 16th, 2017

THE low volume of trade between Pakistan and China is not reflective of the economic size of two neighbouring countries. This indicates there is a huge untapped trade potential in both countries, which can be utilised mainly to enhance welfare of the masses.

Due to shortage of arable land and freshwater resources in China, the country needs to import land-extensive crops (such as wheat and rice) to feed its population.

Further, with rising living standards, the Chinese demand for agricultural imports is gradually moving up, which is likely to create agro-based trade opportunities in countries having substantial potential in agriculture produce.

China’s demand for cotton yarn and rice imports is met by the emerging economies of Asia, such as Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand and India. However, the relative share of China’s import of these products has witnessed some changes recently.

Keeping in view the fact that agriculture sector accounts for around 20 per cent of Pakistan’s GDP and employs over 40pc of the country’s labour force, both Pakistan and China have agreed to enhance cooperation on agriculture under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Various agricultural projects have been initiated to get maximum benefit of the CPEC initiative, which include:

Fruit processing industry in Gilgit-Baltistan: The climate and fertile soil of Gilgit-Baltistan offer ideal environment for producing fruits like apples, peach, cherries, almonds, apricot, etc. According to an article published by the Asian Development Bank, farmers in Gilgit-Baltistan produce over 100,000 tonnes of fresh apricots a year. Setting up the fruit processing industry in the region would help boost the country's fruit exports.

Sino-Pakistan Hybrid Rice Research Centre at Karachi University: Both countries have recently initiated research to produce high-yielding and high-quality rice. Setting up a rice research centre is a right step towards achieving the objective.

Meat production and processing facilities in KP: Setting up of meat production and processing facilities in KP would help increase Pakistan's meat exports to China, as well as, to Afghanistan and Central Asian market.

KP-China Sustainable Donkey Development Programme: To increase the donkey population in Pakistan so as to ensure interrupted backward supply for export of live animals and raising income of donkey breeders and traders.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1363981

CROP INSURANCE A HOPE FOR SMALL LANDHOLDERS
The Express Tribune, October 16th, 2017.

Muhammad Awais Umar

ISLAMABAD: Almost 61% of people in Pakistan live in rural areas even without having adequate landholdings and sufficient financial resources for agriculture to earn their livelihood. With low level of income, they are plunging into abject poverty.

Challenges such as uncertain weather conditions (floods and droughts), leading to crop failure or loss, insecure land ownership limiting farmers' propensity to invest, restricted access to capital and farm inputs such as fertiliser and seeds, unfavourable trade policies and price fluctuations hurt their sustainability and sometimes subsistence levels.

Many of these constraints are beyond their control as they have to depend on climatic conditions, government policies and market players.

On the other hand, their current risk management mainly consists of diversifying agricultural activities by altering crop variety, early sowing of crops and cattle breeding. They have hardly any risk transfer tools, which in turn limit the availability and range of agricultural credit offered by banks.

A lack of credit availability is the main limitation. Though there are some microcredit facilities available, farmers are reluctant or unable to pay high interest rates on these microcredit opportunities.

It could be observed that farmers get information on climate change through radio or public awareness programmes of community groups, peers and other sources.

Majority of the farmers indicate that they have experienced higher temperatures, riverine floods, less water for irrigation and lower crop yields due to changed weather conditions over time.

Agricultural production and farm incomes in Pakistan are frequently affected by natural disasters such as droughts, floods, cyclones, storms, landslides and earthquakes.

Susceptibility of agriculture to these disasters is compounded by the outbreak of epidemics and man-made disasters such as fire, spurious seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, price crash and improper market for final product.

In the case of Pakistan, agriculture is highly affected by climate change and variability. But a big gap exists in our knowledge on the capacity of agricultural systems to adapt to climate change as its effects cannot be estimated through bio-physical impact modeling alone.

Beyond the traditional knowledge of farmers, the agriculture sector has accumulated complex systems of knowledge through research, extension services and innovation involving government, civic and market institutions.

The capacity of a household to cope with climate risks depends to some degree on the enabling environment and the adaptive capacity of the community is reflective of the resources and processes of the region.

When we asked a select group of small farmers to identify the best measures needed to enhance effective adaptation to climate variability, they pointed to the provision of subsidies on farm inputs, updated information services (through the extension department) and sufficient irrigation water supply as necessary measures.

A farmer from Muzaffargarh said: “Government has to work to make sure continuous provision of water for irrigation along with good-quality seeds, pesticides and fertilisers for the farmers at reasonable prices.”

Another farmer said: “There is no ‘mandi’ (local market) close to our area and we have to go to Multan and it is difficult for us to bear the transportation cost. That’s why we are bound to sell our crops to the middlemen at low prices.”

Access to credit provides financial resources to the farmers for buying crop inputs and accelerates the pace of adoption of new technologies.

The credit access has the potential to help farmers in smooth adaptation to climate change, if funds are available at a low interest rate. These will allow farmers to set aside sufficient resources for crop production, which will ultimately help in repaying loans.

In Pakistan, only 30% of farmers are getting benefits from the agricultural loan schemes. Majority of the farmers (84%) are small landholders who rely on informal sector credit at exorbitant interest rates to meet their requirements as they are unable to provide collateral to banks.

Furthermore, in case of crop failure, it is difficult for the farmers to pay back their loans. They have to either sell their cattle and other farm assets or again acquire a loan to pay the previous one.

When asked about this situation, a farmer said: "We recover our crop loss by either selling our land, livestock or relying on loans with a heavy interest rate."

Crop insurance has the potential to address some of these constraints by facilitating access to the means of production and changing behaviour by reducing uncertainty.

This coverage can enable farmers to invest in riskier but potentially more lucrative crops. Timely insurance payout after crop losses can help small landholders to maintain their consumption patterns and avoid the sale of assets.

Crop insurance appeals the most when offered alongside other services such as weather forecasts through text messages, agricultural extension services, price fluctuation and other market information which, coupled with basic agricultural advice such as planting dates for crops, are considered highly valuable to small holders.

Currently, the Crop Loan Insurance offered in Pakistan is linked with agricultural loans from banks and the scheme can only be accessed by 30% of the farmers who are able to secure bank loans.

Small farmers are willing to get their crops insured if any crop insurance scheme is launched for them and the government is willing to share some portion of the premium.

A farmer highlighted the importance of crop insurance, saying: "We live in an uncertain condition as we are not sure about our crops whether or not they will benefit us; if we get insured, it will help us to shift our loss/damage when our insurance claims are paid."

In order to provide crop insurance, there is a need to win the confidence of farmers by educating them about the pros and cons of the scheme and how it works, providing them proper assistance and assurance regarding timely payments of their claims.

The writer is a project assistant at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1532323/crop-insurance-hope-small-landholders/

AGRICULTURE SECTOR FAILS TO MAKE ADEQUATE INVESTMENT IN VALUE ADDITION
The Express Tribune, October 16th, 2017.

The policy environment that for several decades favoured just a few has not only resulted in a decline of industrialisation in the country, but has caused severe deficiencies in the agriculture sector in the name of industrialisation.

Pakistan has left its agriculture sector at the mercy of free market and compliance with the World Trade Organization (WTO), whereas its main competitors have managed a more aggressive and active policy, yet maintained acquiescence with all international requirements.

Taking the above argument forward, it is thought-provoking to look at the comparison of Pakistan's agriculture sector with that of our neighbour India. Agriculture is an extremely important component in the economies of both India and Pakistan. The sector contributes a significant amount to GDP and employment of both countries.

In terms of size, India's agricultural production, however, is more than five times that of Pakistan, yet Pakistan's per capita production across major crops is substantially higher than that of India.

Although there are similarities in the structure of agricultural production across geographically contiguous regions of the two countries, there are major differences as well.

While Pakistan has grown substantially in livestock production over the past few years, Indian agriculture has been dominated by the rise of cotton production that trebled in the last 10 years since its adoption of bio-genetic varieties.

Moreover, the geographical and climatic diversity across the two countries is a major factor behind differences in variety and pattern of agriculture produce. But perhaps the most important difference between agriculture sectors of the two countries is their contrasting policy regime.

Since 1947, India, driven primarily by the objective of achieving food security for its population, has adopted and maintained an interventionist regime in agriculture. The state continues to subsidise agricultural inputs, provides price support for 24 crops and maintains high average applied tariff rates on agriculture.

In contrast, Pakistan over the years has liberalised its agriculture sector, which now has minimal state intervention. Market liberalisation reforms have meant a gradual phasing out of subsidies and price supports and a reduction in agricultural tariff rates.

The only crop procured by the government at a fixed pre-announced price is wheat; the rest are freely traded at market prices (some exemptions were introduced for sugarcane and rice).

From the standpoint of the agricultural sector of Pakistan, this difference in policy regime has created an uneven playing field. Indian subsidies have reduced costs of cultivation, distorted prices and have not only affected the direction and volume of bilateral trade, but India has priced out Pakistan from international markets in key products.

The other active intervention has been how India has managed to successfully control its market access and yet be compliant with all international protocols. High average tariffs on agricultural goods and non-tariff barriers (NTBs), such as health and quality standards (SPS and quarantine standards), are cited as the major levers that have been used to protect the local producers.

Altogether, according to the World Bank, the Overall Trade Restrictiveness Index (OTRI) in agriculture in India was 69.5% compared to 5.8% for Pakistan. Thus, despite the fact that Pakistan has not extended MFN to India and maintains a negative list for imports from India, both the overall and agricultural trade balance is heavily tilted in India's favour.

Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) calculations show that Pakistan is competitive in citrus fruit, mangoes, apricots, peaches, olives, fish and fish products. Moreover, these products have the potential to attract significant demand in Indian markets, yet we have failed to achieve that, primarily due to weak policy support and negotiation.

The lesson to draw from the above comparison is not only that of a red balance of payments entry, but a sector that now suffers from low growth, lack of diversity and high-risk production and performance. Due to prolonged ignorance, Pakistan's agriculture has failed to make adequate investments in the value addition of commodities.

The sector has missed out on early opportunities and first mover advantage to other competitors such as India and China, who capitalised on the graduation of international markets towards value added rather than just commodities.

The government was not able to timely push incentive frameworks that could have directed the allocation of land, labour and water to higher value uses by altering returns on modern technologies and investments.

The government's historical intervention in the pricing, procurement and storage of agricultural commodities, along with the presence of import tariffs on input commodities, have resulted in negative effective rates of protection, reducing the incentive to shift towards high value-added production.

During the past two decades, the crop sub-sector has declined from 65% in 1990-1991 of agricultural value addition to 42% in 2010-11. The growth rate of the agricultural sector has declined, with a noticeable decline in the crop sub-sector despite higher international prices.

The agriculture sector continues to be the mainstay of Punjab's economy as it makes a substantial contribution to the province's economic growth and employment. The performance in Punjab has also mimicked the trend experienced at the national level.

The government of Punjab, however, is actively involved in multiple initiatives aimed at increasing productivity as well as production in the sector, such as improvements in seed quality, plant protection and research expansion.

The flagship programme Kissan Package was introduced in September 2015, focusing on the benefits of financial inclusion to productivity in a sector prone to the vagaries of sudden price shocks.

SMART agriculture is another initiative of the Punjab government that is aimed at using the Information Communication Technology (ICT) to spur innovation and improvements in the agriculture sector.

In addition, CPEC may provide avenues that the government are considering to support the agriculture of the province. The current long-term plan for cooperation in agriculture includes areas such as (i) planting and breeding (ii) agricultural products processing (iii) storage and transportation of agricultural products (iv) infrastructure construction and (v) epidemic disease prevention and control.

However, the stance taken by us in previous articles suggests that CPEC opportunities are contingent upon government responding to the needs and building a policy framework to realise the full potential. This, response for agriculture, will be covered in our next article.

Muhammad Usman Khan is an Adviser and Dr M Amanullah is Chief Economist at the Planning and Development Department, Government of Punjab

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1532330/agriculture-sector-fails-make-adequate-investment-value-addition/

POLICE FOIL FARMERS BID TO 'BESIEGE PA'
Dawn, October 17th, 2017

LAHORE/Kasur: A group of farming community on Monday tried to enter the provincial metropolis to protest against withdrawal of subsidies but police foiled their attempt by closing their route by placing containers on the road.

Members of the Pakistan Kissan Ittehad riding dozens of buses and cars coming all the way from Bahawalnagar, Multan, Sahiwal and Okara first encountered police "siege" at Manga Mandi, around 35km from here on Multan Road.

They, however, managed to break the police cordon by diverting from the main road and driving through EME Society reached Thokar Niaz Beg only to encounter another police picket.

Led by Chaudhry Anwer, the farmers armed with batons were demanding restoration of subsidies for various crops, opposing the court order of reversing shifting of sugar mills of the Sharifs from Rahim Yar Khan back to Pakpattan, Nankana Sahib and Gojra.

They vowed to lay a siege to the Punjab Assembly building until fulfillment of their demands.

Mian Umair, general secretary of the rival group of the Kissan Ittehad, alleged that the protesters enjoyed the support of the Punjab government and that the hurdles in their way were just to hoodwink the people.

He claimed that some officials of the provincial government had approached their group too for taking out the rally and promised to facilitate them by offering transport and other services but they declined the offer.

Khalid Khokhar, PKI president, claimed that the Lahore Metropolitan Corporation has been tasked with taking care of food needs of the protesters.

He regretted that whenever the farmers came out of their homes for their 'genuine' demands they were treated harshly as police used batons and even tear gas to prevent them from assembling in Lahore or Islamabad. But for their own interests the rulers were facilitating the protesters, he alleged.In Kasur, farmers blocked Multan Road near Halla Chowk and Jamber Chowk and threw traffic out of gear for hours.

Earlier, more than 10 personnel near Kalalawala Khoh in the limits of Manga Mandi police station did not dare stop the rally, comprising about 1,000 farmers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1364289

‘SUBSIDY ON DAP FERTILIZER BEING PROVIDED TO 5.2M FARMERS IN PUNJAB’
Business Recorder, 18 October 2017

M Rafique Goraya

LAHORE: A spokesman for Agriculture Department has said that under Khadam-E- Punjab Kissan package, the government is providing subsidy on DAP fertilizer to 5.2 million farmers in the province in the form of vouchers which will be sealed in the bag of DAP fertilizer.

He said the farmers/stakeholders will type voucher number along with their CNIC number and send it to 8070 through SMS. The farmer will get subsidy of Rs 150 per voucher through mobile cash agents. A farmer can get subsidy vouchers on up to 20 bags of DAP fertilizer

This subsidy is being provided to all registered farmers of Kissan package. Unregistered farmers can contact Agriculture Helpline toll free numbers 0800-15000 & 0800-29000 to register themselves and get benefit of this subsidy scheme.

The Spokesman said through this subsidy scheme the farmers cost of production will be reduced while use of DAP fertilizer will increase per acre yield of crops.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/18/5-page/676898-news.html

COTTON PRODUCTION UP 37PC
Dawn, October 19th, 2017

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: The country is likely to achieve the cotton production target of 13 million bales this season, latest figures released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) show.

The country produced 5.984m cotton bales by Oct 15, up 36.79 per cent from the output recorded in the corresponding period of last year.

Following a crop failure in the last two consecutive seasons, the cotton production is likely to be 3m bales higher this year.

Both Sindh and Punjab recorded higher year-on-year cotton production with the former producing 534,687 more bales. The output of Punjab was 1.07m more bales up to Oct 15.

Punjab’s cotton production grew 54.89pc to 3.032m bales this year. Sindh produced 2.951m bales, showing a growth of 22.12pc year-on-year.

The fortnightly flow of phutti from cotton fields to ginneries remained 1.993m bales against 1.729m bales last year.

As for consumption, spinners purchased 4.232m bales against 3.144m bales that they lifted in the corresponding period last year.

Exporters purchased 180,602 bales compared to 95,490 bales a year ago.

Ginners are also holding unsold cotton stocks of 1.571m bales compared to 1.135m bales last year.

In total 979 ginning factories are currently operating in Sindh and Punjab.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1364683

DEMANDING THEIR DUE : FARMERS WARN OF FURTHER PROTEST
The Express Tribune, October 19th, 2017.

LAHORE: Reiterating their demands, farmers demanded the release of pending sugarcane payments, waiver of arrears from agriculture tube wells' bills and a subsidy on different inputs.

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) leader Chaudhry Anwar warned the provincial government that if farmers' demands were not met promptly, they would hold a sit-in at Thokar Niaz Beg on Thursday (today).

Speaking to the media after a meeting with the CCPO on Wednesday, Anwar highlighted that the police officer lacked the authority to resolve farmers' problems. "However, he can help schedule a meeting with Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. He said Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah had informed farmers over the phone that the chief minister had accepted all of their demands. He also assured that a meeting would soon be held with leaders of the farming community. Farmers have been on the roads for 48 hours in favour of their demands. "If Shehbaz does not give them does not give them an appointment to hear their demands, they will again hold a sit-in."

Anwar, along with other leaders of the farming community, said hundreds of angry growers protested on Main Multan Road late on Monday night and it continued till late Tuesday night. He said the provincial government assured farmers' representatives that the government had accepted all their legitimate demands.

The farmers blocked main Multan Road and M2 Motorway for all kinds of vehicular traffic. This caused great inconvenience for commuters. Though, farmers from different areas had termporarily called off their protest, most demonstrators were still in the city and ready to take to the streets at any time if the government failed to accept their demands.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1535055/demanding-due-farmers-warn-protest/

WOMEN FARMERS PRESENT 'CHARTER OF DEMANDS' TO MINISTER
RECORDER REPORT

LAHORE: Oxfam Pakistan and Indus Consortium organized a rural women's convention where over 80 women farmers from five districts of Punjab, presented a "charter of demands" to the Minister Environment Protection Zakia Shah Nawaz.

The charter demands the approval of the Climate Change Policy with proper resource allocation for smallholder women farmers and their participation in budget decision making. The convention was attended by a large number of people from civil society organizations, government officials, environmentalists, academia, corporate entities and development organizations.

Upon being presented the charter of demands, Minister Zakia Shah Nawaz said, “Farmers, especially female play an important role in contributing towards Pakistan’s economy. They are the backbone of our country.”

She highlighted that as per directives of the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, we are investing heavily in educating our rural youth as they are unaware of their rights, once educated they will be able to understand what their rights are.

Presenting their “charter of demands”, the female farmers from rural district of Punjab said that natural disasters are affecting their crops, thus the government needs to take action and safeguard their crops. They further demanded that the government should provide good quality seeds for improved crops, loans should be provided to small female farmers on easy installments. The female farmers also demanded sufficient allocation for agriculture in the provincial budget.

In Pakistan, women contribute significantly to agricultural production, processing and promotion. Still they face formidable obstacles to their potential role as a major economic and social force in the development of the agriculture sector. Amongst the problems that constrain the development of women’s potential are heavy workloads, lack of access to factors of production, lack of training and access to advisory services.

Oxfam’s Programme Director Javeria Afzal welcomed the participants and encouraged them to support rural women farmers.

The women’s convention provided a platform to Punjab’s women farmers to raise their voices, share their concerns, and present their demands to prompt the government to respond effectively and systemically to domestic climate change threats and to incorporate women focused schemes in the budget of the provincial government in the upcoming year.

“Hashoo Group is working through the foundation to enable young women and men, women farmers and producers through a wide range of rural development approaches. We believe in leveraging local knowledge with scientific research for the benefit of rural communities,” said Dr Ayesha Khan, Country Director, Hashoo Foundation.

Pakistan must invest more in small-scale agriculture, especially women who play a vital role in food security. Agriculture needs to be rebuilt along different lines and poor farmers in developing countries made central to that change.

Moderated by Fiza Qureshi, Program Manager, Indus Consortium, the concluding session was chaired by Dr Ayesha Khan, Country Director, Hashoo Foundation whereas Saadia Sohail, Member Provincial Assembly, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf, Faiza Ahmed, MPA from Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Saira Iftikhar, MPA from PML-N were the panelists.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/21/5-page/914363-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 9 Th TO OCTOBER 15 Th 2017 'SMALL GROWERS OVERLOOKED IN WB-FUNDED PROJECTS'
Dawn, October 10th, 2017

HYDERABAD: The Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) has criticised the provincial government for poor performance in the World Bank-funded farm sector projects and complained that small growers have been completely overlooked in the projects and kept out of policymaking process.

SARC leaders Ali Palh, Wali Mohammad Thebo, Mohammad Ali and others said at a press conference at the press club here on Monday that Sindh contributed substantially to the country's agrarian economy but the province's agriculture sector suffered serious official neglect and its small growers faced a host of problems.

They said that there was no effective agriculture policy in Sindh and small farmers had no role in policymaking for farm sector at any level and no input was sought from small growers in the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project (SAGP), a WB-funded project, adding that only big landholders had been given representation in the SAGP.

Besides SAGP, the leaders said, several other WB-funded projects were being executed in the province, including the Sindh Irrigated Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Project (SIAPEP) under which watercourses were to be lined and farmers were to be educated in water conservation techniques and to be provided technology.

Mr Palh said that no consultation had been made with small growers over the lining of about 7,000 watercourses in the province. Moreover, Rabi season was about to set in but tail-end areas had not yet received their share of water, he said.

He said that 112,000 growers of the province had been overlooked in the SAGP while the project's performance had been hit by frequent transfers of its project directors. The project aimed to develop 66,000 hectares of land, he said.

He alleged that all WB-funded projects had been handed over to blue-eyed boys although the bank's funding was a loan which was to be repaid with interest and would certainly be a burden on the poor. He said the incumbent project directors (PDs) had not been able to bring about any qualitative change in their respective areas like agriculture engineering and extension.

He said the directors general of these departments had been given additional charge of PDs of these projects and demanded the government should appoint separate PDs for the projects who were competent and had a grip on their field.

Mr Palh pointed out that Sindh High Court had also highlighted corruption in the WB-funded projects and called for inquiry. If mid-term review of the projects was carried out it should be shared with growers so that they could learn about the level of progress made so far on the projects, he said.

He said that under the SAGP livestock component which would be over in June 2019 chillers had not yet been established and milk producers groups (MPGs) had not been formed completely.

About sugar cane crushing season 2017-18, Mr Palh said that sugar cane producers should be provided Rs250 per 40kg price for their produce because sugar factory owners obtained multiple by-products from the crop.

He said that sugar mills should start crushing from Nov 15 at all cost and thanked Sindh Minister for Agriculture Sohail Anwar Siyal for ensuring commencement of crushing season from Nov 15 last year and resolving dispute over sugar cane rate.

Mr Palh called for appointment of a fully-fledged irrigation minister and demanded the government put an end to occupation of land of Agriculture Research Centre and provide solar-powered tube-wells and Rs5 electricity tariff to growers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1362727

GOVT FAILS TO CONTROL PRICES OF TOMATOES DESPITE CLAIMS
The Express Tribune, October 9th, 2017.

A market survey conducted by The Express Tribune shows that with a few exceptions, the prices of most of the seasonal vegetables are around Rs100 due to inefficient price control system in the city. Even after importing tomatoes from Iran and other countries the price is still hovering between Rs140 to Rs150 per kilogramme.

The Lahore Market Committee's official price list shows that the government has fixed tomato price at Rs115 to Rs122 and Rs116 to Rs120 per kg for open market and Sunday bazaars but tomatoes are being sold for Rs140 to Rs150 per kg in the market. Even though the government has ensured availability at Sunday bazaars, most shoppers complained about poor quality and high price of the available variety.

Citizens also complained that instead of controlling prices and ensuring availability of tomatoes at Sunday bazaars, the government has lost its control on onions too.

Muhammad Rafiq, who was visiting Shadman Sunday bazaar, said that it was one of the biggest Sunday markets in the city where ministers, deputy commissioner and other senior officials are seen regularly, yet the bazaar management had failed to make onions available at stalls.

"If this is the situation at Shadman, what can we expect at other makeshift markets in the city," he said.

Another citizen, Mrs Mudassar Sheikh, said vendors have displayed price lists indicating onions price is fixed at Rs68 to Rs70 per kg in Sunday Bazaars but they have no stock for sale. "The same onions are available for Rs80 to Rs85 per kg just outside the makeshift market. But no one is available to check this malpractice," she said. "I am unable to understand what the use of these makeshift markets is if the government cannot ensure fair price and availability."

Nasir Javed, another shopper, said the entire state machinery is focused on making tomatoes available as the chief minister took notice of public complaints but nobody is paying attention to the rest of the commodities. He said prices of most seasonal vegetables are on the higher side but nobody is controlling prices.

Speaking to media on Sunday, Price Control Committee Chairman Mian Usman claimed that the government has launched a crackdown against profiteers and has plans to further strengthen the system. He said that price control magistrates are regularly inspecting prices in markets and good results are being witnessed because of surprise visits.

He pointed out that the government is setting up an efficient market intelligence system to strengthen price control mechanism in the city. "This new system will help government departments to promptly take action against profiteers selling essential commodities at higher rates."

Usman also claimed that officials of the government price control teams are taking indiscriminate action against profiteers, no matter how big or small their business is. He added that it was a wrong impression that price control magistrates are taking action against small shopkeepers only.

The Lahore division commissioner and deputy commissioner are supervising all price control efforts daily and it is impossible for any official to deceive the system, he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1526251/govt-fails-control-prices-tomatoes-despite-claims/

TAREEN URGES SC NOT TO INTERPRET AGRICULTURE TAX MATTERS
Dawn, October 12th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The counsel representing Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf secretary general Jahangir Khan Tareen on Wednesday pleaded before the Supreme Court hearing the disqualification case not to interpret agriculture tax matters through the present petitions. Otherwise, he argued, it would amount to his tax auditing and might prejudice a similar reference already pending before the Lahore High Court and an appeal before the apex court the outcome of which would eventually come to the top court.

However, Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar reminded Advocate Sikandar Bashir Mohmand that in his judgement in the Panama Papers case, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa had held that the power of the Supreme Court under Article 184(3) could not be circumscribed from hearing even when a similar matter was pending before any forum.

"What prevent or deter us from interpreting laws if similar cases are pending," said the chief justice who was heading a three-judge bench, adding that the Supreme Court, being the ultimate court of law, was hearing the matter only to resolve intricate issues.

The court had taken up the petitions of PML-N leader Hanif Abbasi seeking disqualification of PTI chief Imran Khan and secretary general Jahangir Tareen over non-disclosure of assets, existence of thier offshore companies as well as the PTI being a foreign-aided party.

The counsel, however, reminded the court that Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan and Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed had also held that the Supreme Court under Article 184(3) never went into tax matters.

The petitioner has alleged that Mr Tareen showed the revenue he earned and the tax paid in 2010 from the 18,566 acres of leased lands before the Federal Board of Revenue in his tax returns, but did not mention the same in his nomination papers submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

When the counsel recalled that the tax tribunal had already held that his client had correctly computed the agriculture tax, Justice Umar Ata Bandial reminded that the tribunal had only scrutinised nine agreements on leased lands out of a total of 108, besides it never inquired about the ownership of the leased lands.

“Does it not amount to tax auditing when the court is trying to go behind finding the truth in tax matters?” the counsel asked. He said that the exercise taking place here in the court was complete overlapping of the proceedings already pending.

“My right to due process would be prejudiced,” the counsel emphasised, saying that no reassessment on agriculture income could be done after two years — a period after which agriculture tax paid attained finality and could not be reopened under Article 184(3) as ordained by the Punjab Agriculture Income Tax Act, 1997.

“We are only hearing a disqualification case because the petitioners alleged that your client was guilty of misdeclaration on oath by concealing agriculture income in his nomination papers,” observed Justice Bandial.

Even if the declaration was right, the petitioners were accusing Mr Tareen of concealing his agriculture income because he paid taxes on 507 acres of land owned by him and not of the 18,566 acres of the leased lands, Justice Bandial observed, reiterating that what the court was looking for was not the income tax paid but non-disclosure of the income.

“We are not bothered either you paid full tax or not, but we are hearing the allegations that your client allegedly laundered money through a tax-free income device because there was no tax on leased lands,” Justice Bandial observed.

Sikandar Mohmand, however, denied by emphasising that he made full disclosure since the income tax returns in which he showed all the income before the tax authorities that was part of his nomination forms through annexures.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1363224

WHEAT PRODUCTION TARGET SET AT 26.4M TONNES
Amin Ahmed

Dawn, October 12th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) on Wednesday set the wheat production target for the Rabi season at 26.46 million tonnes over an area of about 22.2m acres (9m hectares).

The target for wheat production in 2016-17 was 26m tonnes whereas actual production was 26.38m tonnes, according to the second estimates of provincial crop reporting centres.

The FCA approved a six-point strategy to achieve the wheat production target. The strategy includes maximum access to agricultural loan facilities, availability of quality certified seeds, timely availability and supply of fertilisers, promotion of the balanced use of fertilisers, increase in the supply and use of herbicides and the promotion of production technology.

The committee decided that the wheat support price will stay unchanged at Rs1,300 per 40 kilograms.

The committee also reviewed the performance of Kharif crops of 2017-18. The production of sugarcane reached 81.44m tonnes while that of maize touched 5.27m tonnes.

The FCA proposed that the area of wheat cultivation be rationalised and that of pulses, oilseeds and other high-value crops be enhanced. The committee agreed to the potato production target of 3.81m tonnes over an area of 0.42m acres (0.17m hectares).

In view of the expected reduced rainfall in Oct-Dec, the Indus River System Authority's advisory committee anticipated a shortfall of 20 per cent in the availability of water during the Rabi reason.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department informed the committee that 10-15pc less rain should be expected in Oct-Dec whereas two to three spells of moderate rainfall are likely in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and northern parts of Punjab.

National Food Security and Research Minister Sikandar Hayat Khan, who chaired the FCA meeting, told a news conference that the impact of the water shortfall will be passed on to Punjab and Sindh, which are major users of irrigation water.

The prevailing weather conditions are not promising and the shortage may extend to 25pc, he added. However, the shortfall position will be reviewed in the first week of November, he added.

KP and Balochistan will be exempted from the adverse effects of the water shortage, he said.

During the ensuing Rabi season, provinces will be allocated 29.5m acre feet (MAF) of water against 29.7MAF a year ago, he said. The provinces will also be asked to reduce the use of water that is currently available in canals.

About the availability of fertilisers, he said the supply of urea and diammonium phosphate (DAP) will remain at the comfortable level during the Rabi season due to the enhanced local production and sufficient stock position.

However, the availability of DAP may remain slightly inadequate because of insufficient local production and low imports by the private sector. The FCA asked the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to ensure sufficient availability of all requisite fertilisers at reasonable prices.

Responding to a question, Mr Khan said the shortage of tomato could have been avoided had Pakistan imported it from India. The reason for its shortage was the reduced tomato crop in Sindh following excessive rains.

The minister said that Pakistan saved Rs10 billion by not importing tomato from India. "No doubt its price increased in the market," he said, noting that the resulting savings were pumped into the rural economy.

As for onion, he said its price will start decreasing shortly as the onion crop from Balochistan is making its way into the market. Onion from Sindh will also hit the market soon, he added.

The minister said Pakistan currently has roughly 11m tonnes of surplus wheat stock. The national requirement of wheat is 25.8m tonnes, including 1m tonne in reserve.

The government is trying to export wheat as much as possible before the arrival of the new crop, he said. Wheat exports to Afghanistan continue, but the provinces have also submitted proposals for the utilisation of the surplus wheat stock. These proposals are currently being evaluated, he said.

The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council and provincial agricultural research centres have been asked to jointly produce the certified seeds of lentil to enhance its production, the minister said.

About oilseed crops, he said the current production does not meet the country's need. The Punjab government is providing a subsidy to farmers to increase oilseed crops, he noted.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1363234

INDIAN STATE REVOKES ORDER TO CHECK MONSANTO GM COTTON
Dawn, October 15th, 2017

NEW DELHI: A leading Indian cotton producing-state has withdrawn an order asking government officials to inspect fields planted with an unapproved variety of genetically modified (GM) cotton developed by Monsanto Co , the world's No 1 seed maker.

Farmers in Andhra Pradesh have planted 15 per cent of the cotton area in the state with Bollgard II Roundup Ready Flex (RRF), prompting the local government on Oct 5 to form a panel of officials to inspect the fields of farmers growing RRF.

The earlier order has been cancelled, senior Andhra Pradesh official B. Rajasekhar said in a statement issued on Friday, and seen by Reuters.

Rajasekhar did not give any reason for rescinding last week's order. Calls to his office went unanswered.

Bollgard II RRF is a proprietary technology owned by Monsanto, which last year withdrew its application seeking approval from the regulator, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), for this variety.

It is not clear how Bollgard II RRF seeped into some cotton fields without the approval of GEAC.

Monsanto applied for GEAC approval of Bollgard II RRF, known for its herbicide-tolerant properties, in 2007.

When the US company withdrew the application last year, it was in the final stages of a lengthy process that included years of field trials.

A Monsanto spokesman had earlier said that it was a matter of “grave concern” that some seed companies were attempting to incorporate unauthorised, unapproved technologies into their seeds.

New Delhi approved the first GM cotton seed trait in 2003 and an upgraded variety in 2006, helping transform India into the world’s top producer and second-largest exporter of the fibre.

Monsanto is locked in a bitter battle with a leading India seed company, Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd, drawing in the Indian and US governments.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1363859

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 1ST TO OCTOBER 8 Th 2017
FEAR OF LOSSES HAUNTS PADDY GROWERS DESPITE EXPECTED BUMPER CROP
Dawn, October 1st, 2017

Hanif Samoon

BADIN: Otherwise jubilant over the timely and sufficient rainfall in Sindh and certain other factors contributing to what they believe a bumper rice crop, now ready to reap, paddy growers are facing an uncertain situation with regard to the sale of their produce. Market pulse has started sending disappointing messages to them as millers, realising availability of the commodity in abundance over the next few weeks, are likely to offer very low rates.

The middlemen, who always take the side of millers in bargaining with growers, have been at work to make up growers’ mind predicting a rate much lower than what growers expect this season. The trend has already sparked calls from growers of Badin district for government’s intervention to fix an official rate in order to save them from suffering heavy losses.

Badin is one of the biggest rice producing zone of the country. According to official figures, paddy has been grown over more than 155,000 hectares this year which may lead to a record yield of the chief crop of this region in Kharif season. Growers of Shaheed Fazil Rahu (formerly Golarchi) taluka are sure about a bumper crop while those of Matli, Talhar, Tando Bago and other areas also expect a high yield. Harvesting in most parts of the district has already begun.

Allah Bachayo Rahukro, a paddy grower of Talhar and a leader of the Laar Abadgar Forum, told Dawn that harvesting within the areas fed through Akram Wah and Phuleli Canal, had picked up momentum and the crop was likely to arrive in the market very soon.

Many growers speaking to this reporter in Tando Bago, Matli and Talhar complained that they were being forced to dispose of their produce at Rs750-Rs800 per 40 kg to millers. The rates do not commensurate with even the cost of production, according to them.

Wali Hyder Memon, a farmer from Tando Bago taluka, explained that with the use of hybrid seed, the per acre cost came to a minimum of Rs25,000, which meant that selling the produce at the offered rates would leave growers without or a negligible return.

Mr Memon argued that millers fully realised that growers had no other option but to accept the offered rates as government was unlikely to timely fix official rates for various verities and set up procurement centres to lift the crop.

Millers have their own arguments. Zulfikar Ali Dal, who owns a rice mill in Dei town, told this reporter that his side could not jump into a competition until being informed that how much stocks would be lifted by government for exports. “Millers are never taken into confidence by the relevant departments in this regard,” he said, adding that millers had a bitter experience in past years due to the uncertainty. “We have even suffered heavy losses individually after procuring the crop amid an uncertain situation,” he said.

Mr Iqbal Haider, a water expert from Badin, pointed out that growers of tail-end areas of Badin, Tando Bago and Shaheed Fazil Rahu had lately started sowing due to late arrival of water. He attributed the unfair treatment to lethargy and mismanagement on the part of the irrigation officials concerned. “Those harvesting the crop in the August-September period may never get proper yield sufficient enough to cover the cost of production,” he said.

Mustafa Ayaz Mehri, a grower from Kario Ghanwar, said the areas which were timely provided water would give a record yield this season. He said the process of the harvesting would also continue for a record three months.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1361039/fear-of-losses-haunts-paddy-growers-despite-expected-bumper-crop

PUNJAB GOVT TO SET UP HI-TECH AGRI MACHINERY CENTRE
Business Recorder, 1st October, 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab government is setting up ‘hi-tech agricultural machinery centre’ at a cost of Rs 1.80 billion to promote mechanized farming aimed at helping growers to increase their farm output.

These centers will be set up in public private partnership to provide access to the growers to latest hi-tech agricultural machinery and will demonstrate the modern technologies to end users for their large scale introduction and promotion.

Though this scheme will be implemented throughout the province but in first phase these are planned in 18 districts. These include Rahim Yar Khan, Sahiwal, Faisalabad, Bahawalnagar, Vehari, Sheikhupura, Bahawalpur, Gujranwala, Kasur, Jhang, Sargodha, Okara, Khanewal, Muzaffargarh, Lodhran, Multan, Chakwal and DG Khan.

The Punjab Agriculture Department’s circles said that firms dealing in agricultural machinery and farmers cooperative societies can apply to have financial assistance from the government for setting up these model agricultural machinery centers. The eligible firms or societies can apply till October 13, 2017.

Pakistan is an agricultural country and farm mechanization is an important ingredient of the strategy to accelerate growth rate in agriculture sector. Main constraints in increasing agricultural productivity are non-availability of farm machinery to the farmers at right time and at affordable prices.

Meanwhile, a spokesman of the department has urged the growers to adopt latest techniques and methods for spraying of pesticide on different crops. He said that experts have asked for using high quality machinery and proper nozzle for spray of pesticides and other poisons.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/01/5-page/909740-news.html

CHINESE EXPERTS HOLD AWARENESS SESSIONS FOR HYBRID RICE CULTIVATION
Dawn, October 3rd, 2017

ISLAMABAD: A group of Chinese hybrid-rice researchers and experts along with local scientists has visited more than 100 rice farms across the country under the 'Travelling Rice Seminar' initiative.

The travelling seminar was designed by Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) and Chinese Yuan Longping High-tech Agriculture Company and aims to boost hybrid rice cultivation in the country.

According to Programme Coordinator and Member Plant Science PARC Dr Anjum Ali, the experts also visited research stations, agricultural universities and seed outlets of different companies to exploit the cultivation of hybrid rice.

The Chinese experts travelled to Khyber Pakhtunkhawa, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan in order to create awareness about the cultivation of hybrid rice among growers.

"This was a month-long activity in which a group of hybrid rice researchers from China comprising 12 scientists trained the local scientists, seed producers and field extension departments of the provincial governments," he added.

He said the main aim of this joint initiative is to enhance per acre crop productivity, increase profitability and produce surplus commodity for exports enhancement.

"In order to further enhance the local rice output, China and Pakistan have decided to work together for conducting joint awareness programmes to adopt hybrid rice seeds," he added.

The Chinese scientists trained 30 Pakistani agriculture scientists who were selected from across the country.

Dr Ali said the Chinese experts will also impart training to the members of the provincial field extension departments on hybrid rice cultivation.

In addition, the activity will also help in capacity building of local experts from all over the country in order to promote hybrid rice techniques.

Road-shows and field visits were organised across rice-growing areas to address issues and challenges faced in promotion of hybrid rice seed, he added.

He further said a revolutionary hybrid rice seed has been developed recently by the Chinese researchers, which would help Pakistani farmers to enhance significantly their per acre yield, hence the country would be able to export more rice, he added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1361298

UREA MAKERS DEMAND REVISED EXPORT POLICY
Dawn, October 4th, 2017

LAHORE: Fertiliser manufacturers have demanded a change in the urea export policy to get rid of the accumulating yearly surplus stocks.

The Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) said the current urea export policy has several flaws in it and the council has repeatedly urged the government to review and make strategic changes in this policy in order to facilitate the surplus urea inventory.

In a statement on Tuesday, the FMPAC said that 0.6 million tonnes of urea accumulated each year because of the gap between production and domestic consumption. The State Bank of Pakistan has given a very 'tight timeline' to export the surplus by October end with a penalty of 15 per cent of the export-price in case of failure to export the commodity within the deadline.

The council argued that being an irregular urea exporter, Pakistan's industry has had only a limited international market, and therefore, exporting urea within the stipulated period is a fairly difficult job. For fear of penalty, the industry was reluctant to get fresh export orders, it added.

The industry said the carrying costs and storage of around 1.5 million tonnes of the current fertiliser inventory is a big financial burden on this heavily-taxed sector and demanded the government to relax the export timeline.

According to the advisory council's statement, if the last-year's stock is carried forward, the country can easily export 1.2m tonnes of surplus fertilisers worth $200m, without disturbing the local supply as this year the domestic demand for urea is expected to remain flat.

Critics argue that fertiliser manufacturers enjoy a heavily subsidised gas price for their feedstock specifically to help agriculture. If the manufacturers now wish to export their product, the critics contend, then the subsidy should be withdrawn and they should pay the market price for their feedstock gas.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1361499/urea-makers-demand-revised-export-policy

FERTILIZER INDUSTRY: 'RS9BN TO BE RELEASED ON ACCOUNT OF SUBSIDY PAYMENTS'
Business Recorder, 5 October, 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: Federal Secretary of Ministry of National Food Security & Research (MNFSR) Fazal Abbas Maken has assured the fertilizer industry that the government will release Rs 9 billion within a week to the industry on account of subsidy payments.

The assurance was given to Executive Director of Fertilizers Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC), Brigadier Sher Shah who called on the newly-appointed federal secretary and briefed him on the protracted delays in payments, claimed FMPAC sources here on Wednesday.

The Secretary was apprised of the issues related to subsidy payments causing cash flow challenges to the industry. During the meeting, the federal secretary acknowledged that the government's commitment to the industry has to be fulfilled and assured the fertilizer industry of facilitating in future payments and also sorting out the huge pending claims at the earliest. He promised that the government will release the available funds to the tune of 9 billion rupees within a week which will redress the cash flow problems faced on account of significant delays in disbursement of the subsidy.

For the remaining pending amounts of subsidy claims, the MNFSR is conducting a third-party validation which reflects the government's serious commitment and efforts to resolve the subsidy crisis which has been creating serious financial challenges for the fertilizer industry, said the FMPAC sources.

The stakeholders of the fertilizer industry are optimistic that this concrete effort by the new federal secretary of the MNFSR will prove to be a significant step, which will bring an end to the financial hardships faced by the fertilizer industry due to delays in the subsidy payments. This also shows the government's seriousness in accelerating the growth of agricultural sector by reducing the cost of soil-nutrition.

This subsidy on urea promises may bring economic benefits by extending the much-needed financial support and relief for the revival of the fertilizer industry which is the biggest revenue contributor to the national exchequer. Earlier, Secretary to Prime Minister Fawad Hassan Fawad had chaired a meeting on July 24, to resolve the crisis however the direction of PM office has yet to come to effect. While the Ministry of Finance has issued the requisite notification for subsidy in 2017/18, the funds are still to be released.

Over the past couple of years, the government has granted a subsidy on fertilizers. The urea manufacturers had agreed to participate as an intermediary and facilitator for delivering this valuable incentive to the common farmer. Now, as that the fertilizer companies have sold large volumes of fertilizers at discounted prices, the government must expedite the overdue payments by simplifying the validation process of the subsidy claims, demanded the FMPAC.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/05/9-page/674479-news.html

ABBASI SEEKS GOVT, PRIVATE SECTOR INPUT FOR AGRI POLICY
Dawn, October 05, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Wednesday stressed on the need for public and private sectors to collaborate and formulate a policy which will strengthen and promote agriculture in the county.

"In order to ensure food security and to address the issues faced by farmers, there is a need to prepare a comprehensive plan with input from agriculturalists," PM Abbasi said.

He was speaking to a delegation of agriculturists. Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikander Hayat Khan Bosan was also present in the meeting.

Issues relating to the agriculture sector including cost of production, productivity, marketability and competitiveness of local agri-products and challenges faced by farmers came under discussion.

Export potential of the sector and new opportunities generated under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor were also discussed.

The prime minister formed a committee comprising the representatives of the ministries of finance and commerce, Federal Board of Revenue and agriculturists to review and overcome issues pertaining to input prices, taxes and over-billing of electricity charges.

Mr Abbasi assured the agriculturists of continued support of the government.

He appreciated the role of the agriculture sector towards employment, economic growth and ensuring food security in the country.

The agriculture sector remained a key priority of the government and every effort was being made to facilitate farmers, especially small farmers to flourish and contribute towards economic growth, the prime minister stressed.

Talking to Dawn after the meeting, Kissan Ittehad President Khalid Khokhar said the prime minister had agreed to review over-billing of power supply. In this regard, teams will review the issue district-wise, he added.

The newly-formed committee will also review the prices of fertilisers since there is no balance in pricing due to GST, he said.

The delegation included Imdad Nizamani, Syed Nadeem Shah, Sahibzada Qudratullah, Maseer Muhammad Maidakhel, Malik A Rehman Lang, Mian Umair Masood, Chaudhry Rizwan Iqbal, and Mian Ghulam Mustafa Wattoo.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1361739/abbasi-seeks-govt-private-sector-input-for-agri-policy

GOVT PROMISES TO RELEASE RS9 BILLION FERTILISER SUBSIDY WITHIN A WEEK
The Express Tribune, October 5th, 2017.

KARACHI: The federal government has assured the fertiliser industry that it would release the subsidy of Rs9 billion within a week.

The understanding was reached in a meeting between Fertilisers Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) Executive Director Sher Shah and newly appointed Federal Secretary of the Ministry of National Food Security & Research Fazal Abbas Maken.

The secretary promised that the government will release the available funds within a week, according to a FMPAC press release.

The fertiliser industry has been urging the government to release subsidy to resolve cash flow problems faced on account of significant delays in disbursement of the subsidy.

The secretary was apprised of the issues related to subsidy payments causing cash flow challenges to the industry.

During the meeting, the secretary reiterated the government's commitment to the industry. He said the government would fulfil its commitments and assured the fertiliser industry of facilitation in future payments and also settling the huge pending claims at the earliest.

For the remaining amounts of pending subsidy claims, the ministry is conducting a third-party validation, which reflects the government's commitment and efforts to resolve the subsidy crisis that has been creating serious financial challenges for the fertiliser industry.

The stakeholders of the sector are optimistic that this concrete effort by the new federal secretary will prove to be a significant step, and will bring an end to their financial hardships.

The fertiliser industry believes that the subsidy on urea promises many economic benefits to the agriculture sector.

Earlier, Secretary to Prime Minister Fawad Hassan Fawad had chaired a meeting on July 24, to resolve the crisis; however, the direction of the PM office has yet to come in to effect. While the Ministry of Finance has issued the requisite notification for subsidy in 2017-18, the funds are yet to be released.

Over the past couple of years, the government has granted a subsidy on fertilisers. The urea manufacturers had agreed to participate as an intermediary and facilitator for delivering this valuable incentive to the common farmer.

Industry officials say now that the fertiliser companies have sold large volumes of fertilisers at discounted prices, and the government must expedite the overdue payments by simplifying the validation process of the subsidy claims.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1523117/govt-promises-release-rs9-billion-fertiliser-subsidy-within-week/

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1523117/govt-promises-release-rs9-billion-fertiliser-subsidy-within-week/
'BALOCHISTAN FARMERS OWE RS150B IN ELECTRICITY BILLS'
The Express Tribune, October 5th, 2017.

State Minister for Energy (Power Division) Abid Sher Ali told a parliamentary panel on Wednesday that Balochistan farmers were required to pay Rs150 billion on account of electricity supply to their tube wells.

Briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, Ali claimed that 11,514 megawatts of electricity would be added to the system by June 2018.

The shortfall, which was 8,000MW in 2013, had been slashed to 2,880MW by June 2017 and consequently load-shedding was brought down from around 12 hours to 3-4 hours a day. Owing to investment in the power generation and distribution system, line losses and other costs dropped from 18.5% to 17.9%.

In keeping with its policy, the government was, however, carrying out load-shedding for significantly longer durations in areas where transmission and distribution losses were higher than other areas.

The committee was informed that overall load-shedding had gone down 52% over the past four years while bill recoveries went up to 94%.

Committee Chairman Senator Mir Israr Ahmed Khan Zehri voiced concern over dearth of gas and electricity in large swathes of Balochistan.

However, the committee was told that power production had improved significantly and many new projects were in the pipeline to provide gas and electricity connections in remote areas of the country.

It was informed that electricity production in the country stood at 11,800 megawatts in 2013, which had now risen to 18,658MW.

Of around 298 faulty transformers, 270 had been repaired completely, which would help in a smooth supply of electricity, especially during peak summer days.

Apart from this, upgrading work on power transmission lines was expected to be completed by June 2018. So far, repair and upgrading work on 102 out of 137 transmission lines has been completed.

Peshawar Electric Supply Company and Sukkur Electric Power Company had made recoveries of Rs40 billion, said Ali. The senators expressed dismay over the lack of gas connections in large parts of Balochistan including Khuzdar – the second largest city of the province. Committee members also called for supplying gas to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata).

Responding to the demand, State Minister for Energy (Petroleum Division) Jam Kamal Khan pointed out that there were plans in place for setting up liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) air-mix plants in many areas for gas supply through pipelines.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1523147/balochistan-farmers-owe-rs150b-electricity-bills/

ORCHARD FARMING : PARC TO GIVE 20,000 HYBRID FRUIT PLANTS
The Express Tribune, October 6th, 2017.

The Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (Parc) will provide 20,000 certified hybrid fruit plants to promote orchard farming in different ecologies across the country.

In this regard, Parc has developed plant nurseries in its National Tea and High Value Crop Research Institution (NTHRI), Mansehra. As many as 60 types of fruit plants including apple, peach, apricot, cherry, almond, fig, pomegranate and walnut have been developed for farmers, said NTHRI Director Dr Zahid Hamid.

He said due to rapid urbanisation, fruit orchards were shrinking rapidly, resulting in massive reduction in farm income of the locals.

The cultivable farm land was also transforming into barren land, which enhanced rural poverty, he added.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1523901/orchard-farming-parc-give-20000-hybrid-fruit-plants/

STRONG DEMAND FOR COTTON KEEPS PRICES FIRM
Dawn, October 8th, 2017

KARACHI: Strong demand for quality cotton kept prices firm on Saturday.

Interestingly, higher arrival of phutti (seed cotton) did not dent cotton prices.

Due to peak season for the textile industry, there was rush of buyers who were keen to replenish their cotton inventories. It was encouraging that the flow of quality cotton also remained high. Phutti arrival is at its peak since picking in almost all cotton growing districts of Punjab is in full swing.

However, phutti arrival from lower Sindh, where cotton sowing took place earlier, is nearing an end and a number of ginning factories have also closed down.

Despite a glut, the prices of phutti remained on the higher side — indicating that off-take of cotton was equally high.

According to estimates, world cotton production would be much higher than last year.

On Saturday, world leading cotton markets closed firm, with New York cotton recovering its recent losses. The Indian cotton market also stood steady. The Chinese market remained closed.

The following major deals were reported to have transpired on ready counter: 800 bales, Shahdadpur, at Rs5,500 to Rs5,800; 800 bales, Shahpur Chakar, at Rs5,975 to Rs6,000; 1,400 bales, Nawabshah, at Rs5,975 to Rs6,000; 1,600 bales, Sakrand, at Rs6,050 to Rs6,075; 2,000 bales, Khairpur, at Rs6,100 to Rs6,150; 1,600 bales, Saleh Pat, at Rs6,150 to Rs6,200; 1,000 bales, Rohri, at Rs6,150 to Rs6,200; 1,000 bales, Mian Channu, at Rs6,200; 1,000 bales, Mianwali, at Rs6,100 to Rs6,200; 1,200 bales, Khanewal, at Rs6,150; 800 bales, Bahawalnagar, at Rs6,125 to Rs6,140; 600 bales, Faqirwali, at Rs6,100; and 800 bales, Burewala, at Rs6,150.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1362367/strong-demand-for-cotton-keeps-prices-firm

INTEREST-FREE LOAN FOR 173,000 SMALL GROWERS
Business Recorder, 8 October, 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab Agriculture Department has disbursed interest-free loans to 173,000 small growers during the last 10 months under Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package.

The department is offering Rs 40,000 per acre for Kharif and Rs 25,000 per acre for Rabi crops and these loans are being given to growers having up to 12 acres of land. A spokesman of the department said that under the package, 600,000 growers will be disbursed interest-free loans with preference to those having up to 5 acres of land. A grower who succeeds to repay the loan taken at the last crop will again be given loan for the new crop, the spokesman added. The growers will be registered under the scheme free of cost and will be issued a token soon after registration and bank or financial institution concerned will itself contact the growers for further proceeding.

The growers should get themselves registered at tehsil land record center by visiting it along with their original CNIC, mobile number and details of the land. Tenants and those having land on lease can also apply for loan under this scheme.

Last date of registration is November 30, 2017, and loans will be given by Akhuwat, National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), Zarai Taraqiati Bank, National Bank of Pakistan or Telenor Bank.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/08/5-page/675050-news.html

November 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 27ThTO DECEMBER 3rd

DEREGULATING PUNJAB'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Amin Ahmed

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, November 27th, 2017

THE Punjab government is negotiating a project with the World Bank to deregulate its rural-based agro-economy to increase the productivity of crop and livestock farmers, improve their climate resilience and foster agribusiness in the province.

The provincial government has requested the bank to support the Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation (SMART) programme.

The programme will support selected parts of the government's broader programme by helping it transform agriculture, livestock, water resources management and the rural non-farm sector with a focus on increasing productivity, improving the functioning of markets including food safety, supporting the rural non-farm economy and enhancing resilience and inclusiveness over a five-year period through 2022.

The deregulation is expected to create space for more budgetary allocations in the public sector through the reduction of subsidies. The budget could then be reallocated to better maintenance of irrigation infrastructure, promoting high value agriculture, improving the delivery of agricultural services, research and extension and agricultural insurance.

If the legislation pertaining to agriculture, water and the environment is enforced and complied with, deregulation will benefit the environment in the form of improved water efficiency and productivity and less use of fertilisers and pesticides, the World Bank believes.

Punjab's rural economy is characterised by an unequal distribution of resources and a proliferation of smallholders, who do not necessarily have access to policymakers and legislators who formulate strategies for the agriculture sector.

Preliminary results from the 2017 census place the size of the country's rural population at about 135 million of a total of 208m people. The total population of Punjab is estimated at just over 110m, of which almost 64 per cent, or 70m, are estimated to be living in rural areas.

Agriculture employs more than 44pc of the country's working-age population, but it does not allow for the regulation of employment terms, nor does it provide social safety nets that can help smooth out significant fluctuations in the value of production, or allow for formal sector financing models to be rolled out at scale.

Interventions in these areas are needed to make a positive difference to the 92pc of farmers who live off landholdings of less than two hectares. The government's broader programme is supported by an investment of $3.797 billion in agriculture, livestock, farm-to-market roads and irrigation over the next five years. Of this amount, $1.145bn is allocated to agriculture and livestock.

In addition, there is a recurrent budget allocation of $330m for irrigation maintenance and repair, and $115m for human resources, bringing the size of the programme expenditure framework to $4.242bn.

The Punjab government also spends an estimated $515m each year on agricultural subsidies, including wheat ($333m) as part of its recurrent expenditures.

The Programme for Results-supported government programme is limited to the allocation for agriculture and livestock, plus human resources and irrigation maintenance and repair for a total of $1.59bn.

The World Bank says that growth in the agriculture sector in Punjab has been poor for some years and this has had a detrimental effect on the well-being of agricultural communities.

Communities dependent on agriculture have traditionally included deprived members of society, including landless farmers, small tenant farmers, and groups who rely on seasonal agricultural labour.

The proposed programme is to increase productivity in the sector, and thereby support household incomes and livelihoods in rural communities.

The Punjab government will have its own agriculture policy to provide further strategic direction to agriculture policy, and increase percentage of allocation to agriculture in the annual development plan for high-value agriculture.

The SMART programme is destined to contribute to three result areas: increase on-farm productivity and value of agriculture and livestock, improve value-addition and competitiveness in agriculture and livestock, and make smallholders more resilient to climate change and natural disasters.

One objective of the project is to modernise the wheat marketing system by gradually withdrawing the provincial government from the wheat market and subsequently phasing out government wheat procurement, reducing the size of strategic grain reserves, and building modern storage facilities.

The programme will also provide agribusinesses with incentives to spur investment in value-addition and agricultural technology.

The provincial government plans to institute a financial support scheme for agribusiness through a system of matching grants. The contours of the scheme are being developed and it will incorporate special incentives to promote the participation of women-owned enterprises and firms working with small farmers.

The government will issue a notification of the 'Punjab Agricultural Marketing Regulatory Authority Act', which will allow greater private sector participation in agricultural marketing.

To improve safety of food for public consumption, a provincial reference food-testing laboratory will be established and operationalised together with a series of regional and mobile laboratories.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1373061/deregulating-punjabs-agriculture-sector

AUSTRALIA PROVIDES $500,000 TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR FARMERS
The Express Tribune, November 27th, 2017.

The Australian Government announced an AUD500,000 programme to train around 4,000 small farmers from Sheikhupura and Gujranwala, Punjab, to produce quality seed, improve crop yield and gain better access to market.

The initiative was part of the Australian Government's Business Partnership Platform support to Engro Corporation Limited Pakistan and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), Australia and aimed to connect around 4,000 smallholder farmers from villages in Sheikhupura and Gujranwala into a larger seed supply chain. The project will also train and support farmers to produce their own quality seed and register as seed suppliers.

The Australian High Commissioner Margaret Adamson said that engaging with the private sector was at the cornerstone of Australia's modernised aid programme in Pakistan, supporting economic growth, incomes and jobs.

"The partnership lays the foundation to enhance the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and enable them, for the first time, to become part of Pakistan's large seed supply chain for rice, wheat and vegetable.

It will also benefit from MEDA's expertise as an international economic development organisation that creates business solutions to tackle poverty in developing regions around the world," Adamson said.

The Business Partnership Platform aimed to accelerate Australia's collaboration with businesses in addressing development challenges around the world. The platform recently expanded to include 19 private sector partnerships around the world with the conclusion of a second round of submissions.

Engro Corporation Limited was one of the Pakistan's largest corporations and worked in a range of agriculture commodities including seeds, fertilizers and food.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1569330/1-australia-provides-500000-improve-access-farmers/

FARMERS PROTEST AGAINST DELAY IN CANE CRUSHING SEASON
Khalid Abbas Saif

Business Recorder,Nov 28th, 2017

FAISALABAD:Sugarcane farmers have staged strong demonstrations in front of the Sugar Mills as a mark of protest against the delay in cane crushing season in Faisalabad Division, here on Monday. The major demonstration held at Jaranwala, where protesters carrying banners and placards reached on tractor-trolleys, wagons and buses at the call of Farmers Association and Kissan Board Faisalabad.

Protestors raised slogans against the Punjab Government and local administration for step-motherly treatment with Sugarcane farmers. They staged a sit-in at front of Hussain Sugar Mills Jaranwala and demanded the chief minister for immediate order of launching Sugarcane Crushing, which was used to start in Punjab during the first week of November in every year.

Rana Abdul Waheed, local leader of Jamat-e-Islami and Kissan Board, who led the demonstration, said that delayed cane crushing a conspiracy of the Mill owners and Government, because both are connected with Sugar Trading. Farmers are still demanding cane payment of last year's supply. Addressing another gathering of farmers, the Divisional President, Kissan Board Ali Ahmad Goriya warned that the delay in sugarcane crushing is yielding negative impact over 'Farming Economy' and yielding benefits of Sugar Mills owners.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/11/20171128238689/

UREA OFF-TAKE STEADIES
Business Recorder, 29, November, 2017
On the back of best ever Kharif season in terms of fertilizer application, urea off-take returned to more modest levels in October 2017. The nitrogenous fertilizer application inched by 4 percent year-on-year, second consecutive month of low-ish urea application, as September saw an all-time low for any month.

The overall picture does not appear as grim, as the 10MCY17 off-take stands at a healthy 4.5 million tons – a healthy 18 percent increase over same period last year. The 10-month urea off-take is also comfortably clear of the 5-year average, mainly at the back of a stellar second quarter, after the farmers' package.

Recall that ambiguity around the budget period had sent urea off-take in to a near halt, but clarity emerging thereafter seems to have normalized the off-take pattern. For the first time in seven years, Pakistan is in with a realistic chance of crossing 6 million tons for the full year. Although, all of it could change should prices go up again as feared. For that to happen, the momentum has to build in November and December – and urea off-take needs to be well over 25 percent clear of 5-year CAGR of the dying months' off-take.

There is some upwards movement in international urea prices, after a long hiatus. The international commodity price has moved briskly after staying around $200-220 per ton to now at $280 per ton and growing. The local prices have so far been shielded as the government is offering subsidy and the strong off-take is also indicative of farmers taking advantage of government subsidy and the discounted prices that were on offer.

The stockpile has also come down to just over half a million tons, and might ease off pressure on local manufacturers.

The rising international prices will also offer more breathing space to local players should they decide to regain the lost margin in the days of oversupply.

On the phosphate side, things are looking up. The DAP off-take is all set to go well beyond 2 million tons for CY17 – which has happened only once previously. More heartening is the improvement in balanced fertilization ratio, which has now come down from 5.5 to 2.6 – much close to the ideal ratio of 1.75. Surely the subsidy mechanism has worked well thus far, and is likely to continue.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/29/2-page/684840-news.html

PROPOSALS SOUGHT FOR COTTON POLICY
Business Recorder, 30,November,2017
MULTAN: Cotton Crop Production Group has constituted different groups of stakeholders to formulate proposals for preparation of cotton policy.

The basic aim of the policy was to enhance cotton production and improve its quality.

The proposals were being prepared after instructions of Secretary Agriculture Punjab Muhammad Mehmood, said official source on Wednesday.

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture Vice Chancellor Dr Asif chaired a meeting of the Cotton Crop

Production Group, in which Directors Dr Sagheer Ahmed, Rana Ahmed Munir, Dr Zahid Mehmood, Dr Tasawar Malik, Professor Shafqat Saeed, Dr Irfan Mirza, Deputy Directors Chaudhary Nasir Ahmed, Naveed Asmat and other members participated.—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/30/5-page/685047-news.html

GOVT AGREES TO BEGIN SUGARCANE CRUSHING
The Express Tribune, November 30, 2017

KARACHI: The Sindh government has finally decided to start sugarcane crushing from today (Thursday) by fixing last year's rate of Rs182 per 40 kilogramme. This was decided at a meeting chaired by the Agriculture and Home Minister Sohail Anwar Siyal at his office on Wednesday. Representatives of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association and growers attended the meeting.

“The growers have been protesting for many weeks. The government did not pay any heed to their concern to increase sugarcane rate, but has decided to start crushing from today,” said Sindh Abadgar Board President Majeed Nizamani. It is believed that the strike announced by growers from December 2 to December 4 proposing to block national highways forced the government to start the crushing process.

“Majority of the mills are owned by rulers in Sindh and other provinces, so they are not interested in resolving [growers’] problems,” said Nizamani, adding that the growers had no option but to call off their strike. “Our prime demand was to start crushing and fix the rate. They have met one demand, so we are now going to postpone the strike,” he said.

Siyal was of the view that it is the federal government’s incompetency that failed to frame a policy with regard to export of sugar. The minister denied whether the Pakistan Peoples Party co-chairperson owns a sugar mill in Sindh. “I challenge anyone to prove it. Zardari sahab does not own any mill,” he said.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1572020/1-govt-agrees-begin-sugarcane-crushing/

FARMERS OF RAIN-CROP AREAS ASKED TO AVAIL MOISTURE
Business Recorder, 3 December, 2017
KARACHI: The Met Office on Saturday asked the farmers of rain-crop areas to take a full advantage of soil moisture left from recent rains for Rabi crops.

It said that farmers of the rain-crop areas should utilize the dampness in soil for Rabi cultivation. It said that rains left dampness is beneficial for the crops growth.

Isolated rain-thunderstorms, gusty winds with snowfall over the hills are expected in Malakand and Hazara Divisions, Gilgit-Baltistan and the Fata. Shallow fog may continue to grip plains of the Punjab and Upper Sindh during morning hours. Mainly cold and dry weather is expected elsewhere in the country in the next 24 hours. Temperature in Skardu and Gupis was minus 5 degrees Celsius, each, Kalam, Gilgit, Kalat and Quetta minus 4, each, Chitral and Dir minus 2, each, and Astore minus 1, as cold weather prevailed across the country over the past 24 hours. “A westerly wave is likely to enter upper parts of the country today evening and may persist during next 02-03 days,” the Met said.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/03/2-page/685458-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 20Th TO NOVEMBER 26Th 2017

SUGAR MILLERS, GROWERS FIGHT TO THE BITTER END
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, November 20th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

AS like in the past, the start of sugarcane crushing has remained in limbo this year too. Back-to-back meetings between the agriculture minister, growers' leaders and millers remained inconclusive until Nov 17.

The delay is mainly due to millers' insistence on a raise in federal subsidy on the export of sugar.

At a Nov 16 meeting, Sindh Agriculture Minister Sohail Anwar Siyal failed to persuade influential millers to start crushing for this season. He instead proposed that growers should agree to a notification for the crushing season and get sugarcane rate fixed later on.

Farmers' leaders rejected the proposal outright, arguing that accepting it would amount to withdrawing from their right to demand sugarcane's minimum price before crushing starts, and that it would set a precedent for future decisions.

They want the Sindh government to fix the sugarcane price at Rs182 per 40 kilograms. The Punjab government has already notified a price of Rs180 per 40kg for the 2017-18 season.

However, Mr Siyal — who heads the Sindh Sugarcane Control Board, formed under the Sugar Factories Control (Sindh Amendment) Act of 2009 — adjourned the meeting to discuss the matter with the chief minister before convening the board's meeting again.

If provisions of the act are anything to go by, the start of the sugarcane crushing season could not be linked to sugar exports.

The act, according to a Sindh government official, primarily calls for protecting growers' rights, fixing cane's price and recovering cess from sugar factories, but it has nothing to do with domestic or global market prices of sugar.

The indicative price of sugarcane had always been announced in October from the 1990s to 2006-07, except for 2002-03 and 2003-04 seasons when it was notified in mid-November.

Even after the amendment in 2009, the act calls for the start of crushing not later than Nov 30.

Delayed wheat sowing

Sugarcane is grown on around 600,000 acres in Sindh. A delay in its harvest leads to delayed sowing of wheat and other Rabi crops. Therefore, if sugar mills had started crushing in early November, around 150,000 acres would have been freed for other crops.

Sugar millers say they delay crushing because the cane crop doesn't mature in October. But it's a "lame excuse", says Mahmood Nawaz Shah, vice-president of the Sindh Abadgar Board. "We have been deprived of our right when to harvest our crop," he complains.

Crushing is not expected to begin before early December this time around, because even if the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) agrees to the growers' price, factories will need at least a week to fire boilers.

The PSMA argues that crushing couldn't be started soon as the unsold buffer stocks of sugar — estimated to be around 500,000 tonnes until mid-November — are putting a crunch on millers.

Political dimension

For the last several years, Sindh has witnessed a row between millers and growers over sugarcane rates. Growers point out that because those at the helm in the Sindh government since 2008 own mills themselves, they try to undermine legitimate interests of growers.

Even police have been used in the last couple of years to divert sugarcane from fields to certain factories, leading to a row between the Sindh government and the provincial police boss.

"Sugarcane crop now has a pure political dimension in Sindh due to conflict of interests of government and millers," argues Sindh Agriculture Research Council's Ali Palh, who has filed a petition in the high court to get sugarcane rates fixed for the current season. "A certain group of millers connected with the government is dictating its terms."

Sindh, which makes substantial contribution to Pakistan's agrarian economy, has witnessed a sudden rise in the number of sugar mills — from 32 to 38 — in last few years. Most mills have been set up in areas known for cotton cultivation.

'We can't recover costs'

Around 22 million tonnes of sugarcane was crushed in the 2016-17 season in Sindh against 17.82m tonnes a year ago. Sugar production stood at 2.23m tonnes in the outgoing season as compared to 1.89m tonnes in the preceding year. The increase was attributed to a rise in supplies from Punjab.

The PSMA wants the federal government to increase the sugar export subsidy from Rs10.70 per kg to up to Rs19.

The Sindh chapter of the association has cautioned the provincial government through advertisements that if it failed to get the subsidy, it won't be able to pay more than Rs125 per 40kg to growers.

"A bumper crop [of sugarcane] is expected this year too, and we anticipate surplus sugar stocks of around 8m tonnes in the country," PSMA Sindh chairman Asim Ghani says. "Therefore, exports should remain open."

He contends that the cost of sugar production varies between Rs60 and Rs62 per kg, while the ex-factory price of sweetener remains Rs47, inclusive of Rs6 federal duty which means millers get around Rs40. "We can't even recover the sugarcane cost [i.e. Rs182 per 40kg]," he remarks.

However, Nawab Zubair Talpur, brother of PPP's MNA Nawab Yusuf Talpur and president of the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad, doesn't rely on the stock figures released by the PSMA, and says the provincial government should carry out its own survey to determine the actual figure.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1371552

FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE POLICY INSTITUTE HANGS IN THE BALANCE

Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, November 20th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

THE Ministry of National Food Security and Research is on the verge of losing one of its organs — the Agriculture Policy Institute (API) — as it has remained dormant over the past decade.

The institute came under fierce criticism at a recent meeting of the Senate's Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, but the food ministry had no answer to the committee's objections.

Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah, the committee's chairman, asked the ministry to submit a detailed report on API's functioning over the past 10 years. He argued that the API had been receiving allocations from the budget and therefore was supposed to report to the committee on its performance.

The prime objective of the institute is to analyse the impact of important agricultural policies on groups such as consumers, processors and exporters, and advise the food ministry on policy adjustments needed for greater efficiency and equity.

One major effort by the API was to produce annual policy analysis reports on cotton, sugarcane, rice, wheat and tobacco crops. However, no report has been produced in the recent past.

The institute — previously known as the Agricultural Prices Commission, which was created in 1981 — is being run by only four officials. It has no full-time director general, and a joint secretary of the food ministry is handling its affairs as an additional charge.

Ever since it was set up, the institute has no permanent office, and it has changed its location at least eight times so far. "We are in a confusion about API's future," an official of the ministry told this writer.

Sources close to the food ministry say the secretaries' committee took up the issue of the API a few months ago and asked the ministry to submit proposals for restructuring the institute. Most committee members are in favour of keeping the API after its restructuring. However, it has been learnt that the food ministry has yet to take any decision in this regard.

The national food security policy — which was due in 2013 following the devolution of the ministry of food, agriculture and livestock — has not yet finalised. Its draft has seen several revisions and was said to be finalised recently by the director general of the National Agricultural Research Centre. However, it is still not known when the ministry will submit the policy to the cabinet for approval.

The API has failed to conduct studies on emerging policy issues. It was supposed to periodically examine, process, store and market the costs of agricultural commodities, to recommend policies and programmes to reduce these costs, and to make commodities more competitive.

With limited capacity, the API was supposed to conduct annual input-output field surveys in main producing areas of cotton, sugarcane, rice, wheat and tobacco crops.

It was also required to prepare papers on the most-favoured-nation (MFN) strategy, South Asian Free Trade Area and the 'sensitive list' referred from the Ministry of Commerce, in addition to analyse the Indian subsidies in the agriculture sector on fertiliser, power, irrigation water and food subsidy.

Its special assignments included preparing summaries for the Economic Coordination Committee on the availability and pricing of pulses in the country.

The API has also been given the role of preparing annual papers for meetings of the food supplies committee of defence planning; however, the institute is facing growing challenges owing to its limited capacity.

In its last meeting, the Senate's committee concerned sought a detailed justification report from the food ministry on the future of the API, Senator Muzaffar Shah said.

The presentation made by the food ministry was not substantive, and it was asked to submit a concrete report on the functioning of the API so that its future could be decided.

Mr Shah said that after the devolution, agriculture was transferred to provinces; however, provinces failed to make the required allocations for this sector, hence the vast potential in agriculture remains under-exploited.

There is a need for producing new varieties of crops and reaching out to farmers on their doorstep with benefits of research, he said.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1371551/future-of-agriculture-policy-institute-hangs-in-the-balance

PUNJAB GOVT CHALKS OUT RS2.14BN PLAN FOR PROMOTING AGRICULTURE
The Business Recorder, 20,11, 2017

SIALKOT: the Punjab government has chalked out a four-year plan costing more than Rs 2.14 billion for the promotion of agriculture and prosperity of farmers in the province.

Sources in agriculture department told Business Recorder on Sunday that under the plan special attention would be accorded on reclamation of water-logging and salinity hit land in different districts of the Punjab.

The reclamation is the process of changing land that rendered unfit for farming, sources said. The proposed reclamation programme would be supportive in making water-logging and salinity hit land cultivable in across the Province. The proposed plan would be carried out during next fiscal period and the government was making adequate arrangements for initiating the proposed plan for attaining yielding results sources added.

The Punjab government under the directives of the Punjab Chief Minister has initiated a detailed plan to introduce new modes to promote agriculture sector on modern lines and to save the irrigation water through modern irrigation system. About 25 percent canal water, 30 percent water courses and 35 percent water is wasted in agriculture fields from available water resources as a result of which availability of water reduced to 45 million acre feet whereas required water is 65 million acres feet is needed for crops annually in Punjab.

According to the experts, the agriculture sector is confronting with the shortage of water since long and it will be more worsen in future. The experts urged upon the farmer community that they should adopt modern irrigation technology for avoiding the wastage of irrigation water. The adoption of modern of modern irrigation system will be supportive in saving 40 to 60 percent water as well as help to save 30 to 60 percent the wastage of fertilizer.

Sources said that Punjab government is committed to bring about revolutionary changes in agriculture sector on top priority basis and many steps had already been taken in this regard. The basic concept of this plan is to promote agriculture sector on modern lines to make it profitable and to enhance productivity.

The Punjab government has set aside Rs 4.76 billion for a three-year plan for the promotion of per acre yield in the province. Drip irrigation system under the programme had been installed on over 11,000 acres of land while solar system for drip sprinkler had also bee installed over 1500 acres of land in various parts of the Punjab. Similarly, under the government initiatives special steps had also been taken for the promotion of tunnel farming technology and so far tunnel farm technology had been installed over 350 acres of land in Punjab.

The tunnel farming will help promote the growing off-season vegetables around the year which will be supportive in improving the economic conditions of the growers of the Province. The programme will pave the way for introducing modern and profitable farming, enhancing productivity, lessening the productivity expenditures, better utilization of fertilizers and pesticides and save the water.

The government will provide 80 percent subsidy on installation of solar system while the government will also provide 50 percent subsidy on the installation of Tunnels (Tunnel farm Technology) and 60 percent subsidy for sprinkler irrigation in the Province, sources added.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/20/2-page/683174-news.html

GROWERS SLAM MILLERS, GOVT FOR DELAYING CANE CRUSHING
Dawn, November 22nd, 2017

HYDERABAD: If the Sindh government fails to take notice of sugar cane growers' protest over delay in issuance of cane prices for 2017-18 and mill owners do not start crushing, the situation would be harmful for the provincial farm sector.

This was stated by Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) president Abdul Majeed Nizamani while expressing grave concern over the delay.

The situation would lead to serious consequences for the government, agriculture sector and the ruling party, he said.

In a statement issued here on Tuesday, he supported the protest by sugar-cane growers in Ranipur against non-issuance of the notification about the commodity price.

He said the growers resorted to protest as the third week of November had started and there was no sign of crushing.

The standing crop of sugar cane needed water while sowing of wheat was being unnecessarily delayed, he added.

He warned that the Sindh government should not undermine the legitimate interests of millions of growers only for the sake of few sugar millers because it would also endanger the future of agriculture sector.

He said the federal government had already given a subsidy of Rs10.7 billion to sugar millers on the export of one million tonne of sugar.

Such a huge amount, he said, was not given even to the flood affected farmers by the government during 2010 super floods; even agriculture sector did not get such a huge subsidy.

Still, they were reluctant to start crushing, which was highly disappointing, he said.

He said the government should not endanger country’s economy for sugar millers and the prices should be fixed while considering per acre cost of production of sugar cane crop as soon as possible.

KHAIRPUR: A large number of growers continued their protest at the main Gambat bypass roundabout on the National Highway on Tuesday, the second consecutive day.

Due to the protest, the National Highway recorded a long traffic jam stretching over miles.

Talking to local reporters, the protestors said that as per the law, the sugar-cane crushing was to be started by Nov 15 every year; however, the sugar mills had not started the process yet.

They said there were two sugar mills in Khairpur district, but the burners had not been ignited yet.

The delay tactics being used by the government, they said, caused them great loss.

In case of delay, they got minimal rates for their crop and the sowing of their next yield also got delayed, they said.

On the other hand, activists of the Sindh Progressive Committee (SPC), Khairpur, staged a demonstration in front of the local press club on Tuesday to express solidarity with sugar cane and paddy crop growers of Sindh.

District SPC convener Mir Munawwar Talpur, Ghulam Qadir Phulpoto, Karam Wassan, Yasin Sindhi and others said the sugar cane and paddy crop growers of Sindh were facing a great injustice.

They demanded that the sugar cane rate should be fixed at Rs250 per maund and that of paddy crop at Rs1,500 per maund.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1372002/growers-slam-millers-govt-for-delaying-cane-crushing

‘CROPS’ PRODUCTION SURGES BY 8PC IN PUNJAB

Business Recorder, 22 November 2017

LAHORE: Secretary Agriculture Punjab Muhammad Mehmood claimed on Tuesday that the agricultural sector grew by 3.5 percent, while the production of different crops increased by 8 percent in Punjab as a result of farmer friendly policies introduced by the government.

Government of Punjab will set up purchasing centers at district level for purchasing sunflower in collaboration with All Pakistan Solvent Extractors Association, he announced while addressing a seminar about profitable cultivation of sunflower arranged by Agriculture Department Punjab and ICI Pakistan jointly.

He said Punjab province is a catalyst in the food security and poverty eradication. Government is aware that country's development is subject to the prosperity of the farmer and for which all possible resources are utilized. Secretary Agriculture further said that revolutionary measures are taken by the Government of Punjab for modern irrigation and meteorological measures. It is a challenge to meet the needs of edible oil due to the mounting population. Despite being an agricultural country our production of edible oils is insufficient, so a special campaign under Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan package has been launched to increase the cultivation of Sunflower.

Approximately 90 percent of the target for cultivation of sunflower is fixed for Southern Punjab cities Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan. He further said that Subsidy of Rs 5,000 per acre on Sunflower cultivation (Oilseed) is being provided under Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package. This subsidy will be provided in form of voucher which will be sealed in Sunflower seed bags. All registered farmers under Khadim-e-Punjab Kissan Package will be given subsidy on cultivation of Sunflower up to 10 acres. Under this subsidy scheme per acre growth of oil seed will be increased and import bill on oilseed crop will be diminished.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/22/13-page/683596-news.html

SUGAR MILLS SEEK GOVT'S NOD FOR EXPORTS AHEAD OF NEW SEASON

The Express Tribune, November 23rd, 2017.

Sugar millers have pressed the government to immediately device a policy for the export of surplus commodity, fearing if the stock is not disposed of the industry may not be able to kick off fresh crushing season by the end of this month.

"As per law, the millers have to start crushing by November 30, however, due to the surplus stock, they are facing liquidity crunch and will not be able to pay off dues to farmers," said Javed Kayani, Chairman of the All Pakistan Sugar Mills Association, at a press conference on Wednesday.

He pointed out that farmers were protesting for the payment of their dues, but how could millers clear their bills when they were unable to sell leftover stocks in the international market.

"So far, around 450,000 tons of sugar has been exported; the government has allowed export of another 500,000 tons, but the industry needs rebate of at least Rs20 per kg to remain commercially viable," he said.

He expected a bumper sugarcane crop of around 8 million tons in the new season valuing at Rs375 billion.

Saying that current international sugar prices were in the range of $320 to $325 per ton, Kayani emphasised that keeping the global market in view, the domestic sugarcane support price should be Rs120 per 40 kg instead of government-approved Rs180 per 40 kg.

With annual domestic consumption of 5.5 million tons, he believed that Pakistan would have surplus sugar stock of three million tons next year.

"How can industry pay farmers their dues with this surplus stock and low international prices; if things remain stagnant, the industry could default to the tune of around Rs190 billion, which will create chaos among farmers as well as sugar millers," Kayani feared.

He suggested that China could be an attractive market as it was paying double the international prices. "Government can sell the leftover stock to China from its platform, which can save the domestic industry and the state will not have to pay the rebate."

He asked the government to either frame a firm policy or deregulate the sector as its dual policy was hurting the industry badly.

"Farmers are blaming the millers, which don't have the cash to pay; they are even negotiating with banks for loan repayments," he said.

According to Kayani, already nine sugar mills have defaulted and two have shut down due to the liquidity crunch. "The next year could be the last crushing season for this industry," if things did not improve, he warned.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1565843/2-sugar-mills-seek-govts-nod-exports-ahead-new-season/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 13Th TO NOVEMBER 19Th 2017
DAP PRICES RISE RS50 TO RS2,670 PER BAG
The Express Tribune, November 15th, 2017.

KARACHI: Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) has increased di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) prices by Rs50 to Rs2,670 per bag, JS Research reported on Tuesday.

The price increase will be effective from November 15. Other players in the industry have also increased DAP prices and revised average prices now stand at Rs2,630 per bag. Fauji Fertilizer Company will also sell DAP at the same rate.

Despite this increase, Sona DAP fertiliser would be selling at a discount to Engro DAP.

Earlier, Engro Fertilizers increased its DAP prices by Rs50 per bag and Rs180 per bag on November 1 and November 14, respectively.

Alfalah Securities reported that the company now planned to increase DAP prices by Rs80 per bag with effect from November 25.

Analysts say the recent increase in DAP prices in the local market was reflective of the enhanced fertiliser demand and increase in international fertiliser prices.

According to provisional data, urea off-take in October 2017 crossed 600,000 tons (including 150,000 tons of exports). Consequently, urea inventory fell to 500,000 tons by the end of the month.

Analysts expect urea inventory to be fully exhausted by the end of calendar year 2017 considering higher demand during the rest of the period. However, urea production is expected to remain on the lower side due to closure of liquefied natural gas (LNG)-based plants.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1558486/2-dap-prices-rise-rs50-rs2670-per-bag/

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT: 45 FARMS TO BE UPGRADED
The Express Tribune, November 13th, 2017.

LAHORE: As many as 45 farms of agriculture department will be upgraded in Punjab to obtain maximum benefit from them by the end of June next year.

Punjab Agriculture Extension Adaptive and Research Director General Zafaryab Haider disclosed this on Sunday. He said that it was the top priority to make barren land cultivable as this effort would not help in boosting yield of various agricultural commodities in the country but also benefit the farmers.

To a question, he said that new avenues of research would be opened by conducting experiments on these farms and growers would obtain financial benefits by following modern methods of cultivation.

Haider said that officers had been directed to discharge their duties with responsibility in this regard so that farmers could obtain maximum from this project.

He said the Punjab agriculture department was making continuous efforts to strengthen the farmers by introducing new methods in the farming sector.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1556783/1-agriculture-department-45-farms-upgraded/

BOARD MEETS TOMORROW TO SORT OUT SUGAR CANE CRUSHING, PRICE ISSUES
Dawn, November 15th, 2017

HYDERABAD: The Sindh government has decided to convene a meeting of the Sugarcane Control Board on Thursday to thrash out sugar cane price for 2017-18 season.

This was decided on Tuesday after Sindh Agriculture Minister Sohail Anwar Siyal chaired a growers' meeting in Karachi.

Representatives of the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) unanimously shot down the minister's proposal for first announcing a date of crushing season and fixing minimum sugar cane price later.

SCA general secretary Nabi Bux Sathio said Sindh's growers would accept nothing short of Rs182/40kg price of sugar cane for 2017-18 season as the Punjab government had already fixed Rs180/40kg. Given the past tradition largely based on better sucrose recovery in Sindh's sugar cane, he said, its rate in Sindh was always a few rupees higher than what Punjab fixed.

He said the minister had hinted at announcing the crushing season first and fixing the cane price later. But everyone from growers' delegation rejected this proposal outright, he added. "This is what sugar factories in fact precisely want. They want that the Sindh government should stay away from fixing sugar cane price every season and their counsel had been arguing this contention in different sugar cane-related cases," said Sathio.

Sindh had last year fixed Rs182/40kg and going by the past precedent, the rate ought to be fixed at Rs184 or Rs186/40kg. Punjab government's announcement has been made and the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA), Sindh zone representatives, had been informed about it, said a Sindh government officer.

The Sindh agriculture minister on Monday met the PSMA Sindh leaders in Karachi separately before meeting with growers today. "Millers were clearly told that when price notification for 2017-18 season was issued in Punjab, the PSMA didn't start clamouring there the way it is dong in Sindh. Not a single statement was seen from PSMA's Punjab counterparts against the Punjab government so far," said a source present in Monday's meeting.

On Tuesday, the growers were told that the millers were constantly telling the government that they were incurring losses due to surplus stocks which until Tuesday stood between 500,000 and 600,000 tonnes. Such situation was not going to enable the millers to offer a price of Rs182 per 40kg to the growers and start crushing until their buffer stocks are cleared. Sindh's growers insist that the millers always try to hold the entire agriculture sector hostage to their whims, which could not be accepted.

According to SAB vice-president Mehmood Nawaz Shah, stocks were certainly disposed of by factory owners and it was hardly 10 to 15 per cent of stocks that are ready for disposal. But this does not provide any excuse to the millers not to start sugar cane crushing or that the Sindh government should avoid discharging its responsibility of fixing sugar cane rate.

He lamented the fact that last year, the government met growers on Oct 9 and this year such meeting was taking place on Nov 13.

He said that if some factory owners were awaiting a market price of Rs100/1kg of sweetener then it was altogether a different issue. He remarked that the government had been told that growers right now did not press their point for Rs200/40kg price for sugar cane this year, therefore, the notification of Rs184/40kg be issued without delay. "The government may issue notification on Friday after Thursday's meeting," he said.

The Sindh agriculture minister chairs the Sindh Sugarcane Control Board, the provision of which is available in Sugar Factories Control (Sindh Amendment) Act 2009. The board has representation of growers' bodies as well and it was a forum which decides the sugar cane price.

SAI president Nawab Zubair Talpur pointed out that the millers were delaying the season while northern winds were drying up sugar cane crop. "Water shortage is already there and Rohri Canal was taking a discharge of 8,400 cusecs. We are in double jeopardy as to how to manage the standing sugar cane crop and sow other Rabi crops, including wheat," he said. He said the millers were just delaying the season and they would eventually start crushing in December.

Sathio was of the view that 15 days' time was to be legally provided to the millers for lighting up factories' boilers so that ultimately crushing would begin in early December.

He said the growers did not object to giving 15 days' time to the millers for pre-crushing preparations, but accepting the rate notification less than Rs182/40kg or so was simply out of the question.

Sindh's sugar cane producers are agitating against delay in start of crushing of sugar cane and fixation of sugar cane price.

A growers' body, the Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC), has already moved the Sindh High Court, praying the court to direct the government to issue price notification for sugar cane crop 2017-18.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1370494/board-meets-tomorrow-to-sort-out-sugar-cane-crushing-price-issues

DAP PRICES RISE RS50 TO RS2,670 PER BAG
The Express Tribune, November 15th, 2017.

KARACHI: Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) has increased di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) prices by Rs50 to Rs2,670 per bag, JS Research reported on Tuesday.

The price increase will be effective from November 15. Other players in the industry have also increased DAP prices and revised average prices now stand at Rs2,630 per bag. Fauji Fertilizer Company will also sell DAP at the same rate.

Despite this increase, Sona DAP fertiliser would be selling at a discount to Engro DAP.

Earlier, Engro Fertilizers increased its DAP prices by Rs50 per bag and Rs180 per bag on November 1 and November 14, respectively.

Alfalah Securities reported that the company now planned to increase DAP prices by Rs80 per bag with effect from November 25.

Analysts say the recent increase in DAP prices in the local market was reflective of the enhanced fertiliser demand and increase in international fertiliser prices.

According to provisional data, urea off-take in October 2017 crossed 600,000 tons (including 150,000 tons of exports). Consequently, urea inventory fell to 500,000 tons by the end of the month.

Analysts expect urea inventory to be fully exhausted by the end of calendar year 2017 considering higher demand during the rest of the period. However, urea production is expected to remain on the lower side due to closure of liquefied natural gas (LNG)-based plants.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1558486/2-dap-prices-rise-rs50-rs2670-per-bag/

UN TALKS PLANT SEED FOR GREENER, MORE CLIMATE-SAVVY AGRICULTURE
Dawn, November 16th, 2017

BONN: UN climate talks in Bonn broke a long stalemate on agriculture this week, an important step which is expected to lead to wiser and better-funded government policies to help farmers, negotiators and development experts said.

Discussions on agriculture were blocked for several years over concerns they could result in obligations for developing states to curb emissions from farming, and for rich nations to pay for poorer farmers to adapt to a changing climate.

With the deadlock now resolved, the UN climate process can start to focus more on ‘real-life solutions’ to make agriculture less polluting and better able to cope with climate change, said Teresa Anderson, climate and resilience policy officer for ActionAid International.

“The UN system can (also) provide more strategic support to countries that need it,” she said on the sidelines of the climate talks.

Agriculture, forestry and changes in land use together produce 21pc of global greenhouse gas emissions, making them the second largest emitter after the energy sector, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Agriculture also suffers about a quarter of losses and damage caused by climate-related disasters, such as floods and storms, rising to more than 80pc when droughts hit, the UN agency says.

For a long time, experts and developing countries complained the stalemate was out of kilter with growing recognition of the role agriculture needs to play in tackling global warming, as well as expanding efforts on the ground to aid farmers to maintain yields as the weather gets wilder.

Those measures include using crop varieties better suited to drought or heavy downpours, cutting down the use of ploughs in fields, putting in solar-powered irrigation pumps, and buying drought-hit livestock from herders before their animals starve to death.

But this week’s decision to link the work of a technical body and another focused on implementation – which still requires final approval at the close of the talks, due on Friday – has opened the door for gaps in practical needs to be identified and filled, experts said.

Some of the topics that could be taken up include how to keep soils healthy and store more carbon in the ground, improved ways of managing livestock, and how the impact of climate change on farming could affect food production.

Gambian negotiator Sidat Yaffa said the decision meant his West African country would be able to submit proposals about key challenges for its agriculture sector to the UN process, and receive technical advice, potentially enabling it to access funding more easily.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1370768/un-talks-plant-seed-for-greener-more-climate-savvy-agriculture

MOU SIGNED WITH BELARUS TO BOOST AGRI COOPERATION
Dawn, November 17th, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Belarus have signed a memorandum of understanding to step up cooperation in agriculture, with a mutual interest in establishing joint milk processing enterprises in the country.

Under the MoU signed here on Thursday, the two countries will facilitate direct contacts between their private sectors for joint ventures in milk processing and whole milk products like ice cream, drinking yogurt, cheese and yoghurt, and baby food using Belarusian milk powder and technologies.

The MoU noted with satisfaction the positive dynamics of strengthening cooperation in the field of agriculture and food, including the implementation of agreements reached during the third meeting of the joint working group in Minsk early this year.

The signing ceremony took place at the end of the two-day meeting of the fourth session of the joint group.

The MoU was signed by Belarusian Deputy Agriculture and Food Minister, Igor Brylo and Secretary Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Abbas Maken on behalf of their respective countries.

It was learned that Belarus has expressed its readiness to introduce milk powder, cheeses, condensed and concentrated milk, butter, canned products from poultry meat and beef in the Pakistani market.

Pakistan has agreed to increase direct supplies of rice, potatoes, mangoes and citrus fruits.

The two countries agreed to cooperate with each other in exploring trading partners interested in the supply of agricultural products in the markets of Pakistan and Belarus.

The agreement also included continuation of work on harmonisation of phytosanitary and veterinary standards, exchange of information in the fields of quarantine and plant protection for the organisation of import and export supplies of agricultural products.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1370957/mou-signed-with-belarus-to-boost-agri-cooperation

SINDH SUGARCANE CONTROL BOARD MEETING REMAINS INCONCLUSIVE

Dawn, November 17th, 2017

HYDERABAD: A meeting of the Sindh Sugarcane Control Board convened to develop consensus over fixation of sugar cane rate for 2017-18 remained inconclusive in Karachi on Thursday as growers rejected the agriculture minister's proposal to agree for notification of sugar cane season and get its price finalised by mid-December.

Sindh Agriculture Minister Sohail Anwar Siyal, who chaired the meeting, is reported to have told the growers' leaders and Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) that he would brief the Sindh chief minister on Thursday's inconclusiveness of the meeting and that another round of talks would be held with the two sides.

Sindh PSMA chairman Asim Ghani led an eight-member delegation of the association and equal number of growers' representatives, including Mahmood Nawaz Shah and Nadeem Shah of the Sindh Abadgar Board, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) general secretary Nabi Bux Sathio, Sindh Abadgar Ittehad president Nawab Zubair Talpur and others, attended the meeting.

"The millers want to meet the Sindh chief minister to use his good offices for holding a meeting with the prime minister so that they press the point for getting Rs15 to Rs18 subsidy on 1kg of sugar," said a participant. The millers also pressed the point for fixation of sugar's price like sugar cane and according to their proposal, they said that if the government intended to fix a price of Rs200/40kg then sugar should be bought by the government for Rs90/1kg and Rs70/1kg rate should be fixed if sugar cane's price was fixed at Rs182/40kg.

"The Sindh agriculture minister wanted us to agree to his proposal for starting crushing season first and deciding rate later on. This was something we can't agree to. It precisely means setting a bad precedent this season so that it is repeated in future. This will also mean that we will not then be able to move court if price notification is not issued," said Mahmood Nawaz Shah.

SCA general secretary Nabi Bux Sathio said the minister was clearly informed that the growers would not agree to a price less than Rs182/40kg. He said that how could growers agree to a proposal in which sugar cane rate was not being fixed. "I told the minister that rate of Rs182/40kg should be announced first and date of crushing may be announced later.

The other proposal was that the government should fix this rate and fix crushing date of Nov 30. Even then the millers do not abide by it, it would be millers versus growers and we will not be complaining to the government," he said.

A government source said the PSMA leaders contended that they were incurring losses and this could be audited by the government.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1370919/sindh-sugarcane-control-board-meeting-remains-inconclusive

DISAPPOINTED WITH SINDH GOVT, FARMERS SEEK BILAWAL'S HELP
Business Recorder, 19 November, 2017

The Pakistan Peoples Party's Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has been requested to intervene and settle the ongoing sugarcane crushing conflict in favour of the farmers.

In an open letter to Bilawal on Saturday, a non-profit organisation working for farmers' rights stated that the PPP government is exploiting the farmers in the same way for which the PPP used to criticize Punjab government.

"The same treatment for which you criticised Nawaz Sharif's Punjab government is being given to farmers in Sindh," the letter, written by Hyderabad Sindh Agriculture Research Council, alleged.

The letter alluded to PPP Parliamentarians' chairperson and Bilawal's father Asif Ali Zardari for the plight of the sugarcane farmers because Zardari allegedly owns 17 to 19 sugar mills through his front men. "This [allegation] also echoed in Sindh Assembly by a member of the opposition few days ago."

Every year the farmers take to the streets to protest the delay in officially notifying the start of the crushing season and fixing the crop's price, which is also acceptable to the growers. Under the Sindh Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950, the Sindh government is stipulated to issue the notification in the month of October each year.

On November 14 and November 17, Sindh Sugarcane Control Board called meetings in Karachi. The provincial minister and secretary of agriculture department, cane commissioner Sindh, an eight-member delegation of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association, Sindh Abadgar Board, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad attended these meetings. However, both the meetings ended inconclusively.

The millers pressured the government to increase the price of sugar to at least Rs70 per kilogramme if its proposed rate of Rs182 per 40 kilogramme of sugarcane was to be fixed. They argued for a still higher price of sugar at Rs90 per kg if the farmers' demand of setting Rs200 per 40 kg was to be accepted. The date for starting the sugarcane crushing was not decided either.

"The farmers in Sindh have become disappointed with Sindh government's inaction," the letter read. "The current situation reminds them of Benazir Bhutto who always took decisions in favour of the farmers."

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1562298/1-farmers-seek-bilawals-help/

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 6Th TO NOVEMBER 12Th 2017
GROWERS' BODY PLANS AGITATION AGAINST GOVT FROM 12TH
Dawn, November 6th, 2017

HYDERABAD: Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) announced on Sunday that it would launch agitation against the Sindh government for delaying commencement of sugar cane crushing season and failing to fix official rate of cane crop. It also expressed its grave concern over unavailability of a correct table of water flows in rivers after a recent decline.

The announcement was made at a meeting of the board held under the chairmanship of its president, Abdul Majeed Nizamani.

It decided to hold protests in every district of Sindh. It said that by not starting cane crushing so far, owners of sugar mills were showing obstinacy to cause losses to the agriculture sector and Sindh's economy.

The meeting said that due to efforts of the board, the federal government announced a subsidy of Rs10.7 per kilogram on sugar for the millers. The meeting noted that the overall benefit of this subsidy ran into billions of rupees for one million tonne of sugar to be produced by them.

The meeting criticised the provincial government's role of continuously patronising sugar millers instead of playing an effective role in avoiding heavy losses to cane growers.The SAB meeting also noted that despite correspondence and reminders, the Sindh government was neither fixing official cane price nor was it holding a meeting with growers to ensure start of crushing. Even it was not responding to the board's letters, it said.

The meeting decided to launch a protest campaign from on Nov 12.

The meeting also expressed its concern over announcement of a water shortage for the Rabi season by the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) and condemned the opening of the link canal without its (Irsa's) permission. It said that it was absolutely illegal that canal was operated in this way.

Mr Nizamani told the meeting that under the Water Apportionment Accord-1991 any link canal could only be operated when there was surplus water in dams and Irsa's permission was obtained. He deplored Irsa for not taking any notice of the unauthorised opening of the link canal and called for its immediate closure.

He also told the meeting that the board would move court against government's indecision on commencement of cane crushing.

DADU: Sind Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) organised a protest rally in Dadu city on Sunday which emerged from its office and culminated outside the local press club.

Cane growers from various towns of Dadu district took part in the rally. They were carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans against the Sindh government over its failure to announce official rate of cane crop of the current season and make sugar millers to commence crushing. SAI president Nawab Zubir Ahmed Talpur led the rally.

Speaking to the participants, Mr Talpur said the cane crop was ready for crushing but millers were not lifting it. This, he said, was causing immense hardship to growers and creating an artificial crisis.

He said the provincial government was equally responsible for the situation as it had delayed both fixing of official rate of cane and commencement of the crushing season.

He urged the cane commissioner to discharge his duty by doing the needful immediately.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1368583/growers-body-plans-agitation-against-govt-from-12th

GARLIC FARMERS SUFFER LOSSES AS PRICES FALL
Business Recorder, 6 November 2017

PESHAWAR: The farmers of garlic in Bannu and the rest of southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA have suffered losses in garlic crop this year.

The garlic market of Bannu is famous in the whole region for supplying good quality garlic to different parts of the country. Thousands of people are associated with the garlic supply in the market.

Malik Ayaz, President of the garlic market, says the farmers have suffered massive losses this year due to decrease in prices.

"From this market, we send garlic to Karachi, Sukkur, Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and other cities of Punjab and Sindh. The farmers had bought the garlic for sowing their crops at Rs10,000 per maund, but now the price per maund has reduced to Rs2,500," Ayaz said.

Farmers bring garlic for sale to the Bannu market from Frontier Region Bannu, Lakki Marwat, North Waziristan and other surrounding areas.

Irfanullah, a garlic trader, said while talking to media persons that garlic is a cash crop of southern districts of KP and North Waziristan. "All the farmers in the southern districts and surrounding areas bring their garlic to the Bannu market," he said.

Malik Ayaz said the garlic of Bannu market is liked by the consumers from all parts of the country. He says the garlic of this region has good quality due to specific climate of the area. "The garlic of Bannu market is a bit expensive due to its good quality and odour. The market also provides good quality fruit," he said.

The farmers have suffered losses due to dip in prices this year. They are not very hopeful about improvement in the situation even next year.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/06/5-page/680504-news.html

INDUSTRY WANTS UREA EXPORT DEADLINE EXTENDED TO DECEMBER 31
Business Recorder, Nov 7th, 2017

Mushtaq Ghumman

Islamabad: Fertilizer industry is reportedly putting pressure on the government to extend urea export deadline up to December 31, 2017, well informed sources told Business Recorder. In this regard Commerce Minister Pervaiz Malik presided over a meeting with the fertilizer manufacturers and other public sector stakeholders on November 6, 2017 and decided to delay the decision till after the Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) meets on November 15, 2017 which is competent to recommend such a proposal to the government.

The sources said the proposal was opposed on the ground that urea demand increases in November and December and any such decision will lead to shortage of urea and increase in price in the domestic market.

The sources said giving the background that on a summary moved by Ministry of Commerce, Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet in its decision of January 23, 2017 allowed export of urea fertilizer up to 0.3 million tons (MT) by April 28, 2017. The ECC also decided that FRC would meet immediately after April 28, 2017 to review the exported quantity and in case the originally estimated surplus materializes, the FRC may recommend additional quantity for export. It was also decided that the FRC would monitor domestic price of urea on monthly basis and would recommend to ECC for discontinuation of further export if there is an increase in retail price.

On another summary moved by Ministry of Commerce, the ECC in its decision of May 16, 2017 allowed increase in quantity of urea for export from 0.3 Million MT to 0.6 million MT and also extended deadline for export of urea from April 28, 2017 to October 31, 2017, with the same terms and conditions as specified earlier.

The sources said a meeting of the FRC was held in the Ministry of Industries & Production (MoIP) on September 11, 2017 in view of a request from Fertilizer Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) to extend the deadline of ongoing urea export, allowed by the ECC on January 23, 2017 and May 16, 2017 from October 31, 2017 up to December 31, 2017.

The sources further stated that minutes of the FRC meeting indicate that there was no mention of an extension in the export deadline as requested by FMPAC. In pursuance of the FRC minutes, the MoIP issued a corrigendum on September 27, 2017 conveying to all the stakeholders (except National Fertilizer Development Company (NFDC) and National Fertilizer Marketing Limited) that an extension in the deadline of urea export up to December 31, 2017 had been agreed by the FRC.

Another meeting of the FRC was also held in Ministry of Industries and Production on October, 2017. During the meeting, the final estimate of Rabi 2017-18 for urea were agreed as follows: (i) opening inventory, 0.722 million tons; (ii) domestic production, 2.782 million tons, of take + strategic reserve, (3.200) million tons; the remaining export (0.189) million tons with an estimated closing inventory of 0.103 million tons.

All stakeholders ie all provinces, PSB, Ministries of Finance, National Food Security and Research and Petroleum and National Fertilizer Marketing Ltd (NFML) opposed the extension of export of urea beyond October 31, 2017 in view of a likely surge in the domestic demand of urea and the subsequent price hike during the upcoming Rabi Season to commence from November 2017 onward. However, Ministry of Commerce and private industry supported the proposal of extension in time period of export of urea beyond October 31, 2017. The meeting concluded that is it not safe to extend the timeline of export of urea beyond October 31, 2017.

The sources said the ECC in its decisions had directed that the FRC would meet immediately after October 31, 2017 to review the exported urea quantities and if the originally estimated surplus materializes, the FRC may recommend additional quantity for export. It was evident from the minutes of the FRC meeting held on October 13, 2017 that the domestic price of urea is under control and stood lower than the baseline price of Rs 1400/ 50 Kg bag.

The latest urea export quota utilization as received from SBP is as follows: (i) total allocated, 600,000 MT ;(ii) used up quota, 558,912 MT – 93.15% and ;(iii) available quota, 41,088 MT – 6.85%

The urea export effected till October 13, 2017 was around 410,000 MT as reported by FMPAC. However, the export data from Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) reported export of around 111,000 MT as of October 04, 2017. However, all the stakeholders present in the FRC meeting held October 13, 2017 unanimously agreed on the export figures reported by the FMPAC. As per latest PRAL data, urea export of around 125,378.2 MT was made as on November 03, 2017.

One of the representatives of fertilizer industry told Business Recorder that the industry's main interest was to honour its commitments to buyers especially those in Sri Lanka.

He said a fine Rs 122 million on companies which is 15 per cent of contract value, has also been imposed for not honouring the contracts after registration due to paucity of time. Answering a question, he said that Ministry of National Food Security and Research has paid only Rs 2 billion subsidy to the industry against total amount of Rs 20 billion.

https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/11/20171107232924/

EARLY WHEAT SOWING 'DELIVERS BEST YIELD'
The Express Tribune, 8 November 2017

Agriculture experts said on Monday that sowing wheat early in standing cotton crop saves time, resources and delivers best production results.

The experts maintained that healthy and disease-free seeds of wheat should be chosen, while the seeds should be treated with anti-fungus agent before sowing.

They added after sowing, farmers should keep the beds wet or moist for better germination.

They pointed out wheat sown before November 15 ensures robust growth of shoots.

They said that farmers could finish picking of cotton from the remaining bolls from December 15 to 30. However, before embarking on last picking of cotton, farmers should apply 1.5 to two bags of DAP and a bag of Urea per acre and then complete the cotton picking and remove sticks.

They elaborated that wheat sown in cotton field should get water after seven to 10 days after sowing. Similarly, water should be applied in third week of December, in second week of January and in the third week of February.

This type of wheat sowing reduces weeds growth however, farmers should apply weedicides after consulting agriculture officials.

The experts said that in time sowing of wheat enhances wheat production by 50 %. It also reduces land preparation expenses by 95% and hence become a profitable practice.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1552441/1-early-wheat-sowing-delivers-best-yield/

UREA EXPORT: GOVT FACING PRESSURE TO EXTEND DEADLINE
Business Recorder, November, 10, 2017

ISLAMABAD: Fertilizer industry is reportedly putting pressure on the government to extend urea export deadline up to December 31, 2017, well-informed sources told Business Recorder.

In this regard, Commerce Minister Pervaiz Malik presided over a meeting with fertilizer manufacturers and other public sector stakeholders on November 6, 2017 and decided to delay the decision till after the Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) meets on November 15, 2017 which is competent to recommend such a proposal to the government.

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The urea export effected till October 13, 2017 was around 410,000 MT as reported by FMPAC. The export data from Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) reported export of around 111,000 MT as of October 04, 2017. However, all the stakeholders present in the FRC meeting held on October 13, 2017 unanimously agreed on the export figures reported by FMPAC. As per latest PRAL data, urea export of around 125,378.2 MT was made as on November 03, 2017.

One of the representatives of fertilizer industry told Business Recorder that the industry's main interest was to honour its commitments to buyers especially those in Sri Lanka.

He said a fine of Rs 122 million on companies which is 15 per cent of contract value, has also been imposed for not honouring the contracts after registration due to paucity of time.

Answering a question, he said that Ministry of National Food Security and Research has paid only Rs 2 billion subsidy to the industry against total amount of Rs 20 billion. —MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/11/10/12-page/681313-news.html

SUGARCANE GROWERS FLAY DELAY IN CRUSHING SEASON
Dawn, November 11, 2017

PESHAWAR: The delay in crushing season of sugarcane crop has caused serious unrest among the growers who fear that the cold response of millers to start the process will waste cultivation time of wheat crop in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Speaking at a press conference at Peshawar Press Club on Friday, Kisan Board Pakistan provincial president Rizwanullah Khan said that the delay in cultivation of wheat crop would affect the production of various crops and vegetables. He also demanded raise in the support price of sugarcane and early start of crushing season to save growers from bankruptcy.

Flanked by Kisan Board provincial general secretary Abdul Samad, former provincial minister Hafiz Hashmat Khan and Fazalullah Daudzai, Mr Rizwan said that most of the problems being faced by the farmers were due to absence of agricultural policy in province.

He said that the delay would have multiple implications for the farm sector. It deals a blow to harvesting of sugarcane and sowing of wheat crop in the area where sugarcane remains in the field. He said that successive governments had never bothered to frame a comprehensive agricultural policy. He demanded fixation of per 40kg price of sugarcane at Rs210 and commencement of crushing season without delay.

Mr Rizwan said that the price of sugarcane was fixed at Rs180 per 40kg during the last season, which was insufficient to meet the increasing cost of production and others expenses. He claimed the cost of sugarcane production remained up to Rs237 per 40kg during last year, due to which the farmers had to face a loss of Rs57 per 40kg.

He demanded that the support price should be increased to Rs210 per 40kg to save the small farmers from financial losses in the current season.

The sugar millers, he said, should start the sugarcane crushing before Nov 15 so that the farmers could cultivate other crops on time. He said that if the government failed to resolve their issues the local economy would get a serious setback. He regretted that the farmers had made huge investment in cultivation of crops, but they didn't get the support price of their harvest in the market.

The Kisan Board president said that the number of sugar mills in KP was low and they too used to start crushing with much delay. "We have no other option, but to stop its cultivation because farmers are unable to meet even the labour charges," he said.

He said that in Dera Ismail Khan there were three sugar mills and they too used to buy sugarcane from Punjab while the growers of KP had to wait in line and face financial issues. He urged the mills owners not to buy sugarcane from outside before finishing of stock with local growers.

He suggested fixation of uniform commission for gur, which could be acceptable to growers. He said that the gur commission agents should be bound to avoid imposing additional charges against the fixed commission.

Mr Rizwan said that sugarcane was a cash crop of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and being cultivated on around 293,450 acres in different districts, including Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda and Nowshera.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1369737/sugarcane-growers-flay-delay-in-crushing-season

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 30TH TO NOVEMBER 5 Th 2017

DUSK FALLS ON SUNFLOWER CULTIVATION IN SINDH
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, October 30th, 2017

ANNUAL wheat harvest crossed 25 million tonnes for the fourth year in a row in the previous fiscal year, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). As this amount exceeds the domestic consumption, the country had 5.7m tonnes of wheat in stock by June due to successive surpluses over the years.

The problem is that maintaining such high level of stocks has a cost. Moreover, exporting wheat has also become costlier, as the government kept procurement prices significantly higher — particularly when global prices are falling persistently over the past few years.

The situation is likely to persist as global wheat prices are expected to remain lower on the back of better harvest in major wheat-exporting countries.

The SBP annual report for 2016-17 certainly provides plenty of food for thought. Our policymakers should ensure a balanced wheat production while making winter crops, particularly oilseed and pulses, viable to reduce food imports, the third biggest component of the Pakistan's overall import bill.

Food imports in the previous fiscal year stood at $6.13 billion, including $1.9bn spent on edible oil and $2.05bn on 'other food items'.

Pulses' imports surged to 1.23 million tonnes (costing $952.25m) in 2016-17 from 898,615 tonnes in 2015-16, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. It put importers in a quandary as demand for pulses remains lower on the retail market.

Oilseed crops such as canola and sunflower are considered the best alternative to wheat in Sindh and Punjab. Punjab has already pitched in a Rs1bn subsidy (Rs5,000 per acre for a maximum of 10-acre cultivation) for canola and sunflower this season.

But the Sindh government continues to look the other way the acreage of sunflower crop declines.

"We can substantially reduce our import bill in three to four years if the cultivation of these crops gets positive response from farmers and the government," says Khalid Mehmood Khokhar, whose Pakistan Kissan Ittehad strongly supported this subsidy in Punjab.

Sunflower involves lower input costs and can be ideally grown between October and February, even with nominal irrigation water supplies and marginal soil quality.

However, despite having become the best Rabi crop option in Sindh, its cultivation has not been sustainable due to low prices and the absence of quality seed.

"It only needs government's focus on research and development. With government intervention, the demand for edible oil production can be met and wheat surpluses can be balanced," says Mahmood Nawaz Shah of the Sindh Abadgar Board.

Only seven years ago, sunflower was grown on 266,964 hectares in Sindh in 2010-11 (when countrywide acreage was 300,614 hectares), indicating the potential for sunflower cultivation in the province.

However, the acreage then plunged to 65,883 hectares in 2015-16 before rising slightly by 2,000 hectares in 2016-17.

Noor Mohammad Baloch, Sindh's director general for agriculture research, says the acreage dropped due to water shortage. He perhaps ignores the fact that sunflower is a low-delta crop, that is it doesn't require much water to grow. Simultaneously, high-delta crop like rice is thriving and surpassing sowing targets.

The department's research station has not been able to introduce new higher-yield varieties of sunflower. The available HO1 local variety gives 15-16 maunds per acre. (One maund equals around 37 kilograms.)

Sunflower grower Nadeem Shah says growers prefer imported hybrid seed to local variety for getting higher yields in Sujawal district (previously part of the coastal Thatta district).

He used to get a per-acre yield of 15 to 20 maunds and sell the produce for Rs2,200 to Rs2,300 per 40kg. However, yield has now dropped to seven to eight maunds and price to Rs1,500 and Rs1,800.

Moreover, "unjustified" deduction by buyers due to moisture in the crop also makes matters worse for growers, he says.

Even hybrid seed is not performing, he says, adding that local seed is also unavailable in the market.

This is why Nadeem Shah has reduced the area under sunflower cultivation to 25 from 200 acres.

In September, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi chaired a meeting on food security soon after he took office. The meeting lasted for three hours and, according to officials concerned, the premier expressed concern over the country's reliance on edible oil imports and the overall food import bill.

He tasked the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) to come up with a working paper to address the issue.

"We are importing low-quality oil. And since the solvent industry gets it on the cheap, it finds its import viable," says Dr Yusuf Zafar, director general of the PARC. "Besides major crops, we need to give importance to pulses and oilseed crops to get out of this quagmire."

Pakistan is producing surplus wheat and sugar, which forces the government to subsidise its exports as global prices remain lower. Just last month, the government allowed subsidised export of half a million tonnes of sugar at the rate of Rs10.70 per kg.

Sugar millers are not ready to start sugarcane crushing on time and refuse to offer more than Rs120 per 40kg to growers unless surplus stocks are exported.

There are no calculations by government how much pulses have been imported by market players in the last few years. However, Karachi Wholesale Grocers Association chairman Anis Majeed says annual imports recently touched around 1m to 1.2m tonnes as compared to normal figures of 500,000 to 700,000 tonnes.

"We don't know how to dispose it of in the retail market. We have excess stocks of lentils (masoor), desi chickpeas (kala chana) and black matpe (sabut maash)," he says, adding that the government is least concerned about imports. "The government and importers are not on the same page," he says.

He believes that increasing population and low domestic production of pulses have paved the way for a rise in imports.

The PARC has developed a Rs2.24bn project under the Public Sector Development Programme to improve pulses' productivity by developing new varieties, ensure free supply of new an advanced seeds to poor farmers and introduce farm mechanisation in four varieties of pulses, i.e. moong, maash, masoor and chickpeas. The 10-year project is set to start in January.

Moreover, the PARC has proposed that the quality of palm oil being imported should be checked to discourage its imports. However, the top research body will take time to come up with an oilseed crops project for which it is reported to have submitted a brief to the prime minister.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1367096/dusk-falls-on-sunflower-cultivation-in-sindh

PAKISTAN MUST ACT NOW TO ENSURE WATER SUPPLY FOR AGRICULTURE
The Express Tribune, October 30th, 2017.

Ahmed Awais Khaver

Earth's 70% surface is covered with water. It seems that this quantity would be sufficient to meet people's needs.

A mere 3% of the global water resources are freshwater that is fit for human consumption. Of this, only 1% is accessible by humans as the other 2% is packed in frozen glaciers.

The United Nations maintains that water on earth is enough for 7 billion people but unequal distribution, mismanagement and wastage make it inadequate. Around 70% of global freshwater is used for crop irrigation. Around 20% is for the industry and the remaining 10% for human consumption.

Water availability per capita in Pakistan has dropped from 5,260 cubic metres in 1951 to 1,040 cubic metres in 2010. This drastic fall places Pakistan in the category of water-stressed countries that are ultimately headed towards water scarcity.

Prime factors such as population explosion, water mismanagement and impact of climate change are responsible for such a change in water availability.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17, the share of agricultural output in the gross domestic product (GDP) is 19.5% and the sector employs an astounding 42.3% of the labour force.

As population rises, the need for agricultural production is also increasing. Water requirements for different crops, including wheat and rice, could rise steeply in forthcoming decades on account of the impact of global warming induced by a rise in global temperatures.

The World Bank, in a report, states that the change in water availability and variability can induce migrations, incite conflicts and reduce GDP by 6%.

Water is essential for agriculture and so is its share in GDP. However, the need for water is increasing for industrial and domestic uses as well. Is there an effective way out that can help carve out a tradeoff among these competing forces?

As Pakistan uses 93% of its freshwater resources on agriculture, there is a need to improve the efficiency rate which currently stands at 50%.

The United Nations is of the opinion that potential savings from an increase in efficiency of water for agriculture globally can be worth $115 billion annually by 2030 (2011 prices). Moreover, the provision of more efficient water technologies to some 100 million poor farmers will generate an estimated direct net benefit of $100-200 billion.

For more than a decade, a draft of the national water policy has been in circulation among relevant government departments but no concrete action has been taken so far for its approval.

Water is a provincial matter and the federal government can only put the policy forward as guidance. It is the responsibility of the centre to bring all provinces on board in relation to acceptance of the water policy through the Council of Common Interests.

All responsibilities and checks should be clearly defined and mapped out for the provinces to follow. The draft also says the need of water for agriculture will grow in the wake of increasing demand for food. A lack of proper maintenance of the canal system, silting of dams and rising domestic and industrial needs are also the factors behind the decrease in water availability.

There is a need to improve the efficiency of water use through better farm practices and well-maintained and expanded irrigation infrastructure. However, political and constitutional hitches delay the announcement and formal acceptance of the water policy.

Pakistan's Vision 2025 highlights the need for an effective pricing mechanism and methods to conserve and efficiently use water through structured methods as a way forward to reduce water scarcity in the country. The document proposes the constitution of a national water commission to monitor water resources and their allocation to agriculture, industry and other domestic uses. These suggestions and recommendations would only bear fruit once the policies are put into action.

The United Nations World Water Development Report (2015) states that by 2050, the developed world will have to increase its food production by 60% and developing countries by 100%.

The need of water for agriculture will certainly increase amid the rise in food production. If Pakistan cannot increase the supply of freshwater, then efficiency in food production may not be achieved and hence somehow we will have to create a balance between supply and demand of freshwater.

As water scarcity increases, the vulnerability of the agriculture sector to climate change will rise too. Arguably, by fighting climate change successfully through mitigation and adoption strategies, Pakistan can ensure improvement in performance of its agriculture sector.

We cannot ensure endless supply of water rather we need to look at increasing efficiency of water consumption. Water efficiency can be enhanced by its pricing, involvement of communities and utilising latest technologies that help increase equity and sustainability.

Innovative technologies include direct seeding, drip irrigation, micro-irrigation, low-energy precision application of sprinklers, recycling and treatment of wastewater.

Policymakers must ensure sufficient expenditure on agricultural research and development to improve crop varieties to make them resilient to climate change. The resilient crops should be high-yielding, tolerant to heat and water stress, and less prone to viral attacks. Pakistan cannot wait any further. The time to act is now.

The writer works at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute as project assistant and specialises in environment, water governance and flood management

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1544777/1-pakistan-must-act-now-ensure-water-supply-agriculture/

OVER 2,000 FARMERS TO BE BROUGHT UNDER OLIVE CULTIVATION DRIVE IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, 30 October 2017

ISLAMABAD: Barani Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) would extend its outreach to 12,000 progressive farmers of the Punjab province by December end this year in order to exploit olive production potential for enhancing output of the commodity in the country.

The institute under its olive promotion drive has so far distributed about 300,000 olive plants of different varieties among the potential growers free of cost, whereas over 800,000 acre of marginal land in Potohar region was identified for olive cultivation, said head BARI Dr Muhammad Tariq.

Talking to newsmen he informed that olive cultivation had been completed about 2,200 acres, whereas it would be cultivated over an additional 15,000 acres in districts Chakwal, Jehlum, Attock and Mianwali.

Under the olive promotion drive in the country, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) had imported about 600,000 plants from Italy and other European countries, he added.

About 280,000 plants were distributed free of cost to Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was provided 150,000 olive plants, where as Balochistan 140,000 and Azad Jammu and Kashmir 5000 plants, he added.

Dr Tariq further said that a center of excellence for high value crops would also be established in BARI for exploiting the true potential of high value crops and citrus fruit production and exporting, adding that about 238km of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would cross through this area and an economic zone would also be established here.The initiative would help in producing about 70 million litters of extra virgin olive oil valuing Rs 3.9 billion annually, besides creating livelihood opportunities for the rural youth and women and it would also help in strengthening the cottage industry. He informed that the initiative would also help in fulfilling the increasing domestic per capital oil consumption, which at present was 18 liters per individual.

He said that the institution was also providing technical training to women for olive value addition and production of by-products in order to make them economically strong and stable by bringing a marginal land under the crop production. He informed that about 69 different varieties have been developed at BARI adding that 12 varieties were fit for domestic cultivation across the country.—APP

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/10/30/3-page/679156-news.html

SINDH GOVT YET TO NOTIFY INDICATIVE PRICE FOR SUGARCANE
Dawn, October 31st, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

HYDERABAD: The Sindh government has yet to notify the indicative price for sugarcane and fix crushing date despite the fact that the 1950 Act calls for beginning of crushing season in October.

Meanwhile, influential millers are aiming for additional subsidy from the Sindh government besides the one given by the federal government on sugar exports. Such subsidy is to come from public purse.

The Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) said that if it failed to get subsidy, it won't pay more than Rs1,250 per 40kg to growers and delay crushing.

Meanwhile, growers are agitating to safeguard their interests and seek a price of Rs200 per 40kg. On the other hand, millers demand for an increase in rebate and permission to export 1.5m tonnes sugar in one go rather than exporting 500,000 tonnes tranches in phases.

Anticipating surplus sugar due to a bumper crop this year, PSMA Sindh Zone Chairman, Asim Ghani says the government must allow open export in 2017-18 so that international markets can be capitalised.

He expects the Sindh government to pitch in the subsidy like it did previously.

A meeting of Sugar Advisory Board was held in Islamabad on Oct 27 where PSMA pressed for exporting another 1m tonnes of sugar with Rs18-Rs19 per kg instead of Rs10.70 per kg subsidy besides 500,000 tonnes, allowed in September by Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) with a rebate of Rs10.70/1kg. Cost of subsidy is to be shared on 50-50 per cent basis by the provincial and federal governments.

"In the Oct 27 meeting, millers offered to pay Rs140/40kg in 2017-18," says a government official.

He added that reports of Sindh agriculture department show sugarcane acreage has increased by another 20,000 acres in the province.

Sugarcane growers are protesting delay in commencement of crushing season, saying they would have to supply more water to save the crop at the cost of wheat sowing.

Protests are being held by farmers' bodies like Sindh Abadgar Ittehad and Sindh Agriculture Research Council.

The Sindh government, on behalf of millers, had paid around Rs4 billion subsidy in 2014-15 season while payment of Rs10 differential amount is pending subject to disposal of millers' case against sugarcane cost in apex court.

Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) vice president Mahmood Nawaz Shah says that to handle the present situation, the government must ensure some credit line to growers along with some concessions to ensure their cost of keeping stocks.

He says that if millers want regulation of sugar, they could take it up with government. “Existing law governs sugarcane crushing and not sugar. Our crop of 2017-18 has been in field for 13 to 14 months and growers have already invested on crop which will be harvested in 2018-19 season,” he added.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1367290

‘BUMPER KINNOW CROP EXPECTED THIS SEASON’
The Express Tribune, November 1st, 2017.

SARGODHA: Citrus Research Institute Sargodha (CRIS) Director Muhammad Nawaz Maken has said Pakistani oranges (kinnow) export would be increased during the current season due to expected bumper crop and the best quality production.

The CRIS was making all-out efforts to improve the quality of citrus and special attention was also being paid to seedless kinnow production which had great demand across the globe, besides strengthening the national economy, he added.

He said that Rs800 per 40 kg kinnow rate had already been decided with consultation of all stakeholders, including factory owners and growers.

Nawaz Maken maintained that growers’ rights were also being protected and Rs200 per 40 kg rate of low quality kinnow had also been decided by the district administration. He pointed out that around 200 different varieties of citrus were available at the CRIS and new techniques were also being introduced among growers to enhance the production and quality.

He urged growers to consult with the institute for making their orchards the best and advised them to cultivate seedless kinnow due to its demand in the international market and potential to attract better rates.

He said the CRIS experts were also providing assistance to farmers and special seminars were also being held in this regard.

Earlier officials said the demand for Pakistani oranges has dropped in overseas markets as India, Turkey and Egypt have started producing seedless kinnows.

They said the demand for seedless kinnows remains high, especially in the West, but unfortunately Pakistan does not produce such varieties. They urged Pakistani farmers to start seedless kinnow production so that exporters could be able to penetrate European Union markets and introduce new varieties, which will fetch good prices in the existing markets.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1546287/1-bumper-kinnow-crop-expected-season/

FARMERS’ CONTRIBUTION TO IRRIGATION PROJECT TO BE COMMUTED INTO LOAN
Dawn, November 3rd, 2017

Manzoor Ali

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to convert over 13 per cent due contribution by farmers to the Gomal Zam Dam Command Area Development Project (GZD-CADP) into a long-term loan, officials say.

Officials in the agriculture department told Dawn that the farmers had to contribute about 13.71 percent or Rs462 million out of Rs3.37 billion cost of the irrigation project.

The USAID is contributing a major chunk of Rs2.2 billion of the project's cost, while the government's share amounts to Rs710.95 million.

The command area project is part of the Gomal Zam Dam and irrigation system.

Govt decides to make Rs462m payment to contractors by itself

The GZD is a multi-purpose gravity dam is South Waziristan Agency, which impounds the Gomal River at Kajori Kach where the river passes through a narrow gorge and is aimed at irrigation, flood controls and hydroelectric power generation.

The documents shared with Dawn show that the cultivable command area is 191,139 acres falling in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank districts.

Of this, 94,139 acres of land is located in Tank district, while 97,000 acres is in Dera and Kaluchi tehsils of Dera Ismail Khan district.

Officials familiar with the matter told Dawn that poverty was rife in the area and there was also no mechanism available for farmers to pay this sum to contractors, which was resulting into problems in the project's execution for the department.

“There were no mechanisms available for the contractors to collect the farmer's share,” the official said.

He said Chief Minister Pervez Khattak had visited the area last December to inaugurate work on the project during which farmers asked him to waive their share.

The official said after lengthy deliberations, the department had forwarded a summary to the chief minister to commute the farmer's share into a long-term loan, which was likely to be approved shortly.

The official said now the government would pay this amount to contractors and the farmers would have a grace period of 10 years to pay the loan.

The official said after the grace period, the farmers would start paying the amount in water charges and revenue costs.

The official said the crucial project was to be completed within 36 months but critical issues including PC-approval by the Economic Committee of National Economic Council which revised the original price tag by Rs900 million to Rs3.3 billion.

He said the revised date of project completion was Sept 2018.

"The project is now in a take-off stage," the official said, adding that most of the issues delaying the project have been resolved.

The official said that this project would greatly contribute towards the food security of the province and would also raise the economic prospects and life standards of the poor farmers of the area.

The official said that security of the teams working on the project was biggest issue faced by them due to volatility in the surrounding of the project. "Moving about in the area is a big challenge for us," the official said.

The details show under the project, 17 distributaries will be dug up to irrigate 191,139 acres of land extending 369 kilometers in length.

A single outlet would irrigate 446 acres of land, while water allowance stood at 5.2 cusecs per 1,000 acres.

The document says the department has received revenue 'chakbandis' of 249 outlets, command area maps of 237 outlets and also received owner lists of 146 outlets from the revenue department.

In addition to this tenders have been floated for the construction of 130 watercourses, awarded tenders for the construction of 55 and work has been initiated on another 55 watercourses.

GZD-CADP project director Rab Nawaz confirmed that the government had decided to commute the farmer's share in the project.

He said work on the project was likely to pick pace in few weeks as most of the issues causing delay had been addressed.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1368063/farmers-contribution-to-irrigation-project-to-be-commuted-into-loan

PAKISTAN HELPING INDIAN FARMERS INSTEAD OF ITS OWN: IMRAN
The Express Tribune, 2 November 2017

BAHAWALPUR: Continuing his tirade against the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan said on Thursday that governments in all countries help their farmers gain prosperity, but the Pakistani government is helping Indian farmers by importing their products.

“Unlike Pakistan, China has helped its farmers eliminate poverty,” said the PTI chief while addressing a public gathering at Dhorkot, near Uch Sharif around 70km away from Bahawalpur City. “In 30 years, China finished poverty of around 700 million people,” he added.

Khan said, “About Rs200 billion is being spent on Orange Train. If Rs60 to 70 billion is spent on farmers, prosperity will come within a year.”

Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif should compensate those farmers who had lost their jobs after the closure of sugar mills owned by the Sharif family on the orders of the Lahore High Court, he said, adding that personal money should be used for compensation and not the government’s money.

“The PTI is devising a policy for the well-being of farmers,” he said. If our farmers get what they deserve, our country will flourish instantly.”

He said there were two laws in the country – one for the poor and the other for the rich. “When a poor person commits a crime, he is brought to justice, but when a rich commits a crime, no action is taken,” he said.

“Nawaz Sharif embezzled Rs300 billion and shifted it to foreign countries,” he said. “Now he pretends to be innocent by asking why he was disqualified. He is trying to defame the country’s judiciary and armed forces.”

Khan said hefty loans had been taken during the last nine years which had piled up the debt. Nine years ago, a Pakistani was under the debt of Rs34,000, and that same had now climbed to Rs124,000.

“The money goes into the pockets of a limited number of politicians sitting at the top,” he said. “The government money is actually people’s money and when this money, which is supposed to be spent on the people, goes into the pockets of a small group of people, nations cannot survive.”

He said Sharif thought he enjoyed the support of the people which would bring him back to power. “But I challenge him to gather only enough people to cover half of the Parade Ground in Islamabad,” said Khan. “When I bring people to the Parade Ground, it will be overcrowded.”

In the coming general elections, care should be taken not to vote for those people whose assets were outside the country, Khan advised.

A large number of people gathered to attend the public gathering and exercised patience when Khan could not arrive on time as he had to take a road trip to Bahawalpur due to strong smog. Even though the event started six hours late, the crowd appeared energised.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1548156/1-govt-ignoring-farmers-investing-billions-bus-projects-says-imran/

December 2017

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 25th TO DECEMBER 31st 2017

EXPERTS WARN AGAINST USE OF CHEMICALS FOR RIPENING FRUITS
Dawn, December 26, 2017

Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The frequent/common use of chemicals for artificial ripening of fruits and vegetables in the country appears to be going unnoticed with health experts raising serious concerns about the safety of public health.

This also highlights a major slip caused by devolution that transferred the subject of health to provinces without any national policy for check and balance over the standards of food-related chemicals with the Ministry of Interior taking over the control of the leftover health departments in Islamabad.

“Currently, an imported powder has been introduced for ripening fruits. The powder is so strong that if it is placed under a stone the colour of the stone will be changed within three days. One should imagine what would be the effect of the powder on fruits,” President Fruit Mandi Traders Welfare Association Syed Siraj Agha told Dawn.

“Whenever we interfere in the process of nature we face the consequences. The world has been moving towards organic farming but we are still depending on artificial ways of ripening fruits and vegetables which is not only becoming a reason for osteoporosis but also affecting cells in the body through blood veins. Moreover, the health hazards are transferred to the next generations,” said Pims Vice Chancellor Dr Javed Akram.

The use of calcium carbide has been stopped in developed countries and even completely banned in India.

Recently, the government of Punjab decided to ban the use of calcium carbide but the decision could not be replicated in any other province or the federal capital.

MNA Tahira Aurangzeb raised the issue during the last session of the National Assembly and asked if there was any proposal under the consideration of the government to impose a ban on the ripening of fruits by using calcium carbide in Islamabad.

However, Minister of Interior Ahsan Iqbal, in a written reply, informed the house that there was no proposal to ban such fruits in the Islamabad capital territory.

Mr Agha acknowledged that fruits should be ripened naturally, adding: “Not only sunlight but moonlight also plays a vital role in ripening and giving colours to fruits.

However, in a country like Pakistan where a majority of people belong to the lower class it is not possible to allow ripening of fruits naturally. Usually, gardeners collect unripe fruits and after putting them in a basket place a small amount of calcium carbide on them which increases the temperature in the basket and helps ripen the fruits,” he said.

“As it takes two to three days for fruits to reach markets and then another two to three days to reach the consumers, the fruits get ripe. Gardeners cannot afford sending fully ripened fruit to the markets because it will rot while reaching the destinations. Moreover, retailers usually don't have chillers to store fruits," Mr Agha said.

He claimed that calcium carbide had been used for ages and was not harmful. However, he alleged that newly imported chemicals were very harmful.

"Now spray and injections are also being used to ripen fruits and change their colour. This is hazardous. I suggest that before taking such a decision the government should contact all the stakeholders," he said.

Dr Akram said the government was not taking the issue seriously.

"The use of calcium carbide has been banned in all developed countries and even in India. The Punjab Food Department has also decided to ban the use of calcium carbide. Other provinces should follow suit," he said.

"A fruit ripens in a month but if a chemical is used it not only ripens in a few days but also rots quickly. Chemicals affect the mental growth of children and also reach the blood and affect the body cells," he said.

Dr Akram said chemicals also stop metabolism of calcium in the body and cause osteoporosis in which bones become weak and are more likely to break, especially in women. Fruits are antioxidants but chemicals reduce the process of oxidation.

"Even hormones, such as oxytocin, are injected in fruits which are causing hormonal imbalances.

"The government should announce incentives for pure organic farming otherwise the issue will destroy our future generations," he warned.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1378832

FARMERS ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED ON PRIORITY BASIS
The Express Tribune,December 27h, 2017.

Issues of farmers are being resolved on a priority basis by the Punjab government, said Provincial Agriculture Minister Muhammad Naeem Khan Bhabha on Tuesday.

Presiding over a meeting regarding issues of sugarcane farmers, he said that the Punjab chief minister had assigned him the task of monitoring the sale process of sugar cane.

He directed Indus Sugar Mills General Manager Sanaullah Niazi to ensure payments of sugarcane to farmers at the rate of Rs180 per 40 kg. Bhabha also asked him to issue maximum permits to small farmers on a daily basis.

Niazi informed the minister that 500 to 600 permits were being issued to farmers by the mill on a daily basis. He said that the mill administration was purchasing sugar cane from small farmers and they were being paid.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1593625/2-farmers-issues-resolved-priority-basis/

CURRENT FISCAL WORST EVER FOR GROWERS, SAYS SCA
Dawn, December 28, 2017

HYDERABAD: The current financial year may be the worst ever for the country's agriculture sector in terms of growers' income.

This was observed in statement jointly signed by Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) president Kabool Khatian and general secretary Zahid Bhurgari after a meeting of the organisation held here on Wednesday.

The meeting described 2017-18 as the year of destruction for the agrarian economy and growers in Pakistan.

Expressing concern over the present state of the country's agriculture sector, they maintained that sugar factories in Sindh had been closed, which was destructive for the agriculture of Sindh. They urged the judiciary and government to take notice of the situation.

Pointing out that Sindh's agriculture economy involved 30 million growers, they feared that Sindh would face a crisis in view of sugar factories' intransigence. The crisis might engulf the entire economy of Sindh, they added.

They said sugar cane crop was standing over 700,000 acres with a total cost of Rs7 billion but was facing destruction on account of delay in its harvesting.

They claimed that not only growers, but also the labourers and haris were facing serious issues in the economic sense. They said that due to delay in sugar cane harvesting, sowing of wheat crop was also being affected and the situation witnessed enormity of crisis.

They demanded immediate commencement of crushing by sugar mills and warned millers against pushing cane growers economically against the wall.

They urged the chief justice of the Sindh High Court to ensure implementation of his Dec 21 order on sugar cane price notification and save economy of the agriculture sector from getting paralysed.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1379226

CANE GROWERS VOW TO BLOCK ROADS ACROSS PROVINCE TODAY
Dawn, December 28, 2017

MIRPURKHAS: Sugar cane growers will block roads across the province today (Thursday) to force the Sindh government to implement Sindh High Court's directives for mills to resume crushing and pay adequate price to farmers.

A joint meeting of Farmers Organisation Council (FOC) and Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) held here on Wednesday appealed to all growers to participate in the protest sit-in and blockade of main roads in large numbers.

The meeting presided over by FOC chairman Javed Ahmed Junejo and SARC chief advocate Ali Palh finalised the protest campaign against the mills and said that after the province-wide road blocks, a token hunger strike would be held on Jan 4 and 5 outside the Mirpurkhas press club, coinciding with Pakistan Peoples Party’s public meeting in order to draw attention of Asif Ali Zardari who would be addressing the gathering in Gama Stadium on Jan 5.

In the evening of Jan 5 a sit-in would be staged outside Al Abbas sugar mill whose owner was president of the Sindh chapter of Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA), said the meeting.

The meeting invited other growers’ organisations and farmers to join forces against the defiant mills and said that growers should set aside their political affiliations and unite for common cause to make the struggle more effective.

The organisations’ meeting held a day ago, which was also attended by office bearers and members of Sindh Abadgar Board and Sindh Chamber of Agriculture decided that growers would continue to harvest their crop and transport it to mills.

If the mills refused to receive the cane, they would park the loaded vehicles outside the mills so that the Sindh government was held responsible for the untoward situation should it take place, said the meeting.

The meeting was informed that tonnes of harvested cane was lying in the open after the crushing closure. Growers resolved that they would continue the protest campaign till they received official cane price of Rs182 per 40 kg.

Imamuddin Mahar, Mumtaz Marri, Mohammad Umer Bughio, Sarfaraz Junejo, Yar Mohammad Baloch, Zahid Noon and Maher Ali Mirza from Khairpur, Nawabshah, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Umerkot, Sanghar, Badin, Jamshoro and Tando Aallahyar attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, growers held a demonstration on Wednesday outside sugar mills of Mirpurkhas, Tharparkar, Al Abbas and Digri against abrupt closure of crushing and refusal to buy harvested cane from growers on court orders.

Sindh Abadgar Board leader Mohammad Umer Bughio, Mumtaz Marri and others told reporters outside the Mirpurkhas sugar mill that all the four mills had closed crushing and receiving cane, inflicting huge losses on growers.

They said that tractor-trolleys and trucks loaded with cane had been parked outside main gates of the mills after the mills banned their entry while drivers and growers had exchanged hot words with security guards posted at the gates.

They said that affected growers had held the protest demanding the government take notice of the situation which could spiral into a law and order issue.

They urged the judiciary to get its orders implemented as the mills were openly violating the SHC directives.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1379222/cane-growers-vow-to-block-roads-across-province-today

FARMERS' REPRESENTATIVES TERM 2017 BAD FOR AGRI SECTOR
Business Recorder, 28 December, 2017

Zahid Baig

LAHORE: Representatives of different farmer organizations have termed the year 2017 as 'not good for the agricultural sector' both in production and price of different crops making it a trade deficit for the growers.

Director Farmers Associate Pakistan (FAP) Dr Zafar Hayyat while talking to Business Recorder here on Wednesday said that major crops including cotton, rice, sugarcane or wheat could not perform in field or in the market except the rice which attracted some reasonable price.

Mentioning the sugarcane and cotton, he said sugarcane production was better because of increase in the area under cultivation, but the main dent caused to its grower was that it could not get handsome price and the negative and delaying tactics adopted by the sugar millers deprived the farmers of their due compensation. He termed that delay in announcing a crushing policy was the main reason of mess being seen in the sugarcane sector.

Talking about cotton, he said for the last two years there was a continuous production decline for this crop and the main reason was non-availability of quality seed. "Seed technology was standing right at that place where it was many years back. Though we have seed available in the name of latest technology but they are not making any impact on the production and these seeds are also not capable of fighting with different pests or diseases especially bollworms," Dr Zafar added.

He said current cotton seed available in the market have no resistance and proper gene expression. He warned if the government failed to take timely corrective measures, American Bollworm would be another threat to this crop like pink bollworm.

The FAP Director further said that in wheat though its production was increasing again due to increase in area; farmers were ditched by the middlemen and others because of absence of an effective official procurement policy.

Chairman of Agri Forum Pakistan, Muhammad Ibrahim Mughal termed the 2017 as the bleakest for agriculture. He said cotton is bread and butter for Punjab but its production is on constant decline. He said that cotton production had declined to only six million bales in 2017 against normal 11 million bales per annum. Thus it had caused a loss of Rs 250 billion as this crop was not only used in textile but it also created jobs, oilcakes for livestock and contribute to edible oil.

Regarding sugarcane, he said its production was in abundance but the fact is that sugar millers were selling sugar at Rs 50 per kilogram when they were buying sugarcane at Rs 180 per maund and the rate was same. Now they were buying it at the rate of 130 per maund besides delayed crushing season.

He said they should have sold sugar at Rs 35 per kilogram in line with their present cane procurement price. He claimed that the sugar millers would be posting a collective profit of Rs 70 to 75 billion.

Central Secretary Information of Kissan Board Pakistan (KBP), Haji Muhammad Ramzan said that he had not seen such a bad year in his 67 years of life. He said all the major crops had seen worst mismanagement at the part of the government. “Support prices were announced for sugarcane or other crops but due to lack of the government interested growers were not able to get it from the market,” he said.

He said cotton had started attracting some good price but the government crushed its growers by allowing its import from India. Similarly, he said sugar mills were all owned by the rulers which were the main buyer of sugarcane. Delay in the support price, lack of government writ in ensuring timely start of crushing season, buying on the government prescribed rates by the mills and delay in crushing season had brought the farmers at the brink of bankruptcy.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/28/13-page/690434-news.html

PROTESTER ATTEMPTS SUICIDE
Dawn, December 29th, 2017

MIRPURKHAS: A sugar cane grower, Abdul Majeed Qambrani, 55, sustained 40 per cent burns when he attempted self-immolation during a protest sit-in by growers at toll plaza here on Thursday.

He was rushed to the Mirpurkhas Civil Hospital where he was admitted for treatment. A resident of Mashooque Marri village of Hussain Bukhsh Marri taluka, Qambrani told reporters at the hospital that he could not bear the heavy loss feared to be caused by sugar millers’ denial of a reasonable rate of his produce. He said a halt to cane crushing by millers was bound to devastate him, like many other cane growers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1379401/protester-attempts-suicide

GROWERS HOLD PROTESTS IN SEVERAL TOWNS AGAINST CLOSURE OF SUGAR MILLS
Dawn, December 29th, 2017

HYDERABAD: Protests were held on Thursday in many parts Sindh over abrupt closure of sugar mills and non-implementation of sugar cane price notification of Rs182 per 40kg.

On the call of their representative organisations, agitating sugar cane growers held demonstrations and sit-ins at various places in the province to register their protest.

They kept the Hyderabad-Badin road blocked for three hours. A mock funeral of sugar cane crop was also staged in Hyderabad. Office-bearers of the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad and Sindh Chamber of Agriculture led the protest.

Speaking to the protesters, the leaders said that despite a Sindh High Court order, sugar mills were not ready to pay even Rs172 per 40kg which was a contempt of court and they would move the SHC in this regard. They alleged that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was siding with the sugar mills instead of its voters.

They deplored that the Sindh government did not take any notice of the closure of the sugar mills, therefore the judiciary should take a suo motu notice of the situation to make the mills to pay Rs172/40kg to growers and resume crushing.

They observed that it was a conspiracy to destroy agriculture in Sindh because a particular lobby wanted its monopoly over the farm sector. In the next year, sugar cane cultivation would witness a serious decline and Sindh would face a crisis of sugar production which would be more severe than rice and wheat crops, they warned.

In Mirpurkhas, several hundered cane growers staged a sit-in at the Toll Plaza on the Hyderabad-Mirpurkhas road and blocked it with the help of tractors trolleys and other vehicles in protest against sugar mills closure.

Leaders and members of the Farmers' Organisation Council (FOC) Sindh and Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) also joined the protest sit-in. Passengers travelling between Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad faced great hardships.

Hundreds of sugar cane growers belonging to Kot Ghulam Muhammad town and taluka blocked the main intersection of the town suspending the flow of traffic between the town and other cities including Mirpurkhas and Samaro.

Carrying banners and placards, they created hurdles to block the main chowk for three hours.

In Nawabshah, sugar cane growers belonging to Shaheed Benazirabad district blocked the Mehran Highway and main railway track near Bandhi against the sugar mills managements. They observed the sit-in for an hour, carrying sugar cane in their hands. Growers and farmers in Badin also staged a demonstration and sit-in on the Badin-Hyderabad bypass road near Matli town against the Sindh government and sugar millers.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1379402/growers-hold-protests-in-several-towns-against-closure-of-sugar-mills

SHAHBAZ WARNS MILLERS AGAINST CUT IN WEIGHT OF SUGARCANE

Business Recorder, 30 December 2017

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif has said that case will be registered against the sugar mills owner and he will be arrested if any complaint is received about deduction in the weight of sugarcane.

He was presiding over a meeting from Madina Munawara through the video link to consider the recommendations and proposals of the special committee set up to solve the problems of sugarcane farmers. It also reviewed the steps taken to provide relief to the sugarcane farmers.

Addressing the meeting, Shahbaz said that sustained action should be continued against the elements that have set up illegal weighbridges and such persons should also be brought to justice. Concerned provincial ministers as well as the administrative secretaries should remain available in the field and they should continuously conduct field visits to ensure timely solution of problems of sugarcane farmers and the results of these visits should be communicated to me as well, he added.

He said that no leniency will be shown to the sugar mills owners going against the interests of the farming community. The management of sugar mills should realize that protection of interests of the farmers will be ensured at every cost and no one will be allowed to play havoc with the sugarcane farmers.

Shahbaz categorically directed that indiscriminate action should be initiated against the sugar mills involved in the practice of underweight procurement of sugarcane and added that if his own mill is found doing the same, then it should also be prosecuted upon without any discrimination. “All my sympathies are with the farmers and protection of their interests is my duty which I am committed to fulfill,” he added.

He reiterated that the elements involved in incurring financial losses to the farmers will not be tolerated and no one will be allowed to make a dacoity with the farmers. The reward of hard work of sugarcane farmers will not be allowed to be wasted, he added.

Provincial Ministers Sheikh Alauddin, Dr Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Dr Farrukh Javed, Naeem Akhtar Bhabha, Chief Secretary, farmers’ representatives namely Sarfraz Khan, Khalid Khokhar and Anayat Azhar, President Sugar Mills Association Javed Kiyani and others attended the meeting from Model Town through the video link. Provincial Minister Bilal Yasin and Secretary Food participated from Jhang and Faisalabad respectively; while Ahsan Latif of Sugar Mills Association attended the meeting from Khushab through the video link.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/30/21-page/690886-news.html

UAF, MINISTRY VOW TO OBSERVE BIOSAFETY, SANITARY MEASURES
Business Recorder, 31 December 2017

FAISALABAD: Ministry of National Food Security and Research, and University of Agriculture Faisalabad in order to strictly observe the biosafety, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, vowed to further strengthen the coordination to arrest the growing pests and insect pathogens in the imported agriculture items causing billion of rupees loss to the national exchequer and posing numerous challenges to human, plants and livestock health, and depleting the environment.

The pledge was made during a three-member high ranking committee visit to the varsity for the assessment of technical capacity of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. The committee which was constituted by the National Biosafety Committee (NBC), Ministry of National Food Security and Research to examine the present capacity and indicate the loopholes in the befitting implementation of biosafety protocols at an organizational level. Dr Syed Waseem-ul-Hassan Food Security Commissioner and DG Plant Protection heading the committee was flanked by Dr Syed M Saqlain Naqvi, Vice Chancellor, Bacha Khan University Charsadda, Dr Tayyab Husnain Director Centre for Excellence in Molecular Biology, Lahore and Assistant Director Plant Protection Allah Dita Abid.

The committee called on UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Muhammad Iqbal Zafar and held meeting with Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC). The committee also paid visit to Centre for Advanced Studies in Agriculture and Food Security (CAS-AFS) and participated in a briefing on biosafety and one-health program. Director CAS-AFS Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan briefed the committee about biosafety measures in 12 research labs and other components of his Centre.

Addressing the meeting Food Security Commissioner and DG Plant Protection Dr Syed Waseem-ul-Hassan said that Pakistan as a responsible country is signatory among the 198 countries of the world regarding strict compliance of the International Plant Protection Convention.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/31/5-page/690984-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 18th TO DECEMBER 24th 2017
GROWERS RULE OUT COMPROMISE ON CANE PRICE
Dawn, December 18, 2017

HYDERABAD: Sugar cane growers on Sunday said that their protest on Saturday (Dec 23) would be held as per the plan and they would hold no negotiations with the government over the issue of cane price unless it assured them that the talks would be meaningful.

The sugar cane growers' joint action committee had earlier announced a "big protest" on Dec 23 against government's failure to implement its notification fixing the minimum cane procurement price at Rs182/40kg. Most sugar mills have refused to buy cane at the official price or they are offering a much lower price in violation of the notification.

"We will not agree with government for talks unless it agrees to go for implementation of the notification," said Mahmood Nawaz Shah, the vice president of Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB). "It's a decision taken by the action committee today," he added.

The meeting was held in the office of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA). It was attended by SCA leaders Kabool Kathian, Nabi Bux Sathio and Zahid Bhurgari; and Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) president Nawab Zubair Talpur, besides Nawaz Shah.

The committee leaders vowed to hold the Dec 23 protest sit-in at Hatri bypass, pointing out that millers were offering as low as Rs130/40kg to growers which was unacceptable.

Mr Kathian told journalists at the briefing that the sit-in would continue until the notification was implemented.

The growers' leaders had called on Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in Karachi on Friday on latter's invitation to sort out the cane price issue. The meeting remained inconclusive as, according to Nawaz Shah and Zahid Bhurgari, the CM sought two days' time to come up with a proposal to bring an end to the impasse.

Ruling out any compromise on the fixed rate, Mr Khatian said that in fact, growers of small- and medium-size landholdings were suffering badly now as half of December had already passed off.

He observed that present situation had so far benefited sugar mills' owners in all respects. "Millers have been given subsidy both by the federal and provincial governments at the rate of Rs10.70/kg and Rs9.30/kg, respectively, while belated crushing season was going to benefit them again because they would certainly be making more sucrose recovery than what they achieved in mid-November.

Mr Sathio said that Sindh government had not shown any seriousness in implementation of its own notification. “Through the Dec 15 meeting, the government tried to engage us so that we should postpone our Dec 23 sit-in,” he said.

Mr Bhurgari said that when the government had already notified the rate, there was no reason left for millers to deny the rate.

During the Sunday meeting, Nawaz Shah said“Millers tell us that they are producing sugar at the ex-mill rate of Rs45 to Rs47 per kg; therefore, they will pay only Rs130 to Rs140 per 40kg to growers for their produce,” said a Sindh government source.

Nawab Zubair Talpur told reporters that the provincial government was protecting millers’ interests at the cost of farmers’. He said the government didn’t have the right to rule over the province if it was unable to enforce its writ.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1377230

FARMERS KEEN TO ADOPT NEW SEED TECHNOLOGY, BUT CONCERNS PERSIST
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, December 18th, 2017

Amjad Mahmood

PAKISTAN, with a Rs220 billion seed market potential, is attracting multinational and local seed companies. At present, more than 750 private seed companies are officially registered, though only half of them are functional.

Both local and foreign experts agree that the farming community is keen to adopt new technology and improved seed varieties, but various technical and administrative obstacles exist. The overall availability of quality seed has only been able to meet around 20pc of the total demand for the last 15 years.

Lance Wang, vice-president of Monsanto’s Asean and Pakistan chapter, is impressed by the willingness of the local farming community to embrace new technology, but regrets the slower rate of mechanisation of the agriculture sector.

Jamshed Iqbal Cheema, president of the Pakistan Agriculture Scientists Association, endorses this view. He says that social approval for new technology exists in Pakistan, unlike in China, India and some other countries.

The large market potential is, however, arousing controversies among stakeholders, thus becoming a major challenge for the sector. Besides health risks associated with genetically modified (GM) seeds, there are concerns among farmers that the new technology monopolises the local market, leading to overcharging.

Mr Cheema believes that the high number of seed companies is the biggest impediment to the development of the seed market. He advocates promoting only those companies which have proper facilities for research, storage and marketing, have breeding programmes and can carry out farmer awareness campaigns.

“Pakistan is among the top 10 agricultural producers of many crops, including cotton, wheat, sugarcane, rice, but when it comes to seed production we are not even mentioned in the top 30 or 40 countries,” he regrets.

Referring to overpricing, Mr Wang says Monsanto is not the only provider of technology in the market. He says farmers are smart, no matter they are in Vietnam where they own small pieces of land or in Pakistan where they own 10 hectares on average.

And they make best decisions in an open market, he believes. “If they don’t see the value of the thing they’re paying for, they won’t go for it. Each year they’ll have the chance to decide which seed and other products to choose for plantation.”

He claims that on an index of 100, farmers will take 78pc share of the benefits in the crop technology trade.

A former Punjab agriculture minister, who did not wish to be named, seconded the view that farmers would be the biggest beneficiary of the new technology. But he urged caution before opting for biotechnology, terming it a double-edged sword.

“Contrary to the impression of being pest-free, BT cotton failed in India due to pink bollworm attack, despite the fact that the seed used there was of second generation compared to the first-generation variety being used here,” he says.

He also questions the high price demanded by multinationals for the provision of the BT seed, and advocates striking a better deal to introduce third-generation BT seed.

Mr Cheema claims that multinational companies are seeking at least five times the actual cost of the technology. He also says that the farmers should pay one-time price only while purchasing a seed variety, not for each crop as demanded by some companies.

Some stakeholders also object to introducing the BT seed prepared in a foreign climate, fearing it may not produce good results in the local atmosphere.

Mr Wang addresses these concerns by saying that before government trials companies conduct their own tests to ensure that the technology works in the local environs. “For seed, we take extra care and conduct multiple tests, as seed is a living organism which may work in the United States but not in Pakistan because of a difference in temperature, fungus, disease, water and environs.”

Terming health concerns about GM foods a “propaganda”, he says some people wish there should be no biotechnology on this planet.

“The biotechnology is in the market for over 20 years. These products directly or indirectly go to food chains and billions of people have been consuming these foods. There is not a single study to suggest that anything went wrong due to consuming bio-products,” he says.

He argues that there has been no product or technology as fiercely regulated by the government in sthe United States as biotechnology. From environment to drug to agriculture, authorities check if the products have any direct or indirect adverse effects on environment, farm, animal or human health.

Similarly, in Europe and other counties there is a robust regulatory system in place to ensure that the biotechnology is safe.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1377174

SUGAR CANE FARMERS TO BLOCK NATIONAL HIGHWAY ON DEC 23
The Express Tribune, 18 December, 2017

Organisations representing farmers that are involved in an ongoing conflict with the Sindh government and the sugar mills have shut the door on further negotiations over the price of sugar cane. The announcement was made on Sunday after several rounds of meetings since September, including one chaired by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah in Karachi on December 15, among the three stakeholders remained inconclusive.

"On December 23 thousands of farmers will stage a sit-in on the National Highway near the bypass [in Hyderabad]. And we will not leave the place until our demand is accepted," declared Qabool Muhammad Khatian, president of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA), at a press conference at SCA's office in Hyderabad on Sunday. Before the press conference, the Joint Sugarcane Growers Action Committee, comprising the SCA, Sindh Abadgar Board, Sindh Abadgar Ittehad and Sindh Agriculture and Research Council, held a meeting.

The Sindh government belatedly issued a notification on December 5 – under Sindh Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950, the government has to notify rates by October every year – fixing the price of sugar cane at Rs182 per 40 kilogrammes. However, farmers complain that in blatant violation of the officially fixed price, the mills in Sindh are paying between Rs130 and Rs140 rate.

The farmers' protests, which started in October, resumed with heightened fury after the first week of December and last week hundreds of farmers were baton charged and tear gassed on the way to Bilawal House in Karachi.

"We will not hold another meeting with the government. If the Rs182 notification is not enforced by December 22, we will stage an indefinite protest from the next day," Khatian warned.

Sindh Abadgar Board Vice-President Mehmood Nawaz Shah said the farmers felt compelled to take to protests because of the government and Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA). He claimed that the country's sugar production never before reached the seven million ton mark nor had the government ever paid a Rs20 billion subsidy to the sugar mills in advance.

"The federal and Sindh governments have paid Rs20 billion as export subsidy to the mills but they are still begrudging the Rs182 price for the crop," Nawaz said, arguing that the alleged defiance on the part of the mills violated not only the government's notification but also the 1950 Act. "PSMA has trampled on the notification."

Sindh Abadgar Ittehad's Nawaz Zubair Talpur said the sit-in will be the historically biggest farmers' protest in Sindh. He complained that delay in the cane harvest is delaying the wheat sowing.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1586450/1-sugar-cane-farmers-block-national-highway-dec-23/

ISSUE OF SUGARCANE PRICE ECHOES IN NA
Business Recorder, 20, December, 2017

ISLAMABAD: The issue of farmers not getting price for sugarcane as fixed by Sindh and Punjab governments echoed again in National Assembly on Tuesday as members from both opposition and treasury benches urged the government to look into it on a priority basis.

Speaking on the floor of the House, Leader of Opposition Khursheed Shah said the federal and provincial governments had agreed to give subsidy to sugar mills owners as 50:50 while Sindh government is ready to provide its share but the federal government is not honouring its commitment.

He said that it was decided to release Rs 8.6 billion as a subsidy for the sugarcane farmers, but it is yet to be materialized.

Shah said that Pakistan is an agro-based country but the farmers are not getting fair price for their produce. He urged the government to resolve the issue at the earliest.

Independent member Jamshed Dasti also highlighted that sugar mills owners are not purchasing the sugarcane from farmers as the people linked to the sugar mafia are sitting in the government.

He said the touts of sugar mills owners have been giving Rs140 per 40kg to farmers for the sugarcane against the provincial government's fixed price of Rs180.

PML-N member Rana Muhammad Hayat complained that he has been raising the issue for the last many days but it is falling on the deaf ears.

He urged the government to arrest the sugar mills owners who have not been giving the fixed price to farmers for sugarcane.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf member Lal Chand Malhi said the Sindh government has been using force against the farmers who have been protesting for not getting the fixed price for sugarcane.

He threatened if the issue is not resolved, the farmers in Sindh will protest again on December 23 by blocking the roads.

Responding to all these points, Minister for National Food Security and Research Sikandar Hayat Bosan said the issue is related to Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industries and Production and the provincial governments.

The minister proposed that a committee comprising all the stakeholders should be constituted to resolve the issue.

Minister for Commerce and Textile Pervaiz Malik admitted that sugarcane farmers are not getting the fixed price for their produce, but said that role of his ministry to resolve the issue is limited.

Members from opposition parties also staged a walkout from the House in protest against the government for not tabling FATA Reforms Bill for vote.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, however, assured the opposition members that it is likely that the issue of FATA reforms would be resolved on Wednesday (today)

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/20/3-page/688683-news.html

LHC ORDERS CASES AGAINST MILLS NOT STARTING CRUSHING TOMORROW
Dawn, December 21st, 2017

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Wednesday ordered the Punjab cane commissioner to lodge cases against sugar mills not starting crushing till Dec 22 (tomorrow).

Justice Sajid Mahmood Sethi was hearing a petition filed by Jamaat-i-Islami-Punjab Emir Maqsood Ahmad, challenging closure of sugar mills' production during the peak crushing season.

Following an earlier notice, Cane Commissioner Mr Sanaullah appeared before the court and stated that the mills' owners had not started crushing despite show-cause notices served on them.

Justice Sethi directed the commissioner to proceed against the mills who did not start crushing by Dec 22 and submit a report in the court.

The petitioner had submitted that sugar mills were bound to start crushing by October but they had not been following the rules for the last two years.

He stated that the delay in start of crushing had been causing heavy losses to both the farmers and the consumers. He said the farmers' losses in South Punjab region were well over Rs40 billion. He asked the court to order the authorities to take action against the sugar mills flouting rules.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1377915

ZEHRI HOPES TO EARN ECONOMIC BENEFIT FROM AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK
Dawn, December 21st, 2017

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Nawab Sanaullah Khan Zehri has said his government is committed to eradicating poverty and unemployment and bringing about development by utilising the provincial resources.

Promotion of agriculture and livestock will not only help reduce unemployment but would also strengthen the provincial economy, he said during a visit to the Balochistan Agriculture College on Wednesday.

The government was utilising the resources for the development of agriculture, fisheries and livestock sectors, he said, adding that the establishment of agriculture institutes would help in alleviating the shortage of researchers and experts as well.

The chief minister also visited the under-construction parts of the college. During a briefing by senior faculty members, he was told that Rs4.5 billion was being spent on the upgradation of various blocks of the college. Students on completion would be able to study agricultural engineering, livestock, environment, and social sciences at the college which would soon be given the status of a university, they said.

Expressing satisfaction over the development process, Nawab Zehri vowed not to compromise on it, as the priority of the government was education and health.

The government had established colleges in remote districts of Balochistan, he pointed out. He expressed the hope that the province would reap handsome dividends by putting the agriculture and livestock sectors on modern lines.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1377933

PAKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN TO ENHANCE AGRI-COOPERATION
The Express Tribune, December 21st, 2017.

Pakistan and Uzbekistan agreed on Wednesday to enhance bilateral cooperation and share expertise in the fields of agriculture and livestock for their development in both the countries.

The understanding was reached in a meeting between Uzbekistan Ambassador to Pakistan Furkat A Sidikov and Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (Parc) Chairman Yousuf Zafar.

The ambassador also visited the National Agricultural Research Centre (Narc) and discussed various avenues of mutual cooperation for the development of agriculture sectors of both the countries.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed areas of mutual interests including agriculture, agro-machinery manufacturing, food processing, dry fruits, fresh fruits, cotton, milk and its by-products and leather.

Speaking on the occasion, Parc Chairman Yusuf Zafar informed the Uzbek ambassador of the tremendous opportunities for mutual cooperation in the above-mentioned areas. He also highlighted the importance of these sub-sectors of agriculture for the country’s economy.

“Pakistan, being an agro-based economy, relies heavily on agriculture for both employment and growth,” Zafar said, adding 70% of gross domestic product (GDP) depends on the agricultural sector while 45% of the country’s labour force came from the agriculture sector.

Zafar expressed keen interest in the agriculture machinery manufacturing capacity of Uzbekistan and stressed the need for initiating joint ventures for machinery manufacturing in Pakistan for a greater and cheaper mechanisation of farm practices.

He said Pakistan was struggling to increase per-acre yield and required advanced agricultural equipment while Uzbekistan was far ahead in producing technologically advanced equipment.

Agricultural experts believe Uzbekistan is producing agriculture machinery of a far better quality than the machinery produced in India and China, Zafar said, adding that mechanised cultivation can double the yield in Pakistan.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1589127/2-pakistan-uzbekistan-enhance-agri-cooperation/

PQD'S NEW CONDITIONS TO HIT IMPORT OF HYBRID SEEDS
Business Recorder, 21 December, 2017
Sohail Sarfraz

ISLAMABAD: The smooth supply of high performance imported hybrid seeds for various crops to local farmers would adversely be affected due to new conditions imposed by Plant Quarantine Department on imported seeds.

Experts told Business Recorder here on Wednesday that the high performance imported hybrid seeds for various crops, including rice, maize, potato and vegetables have played a significant role in enhancing yields over the past decade and a half, leading to improved farmer profitability and secured supply of produce to downstream industry.

The Plant Quarantine Department has recently included new requirements in its import permit conditions which require lab and field tests for conformance. These are expected to critically impact timely import of seed and impede R&D efforts of companies responsible for the provision of high performance hybrids to local farmers.

According to experts, these conditions were imposed without any prior consultation with relevant stakeholders and are not qualified through either a World Trade Organization (WTO) notification or clear scientific reasoning. Under the current regulatory regime all types of seed are evaluated through the National Uniformity and Yield Trials (NYUT) where a special emphasis is given on disease evaluation in specialized institutes. These new conditions are viewed as an unnecessary burden on the regulatory process with far reaching impact on seed imports.

The high performance imported hybrid seeds have played a significant role in enhancing yields, leading to improved profitability for farmers and secured supply of produce to downstream industry, they added.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/21/21-page/689057-news.html

CHIEF MINISTER ASSURES JUSTICE FOR FARMERS
The Express Tribune, December 22nd, 2017.

Action will be taken against mill owners if they are found involved in changing the price or weight of the sugarcane. The farmers have sown the crop with hard work and this will not be allowed to be wasted. Injustice will not be done with sugarcane farmers at any cost.

This was said by Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif during a meeting with the delegation of Kissan Ittehad in Lahore on Thursday. He said the government protected the interests of the farmers in the past and the same would be done in future as well.

"I will go to every extent to secure stakes of the farmers. Sale of sugarcane at the rate of Rs180 per maund will be ensured at all costs and the complaint of lessening of sugarcane weight will not be tolerated," he warned.

The sugar mills will be bound to give original receipt to the farmers and the mills giving temporary receipt will be prosecuted, the chief minister pointed out.

On the occasion, Shehbaz Sharif constituted a committee to implement the decisions. He said that the committee will review implementation status of the decisions.

"No leniency will be shown with sugar mills owners in case of any injustice with farmers. Even if a complaint is raised against any of my relatives, strict action will be taken and facilities will be provided to farmers to receive their payments from the mills."

He said commissioners, deputy commissioners and police officers will be bound to implement decisions taken for the protection of the interests of the farmers. The CM added action will be taken against concerned administrative and police officers in case of a violation. He directed the agriculture, industry and health department ministers and secretaries to personally visit and inspect the on-ground situation and present their reports.

He said a package worth billion of rupees had been provided to provide a relief to the farmers and fertilizer subsidy was also given. Along with the federal government, the Punjab government is also giving a subsidy on fertilizers.

The project of installing 105 tube wells in Lahore was completed in collaboration with JICA for providing clean drinking water to the masses.

While speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said the project had been completed in 18 months with a cost of Rs2.30 billion.

He added, "We are thankful to Government of Japan for extending cooperation."

The CM said during the last nine years, the provincial government gave priority to the issue of providing clean drinking water to the people along with the provision of health, education and other civic amenities.

"Clean drinking water is the basic right of every citizen and efforts were carried out to give this right to them," he said.

Shehbaz Sharif said a similar clean drinking water supply scheme had been completed with a cost of Rs13 billion in Faisalabad, while another scheme worth Rs14 billion will be launched soon.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1589849/1-chief-minister-assures-justice-farmers/

FARMERS TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH NATIONAL HIGHWAY BLOCKAGE
The Express Tribune, 22 December, 2017

As the deadline to implement the official price of sugar cane comes to an end, farmers have threatened to block the National Highway on December 23 for an indefinite sit-in.

At a press conference at the Hyderabad Press Club on Thursday, representatives of the Joint Sugar cane Growers Action Committee announced that they will keep the highway, which connects Karachi with the rest of the country, blocked until their demand is met.

The committee consists of the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), Chamber of Agriculture, Abadgar Ittehad and Agriculture and Research Council. The farmers from across Sindh will gather in Hyderabad for the protest, said SAB President Abdul Majeed Nizamani.

The government, under the Sindh Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950, fixed the rate at Rs182 per 40 kilogrammes (kg) but the farmers complain that the sugar mills, in violation of the notified rates, are paying them between Rs120 to Rs140 per 40 kg. The representatives claim that this exploitation is enabled because of the involvement of Pakistan Peoples Party Co-Chairperson Asif Ali Zardari.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1590050/1-farmers-follow-national-highway-blockage/

GROWERS CALL OFF PROTEST AFTER SHC'S INTERIM ORDER
Dawn, 23 December, 2017

HYDERABAD: Growers of Sindh have called off the protest they had scheduled for Dec 23 (Saturday) against government's failure to implement its notification fixing the sugar cane procurement price at Rs182 per 40kg for the season 2017-18.

The decision to call off the protest was announced by the joint sugar cane action committee, having representation of various organisations of growers, in the office of the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) on Friday evening.

The committee held its emergency session earlier in the day after the Sindh High Court in Karachi passed an order in favour of the growers' organisations that had moved court over the matter.

The emergency session was attended by SCA president Kabool Mohammad Khatiyan and general secretary Zahid Bhurgari; Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) president Abdul Majeed Nizamani and senior vice president Mehmood Nawaz Shah; Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) president Nawab Zubair Talpur and other leaders.

Kabool Khatian told reporters here after the session that the SHC allowed sugar millers to procure the cane crop at the rate of Rs172/40kg but ordered them to deposit Rs10/40kg with the court Nazir as security. He said that growers would become party to this case and the three organisations of growers would engage their separate counsel to plead the case in court.

Majeed Nizamani and Nawab Talpur, stating that growers respected the court order, announced that the protest planned for Saturday (today) was being called off.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1378226/growers-call-off-protest-after-shcs-interim-order

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 11th TO DECEMBER 17th 2017
ENTREPRENEURS WILL BE KEY PLAYERS IN CORPORATE FARMING
Dawn, The Business and Finance Weekly, December 11th, 2017

Jawaid Bokhari

LATE last month, the federal government allowed export of 1.5m tonnes of sugar with a subsidy of Rs10.7 per kilogram. But the Pakistan Sugar Mills Association was not happy because it considered the subsidy inadequate amid falling international sugar prices.

In every cane crushing season, one witnesses a tug of war between farmers and mill owners over the price of cane. At least in the case of Sindh, the announcement of an “agreed” official price is usually delayed by the provincial government. This works in favour of mill owners and to the disadvantage of growers in the province.

Mill owners want either corresponding support for sugar price as given for cane or a free hand for market forces to set prices of the two commodities on the basis of demand and supply.

The issue remains unresolved despite the importance cane economics holds for the country. Pakistan is among the world’s top 10 producers of cane, and the sugar industry is the country’s second largest after textiles.

Unlike Pakistan, the major cane-producing countries have upgraded and diversified production to a level that sugar has turned into a cheap by-product. The country is moving in this direction at a snail’s pace. Currently the industry’s notable by-products are: molasses, ethanol, bagasse and press-mud. But not all the mills are producing the value-added ethanol.

There is a huge potential for producing a wide of range of ancillary products, a few of which may be financially viable in the currently growing domestic market. Diversifying products, as some developing countries have already done, can reduce the cost of sugar production and make it globally competitive. It is also about time policymakers gave incentives to entrepreneurs undertaking pioneering efforts.

The key challenge facing the commodity-producing sectors is low productivity, as evident from a wide range of subsidies on inputs, on credit for crop production and on processed finished products for exports. The crutches can only be removed by improving per-acre crop yield and industrial productivity to international levels.

Much of the country’s industrial capacity — including textiles, sugar and leather goods — is fed on primary produce such as cotton, cane and raw hides or skins, with substantial supplies coming from uneconomic small farming units and dispersed family holdings of livestock or least productive big farms still managed under crop-sharing arrangement between the rural gentry and the tiller-tenants.

The low productivity in agriculture is a major drag in efforts to improve industrial productivity, though a stable exchange rate for the past two to three years has helped the manufacturing sector to keep the cost of imported intermediate goods largely stable.

In a way, agricultural productivity holds the key to building an efficient, competitive and subsidy-free industrial economy and therefore deserves to be at the centre of the country's development strategy.

An article published in The Economist on Oct 14 points out that restructuring agriculture is "one crucial factor that has been relatively underplayed" in economic literature on East Asian miracle.

Japan, followed by four original 'Asian Tigers' — that is Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan — and China redistributed farmlands which served a catalyst for "sustained bounded growth for decades". Most studies attribute the success story to market-friendly policies and their resulting outcome.

In sharp contrast, South-East Asia — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines — did not do so well for want of inclusive agricultural growth that "prefigured today's thriving democracies".

Pakistan's own experience of moderate cut in ceilings of landholdings, both during military and civilian rules, did not spur enough growth in farm productivity and nor did it promote inclusive agriculture that could make a significant, long-lasting difference.

These reforms were executed by a rural administration under the sway of the landed gentry and in the absence of any social force in the countryside to back them.

Even Sindh's scheme for distributing state lands to landless peasants did not succeed due to lack of financial and other required support to bring allotted piece of land under cultivation. Many sold their holdings to affluent landlords. Resumed holdings earmarked for leasing to landless were instead leased out by the Zia regime to affluent farmers.

In his recent book How Asia Works, Joe Studwell says farm yields often stagnate as population grows, making land scarce. Landlords jack up rents and lend at extortionate rates. That leaves poor tenant farmers mired in debts, with no money to invest.

In Pakistan, about half of the cost of farm inputs is shared between the tenant and landlord under the existing crop-sharing arrangement — usually on a fifty-fifty basis — at the time of harvest when crop prices are low and tenants burdened with debt are in dire need of money.

However, mechanisation of farms is introducing wage-labour or contract system which is far more efficient in increasing productivity.

The issue on land redistribution has once again surfaced at the international level in Banyan's column in The Economist which considers grant of 'land to the tiller' as of 'crucial importance of fair farming to Asian prosperity'.

In Pakistan, farm productivity also suffers because of a huge number of small and uneconomic holdings that offer enormous scope for consolidation of fragmented pieces of fertile land into large cooperatives or corporate farming run on economies of scale. The equity investment could come in the shape of these mini-landholdings.

According to the Agricultural Census of 2000, 61pc of the private holdings were then under five acres each and 94pc were in the category of less than 25 acres. The situation appears to be no different today.

Small farmers are the most suitable candidates for corporate and cooperative farming, as they are highly vulnerable to the vagaries of climate and exogenous shocks. They are quite often hit by a bad crop, adverse economic/farm policies and slip back to below the poverty line, says an agricultural expert.

The key players in corporate/cooperative farming will be entrepreneurs. The big question is: will they rise to the occasion to address the daunting challenge?

https://www.dawn.com/news/1375857

AS SINDH CM SPEAKS OF LABOUR RIGHTS, POLICE CRACK DOWN ON FARMERS
The Express Tribune, 12 December, 2017

A number of demonstrators fell unconscious due to the police action, while many were injured.

The protest came as a reaction to the sugar cane price of Rs182 per 40 kilogramme fixed by the Sindh government.

Following the announcement for protest, farmers had gathered around Boat Basin to march towards Bilawal House. Traffic on the road leading from Boat Basin to Bilawal House was blocked, as all routes leading to the house of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairperson were barricaded by the police.

The demonstrators, who included a number of women and children, chanted slogans against the provincial government and sugar mill owners. They demanded that the government ensures that the official prices set for the sugar cane crop be adhered to and the reopening of shut down sugar mills across the province.

The protest continued for half-an-hour, after which Cane Commissioner Agha Zuhair arrived to negotiate with the farmers. He proposed that a two-member team representing the protesters should join him to discuss the issue with other government officials, but his idea was shot down by the farmers, who then began their march towards Bilawal House.

Policemen stationed along the route began to fire teargas shells and douse the protesters with water from a water cannon. The firing resulted in many people passing out. Law enforcers took 50 protesters into custody and shifted them to various nearby police stations.

The few protesters that were able to make it to Bilawal Chowrangi and its adjacent lanes were also taken into custody.

According to the Clifton SP, 49 people who tried to enter the ‘red zone’ were taken into custody. However, Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) President advocate Ali Palh and Javed Junejo, who organised the protest, said that around 90 of their companions were taken into custody. “Our protest was peaceful and justified," said Ali. "We wanted to protest at Bilawal House for our rights," he said.

The protesting farmers accused the Sindh government of colluding with sugar mill owners. "The government of Sindh cannot feel the plight of the poor farmers," said the protesters, warning that demonstrations would continue if their sugar cane crop price was not accepted.

Dr Shakil Palh, Ali's brother, told The Express Tribune that his brother is among 80 persons who have been arrested. "The police have locked them up at the Clifton police station while 30 other people are missing, including a seven-year-old child and a woman."

According to Dr Shakil, the police resorted to baton charge and teargas shelling as the protesters reached Boat Basin on the way to Bilawal House. Besides Ali, growers' representatives such as Wali Muhammad Thebo, Rizwan Lashari and Ali Nawaz Chohan were also arrested.

"We wanted to hold a peaceful protest and to convey our demands and complaints to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. But, the police used force and denied us from exercising our democratic right," he claimed. He said if his brother and the other detained people were not released, the protesters will march towards Chief Minister House from the press club.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture leader Nabi Bux Sathio condemned the police action and arrest of the farmers. "A democratic government [would] never opt to baton charge or tear gas peaceful protesters. They always give patient hearing to their legal and due demands."

Ali also represents the Sindh Human Rights Defenders organisation. His arrest drew condemnation from civil society activists. "The corrupt rulers in Sindh are responsible for economic murder of the farmers," alleged Grand Democratic Alliance General Secretary Ayaz Palijo who condemned the police action. He demanded that the police officers and other people who ordered them to beat up the peaceful protesters should be booked in an FIR.

The SARC called the protest over the prevailing sugar cane price controversy. The farmers have been demanding a Rs185 per 40kg rate for their crop. However, the government recently notified a Rs182 price. But, the farmers complain that in violation of the notification the sugar mills are paying them between Rs130 and Rs140. They hold PPP Co-Chairperson Asif Ali Zardari for the alleged exploitation of the farmers by the mills.

According to the Sindh Sugar Factories Control Act, 1950, the Sindh government is obligated to notify the start of the cane crushing in October every year. The government has also been made responsible to fix the buying rate of sugar cane in consultation with farmers and mills, according to the Act.

However, for the last several years, the farmers have been persistently complaining of two to three month delays in notifying the crushing season and fixing low price for the crop to favour mill owners. On their parts, the mills maintain that the growers' demanded rate is not feasible.

Sindh Abadgar Board Vice-President Mehmood Nawaz Shah, who also strongly condemned the onslaught, said they are ready for a similar showdown in Hyderabad on December 23. "We will block the highway [at Hatri Bypass in Hyderabad]. We have resolved to go there for a sit-in to draw attention of the government and the sugar mills," said Nawaz, who added that the board and other organisations representing the farmers are under pressure from their community to adopt the course of protests. Sindh Chamber of Agriculture, SARC and Sindh Abadagar Ittehad will also participate in the December 23 sit-in.

He said the Karachi protest was meant to demand from the government to implement its own notification for payment of Rs182 per 40kg against Rs130 to Rs140 which is being currently paid. He lamented that the sugar mills which have been given an over Rs20 billion subsidy by the federal and provincial governments are not paying adequate rates to the growers.

Commenting on the issue, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said that the government was ready to provide a subsidy for the export of sugar. "We want to begin the crushing season but the federal government has not issued any notification regarding the subsidy," he justified.

Ironically, Murad was speaking to the media after attending the International Labour Conference organised by human resources ministry.

"The government is sincere with the sugar cane producers. We have announced a price of Rs182 for 40kg to relieve the producers," he claimed in response to a question regarding how exactly the provincial government was 'supporting' the farmers. "The provincial government has already issued a notification in this regard," he assured.

The CM said that a decision to provide a sugar export subsidy of Rs10.70 per kg was made during a Council of Common Interests meeting last year. To further ease the deadlock between sugar producers and mill owners, the provincial cabinet had also approved an additional subsidy of Rs9.30 per kg, giving farmers a profit of Rs20 per kg and ensuring a price of Rs182 for 40kg. "I am sad that the federal government has not issued any notification in this regard," Murad lamented. "The responsibility of the crisis lies with the federal government," he said, absolving his government of all blame.

He appealed to the sugar cane farmers to be patient for a peaceful resolution to their issues. "I will approach the federal government again and request it to release the notification soon," he promised.

Condemning the police attack on peaceful farmers who were heading towards Bilawal House, Pakistan Muslim League – Functional (PML-F) Sindh General Secretary Sardar Raheem demanded the immediate release of all the arrested farmers. Talking to Express News, he claimed that at least a dozen of the detained farmers were affiliated with the PML-F. "The PPP, which poses as the champion of democracy, is causing millions of rupees loss to poor farmers and giving a subsidy of billions of rupees to sugar mill owners," he claimed, adding that the PPP's crackdown on farmers reminded him of a dictatorship. Rahim announced that a movement will be launched if the government did not free the detained farmers.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/1581722/1-sindh-cm-speaks-labour-rights-police-crack-farmers/

MILLERS DEFY NOTIFICATION FIXING MINIMUM SUGAR CANE RATE
Dawn, December 12th, 2017

Mohammad Hussain Khan

HYDERABAD: Sugar mills of lower Sindh appeared not ready to pay the notified sugar cane rate of Rs182 per 40kg although most of them have procured the cane crop and started crushing.

Barring a few mills — one in Badin and two in Thatta — all sugar mills have commenced crushing after the Sindh government notified the new rate on Dec 5.

The Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) has expressed its disagreement and brought its reservations on record over the newly fixed rate on the ground that they had a substantial quantity of surplus sugar stocks which had to be exported with a subsidy.

According to Mahmood Nawaz Shah, vice president of the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), lower Sindh's sugar factories have verbally told sugar cane producers that they would be paying Rs130-140 per 40kg instead of the notified rate and that's why they were not issuing CPR (cane price receipt).

Under the CPR, each sugar factory mentions the weight and rate of sugar cane bought as well as the date when it was supplied to the sugar mill concerned.

Sindh has 38 sugar mills in all. It is learn that sugar factories in Ghotki are offering Rs182/40kg notified rate to growers. Out of four mills in Ghotki, two are owned by a politician belonging to an opposition party.

"Sugar millers are in fact violating the fresh notification," he said, and added that sugar cane producers couldn't withhold their crop now.

"Half of December has already passed and sugar cane crop is standing on around 320,000ha in Sindh. Growers have to harvest it anyhow under present conditions. They have already lost an ideal and recommended time of sowing the wheat crop next," Shah said.

There is every possibility that sugar millers may question the sugar cane price notification in the Sindh High Court, Hyderabad circuit bench, which is already seized of the matter.

Members of Sindh Agriculture Research Council (SARC) led by Advocate Ali Palh had earlier filed a constitutional petition in the SHC Hyderabad circuit, seeking issuance of sugar cane price notification.

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) senior vice president Nabi Bux Sathio said that millers were not mentioning the offered rate of sugar cane on the CPR to avoid any complication. "We are not being provided the accounts summary as well," he said. Interestingly, he said, Ghotki-based sugar mills were offering Rs182/40kg to growers. "Are Ghotki's mill owners incurring losses or paying additionally from their own pocket?" he argued.

Sindh government has already come up with a belated price notification on Dec 5 considering the fact that the Sugar Factories Control Act 1950, which was amended in 2009, calls for commencement of crushing by a factory owner in Sindh not later than Nov 30.

The mills in Sindh have, however, started cane crushing in the second week of December.

PSMA Sindh zone was not ready to start cane crushing unless millers are given subsidy on the export of the sweetener by the federal government to enable them to clear their surplus sugar stocks.

The federal government in its recent decision attached some conditions to grant a subsidy. One of the conditions was that cane crushing must start by Nov 30 and continue thereafter.

The timely payment of procured sugar cane crop is also mandatory upon millers. But, this is not the case at least in Sindh.

Surplus sugar in Sindh in the wake of 2016-17 season was largely due to procurement of sugar cane by mills from Punjab as well. The millers claim that Sindh produces a big crop that is sufficient to meet the crushing needs of sugar mills of this province.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) president Kabool Mohammad Khatiyan and general secretary Zahid Bhurgari in a joint statement have condemned baton charge of protesting sugar cane growers by Karachi police on Monday.

They said that millers were committing injustices against growers by offering them Rs130-140 instead of the notified price.

Awami Tehreek president Dr Rasool Bux Khaskheli also condemned the police action and said that holding protest was a democratic right of everyone.

He said that the government adopted a dictatorial path by using force against peaceful protesters.

Growers in several cities and towns, including Badin, Mithi and Mirpurkhas held demonstrations to condemn the police action.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1376011/millers-defy-notification-fixing-minimum-sugar-cane-rate

AGRICULTURE LOBBY OPPOSES MOVE TO ABOLISH MAIZE DUTY
Dawn, December 13th, 2017

Hassan Belal Zaidi

ISLAMABAD: Agriculturalists from the ruling party pre-emptively criticised the government over the "expected abolition of import duty on maize", even though the finance ministry denied the impression that any such measure was on the cards.

The matter, which was brought before the National Assembly through a calling attention notice moved by PML-N MNAs Rana Mohammad Hayat Khan, Rasheed Ahmed Khan and Sheikh Fayyazuddin, was the only piece of business conducted by the house on Tuesday before it was adjourned amid an opposition boycott.

Even though Parliamentary Secretary for Finance Rana Mohammad Afzal Khan categorically claimed that no such move was being considered, the lawmaker from Rahim Yar Khan was adamant that the measure would soon be tabled before the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) for approval.

“To protect our farmers [Pakistan has imposed] an 11pc custom duty, 30pc regulatory duty and 5.5pc withholding tax on imported maize,” he explained, saying that poultry associations in the country were up in arms over the regulatory duty, since it was affecting their industry as the crop is widely used in chicken feed.

“Pakistan’s total maize production was 5.27 million tonnes in 2015, 6.13 million tonnes in 2016 and 5.28 million tonnes in 2017,” he said, adding that the government might consider doing this at a later stage.

“Our country’s farmers are at the edge of ruin and I pray we don’t add to their woes,” observed Mr Fayyazuddin.

“I want to ask the parliamentary secretary on whose behest is this being done? We know full well which lobby will benefit when you slit the throats of farmers,” he said, and revealed that strikes had been called in Faisalabad and Jhang, while farmers had also descended upon Bilawal House in Karachi to press for their rights.

“The government shouldn’t take any decision that will further decrease its popularity,” he concluded, pointedly.

But Rana Mohammad Afzal assured the PML-N lawmaker of this support, saying that even if the matter was laid before the ECC, the government’s representatives were there and would protect farmers’ interests at that level.

Abdul Sattar Bachani, the outspoken PPP lawmaker from Hyderabad, also echoed Mr Fayyazuddin’s concerns.

“The business lobby is hatching a conspiracy against agriculturalists… this is an agrarian country,” he said, adding that the subsidies that were being extended to businessmen from the poultry sector should be given to farmers instead.

Admitting that it was a serious issue, National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq suggested that Mr Bachani move a joint resolution on the issue.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1376281

PLAN EVOLVED TO PROMOTE SUNFLOWER, OTHER OIL SEED CROPS IN PUNJAB
Business Recorder, 13 December, 2017
RECORDER REPORT

SIALKOT: Punjab government has formulated a well-knitted plan for the promotion of sunflower and other oil seed crops in the province. Under the programme sunflower would be cultivated on more than two lakh acres of land in different areas of the province. Sources in Agriculture department told Business Recorder on Tuesday that the step was being taken to produce maximum edible oil aimed at lessening the import and to produce maximum edible oil in the province.

At present only 34 percent edible oil is being produced within country while 66 percent was being imported for catering the domestic needs for which government was spending huge foreign exchange on the import of edible oil every year.

The demand of edible oil was increasing rapidly due to the fast increase in population of the country and under the situation extra efforts were being made for cultivating oil seed crops including sunflower for minimizing the import of edible oil.

The cultivation of sunflower crop could play a vital role in enhancing the production of edible oil because the sunflower seeds had 40 percent oil capacity as compared to other oil seed crops.

Sunflower would be cultivated on 6000 acres of land in four tehsils of Sialkot district. In Sialkot tehsil 250 acres, Daska 2250 acres, Pasrur 1500 acres and 2000 acres in tehsil Sambrial would be brought under sunflower crop.

Keeping in view the importance of edible crops the Agriculture department was making strenuous efforts for motivating the growers that they should cultivate sunflower crop in their fields and get maximum economic benefits and help in enhancing the production of edible oil, sources said. The Agriculture department will extend full cooperation and assistance to the sunflower growers across the Punjab, sources added.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/13/13-page/687434-news.html

STP HOLDS PROTESTS IN FAVOUR OF SUGAR CANE GROWERS
Dawn, December 15, 2017

HYDERABAD: Activists of the Sindh Taraqqi-pasand Party (STP) held protests and took out rallies on Thursday in favour of sugar cane growers of the province who are running from pillar to post in desperation because sugar millers are not paying them the official notified rate of Rs182 per 40kg for their commodity.

In Hyderabad, scores of STP activists held a protest demonstration against injustices being faced by sugar cane growers.

Carrying banners and party flags, they chanted slogans against the Sindh government and ‘Zardari league’ outside the local press club.

Led by STP central leaders Nusrat Channa and Qadir Channa, they said the Sindh government destroyed agriculture of the province and the rulers of Sindh were reluctant to force millers to pay fair price of cane.

They said the growers were coerced to sell their crop at lower price; they were being economically murdered since the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) had assumed power in Sindh 10 years ago.

They warned that they would not allow the rulers to commit injustices with poor growers anymore and they would fight for the rights of the oppressed workers.

Similar protests were held in many districts of Sindh, including Tando Mohammad Khan, Tando Allahyar, Matiari, Jamshoro and others.

Recently, STP chairman Dr Qadir Magsi had announced a province-wide protest on Dec 14 and a shutter-down strike on Dec 19 against non-implementation of the price by the millers.

He announced this during a press conference held at the party office.

STP activists also took out a rally in Jacobabad and held a protest in Sukkur against baton charge of sugar cane growers in Karachi.

According to reports, the rally in Jacobabad was taken out from the STP district office led by taluka party president Abdul Razzak Laghari, Mohammad Umar Solangi and Syed Ali Shah.

The protesters marched on different roads of the city after which they reached the local press club where they raised slogans and held a sit-in, suspending flow of traffic on both sides of the road for some time.

In Sukkur, a protest demo and a sit-in was staged. Speaking on the occasion, local party leaders said the Sindh government had failed to give relief to the growers.

Instead of resolving problems of the growers, the Sindh police had baton charged the peasants participating in a protest held against excesses of sugar millers, they said.

They demanded action against those policemen who were involved in torture of sugar cane growers in Karachi and implementation of the cane rates notified by the government.

A large number of STP workers took out a rally and staged a demonstration at Kashmir Chowk in Mithi in favour of the cane growers.

Local party leaders held the PPP leadership and Sindh government responsible for the mess created by millers.

They demanded that all mills should be sealed if they failed to pay the fixed rate of the crop to farmers.

Farmers and STP workers took out rallies in Badin, Tando Bago, Talhar, Tando Ghulam Ali and other towns against the sugar millers and Sindh government.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1376656/stp-holds-protests-in-favour-of-sugar-cane-growers

MURAD TO CONSIDER DEMANDS OF SUGARCANE GROWERS
Business Recorder, 16 December, 2017

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that his government is making all out efforts to protect the interests of the growers and with this view he wants a workable solution to end the deadlock between the sugarcane growers and mill owners on the issue of the price.

He expressed these views at a meeting with the sugarcane growers at the CM House, here on Friday. The meeting was attended by Minister for Agriculture and Home Sohail Anwar Siyal, Chief Secretary Rizwan Memon, Principal Secretary to CM Sohail Rajput, Secretary Agriculture Sajid Jamal Abro, DG Agriculture Extension Hidayatullah Chhajjro, Noor Mohammad Baloch, DG Agricultural Research, Agha Zahiruddin, Cane Commissioner and the growers viz. Syed Nadeem Shah, Mohammad Nawaz Shah, Qabool Mohammad Khatian, Zahid Bhurgri, Nabi Bux Sathio, Nawab Zubair Talpur, Sharif Nizamani and Khalid Masood.

The chief minister said he and his party always worked with grower to get them better prices of their crops. He cited that they always protected growers' interests and rights.

He said that the sugar mills' owners were of the view that they could not begin crushing because they had surplus stock of sugar for last year in their godowns. Hence, Shah said he talked to the Prime Minister and took up the issue at the CCI also. He said the CCI approved a subsidy of Rs 10.70/kg for sugar export. Then, he called a provincial cabinet meeting which also approved additional subsidy of Rs9.30/kg for sugar export and then the millers began crushing.

"The crushing has started with my constant and untiring struggle," Murad Shah said.

The Cane Commissioner told the chief minister that there were 38 sugar mills in the province; of them six were not going to operate this year and 32 had started crushing. "They are purchasing sugarcane and growers are giving them cane at Rs 130 to RS 140, the price varies from district to district," he said.

The growers complained that the Rs130 to Rs140 price didn't suit them. They said that their expenditures on the cultivation on every 40-kg sugarcane cost them Rs70 and the harvesting, transportation from field to the mill and wastage also cost them another Rs40/45 kg. Hence, they have to sell their crop either at loss or at no profit despite disbursing huge amount on the sugarcane cultivation. They threatened that the cultivation of sugarcane would decline next year and then it would come to zero because they had decided to switch to other crops.

The growers accepted that some political parties were trying to capitalize on their protests. They made clear they had no political agenda but they were simply struggling for due rights of small, medium and big growers so that they could get fair price of their crop. They also admitted that the protest and sit-in outside the houses of the party leaders and others were not an appropriate option, ethically. The chief minister appreciated them for their clear and candid views.

The growers said that this year, sugarcane had been cultivated over an area of 700,000 acres and production would be around 420 tons. They suggested the chief minister announce a subsidy of Rs12/40 kg for growers and asked the millers to pay Rs170 per 40 kg to the growers.

On this the chief minister said that he would consider their proposal if they show some flexibility on the price of the cane.

"We want to end this deadlock at any cost," he said, adding that the financial position of his provincial government was not so strong that it could grant huge subsidies but he assured: "Anyhow, we will sit together with growers again after working out some proposals.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/16/3-page/687946-news.html

SINDH SUGAR CANE GROWERS THREATEN TO SWITCH OVER TO OTHER CROPS IN MEETING WITH CM
Dawn, December 16, 2017

KARACHI: Sugar cane growers have threatened to switch over to other crops from next year if millers continue to deny them the official rate of Rs182 per 40kg of cane.

The threat emerged during a meeting convened by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah to sort out a solution to end the deadlock that has persisted between the growers and the mill owners on the price of sugar cane.

The growers are of the view that the price of Rs130 to Rs140 per 40kg which is being paid in some cities of the province is not justifiable.

They proposed to the chief minister to announce a subsidy of Rs12 per 40kg for the growers and ask the millers to pay the price of Rs170 per 40kg to them.

“The provincial government is not financially strong enough to offer subsidy to everyone but we will try to work out some solutions,” Mr Shah said.

Last Monday, numerous growers had attempted to stage a protest near Bilawal House. Although they were dispersed by police and some arrests were made, the growers did not give up and announced to stage sit-ins across the province and block the National Highway.

The chief minister in a bid to end the deadlock invited some growers to Friday’s meeting which was attended by Minister for Home and Agriculture Sohail Anwar Siyal, chief secretary Rizwan Memon, principal secretary to CM Sohail Rajput and other senior officials.

The mill owners were of the view that they were not starting crushing because they had surplus sugar in their warehouses which they had produced last year.

The cane commissioner told the chief minister that there were 38 sugar mills in the province. Six of them were not going to operate this year and 32 had started crushing.

“The mills are purchasing sugar at Rs130 to Rs140 and the price varies from district to district,” he said.

The growers accepted that some political parties were trying to capitalise on their protests.

“We are not a political party and we are only struggling for the rights of growers so that they can get better price for their crop,” they said.

NAWABSHAH: In an unusual development, activists of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) also joined the protests by the growers across the province on Friday.

The activists of PPP Nawabshah chapter held a demonstration outside the local press club carrying sugar cane plants and placards inscribed with slogans against the mills.

The party's district president Ali Akbar Jamali, chairman of Nawabshah municipal committee Haji Azeem Mughal and others, who led the protest, criticised the mills and said the PPP would never allow economic murder of farmers.

They urged the millers to pay the official rate to the growers to enable them to clear the debts they had obtained for growing the cane and prepare the land for wheat cultivation.

MITHI: Former Sindh chief minster Dr Arbab Ghulam Rahim also joined the growing chorus against the mills and said that PPP rulers were befooling the farmers by denying them a fair price and forcing them to take to the streets as most of the mills were either owned by PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari himself or his cronies.

He said in a press statement that had there been justice in the province all the millers who had defied the official orders would have been in jail.

KHAIRPUR: The growers in Khairpur were being paid Rs130 per 40kg by two mills, said a local leader of Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) Imdad Sahito.

He told reporters that the growers were compelled to accept the dismally low price because they had to clear the land for wheat cultivation.

MIRPURKHAS: SAB, Sindh Abadgar Ittehad and Sindh Chamber of Agriculture had planned to block the National Highway near Hatri bypass on Dec 23 to record their protest, said Mohammad Umar Bughio, president of SAB Mirpurkhas chapter.

Mr Bughio said no authority was ready to take action against the defiant mills and stop economic murder of the growers. Therefore, all growers should attend the sit-in.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1376911/sugar-cane-growers-threaten-to-switch-over-to-other-crops

PUNJAB GETS $300M WORLD BANK LOAN TO MODERNISE AGRICULTURE
Dawn, December 17th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank has approved $300 million loan to modernise agriculture in Punjab, create better prospects for farmers and ensure better quality and safer food at lower prices to consumers.

The World Bank-supported 'Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation' (Smart) project will support the much-needed reforms for agriculture and livestock productivity, improve agriculture's resilience to climate change, and foster agribusiness in Punjab over the next five years. It will also reduce inequality and expand opportunities for women and youth.

The project, approved on Friday, is expected to shift Rs55 billion a year towards ‘Smart’ input subsidies for small farmers, agricultural research, farmers’ training, support for high-value and climate-smart agriculture. Additionally, Smart will help improve the sustainability of agricultural production by strengthening the management of irrigation water, and help tackle ground water depletion.

The resources provided by the World Bank will be part of a larger programme by the Punjab government that aims to better harness the enormous potential for farming in the province, with its fertile soils and extensive irrigation system.

It addresses the paradox that while Punjab’s farmers earn too little, people pay high prices for low quality food.

This situation is largely the result of farm policies that have hardly changed in the last fifty years. These include extensive insufficient subsidies and government spending that does not provide widespread benefits and results in wasteful water use.

“Agriculture in Punjab has great potential but requires a paradigm shift to unlock growth opportunities,” said World Bank Country Director for Pakistan, Illango Patchamuthu.

“The Punjab government is determined to help farmers grow high-value crops and significantly increase their incomes. The project is estimated to create 350,000 jobs and lift 1.7m people from poverty. The bank stands ready to support the provincial government in this exciting endeavour.”

The project is expected to contribute to increased on-farm productivity and value of agriculture and livestock; increased value-addition and competitiveness in agriculture and livestock; and enhanced resilience of smallholder farmers to climate change and natural disasters.

Growth in the agriculture sector in Punjab has been poor for some years and this has had a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of agricultural communities.

Communities dependent on agriculture have traditionally included deprived members of society, including landless farmers, small tenant farmers, and groups who rely on seasonal agricultural labour.

The project will help increase productivity in the sector, and thereby support household incomes and livelihoods in rural communities.

The social benefits associated with the project include improved economic status of farming communities, including livestock producers, mostly women and cheaper wheat and wheat flour.

The project will also help enhance farmers’ resilience through provision of affordable agricultural insurance products and increased investments for climate smart agriculture; a more equitable distribution of water; development and implementation of a participatory citizens engagement strategy for farmers; and capacity building of key government departments, farmers, and agribusiness entrepreneurs to ensure that the objectives of the programme are met.

"Key reforms supported by the project include transition towards high value agriculture, which will substantially raise farm incomes and employment in Punjab," said Senior Agriculture Economist at the World Bank, Hans Jansen.

"This will be done by shifting resources from inadequate subsidies towards supporting farmers to produce higher value products such as vegetables, fruits, pulses, oilseeds, milk and meat, whose demand is growing many times faster than lower value crops such as wheat," he added.

Meanwhile, aiming to enhance agricultural productivity in the province, Punjab government has allowed the use of drones for farming activities.

Drone or unmanned air vehicle consist of a small unmanned aircraft. After the success of this technology it is ready to astound the agriculture sector, a spokesperson of the provincial agricultural department said on Saturday.

Sharing details, the spokesperson said Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif allowed the use of drones since these can be used in the applications of pesticides on crops, monitoring of weeds, pests and nutritional deficiencies, area, water resources, as well as research and development.

The agricultural department has informed farmers and stakeholders to get no objection certificate from the agriculture (extension) department for the use of drones for agricultural purposes.

In arriving at a decision, the protocols about the security of sensitive installations and establishments would be given due consideration. Police personnel would be deputed to monitor the operation of drones at the time of flying activity.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has already encouraged countries to initiate the use of technology for disaster risk reduction in the agriculture sector.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1377052

PUNJAB ALLOWS USE OF DRONE TECHNOLOGY IN AGRI SECTOR
Business Recorder, 17 December, 2017

LAHORE: The Punjab government has allowed use of drone technology in agriculture sector with certain conditions for application of pesticides on crops, monitoring of weeds, pests and nutritional deficiencies.

According to a spokesman of the provincial agriculture department, the permission to use drone technology in agriculture is a revolutionary step leading to enhancement in agricultural production. A UAV (Unmanned Air Vehicle)/drone consist of a small unmanned aircraft and after the success of this technology it is ready to astound the agricultural sector.

The spokesman said that drone/UAV technology can be usefully deployed in application of pesticides on crops, monitoring of weeds, pests and nutritional deficiencies, geographical survey of crops, area and water resources, research and development.

He said that interested farmers can apply to the Deputy Director Agriculture (Extension) in his district for NOC for the use of UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) or drones. The concerned Deputy Director Agriculture (Extension) shall refer all cases/ applications about the use of drones for the aforementioned agriculture uses to the DIC (comprised of DC/DPO). After proper analysis and vetting, an NOC may be granted by the DIC to the applicant specifying therein the area, time and duration of use of drones.

In arriving at a decision to give permission for use of drones to a farmer, the protocols about the security of sensitive installations/ establishments shall be given due consideration, said a notification issued by the provincial government in this regard. The notification further advised that police personnel may also be attached with the operator of drone at the time of flying activity. The Deputy Director Agriculture (Extension) concerned shall inform the applicant in a timely manner about the status and outcome of the application for NOC regarding permissible agricultural use of drone/UAV and the attached conditions, the notification concludes.

http://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/17/5-page/688172-news.html

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 4th TO DECEMBER 10th 2017

FARMER AXED TO DEATH

Dawn, December 4th, 2017

BADIN: A farmer was axed to death by a group of attackers who later dumped the body in sugar cane field on Sunday.Residents of Sualeh Samejo village of Shaheed Fazil Rahu taluka told the police that the attackers repeatedly hit Gulam Ali Samejo, 27, with an axe and took the body to the nearby fields to dump it.

The victim's brother, Achar Samejo, said he knew nothing about the attackers or their motive behind the murder.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1374379

TELENOR, PLDDB LAUNCH IVR SERVICE FOR WOMEN FARMERS

Business Recorder,6 December, 2017

LAHORE: Aimed at empowering Pakistan's female farmers and extending them the benefits of its flagship mobile agriculture service 'KhushaalZamindar', Telenor Pakistan in partnership with Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Board (PLDDB) on Tuesday launched a dedicated free of cost IVR service for female farmers in Punjab called 'KhushaalAangan'.

Female farmers will simply need to dial 727251 to subscribe to the service and get information regarding livestock rearing, family health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.

Women play a massive role especially in rural areas and their contribution surpasses that of the male counterparts as it extends to farm support and animal rearing in addition to ensuring well-being of the family. Currently, more than 4 million farmers in Punjab are using Telenor Pakistan's agriculture service 'Khushaal Zamindar' and over 10% of them are females. "Keeping in view the large number of female workforce in today's rural society and their immense contribution towards agriculture, it's imperative to have a service which caters specifically to their needs.

"The statistics from our flagship Agri program Khushaal Zamindar revealed that an encouraging percentage of users comprised women." said Irfan Wahab Khan, Chief Executive Officer, Telenor Pakistan. "Since the majority of the female workforce in Pakistan is also associated with agriculture, it makes logical and business to cater to them better through a service tailored to their specific working needs.

"Based on our learning, we designed Khushaal Aangan that is aimed to be a perfect lifestyle partner for the rural woman, educating her on agriculture, livestock rearing, family health and much more. "As we continue to be driven by our mission of empowering societies at Telenor Pakistan, through Khushaal Aangan we are aiming to empower the Pakistani women further by equipping them with the knowledge that will make them more productive and improve their livelihoods," he added.

Raja Ashfaq Sarwar, Minister Labour and Human Resources, Punjab & Chairman, PLDDB said, "PLDDB is working to facilitate small-scale farmers and has launched a couple of projects in this regard. Khushaal Aangan is also designed to educate small-scale farmers especially focusing on women.

"It is a positive and encouraging step towards empowering the Pakistani women as it extends the benefits of the industry-leading Mobile Agriculture service Khushaal Zamindar to women in a more focused way. "We congratulate Telenor Pakistan on the launch of this exclusive, female-friendly advisory service, and also thank them for continuing to supplement the Government's efforts for a digital and empowered Pakistan. "Information Communication Technology (ICT) is the way forward when it comes to digital advancement in developing countries like Pakistan."

Saira Iftikhar, CEOP LDDB, said, "It's a trend-setting and much needed initiative taken by Telenor Pakistan & PLDDB and itt will help thousands of rural women improve their agriculture and livestock management practices. "Pakistan's livestock sector is contributing significantly to the national GDP and playing a major role in the country's economic growth and poverty alleviation.

With 'Khushaal Aangan', the rural woman will be empowered and equipped with the knowledge she requires for rearing healthier livestock and to improve health of her family members. Telenor Pakistan and PLDDB are revolutionizing the information dissemination system of agriculture and livestock sectors, enabling every male and female farmer to contribute their best to the country's socioeconomic development and lead healthier and more prosperous lives."

The programme was designed after comprehensive on-ground researches and surveys to gather all insights necessary for a tailor-made, female-only IVR service for rural women. In-depth interviews were also conducted with female farmers of distinct personas in different villages of Punjab in the pilot phase.

It will also feature female-only live shows to foster awareness about the usefulness of mobile techology vis-a-vis the agricultural growth and household management. Female farmers will be able to call and ask questions to access real-time information from female agriculture experts and nutritionists at the show.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/06/13-page/686071-news.html

COUNTRY'S AREA UNDER CROP CULTIVATION NOT INCREASING: FAO
Dawn, December 8th, 2017

Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has said that area under agriculture crops in Pakistan has stagnated, and no expansion is foreseen due to dwindling water resources.

"Protecting the soil is to secure the future of Pakistani generations," emphasised the FAO Representative in Pakistan, Mina Dowlatchahi, on the occasion of the World Soil Day.

The FAO says that soils in Pakistan are low in organic matter and many essential plant nutrients. The parent material of the soils is predominantly calcareous alluvium and loess. In general, 90 per cent of the soils are poor in organic matter, 85pc low in phosphorus and 40pc low in potassium.

The deficiency of zinc and boron is now widely reported at above 50pc in field crops. Iron deficiency in deciduous fruits is also of common occurrence.

Out of the 80 million hectares of total geographical area of Pakistan, about 22m hectares are presently cultivated, which is slightly more than 25pc.

In addition to the stagnation in cropping area, there is pressure on land in peri-urban areas where agriculture land is being converted into real estate, the FAO said.

Ms Dowlatchahi suggested that only an integrated approach of soil, water and input management could address the challenges posed by climate change and promote rural development.

Lasting development could only be 'people- and natural resources-centred', and "we should promote sustainable indigenous best natural resources management practices across different production systems, and present cost-effective solutions for its adoption, especially by the small land holders," she said.

As the population of Pakistan, according to the census, touched the figure of 208m, FAO says that achieving food production for all has become the greatest challenge faced by humanity including Pakistan. There will be a challenge to grow more and nutritious food per unit of land for food security and economic development, the UN agency says.

FAO Pakistan in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture, food security ministry and Pakistan Agricultural Research Council is building capacity of federal, provincial agriculture departments, national fertiliser companies, farmers' associations and other stakeholders in soil fertility management by promoting the concept of 4R nutrient stewardship parallel to the theme of "save and grow".

Development of soil fertility atlases is one of the key deliverables. The atlases of Punjab and Sindh have been developed and the series will be continued for the remaining provinces to provide a complete coverage of the country.

These atlases provide a comprehensive account of the soil types and their current fertility status, native best management practices, fertiliser use trends at the farm-gate level, and management strategy for normal and constrained soils for resource-based improvement.

Additionally, the information compiled on soil classification, dominant soil series and parent material is rarely available from a single source. Most of the findings can help design further detailed investigations for agricultural development under the changing scenario of climate.

In the meantime, the FAO has launched the most comprehensive global map to date showing the amount of carbon stocks in the soil. Soil organic matter, with carbon as its main component, is crucial to soil health and fertility, water infiltration and retention as well as food production. As a major carbon storage system, conserving and restoring soils are essential for both sustainable agriculture and climate change mitigation.

The map shows that globally, the first 30cm of soil contains around 680 billion tonnes of carbon — almost double the amount present in our atmosphere. This is a significant amount compared to the carbon stored in the whole vegetation (560 billion tonnes).

More than 60pc of the 680 billion tonnes of carbon is found in 10 countries (Russia, Canada, the US, China, Brazil, Indonesia, Australia, Argentina, Kazakhstan and Congo). This means that steps should be taken to protect these natural carbon-rich soils to avoid emissions to the atmosphere, the FAO says.

The degradation of one-third of the world's soils has already prompted an enormous release of carbon into the atmosphere. Restoring these soils can remove up to 63 billion tonnes of carbon, significantly reducing the effects of climate change.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1375227

GROWERS PLAN SIT-IN ON NATIONAL HIGHWAY ON 23RD
Dawn, December 8th, 2017

HYDERABAD: Leaders of four growers' organisations on Thursday announced staging a sit-in on National Highway on Dec 23 against the Sindh government's failure to enforce its notified sugar cane price of Rs182 per 40kg.

They said that they would stage the sit-in at 11am on National Highway near Hatri bypass and claimed that over 50,000 growers would participate in the protest, which would continue indefinitely till the government imposed the notified rate throughout the province. They were speaking to media persons at a press conference held at the Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) office here on Thursday.

SCA president Qabool Mohammad Khatian said that sugar mills were reluctant to pay the notified rate of the cane. Both the federal and provincial governments announced billions of rupees subsidies for sugar export, he said.

"Sindh government should not release a single penny to millers until and unless they pay Rs182 per 40 kg to cane growers," said SCA general secretary Zahid Hussain Bhurgri. But mills in lower Sindh, he said, were not paying as per the official rate. The government, therefore, must impose its writ, he said.

Sindh Abadgar Ittehad leader Nawab Zubair Talpur said there were incidents in Misri Khan Khoso and Bhago Unnar villages in Shaheed Benazirabad district in which disappointed famers burnt down standing sugar cane crop in protest against millers' refusal to pay the official price for cane.

Sindh Abadgar Board president Abdul Majeed Nizamani said that the government must impose its writ as growers were facing problems despite issuance of the price notification.

Sindh Agriculture Research Council president Ali Palh advocate and scores of growers' leaders fully supported the planned sit-in.

https://www.dawn.com/news/1375171

DELAY IN CANE CRUSHING: FARMERS TO START PROTEST FROM 11TH
Business Recorder, 10 December 2017

FAISALABAD: Sugarcane farmers have decided to start protest from Monday (December 11) against delay in cane crushing in Punjab, which is yielding negative impact over the agriculture economy. This was announced by a central leader of the Kissan Board Punjab, Ali Ahmad Goriaya, here on Saturday.

Talking to newsmen, he said that the delay in sugarcane crushing and less payment of cane against approved price is a clear cut joint conspiracy of government and sugar mills owners. Farmers are facing difficulties for actual payment of sugarcane at sugar mills in the presence of government's representatives.

Ali Ahmad Goriaya announced that protest rallies will be taken out from Toba Tek Singh, Chiniot, Gojra, Jhang, Tandlianwala, Jaranwala and other cities of the Division.

https://epaper.brecorder.com/2017/12/10/17-page/686936-news.html